

# Hooray for Hummingbirds!

This text is provided courtesy of the National Audubon Society.

Wings whirring, a hummingbird buzzes up to a flower. It stops short, hovers, then pokes its long bill into the flower and uses its long tongue to sip nectar. Once, twice, three times it backs up, pauses, and dives into the flower again. Then *zzzzzz!* Off it flies to another flower. *Zip, sip, zip*-that's hummingbird style!

No other bird flies quite like a hummingbird. Because of the way their wings are made, hummingbirds can hover in one spot as well as fly backwards, side to side, straight up and down, and even *upside-down!*

Hummingbirds also flap amazingly fast-from 20 to 200 times per second. The rapidly beating wings make the humming noise that gives hummingbirds their name.

While hummers sometimes eat small insects and spiders, their favorite food by far is plant nectar. Different kinds of hummingbirds prefer different plants. Hummingbirds often visit many kinds of flowers while searching for nectar. All this flower-visiting makes a hummingbird an excellent pollinator. Flowers need pollen from other flowers to make seeds, but they can't visit other plants to swap pollen. Instead, some flowers get the job done when their pollen sticks to a feeding hummingbird's feathers and bill. The hummer carries this pollen to the next flower it visits.



Kelly Hunt/Photos by MK

*A female ruby-throated hummingbird gets ready to sip some nectar.*

It takes a lot of fuel to power a busy hummingbird on an ordinary day. A hummingbird needs even more energy when it's migrating-traveling between the place where it raises its young and the place where it spends winter. Ruby-throated hummingbirds, for example, double their weight before leaving their winter home in Central America and migrating north. Some of the other hummingbird species that migrate to the United States and Canada are the rufous, magnificent, and calliope hummingbirds.