

## Hummingbirds (Family Trochilidae)

By

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These tiny aerial acrobats often seem like glittering gems with feathers (Kaufman, 1996). They are able to fly rapidly and to hover while sipping nectar from blossoms. The structure of the feathers creates many of the bright iridescent colors of these tiny birds. The actual pigment color of the feathers may be brown or gray. However, transparent cells overlie the feathers and are structured to reflect only certain colors of light. When the angle between the observer, the feather, and the light source are just right, a brilliant color is visible. This is why some of the bright iridescences of the hummingbirds seem to flash on and off as the birds move and to turn to dull black in the shade. Hummingbirds can control their position in midair like no other birds and can fly backwards, sideways, up or down, or hover in one spot.

Hummingbirds are adapted for hovering at flowers and feeding on nectar. All of the North American species have long narrow bills and are mostly attracted to long tubular flowers, especially those colored red, orange, or violet. These birds readily come to feeders containing sugar water mixes and also eat many tiny insects. They also devour small spiders and will sometimes take trapped insects from spider webs.

After the males and females mate, they go their separate ways. The female builds the nest and cares for the young. The nest is usually a compact, open cup like structure. The female feeds the young by inserting her bill deep into the wide-open mouth of the nestling and regurgitating food from her crop.

### *Black-chinned Hummingbird*



**Male Black-chinned Hummingbird**

During the summer, these birds are common in lowland riparian and oak woods and a variety of other habitats including semi arid country, chaparral, and suburbs (Kaufman, 1996; Sibley, 2003). In the Southwest, they avoid most open desert areas but occur along dense washes or

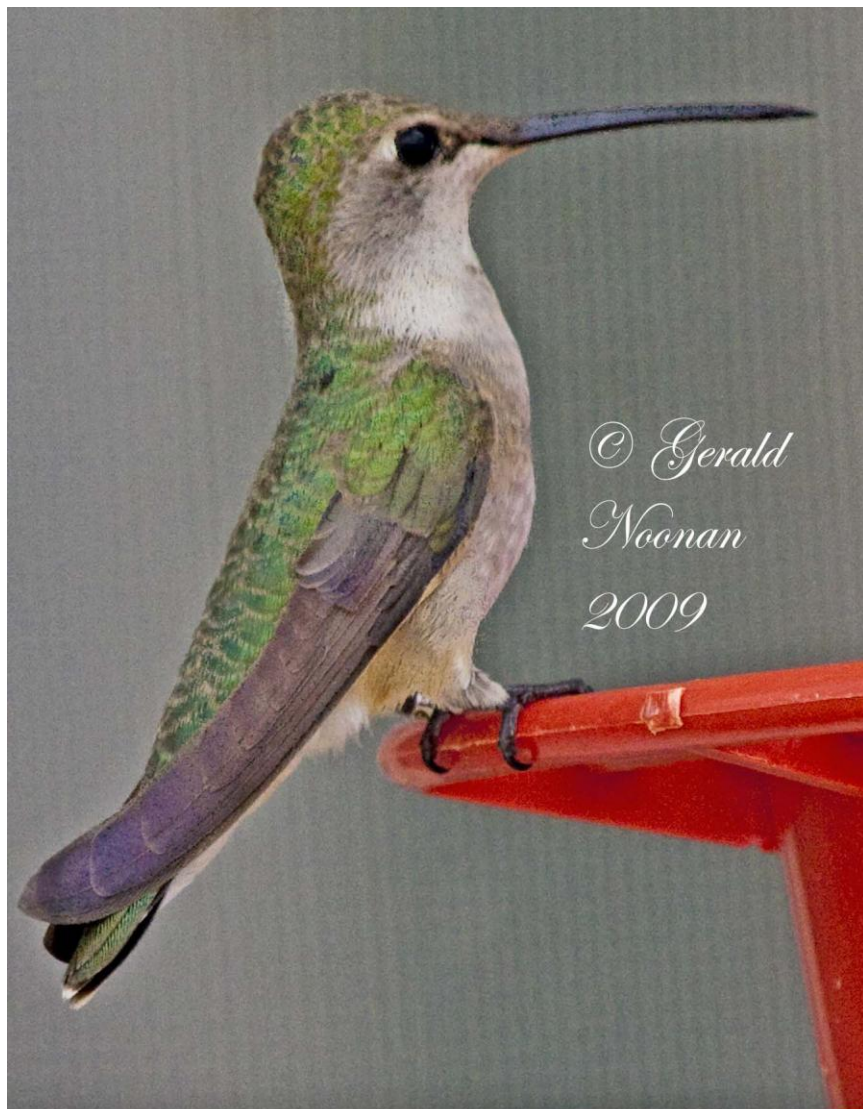
desert rivers. They are strictly migratory in the Southwest, arrive in the spring, and in the fall fly southward to winter predominantly in Mexico.

The female builds a cup shaped nest composed of plant down and fibers that are held together with spider webs and camouflaged on the outside with dead leaves and other debris. The nest is placed in a tree or shrub, most often 4 to 8 feet above ground but sometimes lower or higher. The female lays two eggs, sometimes 1 to 3, that are white color and incubates them for approximately 13 to 16 days. The young take their first flight about 20 to 21 days after hatching. There are usually 1 to 2 broods per year, sometimes three, and the female may begin

building a second nest while still feeding young from the first.

