

Humming Bird Facts

- Hummingbirds are one of the smallest birds, only getting about three to five inches in size.
- Because of their high metabolism they eat a long in a day, particularly nectar which is sugar.
- Hummingbirds are the fastest bird.
- When they are not eating (particularly at night), they can slow down their metabolism by entering a deep sleep known as *torpor* so they don't lose the crucial energy they need.
- The average lifespan of a hummingbird ranges from three to five years.
- Baby hummingbirds begin to learn to fly around eighteen days after hatching.

Flying

- Hummingbirds can flap their wings up to 80 times a second. The smaller the hummingbird, the faster its wings will flap. There is such a thing as the giant hummingbird. Their wing flap beat per second is significantly lower.
- Their heart rate can go up to 1000 beats a minute when they're flying, but still upwards of 600 beats a minute when resting.
- They can hover in midair due to unique patterns in their wing beats.
- Hummingbirds can also fly up, down, forward, backwards, and side to side. They can even stop in midair!
- They have the largest migration route of any other bird their size.

Task: *Can you think of where and how hummingbirds might have gotten their name based on their flying patterns and speed? What else seems unique about their flying pattern?*



Image courtesy of Alan Vernon

Eating

- Hummingbirds love nectar. They require allot of energy for all of that fast flying which is why they love the sweetness of flowers.
- They eat up to eight times in an hour.
- They don't just eat sugar from the nectar and require protein like every other living creature. So, they will catch bugs in flight and eat them for their required protein and other essential nutrients.
- Hummingbirds also enjoy hummingbird feeders. It is important to remember when putting out feeders for the hummingbirds not to place them too close to windows or walls.
- Hummingbirds can be attracted to gardens too by planting red tubular flowers. They enjoy a variety of flowers such as the desert honeysuckle, Indian tobacco, columbine, sage and many others.
- They have the highest metabolism of any animal.

Task: *Why do you think a hummingbird's metabolism is so high?*



Image courtesy of Walter Mains



Image courtesy of Laura Gooch

World's Smallest Bird

The Bee Hummingbird (*Mellisuga helenae*) is not only the smallest hummingbird, but the *world's* smallest bird. Also known as “zunzuncito”, the Bee hummingbird is only found in Cuba particularly coastal and dense forests. They are hardly bigger than a bumble bee, averaging little more than two inches and weighing no more than a penny. They are considered near threatened (BirdLife International) due to habitat endangerment or loss.



Image by DailyNewsDig.com

Cultural Facts

- The Island of Trinidad off the port of Spain, has also been referred to as the “Land of the Hummingbird” because of the large amount of hummingbird species found there. The coat of arms also shows two hummingbirds on the shield.



Image courtesy of Sodacan

- The Spaniards referred to the hummingbird as Valadores or Flying Jewels, especially when discovering the New World. Christopher Columbus called them Flying Marvels.

Task / Question: Going back to previous information about hummingbirds, why do you think the Spaniards and Christopher Columbus referred to them as flying marvels and jewels?

- Many indigenous people ranging from the Navajo, Pueblo and Taino (South America) Indians, had various pleasant beliefs and stories about the hummingbird
- A recipe for “Hummingbird Cake” was officially named Hummingbird Cake in February 1978. It was listed in an article in Southern Living Magazine by Mrs. L.H Wiggin's. It won many ribbons and awards at county fairs (Southernliving.com). It is known for being very sweet.

Task: See if it is possible to bake a hummingbird cake in a home economics class with students. This can be done at all ages. Younger students should be supervised and guided in measurement, handling kitchenware and the oven. Older students can do this project on their own or with a partner with a supervising teacher nearby.