

Birds and Words: Aurality, Semantics and Species in Anglo-Saxon England

The hearing ear, and the seeing eye, the Lord hath made even both of them – Proverbs 20:12

The King James Bible's rendition of Proverbs 20:12 can be read variously, depending on whether 'even' is read adjectivally (i.e. they are made equal) or adverbially (i.e. the Lord made them indeed). Whichever is the case is more or less irrelevant here, as these two senses – hearing and seeing – are repeatedly invoked in the Bible as those which grant or allow access to knowledge.¹ This would have been as true for the majority of Anglo-Saxons, too: even literacy, the privilege of the religious and a select few among the laity, depended on these two senses for its acquisition and practice.² Sight and sound would have been the principle faculties used for quotidian tasks, and would have frequently prefaced any other kind of stimulation: objects are seen before they are touched, people and animals are (often) heard before they are seen, food is seen (or smelled) before it is tasted, and so on.

There is a bias towards the visual in scholarship: historically, scientific enquiry privileged the observable, and observable data (whether written or illustrative) was well-suited to being textually transmitted.³ This is a bias which we must confront when embarking on recovery of sensory perception in the medieval world, in which the unseen was at least as influential as the seen.⁴ Blindness and partial-sightedness might be considered some of the more significant barriers to functional independence today, but that is because priority is placed on interacting with the visual: reading, writing, navigating and so on. However, in the middle ages, deafness was a greater impediment to an individual's wellbeing because it precluded them from hearing – and therefore understanding – the word of God.⁵ In the chiefly oral society of the Anglo-Saxons,

¹ E.g. Genesis 24:30, Exodus 3:7, Numbers 24:4, Deuteronomy 4:12, 18:16 and 29:4, 1 Samuel 3:11, 1 Kings 3:28 and 10:7, 2 Kings 6:30, 19:16 and 20:5, Nehemiah 9:9, Job 29:11, Isaiah 5:7, Ezekiel 1:28, Luke 23:8, Acts 7:31 and 8:6, Revelation 22:8.

² On literacy see H. MAGENNIS, "Audience(s), Reception, Literacy", in *A Companion to Anglo-Saxon Literature*, ed. P. PULSIANO and E. TREHARNE (Oxford, 2008), pp.84-101; G. H. BROWN, "The Dynamics of Literacy in Anglo-Saxon England", in *Textual and Material Culture in Anglo-Saxon England: Thomas Northcote Toller and The Toller Memorial Lectures*, ed. D. SCRAGG (Cambridge, 2003), pp.183-212, and D. H. GREEN, *Medieval Listening and Reading: The Primary Reception of German Literature, 800-1300* (Cambridge, 2005).

³ This tendency is implicit – but nonetheless clear – in the histories of science, biology and ornithology. For general histories of science see D. C. LINDBERG, *The Beginnings of Western Science* (Chicago, 1992); E. GRANT, *The Foundations of Modern Science in the Middle Ages: Their Religious, institutional and Cultural Contexts* (Cambridge, 1996); *Ibid.*, *Science and Religion, 400 B.C. to A.D. 1550*: (Baltimore, 2004); *Ibid.*, *A History of Natural Philosophy: From the Ancient World to the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, 2007). A history specifically on biology is E. MAYR, *The Growth of Biological Thought: Diversity, Evolution and Inheritance* (London, 1982); histories of specifically of ornithology are E. STRESEMAN, *Ornithology: From Aristotle to the Present* (London, 1975); M. WALTERS, *A Concise History of Ornithology* (London, 2003); and P. BIRCHAM, *A History of Ornithology* (London, 2007).

⁴ This is more true for the perceived workings of the Christian God than it is for those superstitious elements in traditional culture: see A. HALL, *Elves in Anglo-Saxon England: Matters of Health, Gender, and Identity* (Woodbridge, 2007), esp. pp.67-68.

⁵ I. METZLER, *A Social History of Disability in the Middle Ages: Cultural Considerations of Physical Impairment* (Abingdon, 2013), esp. pp.200-201.

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wherein speaking and hearing were the main means of exchange between individuals, aurality would have been the primary means of receiving and imparting knowledge.

The importance of aurality (and orality) in Anglo-Saxon culture has been well-considered in some respects, but not in others.⁶ The Anglo-Saxon perception of birds falls into the latter. While the importance of bird calls has frequently been noted as underlying (at least) some Old English bird-names,⁷ discussions of these have almost always been predicated on equating these bird-names with the visually-oriented identifications we give pride of place to today. Essentially, they fall into the fallacy of supposing that “the Anglo-Saxons’ way of looking at the world is essentially the same as the modern one, except that the words are different.”⁸ Underlying this mentality, too, is the assumption that there is some kind of objectivity inherent in the categorisation – i.e. the speciation – we have of birds today. There is not. This mentality, which we may term an essentialist approach, derives ultimately from the Aristotelian tradition of essences, and it asserts that there is some objective essential basis by which species are differentiated.⁹

Semantics, Species and Taxonomies

Speciation is categorisation.¹⁰ These acts of vernacular quotidian speciation are commonly known as ‘folk-taxonomies’, and they are closely bound up with how users of a language perceive and organise the world around them.¹¹ These folk-taxonomies underpin present-day

⁶ See, for example, the essays in *Orality and Textuality in the Middle Ages*, ed. A. N. DOANE and C. BRAUN PASTERNAK (London, 1991); A. JORGENSEN, “The Trumpet and the Wolf: Noises of Battle in Old English Poetry”, *Oral Tradition* 24/2 (2009), pp.319-226; R. DANCE, “Pær wearð hream ahafen: A Note on Old English Spelling and the Sound of *The Battle of Maldon*”, in *The Power of Words: Anglo-Saxon Studies Presented to Donald G. Scragg on his Seventieth Birthday*, ed. J. WILCOX and H. MAGENNIS (Morgantown, 2006), pp.278-317. In relation to birds see K. POOLE and E. LACEY, “Avian Aurality in Anglo-Saxon England”, *World Archaeology* 46:3 (2014), pp.400-415; E. LACEY, “When is a *broc* not a *broc*? When it is a *crawe* or a *brefn*!: A case-study in recovering Old English folk-taxonomies”, in *The Art, Literature and Material Culture of the Medieval World*, ed. M. BOULTON *et al.* (Dublin, 2015), pp.138-152.

⁷ W.B. LOCKWOOD, *Oxford Book of British Bird Names* (Oxford, 1984), *passim*; LACEY, “When is a *broc* not a *broc*?”, pp.142-148.

⁸ This point is made by E.A. ANDERSON, *Folk-Taxonomies in Early English* (Madison, 2003), p.19; see also LACEY, “When is a *broc* not a *broc*?”, pp.138-140.

⁹ J. HAFFER, “The history of the biological species concept”, *Acta Zoologica Sinica* 52 (2006), 415-420; W. KUNZ, *Do Species Exist?: Principles of Taxonomic Classification* (Weinheim, 2012).

¹⁰ Walter Bock differentiates ‘species concept’, ‘species categories’ and ‘species taxa’: the ‘species concept’ comprises such evolutionary biological concerns as genetic and reproductive isolation (and applies only to sexually reproducing organisms), whereas the category and taxa pertain to the relatively arbitrary compartmentalisation and arrangement of these organisms within hierarchies. This hierarchical organisation is the same thing as folk-taxonomies. See W. BOCK, “Species: the concept, category, taxon”, *Journal of Zoological Systematics and Evolutionary Research* 42 (2004), 178-190; *Ibid.*, “Species concepts versus species category versus species taxa”, *Acta Zoologica Sinica* 52 (2006), 421-424; see also ANDERSON, *Folk Taxonomies*, pp. 21-54; LACEY, “When is a *broc* a *broc*?”, pp.138-139; MAYR, *The Growth of Biological Thought*, pp.147-300.

