

by Daniel Edelstein

"The Fascinating Facts & Folklore Of Hummingbirds"

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Which bird can fly forward, backward and even upside down? Beats its wings an unbelievable 78 times per second? And boasts 367 different varieties in our hemisphere — the smallest one weighing less than a penny at only 2 1/4 inches long?

It's the hummingbird.

Hummingbirds are a common visitor to my backyard. I've discovered that a five-parts water to one-part sugar solution is the ideal mixture to attract hummingbirds to the feeder I post outside my window.. I keep the window cracked a couple of inches.....listen and watch closely for a few days.....and soon enough hear the low tamborine thunder of the hovering hummingbird sipping while dipping its long beak into the sweets I've provided.

He's a beauty — the Anna's hummingbird, a hovering exclamation, beating steady only a couple feet from my transfixed gaze. The remarkable Anna's is our resident and most common variety in the Bay Area, its telltale presence told by the male's neon magenta throat patch and head mask.

Now..... I'm into the romance of life and hummingbirds definitely tug my heart — like how the Portuguese coined them as "flower kissers" (beija flor) due to their unique way of feeding. And the Mexicans referred to the hummingbird as huitzitzil and pigada—"rays of the sun" and "tresses of the day star."

But I wondered what hummingbirds do at night when they can no longer see the nectar-rich flowers and backyard feeders that fuel their hyperactive metabolism? The surprising answer: They retreat into an almost hibernation state. Their rapid-fire metabolism — a dozen times faster than a pigeon or 100 times the rate of an elephant — slows to about only one-fifteenth the day rate. To make it through the night, the hummingbirds feed feverishly at sunset on flower nectar and small insects.

Then I discovered that I could attract even more hummingbirds to my yard when I planted some flowers they prefer to visit: honeysuckle, fuschia, and columbine.

Now, I sit back and enjoy the view of the miniature flying sunsets of colors.