

## **Return to the Nest**

Country: Spain

Category: Documentary

**Title: Retorno al Nido**

Company: Laura Romero Valldecabres

Author, producer, director, sound engineer: Laura Romero Valldecabres

Other key staff: curated by Montserrat Palacios and Llorenç Barber, mastering by David Dorado

Language: Spanish, Valencian and Catalan

Length: 50:30

## **SUMMARY**

Return to the Nest is an audio documentary made during the spring of 2022 with recordings of landscapes and bird songs in the region of the Vall d'Albaida (Valencia region, Spain). The piece combines the presence of birdsongs with the oralities of local residents in relation to their struggle for the preservation of the natural landscape. Concepts such as rhythm, melody, harmony, texture and silence are intermingled to assess the extent to which human activity (anthropophony or other non-audible vibrational sources) affects natural environments. 'Return to the Nest' reflects on the current conflict of the massive installation of photovoltaic macro-plants in the Valencian Region, which is currently managing more than 300 projects in rural areas. Since 1993, the entity SEO/BirdLife has been defending 'Responsible Renewables' designed to provide maximum benefit to local communities and minimum environmental impact. The piece also pays homage to the patient and passionate profession of ornithology and field recording, specially with Eloïsa Matheu, the first biologist woman who began to record soundscapes in Spain. It often happens that we listen to the songs of birds but we do not manage to see or distinguish them. This is the acousmatic listening of every day. An invitation to pause in listening and return to the ancestral nest. This piece includes some old texts by authors such as Wallace Stevens (Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird, 2017).



SIDRO

## **RETURN TO THE NEST**

By Laura Romero Valldecabres

Script Spanish/Catalan/Valencian to English

.

Illustration by Sergio Sanisidro @sidro\_ilustracion

Script

**0'00'**

There are two sides to a tree:

the side you can see and the side where the bird is.

**1'26'' LAURA (narrator):**

*"Return to the Nest" (in Valencian/Catalan), "Return to the Nest" (in Spanish)*

**2'00'' LAURA (narrator):**

I am at Pont de l'Arcà, Aiello de Malferit, at sunset on a May day.

I carry a water whistle in the shape of a little bird with which I try to call its attention. The bird does not take long to answer me.

**3'05''**

The common nightingale is capable of imitating some sixty different songs after hearing them just a few times.

Its voice sounds so loud that it almost rumbles in my chest. Studies show that nightingales sing at about 90 decibels.

**3'39''**

Approximately half of the birds on the planet are songbirds, around four thousand species.

The nightingale's serenade at dusk is a romantic call to attract the female.

But this bird has nothing to envy to other of the most virtuous of songbirds:

**4'08''** The blackbird

and the song thrush. (*"la griva, el tord", other regional names for the bird "Thrush"*)

As Wallace Stevens wrote...<sup>[L]</sup><sub>[SEP]</sub>

*I do not know which to prefer,*

*The beauty of inflections*



am currently collaborating with the Museum of Natural Sciences of Barcelona, where I am documenting and digitizing an old collection of sounds in the Sound Library.

**7'45''**

Before, when you went to record, you gave it more thought. It's like the cameras of the old days. If you worked with a photographic camera with a slide, well, picture taken, picture lost, right? You gave it some thought before taking a picture. And also with the analogic... And above all, at that time I went to record species, that was what I was interested in, because I wanted to make a sound catalog of bird songs... And of all animals, but basically of birds. And I admit that when I started, I didn't know what a soundscape was. It was by recording the species, being in the field, listening, discovering and working on my listening that I discovered the soundscape, that is, the concept, and the possibility of recording that and saying: oh, this has value...

**8'51' ELOÏSA:**

Then I met Jean Roché, who is a man who was one of the first to publish a collection of records —he started mostly on cassette—, and we met him because he wanted to produce a work for Spain and he was looking for ornithologists and so he found us and we said yes. And we went to his house. And he had the studio there. And then, to see the studio he had there, the tape recorders, —because of course everything was analog—, all those devices there and the loudspeakers, and how it sounded, all made of wood... Well, I don't know, I was really blown away, right?. And then we started to listen to things and he saw that I was immediately enthusiastic about it.

