

## For the Love of the Birds

Hummingbirds, or Hummers, as they are frequently called, are a source of fascination in California.

The five types of hummingbirds most frequently sighted in California are:

- Annas
- Rufous
- Allens
- Costas
- Ruby-Throated

In Madera County, Annas and Rufous are the two types most regularly seen. Unlike the chit-chit sound of other hummers, Annas can sing.

Allens is a type nearly indistinguishable from Rufous but is more frequently spotted near the coast.

Annas and Allens are believed to be permanent residents of North America. Rufous is credited with having the longest migratory path.

During the spring in south Madera county, I watched a female Rufus in front of my kitchen window. Just below my window is an ivy bed covered with a thick mat of spider webbing. I watched and was surprised to see the bird dive bombing the webbing. My first thought was that she was after bugs. She dove a second time. This time I saw the bird pulling at the webbing with her beak. Since Rufus use spider silk to build nests, I suspected, and later discovered, this one was engineering a nest.

A hummingbird's nest is the size of a large thimble. This Rufus built her nest in a heavily canopied garden variety walnut tree. The eggs, typically two, are the size of peas. Incubation varies from 14 to 31 days.

Several weeks later I was delighted to see two fledgling Rufous drinking at my feeder. The tiny beige birds drank morning and evening for two days and then, along with their mother, disappeared.

What happened to them? Do I dare assume they joined others on their migratory route from Mexico to Canada? Perhaps they will return in the fall on their route back to Mexico. I have no choice, but to wait and see.

If you would like to entice hummingbirds to visit your home, plant your garden with plants attractive to hummingbirds.

If artificial feeders are used, it is essential that they be kept clean with frequent sugar-water changes, especially during hot days. This is to insure that harmful bacteria, which can grow in the sugar water, is not introduced to the birds.

Native birds, as well as bees, and butterflies are partial to native plants. Native plants offer the most desirable food for them. Some of the species recommended by the University of California, Davis, to attract hummingbirds are:

Autumn Sage or *Salvia greggii*, a small shrub with showy flowers from pink to white, red or orange.

California fuchsia or *Epilobium canum*, is a low growing form with trumpet shaped orange flowers and unlike other fuchsia species this one is well adapted to our climate. Vine hill, or manzanita is a medium sized shrub with white to pink flowers in winter and spring. Prefers well drained soil and infrequent irrigation.

Two more good choices described in *Sunset New Western Garden* book is the common Trumpet Vine or *Campsis*, a vigorous climber that clings to wood, brick, and stucco surfaces with aerial rootlets. *Radicans* is the common Trumpet creeper and *Taglabuana* is a hybrid between two species.

Lastly, Coral Bells, also known as Alum root or *Heuchera*. These are pretty evergreen clumps of round leaves with scalloped edges. This delicate plant needs some shade with plenty of moisture. The *micranth* genus is native to the west and adapts easily to garden conditions. The *maxima* blooms much earlier than the *micranth*. Hundreds of small white or pink flowers in each cluster. A good choice for a water or rock garden and another good choice for Hummingbirds.

Water fountains are also attractive to hummingbirds.

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