

HUMMINGBIRD NATURE NOTES

Hummingbirds are part of the Trochilidae family of birds; the name stems from the Greek word for small bird, “trochilos.” They are only found in the Americas but make up the second largest family of birds in the Western Hemisphere with over 300 species. Most hummingbird species are found in Central and South America. The greatest diversity of hummingbirds is found in Ecuador, which is home to more than 130 species. Sixteen species of hummingbirds breed in the U.S. but only the Ruby-throated Hummingbird regularly breeds east of the Mississippi River.

U.S. Breeding Hummingbirds

- Allen’s (*Selasphorus sasin*)
- Anna’s (*Calypte ana*)
- Berylline (*Amazilia beryllina*)
- Black-chinned (*Archilochus alexandri*)
- Blue-throated (*Lampornis clemenciae*)
- Broad-billed (*Cyanthus latirostris*)
- Broad-tailed (*Selasphorus platycercus*)
- Calliope (*Stellula calliope*)
- Costa’s (*Calypte costae*)
- Lucifer (*Calothorax Lucifer*)
- Magnificent/Rivoli (*Eugenes fulgens*)
- Ruby-throated (*Archilochus colubris*)
- Rufous (*Selasphorus rufus*)
- Violet-crowned (*Amazilia violiceps*)
- White-eared (*Hylocharis leucotis*)

Hummingbird Facts

- Named for the humming sound of their wings
- Wings beat 20 to 200 times a second
- Only birds that are able to hover and fly both backwards and upside down
- Fly 25 mph up to 60 mph in a dive
- Range in size from two to eight inches
- Weigh between 2 and 20 grams
- Bee Hummingbird is the smallest hummingbird and bird in the world (Length 2 inches, Weight 2 grams = 1 U.S. dime)
- Giant Hummingbird is the largest hummingbird (Length 8.5 inches, Weight 20 grams = 4 U.S. quarters)
- Ruby-throated Hummingbird weighs less than a U.S. nickel
- Heart beats around 250 times a minute at rest and up to 1,250 times per minute while flying



- Body temperature is around 105 degrees
- Iridescent color comes from the reflection of light on their feathers, not pigment
- Average life span is 6 years; oldest wild hummingbird ever recorded was 12 years old

Hearing & Ultraviolet Vision

Hummingbirds can hear and see better than humans. Like butterflies and bees, hummingbirds can see ultraviolet light to help them find flower nectar.

Torpor

Hummingbirds go into a hibernation-like state called torpor when they sleep at night to conserve up to 60% of their energy. When they enter this state their heart rate can fall to 50 beats per minute and their body temperature to 70 degrees. During torpor hummingbirds appear as if they are dead. It can take up to an hour for a hummingbird to come out of the torpor state and return to normal.

Migration

Not all hummingbirds migrate but those that do typically spend the spring and summer breeding season in the U.S. and Canada and then fly to Central or South America for the winter. Hummingbirds double their weight before migration in order to have enough fuel to make the journey. The Rufous Hummingbird migrates the farthest of all hummingbird species traveling 2,000 to 3,000 miles between Canada and Central America.

Ruby-throated Hummingbirds migrate between Central and North America each Spring and Fall. During the northern migration in Spring most Ruby-throated Hummingbirds fly from the Yucatan Peninsula across the Gulf of Mexico to the Gulf Coast states. This 500-mile nonstop flight takes them between 18 and 24 hours! Others will follow the Gulf Coast north along Mexico and Texas to the Mississippi River. From there they will migrate northward across the eastern U.S. reaching Canada in late May. Mature males usually arrive first along the Gulf Coast from Louisiana to Florida in late February and early March. Females and juveniles follow several weeks later. The southern migration starts in August and continues through the Fall as Ruby-throated Hummingbirds return to their winter range in Central America. A few Ruby-throated Hummingbirds will winter along the Gulf Coast into Central and South Florida.

Nesting

Hummingbird nests are usually built on a tree or shrub branch. Nests are made out of lichens and spider webs and are about the size of a golf ball. Females do all the nest building, incubating and feeding of the young. The female usually lays a clutch of two pea-sized white eggs and incubates them for two to three weeks. Hummingbird nestlings will stay in the nest and are cared for by the mother for another three weeks during which time she feeds them mostly small insects like flies and spiders.



Food

Hummingbirds consume half to eight times their body weight each day in plant nectar, pollen, and small insects. They feed most actively at dawn and dusk. Hummingbirds visit over 1,000 flowers a day and know how long it takes for the flower to refill with nectar so they can avoid wasting energy by visiting them too soon. Minute hairs on their W groove-shaped tongues help them lap up nectar and catch bugs. Like bees, butterflies, and bats, hummingbirds are important pollinators and help pollinate over 1/3 of the food we eat!

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[Feeding Hummingbirds/Nectar Recipe](#)

[Hummingbird Neonicotinoid Pesticide Study](#)

[Audubon Hummingbirds at Home](#)

[Journey North Hummingbirds Migration](#)