Howdy, friends of TWA!

I’m currently on a trip visiting my grandma, Nana Nineband, at her home in Kingsville, Texas. Best known for the King Ranch, this historical town is located along the Gulf Coast just south of Corpus Christi. Nana and I both enjoy watching and identifying the many different plant and animal species which live within the diverse range of habitats along the coastal plains. Thanks to its location near the Gulf of Mexico, Kingsville’s climate is mild, which means that the summer and winter weather is not usually too extreme. As a result, many types of birds call Kingsville home. It is also a favorite “pit stop” for some traveling along their winter migration routes.

Though I am able to spot many types of native and migrating birds along the highways and in the countryside of South Texas, Nana Nineband’s back patio is my favorite place for bird watching. On a fair and breezy November day, Nana and I grabbed our birding journals and binoculars and watched to see which birds were at her many feeders and potted flowers. We noted various shorebirds, songbirds and even a few hawks. After the sun passed us overhead and started to settle to our west, we decided to make some delicious termite tea and talk about the birds we saw. I was just about to take a sip of tea when I heard what sounded like buzzing. As I started swatting the empty air around me, I yelled “Wasps, hornets and bees, oh my!”

“Golly gosh, Nancy, what on Earth are you doing?” asked my very startled Nana.

I replied, “Can you hear that noise? It sounds like there is a giant bee nearby!”

Nana laughed and said, “Well, I’ll be a monkey’s uncle! Silly little Grand-dillo, that’s not a bee. That little fellow is a hummingbird. See it there, by my bright red bird feeder?”

I watched as this petite green bird fluttered and darted to and from the feeder faster than my eyes could keep up.

“Wow!” I exclaimed. “That is the tiniest bird I have ever seen! Her wings are moving so quickly that I can hardly see them, and yet her head and body appear to be perfectly straight and still. Look at the way she’s flying up, down and sideways like she can’t make up her mind! What do you have in that feeder, Nana? Is it one of those 24-hour energy drinks that I see on television?”

With a warm chuckle Nana answered, “Well, sort of. These little flying critters snack on bugs, but their main energy source comes from the sweet nectar of flowers. I made some “nectar” out of sugar and water to put in my feeders to draw them near. They need lots of energy to fly so fast and move the way they do. The buzzing that you heard is the sound of their wings flappin’ and beatin’ the air so quickly. That’s why they’re called Hummers.”

“What an amazing creature,” I told Nana. “I’ve never seen a hummingbird in the wild. It seems that I see them only at feeders.”

Nana explained, “Hummingbirds are a favorite among bird-watchers and they go hog wild over flower nectar and sugar water in feeders. Although Texas hummingbirds live all over the state much of the year, most of them migrate to my neck of the woods during the winter. I am lucky to live in such an area that allows me to enjoy these little jewels.”

Whew, Texas has so many great treasures, even in our own backyards! I am excited to learn more about hummingbirds and what makes them such a unique and popular bird.

Until next time,

Nancy Nine-band
Texas Wildlife Association (TWA) and Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) have joined forces to offer youth hunts that are safe, educational and very affordable. We sponsor introductory, instructive youth hunts for deer, turkey, hogs, javelina, exotics, dove, small game, waterfowl, varmints and other species. Normally, we provide mentors, lodging and meals.

**Our Goals**

☆ To preserve the hunting heritage in Texas for present and future generations.
☆ To instill in youth a basic understanding of practical conservation measures.
☆ To encourage wildlife habitat access, enhancement and management.
☆ To teach the basic skills, values, techniques and responsibilities of hunting.
☆ To promote the highest ethical standards in hunting.
☆ To give our youth an initial, positive, safe, educational, mentored hunting experience.

**Our Mission**
The Texas Youth Hunting Program was established to increase the number of youth participating in wildlife and hunting activities and to promote the hunting heritage in Texas.

To participate in the Texas Youth Hunting Program, you must ...

☆ Be 9 to 17 years old.
☆ Complete and submit the Texas Youth Hunting Program Application at [www.texasyouthhunting.com](http://www.texasyouthhunting.com)

To hunt with TYHP, youth must ...

