



Brunswick Wildlife Feeding Hummingbirds

The arrival of spring brings a birding treat most birders relish...the return of OUR hummers. Have you who have been late hanging your hummingbird feeder seen a hummer inspecting the area where one hung the previous year? Please raise your hand if you have. I thought so...many (including me) have had this experience because hummingbirds have a high degree of site fidelity to past nesting locations...so they are waiting for THEIR feeder to show up!

Of the 300 plus hummingbird species in the Western Hemisphere, eighteen regularly breed or visit in North America and a few others are categorized as accidental visitors. The Ruby-throated Hummingbird pictured above is the only species that breeds east of the Mississippi; however, ten species have been officially recorded in North Carolina, the others showing up on rare occasions mainly during migration and winter.

Over the summer and into fall, you will usually notice an ebb and flow of hummingbird activity at your feeders. Males show up by early April, joined by females a couple of weeks later. Then the kids start arriving in June and sometimes a second brood is fledged later in the summer.

As native flowers like the Trumpet Creeper bloom they will draw the hummers away from feeders. Hummingbird's main food is insects and that is generally what they feed their young...the protein fuels rapid growth...so adult females will make fewer trips to your feeder during this period.

Near migration, your hummingbirds will make more visits to your feeders since they need the carbs to fatten up (often doubling their weight) for their long nonstop flights across the Gulf of Mexico...the anti-Adkins diet.

Finally, hummingbird activity will vary in fall as they migrate south in waves. Then we say goodbye to hummingbirds until the next spring. Right? Not so fast! If you leave your feeder

up into late fall, you may get a visit from a western species...usually a Rufous...and it may spend the winter with you!

The phenomenon of overwintering hummingbirds in North Carolina has been recorded for many decades and is being increasingly observed. The increase may be a product of climate change and genetics, of more observers leaving their feeders out, or both.

The fact they are here means there are enough insects and tree sap around to support them. Also, hummingbirds protect themselves from dying of hypothermia by going into torpor, a state of temporary hibernation, featuring a deep sleep with greatly decreased body temperature and metabolic rate which allows them to conserve energy.

Of course, your feeder will provide a great supplement for winter's natural food sources. If you try to attract winter hummers, be sure to take the feeder inside when the temperature is or is expected to be below thirty degrees to keep the water from freezing.

No matter the time of year, there are a few basic rules for feeding hummingbirds. Prepare sugar water by dissolving one part sugar in four parts hot water and let cool before filling your feeder. The water does not have to be red so I recommend staying away from store-bought "nectar" and other products that contain red dye.

I also recommend cleaning your feeder with warm soapy water and replacing the sugar water every two or three days. Also, please keep feeders away from windows since hummingbirds may fly into the reflection of the sky in the glass at break-neck speed.

Happy hummingbird watching and may your yard sparkle with these avian jewels throughout the year!

John Ennis

