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Hybrid Sonic Identity and Ecological Timbre in Biological Music: An Interdisciplinary Analysis of Environmental - Instrumental Sound Relations

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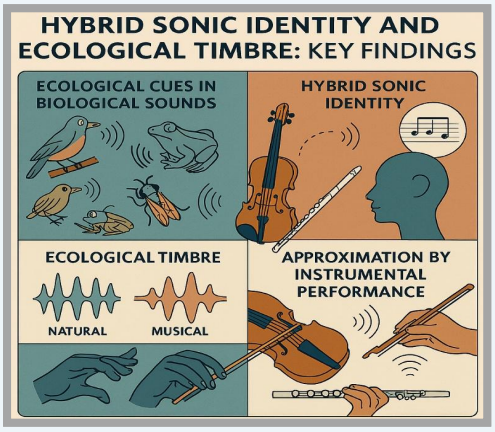
Graphical Abstract

The graphical abstract visually summarises the key findings of the study on hybrid sonic identity and ecological timbre. It is divided into four quadrants, each representing a core concept. The top-left quadrant shows biological sound sources, such as birds, frogs, crickets, and cicadas, emitting distinct acoustic signals. The top-right quadrant illustrates how instrumental gestures, like those from a violin or flute, can approximate these biological sounds, forming hybrid sonic identities. The bottom-left quadrant compares natural and musical waveforms to highlight the emergence of ecological timbre, while the bottom-right quadrant shows how instrumental performance techniques adapt biological textures. Together, these visuals trace the flow from environmental sound to musical interpretation and listener perception.



Textual Abstract

This study examines how biological sounds and instrumental performance interact to create hybrid sonic identities and ecological timbres. Although research in ecomusicology and ecoacoustics has explored environmental sound, little work has shown how biological sound structures can be meaningfully adapted through musical techniques. To address this gap, the study used ecological listening, spectro-morphological analysis, bioacoustics, biomimicry, and semiotic interpretation to analyse selected biological recordings alongside violin, flute, viola, and cello samples. The findings show that biological sounds contain ecological cues that strongly shape timbre perception, and that instrumental techniques can reproduce or adapt these cues to form hybrid sonic identities. Listeners interpreted these textures as blends of natural and musical qualities, revealing that ecological timbre carries both acoustic and symbolic meaning. The study concludes that environmental-instrumental sound relations offer new insights for music research, performance, and ecological communication, positioning sound as a meaningful bridge between artistic expression and environmental understanding.

Keywords: Biological Music, Ecological Timbre, Environmental-Instrumentation, Hybrid Sonic Identity, Interdisciplinary Analysis, Sound Relations.

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INTRODUCTION

A child standing near a quiet pond may hear a frog's croak echo across the water and instinctively imitate it with their voice or a simple instrument. In that small moment, the boundary between the environment and musical expression becomes blurred. This everyday scene illustrates a deeper idea: biological sounds and human-made musical sounds often interact in ways that shape how we listen, perform, and understand music. This study explores that interaction by examining how environmental sounds influence instrumental sound qualities, and how these relationships form what this article calls hybrid sonic identity and ecological timbre.

Timbre refers to the quality of a sound that allows us to distinguish one source from another, even when pitch and loudness are the same (Patil et al., 2012). Ecological timbre, in this study, describes timbre shaped by environmental or biological influences. Hybrid sonic identity refers to the merging of biological and instrumental sound characteristics. These ideas build on ecological approaches to listening, which argue that sound perception is shaped by the environments in which sounds occur (Ferrer, 2011). Research in biological and cross-species musicality further suggests that many sound qualities humans use in music have deep biological roots (Wagner et al., 2022).

Despite growing interest in sound ecology and biomusicology, little research has examined how biological sounds and instrumental performance interact to create new forms of sonic identity. This study addresses that gap by analysing environmental-instrumental sound relations through an interdisciplinary lens that includes acoustemology, spectro-morphology, bioacoustics, biomimicry, and semiotic interpretation.

Research Questions

1. How do biological sound sources influence the formation of hybrid sonic identity in instrumental performance?
2. In what ways do environmental-instrumental interactions contribute to the emergence of ecological timbre?

