

## A Conspiracy of Hummingbirds

This morning, in my garden, I was rehangng a freshly filled hummingbird feeder when I was buzzed by three crows, followed shortly after by a hummingbird. The hummingbird was not a surprise. The crows, flying so low together, were.

Ever since I hung up a hummingbird feeder in my backyard garden a few years ago, I have been visited with a steady group of those little, furious birds.

The initial feeder that I put out was not enough, as one stout little fellow began to defend it as his own. He would sit on a nearby branch and chase off any near-do-wells who attempted his feeder. Before too long, the sugar water in the feeder fermented. Silly little fellow couldn't take in the whole thing by himself.

To combat this combative creature, I installed a second feeder some 20 feet away. Thus began the Hummingbird Wars.

Watching the battle scenes in a 3-D movie, like Star Wars, is the closest comparison. Except that you would be the planet all those high-speed space craft was zooming past.

In the time I've been exposed to the fantastic aeronautics of the hummingbird, I've learned that these birds are combative, fearless, demanding, and just plain mean. They are also beautiful and amazing.

They are so fast, can turn on a speck, can stop and start in a blink. They are wonderful to watch, whether in motion or still.

A flying hummingbird makes a buzzing sound far too loud, given its size. Its cackling chirp is louder than a finch or sparrow. For such a tiny, winsome creature, it has great presence.

In the first few months of the Hummingbird Wars, I would hear the buzz of erratic flight and duck my head. I was convinced (and haven't completely ruled it out) that one of the little beasts would plow into my temple with its long, pointy beak. I'd be found dead in my yard—murder weapon unknown.

I've since learned to trust the devils. Well, not the birds themselves, but in their abilities. Watching them fly at each other and give chase is fascinating, as it takes place in seconds and covers the distance of dozens of yards.

They have been cheeky at times, too, trying to bully me out of my own yard. One day I was just getting out of my car when one came and hovered less than three feet from my face for a few seconds. Then it hopped, in flight, over the wood fence that separates my car park from my garden. Going in through the gate, I saw the same bird hovering right next to they empty feeder. Did he recognize me? I've a sneaking suspicion that he did.

For as frequently as the birds are in my yard, I really can't recognize one from another. They rarely stop long enough for me to get a decent look.

This brings me back to this morning. As the crows flew by, I thought "a murder of crows." For a group of crows are called a "murder," of course. I love that phrase, so much more mysterious than flock. Crows, to me, are rather ordinary, as they were the first birds I knew as regular inhabitants of the nut trees in my parent's yard. Being a murder adds some spice. Especially when it looks as if a murder of crows were being chased off by one tough little hummingbird.

I wondered then, as the bully hovered near my head looking after the fleeing crows, what a group of hummingbirds was called. I went online to find out. After finding that there are several nouns that refer to groups of cats (what is the point of that? cats are too solitary), I found that there is no official noun for a group of hummingbirds.

I was both pleased and displeased by this development, for I think hummingbirds should have a particular name for their groupings. However, this morning, when I thought "a murder of crows," it came to me that a group of hummingbirds is a conspiracy. The little devils are conspirators—not necessarily allies or friends or even enemies. They fight with each other constantly, but are united in their bullying.

I like the phrase, "A conspiracy of hummingbirds." It sounds much more grand than their tiny, frail bodies appear. It's a big, complicated word to match their large personalities, their large presence.

When you hear the tell-tale buzz of a conspiracy of hummingbirds, be sure to duck.