

Hummingbird

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff



Averaging only 3.5 inches head to tail, Hummingbirds are the world's smallest birds. Not only are they beautifully adorned with iridescent plumage, they also perform near-mythic flying abilities. Hummingbirds first captured the imagination of the New England Colonists, who are credited for naming them after the whirring "hum" of their hovering flight.

[Hummers](#) have a high metabolism, beating their wings 60-80 times per second during flight and a heart rate nearing 1,220 beats per minute while on the move. To keep up, they may consume 2/3 of their body weight each day, feeding in 10 minute sessions at a time throughout the daylight hours. They usually feed on nectar from flowers and feeders, but can also catch flying insects right out of the air. Many people think hummingbirds' tongues are hollow like a straw, but actually, the sides of their tongues are grooved to collect nectar by rapidly extending and constricting, "lapping up" nectar from flowers and feeders in mid-flight.

Interesting Facts:

Species: Hummingbirds are part of the Trochilidae family found only in the Western Hemisphere. With 338 species, hummingbirds make up the second largest family of birds.

Location:	Most are in the tropics; 16 different species exist in North America such as the Ruby-throated, Anna's, Rufous, and the Broad-tailed Hummingbirds. During the warmer months of the year (April through late September), any yard in North America can expect to have at least one hummingbird species visit.
Migration:	In winter, most hummingbirds leave, seeking warmer climates where flowering vegetation and lots of insects sustain them. With exception, the Anna's Hummingbirds are year-round residents, able to withstand the cold and occasional snow.
Nesting:	The average hummer's nest is only about 1-1/2" in outer diameter. It is lined with plant down and held together with spider webs. The average eggs (two or, rarely three) are 1/2" long. It only takes 15 to 22 days for the eggs to hatch and the young birds start leaving the nest around three or four weeks old. The male has nothing to do with the babies. Some species have two broods a year.
Diet:	Many people think hummers only eat nectar or the sugar-water from the feeders that are set out for them, but they also eat insects for the protein. They catch insects in the air and from the flowers as they suck the nectar.
Size:	Hummingbirds range from 2-1/2" to 8-1/2". The smallest is the <i>Calypte helena</i> , commonly known as the Cuban Bee Hummingbird. This little bird is only 2-1/2" long. The largest hummer is the <i>Patagona gogas</i> , commonly known as the Giant Hummingbird, measuring 8-1/2" long.
Special Characteristics:	Hummingbirds can fly right, left, up, down, backwards, even upside down. While other birds get their flight power from the downstroke only, hummingbirds have strength on the up-stroke, as well. Hummingbirds are able to perch and will do so at feeders regularly. Because they fly so much, they have poorly developed feet. They can barely walk at all. The hummingbird is much more comfortable in flight.
Attracting:	You can attract hummingbirds to your yard by planting red flowers and putting up a hummingbird feeder . Tying some red ribbons to the pole where the feeder hangs will further entice these hovering beauties. To make your own nectar to fill your feeder, boil a four-part water to one-part sugar solution. or you could also get a mix-and-serve instant

[hummingbird nectar](#) in powder form. You need not add any color or vitamins to the nectar solution. Hummingbirds can also be attracted to a reliable water source such as a [birdbath](#).

Life Span: 5 to 6 years.