

## Pollinator Spotlight: Birds

Birds are very important pollinators of wildflowers throughout the world. In the continental United States, hummingbirds are key in wildflower pollination. In other areas, honeycreepers (Hawaii) and honeyeaters (Australia) are important pollinators. In addition, brush-tongued parrots (New Guinea) and sunbirds (Old World tropics) serve as tropical pollen vectors.

There are 2,000 bird species globally that feed on nectar, the insects, and the spiders associated with nectar bearing flowers.

The flowers that are visited by birds and hummingbirds are typically:

- Tubular and have petals that are recurved to be out of the way
- Have tubes, funnels, cups
- Strong supports for perching
- Brightly colored: red, yellow, or orange
- Odorless (birds have a poor sense of smell)
- Open during the day
- Prolific nectar producers with nectar deeply hidden
- Modest pollen producers that are designed to dust the bird's head/back with pollen as the bird forages for nectar

Hummingbirds have very good eyes and are extremely attracted to red. They thrust their long slender bills deep into the flowers for nectar, withdrawing faces dusted in pollen.

Although a hummingbird weighs between two and eight grams (a penny weighs 2.5 grams), they eat frequently in order to power hearts that pump **1,200 times per minute** and wings that beat seventy times each second. To survive, they must eat several times their weight in nectar every day! For protein, they supplement their sugary diet with small insects.

In the eastern United States, there is only one kind of hummingbird, the ruby-throated hummingbird. In the southwestern states, birdwatchers can find a dozen species of hummingbirds.



[Ruby throated hummingbird](#) feeding in a trumpet creeper ([Campsis radicans](#)).  
Photo by T.G. Barnes, University of Kentucky.



Ruby-throated hummingbird. Photo by Dr. David W. Inouye.