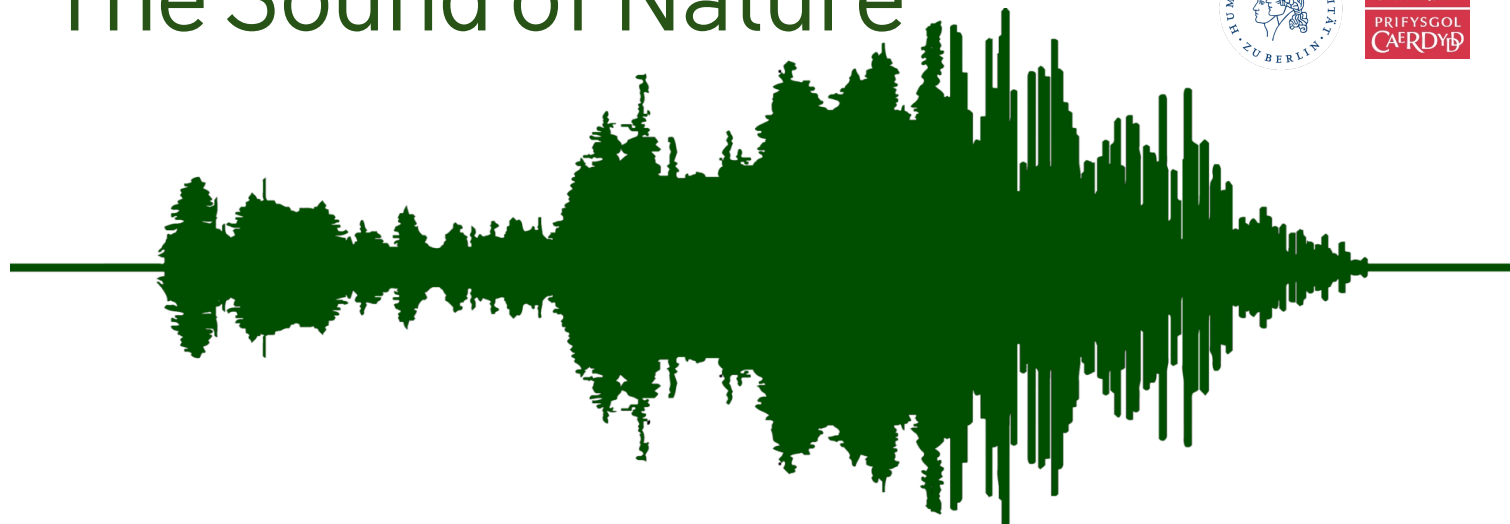
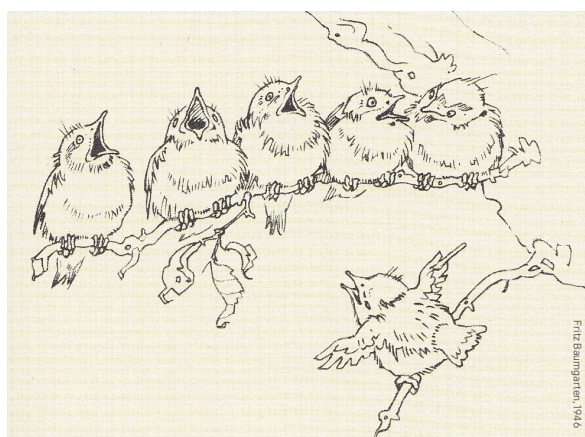


The Sound of Nature



Soundscapes and Environmental Awareness, 1750-1950



Textual Recordings

Before audio recording technology, authors developed sophisticated methods to capture natural sounds in text:

- Literary descriptions preserved entire soundscapes, including their emotional and cultural significance
- Technical approaches ranged from onomatopoeia to innovative textual representation
- Writers created rich "acoustic archives" of environments now fundamentally altered
- These textual recordings documented not just individual sounds but their ecological contexts



Key examples from our research include Wordsworth's attentive listening in the Lake District, Clare's precise transcriptions of birdsong, environmental politics in Gaskell's writings, and German popular scientific and conservation literature that linked natural sounds to national identity.

Interdisciplinarity

Our research combines methodologies from literary studies and environmental history to investigate natural soundscapes and their role in shaping environmental awareness. This interdisciplinary approach has allowed us to:

- Analyze both literary and historical texts to understand how natural sounds were recorded and valued, focusing on what we call "textual recordings"
- Compare sound perception across different national contexts, particularly Britain and Germany
- Use close reading alongside digital methods to identify patterns in large text corpora
- Trace the evolution of environmental consciousness through changing perceptions of sound

By bringing together diverse disciplinary perspectives, we reveal how the recording and interpretation of natural sounds contributed to early environmental thinking.

Team



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Outcomes

Our forthcoming special issue in the *Journal of Literature and Science* demonstrates the central role of sound in the development of environmental awareness throughout modernity:

- The textual form captures historic soundscapes in rich and varying ways
- The centrality of listening, even as its practices evolve, shows continuity through time
- Attentive listening is a necessary condition for growth in environmental awareness
- The increased attention to natural sounds fostered ecological understanding and conservation values.

Looking forward

For the future we envision to broaden the scope of our research both spatially and temporally, adapting our methods to the global scale and the issues of the current day. In particular, we are interested in exploring the colonial dimensions of the appreciation of environmental sounds, including also methods from musicology and ethnography.



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