


A STORY ABOUT THE BIRDS AND THE BEES

By

Tom Linton

When one travels in distant lands it is advisable to be aware of Regional Meanings, for example.

“Sticky-beaks” a term of insult if used in certain countries  but in Port Aransas Texas it is a compliment.

I am preparing to attend for my 15th time, this 31st Annual Hummingbird Festival in Rockport/Fulton, Texas – 19 – 22 September.

Hummingbirds are loved and revered by literally thousands

This annual event in Rockport/Fulton always draws a crowd and as usual it is expected to do so again this year – thus far 200+are pre-registered.

They come from far and wide not only from the U.S but well beyond.

Many European and Asian countries are represented

Pre-registration is highly recommended as the attendance for the event normally nears the 5000 mark and some activities have limited registration.

The Festival was essentially started because of the pioneering efforts of, the “Hummingbird Lady,” Connie Hagar along with Betty Baker and Jesse Grantham (Audubon Society) - two individuals acknowledged as primarily responsible for starting the festival.

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Connie Hagar

Through Connie's dedication and efforts, Rockport/Fulton became widely known as a "Hot Spot" bird watching on the lower Texas coast- especially when the "Hummers" are migrating!

And because of that dedication and effort on the behalf of coastal birding – and hummingbirds in particular – a wildlife sanctuary was created and named in her honor.

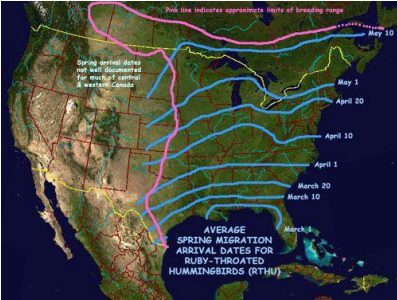


CONNIE HAGAR WILDLIFE SANCTUARY

The **CONNIE HAGAR WILDLIFE SANCTUARY** - known locally as **Little Bay** - was designated as a sanctuary by act of the Texas Legislature in December, 1943.

It is managed by Texas Parks and Wildlife.

And to show how apropos that such a sanctuary be established in this area, It is estimated that 5,000+ hummingbirds congregate in the Rockport/Fulton area each Fall to begin their southern migration to their wintering grounds in Mexico and Central America.



The local Chamber of Commerce especially appreciates this – it brings business!

And in that regard, this thought of the neglected “business” provided by hummingbirds came to mind.

The plants – in the flight path of the hummingbirds – appreciate this – the bird brings pollen!

Bees get most of the PR attention as pollinators but hummingbirds also play an important role in pollination of plants – a role that is often overlooked.

The hummingbird technique for pollenating differs from that of the bee.

Hummingbirds have long beaks and even longer tongues, which allows them to feed at flowers that are too long and thin for anything else. When a hummingbird inserts its beak into a flower to drink the nectar, it becomes a sticky-beak. Pollen, which is sticky by nature, clings to the bird's beak thereby getting a free ride to the next flower, some of the pollen grains are transferred, and if both flowers are the same species, pollination occurs.

I asked Glenn Olsen – a longtime observer of hummingbirds – what he thought about the comment in the previous paragraph.

This was his response:

"Pollination is even more astounding than this! In many flowers, pollen is not located where much of it could be deposited on the bill of the bird. Various species of flowers have co-evolved flower petals, color, structure, stamens (pollen producing), etc. in association with hummingbirds in ways to maximize pollination and minimize loss of pollen, even by particular species of hummingbirds. For Example, the cardinal flower (Lobelia cardinalis) and coral bean (Erythrina herbacea) both have long red tubular shaped flowers and are both pollinated by the Ruby-throated Hummingbird (a primary but not the only pollinator).

As this species probes into the flower to feed, the stamens of the cardinal flower touch the top of the bird's head and deposit pollen, however, the stamens of the coral bean touch the throat of the bird and deposit pollen there.

The structure and location of the stamens prevents each species of flower's pollen from competing with the other's pollen thereby increasing the probability of pollination for each respective plant."



He also directed me to the following referenced information:

“...in western North America alone about 130 species of plants exhibit features apparently modified through evolution for foraging and pollination by hummingbirds. (Grant and Grant 1968). Another 20 species or more of eastern North American plants have been similarly affected (Austin 1975).”
The Hummingbirds of North America. Second Edition Paul A. Johnsgard page 33.

While hummingbirds are attracted to flowers in the reddish to orangish spectrum of color they are opportunistic feeders and will seek nectar and insects from a variety of flower shapes and colors as well as other surprising sources.

For example, Glenn Olsen has observed and noted that during fall migration the Ruby-throated Hummingbirds are often found in live oak trees (*Quercus virginiana*).

Live oaks provide great protection from predators, shade, and food.

The question then becomes, where and how does a hummingbird get food from an oak tree?

In the fall, the acorns ripen and fall from the tree.

"The acorn has been nourished to become a seed by the sap of the tree. If you look in the cup that remains on the tree and from where the acorn fell, you will find an ever so tiny drop of sap. Now sap is about 20% sugar. Just what the hummingbird needs."

Source: ***Hummingbirds of North America***. Peterson Field Guides. Sheri L. Williamson page 21.

Bees pollinate such crops as apples, cranberries, melons and broccoli. Some crops, including blueberries and cherries, are 90-percent dependent on honey bee pollination. One crop, almonds, depends entirely on the honey bee for pollinating at bloom time.

Honey bees gather pollen and nectar for their survival – hummingbirds do it gratis!

They should be recognized for this valuable service they provide – and I do!

But if you have the good fortune to be at "The Right Place at the Right Time" – that is when the hummingbirds are bunching up in the hundreds at the edge of the Gulf – near Rockport/Fulton – waiting for a favorable off-shore breeze to help them make their long, long journey – you will see a sight you will never forget.

Also, Sandy Jumper, Vice President Marketing and Promotion of the Rockport-Fulton Chamber of Commerce – and longtime member of the team that manages this amazing annual event said that , "In addition, if you want to get "Up close and personal," some 30 residents will open their personal back yard for visitation and even closer than that is the opportunity to participate in the hummingbird banding demonstration.

For more information www.rockporthummingbird.com or 361-729-6445



AUSTRALIAN/NZ

noun

plural noun: **sticky-beaks**

1. an inquisitive and prying person.

verb

3rd person present: **sticky-beaks**

1. pry into other people's affairs.