

Hummingbirds...

Zoom! Dart! Dash!

BY CHRIS FRANCCIN
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These fascinating small birds play a vital role in pollination as they dart and dash from flower to flower. Attracted to brightly colored petals, they perch on plants and, with their slender bills and tongues that are shaped like a tube, they consume sweet nectar, which gives them energy and shores up their metabolism.

Hummingbirds will generally eat about every 15 minutes. They need to eat regularly and can survive no longer than three to five hours without food. To keep up their energy, they will consume nectar from one to two thousand flowers per day. It is a matter of survival, so gardens with plenty of flowers and feeders play an important part in supporting these birds and healthy ecosystems. Hummingbirds tend to land on wildflowers and perennials such as columbines, daylilies, lupines, foxgloves, impatiens, and petunias, just to name a few.

Like most birds, the male is more colorful than the female with bright feathers of red, green, purple, and pink, while the females tend to be dressed in dark green, white, and brown. Their iridescent rainbow-hued feathers are beautiful, and these miniature wings of wonder are extremely interesting to watch.

Hummingbirds are very small, delicate birds, weighing 0.1 to 0.2 ounces. They can fly 30 miles per hour and 60 miles per hour in a courtship dive performed by the males. Depending on the species, they flap their wings between 50 to 70 times per second with thousands of flaps per minute. One very interesting fact is that because of their wing structure, they are the only birds in the world that can fly backward, and they can also fly upside-down. Talented birds, they are! Hummingbirds can live up to 5 years.



Florida is one of those states that offers so many opportunities for bird watching. The Florida Hummingbird season runs from March through September. Hummingbirds that are native to Florida stay in the area most of the year, while others just fly through. There are three species found in Florida: the Black-Chinned and Rufus birds can occasionally be seen in Florida, with the Ruby-Throat bird being the most common. Migrating species can fly up to 1,200 miles nonstop. Research indicates that they can fly 29 million times the length of their body without resting.

Hummingbirds return to our gardens and parks each spring in April, gracing us with their beauty and charm. They are curious birds and investigate their surroundings before nesting. About one inch in diameter, most nests are very small and are built under the cover of deciduous trees near or over water which helps keep the birds cool. They usually are hidden to allow them to shelter from the sun. The female will build the nest with twigs, bits of plants, and leaves for its foundation over a 7-day period. Once completed, it will be covered with moss





WINGS OF WONDER...

and green lichen that act as perfect camouflage, providing them with protection from predators. On average, they sleep 12 hours, dusk to dawn. When it is too cold, the birds will go into a type of hibernation or deep sleep to conserve energy called torpor and sleep for up to 18 hours.

These small birds do need water to drink and to bathe. Although they might delight in a discovered birdbath, fountain, or puddle, they prefer the gentle spray from the rain and morning dew if it is available. Their primary food source is the sweet nectar from flowers and feeders that they can find. They also eat small insects such as ants, gnats, and mosquitoes. Hummingbirds do not like to feed in the open and prefer a more sheltered space.

IF you are planning on placing feeders in your outdoor space, they should be 10 to 15 feet from a tree or bush. Make sure they are well separated to establish boundaries if you hang multiple feeders. They can be placed off a lanai, porch, or fence. It may be appealing to place them by your windowsill, but since these tiny birds could collide into the glass, it is important to keep them far away from this area. Hummingbirds are attracted to red, so you'll find that most feeders are available in that color or are decorated with red ornaments or ribbons. Once they have discovered a feeder, hummingbirds will come back each year. They feed from dawn to dusk and many times during the day. With Florida's hot weather, it is important to clean and refill feeders every other day to prevent mold. You can purchase nectar or make your own with recipes you can find online, all of which recommend not adding red food coloring, and most offer alternatives that will ensure their nectar attracts these fabulous, feathered friends. Supplying a water source that is changed daily is also vital.

Nature has its wonders, and we are the recipients of these gifts. It's a privilege to be in the presence of these majestic birds and so interesting to know how they maneuver in this world. Spotting one may be a challenge, but it's well worth the wait.

Photo of large blue bird feeder by Susan Bowles.



PATHS IN PARADISE...

THE VENICE FISHING PIER

WRITTEN BY CHRIS FRANCIN
PHOTOGRAPHED BY STEVEN OLIEMULLER
VENICE GULF COAST LIVING MAGAZINE



Many unique spots in our magnificent city can be found that make us want to pause for a while, gaze at the beauty, and appreciate the peacefulness that abounds. We hope you stroll along some of these paths and discover the wonder of living in paradise...

~ Chris Francin, Publisher

Take a ride to Venice Island and cruise south on Harbor Drive and soon you will discover an enchanting destination, the Venice Fishing Pier. Enjoy a stroll on this 700-foot pier as you gaze at the beautiful Gulf of Mexico and take in a stunning sunset. Watch dolphins play and listen to the music of the waves and the sounds of oohs and aahs as the sun paints the sky.

The salty air, ocean breeze, and the intrigue of all the different water birds add to the experience, and on your walk back, you are treated to the picturesque restaurants, Sharky's and Fins, as they light up the night. It's a beautiful sight to see...

Stroll along the pier and enjoy this path in paradise.

For more information or to purchase Steven's photography, log on to StevenCaseyPhotographer@gmail.com.