And then he played a record, I remember, a record he had of the forests of Southeast Asia and wow it was amazing, it was like a concert created by him,

track by track, because in the fifties this man focused on travelling all over the world recording birds.

### **10'19"**

Roché told me that before recording, he would go with a reel of cable, he would be there watching the place where the bird would sing, he would study the places and finally he would lay the cable, attach the microphone, he would put it there and he would hide and wait. And when the bird came and stood there, he recorded. Of course, the recordings he made were very good, but obviously it would take him three days to make a one-minute recording.

Now many people are emerging from the world of music, sound artists, and of course I have discovered this world later and now I am seeing many people who are also very interested in the sounds of nature and the soundscape, sometimes even more than biologists or zoologists, who are still out in the field with binoculars, right?

### **11'31"**

For me as a zoologist, or as a biologist, as a bioacoustician, as a... I don't know exactly what I am, I am interested in collecting this because it creates a catalog and provides knowledge, but I believe that sound is very powerful in terms of emotions, perceptions, and it is a very useful tool to raise awareness, to make nature known, to raise awareness about the need to preserve it, etc...

### **12'22"**

#### **LAURA (narradora):**

Swifts "*falcies*" or "*falciots*" (*catalan/valencian names*) can spend up to a year without perching at any time, eating, drinking and sleeping while flying without interruption. They only perch when nesting. They do so in the highest areas, usually in cracks and holes in our buildings. That is why they have become one of our neighbors in towns and cities.

But, according to SEO BirdLife, these birds are suffering from the destruction of their breeding sites. Thus, when swifts return from Africa year after year to breed in the same buildings, they sometimes find their breeding areas destroyed by rehabilitation works.

**13'20"**

The wren, or "cargolet" (*catalan/valencian name*) a tiny brown bird known for its lively trill, intones up to thirty-six notes per second, a speed that far exceeds what our ears or brains are equipped to perceive or assimilate. It is as if songbirds have the auditory equivalent of a slow-motion option in the brain, allowing them to hear details that completely escape us.


This raises an interesting question: if we were able to hear birdsong in the exact same way that a bird hears it, would we still consider it "beautiful"?

**14'08"**

I tried with swifts. If we slow down their voice and listen to their high-pitched, brilliant song in slow motion, they are terrifying.

Are they warning us?

***Mix of soundscapes and animal sounds      Nocturnal landscape***

**17'32"** 

**LAURA (narrator):**

The sense of hearing in most birds is quite similar to ours. Although not in nocturnal species and in those that are oriented by sound, such as owls.

**17'51"**

The tawny owl.

**18'05"**

*"The entire face of the owl is a sound receptor, a double concave surface that acts as a parabolic receiver that focuses and amplifies the sound signal. In each*



*of the acoustic foci there is an opening that communicates with the ear, which is also asymmetrically positioned to increase spatial sensitivity.*

“In some ways, the facial disc of an owl acts as both a parabolic reflector and a binaural microphone. The result is a sound amplification of up to ten decibels in some frequency ranges”.

“With the Ear of an Owl”, a text by Carlos de Hita.

**20’51” LAURA (narrator):**

Birds have a reflex that reduces the sound of their own voice, so they do not damage their ears with their own singing.

*“Magpies are not very popular. I find them funny because they have a daring way of bursting onto the scene. Cawing, joking, teasing each other, challenging each other... They live in permanent flocks and it has been proven that they can recognize themselves in the mirror”.*

“The Genius of Birds”, Jennifer Ackerman.

**21’48”**

**LAURA:**

So, this is called La Pinà de la Caseta..... **JAIME:**

Caseta Ortiz, that's the house over there. Sometimes there are barn owls. One day there was one up there, I think I have a picture of it, and it was there "whooooo, whooooo, whooooo" (*Jaume imitates its song*).

