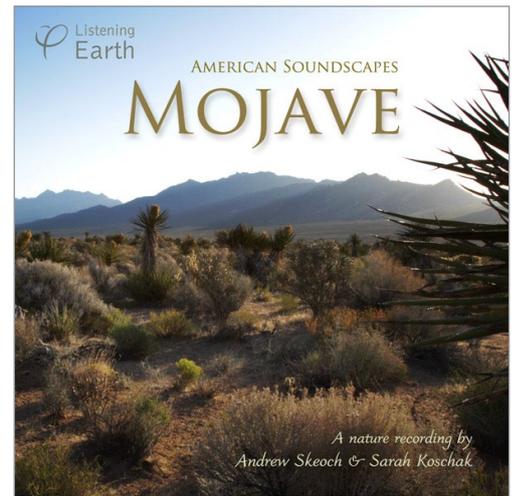


“American Soundscapes - Mojave”

Listening Notes

This album on www.listeningearth.com:
<http://www.listeningearth.com/LE/product.php?id=118>



This album is comprised of one single recording, documenting an April morning in the southern Mojave Desert.



Microphones were set up at the edge of a dry, sandy outwash, which swept down from the rocky slopes of the Granite Mountains which almost encircle the site. Low shrubs line the outwash, while a variety yuccas, cactii, sagebrush and the iconic Joshua trees are found on the surrounding plains.

We begin in the still moments before dawn. The sky is still dark, with a pale glow on the eastern horizon. The desert night air is crisp and cool, and any sound carries clearly over a great distance.

Track 1: **First Voices in the Dark; Black-throated Sparrows and Ash-throated Flycatcher**

Silence - at first. Only the last of the nocturnal crickets still to be heard faintly. Then the first birdsong begins; a Black-throated Sparrow (0:17). Soon it is joined by others, and the dawn chorus has begun.

Distantly, a pair of Great Horned Owls patrol their territory, moving up and down the broad valley, giving their deep hooting calls which reverberate off the hills (0:16...). You can hear them moving around from place to place.

A pair of Coyotes begin calling from up the hill slope (1:40...). (Just for reference henceforth; they are heard in the left channel).

We will hear Gambel's Quail in close proximity later, but for now the first one is heard distantly (1:35). Almost subliminally, a Hummingbird flies past (1:56).

An Ash-throated Flycatcher joins in with its scratchy, percussive voice (3:01...). Once it gets going it becomes one of the dominant contributors to the dawn chorus.



Track 2: **The Coyote Pack**

Now the whole Coyote pack join in for an extended chorus of yipping and yowling (0:01...).

Mourning Doves can be heard very faintly, far off (1:03...).



Track 3: **Great Horned Owl**

The male Great Horned Owl (the lower pitched of the two voices), has come much closer, and calls from perhaps only a few hundred meters away (0:00...). After a while he moves off again, and the pair can again be heard calling to each other (3:06...).

A species of Thrasher, likely Bendire's, sings briefly in the middle distance, right channel (0:14, and later at 3:08 and 6:10). A first Cactus Wren is also heard in the distance (2:00), as is the Mourning Dove again (3:17...).



A Black-throated Sparrow flies in, giving soft "ticking" flight calls, and lands in a bush on our right side (2:08), before flying over and away to our left (2:32).

By now, the dawn chorus is in full swing.

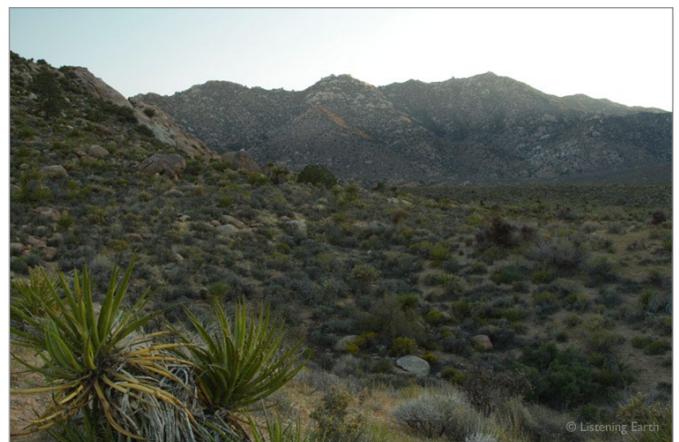
Track 4: **Common Poorwill**

The Poorwill, named after it's call, is a member of the nightjar family, and so it's calling here is actually part of its roosting routine. You've heard it earlier, but it is somewhat closer now, its repeated calls nicely echoed by the landscape (0:00).

Another hummingbird shoots past (0:34), and the first buzz of a Bewick's Wren singing distantly can be heard (1:57). It calls for the next three minutes, and is difficult to pick up amidst the general dawn chorus, but we'll hear it closer later.

Similarly, a Brewer's Sparrow has been singing for the last minute or so, but can now be heard a little more clearly (8:33...).

Once again, a Black-throated Sparrow flies in giving flight calls (10:09), lands nearby (10:13) and begins to sing (10:19). Another flies off (11:12).



Track 5: **Bewick's Wren**

Now we can hear the Bewick's Wren a little clearer and closer (it has been calling for a minute or so, but you can pick it up more clearly at 0:24). Later the bird singing close by changes to a different song type (6:06 - 9:07).

The Gambel's Quail are also closer now, and here one gives a sequence of contact calls (2:26). Their "Wow!" contact calls are much closer, as you can hear. Three of them nearby take to the air with rapid wingbeats (10:39).

