



ARIZONA HUMMINGBIRDS

Fourteen Species — A Photographic Guide



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by Francis Morgan



White-eared Hummingbird

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ANNA'S HUMMINGBIRD* *Calypte anna*



ANNA'S HUMMINGBIRD is one of the most familiar hummingbirds in Arizona, particularly in urban and suburban settings where flowering plants and feeders provide a reliable food source. Originally centered along the Pacific Coast, the species has expanded its range inland over the past century.

The first Hummingbird I ever saw was an Anna's when I moved to California from the UK. In Arizona it is most common in the southern and central parts of the state, where it is a year-round resident rather than a migrant. Its adaptability—to gardens, desert scrub, and even city parks—

has made it a consistent presence where other hummingbirds are seasonal.

The male is unmistakable. In good light, the head and throat flare into a vivid rose-magenta that can appear almost incandescent, extending beyond the gorget to cover the crown. At rest or in shade, this brilliance can disappear, leaving the head looking dark and subdued. The body is otherwise green above with a grayish underside, compact and sturdy compared to many other hummingbirds. Males are often seen perched conspicuously, returning repeatedly to favored lookout points, from which they defend feeding territories with short, aggressive chases.



The female is more understated but equally distinctive on close inspection. She lacks the full magenta head of the male, showing instead a green crown and back with pale gray underparts. Many females display a small patch of pink or reddish speckling on the throat, sometimes quite noticeable. In flight, both sexes show a relatively short, straight bill and a broad tail that can flash white tips when fanned. Females tend to be less territorial and are more frequently observed hovering methodically among flowers.

Breeding begins early—often in winter—when males perform steep, arcing display dives accompanied by a sharp, explosive sound produced by the tail feathers. Nests are small and well concealed, placed on horizontal branches and constructed with plant down, spider silk, and lichen. Anna's Hummingbird's ability to breed in cooler months, combined with its tolerance of human-altered landscapes, helps explain its continued success and increasing prominence across Arizona.

BROAD-BILLED HUMMINGBIRD

Cynanthus latirostris



THE BROAD-BILLED HUMMINGBIRD is one of the most vivid and unmistakable hummingbirds in southern Arizona, particularly in riparian corridors and desert canyons where flowering shrubs and trees are abundant. It is primarily a summer resident, arriving in spring to breed, though a small number now remain through the winter in favored locations.

We have Broad-billeds in our Tucson yard all year round. Its presence is often announced not by sound, but by color—flashes of blue and green moving quickly through shaded vegetation.

The male is striking at any distance. The body is a rich, iridescent green, but the head and throat shift to a deep blue that can appear almost violet in certain light. The bill is equally distinctive: bright red with a sharply contrasting black tip, a feature that immediately separates it from other hummingbirds in the region. In flight, the wings appear relatively broad and strong, giving the bird a slightly heavier, more deliberate look as it moves between flowers or hovers to feed. Males are assertive around nectar sources, often returning to the same perches and defending them with short, direct chases.



The female is more subdued but can be identified with a little attention. She lacks the blue throat and crown of the male, instead showing a green back and a pale gray to whitish underside. The bill is similar in structure but less vividly colored, typically darker with only a hint of red at the base of the lower mandible. Her face often appears softer, with a faint pale line behind the eye that can help distinguish her at close range. Compared to the male, the overall impression is cleaner and more understated, but still distinctly patterned. In behavior, both sexes are closely tied to flowering plants, especially in canyon habitats where seasonal blooms are concentrated. The female is often less conspicuous, feeding methodically and moving quietly through vegetation, while the male is more exposed and territorial.

COSTA'S HUMMINGBIRD* *Calypte costae*



COSTA'S HUMMINGBIRD is closely associated with the arid landscapes of the Sonoran and Mojave Deserts, where it moves easily among ocotillo, chuparosa, and other flowering desert plants. In Arizona it is most often encountered in lower, drier habitats, and its presence can feel almost inseparable from the rhythm of desert bloom. Compared to other hummingbirds in the region, it is smaller and more compact, with a quick, darting flight that carries it low through open vegetation. Costa's are familiar at our nectar feeders year round.

