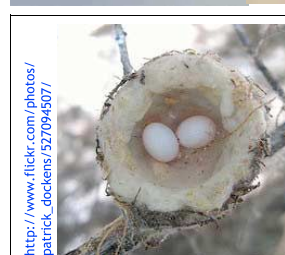


Bird Life

There are over 320 different species of hummingbird, making them the second largest family of birds in the world, after flycatchers. Hummingbirds are found only in North, South and Central America, and on the islands of the Caribbean. Different species can be found in various habitats - from Alaska all the way down to Tierra del Fuego at the bottom of South America - although most species are found around the tropics. Hummingbirds are tiny birds, weighing from 2 to 20 grams and are most noted for their rainbow colouring and the iridescent plumage of the males. Their unique ability to fly by rotating the whole wing, means they have an extremely rapid wing beat, beating as much as 90 or more times per second! This beating produces a humming sound and gives them their name. It also means they need to eat huge amounts of food every day, often eating 100-200% of their body weight in nectar and add protein to their diet by eating insects. Their long slender beaks and tubular tongues are specially adapted to probe flowers.



Images courtesy of AD Wilson www.naturespicsonline.com



Mini Bird Nests!

Being tiny birds, hummingbirds also have tiny nests and lay 2 eggs in a clutch. The eggs are tiny, white and about the size of jellybeans. The nests are made from flower down, leafy material and lichen, all held together with spider silk.

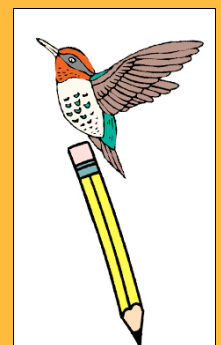
A hummingbird lookalike!

There are no hummingbirds on this side of the Atlantic Ocean (unless in captivity) but there is a creature that might be mistaken for it. The Hummingbird Hawkmoth shares a number of similar characteristics to the hummingbird. The moth has a long tongue that mimics the slender beak of the bird and as it also has a rapid wing beat, it gives the impression that it's hovering as it feeds. Last year a number of "sightings" were reported to BirdWatch Ireland, who were able to confirm that they were not hummingbirds - it would be too great a journey across the Atlantic!



The World's Smallest Bird!

One species of hummingbird, the Bee Hummingbird, is the smallest bird in the world. Native to Cuba, it measures approximately 5.5cm and is scarcely bigger than a bee. An adult male weighs about 1.95g and its nest is only 3cm across!



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