The pleasant, upslurred whistles of Phainopeplas can be heard more or less continually from here on (9:14...). The Ash-throated Flycatcher has changed from its dawn to day-time call, and can be heard way off in the distance (9:28).

The morning must be getting warmer, as the flies are becoming active (10:55)!

Track 6: **Gambel's Quail**

Now the quail are all around us. One calls very closely, repeating its "Wow!" call loudly.

The Phainopeplas are also closer, flitting among the yucca plants and giving repeated call notes almost continually. Their whistles form an almost musical texture.



Track 7: **Phainopeplas**

Phainopeplas are part of a tropical family of birds known delightfully as 'Silky Flycatchers', in reference to their soft, sleek plumage. One flies across right in front of us and begins whistling (0:00).

Notice the difference in the Phainopepla's intermittent, flitting wingbeats, and the determined rapid flight of a quail shortly after (0:43) - they are so audibly different. The quail calls which come immediately after (0:46) may be either courtship or aggressive calls. Later we hear their covey contact call (2:18).



As well as the upslurred whistles, Phainopeplas have a downslurred, buzzy song, referred to as 'laser beams'. Several were heard far off a while back, but now they are close and clear (1:22). Later (3:57), a pair call alternately, with some snatches of song.

The descending whinny of a Ladderback Woodpecker may just be heard way off in the background (3:03).

A quiet, low series of 'barks' (5:36) is given by a female Greater Roadrunner, and immediately after, a Chukar can be heard in the distance (although reasonably clearly) (5:39).

The Bewick's Wren returns at the end, singing clearly nearby (6:32).

Track 8: **Northern Mockingbird**

The dawn chorus is now winding down.

The Northern Mockingbird is renowned as both a virtuoso songbird and mimic. Rather than sing in the dawn chorus, he has waited for his moment to shine without distraction.

Once he starts (0:02), he reels out a stream-of-consciousness song at full volume.

It is primarily composed from his own extraordinary repertoire of phrases, but every now and then one can pick up mimicry. A very passable Gila Woodpecker imitation (0:26) is unusual, as these birds are rare in California, and don't really occur in the Mojave region, so this Mockingbird must have learned this sound on migration or wintering grounds. Later he seems to be imitating Blue Jays (1:04) and Western Scrub Jays (2:42).



Track 9: **House Finch**

House Finches are one of those birds which you are just as likely to find in wilderness as perched on a suburban fence. They are pretty common, and here one appears and gives its pretty, twittering song (0:00). He continues with sharp, splintered calls until eventually moving away (around 2:23).

A Blue-gray Gnatcatcher begins calling, slightly left of centre (3:20). However its delicate, fizzy calls are almost obscured by the Mockingbird at first, becoming more noticeable (at 3:27 and continuing until 3:44).

More Mockingbird mimicry can be heard, this time an American Kestrel (4:04), and again, Blue Jays (5:36). He continues moving around from one favoured songperch to another, singing all the while.

The Brewer's Sparrow returns again (7:08).



Track 10: **Greater Roadrunner and Brewer's Sparrow**

We've heard both these characters before, but now a bit more clearly.

First the female Roadrunner, a lot closer now than she was previously (0:00), followed by the song from a Brewer's Sparrow (0:02).

The Roadrunner gives a different call shortly after, a very soft, purring call, which is actually made by bill-clacking. It is very quiet, in the left channel (0:59), and a little easier to hear when given a second time (1:35-1:46).

The Mockingbird is still mimicking Blue Jays (3:00), and in the background you may just pick out some Ash-throated Flycatcher interaction calls (3:12).

Track 11: **Cactus Wrens**

Having been calling almost continuously for the last hour or so, a small group of Cactus Wrens come by, with males taking turns to sing loudly from prominent perches atop shrubs (0:00).

A Hummingbird (species unknown) passes very close (1:00), and a Black-throated Sparrow is heard clearly (notably around 2:22...).

An Orange-crowned Warbler gives a series of very high frequency “chip”s (3:24). It has actually been giving single chips every now and then for a while now, but this is an opportunity to hear it more clearly.



Track 12: **White-tailed Antelope Squirrel**

This deceptively bird-like call is actually the agitation call of a White-tailed Antelope Squirrel (0:00).

The fizzy, descending calls of a Black-tailed Gnatcatcher are similar to the Phainopepla’s ‘laser beams’, but lighter in texture and given in a quick series (middle distance, 0:23). Compare also with the similarly nasal calls of the Blue-gray Gnatcatcher that we heard earlier (track 9).

The House Finch is back, this time giving a series of uplurred, buzzy calls (1:31), in the

middle of which can be heard a few more stratospheric “chip”s from the Orange-crowned Warbler (1:52).

The Phainopepla can be heard doing more ‘laser beams’ (3:55), along with the Black-tailed Gnatcatcher again (4:10).

Track 13: **The Phainopepla’s Song**

Finally, we get to hear the Phainopepla giving its song proper, such as it is. It is preceded by a few ‘laser beams’ (0:00), and can be heard as brief snatches of gurgling twitters between further ‘lasers’ (such as at 0:28).

The Black-tailed Gnatcatcher can be heard once more (0:11), a few more “chip”s from the Orange-crowned Warbler (1:27), and finally (just to test your ears) some distant and quiet mewing calls from a Spotted Towhee (2:07).

By now, the morning birdsong is ebbing into the quiet and heat of the day. The last remaining singers are the Mockingbird, a few Sparrows, Cactus Wrens, plus occasional Phainopeplas and Quail. Soon, even they will be silent - until the next day.

