

[Birding by Ear: Eastern/Central North America](#)

Audio Review

Surfbirds.com

By Elise Faike



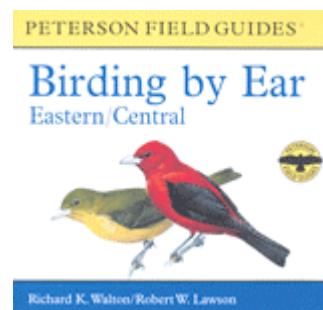
[Peterson Field Guide Audio Series: Birding by Ear: Eastern/Central North America,](#)

by Richard K. Walton and Robert W. Lawson, series edited by Roger Tory Peterson /
First Edition 1990, Revised April 2002 / 3 CDs, booklet \$US30.00

www.houghtonmifflinbooks.com



Anyone wanting to learn or to review their bird songs will enjoy using Dick Walton and Bob Lawson's **Birding by Ear** audio CDs. The series is relatively old, but it's good. I've used the two other editions for years, **Western** and **More Birding by Ear**, but I recently got **Eastern/Central Birding by Ear**.



What makes these different from other recordings is that instead of simply naming birds and playing their songs and calls, Walton teaches you how to tell them apart and to how to remember them by using phonetics, mnemonics and other tricks. He instructs you how to put your own “handle” on a vocalization, like the Great Horned Owl's call, “Who's awake? Me too,” or the Downy Woodpecker's descending whinny—down for Downy.

They divide similar sounding birds into groups and go from there, covering 85 species found east of the Rockies. Groups include Mimics, Sing-Songers, Chippers and Trillers, and Name-Sayers. Learning to tell Chipping Sparrows from Juncos is great!

They talk about syrinx structure, bird voice, and differences between songs and calls, and for example slow down the Veery's song to half-speed to illustrate the way it seems to sing a duet in harmony with itself! That's not possible to hear in the field, but it's very interesting and informative.

While the booklet was revised in 2002, the CDs probably were not, because some minor oddities remain, such as reading in the booklet Baltimore Oriole, but on the disc hearing it announced Northern Oriole. The revisions in the booklet seem mostly to update page listings for the accompanying Peterson Field Guide book.

No matter! For beginners, using these CDs is a quick and easy way to learn common bird songs and calls. For everyone else it's good to go back and listen to this CD set now. It's also good to review Birding by Ear skills each year and often, because if you're like me, you may forget many of them over the winter and have to start over each spring! While it's impossible to listen to very many comparisons at one sitting, taking in a few at a time while you stretch or eat breakfast will soon get you ready for Birding by Ear in the field. How's that sound?

