

## **The Ruby-throated Hummingbirds are Back in Town!**

By Sue Heath and Celeste Silling

At Gulf Coast Bird Observatory, we've been seeing more and more Ruby-throated Hummingbirds lately, so we know that their fall migration has started. These birds begin their southward migration in August and continue through October. Mid-September is the peak time when we see the most hummers here on the coast of Texas, so look around now and you're likely to some!

Ruby-throated Hummingbirds breed as far north as central Canada. So, when the time comes for them to fly to their winter grounds in Mexico and Central America, they've got quite a journey ahead of them! Many of these birds have to fly up to 1000 miles twice a year between their wintering and breeding grounds. That's an incredible feat, especially for such a tiny creature!

Fortunately for us hummer lovers, the migration path of these birds often leads them right through coastal Texas. Even though they are just passing through, many take shelter here for a few days to fuel up on nectar and insects before they continue their flight South.

To celebrate the Ruby-throated Hummingbird migration, Gulf Coast Bird Observatory is hosting our annual Xtreme Hummingbird Xtravaganza on September 17 and 24 from 8:00 AM to 12:00 PM. We'll be at our headquarters at 299 Hwy 332 West, Lake Jackson catching hummingbirds to band for our research and inviting the public to view these birds up close!

You can watch the hummingbird banding, play games and activities for the kids, visit our nature booths, buy native hummingbird plants, and even symbolically adopt a Ruby-throated Hummingbird of your own. If the bird you adopted is caught somewhere else and identified by its band, we'll send you an email letting you know where in the world your bird was found! If you want to learn more about XHX, visit our website at [www.gcbo.org](http://www.gcbo.org).

Ruby-throated Hummingbirds are the only species of hummingbird that breeds in the eastern U.S. There are 15 species that breed in the western U.S. including the Anna's Hummingbird and Calliope Hummingbird. While we are inundated with southbound Ruby-throated Hummingbirds in the fall, during the winter, Texas is home to several species of western hummingbirds including Rufous, Allen's, Broad-tailed, Calliope and Buff-bellied Hummingbirds.

Ruby-throated Hummingbirds weigh only 3 grams, but they're incredibly agile flyers and a supreme predator of little flying bugs. If you've got an overabundance of mosquitos on your property, try attracting some hummingbirds. They'll be happy to help out!

If you want to bring hummingbirds to your little patch of nature, we encourage you to plant native plants that support hummingbirds (giving nectar, attracting insects, or giving shelter) and to put hummingbird feeders out in your yard. Fill the feeders with a mixture that is three or four parts water to one part sugar, and change it every 4-5 days. There is no need to add red food coloring as the birds will be attracted to the red on the feeder and there is some evidence that the food coloring is not good for the birds. Not only will you help out the birds, but you will get many hours of enjoyment watching them!

Photo by Tony Leukering

Caption: Ruby-throated Hummingbirds swarm our nectar feeders during September migration.