

VARIOUS

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Содержание

TO A HUMMINGBIRD	5
THE ANNA'S HUMMINGBIRD	6
LONGING	9
EXPERIENCES WITH "HUMMERS."	10
MY HUMMINGBIRD	12
THE RUFOUS HUMMINGBIRD	13
WHAT A LITTLE MOUSE SAID	14
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	16

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TO A HUMMINGBIRD

Voyager on golden air,
Type of all that's fleet and fair,
Incarnate gem,
Live diadem
Bird-beam of the summer day, —
Whither on your sunny way?

Loveliest of all lovely things,
Roses open to your wings;
Each gentle breast
Would give you rest;
Stay, forget lost Paradise,
Star-bird fallen from happy skies.

Vanished! Earth is not his home;
Onward, onward must he roam
Swift passion-thought,
In rapture wrought,
Issue of the soul's desire,
Plumed with beauty and with fire.

— *John Vance Cheney.*

THE ANNA'S HUMMINGBIRD (*Calypte anna.*)

Buffon, writing of the Hummingbird, and his words do not refer to any single species, but to them as a group, says that “the emerald, the ruby and the topaz glitter in its garb, which is never soiled with the dust of earth, for, leading an aerial life, it rarely touches the turf, even for an instant. Always in the air, flying from flower to flower, it shares their freshness and their splendor, lives on their nectar, and only inhabits those climates in which they are unceasingly renewed.”

Of all the birds that might receive the appellation, “The Bird of America,” to none could it be applied more truthfully than to the Hummingbird. For of all the families of birds that are distinctively peculiar to the Americas the Trochilidæ, or the Hummingbird family, contains the larger number of species. There are over five hundred species inhabiting North and South America and the adjacent islands, from Patagonia on the South to Alaska on the North. The species is more numerous in the tropics and but seventeen are known to frequent the United States. Of these only one, the ruby-throated hummingbird, exhibits its beauty east of the Mississippi River, and but seven species have their breeding range chiefly or entirely within the United States.

“They abound most in mountainous countries, where the configuration of the surface and productions of the soil are most diversified within small areas. Their center of abundance is among the Northern Andes, between the parallels of ten degrees north and south of the equator, from which region they gradually diminish in numbers both to the northward and southward, but much more rapidly toward the extensive lowlands of the eastern portion of the continent.”

A very interesting group, not so gem-like as many of their sister species, is the hermit hummers represented by a number of species that chiefly inhabit Brazil. These hummingbirds are notable for their plain colors, their plumage having but little of the lustrous metallic iridescence which is so marked a characteristic of the species with which we are more familiar and which frequent flowers in the bright sunshine. The laws of Nature seem to provide against excess even in coloration. The hermit hummers obtain their food only from the insect world, feeding upon those species found on the leaves of trees in deep forests. In such a home a gorgeous dress would be out of place and needless.

Regarding their actions, Mr. Robert Ridgway says: “Hummingbirds are so distinct from other birds in their external structures and manner of flight that they present in every respect, except when at rest, an appearance entirely peculiar to themselves. They spend perhaps the greater part of their time upon the wing, usually hovering or balancing themselves before a flower from which they are procuring their sustenance of honey or of minute insects. At such time the body is nearly vertical or inclined at a slight angle, the head bent nearly at right angles with the axis of the body, the wings spread nearly at right angles with the same axis.” The motion of the wings, which is always rapid, may carry the bird in a horizontal direction or poise it in its vertical attitude directly over a flower. In this latter position the motion of the wings is so rapid that a mere haze appears on each side of the bird's body. Mr. Gould, speaking of their flight, says “The bird does not usually glide through the air with the quick, darting flight of a swallow or swift, but continues tremulously moving its wings while passing from flower to flower, or when taking a more distant flight over a high tree or across a river.”

Such a dainty dress as that worn by most of the hummingbirds deserves constant attention. Appreciating this these little lovers of sunshine are very fond of preening their beautiful feathers. While thus engaged they usually perch on a bare or dead twig in an exposed position. Truly fortunate is he who is afforded the opportunity of watching a hummingbird at this time. In this position various and graceful attitudes are assumed and the colors of the plumage are most beautifully exhibited. Mr. Audubon tells us that when perching the hummingbirds “move sidewise in prettily measured steps,

frequently opening and closing their wings, pluming, stroking and arranging the whole of their apparel with neatness and activity.”

