Hello everyone,

I will just add a few observations about drone flutes in addition to the fine explanations given by the Sparkman and Francesca. I've been making drone flutes for about ten years and over this time have learned a few things, often as an unexpected discovery, and just as often as a result of feedback from Mary Youngblood. Initially, having seen a photo of a drone flute, and dying to hear what one would sound like, I simply made two flutes in the same piece of wood. I couldn't see the mouthpiece of the drone flute in the photo, so I debated for a bit about whether or not to put one or two holes in the mouthpiece. It would work either way, but having two separate holes gives the drone flute a lot more versatility so that's the design I chose. This first drone flute, upon meeting Mary Youngblood at a flute circle, quickly became Mary's first drone flute and thus began her love/infatuation with the "double barrel flute" and its subsequent use in many of her recordings.

The octave shift of the drone barrel as well as its fine tuning can be controlled or adjusted during crafting, and afterwards, by the player, by slight adjustments of the bird position and breath control. During crafting, close attention is given to the point at which the drone octave shift occurs and slight modifications are made to the drone barrel bird to achieve this feature. The drone flute can be designed and crafted so that it is possible to play the entire scale while keeping the drone barrel in the lower octave. Alternatively, while playing the upper three notes (typically) of the scale, a slight burst of air will cause the drone to jump up an octave to mix with the scale notes. This increased air flow rate must be maintained or the flute will drop back down into the lower octave. The player then has the option of playing with the drone in either octave and can decide when to initiate the shift.

When blowing into both barrels, with all playing holes covered, both barrels are playing approximately the same note. Any difference between the barrels will result in a "wow wow" or wavering component which is known as a binaural beat. This binaural beat will be occurring at a rate equivalent to the difference between the two barrels. By adjusting the position of the one or both of the birds, the "speed" of the binaural beat can be adjusted. When the birds are adjusted so that both barrels are exactly the same, the binaural beat will disappear and only one continuous steady note will be heard. Another way to vary the binaural beat, even while in the middle of playing a tune, is to position one's lips on the mouthpiece to partially block the drone barrel air input hole, which will reduce the amount of air being introduced into the drone barrel. This reduction of air flow will cause the drone barrel to be flat or lower than the scale barrel and vary the binaural beat. I find a small amount of wavering or binaural beat to be appealing when playing with all holes covered, although some folks prefer no wavering. Its no problem because this can be adjusted to individual preferences.

One other feature of the drone flute is what I believe Mary refers to as "barking." This is achieved by playing both barrels with all holes covered and then simultaneously, blowing a strong burst into both barrels while momentarily raising the lower two or three playing holes. Those of you who attended Mary's embellishment class this past June, were no doubt shown this technique. Happy Droning, Russ Venable