

*This Week's Montage*

—*Spring Migration*

*Comparative Haiku*

selected by

*Allan Burns*

The strategies birds use to attract one another—vibrant colors, beautiful songs—attract also, quite inadvertently, non-avian observers, who might be found bearing guns or cameras or binoculars or simply notepads in which to scratch down haiku. Birds provide, to a degree few other things in the world do, a focal point and a motivating stimulus for haiku. The typically fleeting nature of a bird sighting—a resonant moment in spacetime—almost cries out for haiku treatment. Unsurprisingly, many first-rate haiku, from Bashō's time to our own, take birds as their subjects. This gallery juxtaposes spring bird haiku from both sides of the Atlantic. John Barlow and Matthew Paul assembled 323 British bird haiku in their marvelous recent collection *Wing Beats*. A selection from those haiku appears here alongside some North American bird haiku composed by one of our most distinguished and versatile haikai, Peggy Willis Lyles. Enjoy—and then reach for your binoculars. The migrants are returning. (*The opening sentences of this headnote derive from my review of Wing Beats in Presence 37, 2009.*)

*Peggy Willis Lyles* (b. 1939)

*Matthew Paul* (b. 1966)

*John Barlow* (b. 1970)

kingfisher  
plucking silver  
from the dark lagoon

pine tops  
against deep twilight  
a bob-white's call

wild azaleas  
a meadowlark sings  
into the scent

haze-blurred horizon...  
a painted bunting hovers  
in the sea oats' curve

the third-note rise  
of a towhee's song  
fragrant breeze

good morning kiss  
wing beats  
of the hummingbird

thunderheads offshore  
the osprey coming early  
to its nest

1 from *Brussels Sprout* 2.4, 1982  
2 from *The Heron's Nest* 2.9, 2000  
3 from *Haiku in the Light*, September 2001  
4-7 from *To Hear the Rain* (Brooks Books, 2002)

limestone hills—  
lamb and pheasant  
nose to beak

under the footbridge  
two pigeons pluming  
one another

sand martins lunge  
upstream and downstream—  
the silent barge

cumulonimbus  
tumbling swallows

blackbird song  
the old cat retches  
on the threshold

a mistle thrush  
springs the telephone wire—  
turquoise sea

coastal rain  
sweeps the potato field—  
the lustre of crows

from *Wings Beats: British Birds in Haiku* by John Barlow & Matthew Paul (Snapshot Press, 2008)

dripping waterweed...  
the great crested grebes  
breast to breast

the mating chase  
of common sandpipers  
water over stone

sand martins  
return to the river...  
the fineness of the rain

flood debris  
the flexing legs  
of the spring dipper

distant wren song...  
the brown river  
slowed to green

harrowed soil...  
sunlight silvers  
the rooks' wings

depths of the wood  
the bullfinch's breast  
empties of song

from *Wings Beats: British Birds in Haiku* by John Barlow & Matthew Paul (Snapshot Press, 2008)

*Previous Montages*

*March 29: Frontiers*  
*April 4: Play Ball*

*Next Week's Montage: The Good Earth*

Paul O. Williams  
Marian Olson  
Paul MacNeil