Well then, all this around in there, up to Cairent, you can see everything, but of course you have to find it, you can spend hours...

**22’21”**

Hey, good morning, Salvador!

Well, we're off, we go to Cairent!

**22’38”**

**JAIME:**

Hello, I am Jaume, Jaime, I am also known as Jaime here in Aielo, and well I am an archaeologist, a heritage technician, I have also been a professor of history... And so, at the moment, sometimes I have had to be the spokesman for the Association for the Defense of the Environment and the Territory of Aielo and the platform Salvem Cairent. And we are involved in all this activity around land protection in order to prevent the installation of these large-scale photovoltaic power plants.

**23'30''**

**LAURA:**

Do you see that one doing...?

**JAIME:**

A "*puput*". Hoopoe. In Valencian, I suppose it must be the same as in Catalan.

In Catalan it is *puput*.

There is that one that goes "twoo roo roo".

**23'50''**

**LAURA:**

This is called Pi de Cairent. Why? Is it because of that pine tree?

**LIDIA AND PATXI:**

Because of that pine tree, yes, exactly. It must be hundreds of years old.

**LAURA:**

And those are the houses of the marquis?

**LIDIA AND PATXI:**

Yes, the houses of Cairent.

**24'05'' JAIME:**

And there was a Roman road there. And this... these very round holes, well, but this bird has not returned, it is not here now, it will come later. It's the bee-

eater, which has very beautiful colors. They make these nests and return to them the following year.

Let's keep going, because this way we'll hear less... The road is very loud, isn't it? You must hear it, right?

**LAURA:**


Yes, the highway is always a bit present there.

**JAIME:**

Mostly for these trees to act as a kind of screen.

**25'00" PATXI:**

This was a forest. And here they cut down thousands of trees... So, the trees prevent the sun from reaching the plates. What makes no sense at all is what was done, because that was not biomass, that was just cutting down trees savagely.

**25'28" **

I think this is also about protecting this, because this is one of the few things we have left, and it is sad that this is the only thing left. When I come here, coming along the highway and seeing the Aielo area, it makes me very sad, because what you see here is practically the desert.// And if what little is left at a natural level as landscape, and not only landscape, but the flora and fauna, the plant life that you can have here, is no longer available anywhere else in the Vall d'Albaida... Where else can you find it?

**26'05" JAIME:**

*(Whistles)*

Let's see if it answers ....

*(Whistles)*

They are very difficult to see, in an environment full of branches and...

For example, in a jungle, you don't see them and you hear a lot of animals...

**26'46''**

**LAURA:**

This one sounds super bright.

**JAIME:**

It's up there.

**JAIME:**

What is most special is that Aiello is a territory that is only 27 square kilometers. If we take away all that is the urban area of the town, plus the area of the industrial estate, then of course what remains is an area mainly of traditional crops, which in many cases the plots are no longer profitable, or their owners have, to a certain extent, not completely abandoned them, but have dedicated them to other activities, in some cases as hunting, etc.

**27'42'' PATXI:**

We created an association, an important citizen mobilization. What this has done is that, well, when people analyze things and so on, they rebel. But look, everything you see there, there will be a macro plant that will depend on the Ministry, which is more than 50 megawatts, which is an outrage, but there are several others out there. Although we do feel a bit satisfied in the sense that from what was the initial project to what it is now, at least there has been some political will.

**28'17''**

We agree that alternative energies must be promoted, but not necessarily in an industrial way and for the enrichment of companies that have nothing to do with it, without any benefit for the town, only creating an ecological disaster. The reasonable thing to do is to promote, first, self-consumption. First,

everyone should be able to have solar panels in their homes, to be able to supply themselves with solar panels.

**28'44" LIDIA:**

Self-consumption and providing aid for that. And that people could be able.. Because, what is in it for Aiello, if they put this here? Nothing, because they are going to distribute it and sell it. It is not that the electricity will be cheaper or anything else.

