



Hummingbirds

Hummingbirds are only found in North and South America. About half of the more than three hundred species are found in Ecuador, which is only about the land area of California. Only about twenty-six species have been seen north of the Mexico border. Only one species is normally found in the entire eastern half of North America, the Ruby-throated hummingbird. A few western species do visit the gulf coast on occasion, especially in the winter. The rocky mountain and west coast areas get as many as seven species visiting in a year, but North America's hummingbird heaven is southern Arizona. Around thirteen species visit the desert mountain canyons each year.

The area south of Tucson, especially the Santa Rita Lodge area in Madera Canyon and north of Patagonia has mountains (snowcapped in winter), deserts, grasslands and streamside forests. It is on a major migration route from Canada to Central America. There are hummingbirds year round. Visit from late July to mid-September.

South of the town of Sierra Vista and the Fort Huachaca army base is a series of canyons in the Coronado National Forest. These canyons house many rare species of birds. The Nature Conservancy has the Ramsey Canyon Preserve, which is a limited use area that is best to schedule reservations to get into. Call 520-378-2785 for more information.

Miller canyon is also a great place to visit, especially the Beatty's Miller Canyon Apiary and Orchard. They have rental cabins next to the orchard and they have set up feeding stations where eleven species of hummingbirds have been seen at the same time. Call 520-378-2728 to get reservations and to pick up some pesticide free honey and beeswax.

For information on wintertime bird watching in southern Arizona for all you snowbirds that go there for the dry heat, check out the web site for the Southern Arizona Bird Observatory at www.sabo.org.

Question: Last year we had lot of hummingbirds, but this year we do not have any. What can we do to get them back again?

Answer: Having had them once you should be able to get them back again, if the neighborhood has not under gone some major development. North American hummingbirds are very small birds and that means that they will have very small territories. If someone down the street has a better habitat for them, they may locate down there and only come to your house for the hummingbird feeder.

The best way to attract them is to create the right kind of habitat. Nectar producing flowers are their preferred food source. Almost any tubular or trumpet-shaped red, orange or deep pink flower will attract hummingbirds, but the best choices are plants native to your area. Chose a wide variety that will bloom over a long period of time.

Hummingbirds also eat large quantities of insects, but these will come to the flowers without your help.

The hummingbird also needs shelter for nesting; they tend to nest in the shelter of large mature trees, so plant some now so someone in the future can enjoy that aspect of the habitat.

Question: When should I take the hummingbird feeder down in the fall?

Answer: Do not take the feeder down until it has been a couple of weeks since you last saw it being used. In cold climate areas, a frost will kill off the flowers. When that happens, there may be a few hummingbirds that still need a little more energy before heading farther south. They cannot get the sugars from the dead flowers, so your feeder will help.

Having a feeder up will not entice hummingbirds to stay past the time they should leave. The instinct to migrate is too strong for that to happen. If you live along the Gulf Coast, in southern California or the desert southwest, it is possible to have hummingbirds visit your yard all year long.

Question: What kind of hummingbird feeder is best?

Answer: A feeder that has the sugar solution below the portholes will not have as many problems with ants, bees or wasps. These insects like the sugar water and will drive away hummingbirds to get it. When the solution is above the portholes, it will leak and drip. It is very easy for the insects to get it out of the hole. With the solution below the porthole, only long beaks or tongues can get it, such as hummingbirds and butterflies.



Question: Does the sugar solution have to be red?

Answer: No it doesn't. The nectar in flowers is not red, so the sugar solution doesn't have to be either. Hummingbirds are attracted to red, so the feeder can be red or red ribbon can be tied next to the feeder to attract them.

Question: How many parts sugar to how many parts water make up the solution?

Answer: The solution is four parts water to one part sugar. If you tried it the other way around, it would just be a pile of wet sugar. Just use enough to fill the feeder part way until they find it, so you are not wasting full feeders until they come. The solution goes bad in less than a week, so change it often, especially in hot weather.