

**DID YOU KNOW?**

## Ruby-Throated Hummingbird

Generally, hummingbirds need to feed every few minutes to produce the energy required for their buzzing wings. However, evidence suggests that at least some ruby-throated hummingbirds (*Archilochus colubris*) have figured out how to sustain themselves for a monumental migratory flight across the Gulf of Mexico, a journey lasting approximately 18 to 20 hours and spanning 800 kilometers/500 miles or more.

Several hummingbird species winter in Central America, migrate north to breed in the United States and Canada during the warmer months, then return south as temperatures drop in the fall. Many fly through Mexico, staying overland, but the journey is long, and food, fresh water, and shelter can be scarce along this route. So, some hummingbirds cut the distance and instead travel overwater between the Yucatan Peninsula in Mexico and the Gulf Coast of the United States.

To execute this seemingly impossible migration, they double their body mass before the trip by feasting on insects and nectar. Some luck out en route and catch a break on offshore oil rigs, but for most, it's a nonstop flight.

Hummingbird banding programs, such as the one held at the Potlatch Cook's Lake Nature Center in Casscoe, Arkansas, USA, allow scientists to track the lives, habitat ranges, and migration patterns of individual birds. A hummingbird band generally measures less than 1.5 millimeters/0.06 inches in diameter and can be stored on a safety pin. Each band only has room for one letter and five numbers, and 5,500 can be mailed with a single U.S. first-class stamp.

— Danielle Phillippi

Photos courtesy of the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission

