

# Colorado's Visiting Hummingbirds

## **Broad-tailed Hummingbird** *Selasphorus platycercus* 4" - 4 ½ " long

This is the most common hummingbird that migrates to Colorado. They nest throughout our area.

**Adult male:** Metallic green back and crown, white breast, rose-colored iridescent gorget (throat), rounded tail. Wing tips make "cricket like" noise while in flight.

**Adult female:** Green back and crown, white throat often with black spots, rusty sides, green central tail feathers: outer tail feathers are rusty at base, black in middle and white at tips.

## **Rufous hummingbird** *Selasphorus rufus* 3 ½ " long

This bird migrates back South through Colorado during July and August.

**Adult male:** Rufous brown back, crown, tail and sides. Iridescent orange/red gorget, white breast. Wing tips make a "bumblebee" noise while in flight.

**Adult female:** green back and crown, white breast, rufous sides and base of tail feathers, white tips on outer tail feathers.

## **Calliope Hummingbird** *Stellula calliope* 3- ¼ " long

This is the smallest hummingbird that migrates into the United States- occasionally spotted.

**Adult male:** Metallic green back and crown, white gorget with fuchsia-colored rays that sometimes extend outward from the throat.

**Adult female:** Green back and crown, white throat with dark streaks, buff sides, white-tipped outer tail feathers.



## **Black-chinned Hummingbird** *Archilochus alexandri* 3- ¾" long

Occasionally spotted- thought to be breeding in our area and documented in areas of southwest Colorado.

**Adult male:** Metallic green back, crown and breast. Black gorget with a purple band at the lower edge against a white collar.

**Adult female:** slightly longer than female broad-tailed, green back and crown, white breast (green-gray overall appearance), white throat often with dark streaks, white tipped outer feathers.

## **Here are suggestions if you want to attract hummingbirds to your yard:**

- Plant flowers. Tubular flowers will contain the needed nectar, while other flowers are used for attracting insects.
- Add a water source. Hummingbirds need to bathe frequently. They love spraying water from fountains or sprinklers and "mistifiers" that can be purchased at garden centers.
- Research organic gardening methods. You will need to allow for the insects that hummingbirds depend.
- Encourage your neighbors to also attract hummingbirds. Larger, diverse habitats will attract more birds.
- Hang a hummingbird feeder. For the bird's safety, your feeder will need to be at an appropriate distance from large windows. Feeders should be put up early April (the Broad-tailed male "scouts" arrive around the 15<sup>th</sup> of April). The feeder should be hung in an open visible area. Red ribbon/yarn can be tied to the feeder to make it more visible. The recommended solution ratio is 4-1 (4 parts water to 1 part sugar). Only granulated white sugar should be used (never honey!). The solution can be boiled to help dissolve the mixture and remove chlorine. Once the weather gets warmer, the solution spoils very quickly. To keep hummingbirds returning to your feeder, rinse your feeder with hot water and refill with new solution **every three days**. DO NOT ADD RED COLORING. Expensive store bought solutions are unnecessary and often spoil even faster due to their additives. The hummingbirds get their necessary vitamins, minerals, fats and proteins from the insects they eat. If you live in bear habitat, you **must** bring your feeder in at night or create a "bear proof" design. Your feeder should be kept supplied until two weeks after you have seen your last hummingbird. In Colorado, the nestlings leave late September/early October.

# Trivia: Hummingbirds of North Cheyenne Canon

*Learn something today? Please help hummingbirds by sharing your new knowledge with a friend.*

- There are more than 300 species of hummingbirds. They only live in North, South and Central America. Hummingbirds are various sizes, colors, and have a variety of bill length and shapes depending on the flowers they feed from. Four species migrate to this area of Colorado: Broad-tailed, Rufous, Black-chinned and Calliope.
- The Broad-tailed is most common and nests in this area. Male hummingbirds arrive approximately April 15<sup>th</sup>. This allows the males to determine their territories before the females arrive. The females migrate when more flowers are blooming and there are more insects. The males leave approximately three weeks before the females, and later the fledged nestlings. Most hummingbirds will have left Colorado by early/mid October.
- Our visiting male hummingbirds have reflective, brilliantly colored necks (gorget) to help in their territorial displays and to attract the attention of females. The females are more camouflaged to blend into their nests.
- Hummingbirds were given that name not because of a vocalization, but because air moving across their wings causes a humming sound. This sound is different for each species. The male broad-tailed unique wingtip spacing creates a noticeable “cricket like” trill. The male rufous announces himself with a “bumblebee like” trill.
- More than a third of the hummingbird’s weight comes from its chest muscles that give it power in both the up and down beats. These muscles are needed to power its amazing flight forward, sideways, backwards, and even upside down. While hovering, the wings move in a figure-8 motion.
- A hummingbird’s tongue can extend twice the length of its beak, allowing it to reach deeply into flowers for nectar. The fringed end of tongue allows for rapid absorption of liquid. The tongue muscle, or hyoid apparatus, originates on bird’s forehead and can lick approximately 13x a second.
- During their search for nectar, hummingbirds transport pollen that has fallen on their heads and beaks due to the shape of some flowers. Many native, tubular flowers depend upon hummingbirds for pollination.
- The heart of hummingbird is the largest (in relation to size) of any bird. It can beat 500 times a minute and increase to 1200 times a minute if stressed. It breathes 250x a minute compared to 16 per minute for humans.
- If the bird has not eaten enough/the temperature drops considerably, the bird will lapse into a torpor or coma like state. It will fluff its feathers to LOWER its temperature (lacks down feathers) lower its heart rate and its breathing rate. While in the torpor, the hummingbird is very vulnerable. Its normal temperature of 102 degrees (94 when sleeping) can drop to low 70’s.
- Colorado hummingbirds weigh approximately 1/10 of an ounce, or 3 grams (the weight of a penny). The females often weigh slightly more than the males of the same species. When preparing to migrate south, the broad-tailed hummingbird’s weight might increase to that of a nickel or 5 grams.
- The female hummingbirds build a flat, cup-shaped nest from lichens, moss, feathers, and hair bound with spider silk and lined with plant down. Nests are about the size of a 50-cent piece and stretch as the nestlings grow. Females lay 2 white eggs (the size of coffee beans) which hatch after 12- 17 days. Only the female will feed the nestlings who fledge after 18-26 days.
- Hummingbirds lose heat quickly due to their small size. Their fast metabolism helps them to heat their bodies, but forces them to eat large amounts of quick energy- the sugar in nectar can be digested and turned into fuel almost instantly. It is estimated that hummingbirds visit 500- 1000 flowers a day. Hummingbirds get their necessary protein, fats and minerals from eating small insects.
- Male broad-tailed can be spotted performing “U” shaped courtship flights spring and early summer.
- Many hummingbirds migrate 2000-3,000 miles each way. For example, the rufous migrates from Central America to areas of the Pacific Northwest to nest. After nesting, many rufous come through Colorado to “refuel” during parts of July and August.