

Deep Listening to Nature

by Andrew Skeoch

Deep Listening to Nature is an invitation to open our ears to nature.

Our distant ancestors practised listening as essential for survival and a communion with all living things. In modern urban life, we've forgotten the languages of the wild, and how to be sensitive to nature's gentle pace.

Beginning with a walk in the bush, Andrew guides the reader into an attentive awareness, hearing the stories nature has to tell us – stories of different species using specific sounds to maintain their living space, attract mates, form close social bonds, co-operate, express intelligence and foster intimacy.

He encourages us to listen with empathy, finding an awareness of the sentience of other creatures and the aliveness of their minds.

From here, Andrew explores deep time, revealing how sound has shaped evolution, the results of which are audible in the world around us now, if we know what to listen for.

Andrew offers skills and knowledge with which to pursue our own curiosity, and find a deeper personal and sensory

connection with the natural world. In our current environmental crisis, he also suggests that we not only listen to learn *about* nature, but listen to learn *from* nature.

As Andrew points out, nature is animate - it is a process rather than a place, a verb not a noun. Hence listening has much to tell us about the workings of the natural world. He offers examples demonstrating how communication enables inter-species cooperation, facilitating mutually beneficial relationships and webs of interaction.

Andrew highlights the ritualistic behaviours of animals (known as agonistic behaviours) which have evolved to specifically avoid the costs of competition, many of which are communicative.

Why then, he asks, do we create a human world so at odds with the way nature does things? Why do we celebrate competitiveness and the virtues of winning, even though we know the mental health issues, social injustice and violence that result from doing so?

He concludes that we too would do well to communicate better, and shape our social institutions to promote the agonistic rituals of our own species: diplomacy, negotiation, truth telling, fairness, tolerance, reconciliation, trust and kindness.

Finally, Andrew encourages us to be still and listen. Take our time. Extend our senses. Let nature get to know us, and in its own way, to welcome us.