

Hummingbirds in Your Backyard

Natural Resources

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It is a delight to observe hummingbirds feeding from garden flowers. With striking colors, amazing speed and the ability to hover in mid-air, these very active birds are always a sight to see.

General Information about Hummingbirds

Hummingbirds, named for the sound their wings make in flight, are very interesting creatures. Like insects, they buzz around at great speeds, darting from flower to flower to drink the sugar-rich nectar. Specialized for feeding from tube-shaped flowers, hummingbirds also play a great ecological role in the pollination of many species of plants. In West-Central Florida, it is the Ruby-throated Hummingbird (*Archilochus colubris*) that makes an occasional appearance.

The Ruby-throated Hummingbird

This species of hummingbird is found throughout the Eastern United States and it has the largest breeding range of any hummingbird. In West-Central Florida, this species is an occasional year-round resident, but is most often seen during migrations in the spring and fall. Thousands of Ruby-throated Hummingbirds migrate through Texas to Central and South America during the winter months, while others make Florida their fly-way. Some who choose to fly through Florida settle in the Keys and spend the winter feeding on the flowering Orchid Trees (*Bauhinia* spp.) Other populations of Ruby-throated Hummingbirds make a Gulf-of-Mexico crossing from Florida to Central and South America. That is a long way to go on one teaspoon of fuel!

The Ruby-throated Hummingbird gets its name from the brilliant blaze of ruby-red on the male



If you see a hummingbird in Florida, it is likely the Ruby-throated Hummingbird (*Archilochus colubris*). Notice the ruby-colored throat of the male (above).

bird's throat feathers. Females and juveniles lack this color, but males and females share the same shining emerald green plumage on their heads and backs.

Attracting Hummingbirds to Your Garden

In more northern and western states, hummingbirds can be seen by the hundreds at specialized hummingbird feeders. Floridians are known to bring these feeders home in hopes of seeing the same spectacle in their own yard. For some reason, though, Florida Ruby-throated Hummingbirds seem to prefer our native and exotic ornamental flowers over artificial nectar. Their long, needle-like beaks are specially adapted to reach deep into tubular-shaped flowers to reach the nectar within. A tubular tongue can extend beyond the beak and drink nectar as if though through a straw. By providing plenty of nectar-rich tubular flowers you have a much better chance of spotting one of these flying jewels.

Hummingbird Plants for West-Central Florida.

Scarlet Sage, *Salvia coccinea*

Red-flowered, reseeding annual, native to Western and Central North America



Scarlet Sage
(*Salvia coccinea*)

Fire Bush, *Hamelia patens*

Red-orange flowered, medium to large shrub, native to Florida.



Fire Bush
(*Hamelia patens*)

Scarlet Honeysuckle, *Lonicera sempervirens*

Red-flowered, summer climbing vine, native to Florida.



Scarlet Honeysuckle
(*Lonicera sempervirens*)

Shrimp Plant, *Justicia brandegeana*

Interesting pinkish-red flowers, small shrub, native to Mexico.



Shrimp Plant
(*Justicia brandegeana*)

References:

Cornell Lab of Ornithology http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Ruby-throated_Hummingbird/id

Florida's Fabulous Birds: Land Birds: Their Stories [Book].

Trumpet Honeysuckle <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/fp354>

Fire Bush <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/fp237>

Scarlet Sage <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/fp519>

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