¹¹ The concept is known variously as “ethnobiological classification”, folk biological nomenclature” and “biological kind classification” too. The most fulsome study of this kind is ANDERSON, *Folk-Taxonomies*; see further LACEY, “When is a *broc* not a *broc*?”, pp.138-142; S. ATRAN, “The Nature of Folk-Biological Life Forms”, *American Anthropologist* 87:2 (1985), pp.298-315; B. BERLIN *et al.*, “General Principles of Classification and Nomenclature in Folk Biology”, *American Anthropologist* 75:1 (1973), pp.214-242; C. H. BROWN *et al.*, “Some General Principles of This is an accepted manuscript of a chapter published by Brepols Publishers in *Sensory Perception in the Medieval West*, available online at <https://doi.org/10.1484/M.USML-EB.5.109361>. It is not the copy of record. Copyright © 2016, Brepols Publishers.

scientific systematics,¹² and for many people there is no difference between folk taxonomies and scientific taxonomies:¹³ they are both heterogeneous hierarchies which can be formed in multiple ways and according to varying criteria.¹⁴ We cannot, therefore, labour under the impression that there is some fundamental and essential quality that distinguishes species, nor can we assert that folk-taxonomies are somehow inferior or less true.¹⁵ We must also remember that the fixedness of present-day speciation is arbitrary, and that species are liable to recategorisation, separation, and merging in light of new evidence.¹⁶ While present-day species concepts are concerned more with phylogeny and branches of evolution, historical species concepts were predicated, like folk-taxonomies, on features which were arbitrarily deemed significant: reproductivity, ecological niches, and even – in the case of phenetic species concept – morphologically.¹⁷ It is important to remember that these criteria reflect contemporary notions of accurate observation (e.g. genetics, ecology, ethnology), and so, when considering how and why speakers of Old English made the distinctions they did with regards to animals, we must think of the Anglo-Saxons’ notions of accurate observation.

Bede’s *De natura rerum* (“On the nature of things”), like the earliest students of the natural world, was concerned with natural order.¹⁸ Aristotle sought groupings of animals in order to distinguish common features that may elucidate a natural architecture and a deeper understanding of the universe (i.e. a cosmic teleology);¹⁹ Isidore of Seville sought the essence and nature of things in the origins of their words;²⁰ and even the dizzyingly fulsome catalogue in Pliny’s *Natural History* has natural order at the heart of it: the content of the different books is generally governed by what present-day semanticists would call ‘basic level categories’, and the movement across subjects within the books is governed by associations across the natural world.²¹ After the Anglo-

Biological and Non-Biological Folk Classification”, *American Ethnologist* 3:1 (1976), pp.73-85. For categorisation and thinking see G. LAKOFF, *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal about the Mind* (Chicago, 1987), especially pp.5-156 and 269-303; S. HARNAD, “To Cognize is to Categorize: Cognition is Categorization”, in *Handbook of Categorization in Cognitive Science*, ed. H. COHEN and C. LEFEBVRE (Oxford, 2005), pp.20-45; J. BOSTER, “Categories and Cognitive Anthropology”, in *Handbook of Categorization*, pp.92-118.

¹² MAYR, *The Growth of Biological Thought*, pp.147-208; K. DE QUIEROZ, “Branches in the line of descent: Charles Darwin and the evolution of the species concept”, *Biological Journal of the Linnean Society* 103 (2011), pp.19-35; P. H. RAVEN *et al.*, “The Origins of Taxonomy”, *Science* 174:4015 (1971), pp.1210-1213.

¹³ LACEY, “When is a *broc* not a *broc*?”, pp.139-142.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.141-142 (and nn.19-26); see also KUNZ, *Do Species Exist?*, the essays in *Species Concepts and Phylogenetic Theory: A Debate*, ed. Q. D. WHEELER and R. MEIER (New York, 2000) and K. DE QUIEROZ, “Species Concepts and Species Delimitations”, *Systematic Biology* 56:6 (2007), pp.879-886, especially p.880.

¹⁵ See also BOCK, “Species”, p.179.

¹⁶ For example, the gannet (*Sula bassanus*) was recategorised from the genus *Morus*; hooded crows (*Corvus cornix*) and carrion crows (*Corvus corone*) used to be considered the same species (see KUNZ, *Do Species Exist*, pp.99-100); see also P. AGAPOW, “Species: demarcation and diversity”, in *Phylogeny and Conservation*, ed. A. PURVIS *et al.* (Cambridge, 2005), pp. 57-75 (at pp.61-63).

¹⁷ DE QUIEROZ, “Species concepts”, pp.880-882; *Ibid.*, “Branches in the line of decent”, *passim*.

¹⁸ Bede, *On De natura rerum*, ed. and trans. C. KENDALL and F. WALLIS (Liverpool, 2010), pp.1-12.

¹⁹ LINDBERG, *The Beginnings of Western Science*, p.63; Aristotle, *On the Parts of Animals* I.5, trans. J. G. LENNOX, *Aristotle: On the Parts of Animals I-IV* (Oxford, 2001), pp.13-15; see further A. FALCON, *Aristotle and the Science of Nature: Unity without Uniformity* (Cambridge, 2008).

²⁰ S. A. BARNEY, W. J. LEWIS, J. A. BEACH, O. BERGANHOF, *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville* (Cambridge, 2006), pp.18-24.

²¹ T. Murphy, *Pliny the Elder’s Natural History: The Empire in Encyclopedia* (Oxford, 2004), pp.29-48. For “basic level categories” see E. ROSCH, “Principles of Categorization”, in *Cognition and Categorization*, ed. E. ROSCH and B. LLOYD (Hillsdale, 1978), pp.27-48.

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Saxons, the pioneering systematists were concerned with grouping things according to ‘kind’, though precisely what these ‘kinds’ comprised was varied and arbitrary. They could be motivated by utility, as was the case for Frederick II of Hohenstaufen’s division of hunted birds into waterfowl, landbirds and ‘neutral birds’ (I.2), and also a duality of raptorial/non-raptorial birds (I.3), or they could be motivated by “totally artificial” ordering principles like the hardness of beaks, the perceived harmoniousness of their singing or whether they bathe in dust or water.²² Where we have ordered lists of birds in Old English, they are arranged alphabetically in the glossaries and are therefore of no use for inferring the underlying systems of categorisation. Some insight, however, may be gleaned from close analysis of the bird-names themselves.

Bird identification in Old English

Bird-names in Old English can be broadly arranged into four groups: names motivated by appearance, names motivated by behaviour, names motivated by sound, and those which do not clearly (or we do not currently know enough about to) fit into one of the other categories. In the following table I translate the Old English literally without specifying which birds were the referents: as we shall see, below, the relationship between lexeme and referent does not match up easily with our present-day categories.²³

	Name	Name elements	Literal meaning
Behaviour	<i>Dopened,</i>	<i>Dop</i> < OE * <i>dopian</i> (‘to dip’, cf. ON <i>deypa</i> , OHG <i>toufen</i> , OS <i>dopian</i>) ²⁴ + <i>ened</i>	Dip-duck
	<i>Duce</i>	<i>Duce</i> < OE * <i>ducan</i> (‘to dive’, cf. German <i>tauchen</i> , Dutch <i>duiken</i>) ²⁵	Diver
	<i>Dufedoppe</i>	<i>Dufe</i> < OE <i>dufan</i> ‘to dive’	Dive-dipper
	<i>Feolofor</i>	<i>Feolu</i> ‘much’ + <i>for</i> < <i>faran</i> , ‘travel’ ²⁶	Much-travelled
	<i>Frecmase</i>	<i>Frec</i> = ‘greedy’ + <i>mase</i>	Greedy- <i>mase</i>
	<i>Gim,</i>	< Proto-Germanic * <i>gimwo</i> , related to ON <i>gjá</i> ‘gap’ ²⁷	Gaper
	<i>Glida,</i>	< OE <i>glidan</i> , ‘to glide’	Glider
	<i>Hafoc,</i>	Related to OE <i>hebban</i> , ‘to lift’ and Latin <i>capere</i> , ‘to seize’ + <i>-oc</i> (hypocoristic suffix) ²⁸	Seizer

²² Frederick II of Hohenstaufen, *The Art of Falconry, being the De arte venandi cum avibus of Frederick II of Hohenstaufen*, ed. C. WOOD and F. FYFE (London, 1943), pp. 7-15; MAYR, *Growth of Biological Thought*, p.168.