Hummingbirds are very aggressive and show no fear, especially when defending their nests. They will furiously attack any bird or other animal that excites their enmity. They have been known to follow and annoy hawks and other birds much larger than themselves.

Mr. Ridgway says: “In their disposition hummingbirds are not only very tame but highly curious or inquisitive, and exhibit a special propensity to closely inspect a human intruder to their domain.” This characteristic may be frequently noticed in the actions of our common ruby-throat. In spite of the fact that the hummingbirds are easily tamed and may even be induced to take food from the hand or from a flower so held as to attract their attention, they do not survive confinement for any length of time.

Although the nectar of flowers forms a large part of their food, it has been shown that insects also form no inconsiderable portion.

The high degree of intelligence possessed by the hummingbirds is shown in the construction of their nests. Some of the species make the nests “of such form or material as will serve to imitate natural excrescences of a branch, such as a knot or a pine cone.” Other species make a hammock-like nest that they suspend from cliffs by attaching spiders’ webs. Mr. Thomas M. Brewer writes: “Indeed, it is probable that there is no other family whose architectural achievements are more varied than those of the hummingbirds. These variations include not only the material of which the nests are made and the positions in which they are placed; but also the general style of their construction, exhibiting constant differences, in the several species, in the ingenuity and beauty displayed in each design.” Even individual species will change the usual plan of their nests in order to adapt them to the requirements of their environment. In favorable localities a new nest will be built each season on top of the old one of the year before. “The hermit hummingbirds fasten their elongated nests to one side of the extremity of long-pointed leaves for protection, it is supposed, against monkeys and other predaceous animals.”

The eggs of the hummingbirds, invariably two in number, are white and free from spots. Though very small they are large when compared with the size of the bird that laid them. It is claimed by most authorities that under favorable conditions two broods are raised each season.

The Anna’s Hummingbird of our illustration is one of the most striking of those best known. It is perhaps the most beautiful of the species that frequent the United States. It is a native of California and in its migrations passes southward through Arizona to the table-lands of Mexico. It is also found in Lower California.

The head and ruff of the male have a lustrous metallic purplish red color. The female is bronze green above, though the top of the head is sometimes brownish, showing but little if any metallic luster. Both sexes vary somewhat in color. This is especially true of the males, some individuals having more purplish red on the crown and throat than others.

This species inhabits a metal producing region and it is an interesting fact, as cited by Mr. Gould in his “Monograph of the Hummingbirds,” that “those districts or countries having a metalliferous character are tenanted by species of hummingbirds which are more than ordinarily brilliant and glittering.”

Major Charles Bendire in his “Life Histories of North American Birds,” records an interesting observation of Mr. A. W. Anthony regarding the hatching of an Anna’s Hummingbird. These words probably well describe the process followed by all the species.

Writing in regard to a set of eggs which he had collected, he says: “I was somewhat disgusted to find one of the eggs pipped and, realizing the difficulty of making a presentable specimen of it, was on the point of throwing it away when a movement on the part of the tiny creature within the shell suggested to my mind that I hatch the egg and find out for myself how baby hummingbirds come into the world. So far there was but a pin point broken, the rest of the shell being intact; and it was several

minutes before the warmth of my hand, aided by my breath, produced another movement upon the part of the prospective hummer; first a feeble struggle, followed by an interval of rest; another squirm and the point of the bill came in view and was withdrawn; after a moment's rest a new system was adopted, which consisted of turning around in the shell from right to left and cutting a clean, smooth opening with the sharp, horny tip on the upper mandible; this operation was evidently hard work and required all the strength of the little mite, and frequent rests were necessary to recruit. Sometimes an interval of twisting seemed to accomplish nothing, and it would look as if all its struggles would be in vain. I wondered whether the parent would not render a little much-needed assistance at this stage; but after an interval of rest the work would be continued with renewed vigor and another millimetre cut toward the outer world. The cutting was all done in the same direction. When the shell had been cut four-fifths around, the chick succeeded in getting one claw hooked over the edge of the break, and by one or two vigorous pushes broke the remaining shell, leaving in my hand two nearly equal parts of what had been a hummingbird's egg and a squirming something that bore no semblance whatever to one of the peerless members of the genus *Calypte*." The entire operation, which added another individual to America's beautiful family of birds, required but fifteen minutes of time. The energy and perseverance of the little mass of flesh was a hint of that pugnacious disposition that would be so striking a characteristic when it became fully grown and clothed with its resplendent metallic plumage.

