

BIRDING

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different in feather coloration, with males having distinct brilliance and ornamentation of head, neck, wing, and breast feathers. The most typical feather ornament in males is the gorget – a bib-like iridescent neck-feather patch that changes brilliance with the viewing angle to attract females and warn male competitors for territory. During courtship, some male species dive from 30 meters (100 ft) of height above a female at speeds around 23 m/s (83 km/h; 51 mph).

Hummingbird females build a nest as a small cup using spider webs, lichens, moss, and loose strings of plant fibers commonly attached to a tree branch. Typically, two pea-shaped white eggs – the smallest of any bird – are incubated over 2-3 weeks in late spring. Fed by regurgitation only from the mother, the chicks fledge in about 3 weeks.

Hummingbirds have a limited distribution in the New World, with more than 300 species in Central and South America, and only about 15 native species, along with 9 vagrant species, in the United States and Canada. The ruby-throated hummingbird breeds in eastern Canada and eastern United States, migrating to spend winter in the Caribbean region, eastern Mexico, and Central American countries.

Hummingbirds fly by day when nectar sources such as flowers are more abundant. Flying low allows the birds to see, and stop at, food supplies along the way. They are also experts at using tail winds to help reach their destination faster and consuming less energy and body fat. Research indicates a hummingbird can travel as much as 23 miles in one day.

During migration, a hummingbird's heart beats up to 1,260 times a minute, and its wings flap 15 to 80 times a second. To support this high energy level, a hummingbird will typically gain 25-40% of their body weight before they start migration in order to make the long trek over land and water.

The first arrivals in spring are usually males. Some, however, do not migrate, in areas like California and the upper Pacific coast, the southern parts of the Gulf of Mexico states, and some along the southern Atlantic Ocean areas.

While an adult hummingbird may not seem like a significant source of food for a human, to an animal predator, a hummingbird can be a quick, tasty snack. Plump hummingbirds are filled with sweet nectar and good sources of fat, particularly during the late summer and early

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