

Saturday talk by Andrew Skeoch

Deep Listening to Nature

On 26 October, Andrew Skeoch presented a Saturday Talk on listening to nature. The U3A members who attended were not quite sure what to expect. Would we be asked to just stay silent and listen to his recordings?

We did hear many bird calls, but it was much more than that. Andrew used clever graphics of sound waves to reveal the rich information contained in the recordings. A bird call is typically communication between them, which may express their presences in a home range, search for a mate or sheer joy. Neighbouring birds sometimes reply with the same call – at other times they initiate new patterns. Some birds always sound the same while others can learn or mimic others.

Andrew showed how we can use the information from these calls to learn about how birds and other animals relate to each other. Then, how all that can help understand relations among people. We learned the difference between agonistic and antagonistic competition. The former is used by most animals, involves displays and ritualistic fights to define dominance, followed by cooperation. The latter, antagonism, is all too common in humans; a pattern of behaviour that is consistently negative, confrontational, or obstructive.

He challenged us with an insight: nature is not a place; it is a process. We all left with greater interest in our surroundings and in other people. Thank you, Andrew Skeoch.