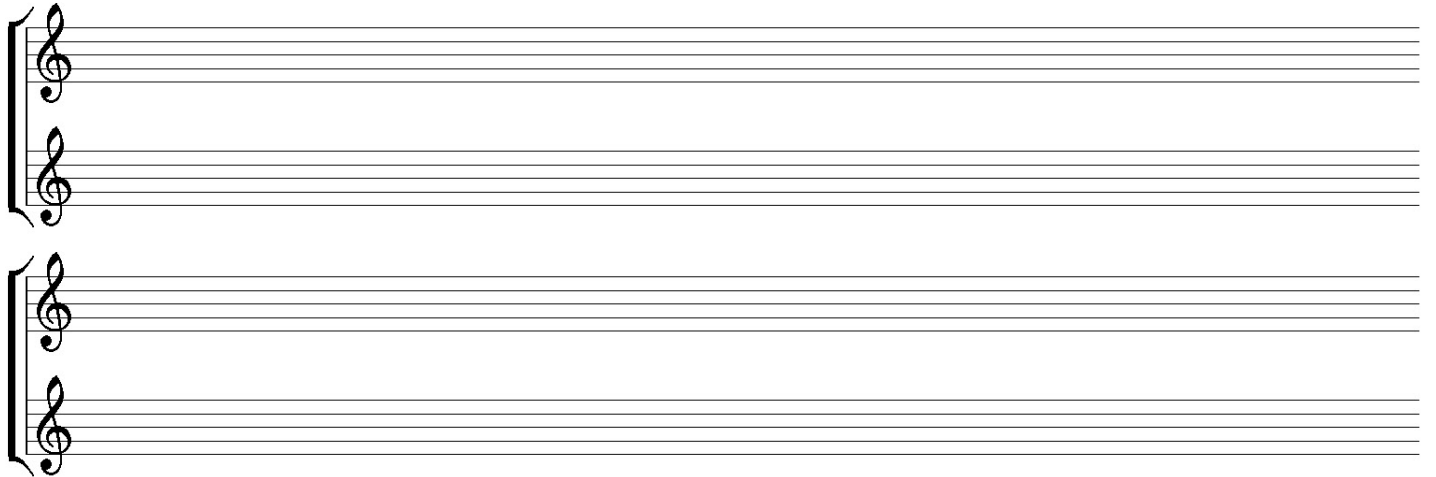


CONFERENCE OF THE BIRDS

BIRDSONG DRAW-ALONG

HOW DO YOU “SEE” SOUND? LET’S GET IN TUNE WITH THE BIRDS.

1. Grab a pencil and find a comfortable spot outdoors. Close your eyes and listen. Focus on one birdsong.
2. Is the tempo fast or slow? Is the pitch high or low? Does it repeat or change? What is the tone or feeling?
3. Place your pencil below. With your eyes closed, allow your hand to respond to the sound. Repeat!



This is an exercise in listening, observing, responding, and recording inspired by Alex Martin’s installation “Gaia’s Loom” featured in “Conference of the Birds” (number 6 on the map). Martin’s installation references the engineering of weaverbird nests at a human scale. Layers of woven material flow between a series of posts, creating a web punctuated with small openings that Martin explains, “offer niches for birds to take refuge” and “read like sheet music, representing notes of birdsong.”

This activity is created in conjunction with “Backyard Bash: Conference of the Birds” and modeled after a virtual workshop created by artist Paul Harfleet.

Ornithologists and bird enthusiasts create visual records of birdsong using spectrograms. Bird enthusiast Nathan Pieplow describes spectrograms as “the calligraphy of the natural world.” To create a spectrogram, an audio recording is used to generate a digital graph of the shape of an audio wave and how its frequencies change over time. Spectrograms read like sheet music, from left to right, with high-pitched notes above low-pitched notes. The width of each note shows duration and the shape depicts clarity. A whistle might appear as a single horizontal line, while a whine or buzz might produce a series of stacked lines.