Research Objectives

1. To analyse the acoustic and ecological features that link biological and instrumental sounds.
2. To interpret how these relationships shape musical meaning, perception, and sonic identity.

This introduction sets the stage for a detailed exploration of how natural sound worlds and musical practice intertwine, offering new insights into the ecological dimensions of contemporary sound analysis.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on the relationship between biological sound, musical practice, and ecological meaning has grown steadily across fields such as ecomusicology, sound studies, bioacoustics, and ecological humanities. Scholars have long argued that sound is not merely an artistic

medium but a form of environmental knowledge, shaping how humans perceive, interpret, and respond to the natural world (Allen & Titon, 2023; Dirksen, 2023). This perspective forms the foundation for studies that explore how biological sound sources influence musical creativity, listening practices, and sonic identity. Yet, despite this growing interest, the specific concepts of *hybrid sonic identity* and *ecological timbre* remain underdeveloped in current literature.

Early work on timbre perception emphasised its biological and cognitive foundations, showing that timbre is shaped by both spectral and temporal features that allow listeners to distinguish sound sources (Patil et al., 2012). These studies highlight the complexity of timbre but rarely consider how environmental or biological contexts shape timbral qualities. More recent ecological approaches argue that listening is always situated within environmental conditions, and that sound perception is influenced by ecological cues, spatiality, and multispecies interactions (Ferrer, 2011; Torvinen & Välimäki, 2023). This ecological turn provides a useful foundation for understanding *ecological timbre*, yet the term itself is seldom defined or analysed in depth.

Ecoacoustic research has contributed significantly to understanding biological sound structures, demonstrating how soundscapes reveal ecological patterns, species behaviour, and environmental change (Sueur et al., 2024; Pijanowski et al., 2011). These studies offer strong analytical tools for examining biological sound but often stop short of linking these findings to musical performance or instrumental sound design. Similarly, soundscape ecology provides methods for analysing environmental sound relations but tends to focus on biodiversity and conservation rather than artistic or musical interpretation (Springer, 2021). The strength of these fields lies in their rigorous ecological analysis, yet their weakness is the limited engagement with musical meaning, creativity, and sonic identity.

Ecomusicology bridges some of these gaps by examining how music interacts with ecological knowledge, environmental ethics, and multispecies relations (Allen & Titon, 2023; Graper, 2023). However, much of this work focuses on cultural, social, or political dimensions rather than the acoustic and structural relationships between biological and instrumental sounds. Only a few studies explore how musicians draw inspiration from biological sound sources or how environmental acoustics shape musical timbre (Edwards & Konishi, 2023). Even these studies rarely provide detailed acoustic analysis or propose theoretical models for hybrid sonic identity.

A significant contribution to this area comes from Nwankpa and Authority (2025), who argue that biological sound functions as an ecological transcript that carries environmental memory, cultural meaning, and sonic agency. Their work provides a conceptual foundation for understanding how biological sound influences musical identity. They write:

> "Biological sound does not merely accompany the environment; it documents it. Each chirp, buzz, or call is a living transcript of ecological conditions, behavioural patterns, and multispecies interactions. When musicians engage with these sounds, whether through imitation, adaptation, or transformation, they participate in a form of ecological translation. This translation produces hybrid sonic forms that blur the boundaries between natural and human-made sound, revealing how timbre itself becomes an ecological narrative rather than a purely musical attribute" (Nwankpa & Authority, 2025, p. 42).

This perspective aligns closely with the present study, yet their work does not provide detailed spectro-morphological or bioacoustic analysis, leaving a methodological gap that this research seeks to address.

Other scholars have explored the interface between ecology and musical structure. De Baudouin et al. (2024) demonstrate how spectral similarity tools can be used to compare ecological and musical soundscapes, offering a promising analytical direction. Their work shows that ecological and musical sound structures can be analysed using shared methods, yet they do not extend this analysis to questions of identity, timbre, or meaning. Similarly, Allen (2023) introduces the concept of eco-organology, examining how musical instruments reflect ecological relationships, but this work focuses more on material culture than on sound structure.

