



**Science
Societies**

Bird Songs Help Students Connect to Nature

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In a class designed to teach students to better connect to the natural world, students learned to appreciate songs from birds like this indigo bunting. Photo by Daniel Hayes.

People have been spending less time interacting with the natural world, which can lead to a detachment from nature and a lack of appreciation of natural resources. Many undergraduate students enter natural resource studies with limited experience as naturalists.

To address this concern, Michigan State University (MSU) began offering an introductory outdoor class (FW101L) aimed at increasing student competency as naturalists. As a group, birds are among the most accessible vertebrates to introduce to students. Still, students need to learn to actively listen and hear bird songs to effectively understand these organisms. Faculty at MSU implemented a short exercise during which students close their eyes for two minutes and actively focus on hearing the soundscape around them, a practice the educators called “putting on their woods ears.”

Student essays indicate that, for many of them, this short experience has a lasting and impactful effect on how they interact with the natural world. The researchers posit that this experience initiates a positive feedback loop whereby bird songs become more readily detected as they become more relevant to the listener.

Adapted from Hayes, D.B. (2023). Putting on your “woods ears”: A lesson in listening. *Natural Sciences Education*, 52, 1– 6. <https://doi.org/10.1002/nse2.20113>

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