

# The Hummingbird Whisperer

By Margaret Fisher



Woodpecker on Hummingbird feeder  
Photo by Joanne Ormesher

In 2000, Joanna Ormesher knew she had found the right house to buy when she was greeted by a hummingbird, the first she had ever seen and which blew her mind. She promptly bought the house in Clifton and has loved living there ever since. Every year she puts up hummingbird feeders in April when they return from Central and South America and leaves them up until Clifton Day, when the last stragglers have departed again. She makes her own sugar water, since the store-bought product has red dye which is harmful and unnecessary, and changes it frequently to avoid fermentation which can cause liver damage.



Hummingbird on Field Thistle  
Photo by Margaret Fisher

Joanna notices that animals seem to respond to her peaceful aura. There is an owl that follows her up and down her road when she takes a walk. Birds come close to her, as she is able to stay very still. Hummingbirds occasionally fly into the house then out again. One day, she noticed that a young hummingbird seemed to be discombobulated, flying around randomly. She went into the house and brought out some sugar water to give it, at which point it sat on her hand to take a drink and seemed to recover its wits before flying away.



Joanna Ormesher, The Hummingbird Whisperer  
Photo by Mark Ormesher

With feeders visible from her kitchen window and on her back deck, Joanna enjoys the show but is aware that what hummingbirds really need is not sugar water but habitat, just like any wild creature. Insects and spiders are an essential part of a hummingbird's diet and are the only thing eaten by their nestlings. She therefore never uses chemicals on her lawn and garden, mows her grass as seldom as possible, and favors native plants, which themselves are the food source for plant-eating insects and ultimately for the many other critters that eat insects. She has noticed more fireflies and butterflies since adopting these healthy yard practices. The Plant NOVA Natives website has a page on how to support hummingbirds in your yard. <https://www.plantnovanatives.org/hummingbirds-1>

Hummingbirds are not the only ones who enjoy a sugar water treat. It is a challenge to keep the feeders out of reach of the very agile raccoons. A more welcome interloper one day was a woodpecker that actually sat on the feeder and took a drink – a very surprising behavior for that species!