

Accent is for the birds

Canadians from different parts of the country may have regional accents but so do most songbirds, according to Dr. Edward Miller, curator of the Vertebrate Zoology Division at the British Columbia Provincial Museum in Victoria, British Columbia.

"Song sparrows or warblers from Ontario generally sound different or have a different 'accent' than the same species in British Columbia," says Dr. Miller. "They learn their accents from parents and neighbours. It appears that almost all songbirds learn their songs in this way."

On the other hand, the long-legged, long-billed species known as shorebirds have none or very little of this ability, says Dr. Miller. Their songs are largely innate or genetic. "An upland sandpiper sounds virtually the same whether it lives in New York, the Yukon or Alaska."

Acoustic signals or songs are therefore a good indicator of genetic relationships between such species and studying their songs contributes to proper evolutionary classification.

For example, it is difficult to distinguish the short-billed dowitcher, a shorebird breeding in northern British Columbia from the long-billed dowitcher which lives mostly in Siberia and Alaska, by their plumed appearance. "Yet they have very different nuptial songs and these differences are very striking when the songs are recorded, analyzed and depicted on sonagrams," explains Dr. Miller.

Technical equipment

"Sonagrams show a visual pattern of the song somewhat as an electrocardiogram records heartbeat patterns." Technical equipment which Dr. Miller uses for sound analysis has been provided by the Friends of the B.C. Provincial Museum.

Dr. Miller is involved in a research project with noted ornithologist Dr. W.W.H. Gunn and Dr. J.P. Myers of the Philadelphia Academy of Natural Sciences in the United States.

The three men are studying shorebirds from many areas including Siberia and Finland. By analyzing the acoustic signals of songs of these birds, the proper evolutionary classification of the species is refined.

Dr. Miller is also working with Henri Ouellet of the National Museum in Ottawa studying the upland sandpiper. This shorebird breeds from New York to Alaska.

Serge et Réal symbolize high fashion in Montreal

Some of the most fashionable women in Canada, the United States and even Europe purchase their clothes from the Serge et Réal house of high fashion in Montreal.

Founded in 1964 by Serge Sénécal and Réal Bastien, the firm has built its reputation on the originality and elegance of its designs, on fine workmanship and on a familiarity with the tastes and needs of its customers, for whom they will plan entire wardrobes.

Samples to clients

In some cases, when a customer does not live in Montreal, Serge et Réal sends sketches to her along with samples of cloth. When the garment is being sewn two days are spent trying the item on and adjusting it.

Ten specialists, who design, cut, sew and sell the clothing, work in the salon, located on Sherbrooke Street, in an elegant district of Montreal.

In recent years, Serge et Réal has added a line of exclusive accessories, such as shoes, handbags, belts, jewellery sweaters, made to the firm's own specifications.



Serge (right) and Réal and two designs from their spring 1983 collection.

