

Biosphere: The Hilvarenbeek Recordings

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April 8, 2018



Biosphere's *The Hilvarenbeek Recordings* is an insular, ambient album that, rather than letting the world yawn in front of us, zeroes in on a specific place: the Boerderij 't Schop farm in the Dutch town of Hilvarenbeek, where Biosphere mastermind Geir Jenssen was invited by the Netherlands' now-defunct Incubate festival to spend a week making field recordings. The album was first released as a limited-edition EP in 2016, unbeknownst to the artist, but this artist-approved wide release expands the fruits of Jenssen's vacation to a full, 38-minute album that's the most satisfying thing he's made since his best album, 2011's *N-Plants*.

This isn't the first time Jenssen's made music from natural, found sounds. His *Cho Oyu 8201m —Field Recordings from Tibet* (2006) used recordings and bits of Jenssen's music to chronicle his journey from foot to summit of the Himalayan peak Cho Oyu. That album had a linear progression, from the comfort of a Tibetan town to the eerie stillness of the summit. This one doesn't get its hands so dirty, and it mostly resembles the natural sounds you might hear on the porch of an idyllic countryside escape—birds, distant airplanes, farm animals and swaths of gentle synth that drift placidly overhead like clouds on a sunny day.

Rather than integrating field recordings and music into one blur of sound, as many similar

albums do, *The Hilvarenbeek Recordings* keeps the field sounds and the music mostly separate. It opens with natural wind sound and the distant cries of a farmer driving his cows. Only gradually does a wash of pad enter, treated with a pulsating filter to give it just the slightest suggestion of a dance rhythm. The music itself mostly sticks to this approach, and there's greater variation in the recordings, many of local animals (the Latin names "Pipistrellus" and "Strigiformes," plus a quick Google search, inform us of the starring species).

This isn't an ambient album with much tension. It's diurnal and placid, suggesting the comfort of a vacation rather than an arduous journey or an existential unease, and though the sounds made by the creatures of "Pipistrellus" are high-pitched and not necessarily pleasant to listen to, the effect isn't to sour the mood but to take us deeper into the environment Jenssen's exploring. David Lynch's *Blue Velvet* bugs might come to mind, but Jenssen's approach is more similar to the 1996 French film *Microcosmos*, which takes an affectionate look at the world of those tiny, creeping creatures we might ordinarily ignore—or step on and squish.

It's also not one with much variation. If it deepens, it's because Jenssen gradually gives up less runtime to the field recordings and more to his amorphous synth-ghosts. Some might desire an ambient album with more going on—one that takes us through many landscapes rather than zeroing in on one patch of land and leaving no stone unturned. But *The Hilvarenbeek Recordings* inspires awe by reminding us just how much is going on in our backyard. In any given plant or patch of dirt, thousands of creatures go through the motions of their lives. Jenssen knows this, and on *The Hilvarenbeek Recordings* he takes comfort in it.