²³ The names in this table comprises only those which are attested in Old English – those which are reconstructed on the basis of later evidence, like many of those in KITSON, “Old English bird-names (I)” and *ibid.*, “Old English bird-names (II)”, are not included here. There is not the space to fully discuss every name analysis here, though in some cases a discussion or supporting evidence is referenced.

²⁴ G. KROONEN, *Etymological Dictionary of Proto-Germanic* (Leiden, 2013), s.v. **daupjan*?; V. OREL, *Handbook of Germanic Etymology* (Leiden, 2003), s.v. **daupjanan*?

²⁵ KROONEN, *Etymological Dictionary*, s.v. **dūkan*?

²⁶ KITSON, “Old English bird-names (i)”, p.487.

²⁷ KROONEN, *Etymological Dictionary*, s.v. **giwōjan*?; KITSON, “Old English bird-names (ii)”, p.8.

²⁸ LOCKWOOD, *Oxford Book of British Bird Names*, s.v. ‘(-ock’.

	<i>Hleapewinc</i>	<i>Hleap</i> < OE <i>hleapan</i> ‘to leap’ + <i>*winc</i> < Proto-Germanic <i>*wenkjanan</i> ‘to move sideways’ ²⁹	Sideways leaper
	<i>Putta/puttoc</i>	<Proto-Germanic <i>*putjan</i> , cognate with Present-day ‘put’ ³⁰ + <i>-oc</i> suffix.	Putter ³¹
	<i>Rindeclifer</i>	<i>Rind</i> ‘bark’ + <i>clifer</i> ‘cleaver’	Bark-cleaver
	<i>yrðling</i>	<i>Yrð</i> = <i>eorð</i> , ‘earth’ + <i>-ling</i> diminutive	Little earth thing
Appearance	<i>Amer</i>	<i>Amer</i> ‘coat’	Coated
	<i>Colmase</i>	<i>Col</i> ‘coal’ + <i>mase</i>	Coal-coloured <i>mase</i>
	<i>Ganot</i>	Ultimately from the same root as <i>gander</i> , ‘goose’ ³²	Long-necked squat-bodied bird
	<i>Geolunwearte</i>	<i>Gealwe</i> ‘yellow’ + <i>earte</i> (of Proto-Indo-European antiquity, meaning some kind of small water-bird) ³³	Yellow water-bird
	<i>Goldfinc</i>	<i>Gold</i> ‘gold’ + <i>finc</i>	Golden <i>finc</i>
	<i>Isern</i>	<i>Is</i> ‘ice’ + <i>earn</i> ‘eagle’	Ice-eagle
	<i>Rædda/ruddoc</i>	< <i>ræd</i> ‘red’ + <i>-oc</i> suffix	Red thing
	<i>Reodmūða</i>	<i>Reod</i> ‘red’ + <i>mūða</i> ‘mouth’	Red-mouth
	<i>Sweartling</i>	<i>Sweart</i> ‘black’ + <i>-ling</i> diminutive	Little black thing
	<i>Ylfete</i>	< Proto-Indo-European <i>*h₂elb^h-o-</i> ‘white’ ³⁴	White thing
Habitat	<i>Ceaffinc</i>	<i>Ceaf</i> ‘chaff’ + <i>finc</i>	<i>Finc</i> which lives among chaff.
	<i>Clodamer</i>	<i>Clod</i> ‘clod’ + <i>amer</i>	<i>Amer</i> which lives among clod
	<i>Edisben</i>	<i>Edisc</i> ‘park’ + <i>ben</i>	<i>Hen</i> which lives in the park
	<i>Erschen</i>	<i>Ersce</i> ‘park’ + <i>ben</i>	<i>Hen</i> which lives in the park
	<i>Feldfara</i>	<i>Feld</i> ‘field’ + <i>fara</i> ‘to go’	Field-journeyer
	<i>Stæðswealwe</i>	<i>Stæð</i> ‘bank’ + <i>swealwe</i>	<i>Swealwe</i> which lives at the bank
	<i>Wuduculfre</i>	<i>Wudu</i> ‘wood’ + <i>culfre</i> ‘dove’	Dove which lives in the woods
	<i>Wudusnite</i>	<i>Wudu</i> ‘wood’ + <i>snite</i>	<i>Snite</i> which lives in the woods
Sound	<i>Agu</i>	Onomatopoeic root (<i>*ag</i>) ³⁵	[ag]-sounding thing
	<i>Ceo</i>	Onomatopoeic	[tʃeu]-sounding thing
	<i>Cicen</i>	Onomatopoeic + <i>-en</i> suffix	[tʃik]-sounding thing
	<i>Coc</i>	Onomatopoeic	[kok]-sounding thing

²⁹ OREL, *Handbook*, s.v. **wenkjanan*’.

³⁰ KROONEN, *Etymological Dictionary*, s.v. **put(t)ōn*’.

³¹ See KITSON, “Old English bird-names (ii)”, p.9.

³² M. E. R. LACEY, “Birds and Bird-lore in the Literature of Anglo-Saxon England” (unpublished doctoral thesis, University College London, 2014), pp.72-82.

³³ KROONEN, *Etymological Dictionary*, s.v. **artō(n)-*’.

³⁴ KROONEN, *Etymological Dictionary*, s.v. **albut-*’.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, s.v. **ag/kkōn*’. Compare W. LEHMANN, *A Gothic Etymological Dictionary* (Leiden, 1986), s.v. *’ahaks*’.

<i>Cran</i>	Onomatopoeic root (* <i>gr</i>) ³⁶	[gɪ]-sounding thing
<i>Crave</i>	Onomatopoeic	[kɪa]-sounding thing
<i>Cyta</i>	Onomatopoeic	[ki:tə]-sounding thing
<i>Disteltwige</i>	<i>Distel</i> ‘thistle’ + onomatopoeic [twi], folk-etymologised under influence of <i>twig</i> ‘branch’.	[twi]-sounding thing found on thistles
<i>Finc/pinca</i>	Onomatopoeic	[pɪŋk]/[spɪŋk]-sounding thing ³⁷
<i>Geac</i>	Onomatopoeic origin < * <i>gaukaz</i>	[gau:kə]-sounding thing
<i>Hen/hana</i>	Root meaning ‘singer’ ³⁸	Singer
<i>Haferblate,</i> (Hege)- <i>sucga,</i>	<i>Hafer</i> ‘goat’ + <i>blatan</i> ‘to bleat’ <i>Hege</i> ‘hedge’ + <i>sucga</i> < <i>sucgan</i> ‘to suck’	Goat-bleater Sucking-noise-making hedge-dweller
<i>Higera</i>	Onomatopoeic root	[χiχ]-sounding thing
<i>braga,</i>	Onomatopoeic root	[χɪai]-sounding thing ³⁹
<i>Hrefn</i>	Onomatopoeic	[χɪaβ]-sounding thing
<i>Hroc</i>	Onomatopoeic	[χɪok]-sounding thing ⁴⁰
<i>Hulfestre</i>	<i>Hulf</i> = onomatopoeic [hʊlf] + <i>-estre</i> agentive suffix ⁴¹	[hulf]-sunder
<i>Hwilpe</i>	Onomatopoeic	[hwilp]-sounding thing
<i>Linetwige > linet</i>	<i>Lin</i> ‘flax’ + onomatopoeic [twi], folk-etymologised under influence of <i>twig</i> ‘branch’.	[twi]-sounding thing found on flax
<i>Mæw</i>	Onomatopoeic	[mæ:u]-sounding thing
<i>Mase</i>	Onomatopoeic	[mas]-sounding thing
<i>nibtegale,</i>	<i>Nibt</i> ‘night’ + <i>gale</i> < <i>galan</i> ‘to chant’	Night-chanter
<i>Pea/pawa</i>	Onomatopoeic/Onomatopoeic borrowing from Latin <i>pava</i>	[pi:ə]-sounding thing
<i>Pipere</i>	<i>Pipere</i> ‘piper’	Piper
<i>Pur</i>	Onomatopoeic	[pur]-sounding thing
<i>Rardumle</i>	<i>Rarian</i> ‘to roar’ + <i>dumle</i> , of uncertain meaning. Possibly onomatopoeic ⁴²	? [dum]-roarer
<i>Scric</i>	Onomatopoeic	[skri:tʃ]-sounding thing

³⁶ KROONEN, *Etymological Dictionary*, s.v. **krana/ōn*-’.