☆ Complete the Hunter Education Program for Texas or another state and be able to provide a copy of your certificate, card or student registration form that shows your test score, etc. You must have Hunter Education to hunt with TYHP, regardless of age. Call Texas Parks and Wildlife Department at (800) 792-1112 for more information and a schedule of upcoming Hunter Education Courses in your area.
☆ Have a valid Texas hunting license and appropriate tags or stamps when required.
☆ Be accompanied by a parent or guardian.
☆ Complete a TYHP Hunting Application that lists your choice of hunts by priority. Select hunts by Hunt Number from Hunt Schedules available through the website.
☆ Complete the TYHP forms located in the Youth Hunter Documents section of the website. Completed documents must be brought to your hunt!
☆ Submit your Hunt Fee, as instructed, to secure your position when you are selected for a youth hunt.
How To Make a Homemade Hummingbird Feeder
photos by Carolyn Bierschwale

1. First, gather the following materials:
   a. Large water or sports drink bottle (remove label)
   b. Red, square, shallow disposable food container
   c. String or thin rope
   d. Decorations for flowers (markers, stickers, etc)
   e. Cutting utensil for making holes (scissors, hole-puncher, or knife)
   f. Adult to help with cutting
   g. Sugar-water (1 part sugar/4 parts water, non-dyed)

2. Second, remove the lids from the bottle and container. Trace the outline of the bottle’s mouth onto the center of the container’s lid and cut out the circle. Try to slide the bottle’s neck back through the hole (you may need to make the hole slightly bigger) and make sure you’re able to screw the bottle cap back on, with the container lid stuck between the two.

3. Third, with the help of an adult, cut a hole in the center of the bottle cap. This hole will need to be big enough to allow the hummingbird food to fill the container without overflowing (the food should only fill to the level of the bottle’s lid).

4. Fourth, cut four small holes near the corners of the container lid. These will be from where the hummingbirds will drink.

5. Fifth, decorate the bottle and container with bright colors and flowers.

6. Sixth, fill the upright bottle with the sugar-water, place the container lid over the bottle neck, screw the bottle cap on, and attach the container to its lid.

7. Last, carefully flip the feeder over and watch the sugar-water fill the container. The feeder can be either placed on a flat surface or hanged. To hang, tie a right loop of string around the bottle (this works nicely if the bottle has grooves). Then, tie another long piece of string to two opposite sides of the loop to make the hanging string.
By Carolyn Bierschwale

Hummingbirds are one of the most popular bird watching subjects which occur only in the Americas, and there are about 340 species of this spectacular little bird. Thousands of decorative hummingbird pieces, such as stained glass ornaments, blankest, wall art, jewelry, music boxes, vases and figurines, make popular gifts because of their elegance and dazzling colors. Named for the “hum” sound made by their rapid wing beats, hummingbirds belong to the bird family Trochilidae, the group of tiny American birds having brilliant iridescent plumage (feathers), long slender bills and wings that are specialized for vibrating flight.

Like all birds, hummingbirds are some of the most accomplished of all flying animals. They are endothermic (warm-blooded) and reproduce by laying eggs. Most survive three to five years in the wild, are highly attracted to brightly colored flowers (especially nectar from deep inside tube-shaped flowers). Amazingly, the shape of each species bill often matches the shape of the flower from which it is feeding. Though the insects supply much of the protein required for growth and development, the nectar provides the added energy needed to match the hummingbird’s high metabolism (breakdown of food to make energy) for flight. In contrast, hummingbirds can adapt to food shortages and cool nights by temporarily lowering their respiration rate and body temperature to conserve energy, a process known as torpor.

Fluttering Flight

When it comes to speed, agility and maneuvering, hummingbirds are the champions of flight. They bear their wings in a figure-eight pattern and can fly upward, downward, sideways, backward and even upside down! This is due mainly to their “elbows” being located so close to their bodies. Additionally, while feeding, a hummingbird will hover at the flower or feeder by beating its wings so rapidly that they are often seen at backyard feeders made of sugar-water and can be heard making a sharp ‘chip’ or ‘tew’ call. In Texas, there are at least 17 different species of hummingbirds and most are found in the western and southern parts of the state, and along the Gulf Coast during the winter months. The most commonly seen species in Texas include the Ruby-throated, Black-chinned, Rufous, Duff-bellied and Broad-tailed Hummingbirds.

