

# Live Free and Dig with the Littleton Garden Club

## Hummingbirds!

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Littleton Garden Club

They're back! Ruby-throated hummingbirds arrived in our area in early May, give or take a few days. The male ruby throat is metallic green with a red iridescent gorget (throat feathers), while females and fledglings are green with white throats.

Did you know that hummingbirds are only found in the Americas and the Caribbean? Ruby throats are only one of about 350 species of hummingbirds. Most species are found near the equator. Hummingbirds are the only birds that can hover, fly backward, and, yes, even fly upside down for brief stints.

Our ruby throats winter in Central America and migrate north each spring. They arrive in the Gulf States in early March. By mid-April, hummingbirds were reported in southern New Hampshire. I hung up a feeder and was rewarded with my first sighting on May 2 in Sugar Hill.

Banding studies show

what people long suspected. Hummingbirds return to the same neighborhoods each summer.

Hummingbirds are remarkable. They are the smallest birds on the planet and the smallest of the warm-blooded creatures.

These birds have the longest migration relative LGC, page A6

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tive to their body size. Hummingbird wings beat 55-80 times per second but can increase to 200 times per second. No wonder they have the largest heart per body weight of any animal. They consume about one and a half to three times their body weight daily and must eat every 15 to 20 minutes. Their diet is nectar and small insects.

If you are fortunate enough to have hummingbirds in your yard during summer, you will have a continuous show of flickering gems. Their plumage is unparalleled in iridescence, and their

acrobatics are astounding.

One of the most rewarding ways to attract and support hummingbirds is to plant flowers that provide nectar. Flowers in gardens, window boxes, or containers are all very satisfactory for your hummer friends. They're especially partial to flowers with tubular shapes like bee balm, salvia, butterfly bush, fuchsia, coral honeysuckle, petunias, and more.

Remember, don't purchase double blooms because hummers and pollinators can't extract nectar from them. Well-tended feeders are also popular with hum-

mers. Make homemade nectar using four parts water to one part white sugar, and never use red dye.

By creating a hummingbird-friendly environment, you're not just attracting these beautiful creatures but also contributing to their survival. Hummingbirds build nests about the size of a ping pong ball for their young to fledge. Summer is the season for them to breed, raise the fledg-

lings, and gain weight for the fall migration.

Our hummingbirds will depart in early to mid-September. They winter in Central America, where they molt and wait until the migration cycle repeats.

The hummingbirds will already grow restless by next February, when the first birds begin migrating, with others following close behind. Ruby-throats head north, and for our hummers,

their destinations are our neighborhoods. When you observe hummingbirds at your flowers or feeders, think about the journey these small birds have taken to return to their homes in your yard. Enjoy them while they're here. I'm wishing you and your hummers a great summer season!

For more information about the club and our meetings, please visit [www.littletonnhgardenclub.org](http://www.littletonnhgardenclub.org).

THE LITTLETON COURIER, WEDNESDAY, MAY 15, 2024