³⁷ Forms with and without initial /s/ are common in words of Indo-European antiquity.

³⁸ OREL, *Handbook*, s.v. **xanōn*’; KROONEN, *Etymological Dictionary*, s.v. **hanan*-’.

³⁹ For *higera* and *braga* see LACEY, “Birds and Bird-lore”, pp.69-72.

⁴⁰ For *crave*, *hrefn* and *hroc* in detail, see LACEY, “When is a *hroc* not a *hroc*?”.

⁴¹ R. HOGG and R. FULK, *A Grammar of Old English. Volume 2: Morphology* (Chichester, 2011), p.51.

⁴² See H. SUOLAHTI, *Die Deutschen Vogelnamen* (Strasburg, 1909), p.385.

	<i>Seggs cara</i>	<i>Segg</i> ‘sedge’ + <i>scara</i> ‘shearer’	Shearing-sounding thing in the sedge ⁴³
	<i>Stangella</i>	<i>Stan</i> ‘stone’ + <i>giellan</i> ‘to yell’	Stone-yeller
	<i>Swan</i>	< Proto-Indo-European * <i>suonb</i> ₂₋₀ ⁴⁴	The sound
	<i>Swealwe</i>	Related to <i>swelgan</i> ‘to swallow’; compare <i>sucga</i>	Swallowing/sucking-sounding bird
	<i>Brostle</i> , / <i>strostle</i>	Onomatopoeic	See discussion, below
	<i>Brysce</i> ,		
	<i>ufe</i> ,	Onomatopoeic	[u:f]-sounding thing
	<i>ule</i> ,	Onomatopoeic	[u:l]-sounding thing
	<i>worbana</i> ,	Onomatopoeic [wɔ:r] + <i>hana</i>	[wɔ:r]-sounding <i>hana</i>
Appearance and sound	<i>Spicmase</i>	<i>Spic</i> ‘blubber’ + <i>mase</i> Possible that <i>spic</i> [spik] analysed onomatopoeically	Fat- <i>mase</i> [spik]-sounding <i>mase</i>
Unclear	<i>Culfre</i> ,	Borrowing of Latin <i>columba</i> ⁴⁵	-
	<i>Cuscote</i> ,	<i>Cu</i> ‘cow’ + <i>sceotan</i> ‘to shoot’	?cow-shot
	<i>Earn</i>	Indo-European antiquity	Eagle
	<i>Earngeot</i> / <i>earngeap</i>	<i>Earn</i> + <i>geot</i> ‘pour’/ <i>geap</i> ‘gape’	?
	<i>Ened</i>	Indo-European antiquity	Duck
	<i>Fina</i>	?	?
	<i>Frysc</i> / <i>Frisca</i>	?	?
	<i>Gos</i>	Indo-European antiquity	Goose
	<i>Herefong</i>	<i>Here</i> ‘army’ + <i>feng</i> ‘to take’	‘Army-seizer’
	<i>Lawer</i>	Non-Indo-European word of Proto-Germanic antiquity ⁴⁶	Lark
	<i>Osle</i>	Indo-European antiquity	Small or medium bird
	<i>Salthaga</i>	? <i>Saltna</i> ‘dance’ ⁴⁷ + <i>haga</i> ‘hedge’	‘Dance-hedge’
	<i>Scealfor</i>	? <i>sceal</i> ‘shoal’ + <i>fara</i> ‘to go’	? ‘shoal-traveller’
	<i>Scraf</i>	? related to ‘scrape’ (e.g. Old Norse <i>skerpa</i> , Old English <i>scearfian</i>)	?scraper ?scrape-sounding thing
	<i>Snite</i>	?	?
	<i>Spearwa</i>	Common Germanic root (* <i>sparwa</i> z)	Small bird
	<i>Star</i> / <i>starling</i>	Indo-European antiquity ⁴⁸	Bird
	<i>Stearn</i>	Common Germanic ⁴⁹	Some small seabird
	<i>Turtle</i>	Borrowing from Latin ⁵⁰	Dove

⁴³ Compare KITSON, “Old English bird-names (i)”, p.497.

⁴⁴ KROONEN, *Etymological Dictionary*, s.v. *swana-‘.

⁴⁵ LACEY, “Birds and Bird-lore”, pp.197-200; LOCKWOOD, *Oxford Book of British Bird Names*, s.v. ‘culver’.

⁴⁶ P. SCHRIJVER, “Animal, vegetable and mineral: some Western European substratum words”, in *Sound law and analogy: Papers in Honour of R. S. Beekes*, ed. A. LUBOTSKY (Amsterdam, 1997), pp.293-316.

⁴⁷ KITSON, “Old English bird-names (i)”, p.486.

⁴⁸ KROONEN, *Etymological Dictionary*, s.v. *star(r)a(n); OREL, *Handbook*, s.v. *staraz ~ starōn’.

⁴⁹ OREL, *Handbook*, s.v. *sternaz’.

⁵⁰ LACEY, “Birds and Bird-lore”, p.197.

	<i>wrenna</i> , (also metathesised <i>warna</i>)	Possibly Common Germanic ⁵¹	Small bird
	<i>Wroc</i>	Unclear	-

The unclear category, as might be expected, is heterogeneous. Some of these are unclear to us (or at least to me): thus both the motivation for and meaning of *tysca* and *frysca* (if they are not, indeed, the same word) are buried beneath confused glossary entries and obscure morphology. Whether or not these were clear (or unclear) to speakers of Old English is unknowable. Some of the other names, like *scealfor* and *scraf*, were probably transparent to speakers of Old English, but are morphologically (and etymologically) uncertain. Others still are generally unclear, both in terms of etymology and referent, like *earngeap/earngeot* and *wroc*. The names of Indo-European and Common Germanic antiquity were probably not analysable to Old English speakers, and so the motivation for their naming is deemed unclear.

For the most part, however, bird-names in Old English were transparently descriptive. This is presumably because named identification – and therefore transmission of this sort of knowledge – would have been *in situ*. In the absence of popular ornithological literature, ornithological organisations, or any other kind of regulating body, the name itself was the principle authority for its applicability to a bird. In this sense, we might term these names endogenic: the expression meaning (i.e. the full range of applicable meanings) of the word was relatively abstract, and this abstract meaning may have determined the range of possible referents.⁵²

Of particular interest here is the fact that so many names are motivated by the sound of birds. This is perhaps no surprise, given that birds are usually heard before they are seen.⁵³ Some birds, such as bitterns, nightingales, and cuckoos, are seldom seen but frequently heard; in some sense, they exist only as aural experiences within a landscape.⁵⁴ Even those birds which are frequently seen, however, may be marked out by their vocalisations (like the *crawe*, etymon of present-day ‘crow’). The names alone demonstrate that aurality was important as a way of perceiving. However, this does not adequately stress its importance: in and amongst these aurally-motivated names are visually similar birds which are distinguished by their calls, suggesting the primacy of aural experience in these cases. In what follows, the importance of sound at rather precise levels of specification is shown, and taxonomic rank is noted by levels. Level I is the ‘basic level’ category, and is to some extent arbitrary (it may be ‘animal’ or ‘bird’, depending on the subject discussed), and additional levels denote specificity. The addition of A denotes a cultural and thematic criterion, e.g. ‘domesticated animals’ is Level IA of Level I ‘animals’.⁵⁵

⁵¹ KROONEN, *Etymological Dictionary*, s.v. ‘*wrandan-?’.

⁵² Prototype semantics is useful here: each of these terms had a prototypical referent (albeit one that varied according to region, background and the like), and similarity to the prototype would have been grounds for inclusion. See L. E. C. DE OLIVEIRA *et al.*, “Prototypes and Folk Taxonomy: Artisanal Fishers and Snappers on the Brazilian Coast”, *Current Anthropology* 53:6 (2012), pp.789-798.

