

# The Editor's Corner

## "Ode to Joy"

By Robi Josephson

*There's music in the waking woods  
There's glory in the air. . . .*

*Impulses of Spring, John Clare,  
English poet (1793-1864)*

*Ridgelines, The Quarterly Newsletter of the Mohonk Preserve, No. 115, p2, Spring 1998.*

Nothing renews like the return of the birds. Their long-awaited pastorate, opening with the fluted recitatives of the bluebird and robin, builds to its well-rehearsed crescendo by mid-May. We all have our favorites, but for me, the most joyful sound of spring's renewal in the Shawangunks is a little pip-squeak that's heard outside our dining room window. It's a cross between a mouse chittering and a human kiss, and it means only one thing: "We're back. Feed us."

One of the most remarkable migrations is that of our hungry spring arrivals, a pair of Ruby-throated Hummingbirds, the only breeding hummingbird east of the Mississippi River. With dogged determination, these penny-weight hovercrafters leave their main wintering grounds in Central America to cross the 500-600 mile Gulf of Mexico nonstop in one day. According to the Audubon Society, hummingbird "flight speed has been clocked at 27 miles per hour and is suspected of reaching at least 50 miles per hour."

I think of the hummingbird whenever I read the following passage from the essay "The Spring Bird Procession" by Hudson Valley naturalist John Burroughs: "Delicacy of color, grace of form, animation of movement, and often snatches of song, and elusive notes and calls, advise the bird-lover that the fairy procession is arriving. Tiny guests from Central and South America drop out of the sky like flowers borne by night winds. . . ."

These "tiny guests" have arrived at our home in past years as early as April 1. With barely a rest from their arduous journey, the female builds her nest within their quarter-acre territory. In the months to come, we'll be entertained by the pendulous aerial dives of the courting male and the shenanigans of the young, but that's another editorial.

Their green iridescence, with the male's deep red throat, will flash by our feeder every day until mid-September. As our guests, they demand and get only the best hospitality. We quickly put out a feeder, its red plastic bottom the hummingbird equivalent of a red carpet. We'll now be at their beck and call every day, but we don't mind. These elfin creatures brighten our days and increase our understanding of their world, which is our world, too. Their squeaks are an "ode to joy,"\* the most glorious of music to our ears.

\* The editor's title is from Beethoven's Symphony #9 with the Final Chorus on Schiller's "Ode to Joy."