LONGING

O, for the woods and fields and streams,
For flowers wild and squirrels shy —
For birds whose sunlit plumage gleams,
For sight of clear, unhidden sky!

For grasses green, for springs and marsh,
For mountain paths and tramps o'er hills
Where nothing sinful – nothing harsh —
The sweetening song of Nature stills!

Lloyd Thompson.

EXPERIENCES WITH “HUMMERS.”

Did you ever hold a live hummingbird in your hand? Well, I have held several of the wee, wee creatures. Did you ever look into a hummingbird’s nest? Well, I have peeped into several of the tiny, downy affairs.

Two of the nests contained eggs; one contained young birds. The eggs were as small as an ordinary garden pea – perfectly egg-shaped. Can I describe the young of the hummingbird? No, impossible. I can only say that they are the smallest animal I ever saw in all my life. Of course, that does not include the insect world.

How did I contrive to get hold of a live hummingbird? Easy enough when you know how.

One hot afternoon in June I was sitting in a garden reading. A few yards away stood a large bunch of brilliant carnations. Now, if there is anything which a hummer fairly dotes on it is pinks. Suddenly I heard a loud hum near by. I looked toward the carnations, and, sure enough, there were too hummingbirds hovering around the flowers.

I watched their movements for several moments with great interest. Presently I observed that one of the birds appeared to be entangled. Its tongue, or long, needle-like beak, was caught in some manner in the petals of a large pink. The little fellow kept fluttering around in a helpless way, but could not liberate itself.

Instantly I dropped the book and ran over to the bed. The other hummingbird darted away like a shot. I very softly took the tiny prisoner in my hand and then gently liberated it. For half a minute or more I held the trembling, fluttering creature in my hand. I wish I could describe the beauty and brilliancy of its plumage. Silk, velvet and the delicate tints of the rainbow are the only adequate words. Finally I released the prisoner. In a flash he was out of sight.

One good fright was enough. Neither bird ever came back to the carnations again. At least, the pinks were not visited by any more hummingbirds that season.

Last summer I was out with a fishing party. We went far back into the mountains, where it was rugged, wild and lonely. One day I was out fishing along a rushing torrent. There was a deep, swirling eddy where I was angling, and just on the bank stood a small cedar tree. A long, slender limb hung only a few feet above my head.

While I was fishing a hummingbird came buzzing around my head. It kept circling around me for some time. Finally I stopped fishing. Instantly the bird alighted on a twig and eyed me closely with its bright bead-like eye. A moment later the little mate arrived.

“Surely there must be a nest near by,” I said to myself. Then I began fishing.

Both birds immediately came whirring about my ears like two hornets. They kept it up until I desisted. Then both alighted and watched me sharply. Again and again I tried to fish, but the little creatures would give me no peace.

Down I laid my rod and began to look carefully for a nest. Sure enough, there was one concealed amidst the cedar boughs. It was right above my head where I stood fishing. Very gently I pulled the pendent branch down until I could peep into the thimble of a nest, which contained beautiful eggs. Meantime the birds kept buzzing around my head in a most distracted manner.

Having satisfied my curiosity I quietly withdrew, to the evident delight of the little parents.

On another occasion I was out in an orchard. I noticed two hummingbirds flying around a certain apple tree limb. As I approached the birds became more excited. When within a few yards of the tree I noticed a young bird sitting on a nest. He was almost grown. Not wishing to frighten the little chap, I stopped abruptly. But he darted away. However, his wings were too weak, and down he sank fluttering, falling into a big tuft of tall grass.