⁵³ J. MYNOTT, *Birdscapes: Birds in our Imagination and Experience* (Princeton, 2009), pp.116-119.

⁵⁴ See also POOLE and LACEY, “Avian Aurality”, pp.400-405.

⁵⁵ See further ANDERSON, *Folk Taxonomies*.

Ule and ufe

Here is a bird for which we have only one onomatopoeic word in modern English, but two in Old English: the owl. In modern English it is Level II bird-name which lexicalizes a range of largely, but not strictly, nocturnal birds with round heads and seemingly flat faces. The semantic range of the Old English terms is not immediately clear, as the two Old English words, (*h*)*ufe* and *ule*, are attested almost exclusively in the glossaries.⁵⁶ Outside of the glossaries we find *ule* once in Leviticus and in possibly four place-names,⁵⁷ though the *ule* is not described at all in Leviticus, and the place-names bearing *ule* are not species-specific environments. Kitson draws attention to Suffolk place-names possibly employing (*h*)*ufe*, though again these environments are not species-specific.⁵⁸ This means that if we are to have any chance of recovering the semantics of (*h*)*ufe* and *ule*, then the lexical and ornithological evidence provides us with the best means of doing so.

While *ule*, the etymon of modern English ‘owl’, is the more common word in Old English, the presence of cognates of (*h*)*ufe* in Old High German suggests the latter is not a bookish neologism, though we cannot remark on its prevalence in Old English with any certainty.⁵⁹ Although *ule* glosses a wide variety of Latin ‘owl’ words, namely *strix*, *ulula*, *noctua* and forms of *cavannus* (most often in the form *cavannarum*), (*h*)*ufe* only ever glosses *bubo* and *bufo*.⁶⁰ Later on, in the eleventh-

⁵⁶ *Ule*. Ælfric, *Ælfric's Glossary*, l.10, ed. J. ZUPITZA, *Ælfrics Grammatik und Glossar* (Berlin, 1880), p. 307; glosses to Aldhelm's prose *De laude virginittatis*, l.5338, ed. A. NAPIER, *Old English Glosses* (Oxford, 1900); Second Antwerp glossary l.986, ed. L. KINDSCHI, “The Latin-Old English Glossaries in Plantin-Moretus MS.32 and British Museum MS. Additional 32,246”, (unpublished doctoral thesis, Stanford University, 1955); Brussels glossary l.35, ed. T. WRIGHT and R. WÜLKNER, *Anglo-Saxon and Old English Vocabularies* (London, 1884), vol. 1, IX.3; Second Corpus glossary, C.119, N.138 and U.238, ed. J. HESELS, *An Eighth Century Glossary, Preserved in the Library of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge* (Cambridge, 1890); First Cleopatra glossary, ll.1275 and 4281, ed. W. STRYKER, “The Latin-Old English Glossary in MS. Cotton Cleopatra A.III”, (unpublished doctoral thesis, Stanford University, 1951), Second Cleopatra glossary, ll.41 and 42, ed. J. QUINN, “The Minor Latin-Old English Glossaries in MS. Cotton Cleopatra A.III”, (unpublished doctoral thesis, Stanford University, 1951), Third Cleopatra glossary, l.1361, ed. QUINN, “The Minor Latin-Old English Glossaries”; an Old English glossary in MS London, British Library, Harley 107, l.55, ed. J. ZUPITZA, “Altenglische Glossen”, *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur* 33 (1989), pp. 237-42; Harley 3376 glossary, C.579, ed. R. OLIPHANT, *Harley Latin-Old English Glossary Edited from British Museum MS Harley 3376*, *Janua linguarum, series practica* 20 (The Hague, 1966); MS Stowe 57 glossary, l.30, ed. R. GARRETT, “Middle English and French Glosses from MS Stowe 57”, *Archiv für das Studium der neueren Sprachen und Literaturen*, New Series, 21 (1908), 411-12. (*H*)*ufe*. Brussels glossary, l.67; Second Antwerp, l.1027; Second Corpus, B.206; Épinal-Erfurt ll.142 and 161, ed. J. PHEIFER, *Old English Glosses in the Épinal-Erfurt Glossary* (Oxford, 1974); First Cleopatra l.700, among some glosses to Isidore's *Etymologiae*, l.4, ed. W. RIEHLE, “Ueber einige neuentdeckte altenglische Glossen”, *Anglia*, 84 (1966), 150-55; and in two other glossaries edited by H. D. Meritt (nos. 36 and 70), both on l.14 (H. MERITT, *Old English Glosses: A Collection*, MLA General Series 16 (New York, 1945).

⁵⁷ Leviticus 11:13, ed. S. CRAWFORD, *The Old English Version of the Heptateuch* (London, 1922). The place-names are in S 79 (*ulan wylle*, ‘owls’ well’), S 377 (*ulan del*, ‘owls’ dale’), S1307 (*ulan bearbe*, ‘owls’ wood’), and S 803 (*ulan hyrste*, ‘owl’s copse’), where the charters are numbered as in P. SAWYER, *Anglo-Saxon Charters: An Annotated List and Bibliography* (London, 1968). The topography of South Stoke indicates that *hyrste* means ‘copse’ in S 803. See G. B. GRUNDY, “The Saxon Land Charters of Hampshire with Notes on Place and Field Names: 4th series”, *Archaeological Journal* 34 (1927), pp. 160-340, at pp.216-217.

⁵⁸ KITSON, “Old English bird-names (ii)”, p.6.

⁵⁹ There are several variant forms in Old High German. J. BOSWORTH and T. TOLLER, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* (London, 1898), note that the OHG (*h*)*uwo* can occur both ‘with and without initial *h*’ (s.v. ‘huƿ’), and SUOLAHTI, *Die Deutschen Vogelnamen*, p. 309, gives *ūro*, *hū(w)o*, and in n.1, *uuof* and *uuo*.

⁶⁰ According to J. ANDRÉ, *Les Noms D'oiseaux en Latin* (Paris, 1967), both *bubo* and *bufo* refer to the Eagle Owl (s.v.v. ‘bubo, -onis’ and ‘bufo, -onis’), whereas *noctua* (s.v.) is a vertically polysemous term which lexicalises both the Level IA meaning covering all nocturnal creatures (where Level I is ‘all creatures’), and the Level III meaning of the Little Owl (*Athene noctua*). *Ulula* (s.v.) refers to the Tawny Owl (*strix aluco*), *strix* (s.v. ‘strix, strigis’) refers to the Barn Owl. This is an accepted manuscript of a chapter published by Brepols Publishers in *Sensory Perception in the Medieval West*, available online at <https://doi.org/10.1484/M.USML-EB.5.109361>. It is not the copy of record. Copyright © 2016, Brepols Publishers.

century, there are also instances where *(h)ufe* glosses Latin *vultur*.⁶¹ This suggests that *ule* had a wider semantic range than *(h)ufe*. As *ule* never glosses *bubo* or *bufo*, Latin words which refer to the large Eagle Owl (*Bubo bubo*), the implication of the glossary evidence is as follows: firstly, that *(h)ufe* is a Level III term which refers exclusively to the large Eagle Owl (and then, if we can trust its glossing *vultur*, as a Level IA term for large birds of prey generally, where Level I is all birds), and secondly, that *ule* is a Level II term which lexicalizes all smaller owls. The former point is supported by Suolahti's analysis of the Old High German cognates of *(h)ufe*, which he argues all also refer to the Eagle Owl.

