Orange Elementary School Hummingbirds

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Setting up the feeder:

Orange School has a beautiful garden full of perennials, vines, annuals, and roses which attracts hummingbirds each spring, summer and fall. Two teachers with classrooms facing the garden placed hummingbird feeders outside their windows. A third teacher, whose classroom faces the playground on the opposite side of the building, placed a feeder outside the classroom window in August, 2005. Hummingbirds quickly discovered this feeder near the playground. Other feeders were visited by the hummingbirds, too, but no data were collected. The type of feeders used were PerkyPet hummingbird feeders. The solution used in the feeders was one part sugar to four parts water.

We had several difficulties to overcome in implementing the project:

Difficulty #1: Sometimes over the week-end, the feeders became empty. It seemed to take the hummingbirds time to use the feeder again once they visited and found no food in it. We solved this problem by hanging a fuschia plant next to the feeder. If the feeder ran out, there would still be food for the hummingbirds.

Photo from Bill Hilton Jr.

Difficulty #2: The hummingbirds had frequent fights while at the feeder in the fall. They were very aggressive, and sometimes they didn't get to eat, they were so busy fighting with each other. We solved this problem by hanging another feeder away from the first feeder. The hanging plant helped, also. There were still fights, but not as many as before.

Difficulty #3: We had lots of hummingbirds visit all the feeders at Orange School, but only students in one classroom recorded their visits. This was a difficult problem to solve, because teachers have lots to get done and it can be distracting if students are counting the hummingbirds. We solved this problem by asking the teachers if they saw any hummingbirds that day, and if they did, we used this information even if there had been more visits. We wish we could find a way to record all the hummingbirds who visit Orange School. We will continue to search for a solution to this problem.

Photo from Bill Hilton Jr.

Difficulty #4: It was hard to identify the males, females, and the immature hummingbirds in the fall. To solve this problem, we think we need to have more practice identifying them. We could easily tell the male from the female in the spring, but it was lots harder to tell them apart in fall because the immature males looked similar to females. We recorded the hummingbirds as adults when we weren't sure.

Orange data:

We learned that the first hummingbird to be seen at Orange School in 2004 was on May 18th. The first hummingbird seen in 2005 was on May 19th. The last hummingbird seen at Orange School in 2004 was on September 24. The last hummingbird seen in 2005 was on October 6. We are predicting we will see hummingbirds this spring during the third week of May. We aren't sure when they will leave our area this fall, but we are looking forward to comparing our data from the past two years with this year's data.

When we compared our hummingbird arrival dates with the average spring migration arrival dates for ruby throated hummingbirds for our area according to a map at the Operation Ruby Throat & Hilton Pond Center web site, we learned our arrival dates were much later than the map indicated. According to this map, hummingbirds should reach our area between April 20 and May 1. The past two years they have arrived nearly three weeks later.

We observed that the hummingbirds seemed to prefer the feeder rather than the fuschia plant. Although they visited both, they stayed at the feeder longer and came back to the feeder more often. We wonder if it was because the plant was reaching the end of its growing season and contained less nectar or if hummingbirds prefer feeders over plants.

In the two years we have observed hummingbirds at Orange School, we have recorded 19 sightings, 41 feeder visits, and 2 flower visits. If the garden were closer, or we were able to be in the garden more often observing, we think we would have more flower visit observations.

We also noted the first hummingbirds in the spring were female. The males didn't arrive until nearly two weeks later in both years.

The last hummingbirds to leave in the fall were the females. The last adult male we saw in 2004 was on August 28. The last adult male we saw in 2005 was on August 13. We don't know if the immature males leave early, too, since it's hard to tell them apart from the females.