He was perfectly helpless, so I very tenderly picked him up and placed him back on the nest. To my surprise and amusement he did not attempt to escape, but stood up boldly and looked at me

in a saucy, defiant way. The parent birds were buzzing around me like angry bees, but when they saw that I did not harm their offspring they both alighted near the nest.

A large clump of wild currants stood in one corner of the yard. I noticed two hummingbirds almost constantly hovering around the bush among the large yellow flowers.

I went out one afternoon and secreted myself in the clump, in order to observe more closely the actions and peculiarities of the birds. One was the largest hummingbird I had ever seen, and its plumage was simply gorgeous.

Soon the birds came around, but they did not seem in the least alarmed by my presence. The larger one came very near, and actually flew against my face. I held up my hand, when the bird flew straight into it. I instantly closed my fingers and held him a prisoner. His plumage was brilliant beyond description. As the beautiful captive did not seem to resent my familiarity, I examined his coat carefully before giving the bird its freedom.

I had still another experience with a hummer. On a bright summer day one flew through an open door into a room where I was sitting. Quick as a flash the bird discovered its mistake. It dashed against a window pane with all its might and dropped on the floor. I hastily picked it up. It seemed quite dead. But as I held it in my open hand, silently sympathizing over its fate, the bird suddenly revived and flitted out through the open door before I could wink.

J. Mayne Baltimore.

MY HUMMINGBIRD

No other fairy did I see
So graceful, pulsing, in the air,
As if the heart of nature beat
Its throbbings in the birdlet there.

The gray, the green, the dash of red,
The beating wings that gauzy seem —
So rapid the vibrating hum —
I almost dream were but a dream.

Then suddenly I cry aloud,
When in a rapid-shooting ray,
My fairy disappears, a-flash,
Into the sun-haunts far away.

Willis Edwin Hurd.

THE RUFOUS HUMMINGBIRD (*Selasphorus rufus*.)

This hardy little “Hummer,” which is even smaller than our well-known ruby-throated hummingbird, is weighted with a number of popular names. Among these are the “Rufous-backed Hummingbird,” the “Ruff-necked Honeysucker, or Hummingbird,” the “Rufous Flame-bearer” and the “Cinnamon Hummer.”

The Rufous is probably the most widely distributed of all the hummingbirds. Its range extends throughout Western North America. It breeds from the higher mountains of Southern California northward, near the coast to Nootka Sound, Alaska. In its migrations it flies eastward to Montana, Colorado and thence southward through New Mexico to Western Texas. In fact, during this period it frequents the eastern slopes of the Rocky Mountains, adding beauty to this wild region. Its winter home is chiefly in Mexico and Lower California.

This Hummingbird is exceedingly pugnacious and, as Mr. Henshaw says, “The fiery red throat of the Rufous-backed Hummer is an index of impetuous, aggressive disposition, and when brought into conflict with the other species it invariably asserts its supremacy and drives its rival in utter rout from the field. Nor do the males of this species confine their warfare to their own sex. Gallantry has no place apparently in their breasts, and when conquest has put them in possession of a perch near a clump of flowers they wage war on all comers, females as well as males.”

The Rufous Hummer is one of the earliest of the migratory birds to leave its winter home, and arrives within the borders of the United States early in March and is known to begin housekeeping as far North as the State of Oregon early in April. Altitude as well as climate seems to have much influence in the selection of a nesting sight. The altitude of the breeding range seems to lie between four and seven thousand feet above the sea level, and nests have been reported as high as ten thousand feet.

Mr. A. W. Anthony, writing of this species as he observed it in Oregon, says that “they nested to some extent in oaks, blackberry vines and on dry roots projecting from upturned trees. One nest hung from the end of a tall fern, while others, drooping over it from above, hid the beautiful structure from all but accidental discovery. Their favorite sites, however, seemed to be the long, trailing vines overhanging embankments and upturned trees. A number were found in railroad cuts. One nest was found that had been placed on top of a last year’s habitation, a mere rim being built to raise the sides, and a flooring being added to cover up a large pebble that could be plainly felt under the cotton lining.” This habit of adding stories to nests of the previous season is not infrequent with other species of the hummingbirds.