#### **Recognition**

**Characters:** (Sibley, 2003)  
Mature males have a dark head and a distinctive black and purple throat. The females are more difficult to identify and are recognized by details of body proportions, the bill shape, and feather colors.

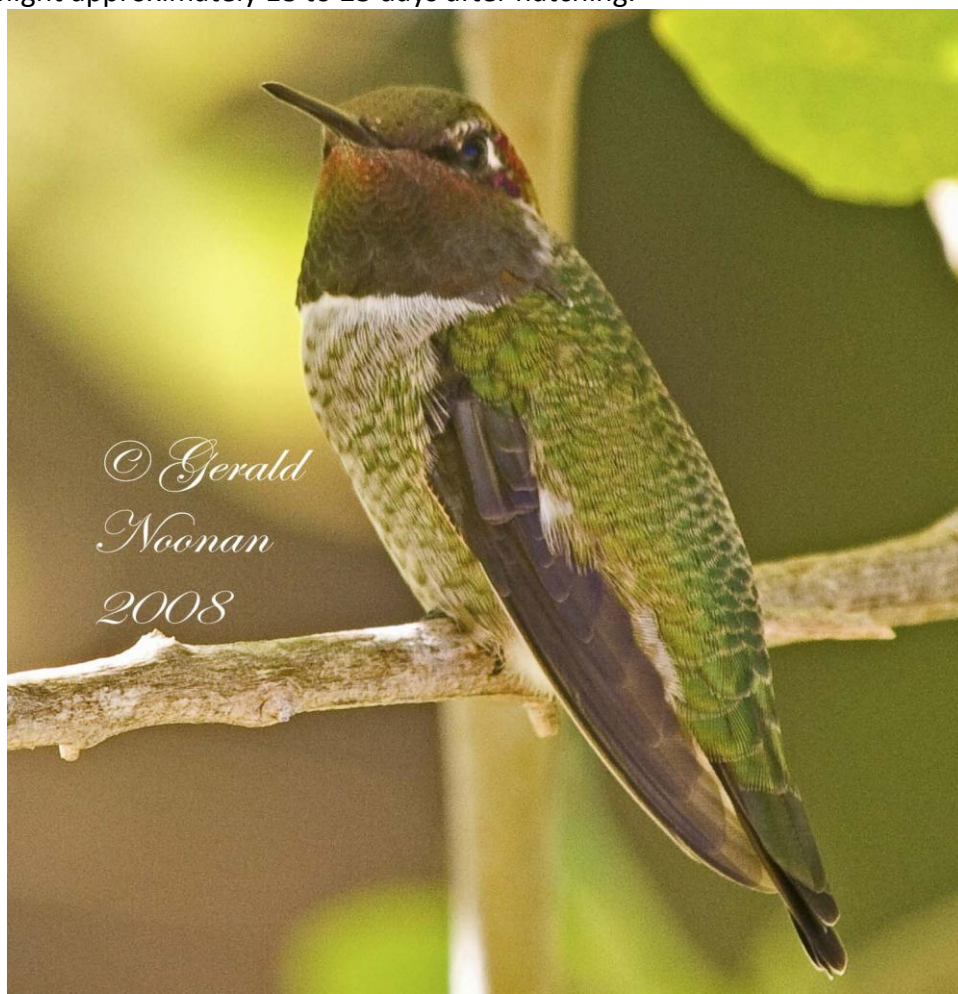


**Female Black-chinned Hummingbird**

## ***Anna's Hummingbird***

These birds are permanent residence along with the Pacific coast from southern Canada to Southern California and also in southern Arizona (Kaufman, 1996; Sibley, 2003). In the winter, some birds migrate into Northwestern Mexico. Anna's Hummingbird occurs in a wide variety of habitats such as chaparral, open oak woodland, arid brush, city parks, and streamside groves.

Females build nests in a variety of sites (Kaufman, 1996). Most often, the nests are on the branch of a tree or shrub but sometimes they are found in vines, on wires and under the eaves of buildings. The nests are a cup of plant fibers and spider webs and are lined with plant down and sometimes with feathers. The female usually lays two eggs, rarely 1 to 3, that are white in color. She incubates them for approximately 14 to 19 days. The young take their first flight approximately 18 to 23 days after hatching.



**Male Anna's Hummingbird in shade**

crown on the top of the head.

### **Recognition**

**Characters:** (Sibley, 2003). Both sexes are relatively larger and sturdier than the Black-chinned Hummingbird and have a relatively short bill. They are approximately 4 inches long from the tip of the bill to the tip of the tail and about 5.25 inches in wingspread. Females are slightly grayer and drabber overall than females of the Black-chinned Hummingbird and have a red central throat patch. Males have a red throat and a red

## References

- Kaufman, K. 1996. Lives of North American Birds. Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston. xxv+675 p.
- Sibley, D. A. 2003. The Sibley Field Guide to Birds of Western North America. National Audubon Society. Alfred A. Knopf, New York. Chanticleer Press, Inc. 471 p.