Physical Characteristics--Jewels of the Air

The family of hummingbirds includes some of the world’s smallest birds, with compact and muscular bodies, relatively small feet and narrow wings. Texas species range in length from 3-4½ inches, but the tail often makes up as much as half of the body length. Wingspan contributes to a width ranging from 4½ - 5½ inches. While females tend to be drab or buff-colored, the male hummingbirds are usually more colorful of the two, often displaying an iridescent gorget or throat patch. This feature can be helpful when identifying and comparing the species. For example, the Ruby-throated and Broad-tailed Hummingbirds have a rosy red gorget, the Black-chinned has a black throat with a violet band, and the Rufous has an orange-red gorget. Unlike these hummers, the male and female Duff-bellied Hummingbirds look very similar.

Diet--Packed with Power

Hummingbirds feed mainly on insects, small spiders and nectar (a sweet, energy rich liquid produced by flowers), and will often eat their weight in food in a single day. Each has a long, slenderer and sometimes curved bill and tubular tongue designed for removing the nectar from deep inside tube-shaped flowers. Amazingly, the shape of each species bill often matches the shape of the flower from which it is feeding. Though the insects supply much of the protein required for growth and development, the nectar provides the added energy needed to match the hummingbird’s high metabolism (breakdown of food to make energy) for flight. In contrast, hummingbirds can adapt to food shortages and cool nights by temporarily lowering their respiration rate and body temperature to conserve energy, a process known as torpor.

Behavior and Reproduction--

Wee Warriors and Petite Parents

Hummingbirds are often solitary, except during the summer breeding season and will often defend their territory aggressively against each other or larger birds. For example, the delicate Rufous Hummingbird’s beauty hides a fearless mean streak, as the males will exhibit remarkable nerve and aggression at their territory or near concentrated food sources. Ruby-throated Hummingbirds will also vigorously defend a feeder or flowers from birds, insects and butterflies. When time to breed, female hummers are courted by males flying in a u-shaped pattern before them. Though the Rufous Hummingbird does not nest in Texas, most hummingbirds’ nesting habits are similar. The female will build a small cup-like nest made of leaves, lichens and spider web silk on a horizontal tree branch, rocks or palm frond. She then lays two tiny white eggs and incubates them for 13-16 days.

General Distribution-- Do You Notice a Pattern?

The Ruby-throated Hummingbird is a common summer resident in eastern Texas to south along the central Coastal Plain and will spend the winter along the coast.

The Duff-bellied Hummingbird is a common resident around the Lower Rio Grande Valley and will travel up the Coastal Plain to Galveston Bay during the winter.

The Black-chinned Hummingbird commonly spends the summer in the Trans-Pecos, Edwards Plateau and northern South Texas areas and will reside along the coast during the winter.

The Broad-tailed Hummingbird is an uncommon summer resident in most of the Trans-Pecos Mountains and rare visitor to the Lower Rio Grande Valley and up the Coastal Plain.

The Rufous Hummingbird is a common migrant in the western third of Texas and rare in the rest of the state. It is a locally u n c o m m o n winter visitor on the Coastal Plain and Lower Rio Grande Valley.

Sources:
Did you know...

...that hummingbirds are the only birds that can fly backwards?
...that to accomplish the incredible feat of a 500-mile nonstop journey across the Gulf of Mexico, the Ruby-throated hummingbird will double its body mass by fattening up on insects and nectar?
...that some species can beat their wings up to 80 times per second?
...that weighing about as much as a nickel, hummingbirds can fly at short bursts of speed reaching up to 62 miles per hour?
...that their hearts can beat up to 1200 times per minute? That's equal to 20 times per second!

Did you know...

Female Rufous Hummingbird by Mikul, Wikimedia

Did you know...

Ruby-Throated Hummingbird
Archilochus colubris

Female has white edges on

Black eye surrounded by dark feathers
Greenish brown feathers
Red feathers (only on male)
White feathers
Long brown bill

Male Ruby-throated Hummingbird by Jeffrey W., Wikimedia

Color Me

Ruby-Throated Hummingbird
Archilochus colubris

Black eye surrounded by dark feathers
Greenish brown feathers
Red feathers (only on male)
White feathers
Long brown bill
Female has white edges on

Did you know...

Berylline Hummingbird shaking out his feathers, Photo courtesy of Suzy Beck

Did you know...

Luciler Hummingbird nest and egg, photo courtesy of Carolyn Ohl

Did you know...

Solitaire Hummingbird nest and egg, photo courtesy of Carolyn Ohl

Did you know...

