

RUBY-THROATED HUMMINGBIRD

FACT SHEET by Patricia Sutton

Ruby-throated Hummingbird - **SIZE:** 3 - 3 3/4 inches; **WEIGHT:** 3.3 grams (can mail 7 Ruby-throated Hummingbirds with a one ounce stamp); **WINGBEATS:** 55/second while hovering; 61/second while moving backwards, 75/second while moving forward, 200/second during display dive. **The East** has only 1 species of hummingbird found regularly, but 5 western hummingbirds have all occurred occasionally in the Mid-Atlantic in late fall and winter (Black-chinned, Calliope, Allen's, Rufous, and most recently Broad-tailed Hummingbird). **The West** has 13 species that breed and several others that wander across our border from Mexico.

WINTER RANGE: S. to Central America (Guatemala, El Salvador, Costa Rica, and as far south as Panama) and N. to rarely Texas, Alabama, and Florida. **BREEDING RANGE:** Central Alberta (Canada) to the Atlantic and Gulf coasts.

MIGRATION: Come from tropical or semitropical winter quarters, keeping pace with the opening of their favorite flowers. Often arrive on very day of their opening. Not bothered by crossing water (Gulf of Mexico), flying 25 feet above the water they fly straight across this 600 mile stretch of open water. There is danger if a late killing frost occurs, eliminating their food supply. Males migrate first, then females. In Cape May County, arrival (as early as April 4 or as late as April 28, but usually don't settle in until April 19-23) coincides with the blooming of Flowering Quince and azaleas. Philadelphia & Washington, D.C. arrival (April 16) is a bit earlier. The major departure of hummingbirds always occurs in mid-September. Feeders left up after mid-September might attract a western rarity. The Cape May Bird Observatory's *Birds of Cape May*, by David Sibley, details rarities that have occurred in September, October, and November, including 5 western species: Black-chinned, Calliope, Allen's, Rufous, & Broad-tailed Hummingbird.

CALL: mouse-like squeals, or nervous fretful chattering, always very sharp and clear, though not loud.

COURTSHIP: male flies back and forth over female as if on a pendulum swing. **AFTER MATING,** the female does everything else (builds the nest, incubates the eggs, feeds the young)! **NEST:** made of silky plant fibers and the fluff of dandelion seeds, covered over on the outside with lichen, and held together and fastened to a downward sloping limb in saddle fashion by spider web silk. They build their nests 10' - 20' high (sometimes 4' - 50' high). Nest often mistaken for a moss-covered knot. An old nest is sometimes occupied for several seasons and remodeled each year. **# BROODS:** 2. **EGGS:** 2 (May 23-August 10), no bigger than kernels of puffed rice. **INCUBATION:** 11-14 days. **FLEDGE:** 14-28 days after hatching. **YOUNG:** fed by regurgitation. Female thrusts full length of her bill down young bird's throat.

FOOD: nectar, soft-bodied insects that feed on flowers too, small spiders, sap of trees due to Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers. **HUMMINGBIRD FEEDERS:** Be sure to read other side of this info sheet!

ENEMIES: caught in **spider webs**; one observed eaten by a **bass** which jumped out of water and swallowed the bird; one found in stomach of **Merlin**; one caught by **dragonfly**; several instances of **frogs** capturing and swallowing hummingbirds, **Preying Mantis** stalk them at feeders out West; and sadly **outdoor cats** take their toll too.

THIS WORKSHEET WAS COMPILED FROM THE FOLLOWING SOURCES OF INFORMATION: (1) *Life Histories of N. American Cuckoos, Goatsuckers, Hummingbirds and Their Allies*, by Arthur C. Bent; (2) *The Birder's Handbook*, by Paul Ehrlich, David Dobkin, & Darryl Wheye; (3) local nature notes accumulated by Patricia Sutton; (4) Peterson Field Guide: *Hummingbirds of North America*, by Sheri Williamson; (5) *Hummingbirds of North America*, by Steve Howell; (6) *Hummingbirds, a Wildlife Handbook*, by Kim Long; (7) *Attracting & Feeding Hummingbirds*, by Sheri Williamson; (8) *Hummingbird Book*, by Donald & Lillian Stokes; (9) *Enjoying Hummingbirds More*, a special publication from Bird Watcher's Digest; (10) *Wild Bird Guides: Ruby-throated Hummingbird*, by Robert Sargent; **enter your own "1st of spring" sightings at:** (11) www.hummingbirdcentral.com and (12) www.journorth.org/hummingbirds , (13) www.hummingbirds.net has spring migration maps for 23 years (1996 - 2018).

HUMMINGBIRD FEEDER WARNING
DO NOT put a hummingbird feeder in your yard
if you do not plan to maintain it !!!

