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Conserving Ruby-throated Hummingbirds



Feeding Hummingbirds

Artificial feeders:
You can provide a regular, clean source of artificial nectar for Ruby-throated Hummingbirds. Recipe: 1 part sugar to 4 parts water. Do not use red dye. Boil the water and add the sugar, cool and store in the fridge for up to 2 weeks. Do not use any artificial sweeteners, they do not have the calories that hummingbirds need. Never use honey or syrups.

If Hummingbirds are not feeding heavily, only partially fill the feeders to prevent spoilage. Molds in sugar water and feeders can harm Hummingbirds.

Clean feeders by scrubbing with soapy water or mild vinegar solution, rinse very well and add fresh sugar-water every 3 days especially in warm weather.

IDENTIFICATION

- Smallest avian species in Eastern North America (9 cm long); weight about 3.0 grams
- Recognized by hovering, darting and a U-shaped display behaviour, buzzing sound of wings and high pitched chirps, squeaks and twitters
- Male-red iridescent throat (appears dark in low light), metallic green head and upper parts; breast white and abdomen greenish-grey; forked tail
- Female similar but white throat and abdomen; larger in size; tail rounded, white tips on 3 outer feathers
- Females and young males can look similar; sometimes young males have darker throat streaking
- Average wing beat 60-70 beats per second; able to hover, fly backwards, forwards and up and down

Female Ruby-throated Hummingbird



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LIFE HISTORY

- Hummingbirds feed on flower nectar by hovering and using their long bill and tongue to reach the nectar. Their diet also consists of insects and sap
- During cool periods, Hummingbirds can slow their metabolism to conserve energy, a state called torpor
- This species has the largest breeding range of all hummingbirds- in Canada, NE BC to NFLD plus the Eastern USA
- This tiny bird is a long distance migrant. It usually winters from Mexico to Central America and occasionally Florida

STATUS and CONCERNS

- This species is ranked nationally and globally as secure
- But, the stability of population is not known.
- Common in gardens, parks, mixed woodlands, clearings, hedgerows and old fields
- Concerns: habitat loss (breeding and wintering range), pesticide use, a changing climate and resulting change in plant phenology, increase in invasive species, and increased outdoor domestic cat population



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Contact Us

If you would like more information on Ruby-throated Hummingbird conservation contact Island Nature Trust.

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HUMMINGBIRDS NATURAL HISTORY

Ruby-throated Hummingbirds are primarily forest birds but diversity of habitat is beneficial, including: riparian areas, gardens, forest openings, wetlands and shrub communities.

Territory: Males arrive back from wintering grounds and defend territories around their food source. Females will defend an area around their food source and the nest.

Courtship: The male's side to side flights, in front of a perching female, serve a courtship function. ("U" shaped flights are an act of aggression). No long pair bond is formed; males and females associate only briefly to mate. Females build a nest and rear young alone. Males breed with more than one mate.

Nesting: Maple and birch forests provide good habitat for Ruby-throated hummingbirds. They nest in a wide variety of trees including: maples, birch, poplar, hemlock, spruce and pine as well as various shrubs.

The framework for the nest is made of bud scales and lichens, held together with spider silk. The nest interior is thickly lined with plant down, such as dandelion, thistle, cattail, fireweed, or even animal hair. It is positioned on a tree or shrub limb 1-15 metres high, under protection of leaves from another branch. The nest is well camouflaged, walnut sized and usually contains two white eggs the size of white beans.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- Plant suitable native plants, shrubs, vines and trees that provide nectar, insects and sap, as well as nesting, perching spots and shelter
- A diversity of plants with blooming periods from early to late in the season will benefit hummingbirds when they arrive on the breeding grounds until they leave
- Do not plant or contribute to the spread of invasive species as they are difficult to eradicate and their nectar sources are less desirable for hummingbirds
- Provide clean water such as a shallow bird bath or occasional water spray (conservatively)
- Do not let domestic cats outside
- Do not use pesticides

Planting native species is also beneficial to other wildlife species.

There are also numerous non-native horticultural specimens - annuals, perennials and biennials that will enhance your property for Ruby-throated hummingbirds. Hummingbirds tend to prefer red-orange, purple or blue tubular-shaped flowers, but they are also attracted to a variety of other colours of blooms. **The Nature Trust also has a list of some of the species of plants that enhance hummingbird habitat.**

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