**WALKERS/HIKERS:**

Hi, good morning!

**JAIME, LIDIA, PATXI, LAURA:**

Hey, morning; hi, good morning!

**WALKERS:**

We are going cross-country...

**29'15" PATXI:**

Of course, it is not only producing energy, then you have to transport it. And besides, to transport the energy you produce, you first have to transform it, you have to set up transformation plants, put it on high voltage towers and take it to the high voltage lines. And this leads to the expropriation of land, or to the search for the straight line, the most economical option or whatever it may be...

**29'44"**

Si que creo que se ha pedido algún permiso de evacuación de electricidad que eso el ayuntamiento sí que lo ha denegado. Sabes, que no solamente es producir

**29'56"**

The association itself does not have any political purpose. Another thing is that the people who is in the government of the day, when they have to face some things or challenge some decision that they may like or dislike more or less, may

feel attacked. And that is not fair either. Our intention, above all, is to safeguard this. What we see here, now that we are inside, is not seen anywhere else in the Vall d'Albaida. This is what little remains, one of the few things that are left. The price is very high, who pays for this? I don't know if I make myself clear, how much is this worth? (...)

**30'30''**

**LAURA (narrator):**

*Albaida, Bufali, Palomar, L'Olleria, La Pobla del Duque, Castellón de Rugat, Otos, Alfarrasí, Aielo de Malferit and Agullent.* Local residents collect signatures to stop the proceedings and open the public debate.

**PATXI:**

(...) solar energy can be set up through cooperatives so that local people can benefit from it (...)

**LAURA (narrator):**

The Generalitat (Valencian Government) is processing about 370 projects. *Villena, Chiva, Ayora...* Not all of them will prosper. The list is long. But the flood of requests has set off alarm bells in different groups.

**31'07'' PATXI:**

Look, here you will see, from here, that there are already solar plants. If you look at them in the mornings —you can see some of them over here—, you can see how the landscape is altered, you can see a reflection...

**31'24''**

**LAURA (narrator):**

In Alfarrasí, just 15 km from Aielo, the largest photovoltaic park in the Valencian Region to date was opened in 2013.

**LIDIA:**

Obviously, I mean, if they set up all this, on that road coming from Gandia to here, people won't even be able to drive because of the glare.

**LAURA (narrator):**

The opening was attended by the president at that time, Alberto Fabra, and the general manager of the company that installed the plant: Valfortec.

The residents of Alfarrasí do not know where the energy goes or how this plant is currently managed. Valfortec confirms to me that the plant was sold years ago to an investment fund.

**32'36''**

**LAURA (narrator):**

This electromagnetic signal was captured in the vicinity of the Alfarrasí plant with a broadband electromagnetic wave receiver.

***Electromagnetic audio recordings***

**32'57''**

And these other high-frequency signals may be almost inaudible to humans, but they are there, persistently.

***High frequencies audio recordings in landscape***

**33'40''**

**ELOÏSA:**

There are many things about migration that are not known. What triggers migration, why a bird decides "tomorrow I'm leaving," and also how they know how to detect the route, whether it's by magnetic fields, whether it's by the stars, there are some that migrate by day, others by night. There are many different patterns. There are birds that go down one route and go up another. There are many factors. And then, some Germans researchers did an experiment with the blackcap, which is that they put it in a place and changed the magnetic field, and what they saw was that when they changed the

magnetic field and the north, or south, was no longer here but there, the blackcap moved that way. That is, it was a demonstration of the hypothesis that these birds, only the blackcap, detect the magnetic field. It seems that they would have in their head a kind of world map of magnetic fields, and they know that they have to go there.

**35'12''**

**LAURA (narrator):**

The journal Nature published a study by the University of Oldenburg showing that electromagnetic noise alters the internal compass orientation of a migratory bird. The experiment was carried out on the European robin.