The nest of the Rufous Hummingbird resembles those of many other species of hummers, and it is very much like that of the Anna’s hummingbird. The framework is composed of delicate tree mosses and fine bark fiber, the outer face of which is sometimes adorned with lichens, though not so profusely as is that of the Anna’s, and fastened together with spider’s webs and the silky threads from cocoons. It is lined with the fine cotton down of plants, especially that of the willow, and the pappus of the Compositae. These nests seem large when compared with the size of the bird. The average nest measures about one and one-half inches in the outer diameter and one and one-fourth inches in depth. “Their nesting sites may be looked for in low bushes as well as on the horizontal limbs of trees at various distances from the ground.” When compared with other species of the family this species is quite noisy, especially when it sees a broad-tailed hummer in the neighborhood. For this species it exhibits an intense animosity and will pursue it, uttering shrill and expressively angry notes.

WHAT A LITTLE MOUSE SAID

I am only a little mouse; my name is Wee Wee.

I live in a big house away out in California. My mother has made a very cozy home for us between the walls where it is nice and dark. We do not mind the dark, you know, for we can see even better then, with our little bright eyes.

Our bed is soft and warm and is made of tiny bits of paper which we children helped our mother to tear up and it is lined with some nice soft cotton which she picked out of a comforter one night when every-one had gone to church.

We have never been out very much but now, our mother says, we are big enough to help get the living. When she told us this, we all said: "Squeak, squeak, squeak," which, in mouse language, meant that we were glad and thought it would be fine fun to leave our nest and go out into the big world.

But mother said: "Children, before you go I want to tell you something; listen well to what I shall say."

And so we six little mice sat very solemnly in a row, on our hind legs and pricked up our ears and listened quietly while she went on. "You go through a narrow passage till you come to a little round hole and when you have squeezed through this you will find yourself in a big room called a kitchen. You must then run quickly across the floor and into the door of a bathroom. There is also a hole behind the bathroom door which you may need to jump into if anything happens. Next comes a nice, large pantry and in there you will find everything that we mice like to eat. Bring what you can carry, after you have eaten all you can, but do not eat too much or you will never be able to squeeze through the hole again. Now you must never go in the daytime, but wait until night."

After telling us this, my mother left the nest saying that she was going to call on one of our neighbors who lived in an old felt hat, very near us. She said she might be gone some time, so, while my brothers and sisters were taking a nap, I thought to myself: "I don't see why mother told me not to go in daylight. I am sure everything seems perfectly quiet now and I don't think anything could hurt me; and I do feel so hungry. I guess I will go on a little trip, and 'we shall see what we shall see.'" With that I crept out of the nest without making the least bit of noise and followed the directions my mother had given me.

Soon I found myself in the pantry and O! how good everything did smell. I found some cheese and I ate a very big hole in a white cake with icing on it and was just thinking what I could carry home as a surprise for the children when I heard a rushing noise like the patter of feet and I jumped behind some glass jars that were on the floor in the corner.

To my horror I saw very near me, for I could see right through the glass jar, a funny thing with long white wool and sharp teeth, a long, pointed nose and a terrible big red tongue hanging out of its mouth and little sharp black eyes that seemed to be looking clear through me. Oh! how I trembled and oh! how I wished then that I had obeyed my mother.

I saw now, when it was too late, that she knew best. Just then a big giant with dresses on came into the pantry and I heard her say: "That dog thinks there is a mouse in here." So it was a dog and I remembered now that my mother had said one day that there was a spitz dog in that house.

The lady went out but the dog smelled me and was determined not to give me up so he ran to the big giant with dresses on and whined and whined until she came in again and said: "Well, Zip, I guess there must be a mouse here since you insist on it." So she went out and got a long stick with a lot of straws on the end of it (she called it a broom), and with that she poked around all over the pantry, and the funny thing with long, white wool and sharp teeth kept smelling around and clawing at the glass jars till I thought I should die of fright. "It must be behind those jars, the way Zip acts," she said; and she took the broom and knocked over all the jars with a crash. Well! I thought my time

had surely come. My eyes filled with tears and my heart almost broke as I thought of my dear mother and all my sisters and brothers so happy at home.

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