The male is immediately recognizable, though the effect depends on light and angle. The gorget is a rich violet, extending outward in elongated, flaring feathers along the sides of the neck—forming a distinctive, almost collar-like shape not seen in other Arizona hummingbirds. In direct light, this can appear brilliant and saturated; in shade, it darkens to near black. The rest of the body is relatively subdued: green above with pale underparts, giving the violet head an even greater visual impact. Males often perch in exposed positions, returning repeatedly to the same branch, from which they launch short feeding flights or display movements.



The female is more restrained and requires closer attention to identify. She lacks the violet crown and flared gorget, instead showing a green back and a soft gray underside. A key feature is the face: there is usually a clear pale line behind the eye, and the overall expression appears more open and less masked than in some other hummingbirds. The tail is also helpful—when spread, it shows white tips on the outer feathers, which can be visible in flight or when the bird briefly fans its tail while hovering. The bill is slender and dark, without the color contrast seen in some other species.

Behaviorally, the female is quieter and less territorial, moving steadily from flower to flower and often remaining within denser vegetation. The male, by contrast, is more visible and assertive, particularly during the breeding season when display flights and short chases are common.

BROAD-TAILED HUMMINGBIRD *Selasphorus platycercus*



THE BROAD-TAILED HUMMINGBIRD is a characteristic species of Arizona's higher elevations, most often encountered in mountain meadows, open pine forests, and along shaded streams. It arrives in spring as temperatures rise in the uplands, bringing a brief but energetic presence to these cooler habitats. Compared to the desert species, it feels more closely tied to seasonal change—appearing with the first flush of flowering and departing again as conditions shift.

The male is cleanly marked and direct in appearance. The throat shows a rose-red gorget that can flash brightly when it catches the light, set against a white chest and green upperparts. In softer light, the gorget darkens, and the bird takes on a more muted tone, the color only revealing itself when the angle is right. The tail is relatively broad and dark, and in flight the wings can produce a faint, distinctive trilling sound—an audible feature that often gives the bird away before it is seen. Males are frequently active and visible, moving between flowers in open areas and returning to exposed perches.



The female is more subtle but still well defined with careful observation. She lacks the red gorget, showing instead a finely marked throat with small dark spots on a pale background. The sides are washed with warm buff tones, giving her a softer, more textured look than the male's clean contrast. The tail is a useful feature: when fanned, the outer feathers show white tips, creating a brief flash in flight. Her overall shape—slender with a straight bill—and her preference for similar upland habitats help separate her from other hummingbirds that may overlap in range.

In behavior, the female is less conspicuous, feeding steadily and often remaining closer to cover, while the male is more exposed and active. Together they reflect the rhythm of mountain habitats: brief, intense, and closely tied to season. The Broad-tailed Hummingbird's presence is as much a signal of place and elevation as it is of species, a bird that belongs to the higher, cooler margins of Arizona's varied landscape.

RUFIOUS HUMMINGBIRD

Selasphorus rufus



THE RUFIOUS HUMMINGBIRD is one of the most assertive and wide-ranging hummingbirds to pass through Arizona, most often encountered during migration when it moves between breeding grounds far to the north and wintering areas in Mexico. Even in brief appearances, it tends to dominate its surroundings. There is a restless quality to its movement—quick, direct, and purposeful—and a readiness to challenge any other hummingbird that approaches a favored perch or feeder.

The male is immediately striking. Much of the body is a rich rufous-orange, particularly on the flanks, back, and tail, which can glow warmly in sunlight.

The gorget flashes a vivid orange-red, though like all hummingbirds it can appear dark when not aligned with the light. In flight, the combination of rufous body and tail gives a strong overall impression of warmth and color, quite different from the greens that dominate many other species. The bird often pauses on exposed perches, turning its head so that the gorget catches the light, then launching quickly into short, aggressive chases.



