

Hummingbirds

This text is excerpted from an original work of the Core Knowledge Foundation.

Birds can be found nearly everywhere on Earth and they come in many different sizes and colors. They also live in many different types of habitats. This affects how they eat, nest, and sing songs. Hummingbirds are among the smallest birds. The bee hummingbird is the smallest bird on Earth, just two inches long. It weighs less than a penny!

A hummingbird is an amazing little animal. It can flap its wings up to 90 times in one second! That's so fast it looks like its wings are a blur. It's hard to see its wings because they are constantly flapping.



A hummingbird compared to the size of a penny

Hummingbirds dart around from flower to flower, like bees. They use their long, pointy beaks to drink sweet nectar from flowers. Since they are so busy flapping their wings, they need to eat a lot to replace all of their energy. A typical hummingbird will visit hundreds of flowers every day, drinking more than its own weight in nectar. Nectar has sugar, which gives hummingbirds plenty of energy. As they find insects on flowers, hummingbirds eat them up.

Hummingbirds are attracted to red flowers. They are also drawn to red feeders, which people hang on porches and trees. The feeders are filled with sugary water, which is then dyed red to attract the birds. People hang feeders for them because these birds are a lot of fun to watch!

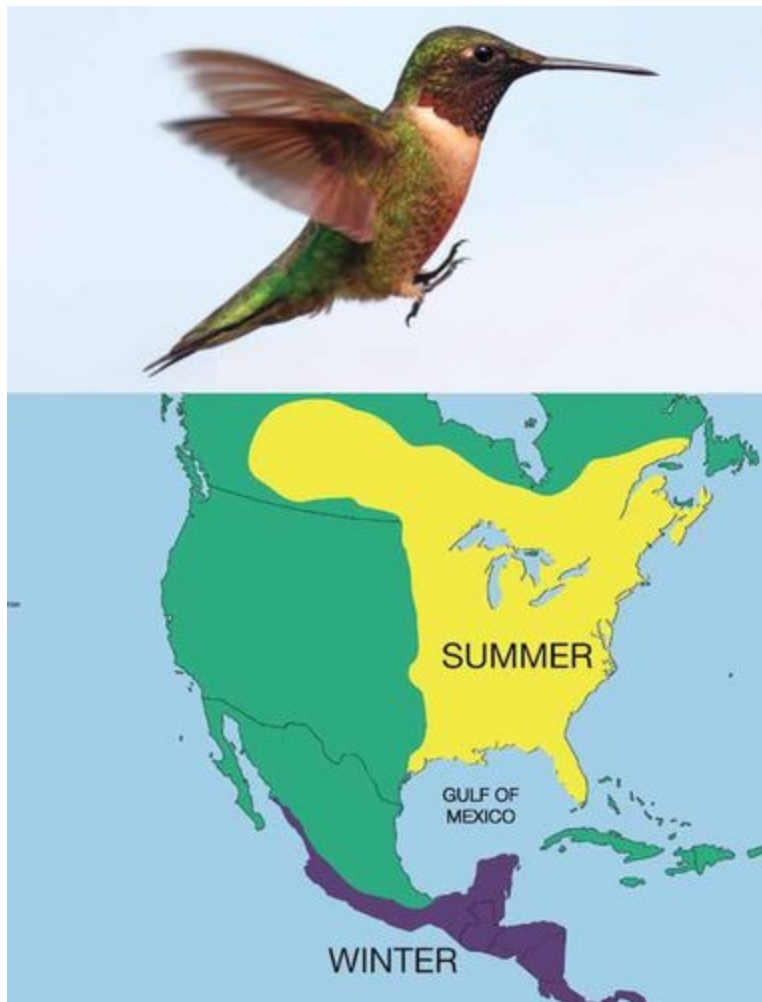


A hummingbird approaches a flower for nectar.

Like many birds, the ruby-throated hummingbird migrates. This means it spends part of the year in one place and part of the year in another place. It can be found in parts of the eastern United States during the late spring and early summer. When autumn rolls around, it heads south for warmer weather.

Here is an amazing fact: this tiny bird, which is shorter than your finger, doesn't migrate just a few miles. It migrates all the way across the Gulf of Mexico-500 miles-without stopping! From there, it may continue south through Mexico to Costa Rica and beyond.

Here is another interesting fact: they are the only birds that can fly backwards! They can also hover and fly upside-down.



The locations where the ruby-throated hummingbird lives in summer and winter

Their nests are very small, about half as big as a walnut shell. They make their nests using little bits of moss and leaves. They use spider webs to hold these little bits of nature together. They sometimes eat the spider before using its web as glue.

The spider's web is nice and sticky. It is also flexible. A hummingbird will lay two tiny eggs. When its tiny eggs hatch and the babies begin to grow, the spider web will allow the nest to expand. This helps the babies stay warm and safe. In the image, a hummingbird is feeding its babies. Maybe it is giving them a nice, juicy bug to eat. Maybe it is sharing a taste of sweet

flower nectar with the babies.

See if you can find a more interesting little bird than that!



A ruby-throated hummingbird feeds its babies.