



photo by David Denicolò

Hummingbirds were called “glittering fragments of the rainbow” by the famous bird artist John Audubon. They are some of the only birds in the world with so many super-bright, shiny colors.

As hummingbirds flit around this summer, The Mini Page learns more about these amazing birds.

## Colorful creatures

Hummingbirds get some of their colors from **pigments**, or chemical colors, just like most birds do. These pigments always show the same color.

For example, a blue jay is always blue, no matter how the light hits its feathers.

But the hummingbird’s brightest colors come from the way its feathers are made. Tiny layers of feather cells break the light into brilliant colors, just as water breaks light into a rainbow. Unless the light hits the bird just right, you can’t see the bright colors at all. The bird just looks dark.

## A colorful strategy

The ability to display colors when they want is a great help to hummingbirds. A male flashes his bright colors to attract a female or scare off an enemy. Even a hawk can be scared off if it sees a sudden burst of color.

Many females have white tips on their tail feathers. Although most females are not as brightly colored as males, they often flash their white-tipped tail feathers to scare off enemies.

## Small ...

Hummingbirds need these defensive tools partly because of their size.

Hummingbirds are so tiny that one of their enemies is an insect, the praying mantis. The smallest bird on Earth is the Cuban bee hummingbird. It is less than 2 inches long from the tip of its beak to the tip of its tail. It weighs about 6/100 of an ounce.

## ... but mighty!

Hummingbirds get their name from the hum created by the superfast beat of their wings. The smallest ones beat their wings the fastest, up to 80 times per second. Their wings beat so fast that people see only a blur.

A hummingbird’s flight muscles make up about one-third of its weight, a bigger amount than in any other bird. They are the only birds that can fly backward, upside down or sideways for more than a few seconds.

They are so good at flying that most don’t ever walk. They use their feet only to perch. Even when they are just changing position on a branch, they fly.

## Mini Fact:

When migrating, some hummingbirds travel as far as 23 miles in one day.



photo by Dan Fogarty

The broad-billed hummingbird is found only in Mexico and the southwestern United States.

## Fueling up

Hummingbirds are so active that they need to eat at least every 30 minutes when they’re not sleeping. They eat some insects, but their main food is **nectar** from flowers or trees. Water makes up about three-fourths of nectar. **Sucrose**, or ordinary table sugar, makes up the rest.

Their long, thin beaks help them drink from flower blossoms. The bills of many hummingbirds are the longest of any birds in relation to their body size.

You can help hummingbirds and give yourselves a treat by putting out feeders or planting the flowers they like.

Hummingbirds’ favorite flowers are red, red-orange or pink. Feeders often have red decorations because hummingbirds know red means food. But do not put red food coloring in the feeder nectar because this could harm the birds.

## Nectar recipe

To make nectar, all you need are four parts of water and one part of white table sugar. For example, dissolve 1 cup of sugar in 4 cups of water.



## Resources



### On the Web:

- hummingbirdcentral.com

### At the library:

- “Tiny Bird: A Hummingbird’s Amazing Journey” by Robert Burleigh
- “The Big Book of Birds” by Yuval Zommer

## Try 'n' Find

Words that remind us of hummingbirds are hidden in this puzzle. Some words are hidden backward or diagonally, and some letters are used twice. See if you can find:



AUDUBON, BEAK, BEAT, BLOSSOM, COLOR, FEEDER, FLOWER, HUMMINGBIRD, INSECT, MIGRATE, MUSCLES, NECTAR, PIGMENT, RAINBOW, RED, STRATEGY, SUCROSE, TINY, WINGS.

S G N I W R J Q B T C W U S N  
N N U T A F E E D E R O F T S  
K K O T W M O S S O L B D R E  
Y A C O I N S E C T N N H A L  
R E W O L F C H N E E I L T C  
N B T I N Y R O L O C A B E S  
W U H U M M I N G B I R D G U  
O F S U C R O S E X R E D Y M  
T N E M G I P D V L Y B E A T  
M I G R A T E D A U D U B O N

## Mini Spy Classics

Mini Spy and the Dots love to watch hummingbirds come to their feeder. See if you can find the hidden pictures. Then color the picture.



Mini Spy Classics appear in the first issue of each month.

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- teddy bear
- star
- fan
- bell
- swan
- dragon
- chicken
- strawberry
- ladder
- sphinx
- heart
- letter L
- word MINI
- eyeglasses
- sheep
- letter E
- toothbrush
- teapot
- frog
- Dalmatian

## Mini Jokes



**Hal:** What bird can always identify a tune?  
**Hayley:** A hummingbird!

## Eco Note



The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service offers ideas about how to attract hummingbirds and other pollinators, such as bees and butterflies, to your yard. Choose plants that flower at different times of the year, and plant them in clumps. Try to use a variety of colors and shapes. When you can, try to use **native** plants, or plants that grow well naturally in your area. Avoid using **pesticides**, or chemicals that kill weeds and unwanted plants.



## For later:

Look in your newspaper for items about area gardens where birds can be seen.

**Teachers:** For standards-based activities to accompany this feature, visit: [bit.ly/MPstandards](https://bit.ly/MPstandards). And follow The Mini Page on Facebook!



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