The female is more variable. She typically shows green upperparts with rufous tones in the sides and tail, often with a noticeable wash of warm color along the flanks. The throat is pale with small dark spots, sometimes with a hint of orange at the center, but never forming a full gorget like the male's. The tail is particularly useful: it is partly rufous, and when spread it shows a mix of orange and darker feathers with pale tips, a combination that helps separate her from similar species. Overall, she appears less saturated than the male but retains enough warmth in the plumage to suggest the species.

Behavior reinforces identification. Rufous Hummingbirds are notably territorial, even during migration, frequently returning to the same perch and driving off larger birds with surprising force. This intensity, combined with the warm tones of the plumage and the bird's direct, energetic flight, gives it a presence that is disproportionate to its size.

RIVOLI'S HUMMINGBIRD*

Eugenes fulgens



RIVOLI'S HUMMINGBIRD is one of the largest regularly occurring hummingbird in Arizona, a bird of shaded canyons and montane forests in the southeastern part of the state. Its presence is often felt before it is clearly seen—a slower, more deliberate movement through filtered light, with a weight and composure that sets it apart from smaller, more frenetic species. It favors mature woodland edges, flowering shrubs, and feeders tucked into cool, protected settings.

The male is unmistakable at close range. The head appears dark at first, but when it turns into the light, a deep violet crown ignites above a rich emerald-green gorget, the two colors separated yet equally saturated. The body is a deep, polished green, and the tail is long and broad, contributing to the bird's substantial, almost stately profile in flight. In the kind of soft, shaded light suggested in the photographs, much of this color can seem subdued, revealing itself only in flashes as the bird shifts position.



The female is more restrained but still distinctive. She lacks the violet crown and brilliant green throat, showing instead a green back and pale gray underparts that can appear slightly washed with buff along the sides. The face is clean, with a pale area behind the eye that helps give definition. Her size is an important clue—noticeably larger and longer-tailed than most other hummingbirds in the same habitat. The bill is long and straight, and her flight has the same measured quality as the male's, though without the visual drama of iridescence.

Behavior reinforces these differences. Females tend to move quietly through the understory, feeding methodically at flowers and often remaining partially concealed. Males are more likely to perch in view, returning to favored branches between feeding bouts.

BLACK-CHINNED HUMMINGBIRD *Archilochus alexandri*



THE BLACK-CHINNED HUMMINGBIRD is a widespread and adaptable species in Arizona, found from desert washes to foothill canyons and urban gardens. It is often present without drawing attention to itself, moving quietly among flowers and feeders. Compared to more visually assertive species such as Anna's, Broad-billed, or Costa's, it can seem understated, but closer attention reveals a refined simplicity that is characteristic of the species. The male is defined less by bold color than by subtle contrast. At most angles, the throat appears dark, almost black, blending into the shadow of the head. Only when the light catches it precisely does a narrow band of iridescent violet flash at the lower edge of the gorget—a brief, controlled accent rather than a full display. The rest of the bird is clean and restrained: green above, pale gray below, with a straight, slender bill and a relatively long, slightly forked tail. In flight or at rest, the impression is one of balance and proportion rather than intensity.



The female is similarly understated but identifiable with care. She lacks the dark throat and violet band, showing instead a plain, pale throat and soft gray underparts. The upperparts are green, sometimes with a slightly bronzy cast depending on the light. The tail provides one of the better field marks: when fanned, the outer feathers show white tips, which can flash briefly as she hovers or shifts position. Her overall look is smooth and even-toned, without strong markings, and her structure—slender with a straight bill—helps separate her from more compact or heavily patterned species. Behavior reinforces this quiet presence. Both sexes feed methodically, often returning to the same flowers or feeders without the prolonged, aggressive chases seen in some other hummingbirds. Males will defend small territories, but typically in short, efficient bursts.

