

A photograph of a hummingbird in flight, hovering over a cluster of bright orange, trumpet-shaped flowers. The bird is positioned in the center-left of the frame, with its wings spread wide, showing intricate feather patterns. The background is a soft, out-of-focus blue and white, suggesting a sky or a distant landscape. The overall composition is clean and naturalistic.

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Found mainly east of the Great Plains, and the East Coast's most common hummingbird, the Ruby-throated Hummingbird (*Archilochus colubris*) can be seen in the summer months in such habitats as woodland edges and gardens, as well as visiting hummingbird feeders, hanging plants, and feeders on porches. The Eastern United States' only breeding hummingbird, this species is known for its vast, non-stop track across the Gulf of Mexico to reach Central America, a trip it makes in the early fall each year.

This hummingbird measures in length from seven to nine cm (2.8 to 3.5 in) long and has wingspan of eight to 11 cm (3.1 to 4.3 cm). The females average slightly larger than the males, with adult males showcasing an emerald green back, near-black wings, a greyish-white belly, and of course an iridescent red throat (also known as a gorget). The male's tail is forked with no white. The females also sport an emerald green back, mostly white breast and throat, and rounded tail with white tips. The female's bill is longer than the male's.

Ruby-throats are known to be inquisitive and so can be seen swooping down to investigate backyard feeders, planters, and other potential sources of food, such as red objects which they find attractive (like the red and orange flowers they prefer to feed on and which they can see due to their good color vision). They also feed on small flying insects and spiders. Male red-throats are aggressively territorial and can often be seen guarding their territory by perching nearby or chasing intruders.

This bird has extremely short legs which prevent it from walking or hopping—in fact, its taxonomic order, Apodiformes, means “without feet”—which is how the bird often looks! ¹

At Brookhaven National Laboratory, this species is routinely documented along the western edge of the northern solar array of the Long Island Solar Farm. It is known to nest in the area and makes its nest using a variety of materials including thistle or dandelion seeds held together with spider silk; it hides its nest using hidden pieces of lichens and/or moss. The female lays one to three eggs and incubates them for about two weeks. Nestlings fledge in about three weeks after hatching. The adults may produce one or two broods each summer. ¹

¹ The Cornell Lab of Ornithology



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