

MOTHER HUMMINGBIRD FEEDING YOUNG

by Lanny and Marilyn Johnson

“Dad, look!” young Billy exclaimed, “A tiny bird is poking a flower with its beak!”

Looking out the window, Mr. Jones responded, “That’s a hummingbird.”

“Is it eating the flower?” Billy questioned.

“No, it is feeding on the flower’s nectar, which is a sweet liquid many plants make. The hummingbird’s body uses this liquid, which is like sugar (sucrose), to make energy. Hummingbirds mostly like red, pink, yellow, and orange flowers that have high amounts of sugar.”

“So, are they using their beaks like a straw to suck up the sugar?”

“No Billy. God designed hummingbirds with long slender beaks and tongues. When they stick them into the flower, special grooves on the tongue traps the nectar and pumps it into their beak. What a lot of people don’t know, however, is that hummingbirds can open their beaks and catch small insects. They can sometimes survive for weeks without nectar, by eating a lot of insects.”¹

Billy’s sister Mary asked, “How do baby hummingbirds eat them?”

“That’s a good question,” Mr. Jones answered. “First let’s look at newly hatched

babies (also called hatchlings, nestlings, or chicks). I think the bird we are looking at is probably a ruby-throated hummingbird. When its babies are born, they are very tiny - about the size of a jellybean. If you take a U.S. dime and cut it into 3 equal parts, the baby will only weigh as much as one part of that dime (0.022 ounces, or 0.62 grams).²

“When the chicks are born, they are helpless and unable to feed themselves, so they depend on their mother’s care to survive. They are born with their eyes closed and don’t open them for 7 days. Their first feathers (pinfeathers) begin to show when the hatchlings are 7 to 8 days old. Yet it will be 2 weeks before they can flap their wings. Even though they begin life weak and uncoordinated, when they hear their mother’s call or the wind from her wings, they can still lift their heads and open their mouths to be fed.”³

“So, if the babies can’t feed themselves, how does the momma feed them?” Mary asked.

“Adult hummingbirds use a lot of energy as they fly around, so they feed often to renew that energy. They will eat half their weight in food daily. Once the babies hatch, the mother gets to work, since the father hummingbird doesn’t help in their care. Just to keep her own energy up, she will eat nectar from about 1,000 flowers each day. The chicks need food that is higher in protein and lower in sugar, so the mother will catch soft-bodied bugs high in protein such as mosquitoes, spiders, gnats, caterpillars, small bees, fruit flies, and insect eggs. The food goes into her stomach

where it is partly digested. Back at the nest, the mother will stick her beak down the throat of the baby’s open mouth and regurgitate the partly digested bugs and nectar.”^{4,5,6}

“Wait a minute, Dad,” Billy interrupted.

“What’s gig-a-tate mean?”

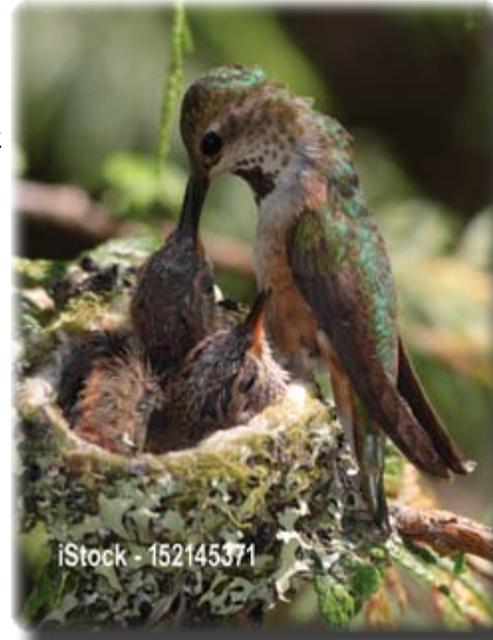
“The word is re-gur-gi-tate. It means to throw up, or as you like to say, puke.”

“Yuck! I sure am glad Mommy doesn’t feed us that way!”

“You and me both, Billy,” Mr. Jones chuckled.

“Most birds feed their young this way. The mother hummingbird will feed her babies 2 to 3 times every hour during daylight hours for 3 or 4 weeks. After about 2 weeks, she will bring whole insects back to the nests for the babies to eat by themselves. After they learn to fly and leave the nest, the mother continues to feed her young for a week or two.”⁷

“The hummingbird is truly a wonder of God’s creativity. It is amazing to see the instinct, knowledge, and dedication He created in both the mother and baby hummingbirds.”



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References

For more information on hummingbirds go to: <https://www.discovercreation.org/ktb-sept-oct-2022/> or <https://creation.com/hummingbird-superhero>

¹ <https://www.wildbirdscoop.com/what-do-hummingbirds-eat.htm>

² <https://birdfact.com/articles/baby-hummingbirds>

³ Ibid

⁴ <https://www.forestwildlife.org/hummingbird/>

⁵ <https://birdfact.com/articles/baby-hummingbirds>

⁶ <https://www.forestwildlife.org/how-do-hummingbirds-feed-their-young/>

⁷ Ibid

Photo: iStock order number 2099204247

The hummingbird is truly a wonder of God's creativity. Can you find the 14 different hummingbirds (not to scale) hidden below, not counting the babies in the 2 nests.



FOR ANSWERS, GO TO:
www.discovercreation.org/kids/newsletteranswers.htm

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WORD SEARCH
 Look for words used in "MOTHER HUMMINGBIRD FEEDING YOUNG" in the puzzle below from the WORD LIST below. The hidden word might be up, down, sideways, or slanted, but not backwards.

T	D	M	V	F	T	Q	V	D	H	S
X	O	N	E	S	T	L	I	N	G	N
P	I	N	F	E	A	T	H	E	R	S
H	W	W	G	I	S	P	M	J	G	U
U	B	J	F	U	K	L	W	P	A	R
M	L	Q	U	C	E	G	A	L	V	E
M	L	P	I	F	L	O	W	E	R	G
I	I	H	N	K	T	D	Y	G	N	U
N	C	V	T	T	W	H	Q	N	F	R
G	O	H	A	T	C	H	L	I	N	G
B	J	B	A	B	I	E	S	S	E	I
I	E	Q	M	G	E	X	U	F	E	T
R	K	A	N	A	M	F	G	E	U	A
D	X	C	K	X	N	H	A	E	N	T
N	E	C	T	A	R	L	R	D	N	E

WORD LIST
 BABIES - BEAK - CHICK - FEED - FLOWER
 HATCHLING - HUMMINGBIRD - NECTAR -
 NESTLING - PINFEATHERS - REGURGITATE
 SUGAR - TONGUE

Puzzles by Lanny Johnson
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