

## Natural Planet

### Ep.5- The Humming Birds

The small, fantastically coloured birds of North America have inspired myths of Native Americans for hundreds of years, suggesting that they are in fact the God of the Sun. This is unproven but what can be said is that Hummingbirds are unlike any other bird alive today.

The varied colour on an individual is due to the top layer of feathers and their specific shape. This causes the light to reflect in different ways depending from which direction you look at them. The colours on any one individual may turn from blues to greens to purples or from reds to oranges to yellows. These colours are mainly seen in males and the purpose of such a display is fight other male hummingbirds over territories and to attract females of their species, to eventually pass on their genetics for beautiful feathers.

Hummingbirds have their name due to the sound they make when they fly, a hum. This is produced due to the immense speed of the wing beats, 50 of them a second. This means they can fly at speeds of over 30 miles per hour but does in fact mean that their heart beat is approximately 1,200 beats per minute. Humans have 70 per minute. To get the energy for this intensive life requires a lot of sugar in the form of nectar. In fact a humming bird's entire diet is 100 per cent sugar from wildflowers.

Each of the 354 species of humming birds has adapted closely with a specific group of flowers for their species, with some only relying on one type of flower for their nectar. The birds have developed a unique long beak and long probing tongue, to get to the very bottom of flowers to get the nectar that other birds would not normally be able to get. However this does mean that the specific hummingbird cannot feed on other plants, and what started as a partnership has ended with the plants using the hummingbird as a slave for pollination.

No matter its relationship with plants, the hummingbird remains a beautiful and elegant bird.