

Wildlife Viewfinder Guide: Home on the range

by Tim Herd

A brilliant flash, a subtle hum and a sweeping zinger mean it's hummingbird breeding time. The broad-billed hummingbird, with its hovering wings, metallic green feathers and red-orange bill, probes the nectar-filled recesses of a thistle flower. Detecting the vital juices, the hummer's long, grooved tongue with a split and frayed tip darts to the dainty reservoir and laps up the sweet succulent like a fine brush. The tiny flier also has a taste for pollen grains, spiders and small insects. Constantly foraging to fuel its high metabolism, the colorful sprite exudes energy, especially at this time of year when breeding and nesting are priorities. The male courts a female with a distinctive display of a repetitive pendulum-swing flight toward her, often accompanied by a high-pitched "zing." The seeming hypnotic act appears to have its effect on her, and the pair breeds. They build a tiny, raggedy cup nest of grass stems, plant down, leaves and bark, all bound together with spider silk, and deposit a pair of jelly-bean-sized eggs.

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