

## The Scoop

A Newsletter from the Gateway Garden Club  
Hummingbirds

It is almost time for the hummingbirds to return to Trigg County. Feeders need to be ready for them by April 15<sup>th</sup>. Some things to think about when you are buying a feeder: Make sure it is easy to clean because ants, fungus, and bugs can be a problem on feeders that are not cleaned and never use soap when cleaning a hummingbird feeder or your hummers will be blowing tiny bubbles when they eat. Clean with hot water and a bottle brush, then rinse with running water and allow to air-dry. Hummingbirds feed on nectar of flowers, so feeders should be filled with a simple sugar water mix of one part sugar to four part water, heat until the sugar is dissolved and allow to cool before putting it in your feeder. Do not add red food coloring to your nectar. Most feeders are red which attracts the hummingbirds and red food coloring can be poisonous. You may want to make a large batch of nectar and keep the extra in your refrigerator. Hummers like cold nectar on hot summer days. Fill your feeder with only as much as your birds will consume in a week. When temperature is over 80 degrees you should change the solution in your feeders every 3 to 4 days to prevent the growth of harmful bacteria. Their long, forked tongue is equipped with small tub-like structures that serve as tiny wicks, allowing greater absorption of nectar by capillary action. The edge of the tongue has a wavy membrane-like structure that actually cups as the tongue goes in and out, at a rate of 15 times per second, it is not like a straw as many have thought.

Now, why would you want to do this? Because the hummers are the most interesting tiny birds to watch when they are at your feeders. The males have that beautiful ruby throat and perch near the feeder to keep watch so no other hummingbirds can eat. They feed constantly all day to remain alive. Beside flower nectar, they get protein by eating small beetles, weevils, bugs, mosquitoes, aphids and spiders.

Some fun facts about hummingbirds: The ruby-throated hummer is the only one that spends its summer in the eastern United States. Its wing beats of more than 75 strokes per second, the tiny bird can fly at 50 to 60 miles per hour. They not only hover, fly backward, and shift sideways, but they can also fly straight up and down, they can go from a resting position to top speed in an instant, producing that darting now-you-see-me, now-you-don't. These maneuvers are possible due to the figure-eight motion of their wings. When they approach the feeder they will open their tail feathers to slow down. The males establish feeding territories from which they chase – very aggressively – not only other male and female hummers but bumblebees and hawkmoths. Males guard their territories by spectacular, swinging, pendulum-like aerial maneuvers, or displays of intimidation. They also fly non-stop across the Gulf of Mexico from the Yucatan Peninsula of Mexico to the Gulf Coast of Alabama or Texas twice a year.

Hummingbirds frequently seem to be searching for feeders in the same locations they were in last year. Do they remember where they ate last year? The question has not been answered but maybe.

You may want to purchase ant traps or small traps that will help discourage wasps and bees which may also be attracted to your feeders.

For more information about the Gateway Garden Club contact Becky Oliver at 270-522-3150.