

Hummingbirds

Hummingbirds are absolutely the most captivating species in the bird world. Even those who aren't into the bird watching scene will stop what they're doing to observe one of these winged jewels. For certain, hummingbirds have never gone unnoticed. For this reason, each year, the Wetlands & Wildlife Care Center's Hummingbird Rehabilitation Team receive nestlings that should have been left alone. The purpose of this ditty is to discourage nest tampering and prevent bird-napping. So please, please, please, leave the babies alone.

Hummingbirds are among our earliest nesters, starting in mid-January.

Hatchlings are about the size of a honey bee. For the first week of their lives they must be fed every 15 to 20 minutes for 14 hours a day. As they get older and stronger they can go as long as 45 minutes between feedings, but not without protest. When these little ones are placed into the Wetlands & Wildlife Care Center's care, the human volunteers are obliged to follow the same schedule.

Hummingbirds expend energy very quickly. They are always just a few hours away from starvation. But never fear, nature has installed a few backup systems to see these little guys through. *None of which is called the human hand.* Hummingbirds can lower their metabolism to a level below that of hibernation. It is called the torpid state. The body temperature drops from 104 degrees in the daytime to 51 degrees at night. When awake and active, their heart beats 1,200 times a minute, but at night the heart rate drops to 35 beats per minute. *Nestlings can go into torpor on cold wet days and remain that way until the weather warms and mother can resume foraging for food.*

Nestlings are never fed nectar by the mother, only very small insects. A hummingbird does all of the growing he'll ever do in about four weeks. So, proper diet is all important from day one. Commercial hummingbird feeder foods, sugar water, honey water, etc., have very little nutritional value and are harmful to an infant hummingbird.

Hummingbird nests are usually constructed of twigs at least 5 feet above the ground. The small cup shaped nest is reinforced with spider webs and lined with feathers and plant down. The young secure themselves to the nest by weaving their tiny toes around the nest fabric. So firm is their hold that if lifted from the nest, most often legs are left behind. *Please never attempt to remove from nest.*

The female builds the nest and rears the young alone. Therefore, time spent at the nest is minimal; after all she has herself and two others to feed. Indeed, she comes and goes very quickly. *Those that report the mother hasn't been at the nest for hours simply weren't watching close enough. If the babies are alive, they're being fed. If they seem to be begging (gaping) most of the time, that's what they do. So please, unless you find mom dead or clenched firmly between the cat's teeth, leave those babies be!*