

# STONY LAKE SOUNDS

By **William Denton**

**D**ID YOU READ last year's Islander article by Anne Bonnycastle? She listed ten bird species whose songs and calls are good starters for non-birders who want to be able to identify these small avian dinosaurs by sound.

Birds are just the start of listening. There are infinitely many other wonderful sounds at Stony. Some come from nature, some are made by people. They are all worth hearing and noting! Attentive listening is a simple and



rewarding way to learn more about the lake, and nature, and your part in it.

You already do a lot of listening. Late on a hot night with the windows open you hear a lone boat far away, slowly getting closer, eventually disappearing around Hurricane Point or Fairy Lake Island, and you wonder where they came from and where they're going. Sunbathing between swims with the rhythm of the waves and the wind in the trees you fall into a somnolent trance. Perhaps visitors at a nearby cottage don't know sound carries over water, and all day you hear phone calls and incorrect opinions.

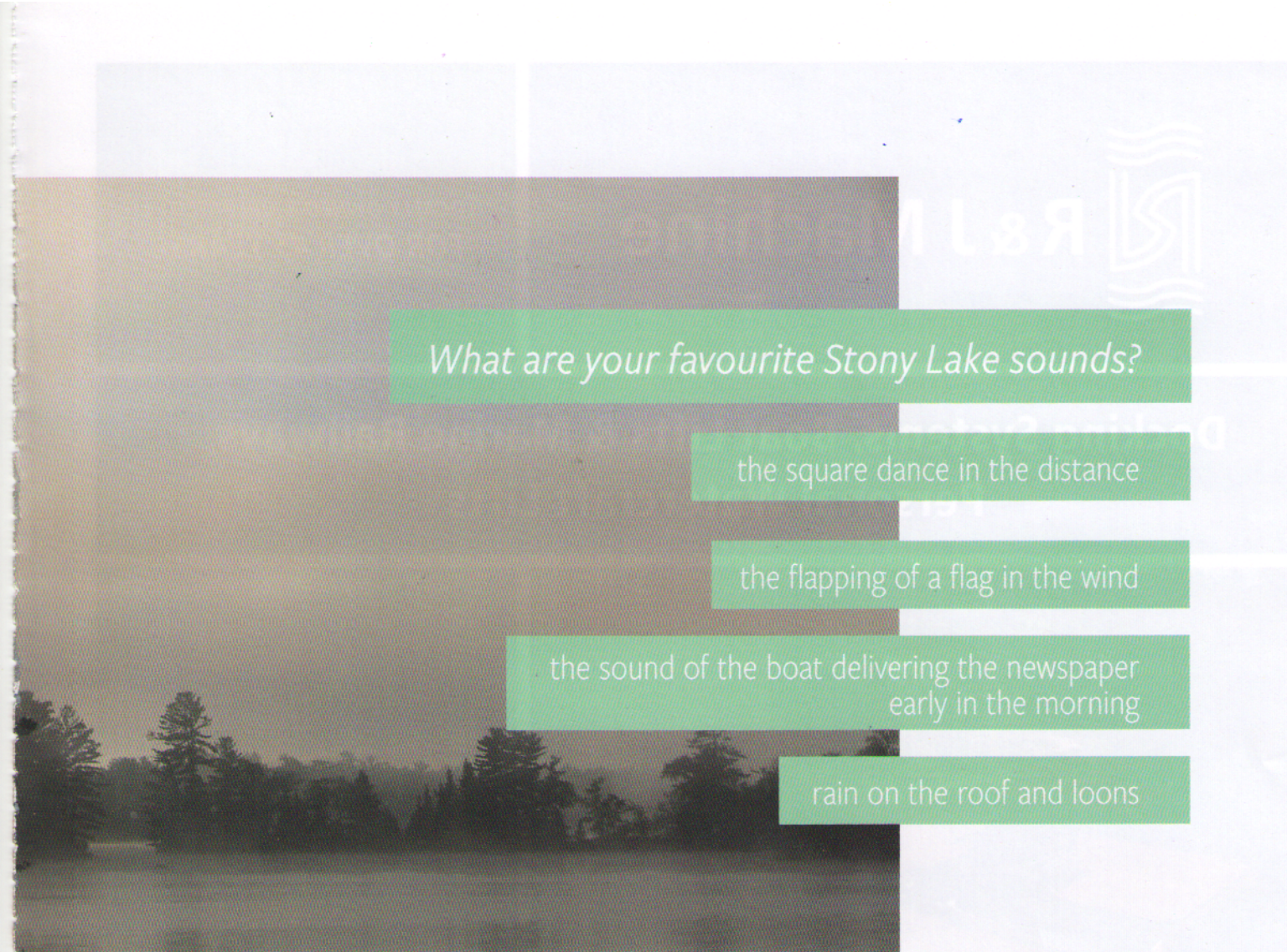
Advance your Stony awareness with focused, attentive, active listening. Close your eyes and take in the entire soundscape around you. There will be all kinds of sounds: quiet and loud, near and far, in front or behind, low-pitched and high, natural and human-made. Slowly move your attention around, focusing on this bird or those waves or that talking, for as long as it takes to appreciate the sound. This is a very



still, quiet, meditative process, but mentally very active. You've looked at things closely. Now listen closely. Try this in bed, on your dock, in a canoe, at Juniper, on a Kawartha Land Trust trail, anywhere.

Next you may want to try making field recordings. I began to do this a few years ago so I could listen to the summer in the winter. I set up microphones and a recorder and captured minutes or hours at a time of ambient sound. Some examples are online at the link below, including a hydrophone (underwater microphone) recording of what rain is like under the surface.

What are your favourite Stony Lake sounds? I'll give you two for free: rain on the roof and loons.



## What are your favourite Stony Lake sounds?

the square dance in the distance

the flapping of a flag in the wind

the sound of the boat delivering the newspaper  
early in the morning

rain on the roof and loons

One of mine is the Juniper Island square dance in the distance, which when the air is still we can hear on our island Kushaquua. Going to the dance is guaranteed fun, of course, but I've had wonderful times sitting on the dock listening to the faint music, sometimes able to hear Bob Trennum or Bronwyn Dickson calling, and waiting for the roar when everyone goes into the middle with a great big yell.

I asked a few people for their favourites and got a wonderful mix. Some were small and focused, like the chaotic flapping of a flag in the wind or the sizzle of a canoe going over matted surface weeds. One person loved the old sound of the boat delivering the newspaper very early in the morning.

It would be fun to ask everyone at your cottage what theirs are, and compare. What are the top five sounds as ranked by children?

Everything we hear is part of the Stony Lake soundscape. Most things are lovely to hear, but some are not. We're not at an uninhabited distant northern lake. It's Stony. It's 2021. There may be water scooters and chainsaws, and you may not like them all the time, but that's what Stony sounds like now.

If you've been on the lake for a while, do you remember sounds from years or decades back? How were the old, smaller boat motors different? What did the ice boat sound like? What were the nights like before the frogs disappeared?

Field recordings let us listen to the past and studying them over time is part of soundscape ecology. You may have seen this in the news last year because everything (except, it seemed, birds) got quieter when the lockdowns began. Many scientists and sound recordists are documenting how sounds changed during the pandemic. Recordings that we make now could be important in the future.

For more information and to download some of my field recordings made at Stony Lake in summer 2020 see <https://www.miskatonic.org/stonylakesounds>. Enjoy your listening! I'd love to know what your favourite sounds are.

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