FEEDER MAINTENANCE:

Read Sheri Williamson's post, "Feeding Hummingbirds: The Basics": www.fieldguidetohummingbirds.com/feeding-hummingbirds-the-basics/

1. My favorite feeder is the **mini HummZinger 8 ounce feeder (by Aspects, Inc.)**. Why? It is so well thought out & educational: (1) easy & quick to clean, (2) has no hidden parts where mold can grow, (3) directions for feeder solution are printed on inside of feeder so you can't forget, (4) has a built in ant moat. If you favor the fountain-type feeder, the **Pinch Waist 8 ounce feeder (by PerkyPet)** is a new easy-to-clean version of the impossible-to-clean old one.
2. Clean feeders out thoroughly at least once a week, more frequently (every 2-3 days) during the extreme heat of summer. Take feeders fully apart and use a bottle brush and warm soapy water to get any mold out, then rinse repeatedly with hot water to remove the soap. Because of this need to keep the solution in feeders fresh, a bigger feeder is not better.
3. Fill (or partially fill if there isn't much hummingbird activity – in early spring I fill with only 2 ounces) with fresh solution each week even if the birds are not diminishing the supply. Otherwise the solution ferments (and becomes alcohol) and can make hummingbirds VERY SICK or may even kill them (because their systems can not deal with alcohol).
4. **The proper feeder solution is one part sugar and four parts water.** A stronger sugar solution is dangerous for hummingbirds and can lead to liver damage. A quart or so can be made at a time and extra stored in the refrigerator. **Red dye is unnecessary (even dangerous; carcinogenic; banned in many European countries)**, since most hummingbird feeders have red parts that serve quite well to attract the birds. **DO NOT USE** honey or brown sugar or raw sugar or any sugar substitute. These could be hazardous to a hummingbird's health. A honey solution may lead to a fatal fungus disease in hummingbirds.
5. Expect **minimal feeder use** when Japanese Honeysuckle is in full bloom (@ mid-May - mid-June) and **heaviest use** from @ July 22 - September 5, due to newly fledged young & migrants. **Put feeders up in the early spring (early April) if you hope to attract nesting birds** (learn when to expect them in your area at: www.hummingbirdcentral.com). Keep feeders up late (Nov. & Dec.: after Ruby-throated Hummingbirds have migrated) and you might attract a rare western hummingbird that has strayed east.

WILDLIFE GARDENING FOR HUMMINGBIRDS AND OTHER POLLINATORS

1. A hummingbird feeder alone is not enough to attract hummingbirds. Native plants are the buggiest, so plant them galore to lure in hungry hummingbirds. Pat Sutton's program features her favorite hummingbird nectar plants, season-by-season. **Spring:** Wild Columbine, Lyre-leaved Sage, Coral Honeysuckle (a vine), Coral Bells, Highbush Blueberry (a shrub), Red Buckeye (a shrub), azaleas. **Mid June thru July:** Coral Honeysuckle (this vine continues to bloom until the 1st frost, with fewer and fewer flowers as time goes on), Blazing Star, Bee Balm, Wild Bergamot, Foxglove Beardtongue (*Penstemon digitalis*), Garden Phlox, Trumpet Creeper (a vine), Swamp Azalea (a shrub). **Late July thru August (and September):** Turk's Cap Lily, Cardinal Flower, Trumpet Creeper (a vine). **Mid August thru September (and October):** Horsemint, Jewelweed, Obedient Plant, Turtlehead. Compliment your native plant garden with "**Chocolate Cake**" annuals that bloom all summer and fall long until the first frost: Tropical or Texas Sage (*Salvia coccinia*), Black & Blue Sage (mine is perennial and blooms until the frost), Blue Ensign (also perennial in my garden), Cuphea 'David Verity' (Cigar Plant or Large Firecracker Plant), Cannas (tubers - dig up in fall and store), Mexican Sunflower, Cardinal Climber (vine).
2. Provide nearby cover and water. We place a leaf mister in our garden that mists out from an upper branch of a White Pine and drips down through branches onto perennials that like wet feet (Swamp Milkweed, Cardinal Flower, Joe-pye-weed, Turk's Cap Lily). So it is a win win! Hummingbirds bath by rolling around on wet leaves or by flying through the mist or drips.
3. Place each feeder within 12 feet of cover where hummingbirds can perch and hide (trellis, leafy shrub, tree, or group of trees). A feeder "out in the open" is unlikely to attract them & makes them vulnerable to predators & other territorial hummingbirds. If animals are topling the feeder at night, consider hanging it from a strand of fishing line tied to a tree limb (with an S hook at the end), so the feeder hangs out over an open space (where animals can't reach it).
4. Hummingbirds feed on nectar and tree sap, but get their protein from soft-bodied insects (like fruit flies, aphids) and small spiders. So **DO NOT USE any insecticides or pesticides** in a hummingbird-friendly yard.