

Hummingbirds

When it comes to pollinators with backbones, we in the northeast have only the Ruby-throated Hummingbird to appreciate. There are hundreds of species of hummingbird in the tropics and over a dozen that live in western North America. If you are a snowbird, you might see a few of these wintering along the Gulf Coast or in Florida. Nectar feeding bats are important pollinators in the tropics and even the desert of the American southwest—but all of our bats feed strictly on insects.



Only the male Ruby-throat has a ruby throat but both are physically charming. When hovering in front of a flower to sip nectar their wings beat at over fifty times per second. Expending that kind of energy requires a lot of replenishment. The hummingbirds are more than happy to fill up at the feeders we provide. Of course that doesn't add to their function as pollinators.



Hummingbirds rely on insects to obtain essential nutrients and to

raise their young---another reason not to use insecticides. While they generally nab insects in flight, hummingbirds can also take advantage of others' efforts to collect insects. The Yellow-bellied sapsucker drills holes in trees that fill with sap that then attracts insects. The hummingbird is happy to clean these sap wells.

You may be tempted to take a broom to any spider webs you see on your landscape shrubs; but if you like hummingbirds, you won't.

Hummingbirds have been known to steal insects from a spider and web materials are important to hummingbirds in nest construction. Thanks to interwoven elastic fibers collected from the webs, the tiny hummingbird nest expands as the nestlings grow.

These tiny birds migrate to Central America for the winter—flying all night and stopping to replenish energy supplies during the day. When you plant your pollinator garden, be sure to include late summer fall bloomers (for instance Cardinal flower and Blazing star) to provide for nourishment during these rest stops. Keep your feeder supplied with FRESH sugar water supplies as well.



Hummingbirds favor tubular flowers with a good supply of nectar especially red ones. Trumpet honeysuckle, Beard tongue, Bee balm, Columbine and Coral bells are examples. Native plants are the best bets since cultured species are often bred for beauty not nectar productivity. The last word—this is nature and everyone is trying to take advantage of a good thing. The bumble bee can't stretch his proboscis to get the nectar from this flower so he drills a hole to find what he knows to be an abundant supply, shirking his pollinator duties and stealing from the hummingbirds and

butterflies that are the intended guests.