



# Tiny Jewels of the Air

Few birds are as distinctive and charismatic as hummingbirds. From their iridescent plumage to their incredible aerial antics, hummingbirds are an irresistible attraction at Rock Springs. Each fall, hundreds of Ruby-throated Hummingbirds pass this way to feast on the nectar of the abundant jewelweed and other wildflowers.

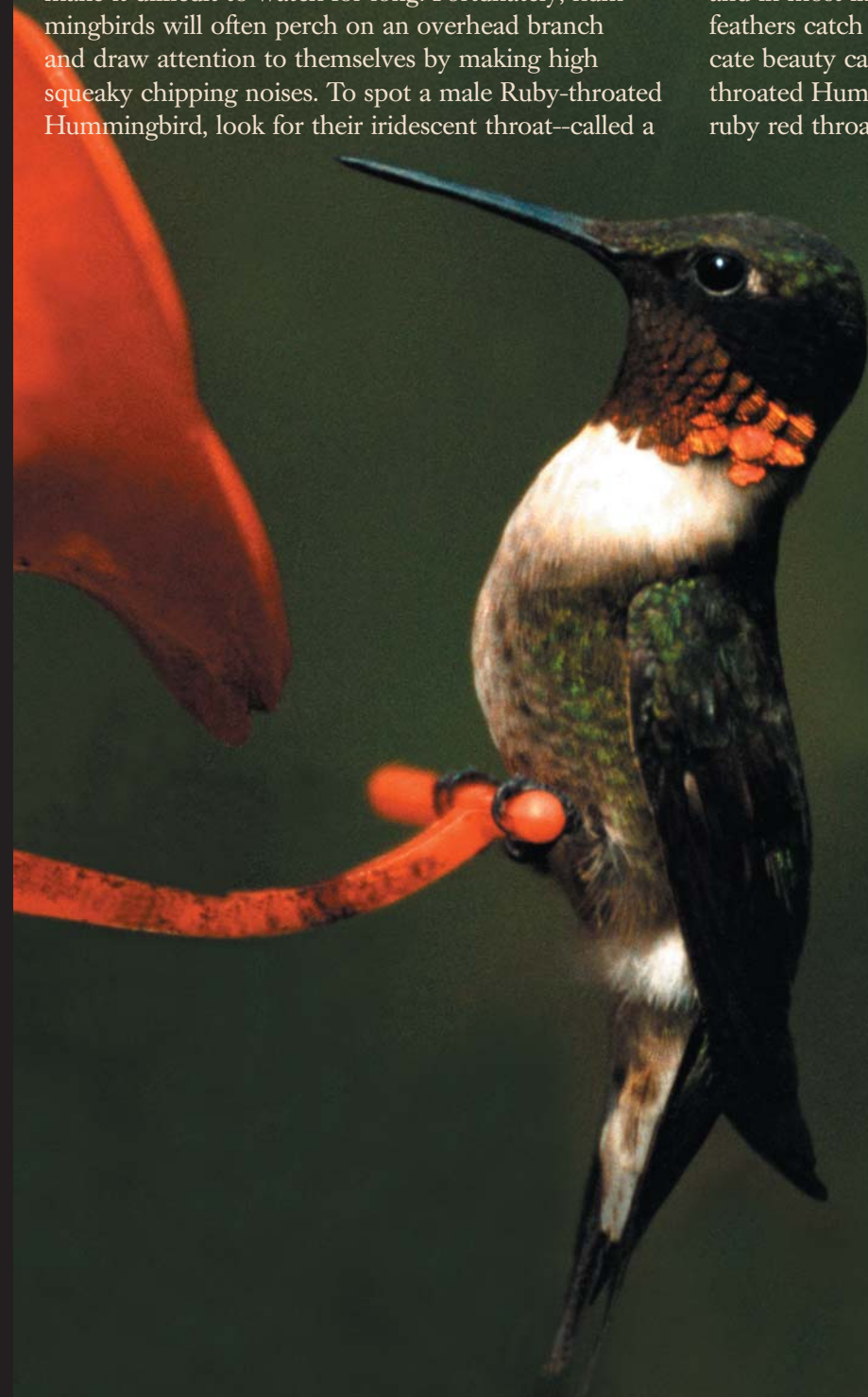
Hummingbirds and certain flowers have evolved an interdependent relationship over millions of years. Flowers provide hummingbirds nectar, the fuel they need to keep flying. In return, hummingbirds transport pollen between flowers, helping the flowers reproduce.

The flowers of choice are long and tubular and usually red, a color bees have trouble seeing. This shape fits the hummingbird's long bill and allows pollen to be deposited on the bird's forehead. Individual flowers usually grow separate from one another, allowing ample space for whirring wings as the hummingbird dashes from flower to flower. Pollen from flowers powders the head of these tiny jewels as they sip nectar. Subsequently, this pollen is then spread to other flowers on which the hummingbird feeds.

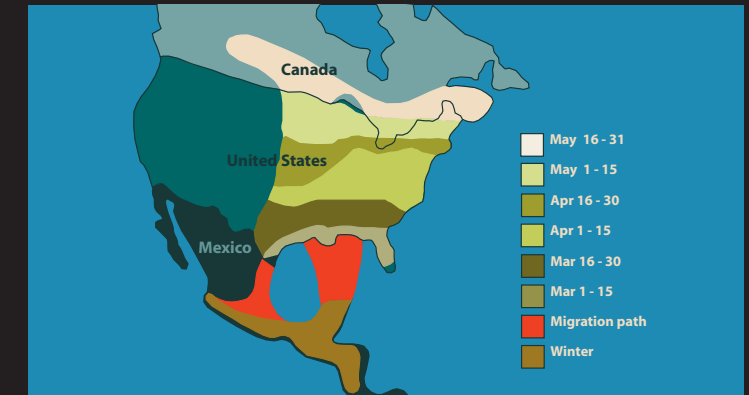
## Faster Than a Speeding Hummingbird?

A hummingbird's small size and rapid movement can make it difficult to watch for long. Fortunately, hummingbirds will often perch on an overhead branch and draw attention to themselves by making high squeaky chipping noises. To spot a male Ruby-throated Hummingbird, look for their iridescent throat—called a

gorget. The color of the gorget depends on the lighting and in most instances looks dark. It is only when the feathers catch light at a certain angle that their intricate beauty can be seen. In good light the male Ruby-throated Hummingbird is unmistakable with his bright ruby red throat.



Ruby-throated Hummingbird/Walt Burch



Migration across the Gulf of Mexico

## Ruby-throated Hummingbird Migration

Each year, Ruby-throated Hummingbirds migrate from eastern North America to winter in Central America. Although some birds work their way south through Florida to the Caribbean or south through Texas to Mexico, Alabama's hummingbirds fly across the Gulf of Mexico. These incredible creatures undertake a 600-mile voyage across open water to find warm weather and plentiful nectar further south.



Rufous Hummingbird/USFWS, Tom Smylie

## Rare Surprises From the West

Each fall, bird watchers from across Alabama visit these patches of jewelweed to witness the spectacle of hundreds of hummingbirds on their southward migration. As an added bonus, these large concentrations of hummingbirds sometimes attract western hummingbird species that have strayed from their usual migration route, particularly in the winter. Species to look for in the fall include Rufous, Black-chinned, Calliope, and Anna's, among the Ruby-throated.