The Ruby-Throated Hummingbird



Read the passage. Then answer the questions in full sentences.

Name _____ Date _____

The ruby-throated hummingbird is a tiny bird with brilliant, jewel-like red and green coloring. It is the only North American hummingbird that breeds, or has its young, east of the Great Plains.

Its head, back, wings and tail are covered in metallic green feathers, and its belly is white. A male has a brilliant red throat, while a female's throat is white. An adult is only 2.8 to 3.5 inches long, and it weighs about as much as a nickel.

A hummingbird feeds while hovering, sticking its long tongue into the center of a flower to draw out the nectar. It also drinks sugar water from backyard feeders and catches tiny insects when it can. Flying burns so much energy that it drinks up to half of its body weight in nectar and sugar water each day. It even defends its food against other hummingbirds.

The female does all the work of raising the young. She builds a tiny cup-shaped nest of grasses and plant fibers, often hiding it with lichens and dead leaves. Then she lays two white eggs, which hatch after 11 to 16 days.

A hummingbird's feet are so small that it cannot walk, so it can only scoot sideways along a perch. Yet when it migrates, it can fly straight across the Gulf of Mexico in a single flight.

1. **How can you tell a male ruby-throated hummingbird from a female?**

2. **What does "breeds" mean in the first paragraph, and which words help you tell?**

3. **Why does a hummingbird drink so much nectar and sugar water each day?**

4. **A hummingbird cannot walk, but it can fly across the Gulf of Mexico. What does this tell you about how it lives? Use the passage.**

Answer key

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1. How can you tell a male ruby-throated hummingbird from a female?
   The male has a brilliant red throat, and the female's throat is white.

2. What does "breeds" mean in the first paragraph, and which words help you tell?
   Has its young. The words right after it, "or has its young," tell you.

3. Why does a hummingbird drink so much nectar and sugar water each day?
   Because flying burns so much energy.

4. A hummingbird cannot walk, but it can fly across the Gulf of Mexico. What does this tell you about how it lives? Use the passage.
   Sample answer: it does almost everything by flying. It even feeds while hovering at a flower, so it needs strong wings much more than strong feet.