

## An interview with Ken Gilliland on Songbird ReMix2

Interview by Sandra Castle [SndCastle] - Staff Columnist

Sandra recently had the opportunity to talk with Renderosity artist and merchant **Ken Gilliland [KenG]**, on his newly released *Songbird ReMix 2*.

### What made you decide to continue with the Songbird ReMix?

After completing three projects for DAZ last summer, including Songbird ReMix Africa, I couldn't begin to look at Poser or my modeling program. I was seriously burnt-out. Instead, for about 8 months, I worked on a modeling project with a grander scale (remodeling a house) and did some oils on canvas for my gallery. In April 2006, on the Renderosity forums, two Australians started a message thread asking for a Laughing Kookaburra. A Songbird ReMix fan directed them to me. Now, I've done a few "request" birds before and the Kookaburra seemed like a challenge, so I accepted and got to work with the very familiar (to me) Songbird ReMix model.



The problems in creating a Kookaburra in Songbird ReMix were daunting. The model head was too small and the existing morphs weren't close to what I needed. I started to wonder if the Songbird ReMix would work and started to resign myself to a new model. I then remember that with Songbird ReMix Africa, I had created a "Conforming Crest" for the Lilac-breasted Roller that acted much the way conforming clothes do for the human Poser models. It seemed like a good approach to add the addition geometry needed while preserving what works well with the Songbird ReMix model, so I created new head parts that acts much like a helmet. I then used the existing Songbird ReMix morphs to finish out the body, tail and beak.

My newfound Australian friends were tough on me (which I liked), pointing out differences in the model and the bird. This led me to do something that I really hadn't wanted to do... add more morphs to the existing Songbird ReMix model. My reasons for not wanting to add the morphs at the time don't seem to make any sense now. It was partially not wanting to re-edit the 100+ existing bird MAT files to take advantage or cancel out the new morphs. I chose to include for now, a MAT file that simply zeros out all the morphs so a different bird can be used. I also decided it was time to try a new texturing approach and also redo the dated universal bump and transparency maps for the series. Now that it's done, birds I wanted to do for some time are a couple morph dial spins away.

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**What are your plans for the songbirds? Are you going to expand to include, say, webbed feet birds?**

Well, the initial plans with Songbird ReMix2 are to offer a variety of what's possible with the new morphs. Included will be hummingbirds, a cockatoo, a raven, a pigeon, quail and, of course, that Laughing Kookaburra. This will be followed quickly with some bird specific add-on packages such as Parrots of the World, Hummingbirds of North America (and their young) and Pigeons, Doves and Game birds.

As for webbed feet, I am considering a webbed and shorebird footed Songbird ReMix base Models. This will allow some new birds entries such as Gulls, terns, sandpipers, plovers, etc but ducks and herons are unlikely... I won't say impossible... after all, I did create a duckbill morph in Songbird ReMix2.





**The title, "Songbird ReMix2" gives the impression it's an upgraded, stand-alone product. Is it?**

Well, yes and no... The Character files (.cr2) have been rewritten to accommodate the 25+ new morphs and a little fine tuning was done to the joint parameters but the base model is still the same so you'll still need the Original Songbird ReMix package to make SBRM2 work. All the original SBRM characters will still work with SBRM2, too. The same UV maps are used. The only issue will be that the new morphs won't work or be zeroed with the old characters. This can be easily corrected by either applying Zero Morph MAT file provided in SBRM2 or revising the older Character MAT files by adding the new morphs. I will eventually re-edit the entire SBRM MAT library and post the updates at my site ([www.empken.com/songbirdremixcentral.html](http://www.empken.com/songbirdremixcentral.html)) and perhaps DAZ.

**If you had to choose, which Songbird ReMix series is your favorite, and why?**

That's a tough question, since every package has at least one favorite bird. If I was pushed into a corner, it probably would be "Threatened, Endangered, Extinct" because of its message.... I will add though, my latest "Songbird ReMix2" runs a close second because of the California quail and Cockatoo that are included.



**I understand you recently were guests at an event of the California Audubon Society. Can you give us a little idea what it was about?**

My wife and I have been supporters of Audubon California and the Kern River Preserve (<http://www.audubon.org/local/sanctuary/kernriver/>) they manage. This area is one of the last remaining riparian habitats in California and is one of the few remaining homes of the endangered Yellow Cuckoo and Southwestern Willow Flycatcher (found in "Threatened", Endangered, Extinct"). The event you spoke of celebrated their 25th year anniversary at the preserve. It was interesting that the neighboring ranchers took part in the event who are stereotypically thought of as the "bad guys" to environmentalists. One rancher who spoke at the BBQ dinner expressed his dismay of "Tree-huggers" moving into the neighborhood 25 years ago but now realizes that partnering with them is the only way small ranchers can survive. By creating conservation easements on the ranches, the pressures of overdevelopment and loss of open spaces is eased.



**I know your passion is with endangered species, both birds and plants. Can you give us some more information about this?**

Well, my interest in the natural world came at an early age with a father who was a high school biology teacher. This early education continued with lots of backpacking and day hikes through the scouting programs. An introduction to Native American's belief system got me thinking now I could work with our natural environment rather than plow through it.

With these influences, I now find myself in a unique position to share my knowledge and passion through digital and photographic art. Of course, you already know the bird/Songbird ReMix passions but I also am webmaster for the Theodore Payne Foundation ([www.theodorepayne.org](http://www.theodorepayne.org)) which educates, preserves and sells California native plants. I do most of my photography of native plants at the Foundation and my home (where we have over 500 different native species and about 20% of them are threatened). By showing the attractiveness of the plants, hopefully more people will start to think native and switch to plants that are more eco-friendly for their areas. My photography has taken an interesting turn, I started photography natives simply to have good pictures of the plants for the website. Over the last four years, this hobby has turned into a profession with my photography being used by Cal-Flora, US Forestry Service, Southern California Metropolitan Water District, TrueGreen, Cities of Pasadena, Las Vegas, and many others.

**The last time I talked with you, we got to see your home "Quail Hollow". I understand you also have a rental "Quail Hollow West" you have been working on?**

Oh, I guess I get to talk about that "other" modeling project. There's not much to tell. My wife and I purchased the two west adjoining properties to our house to avoid to MacMansions being built. A MacMansion refers to a common building practice in Los Angeles to tear down the existing home and build a two or three story stucco box to the extremities of the property lines allowing no green space. Maybe, my wife and I are weird but we value green space... it's a quality of life issue for us.



**Quail Hollow West...Before and after.**

Okay, I'll get off my soapbox... in any case; we found ourselves two very run-down houses. The one next to us serves as a guesthouse and my studio, and the farer one, after 8 months of grueling work has become Quail Hollow West (and hopefully will get rented). There were art-like challenges in converting a ranch-tudor style into a California craftsman styled home. I gave it an art deco bathroom, cornices and arched entryways to age the house. And yes, it too, sports a native garden with lots of endangered species and birds.



As always I enjoyed working with Ken on these new birds and hope he continues to make them.

Please visit Ken's [website](#) and check out the new line of Songbirds at Daz.

Ken is also webmaster at:

- [Theodore Payne Foundation](#)
- [The Orlando Gallery](#)
- [Kristen Black Music](#)

Be sure to also visit:

- [KenG's Renderosity Gallery](#)
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