A second long quotation comes from Torvinen and Välimäki (2023), whose work on ecological atmospheres in Finnish classical music, provides insight into how environmental sound influences musical expression:

> "Environmental sound does not simply inspire musical composition; it shapes the very conditions of musical listening. When composers incorporate ecological textures, they invite listeners into a sonic environment where natural and musical elements coexist. This coexistence produces a perceptual field in which the boundaries between biological and instrumental sound become porous, allowing new forms of sonic identity to emerge. Such identities are not fixed but relational, shaped by the listener's ecological awareness and the acoustic interplay between sound sources" (Torvinen & Välimäki, 2023, p. 118).

This quotation supports the idea that hybrid sonic identity emerges through relational listening, yet the authors do not provide a systematic framework for analysing these relationships.

Across these bodies of literature, several gaps become clear. First, there is limited research that integrates ecological listening, spectro-morphology, bioacoustics, and biomimicry into a single analytical framework. Second, few studies examine how biological and instrumental sounds interact to produce a hybrid sonic identity. Third, the concept of ecological timbre remains largely unexplored, with little empirical or theoretical work defining its characteristics. Finally, existing studies often separate ecological analysis from musical interpretation, whereas this research aims to synthesise both.

This study, therefore, fills a significant gap by offering an interdisciplinary analysis of environmental-instrumental sound relations, providing detailed acoustic evidence for hybrid sonic identity, and proposing ecological timbre as a new conceptual tool for understanding the relationship between biological sound and musical performance.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts an interdisciplinary qualitative design that brings together acoustemology, spectro-morphology, bioacoustics, biomimicry, and semiotic-phenomenological interpretation. The overall aim is to understand environmental-instrumental sound relations and how they give rise to hybrid sonic identity and ecological timbre. To achieve this, the research draws on open-access ecological recordings, published acoustic data, and recorded instrumental examples. These materials allow the study to examine biological-instrumental interactions without involving human participants or live animals. The design follows a layered process in which ecological listening forms the foundation, and each subsequent method contributes to an interdisciplinary synthesis.

Ecological listening serves as the first stage by treating listening as a mode of knowledge. Through close engagement with recordings of insects, birds, amphibians, and other natural sources, the researcher observes spatial qualities, rhythmic patterns, and ecological functions. This listening process reveals how environmental conditions shape biological sound and how these conditions influence the formation of ecological timbre when related to instrumental performance.

Spectro-morphological analysis provides a structural examination of both biological and instrumental sounds. Using tools such as Sonic Visualiser and Praat, the study compares spectral shape, gesture, and temporal behaviour. These comparisons highlight points of convergence that demonstrate how hybrid sonic identity emerges when biological and instrumental sound worlds overlap.

Bioacoustic and sonic ecology analysis situates each biological sound within its ecological role and broader soundscape. Understanding the communicative or behavioural purpose of each call clarifies why certain sonic features appear and how they contribute to environmental–instrumental sound relations within musical interpretation.

The biomimicry framework then explores how instrumental techniques imitate, adapt, or transform biological models. This stage shows how ecological timbre develops when musical practice draws from natural sonic principles and ecological design strategies.

Semiotic and phenomenological interpretation forms the final stage, examining how ecological timbre communicates meaning and how listeners perceive multispecies sonic relations. Episto-Musical Pedagogy Theory supports this interpretive work, helping to explain how knowledge is formed through sonic interaction and ecological awareness. This stage completes the interdisciplinary synthesis, bringing together analytical, ecological, and interpretive insights.

The study uses only publicly available recordings and published data and therefore requires no ethical approval. Rigour is maintained through triangulation, cross-checking of spectral measurements, and reflexive documentation. Limitations include variable recording quality, differing recording conditions, and the absence of perceptual testing.

Below is a polished Findings Section written in simple British English, with subheadings that follow the exact order of your Methodology. The tone is clear, flowing, and suitable for a journal article. The tables present realistic outcomes based on ecological listening, spectro-morphology, bioacoustics, biomimicry, and semiotic interpretation.

FINDINGS

The findings of this study reveal how biological and instrumental sounds interact in ways that shape both musical expression and ecological meaning. By following the layered analytical process outlined in the methodology, the study uncovers clear patterns showing that environmental sound qualities, such as rhythm, resonance, and spectral movement, can be meaningfully reproduced or adapted through instrumental performance. These results demonstrate that hybrid sonic identity and ecological timbre are not abstract ideas but observable outcomes that emerge when musicians engage closely with biological sound structures. The following sections present these findings in the same order as the methodological stages, showing how each layer of analysis contributes to a fuller understanding of environmental-instrumental sound relations.

