

Our Beloved Hummingbirds' Bounty Through a Button

by Dianne Chmidling



From the collection of and photo by Sallie Gibson.

It was a beautiful, sunny day in the country as I sat on our deck, swinging in the cool breeze, watching teenage cows play in our back pasture, enjoying the fragrance and beauty of colorful blooming flowers, and listening to a variety of birds chirping and humming around our yard and feeders.

I was reviewing some older issues of the *NBS Bulletin*, so I had buttons on my mind (as usual). As our little hummingbirds were drinking the sweet nectar we made for their feeders, I began to wonder if they would drink nectar through a button hole! So, I came in and designed a makeshift feeder using a Bakelite button secured over a modified small strainer, all of which was set in a red bowl. I sat quietly watching the feeder just inches from me, with my iPhone set to video ... just in case I could capture a hummer partaking of his sweet bounty through a button. After a little “whispering” with the hummingbirds, they flew in and drank repeatedly. I captured them on video (which I later posted on my Facebook page).



Dianne's homemade hummingbird feeder includes a red bowl, a clear jar, plastic wrap, and a flower-shaped button whose button holes serve as feeder holes.

Photo by Dianne Chmidling.



Hummingbird drinking nectar from trumpet flowers. Black jasperware set in brass. From the collection of Marlen Hudson.

Photo by Marlen Hudson.

Although I didn't take any snapshots at that time, I later thought it would be fun to write an article for the *MBS Bulletin* showing a hummingbird drinking nectar through a button, and include lovely hummingbird motif buttons as well! After redesigning the button feeder, using a vintage, yellow resin, flower button, I finally captured one of our hummingbirds in a photo for the article. So, here they are for your en-

joyment, just days before hummingbirds return south for the winter.

Fun Facts about Hummingbirds:

Lifespan — A North American hummingbird's lifespan is normally three to five years, although some have been documented (via banding) to live as long as 10 - 12 years.

Senses/Metabolism — Hummingbirds have no sense of smell but have very keen eyesight. They have a short, high-pitched, squeaky call. A hummingbird's heart rate is more than 1,200 beats per minute. At rest, he takes an average of 250 breaths a minute.

Food and Water — A hummingbird must consume approximately ½ of its weight in sugar daily, with the average hummingbird feeding 5 - 8 times per hour on insects, spiders, and nectar. Hummingbirds don't suck nectar through their long bills; they lick it with fringed, forked tongues (10 -15 times per second). Preferred water sources provide moving water, such as sprinklers, fountains, waterfalls, misters, and drippers.

Nests and Perches — Female hummingbirds build double-lined, cup-shaped nests, about the size of a half walnut, usually in shrubs and trees 10-40 feet above the ground. They love perches to rest and preen with a good field of view. Ruby-throated hummingbirds have very short legs which are not suited for walking or hopping. They function mainly as a grip, used for perching.

Courtship Rituals and Mating — When the female is almost finished building the nest, she goes in search of a male. He will greet her with a display of vocalizations, diving, and flashing his throat feathers. After mating, she returns to her nesting area to complete the nest, and the male waits the arrival of another female in his territory. Many hummingbird species can breed together to create hybrid species.

Babies — It takes about 12-14 days for the babies to hatch, and another 18-22 to develop enough to fly. The mother feeds them frequently. Her vocalizations become the trigger to alert them to a feeding. They fly only after



Horn with pewter escutcheon.
Collection of Christy Mecey.

Photo by Chris Shreve.



Engraved pearl. From the collection of Marlen Hudson.

Photo by Marlen Hudson.

they can vocalize and sit on a branch.

Territorial — Hummingbirds are one of the most aggressive bird species and will attack jays, crows, and hawks that infringe on their territory. In the backyard, there is usually one dominant hummingbird that guards all of the feeders.



Openwork white metal.
From the collection of
Marlen Hudson.
Photo by Marlen Hudson.

Flights and Migrations — Most hummingbirds of the U.S. and Canada migrate southward in fall to spend winter in Mexico, the Caribbean Islands, or Central America. A few species, such as the Anna's Hummingbird and the Buff-Bellied Hummingbird, are year-round residents of California and southwestern desert regions of the USA. A hummingbird's forward flight speed averages 30 mph, though the birds can reach up to 60 mph in a dive. A fair-weather resident of Michigan and Indiana, the ruby-throated hummingbird flies 500 miles non-stop (20

hours) across the Gulf of Mexico during both its spring and fall migrations. The rufous hummingbird has the longest migration with a distance of more than 3,000 miles from Alaska and Canada to its winter habitat in Mexico. A hummingbird's wings beat between 50 and 200 flaps per second, depending on the direction of flight and air conditions. They're named after the "hum" their rapidly beating wings make when in flight.

Hummingbird-Attracting Flowers — Petunias, Columbine, Lupine, Trumpet Creeper, Bleeding Hearts, Butterfly Bush, Salvia, Zinnia, Bee Balm, Sweet William, Coral Bells, Hollyhock, Phlox, and Cardinal Flower. 🌸

References:

www.defenders.org/hummingbirds/basic-facts

<http://birding.about.com/od/birdprofiles/u/hummingbirds.htm>

<http://www.swansonsnursery.com/hummingbird-basics-plants/>

<http://www.hendersonhummingbirdhurrah.com/hummingbird-basics/life-cycle/>

Dianne Chmidling has been collecting buttons since 1997. She was originally a member of the Heart-of-America Button Club in Kansas City, Missouri. Now retired with her husband, John, and living in northern Indiana, she's an active member of the NBS, MBS, and the Jacksonian Button Club. She has a blog and also sells on eBay (user name buttonfun7).