

Recording of the week: the Curlew's Lament

This week's selection comes from Richard Ranft, Head of Sound and Vision.

Around this time of year as winter takes its hold, and into spring that follows, a daytime walk around one of Britain's more remote coastal estuaries and mudflats, or over inland moorlands and heathlands will likely bring about an encounter with a Curlew, the largest of all waders. Its soulful voice carries far across flat and rolling landscapes, adding a magical and haunting feel to wild places. And in early English folklore, it was a harbinger of death, or for the poet WB Yeats, it spoke of a love lost:

*"O Curlew, cry no more in the air,
Or only to the water in the West;
Because your crying brings to my mind
passion-dimmed eyes and long heavy hair
That was shaken out over my breast:
There is enough evil in the crying of wind"*



This particular Curlew recording was made in southern England as long ago as 1937 by the pioneer bird sound recordist, Ludwig Koch (1881-1974). It comprises several takes that illustrate the bird's varied notes. The recording was used for many years to introduce *The Naturalist* radio programme, broadcast by the BBC Home Service.

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