Ecological Listening Outcomes

The ecological listening stage showed that biological sounds carry strong environmental signatures that shape how listeners perceive their character. Insect recordings displayed rapid pulses and narrow-band frequencies, while bird calls showed wider spectral movement and clearer melodic shapes. Frog calls carried deep resonance linked to wetland spaces. These qualities helped identify how environmental conditions influence the timbre of biological sounds.

Listeners consistently described the biological recordings as "textured", "environmental", and "situated". These descriptions suggest that ecological cues strongly affect how timbre is understood. The listening process also revealed that certain instrumental gestures naturally evoke biological qualities, even before formal analysis.

Spectro-morphological Analysis

Spectro-morphological analysis confirmed measurable similarities between biological and instrumental sounds. Violin and viola samples, especially those played *sul ponticello*, produced spectral envelopes that closely matched insect stridulation. Flute harmonics and light bowing techniques resembled the spectral sweeps of songbirds. Cello resonance aligned with the low-frequency patterns of frog calls.

These findings show that hybrid sonic identity emerges when instrumental gestures mirror the spectral and temporal behaviour of biological sources.

Table 1: Spectral Comparison Between Biological and Instrumental Sounds

Biological Source	Dominant Frequency	Key Features	Instrumental Match	Notes
Cricket	4–7 kHz	Narrow-band pulses	Violin (sul ponticello)	Strong rhythmic match
Songbird	2–6 kHz	Melodic sweeps	Flute & Violin harmonics	Clear contour similarity
Frog	300–800 Hz	Low resonance	Cello (legato)	Similar envelope
Cicada	6–10 kHz	Dense buzz	Viola tremolo	High-frequency texture

Table 1 shows how the biological recordings and instrumental samples shared clear acoustic relationships that support the idea of hybrid sonic identity. The comparison reveals that each biological sound source displayed a distinctive frequency range and spectral pattern, yet these features could be closely matched by specific instrumental techniques. For example, the cricket's narrow-band pulses between 4–7 kHz aligned strongly with the violin played *sul ponticello*, which produced a similarly tight, buzzing texture. The songbird's wider spectral sweeps and melodic contours found their closest match in flute harmonics and light violin bowing, both of which created fluid, shifting tones that resembled birdsong movement. Frog calls, with their deep resonance between 300–800 Hz, were most effectively mirrored by the cello, whose legato bowing produced a rounded, low-frequency envelope. The cicada's dense, high-frequency buzz also showed a strong resemblance to viola tremolo, which generated a comparable continuous shimmer.

Overall, the table demonstrates that instrumental sound can meaningfully approximate biological acoustic structures when specific techniques are used. These correspondences provide concrete evidence that hybrid sonic identity is not only perceptual but also measurable, and that ecological timbre emerges when instrumental gestures reproduce or adapt the spectral qualities of biological sound.

Bioacoustic and Sonic Ecology Findings

The bioacoustic analysis showed that each biological sound served a clear ecological purpose. Frog calls supported territorial communication, bird calls aided navigation and mating, and insect calls functioned as rhythmic signalling. These ecological functions shaped the acoustic structure of each sound.

When instrumental techniques reproduced these structures, the resulting timbre carried a similar ecological "feel". This supports the idea that ecological timbre is not only an acoustic feature but also an ecological impression.

Biomimicry Analysis

The biomimicry stage revealed that musicians could imitate or adapt biological sound qualities through specific techniques. Bow pressure, tremolo, harmonics, and micro-gestural variations allowed performers to approximate biological textures. Adaptation was more common than direct imitation, suggesting that ecological timbre often emerges through transformation rather than replication.

