

Ruby-Throated Hummingbird

Hummingbirds were named for the sound their wings make in flight.



Mrs. Longmire

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There are more than 320 kinds of hummingbirds. One unique kind is the Ruby-throated hummingbird. Though not the smallest hummingbird, we see them in our local area every summer.

Environment: Hummingbirds live in only the Western Hemisphere; the Ruby-throated hummingbird travels throughout the eastern part of North America (See map bottom right). Usually they hang out in wooded areas, but will frequently visit or live near garden where there are a lot of flowering plants in bright colors. They love red flowers, followed by orange, as both colors are easy to recognize in shady places. Hummingbirds will feed on green flowers only when the scenery is not green.

Food: Its main food source is the nectar, or honey-like sap, of flowers, small insects, and spiders. Due to their high metabolism, adults may eat double their body weight in food to sustain their rapid wing beat for flight. They also drink water; they will dip and quickly touch the surface of a water source. Like a bee, it assists with cross-pollination. It carries pollen from flower to another of the same kind.

Migration: It has been established that these hummingbirds go south for the winter to Mexico and Central America and settle in eastern part of North America in the spring. They cross the Gulf of Mexico as they travel between their two homes during a non-stop journey. Many double their weight to have the energy needed to complete this flight.

Predators: Hummingbird eggs and babies are killed by larger birds and snakes. Cats, small hawks and owls, shrikes, roadrunners, orioles, tanagers, large flycatchers, grackles, herons, gulls, large-mouth bass, frogs, and spiders have been known to dine on the adult hummingbird.

♦ Scientific Name:

Archilochus colubris

♦ Size:

3 in.—4 in.

♦ Weight:

0.07 oz—0.21 oz

♦ Life Span:

5 to 9 years


♦ Wingbeats:

55-75 beats per second


Interesting fact: Once a hummingbird finds a feeder or section of flowering plants, it will go back to it, as long as it is hanging or sitting in the identical location.

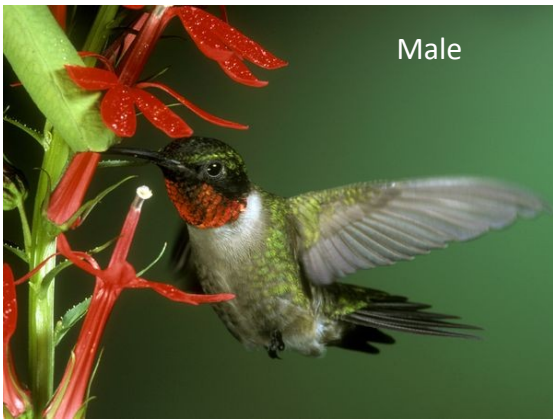


Distribution of the Ruby-throated Hummingbird

 Breeding range

 Wintering range

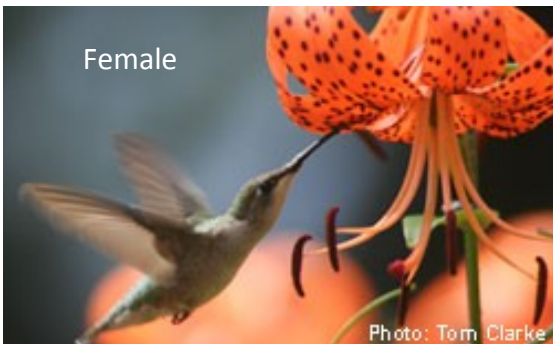
 Breeding and wintering range



Description:

Male: Adult males have metallic green feathers with a greyish white belly. His tail is forked and his throat is red through depending on the light, it may appear orange or black.

Female: Adult Females have the same green (sometimes softer green) with a greyish-white throat, rather than a red patch. Her tail is rounded, not forked; the outer tail feathers may have white spots.



Adaptations:

Pointed wings: Its wings allow it to hover in the air in the exact same place for extended periods of time. Their wings also allow them to fly at amazing speeds and to change directions quickly. They can fly backwards and even upside down! They are a blur in flight. This is a needed adaptation as the ruby throated hummingbirds have very short legs, which does not allow them to walk or hop like normal larger sized birds.

Bill of beak: long, straight, but sharp and slender like a needle. This beak allows them to sucking nectar from flowers.

Tongue: The end of the hummingbirds tongue is forked. The edges curls together to form a trough. This allows it to draw nectar into its mouth.

Extra Insight: This is the only hummingbird to breed in eastern North America. Males court females by their flying and diving behaviors, and by showing off their red throat plumage. The adult females lay one to three eggs and provide all care for their babies: incubated two weeks, feed for about three weeks, then shoed out of the nest. At birth, they have no feathers and cannot see. Adult females may lay eggs more than once in a year. Outside of the mating season, they are usually loners by nature.

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