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We Have Three Types of Hummingbirds in Wakulla

Contemporary life has a frenetic pace. Deeds, task, and jobs all pile in at a feverish and accelerating frequency.

Even the laconic late summer days no longer allow for the reduction of this manic rate of demands. The rapidity of the requirements insures the chronic appearance of stressed distraction.

The obligations generate a fluttering hum throughout the days, ceaselessly moving from one opportunity to the next. Or so it would seem for the hummingbirds taking every advantage of late summers blooms.

Wakulla County's hummingbirds are member of the Trochilide family. Their name is derived from the humming sound created by their beating wings, which sometimes sounds like flying insects with beats up to 80 times per second.

Hummingbirds live only in North and South America. Sixteen species are found in the United States of the 338 species known in the Western Hemisphere. Three occur in Florida and can be seen in Wakulla County.



The ruby-throated hummingbird is the most commonly seen hummingbird in the state. This feathered jewel is about three inches long and weighs as little as a penny coin.

The name describes the most brilliant part of the mature male's plumage. The throat feathers contain air bubbles which give off an iridescent red tone in full sunlight.

Their backs are metallic green and they have two sets of tail feathers. The two green ones in the center cover eight outer black ones when they're folded. In females and juveniles, the black feathers have white tips. The males lose the white tips as they mature

Black-chinned and Rufous hummingbirds are seen during the winter in-route to their cool season latitudes. The Rufous has the

longest migration route of all US hummingbirds from Canada to Mexico.

Nesting in Florida begins in mid-spring, usually April. The nest is a walnut-size structure of plant down, adorned with lichens, moss, and bound with spider webs or fine plant fibers.

Nests frequently are built over water. The female lays two eggs less than one-half inch long. After 20 days of incubation and four weeks of growing, fledgling hummingbirds leave the nest.

For their size, hummingbirds have the largest appetites in the bird world. They feed every ten or 15 minutes from dawn until dusk. During this period, they eat more than half their weight in food and eight times their weight in water.

Hummingbirds must consume large amounts of high-energy food to acquire enough strength to support their high-speed aerobic activities. Adult hummingbirds feed primarily on nectar with the young fed insects by their parents while still in the nest.

Nectar is their energy-rich food of choice which is absorbed rapidly. One adult hummingbird may need nectar from hundreds of blossoms daily just to maintain its body weight.

Hummingbirds are well adapted to a liquid diet. Long needlelike bills and specially adapted tongues allow them to reach nectar in deep tubular flowers. The last half-inch of the long tongue is divided into equal halves, each grooved on the outside edge to form two tube-like structures.

Nectar is drawn into the tongue much the same way liquid travels up a straw. Hummingbirds can lick at a rate of 13 times per second, and their stomach is capable of holding about .2 ounces of nectar.

Hummingbird fossils have been identified from Pleistocene Epoch 2.5 million years ago. Some ornithologists believe they may be related to Swifts.

To learn more about hummingbirds in Wakulla County contact the UF/IFAS Wakulla County Extension Office at 850-926-3931 or <http://wakulla.ifas.ufl.edu/>.