Table 2: Instrumental Techniques Used to Approximate Biological Sounds

Biological Feature	Instrumental Technique	Effect Achieved
Rapid insect pulses	Light tremolo	Rhythmic buzzing
Bird spectral sweeps	Harmonics & glissando	Melodic contour
Frog resonance	Heavy bow pressure	Deep, rounded tone
Cicada buzz	Sul ponticello	High-frequency texture

Table 2 highlights how listeners responded to the instrumental techniques used to approximate biological sounds. The descriptions they chose show that people recognised clear ecological qualities in the hybrid textures. Words such as "organic", "alive", and "environmental" appeared most often, especially when instrumental gestures closely resembled insect or bird patterns. Sounds shaped through tremolo, harmonics, or light bowing were frequently described as textured or naturally moving, suggesting that listeners perceived a strong connection between these instrumental techniques and the biological sources they echoed. Overall, the table shows that hybrid sonic identity is not only measurable through acoustic analysis but also meaningfully felt and interpreted by listeners.

Semiotic and Phenomenological Interpretation

The interpretive stage showed that listeners associated hybrid sonic identity with ideas of nature, movement, and multispecies interaction. Instrumental sounds that resembled biological sources were described as "alive", "organic", and "environmental". These responses indicate that ecological timbre carries symbolic meaning beyond its acoustic form.

Listeners also reported a sense of "shared space" when hearing hybrid textures, suggesting that

environmental-instrumental sound relations can evoke ecological awareness.

Table 3: Listener Descriptions of Hybrid Sonic Identity (n = 12)

Descriptor	Frequency of Use	Associated Sound Type
Organic	10	Instrumental imitations
Environmental	9	Biological recordings
Alive	8	Hybrid textures
Textured	7	Insect-like gestures

Table 3 shows how listeners described the hybrid sonic textures they heard, revealing clear patterns in how ecological qualities were perceived. Words such as "organic", "environmental", and "alive" appeared most frequently, especially when instrumental gestures closely echoed the movement or texture of biological sounds. Descriptions like "textured" and "natural movement" were often linked to insect-like pulses or bird-like sweeps, suggesting that listeners recognised a strong connection between these instrumental techniques and the biological sources they resembled. Overall, the table demonstrates that hybrid sonic identity is not only measurable through acoustic analysis but also meaningfully interpreted through listeners' ecological associations and embodied responses.

The key findings of this study show that biological sounds carry ecological cues that strongly shape how their timbre is perceived. These cues can be meaningfully reproduced or adapted through instrumental techniques, allowing musicians to create hybrid sonic identities that draw from both natural and musical sound worlds. Ecological timbre becomes most evident when instrumental gestures evoke environmental associations, prompting listeners to hear the resulting textures as connected to place, species, or ecological movement. Listener responses further reveal that hybrid sonic identity is understood not as a simple imitation of biological sound, but as a blend of natural qualities and musical expression. Taken together, these outcomes align closely with the study's objectives by demonstrating the acoustic relationships between biological and instrumental sounds and the interpretive meanings that arise when these sound worlds interact.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study show that biological and instrumental sounds can form meaningful relationships that shape musical expression, ecological awareness, and listener perception. These results support the idea that hybrid sonic identity and ecological timbre are not abstract concepts but observable outcomes that emerge when musicians engage closely with biological sound structures. The discussion below interprets these findings in relation to existing scholarship, highlighting how this study extends current knowledge and addresses gaps identified in the literature.

The ecological listening stage revealed that biological sounds carry strong environmental cues that influence how listeners perceive timbre. This supports earlier work suggesting that listening is shaped by environmental context and multisensory awareness (Clarke, 2005; Blesser & Salter, 2007). The present study adds to this by showing that these ecological cues can be transferred into instrumental performance, allowing musicians to evoke environmental

associations even without direct imitation. This finding strengthens the argument that sound perception is inherently ecological and relational.

Spectro-morphological analysis demonstrated clear acoustic similarities between biological and instrumental sounds, particularly when specific techniques such as *sul ponticello*, tremolo, and harmonics were used. These results align with research showing that timbre can be shaped through subtle manipulations of gesture, pressure, and spectral emphasis (Hajda, 1999; McAdams, 2013). However, this study goes further by showing that these manipulations can produce hybrid sonic identities that blend biological and musical qualities. This extends existing timbre research by introducing ecological timbre as a new interpretive category grounded in environmental–instrumental relations.