Green-crowned Brilliant Hummingbird by Jeffrey W., Wikimedia

Male Green-crowned Brilliant Hummingbird by Jeffrey W., Wikimedia
There are many kinds of cactus. Some are tall like the saguaros found in the Sonoran Desert and some are tiny like pencil cactus. But when someone mentions cactus, the vision of the prickly pear pops into the mind next. Did you know that prickly pear can be found in many countries around the world? It can! However, it is native only to the western hemisphere, growing in South America, North America and even Canada. Other countries acquired prickly pear cactus through importation where it is used in landscaping and for food. The prickly pear cactus has proven to be very adaptable.

A Variety to Choose From
Prickly pear is found in the genus Opuntia. There are more than 40 species of Opuntia in Texas, all of which were adopted as the state plant in 1995 by the Texas Legislature. Some of these species have more than one variety. What’s a variety? Well, a variety is a plant that shows most of the same characteristics as the rest of the species, but has a few characteristics that set it apart from what is considered normal. There aren’t enough of these characteristics, though, to make a new species. Most of the prickly pear species have flattened pads, instead of having a trunk like a tree or bush. These pads, also called joints, can be almost any color of green. The joints of some species turn lavender to reddish-purple during dry or cold seasons. Some joints have no spines and some have spines that can be as long as your finger (up to 3 inches). Both usually have smaller spines called glochids. The longer spines can penetrate clothes and can hook into your skin. These are easy to get out, though, compared to the glochids, which are small, barbed, and tend to break off in your skin. Itchy and painful! The glochids form a circle around the longer spine and can be found on the edge and spaced out on the flattened sides of the joint. The spines can be white, yellow, brown, red, black or any shade in between. On younger joints, a leaf can sometimes be seen under the ring of glochids. It doesn’t look like a regular leaf, but instead is cylinder-shaped and pointed. These leaves are short-lived and eventually fall to the ground.

All the Pretty Colors
The majority of prickly pears bloom from April to June. Different species have different colors of flowers, such as white, red, yellow, orange and many shades of pink. Some species can have two entirely different colors of flowers, such as Texas Prickly Pear, where one plant can have yellow flowers and another plant can have orange. Some plants may have yellow flowers with red throats, while others have a single color that changes over time. For instance, Border Prickly Pear’s flowers are yellow when they first open, but by the next day they turn apricot. The fruit, or tuna, is green and can turn to purple or red as it matures. As the seeds mature, some species’ fruit remain juicy, while other species’ fruit dry up and turn tan. The seeds find their way to the ground and grow into new plants. But, did you know that if a joint gets knocked off of a plant that instead of dying, it will grow roots and eventually will grow more joints. Just imagine how fast these plants would multiply if someone thought all they had to do was cut the plant at the base. Every pad they left on the ground would have the potential to grow. Yikes, that could be a lot of cactus.

Cactus Jelly, Anyone?
Did you know you can eat prickly pear? You can! They can be picked from a field or bought from your local grocery store. The tuna of some prickly pear cactus can be eaten raw or cooked. They are very seedy, so some prefer to only use the juice. Many cooks use the tuna, also called nopalitos, in salad dressings, jams, jellies, candies and to flavor drinks. The joints, or nopales, can be eaten in salads, soups or even grilled. Not only do humans eat prickly pear, many animals eat it, too. It is an invaluable source of water for wildlife, especially during droughts. Ranchers can burn the spines off for livestock to eat. Coyotes, deer, and other wildlife eat the tunas as well as the joints. Prickly Pear also provides cover for birds and small rodents. Woodrats have been known to build their nests at the base of prickly pears, chew the spines off of a few pads and use them to adorn the entrances to their homes. Nothing says “Leave my home alone!” like prickly pear spines. With its adaptability to all climates, being a source of water and food during drought conditions for livestock and wildlife, its potential to provide protection for animals and being a food source for humans as well, it is no wonder that the prickly pear is our state plant.
Cozy up to all kinds of critters at the San Antonio Stock Show & Rodeo. Find out what makes them special – and such an important part of our lives. Bring your family and have a great time with:

- Petting Zoos
- Pig Races
- Interactive Educational Exhibits
- Junior Livestock & Horse Shows
- High Flying Rodeo Action
- All New Wildlife Area

Plus, don’t forget to sign up for the Rodeo Wrangler Kid’s Club in the Family Fair Area.

“A VOLUNTEER ORGANIZATION THAT EMPHASIZES AGRICULTURE AND EDUCATION TO DEVELOP THE YOUTH OF TEXAS.”

LET’S RODEO SAN ANTONIO
FEBRUARY 2012
SARODEO.COM