**35'56''**

**JAUME:**

Look over there! Look over there, look over there. There's a nest. Do you see the leaves moving?

**LAURA:** Yes.

**JAUME:**

There is a nest over there. Now the bells can be heard, for sure... That bird. I'm looking at it. You can hear it perfectly.

**36'49''**

**LAURA:**

You mean behind, right?

**JAUME:**

It is behind the branches, behind the leaves. *(Jaume starts whistling and a bird answers him in the same way).*

**37'08''**

*(whispering)* How it answered, eh?

**LAURA:**



It answered you the same way!

**37'23''**

**ELOÏSA:** L  
SEP

The problem with memorizing is that we are not able to describe a sound when we hear it. And you have to make that effort to say: “let's see, how do I describe this that I just heard to a person who has never heard it?” We don't even know where to start, which I get it, huh? Or someone who says: “I know this is a blackbird”. And why is it a blackbird? “I don't know, I just know”. No, let's see, let's think. And little by little you do it... As it is a matter of perception, someone is very struck by the melody, others because it reminds them of a flute, or because of the rhythm. Each one brings something to the table, and you end up making a small description.

Then what works really well are onomatopoeias, especially when you make them yourself. Or when you make them in a group in a workshop, wow, that's great, it's so visual! And in addition to having the melody, you have the structure, the whole construction, you have everything!

**38'36''**

There are many birds whose name is onomatopoeic. Until you are familiar with their song, you don't know it. Well, obviously, the cuckoo, right? But there are others that, when you learn about their song, you say, "ah, that's why it's called by that name!" That is, the name refers to some song or some kind of call they make, like the stonechat —*bitxac [bitchuck] in Catalan*—, for example. Why? Because it goes "bit-chuck, bit-chuck... “

And there are several like this, there are many, and onomatopoeias are very useful in that sense. I try to come up with them.

**39'38''**

**ELOÏSA:** L  
SEP

For example, I always say: when you look at a landscape or create an image, a video, or take a photo... well, an image after all, you are contemplating something, wonderful, beautiful, with some colors, some whatever... But, for me the feeling is that you are outside. However, when you are recording, or listening, but especially if you are recording, you are not so much contemplating. Just the process of listening makes you much more connected and you are even inside. I mean, if you go into a forest and you put two mics, or one, it doesn't matter, and you put on headphones... you're in there, you're one of them. The relationship is very different.

**40'48''**

**LAURA (narrator):** [L] [SEP]

The oriole, "oriole". Its name comes from the Latin word 'aurum': golden. Golden bird. [L] [SEP]

Its fast and short flights among the branches are like sun glints.

**41'16''**

**ELOÏSA:** [L] [SEP]

I think I will die, I will die without having been able to listen to everything I have. Hopefully I'll live for many years and I'll have time.

Now the thing is that for the last 3 or 4 years I have been hardly recording at all.

I don't go out to record as I used to. Every spring, or at the end of the winter...

What I used to do in the spring saying: "goodbye, family, I'm leaving, I'm going to record", which was very good for me, at all levels, I haven't done that for a long time now. If I go out to record it is because I want something specific.

Because I don't want to accumulate any more, because I don't have time.

**42'14''**

**LAURA (narrator):** [L] [SEP]

The great tit “totestiu”, the white wagtail, the corn bunting, the greenfinches and the green woodpecker, all of them are with me on the last day recording in the woods of Aiello, on the morning of the first of June.

**42'57''**

**ELOÏSA:** [L]  
[SEP]

Without recording, just listening, or at least I do, we notice the loss of biodiversity and the number of species, that is, the landscape is impoverished. I remember there was a time when I started to notice this. And I said to myself: "I don't know, today, when I have been out, I don't like very much what I have recorded, I have been noticing for several days that it is not like before when I came here three years ago", for instance, because I am very fond of repeating places. And I thought well, maybe I was tired, or I didn't do it right, I didn't find the right place, or there's a storm coming and the birds feel it. A year goes by, another one goes by, another one goes by... and people start to talk about something happening, right? And indeed it is so.

