

Qualia

World's largest collection of animal sounds now online

January 29, 2013 | Author: AAAS member -- Freelance Writer Mary Bates, Ph.D.



A 1929 recording of a song sparrow is one of the oldest in the Library collection (Image: MDF via Wikipedia Commons)

[The Macaulay Library](#) at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology is the world's largest and oldest archive of animal sounds. And now that the entire collection has been digitized, it is also the most accessible.

The digital archive consists of nearly 150,000 audio recordings, covering about 9,000 species of animals. Although there is an emphasis on birds, species from across the animal kingdom are represented. Over the last decade, the Library has also expanded its mission to include video recordings of animal behavior.

According to library director Mike Webster, digitizing the archive is part of the Library's goal to be "as useful as possible for the broadest audience possible." At the Library's website, anyone can search or browse the archive, as well as learn how to collect and upload their own recordings to continue to build the collection.

In addition to collecting and preserving natural history recordings, the Macaulay Library actively promotes the use of its recordings for a variety of purposes, including scientific research, education, conservation, and the arts. For teachers, the Lab of Ornithology's Education department has developed lessons for elementary, middle, and high school students based around the archive. Moviemakers have used the archive to depict natural sounds accurately and as inspiration for new sound effects. For bird watchers and other nature lovers, Macaulay Library staff have produced audio field guides with recordings of particular species or geographic locations.

Some of the highlights of the collection include a recording of a song sparrow collected in 1929 by Cornell Lab of Ornithology founder Arthur Allen, the earliest recording in the collection. Also wonderful is the video footage of the beautiful and sometimes bizarre courtship behaviors of New Guinea's birds-of-paradise, a collaborative effort of video curator Edwin Scholes and photojournalist Tim Laman. Browsing through the 'Staff Picks' on the website will lead to other

strange treasures, like underwater recordings of a male walrus "song" (described as a series of taps followed by a gong-like sound) and the otherworldly sounds of a bearded seal. The Macaulay Library is an invaluable resource — and a fun and fascinating collection for anyone interested in the natural world.

Related Links:

[The Macaulay Library at Cornell University's Lab Ornithology](#)