

Hummingbirds and Butterflies

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There have been reports of ruby-throated hummingbirds competing with black-chinned hummingbirds at area sugar water feeders. The fall hummingbird migration must have started. In addition to ruby-throated and black-chinned hummingbirds, rufous hummingbirds will also be visiting. The rufous hummingbirds are smaller, but they are usually the toughest species and win the dogfights over the favorite feeder and or nectar plants.

If you don't have one or more sugar water feeders in place, you are missing some action. Feeders are for sale at wild bird supply retailers, retail nurseries, feed stores, pet supply stores and even the local HEB. They can be art objects and/ or very simple. Select one that meets your aesthetic tastes but is also easy to hang on the eaves, rinse out, and refill. My favorites are those made by "Best 1" (a manufacturer from Poteet), and " Perky Pet".

Prepare the sugar water for the feeder by dissolving one-part sugar in 4 parts water by volume. It is easiest to mix up the sugar water a gallon at a time and store it in the refrigerator. At least every week empty the remaining sugar water in the feeder and rinse it out before refilling. The week-old sugar water can be placed in a saucer for the butterflies, they like the old mix.

Many gardeners put red vegetable color in the sugar water, but it isn't necessary, the hummingbirds recognize the red coloring on the feeders.

In the garden the migrating hummingbirds will be seeking nectar in zinnias, salvia, lantana, porter weed, duranta, cape honeysuckle, esperanza, and thryallis. They are especially fond of firebush. If you have a sunny spot on your patio, obtain a blooming firebush in a container from your favorite nursery and place it on the patio. The competition for possession of the firebush blooms will be fierce. Quite often the small but feisty rufous hummingbirds win the competition. Penta is a good choice to replace the firebush if your patio is shady.

In addition to waves of migrating hummingbirds, it is time for the migrating Monarchs to move through San Antonio. The generation we see was hatched in the north and will travel all the way to wintering grounds near Mexico City. In the spring the same individuals will travel back this way and replace themselves by producing a new generation by laying eggs on milkweed along the route and here in San Antonio.

The Monarchs that visit us this fall will collect nectar from our milkweed, but they generally won't lay eggs. Their cousins the Queens may continue to lay eggs this fall. The Queen caterpillar look almost exactly like Monarchs, but the caterpillars have 3 antennae- like extensions instead of the 2 that the Monarchs have. The Queens third antennae emerges out of the middle of the back. It is very distinctive. In addition to the milkweed, the Monarchs will utilize nectar from mistflower, Mexican flame vine, mint marigold, zinnias, duranta, lantana, salvia, porter weed, pentas and other blooms.

With the rains, the horse herb has quickly emerged in the lawn. The black swallowtails will soon be back at the task of collecting nectar from the tiny yellow flowers. Also watch for the giant swallowtails. They lay their eggs on citrus trees. The larvae resemble bird dodo. Let a few of the unusual caterpillars mature

on each citrus tree. They don't do much damage to the leaves and the giant swallowtail butterflies are spectacular.

If you want more information about attracting birds and butterflies to your landscape, there are two free programs that you may want to attend. On the evening of October 2, at 5-6:30PM, Mark Prange at 5007 East Beverly Mae in Dreamhill Estates near Medical Center is hosting a tour of his Butterfly Garden. I will be available to help answer any questions that visitors have about the Garden and the butterflies that it attracts. On Saturday Oct 6 at 9:30 AM I will be making a presentation at Birds Unlimited at 14602 Huebner Rd. in the Olmos Creek Shopping Center on "Gardening to Attract Birds and Butterflies".