**44'06''**

Return to the nest. Return to the village.

***Mix of soundscapes***

**46'56''**

**LAURA:**

Hi!

**CHILDREN:**

Where are the goats?

**LAURA:**

There. Look, this is the recorder and this is a microphone. Do you want to listen?

It's a little loud, huh?

May I?

**CHILDREN:**

(laughs)

**LAURA:**

Speak.

**CHILDREN:** <sup>[ ]</sup><sub>SEP</sub>Hello!

Now me... Hello! Oh, then me! Speak! It's so cool, Marta!

*(laughs)* Hi, Leo! Now me, now me!

I estàs gravant per algun canal?

Está xulo, mola molt!

Teta, diu hola, està xulo!

Ahora yo ahora yo!

Hola, holaaaa Rafaaaa, <sup>[ ]</sup><sub>SEP</sub>hola Marta, holaaaaa!

**LAURA:**

És guai, eh?

Adéu!

**48'38''** <sup>[ ]</sup><sub>SEP</sub>

**LAURA (narrator):**

Birds are dinosaurs, descendants of the few, lucky and flexible dinosaurs that survived the cataclysm that wiped out their relatives. We are mammals, relatives of the shy, tiny, shrew-like critters that emerged from the shadows of the dinosaurs.

While our mammalian relatives were busy growing up, birds spent their time getting smaller. While we were learning to walk upright, they were perfecting their lightness and flight. While our brains generate complex behavior, birds conceived a completely different, but equally sophisticated, neural architecture.

They, like us, were engaged in understanding how the world works.

**END**

## **TRANSLATOR'S NOTE**

It is impossible to transfer the magic of the original sound of one language to another that "sounds" different. For this reason, the translation of 'Return to the Nest' is only an accompaniment to the original work whose objective is to reveal the meaning of what is said in the documentary in both Catalan and Spanish. Keeping the oral character of some interventions while conveying their message has been essential to preserve the soul of the text. The local Valencian color is present in the original text and I hope that listeners who do not know this variant of Catalan can appreciate its musicality and, in this particular case, its rural character. In fact, the great variety with which we name birds in Spain in each area has a clearly rural feel and shows us how people living in big cities have lost the need to name them. As we lose contact with Nature, we simplify all the names of a bird to just one, forgetting the geographical and etymological nuances of each local word.

I declare myself a bird lover. I live in the countryside and, while translating 'Return to the Nest', birds have not stopped singing at my window. They seemed to understand what the recorded birds meant. I'm pretty sure they do. Although they say that within the same species, birds distinguish between several languages and dialects, the language of these intelligent and captivating beings remains an untranslatable mystery. It is good that it is still so, because sometimes, the most beautiful thing is that which cannot be fully understood.

Juande Blasco

## Featured Birds

ESPAÑOL	CATALÀ	ENGLISH
Ruiseñor común	Rossinyol	Nightingale
Mirlo	Merla	Blackbird
Zorzal	Tord	Song thrush
Pinzón	Pinsà	Chaffinch
Herrerillo	Mallerenga blava	Blue tit
Carbonero	Carbonera/Totestiu	Great tit
Vencejo	Falcillot negre	Swift

Chochín	Cargolet	Wren
Cárabo	Gamarús	Tawny owl
Búho	Mussol	Owl
Lechuza	Òliba	Barn owl
Abubilla	Puput	Hoopoe
Abejaruco	Abellerol	Bee-eater
Curruca capirotada	Tallarol de casquet	Blackcap
Petirrojo europeo	Pit-roig	European robin
Cuco	Cucut	Cuckoo
Tarabilla	Bitxac	Stonechat
Oropéndola	Oriol	Golden oriole
Lavandera blanca	Cuereta Blanca	White wagtail
Triguero	Cruixidell	Corn bunting

Verderón, Verdecillo	Verderol	Greenfinch
Pito real	Picot verd	Green woodpecker