

## Hummingbirds - the feathered friends to watch



### Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

I openly admit that I have never been, and still am not, a birdwatcher or “birder” as they are sometimes referred to. I could never bring myself to head to the woods with a set of binoculars and a bird book, with the hopes of catching a glimpse of a yellow-bellied sapsucker.

On the other hand, birds such as ducks, geese, doves, quail, pheasants and turkeys have consumed many hours of my attention. With all the time I spend afield, hoping to catch a glimpse of one of those species probably has more to do with my passion for hunting than me ever becoming a birder.

With all of that being said as a preface, I must confess my fascination for the hummingbirds here in Colorado. These magical little creatures appear in late April and hang around until the middle of September.

My wife places several feeders around the yard, which contain sugar water, for the hummingbirds dining pleasure. The birds will put on a show for any who have the time to watch, for hours on end. Everything from quiet feeding to territorial disputes will be seen.

Colorado has seen up to 11 different species of hummingbirds, but only four are the most commonly seen. Those four are the broad-tailed, black-chinned, calliope and the rufous.

Most of these birds are between 3 and 3 ¼ inches long, weighing in at only 2 to 3 grams. It would take five of them to equal the weight of a chickadee.

These miniature dive-bombers are capable of reaching speeds exceeding 50 mph as their wings beat up to 90 times per second, during normal flight. During courtship, the wings can flap 200 times per second. They can even fly backwards and upside down. If you want to see just how fast they move, try and get a picture of one. (I spent hours trying to photo one on the feeders in the yard, never really getting a good one. So much for me being a birder.)

Their bills and tongues have evolved so they can reach deep into flowers for nectar. The hummingbird tongue can flick into the nectar at 20 times per second. These birds need to refuel every 10 minutes and burn up to 12,000 calories a day.

The hummingbirds build a very small nest, usually made from spider webs, tiny pieces of lichen and tree bark. The nest starts in a cup shape, but stretches as the chicks grow until the cup is flattened into a platform shape.

Most females will have two broods a year with one or two eggs in each. The eggs are about the size of a coffee bean, and the babies when hatched, are around ¼ of an inch long and completely featherless. The only hummingbirds to breed in Colorado are the Black-tailed and the Black-chinned.

The smallest hummingbird, and the smallest bird in the world to migrate long distances, is the Calliope. These guys summer at high elevations and winter in Mexico. Their breeding area is usually the



(Above )This was the best I could capture after several hours of trying. Photo is a rufous adult heading to the feeder my wife keeps filled for them. (Special to the Montrose Daily Press/ Mark Rackay)

(Right) This a a photo of a rufous hummingbird chick in the nest. (Photo courtesy of Colorado Parks and Wildlife)



Northwest States and British Columbia, only visiting Colorado during migration times.

Because of their tiny size, the Calliope feeds from flowers within inches of the ground, in order to avoid the aggression of larger hummingbirds.

Speaking of aggression will bring us to the Rufous hummingbird. These little guys are the most entertaining to have around your feeders. They are the reason you should have several feeders around your yard or campsite.

Rufous are a very solitary species, and become very defensive and aggressive around feeders. This bird will perch on high branches, above the feeder, “keeping guard” on “their” feeder. When an intruder, be it human or another bird, comes near “their” feeder, Rufous will chase, chirp and threaten by dive-bombing, tail fanning and generally raising a vocal discontent until you move away. It is a good thing these little birds do not reach several pounds in size or they could really injure someone.

The Rufous will join us in Colorado during mid-summer. The migration of the Rufous is thought to be the longest of any bird in the world in relation to its size.

The spring migration for the Rufous will take them up the Pacific coast where the birds breed in the Northwest, British Columbia and Alaska. This is the furthest north any hummingbird specie breeds.

Rufous’ southbound migration will start in June, bringing them down the Rockies where they slowly work their way back to their winter territory in Mexico and Guatemala. This migration covers an estimated 3,900 miles, which is amazing for

such a little bird.

There are many feeders available to choose from. I prefer the ones that are easy to clean and refill. The feeder will need to be cleaned at least weekly, and sometimes more often during hot weather. Be careful to not allow any mold in your feeder, as mold is toxic to hummingbirds. Getting several feeders provides the best entertainment.

You can purchase feed premade or in a powder form (just add water). We prefer to make our own here and the recipe is simple.

Mix four cups of water with one cup of white table sugar. Stir until dissolved and bring to a brief boil. Let it cool and fill the feeder. The extra can be stored in the refrigerator for up to a week.

There is no reason to add red food coloring as it is not necessary. Never use honey or artificial sweeteners, or more

sugar than stated, as this will only induce the growth of mold.

If you happen to see me in the woods, wearing my camo and carrying binoculars, rest assured I have not turned into a “birder.” I am probably looking for another species of bird for other reasons. I do openly admit, however, that I really enjoy having those little dive-bombers hanging around all summer. If you do get one to sit still long enough for a picture, let me know how you did it.

Mark Rackay is a columnist for the Montrose Daily Press and avid hunter who travels across North and South America in search of adventure and serves as a Director for the Montrose County Sheriff’s Posse. For information about the Posse call 970-252-4033 (leave a message) or email [info@mcspi.org](mailto:info@mcspi.org)

## USFS issues decision on Mary E, Priest Lake

STAFF REPORT

The U.S. Forest Service has made changes to dispersed camping in the Telluride area.

Under a decision by Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forests Norwood District Ranger Matt Zumstein, dispersed camping at the Mary E recreation site will be allowed at designated campsites marked with a site post and picnic table. Approximately 15 campsites will be

designated within the area by July 1.

All sites will be offered for free. The Forest Service will also provide portable toilets and a dumpster at the Mary E site.

Additional changes at Mary E include:

- Campfires will be strictly prohibited;
- Dogs will be required to be on leash at all times;
- Quiet hours will be set from 10 p.m. to 6 a.m.;

- Maximum stay limit will be seven days in a 30-day period.

Change are also being made at the Priest Lake recreation site, about 11 miles south of Telluride. The site currently offers dispersed camping and a restroom. Under the decision, camping at the site will only be allowed in designated campsites. These designated sites will be marked with a site post and a metal fire ring. Approximately

8-15 campsites will be designated in the area.

In 2018, all sites will be offered free and the current seven-day stay limit will be enforced. These changes will be implemented by July 1.

The decision document and associated maps for these proposals are posted online on the GMUG Forest website: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/gmug> .



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### At my house...

...in case you couldn't tell, we are animal lovers. Over the years we have had cats, dogs, two hamsters, raised wild baby birds until they could fly, and an injured pigeon from the vet who lived so long (20 years!) that we thought we were going to have to put him in our wills!

We have only one cat now, Oscar, who is 16 years old, but he still has it! He slinks through the yard looking for unaware birds. He is three for three this week on his “catch and not release program”. We couldn't figure out how such an old cat could be so quick...until we realized he was hiding behind a statue of St. Francis in the rose garden, catching the birds as they came to the bird bath... there is something not right about hiding behind St. Francis, the patron saint of animals!

### TBD Marine Road

- 1.69 Acres in City limits
- One residential home allowed on this large lot- create your own estate!
- City of Montrose water and West Montrose Sanitation District for sewer.
- Large buildable parcel close to town with a country feel!

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\$85,000



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