

## The Marvels of Flight, Hummingbirds

Hummingbirds are very small petite birds belonging to the family of Trochilidae. These birds have the capability to linger in mid air and flap their wings incredibly fast, that is, fifteen to eighty times per second. The distinguishing characteristics of a hummingbird are:

- a) it can fly backwards
- b) it can fly vertically
- c) its wings make a constant humming noise
- d) it can draw the nectar from flowers while maintaining its position

The bird has got its name from the humming sound of its wings.

Hummingbirds primarily live on the nectar of flowers. They are drawn to a lot of foliage, but Shrimp plants, heliconia, fuchsias, penstemons and other types of flowering plants seem to have a large concentration of hummingbirds feeding on their nectar. Small insects are also eaten, mother birds feed these to their young. These small birds take an active part in pollination of the flowers they feed on. The nesting of these birds sees no active participation of the male hummingbird. Eggs take around fourteen to nineteen days to hatch. The nest is a woven cup like shape in the midst of a tree branch.

Hummingbirds are beautiful. The male birds have bright and colourful plumage and the female birds are a bit duller. Glittering bellied emerald, shining sunbeam, festive coquette are some of the names given to various species of these birds by the enthusiastic admirers. Though they are gorgeous, they are also very small and the bee hummingbird is the smallest in the world weighing hardly 1.8 grams. The flight of humming bird is an area where intense scientific research is being done. The wingbeat cycle of the bird support their body weight, that is seventy five percent of the weight is supported on the downstroke and twenty five percent is supported on the upstroke.

Hummingbirds have high rate of metabolism which is necessary for their fast flapping of wings. Their heart beat rate is also extremely high compared to other birds. They eat more than their weight per day but can slow down their metabolism at night or when food is not available. They are then in a hibernation sort of stage called torpor. For long flights the birds store body fat which is used as fuel. The birds are generally quite hardy.

Hummingbirds are popular with people and many feed the bird with artificial nectar. They accept man made feeders but are partial to the red ones. Hummingbirds can get trapped in garages but if trapped the birds may not survive. They are a source of joy to countless bird lovers.

Source: <http://www.articlecircle.com>

### About the Author

Author Jeff Gise is a naturalist who maintains several related websites. One of his websites is at this location -

<http://hummingbirds.informationvalet.com/>