There is a potential problem here, however, and that is the disputed status of the Eagle Owl in Anglo-Saxon England. Derek Yalden and Umberto Albarella note that "Eagle Owls are not represented in Medieval British archaeology", and that this is "a strong argument that they had become extinct well before then",⁶² though it is worth bearing in mind that the Eagle Owl's preferred habitat in the more remote portions of mountains and forests means that they are not likely to be well represented in the archaeological record.⁶³ The Eagle Owl is still an accidental visitor to Britain today, and it is similarly an accidental visitor to other areas where historically there were populations.⁶⁴ Because of the dearth of evidence for an Eagle Owl population in Anglo-Saxon England, Kitson suggests that OE *(h)ufe* referred to the Long-eared Owl (*Asio otis*), 'as the native species most similar to the eagle owl and most different from the tawny'; he takes *ule* to refer 'mainly' to the Tawny Owl.⁶⁵ This raises the stakes for an accurate identification of the *(h)ufe*, as it may or may not supply documentary evidence for the Eagle Owl's presence in Anglo-Saxon England.⁶⁶

The onomatopoeic nature of *ule* and *(h)ufe* is beyond reasonable doubt, and they match quite well to transcriptions of owl vocalisations. Specifically, *ule* is closest to hooting of the vocal (and nocturnal) Tawny Owl (*Strix aluco*),⁶⁷ whereas, *(h)ufe* captures the forcefully expulsive, almost cough-like, qualities of the calls of crepuscular and nocturnal Long-eared Owl,⁶⁸ the often diurnal Short-eared Owl (*Asio flammeus*),⁶⁹ and, though the evidence for its residency in Anglo-Saxon

(*Tyto alba*), and André identifies *cavannus* (s.v. 'cauannus') as a Gaulish name for the Tawny Owl. The probable source for this lemma is given by André.

⁶¹ KITSON, 'Old English Bird-names (ii)', p.7, notes that two eleventh-century manuscripts of Ælfric's Grammar add *(h)ufe* to gloss *vultur*.

⁶² D. W. YALDEN, and U. ALBARELLA, *The History of British Birds* (Oxford, 2009), p. 138.

⁶³ For the bird's history in the British Isles, see YALDEN and ALBARELLA, *History of British Birds*, pp. 58-60, and J. FISHER, *The Shell Bird Book* (London, 1963), p. 24. Because of issues with the semantic fields of *bubo* and *ufe* we cannot unquestioningly accept Fisher's comments, on p. 324, that identify the Eagle Owl as 'recorded' or 'possibly native' between the eighth and eleventh centuries.

⁶⁴ S. CRAMP *et al.*, *Handbook of the Birds of Europe, the Middle East and North Africa: Birds of the Western Palearctic. Volume 4: Terns to Woodpeckers* (Oxford, 1985), p.467; H. MIKKOLA, *Owls of Europe* (Calton, 1983), pp.88-89.

⁶⁵ KITSON, 'Old English Bird-names (ii)', 6.

⁶⁶ See, for example, FISHER, *The Shell Bird Book*, p. 324.

⁶⁷ The Tawny Owl's hoot is the sound most people tend to think of when imagining an owl-call. See MIKKOLA, *Owls of Europe*, pp.140-142; CRAMP *et al.*, *Handbook*, pp.540-542.

⁶⁸ Often transliterated as 'oh' but described as a 'deep hooting'. See L. SVENSSON *et al.*, *Collins Bird Guide: The most complete guide to the birds of Britain and Ireland and Europe* (London, 2009), p. 228; MIKKOLA, *Owls of Europe*, pp.215-217; CRAMP *et al.*, *Handbook*, pp.582-584.

⁶⁹ The most relevant vocalisations are the alarm-call often transliterated as 'cheɸ', the female's 'cheh-eɸ', and the deep hooting flight-call often transliterated as 'uh'. See SVENSSON *et al.*, *Collins Bird Guide*, p. 228; MIKKOLA, *Owls of Europe*, pp.235-236; CRAMP *et al.*, *Handbook*, pp.597-598.

England is basically non-existent, the nocturnal and crepuscular Eagle Owl.⁷⁰ If we combine this with the glossary evidence, then the following taxonomies are suggested.

Ule

Ule is an onomatopoeic name redolent of the Tawny Owl's hoot, but as the Tawny Owl is nocturnal and rarely seen (or, at least, rarely observed in the act of its eponymous vocalisation), *ule* could plausibly lend itself to a range of nocturnal birds. This would explain the rationale underlying the varied Latin 'owl'-terms it glosses. Moreover, the fact that it never glosses *bubo* or *bufo* suggests that it was firmly differentiated from the *(h)ufe*. Thus, *ule* is a vertically polysemous term which lexicalises both Level IA 'birds of the night' (where Level I is 'birds'), Level II 'non-*(h)ufe* owls' and possibly even Level III 'Tawny Owl'. The status of the now-resident Little Owl (*Athene noctua*) is not clear in Anglo-Saxon England. It is generally thought to have been introduced to the British Isles in the nineteenth century,⁷¹ though Fisher notes that we have fossil evidence for their presence in Britain in the Late Ice Age.⁷² It seems probable that the Little Owl, as well as the other occasional visitors such as the Scops Owl (*Otus scops*), came under *ule* too, even if only in its Level II meaning.

Ufe

(H)ufe is an onomatopoeic name that evokes the cries of not just one, but three species: the Long-eared Owl, the Short-eared Owl and the Eagle Owl. It is uncertain whether the last of these was resident in Anglo-Saxon England, though it seems to have been the primary referent of *(h)ufe*'s OHG cognates. Unlike the Tawny Owl, these three owls are likely to have been seen calling during the day, at dawn, or at dusk, and, moreover, are visually quite similar. The main differences are that the Eagle Owl is substantially larger (59-73 cm long, 138-170 cm wingspan) than the Long-eared or Short-eared owls (L 31-37 cm, WS 86-98 cm, and L 33-40 cm, WS 95-105 cm respectively), and only the Eagle Owl and Long-eared Owl have particularly prominent 'ear-tufts'; these are much more difficult to see on a Short-eared Owl.⁷³ The general coloration is nearly identical: all three are largely yellowish-brown with dark streaks, and in flight expose lighter under-

⁷⁰ See SVENSSON *et al.*, *Collins Bird Guide*, p. 222; MIKKOLA, *Owls of Europe*, pp.73-79; CRAMP *et al.*, *Handbook*, pp.470-478.

⁷¹ KITSON, 'Old English bird-names (ii)', p.6, and D. T. PARKIN and A. G. KNOX, *The Status of Birds in Britain and Ireland* (London, 2010), p. 223.

⁷² FISHER, *Shell Bird Book*, p. 324.

⁷³ SVENSSON *et al.*, *Collins Bird Guide*, pp. 222, 228; MIKKOLA, *Owls of Europe*, pp.69-73, 213-215, 233-235; CRAMP *et al.*, *Handbook*, pp.466-467, 472-473, 488-489.

wings. Therefore, I suggest that the semantic range of *(b)ufe* encompassed these three diurnal and crepuscular owls (to the exclusion of largely nocturnal owls, hence *(b)ufe* never glosses Latin *noctua*), and that identification was made on both aural and visual grounds. The taxonomic level is less clear; it seems safe to say that *(b)ufe* is at least Level II, though the consistency with which it glosses only *bubo* and *bufo* means that it could possibly be a Level III term too.

Further support for this lexicalisation may be found in French, where our Level II ‘owl’ corresponds to two French terms: *chouette* and *hibou*. This French evidence is particularly useful as *hibou* is a borrowing of cognates of *(b)ufe*.⁷⁴ While *chouette* is the Level II term for ‘owl’ generally, the onomatopoeic *hibou* is a Level III term which refers specifically to ‘chouette à oreilles’, (‘owls with ears’; the ears are also known as *aigrettes*),⁷⁵ i.e. the Long-eared, Short-eared and Eagle Owls.

Brysce and prosthle

Another set of similar-looking species with different names in Old English are the thrushes (genus *Turdus*); in particular, the strikingly similar Song Thrush (*Turdus philomelos*) and Mistle Thrush (*Turdus viscivorus*). Both birds are medium sized Passerines (though the Mistle Thrush is slightly larger than the Song Thrush),⁷⁶ brown hued along their heads and backs, with light breasts speckled with dark spots. Their Old English names are *brysce* and *prosthle*, which, as Kitson notes, ‘are closely related, Germanic variants on a root whose meaning ‘thrush’ is of Indo-European antiquity.’⁷⁷ As there is little to disagree with in Kitson’s analysis of these names and their semantic ranges,⁷⁸ I limit myself to supplementing this with a discussion on how onomatopoeia lies behind these names and their semantic fields, and what we can say about their taxonomic levels.

