

## **Ruby-throated Hummingbird Fall Migration**

By Celeste Silling

Here at Gulf Coast Bird Observatory, we are getting ready for our annual Xtreme Hummingbird Xtravaganza on September 13th and 20th. The fall Ruby-throated Hummingbird migration has already begun, so we've been seeing them zipping all around the property, from one flower to another. We are fortunate to be located in the middle of their migration pathway, so there can be hundreds of them on our grounds at once!

The Ruby-throated Hummingbird migration is truly impressive. These tiny birds start their fall migration in August and continue through October. They breed as far north as central Canada, but the majority of them spend the winter in Mexico and Central America. This means that they have to fly as far as 1,000 miles twice a year between their wintering and breeding grounds.

Some will follow the coast around the gulf down to Mexico, but others will take the shorter route straight across! The long flight across the gulf has to be done all at once, since there are no convenient trees for birds to rest on in the ocean. They have been known to rest on ships out in the water, but they can't rely on finding the right ship in the right place. To meet the energy demands of this long journey, Ruby-throats can double their body weight with fat in a matter of days by bulking up on nectar from flowers and feeders and from eating insects.

Our small visitors need a lot of sugar water to prepare for their journey, so I'm sure they appreciate the folks who put out feeders for them. To make the nectar, we recommend dissolving 1 part sugar in 4 parts hot water, then letting it cool before putting it in the feeders. We don't recommend store-bought nectar, as that can often have dyes or preservatives that might not be good for the birds.

Those of us with hummingbird feeders also need to be sure to clean them regularly! In this hot environment, mold and bacteria can grow quickly inside of the feeders. We recommend cleaning them every few days, being sure to get in all of the nooks and crannies where mold and bacteria can grow. You can use dish soap or other cleaning methods, but always be sure to thoroughly rinse with water afterwards!

Of course, nobody can live off of sugar water alone! Hummingbirds require insects as well. So, if you are trying to attract more hummingbirds to your yard, the best solution is to plant native plants and eliminate pesticides. Native plants are the best hosts for native insects, and some of them can provide nectar too.

If you are interested in enjoying the hummingbird migration and seeing these birds up close, come join us at our Xtreme Hummingbird Xtravaganza on September 13th and 20th at Gulf Coast Bird Observatory headquarters in Lake Jackson! You can watch hummingbird banding and even symbolically adopt a Ruby-throated Hummingbird of your own! There will also be activities for the kids, nature booths with live animals, a plant sale, and much more to enjoy. You can learn more at [www.gcbo.org](http://www.gcbo.org). We hope to see you there!

Photo by Michael Gray

Caption: Ruby-throated Hummingbirds are drawn towards tubular flowers with nectar.