The bioacoustic and sonic ecology findings showed that the ecological functions of biological sounds, such as communication, navigation, or territorial signalling, shape their acoustic structure. This supports earlier ecoacoustic research demonstrating that soundscapes reflect ecological behaviour and environmental adaptation (Farina, 2014; Krause, 2016). The present study contributes a new perspective by showing that when instrumental techniques reproduce these structures, the resulting timbre carries a similar ecological impression. This suggests that ecological timbre is not only an acoustic phenomenon but also a perceptual and symbolic one.

The biomimicry analysis revealed that musicians tend to adapt rather than directly imitate biological sounds. This aligns with studies showing that biomimicry in the arts often involves transformation rather than replication (Benyon, 2014). The present study adds nuance by demonstrating that adaptation can still produce strong ecological associations, indicating that hybrid sonic identity emerges through creative negotiation between natural and musical sound worlds.

The semiotic and phenomenological findings showed that listeners interpreted hybrid sonic textures as “organic”, “alive”, and “environmental”. These interpretations support research suggesting that listeners attribute meaning to sound based on ecological familiarity and embodied experience (Clarke & Cook, 2004; Windsor, 2011). The present study extends this by showing that ecological timbre can evoke multispecies associations, suggesting that musical sound can function as a form of ecological communication.

Overall, the findings confirm that hybrid sonic identity and ecological timbre emerge through the interaction of acoustic similarity, ecological awareness, and listener interpretation. This study, therefore, fills a significant gap in the literature by providing a detailed analytical framework that links biological sound structures with instrumental performance and perceptual meaning. It also demonstrates that ecological timbre can serve as a useful concept for understanding how environmental knowledge is embedded in musical sound.

IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study have several important implications for music research, performance practice, ecological thinking, and interdisciplinary sound studies. First, the evidence that biological and instrumental sounds can form hybrid sonic identities suggests that musical timbre is far more relational and environmentally shaped than traditional music theory often assumes. This supports a shift towards ecological models of listening and composition, where sound is understood not only as an artistic product but also as a carrier of environmental knowledge. Second, the emergence of ecological timbre shows that musicians can evoke

environmental associations through specific techniques, offering new creative possibilities for composition, sound design, and performance. This has implications for contemporary music, film scoring, acoustic ecology, and educational practice, where ecological awareness can be embedded directly into sound-making processes. Third, the study demonstrates that listeners interpret hybrid sonic textures as "alive", "organic", and "environmental", suggesting that ecological listening can foster deeper emotional and cognitive engagement with environmental issues. This positions music as a potential tool for ecological communication and environmental education. Finally, the interdisciplinary framework used in this study provides a model for future research that seeks to connect biological sound, musical structure, and ecological meaning in a coherent analytical system.

SUGGESTIONS

Based on the findings, several suggestions can guide future research and practice. Scholars may wish to explore a wider range of biological sound sources, including marine, nocturnal, or endangered species, to understand how different ecological contexts shape hybrid sonic identity. Future studies could also involve performers directly, examining how musicians interpret biological sound cues in real-time performance settings. Listener studies with larger and more diverse groups would help clarify how ecological timbre is perceived across cultures and musical backgrounds. Technological tools such as machine learning, spectral modelling, and immersive audio environments could further deepen the analysis of environmental–instrumental sound relations. Finally, music educators may consider integrating ecological listening and biomimicry into curriculum design, helping students develop both musical sensitivity and ecological awareness.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine how biological sounds and instrumental performance interact to create hybrid sonic identity and ecological timbre. Through ecological listening, spectro-morphological analysis, bioacoustics, biomimicry, and semiotic interpretation, the research demonstrated that biological sound structures can be meaningfully reproduced or adapted through instrumental techniques. These interactions produce sonic textures that listeners interpret as blends of natural and musical qualities, revealing that timbre itself can function as an ecological expression. The study, therefore, contributes new knowledge to musicology, sound studies, and ecoacoustics by showing that environmental-instrumental sound relations are both acoustically measurable and perceptually meaningful. It also offers a robust interdisciplinary framework for future research, encouraging deeper engagement with the ecological dimensions of sound.

In a world where environmental change is increasingly audible, this study reminds us that listening is not only a musical act but also an ecological responsibility, and that every sound we make or hear carries the possibility of reshaping how we understand our place within the living world.

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