As Kitson has noted, *brysce* and *prosthle*⁷⁹ were likely identified as different birds in Old English, though his strongest evidence is that they sometimes gloss different lemmata.⁸⁰ However, Kitson does not draw attention to Lockwood’s rather crucial observation that *prosthle* reflects the same Germanic root as *brysce* with a diminutive ending.⁸¹ Later usage of ‘Throstle’, referring to the smaller Song Thrush, is suggestive, though it is worth noting that the Song Thrush is both smaller and quieter than the Mistle Thrush, and that therefore the diminutive suffix could possibly

⁷⁴ M. DESFAYES, *Origine des Noms des Oiseaux et des Mammifères d’Europe y Compris l’Espèce Humaine* (Paris, 2000), p. 77.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

⁷⁶ SVENSSON *et al.*, *Collins Bird Guide*, p. 294; P. CLEMENT and R. HATHWAY, *Thrushes* (London, 2000).

The Mistle Thrush averages 26-29 cm in length, whereas the Song Thrush averages 20-22 cm.

⁷⁷ KITSON, “Old English Bird-names (i)”, p.484. For the Proto-Indo-European etymon **trosdos*, see J. P. MALLORY and D. Q. ADAMS, *The Oxford Introduction to Proto-Indo-European and the Proto-Indo-European World* (Oxford: OUP, 2006), p. 145. See also LOCKWOOD, *Oxford Book of British Bird Names*, s.v.v. ‘Throstle’ and ‘Thrush’.

⁷⁸ I.e. that they overlap with each other and also, with the Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*) and Blackbird (*Turdus merula*). See KITSON, “Old English Bird-names (i)”, pp.484-5.

⁷⁹ The variation of forms with and without initial ‘s-’ is ‘of Indo-European antiquity’ and is noted by KITSON, “Old English Bird-names (i)”, 485, and so I have silently included OE *strosle* with *prosthle* in my analysis.

⁸⁰ KITSON, “Old English Bird-names (i)”, p. 484.

⁸¹ LOCKWOOD, *Oxford Book of British Bird Names*, s.v. ‘Throstle’.

reference either, or both, of these aspects.⁸² The use of OE *prostle* to gloss Latin *turdella* (properly *turdela*, a diminutive of *turdus*) may indicate that glossators were aware of *prostle*'s diminutive status, and thereby provide evidence that this term was used of the Song Thrush from an early date.⁸³ However, this hypothesis is problematized by the fact that Latin *turdela* referred primarily to the larger Mistle Thrush,⁸⁴ and by the interpretamenta we find for *turdus*, which are never *prysce*. When we do find *turdus* in the glossaries, its preferred interpretamentum is *scric*,⁸⁵ though it is also glossed by *star* ('Starling').⁸⁶ Indeed, *prysce* is attested very rarely in Old English at all: *prysce* glosses *sturtius*,⁸⁷ *prisce* glosses *trutius*,⁸⁸ and *ðraesce* glosses *truitius*.⁸⁹ Kitson would see these lemmata as 'corruptions of *turdus*', though in each of these cases *turdus* occurs as a separate lemma.⁹⁰ Kitson may well be correct in identifying these garbled lemmata as such, but what is important for my purposes here is why the glossators kept such incomprehensible lemmata. While copying glosses out into lists must have been a slavish task, this does not deprive the scribes of having reasons for matching the lemmata and interpretamenta they do.

Understanding both the importance of the aural perception of birds as well as the suggested taxonomic levels can go some way to explaining some of these difficulties, namely: 1) the absence of glosses where *prysce* is the interpretamentum for *turdus* despite the pairing of the diminutives of both of these words, 2) the use of *prysce* only for forms so garbled that they are barely recognisable as corruptions of *turdus*, and 3) the potential for *scric* and *star* to be considered plausible glosses for *turdus*.

Firstly, the existence of a diminutive form does not necessarily indicate a diminutive meaning. The diminutive form is also used hypocoristically, for example, and many bird names are attested with hypocoristic variants which do not substantially alter the word's meaning. To take another Old English example: we find hypocoristic forms of *putta* ('kite', 'buzzard'), in *pyttel*, found only in place-names and personal names,⁹¹ and in *puttoc*, found only as a personal name in Old English. Later attestations of both *pyttel* and *puttoc*, and their reflexes, evidence that these were names for

⁸² KITSON, 'Old English Bird-names (i)', 484, makes the observation that the Mistle Thrush is both louder and larger. Compare also the sonographs in S. CRAMP *et al.*, *Handbook of the Birds of Europe, the Middle East and North Africa: The Birds of the Western Palearctic. Volume 5: Tyrant Flycatchers to Thrushes* (Oxford, 1988).

⁸³ *Turdella* is glossed by variants of *prostle* in Second Corpus, T.323; Second Cleopatra, 1.51; Harley 107, 1.52; Épinal-Erfurt, 1.1011. The *Dictionary of Old English Corpus* <tapor.library.utoronto.ca/doecorpus/> transcribes a further attestation from an unedited glossary in MS Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodley 730, with the short title 'CollGI 25', where it is 1.84. The unusual entries in the Second Antwerp and Brussels glossaries (1.1023: *Turdella se mare star*, 'the starling of the sea', and 1.63: *Turdella sealfor*) are less easy to explain. The most probable explanation is that the common source for Brussels and Cleopatra drew on Isidore's *Etymologiae* XII.7.71 (*Turdela quasi maior turdus*, 'Turdela is the larger *turdus*'), and either understood the text and had **se mara star* ('the greater *star*'), or misread the *maior* as meaning 'famous' and had **se mar star*. In either case, the adjective was subsequently misread as a genitive singular variant of *mere/mare* ('the sea'), which, in spite of generally declining as a masculine noun is attested with the feminine genitive singular form *mere* (see BOSWORTH and TOLLER, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, s.v. 'mere'). See also ANDRE, *Les Noms d'Oiseaux en Latin*, s.v. 'turdela, -ae'.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* See also Isidore, *Etymologiae*, XII.7.71.

⁸⁵ Second Antwerp, 1.1011, Brussels 1.47, Second Corpus T.324, Second Cleopatra 1.55, Leiden glossary §47, 1.63, ed. J. HESSELS, *A Late Eighth-Century Latin-Anglo-Saxon Glossary Preserved in the Library of the Leiden University* (Cambridge, 1906), and Épinal-Erfurt, 1.1013. It is tempting to read *srheich*, which glosses *turdus* in MS Bodley 730, 1.88, and *stint*, in Harley 107, 1.55, as corruptions of the *scric* interpretamentum, though see the remarks I make below.

⁸⁶ *Ælfric's Glossary*, 307.7 and Second Antwerp, 1.1022.

⁸⁷ Harley 107, 1.53.

⁸⁸ Second Cleopatra, 1.56.

⁸⁹ Second Corpus, T.314.

⁹⁰ KITSON, "Old English Bird-names (i)", p.484. *Turdus* occurs as a separate lemma, with different interpretamenta, to the garbled lemmata for *prysce* in Harley 107, 1.53, Second Cleopatra, 1.55 and Second Corpus, T.324.

⁹¹ KITSON, "Old English Bird-names (ii)", p.9.

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kites and buzzards, and that their meanings were no different to that of *putta*.⁹² Although we do not have Germanic cognates to help corroborate which of these is the original form, it is probable, *a priori*, that *putta* (literally ‘that which puts’, a reference to the bird’s swooping strike)⁹³ represents the stem from which *pyttel* and *puttoc* derive. Despite Lockwood’s reticence, we may be sure, on the basis of a wealth of available parallels, that both *-el* and *-ock* suffixes are common diminutives in Old English.⁹⁴ The implication of this parallel is that *turdella* and *prostle* may have been recognised as hypocoristic bird-names, rather than as diminutives with augmentative counterparts.

