



Musing

May 2021 - "Hummingbirds at the Feeders"

Thom Storm, Sweet Lake

It happened on May 8th. It was 7:30 AM and 25 degrees outside. We spotted the emerald green imp sitting in our lilac bush, trying to warm up in the early morning sun. The first hummingbird of the season had arrived!

The three hummingbird feeders I had put out the week before were all frozen. I quickly took them indoors, thawed them out with hot water from the kitchen sink, and refilled them with warm sugar water. I hung them up again, and the little shimmering male flew to one immediately and began to drink. After migrating all the way from South America, he was tired and hungry.

On May 15th, we had three male hummers at our feeders and the hummingbird wars began! One little male liked to sit on a small branch where he could see all three of our hummingbird feeders. When another hummer approached to get a quick drink, he would chirp at it and chase it off with darting quickness.

Did you know that Ruby-throated hummingbirds live an average of 9 years? They like to come back to the territory they were born in, if food is available. One spring we drove up to our cabin, and as soon as we had opened the car door to unload our baggage, a hummingbird flew up to me and hovered in my face for several moments, as if to say, "Get the feeders out!"

Males aggressively defend flowers and feeders in Star Wars-like acrobatics, as they try to attract females. Once they have found a mate, a female hummer will have a clutch of 1-3 eggs in a nest 2 inches across and 1 inch deep, made of lichens and moss and held together by spider webs.

Several years ago one of our cabin neighbors spotted a nest by their deck. We got to watch the development of the babies over a three week period, and then they flew away and were on their own. Sometimes a female will have two clutches during a breeding season.

We sure enjoy watching the hummingbirds at the cabin. They are part of the magic of being at the lake.