The second reason that *prostle* may gloss *turdella* at the expense of *prysce* glossing *turdus* is that the first pair are closely onomatopoeic, evoking a similar sound in a way that the second pair does not. Both *turdella* and *prostle* are commonly acknowledged to be onomatopoeic in origin, though some commentators remark on this quality only with respect to its Indo-European onomatopoeic roots.⁹⁵ It seems that both terms were still perceived as onomatopoeic in the Anglo-Saxon period: *prostle* suggests a /θrostəla/, *turdella* suggests the very similar /tɜrdəla/. The sound evoked by both *prostle* and *turdella* seems a good match for the trisyllabic beginning of the Mistle Thrush’s most characteristic cry.⁹⁶

Similarly, both *turdus* and *prysce* were understood to be onomatopoeic too.⁹⁷ However, in this case, the sounds suggested by the names are much less alike: *turdus* evokes the part of the Song Thrush’s song often transliterated as ‘trrū-trrū-trrū’,⁹⁸ whereas *prysce* suggests a screechier sound like /θru:ʃə/ or /θri:skə/.⁹⁹ The sound suggested by /θru:ʃə/ might explain why it only glosses garbled derivatives of *turdus*: *sturtius*,¹⁰⁰ *trutijs*,¹⁰¹ and *truitius*,¹⁰² which all possess an initial dental, medial back vowel and final lingual consonant possibly redolent of the sound of *prysce*. A combination of poor transmission and an expectation of onomatopoeia may lie behind the entry *Strutio prysce* (1.48) in the Brussels glossary, and also the gloss *Structio scrie* if the Latin were understood to be onomatopoeic (i.e. on the basis of /stru:tiʃə/ and /θru:ʃə/, and /stru:ktʃə/ and /skri:tʃ/).¹⁰³

⁹² *Ibid.*, and LOCKWOOD, *Oxford Book of British Bird Names*, s.v. ‘puttock’.

⁹³ KITSON, ‘Old English Bird-names (ii)’, p. 9.

⁹⁴ See the *Oxford English Dictionary* <www.oed.com>, s.v.v. ‘el, suffix1’, and ‘-ock, suffix’, and LOCKWOOD, *Oxford Book of British Bird names*, s.v.v. ‘(-le’ and ‘(-ock’.

⁹⁵ ANDRÉ, *Les Noms d’Oiseaux en Latin*, s.v.v. ‘turela, -ae’ and ‘turdus’, endorses the possibility that these names are onomatopoeic in origin, though it is not clear how far back he thinks these origins are, or if they were understood to be onomatopoeic; his explanation, s.v. ‘turdus’, suggests the latter. MALORY and ADAMS, *The Oxford Introduction to Proto-Indo-European*, p. 145, like LOCKWOOD, *Oxford Book of British Bird Names*, s.v.v. ‘throstle’ and ‘thrush’, and SUOLAHTI, *Die Deutschen Vogelnamen*, p. 53, consider the Indo-European onomatopoeic origins without remarking on the possibility of contemporary speakers recognising the names as such.

⁹⁶ SVENSSON *et al.*, *Collins Bird Guide*, p. 294; CLEMENT and HATHWAY, *Thrushes*, pp.397-400; see also the copious notes on the differing thrush calls in CRAMP *et al.*, *Handbook of the Birds of Europe, the Middle East and North Africa: The Birds of the Western Palearctic. Volume 5: Tyrant Flycatchers to Thrushes*.

⁹⁷ ANDRÉ, *Les Noms d’Oiseaux en Latin*, s.v. ‘turdus’. For the onomatopoeia of *prysce*, see below.

⁹⁸ SVENSSON *et al.*, *Collins Bird Guide*, p. 294; CLEMENT and HATHWAY, *Thrushes*, pp.397-400.

⁹⁹ I am grateful to Alaric Hall for bringing this phonetic change to my attention. On /ʃ/ to /sk/ see R. HOGG, *A Grammar of Old English. Volume 1: Phonology* (Chichester, 2011), pp.269-270.

¹⁰⁰ Harley 107, l.53.

¹⁰¹ Second Cleopatra, l.56.

¹⁰² Second Corpus Glossary, T.314.

¹⁰³ Harley 107, l.65. The description of the *struthio* (‘ostrich’) in Isidore’s *Etymologiae* XII.7.20 reads: *Struthio Graeco nomine dicitur, quod animal in similitudine avis pinnas habere videtur; tamen de terra altius non elevatur. Ova sua fovere negligit; sed proiecta tantummodo fotu pulveris animantur*, ‘The ostrich is named from the Greek, which is seen to have feathers like a bird, but it does not rise above the ground. It neglects the incubation of its eggs, and the abandoned eggs are brought to life by only by the warm dust’ (in *Isidori Hispalensis Episcopi: Etymologiarum sive Originum*, ed. W. M. LINDSAY, 2 vols (Oxford, 1911). This could conceivably have been understood to apply to either the blackbird or

Presumably a gloss such as **turdus. þrysce* is at the root of all these corrupted forms, and such a gloss could well have been based on parallelism between *þrysce/þrostle*, and *turdus/turdella*. The corruption of the lemma, however, could suggest that such linguistically oriented understanding was not widespread.

The glossing of *turdus* by *scric* and *stær*, as Kitson has remarked, could imply a regional variation in the identification of these birds.¹⁰⁴ I take issue, however, with his subsequent remark that Ælfric, in particular, ‘did not care very much about the names of small birds,’ and that this contributed to the use of *scric* and *stær* to gloss *turdus*.¹⁰⁵ Kitson adduces an entry from Ælfric’s glossary (307.7) to support this, which reads *passer spearwa oððe lytel fugel* (‘*passer*: sparrow or little bird’). There are many reasons to assume that Ælfric’s statement here is indicative of a more general perception of small birds, held more pervasively than by just a few clergymen. The popularity of Ælfric’s glossary and the lack of alteration to this entry in the various manuscripts suggests it was generally accepted by its audience, and we must also bear in mind the difficulty of differentiating small birds of sparrow-size. Furthermore, we must contend with the fact that *passeres* (‘sparrows’) is rendered *staras* (lit. ‘starlings’) in Matthew 10:29 and Luke 12:6,¹⁰⁶ and that we find reflexes of *spearwa* used of other birds in Middle English and in the realm of folk-nomenclature.¹⁰⁷ Together, this suggests that there were degrees of overlap among the small birds, and that *spearwa* could function as a Level II term (where Level I is ‘*fugelas*’, ‘birds’) denoting all small birds, and that Ælfric is as reliable a source as any for the birds and bird-names of Anglo-Saxon England.

Aurality and categorisation

These two case-studies (*ule/ufe* and *þrysce/þrostle*) illustrate the differing ways in which aurality was important in bird categorisation. In the former, aurality provides the means for differentiating birds which are grouped together today. In the latter, a perceived expectation of aurality underlies unusual glossarial interpretations, and that a diminutive could be applied with regards to sound rather than size. Taking this together with the general preponderance of aurally motivated names among birds, it suggests that sound was not just an important faculty for perceiving birds, but one of the most important senses for knowing about them. An *ufe* could be perceived and categorised separately from an *ule* on this basis, as could a *þrysce* and a *þrostle*. This combination of perceived difference and categorical difference amounts to an act of folk-taxonomical speciation. Birds, therefore, were perceived, categorised, and understood via both

the thrushes, which tend to nest low in thick underbrush and are often seen flying close to the ground, and this may have influenced the glossator’s understanding of a garbled form of *turdus*. Although KITSON, “Old English bird-names (ii)”, p.22, suggests that an Old English word for the ostrich, *stryce*, goes back to Common Germanic, both the OE *stryce* and the variety of differing Old High German forms (noted in SUOLAHTI, *Die Deutschen Vogelnamen*, p.223: *struz, struua, struth, stral, strud, strux* etc.) suggests that in these instances, too, the motivation for the gloss was onomatopoeia.

¹⁰⁴ KITSON, “Old English Bird-names (i)”, 485, and n. 1.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ *Middle English Dictionary* < ets.umdl.umich.edu/m/med/>, s.v. ‘sparwe (n.)’, and LOCKWOOD, *Oxford Book of British Bird Names*, s.v. ‘Sparrow’.

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visual and aural means. While those bird-names motivated by behaviour are clearly visually motivated and those based on sounds are aurally motivated, those based on habitat might be motivated by both, as birds would have both been seen and heard in those environs. As in Proverbs 20:12 (and other places in the bible), seeing and hearing are complementary senses, where hearing could both supplement the visual and supersede it, granting knowledge where the visual cannot.