CALLIOPE HUMMINGBIRD

Selasphorus calliope



THE CALLIOPE HUMMINGBIRD is the smallest regularly occurring hummingbird and is the smallest of all birds in North America. In Arizona it is most often encountered during migration, passing through on its way between mountain breeding grounds and wintering areas farther south. Its size is immediately apparent in the field, but it is the structure and detail that hold attention. The bird in flight shows a compact body, short tail, and quick, precise wingbeats, suspended momentarily against a warm, uncluttered background that emphasizes its delicacy.

The male's gorget is distinctive among hummingbirds: narrow, elongated streaks of magenta radiate downward from the throat, rather than forming a solid patch. In this light,

those streaks flare sharply, appearing almost like fine brushstrokes laid over the pale chest. The rest of the plumage is restrained—green above, pale below—allowing the gorget to define the bird. Even at close range, the effect is subtle compared to broader, more saturated throats of other species, requiring both light and angle to fully reveal itself.

The female Calliope is even more understated. She lacks the magenta streaks, showing instead a softly marked throat with faint spotting, green upperparts, and a warm wash along the flanks. The small size, short tail, and overall neat, compact structure remain the best clues. In behavior, both sexes move quickly and efficiently, often passing through without lingering, their presence brief but precise.



THE WHITE-EARED HUMMINGBIRD, is a bird of shaded mountain canyons in southeastern Arizona. The individual shown here is a juvenile, its plumage slightly loose-textured, with a softer, less defined pattern than an adult. Even so, the key features are clear. A bold white stripe arcs behind the eye, set against a darker face, creating a strong, graphic contrast that immediately separates it from other species. In this perched view, the structure is more evident: a relatively long, straight bill with a reddish base, a full-bodied stance, and a tail that extends cleanly beyond the folded wings. The green plumage is present but muted in the soft light, giving the bird a more subdued,

almost quiet appearance compared to the brilliance of many hummingbirds. The setting—cool, shaded, and softly blurred—reinforces its association with higher, wooded habitats. The female White-eared is similar in pattern but less vivid, with the same bold white ear stripe remaining the most reliable field mark. She lacks the stronger color contrasts of the adult male but retains the species' distinctive facial pattern and overall structure. Unlike the transient Calliope, White-eared Hummingbirds tend to remain within these mountain environments, moving deliberately through the understory and returning to favored perches, their presence steady rather than fleeting.

VIOLET-CROWNED HUMMINGBIRD

Ramosomyia violiceps



THE VIOLET-CROWNED HUMMINGBIRD is a species of Arizona's southern canyons, most often found along sycamore-lined streams where light filters through layered foliage. It carries a clean, almost graphic appearance—less about shifting iridescence and more about contrast and clarity. Even in motion, it appears composed, its structure and pattern remaining readable in a way that many hummingbirds are not. The bird shown here reveals that simplicity well. The crown, a soft but distinct violet-blue, sits cleanly above a bright white face and underparts, creating a strong, uncluttered division of color. The bill is striking—red along most of its length with a dark tip—and in the perched bird it becomes a focal point, especially as it opens slightly, suggesting the sharp, dry

call often given from exposed branches.

In flight, the same bird shows a different set of qualities: warm-toned wings catching the light, a green back flashing briefly, and a broad, pale underside that remains consistent even as the wings blur with motion.

Unlike many hummingbirds, the male's coloration does not depend heavily on angle. The crown retains its presence across a range of light, and the white underparts remain bright and stable. This gives the species a distinctive, almost emblematic look—one that stands out not through intensity, but through contrast and restraint. The tail, relatively long and dark, adds to the impression of length and balance, particularly when the bird hovers or shifts position midair.



The female is very similar to the male, and this is an important point of identification. She shares the same white underparts, green back, and red-based bill, as well as the violet-toned crown, though it may be slightly less vivid. Separation in the field often depends more on behavior than plumage, as females tend to be less conspicuous and less inclined to perch in open view. The overall impression, however, remains the same: a hummingbird defined by clean lines and strong contrasts rather than intricate patterning.

In canyon habitats, the species often moves deliberately between perches and feeding sites, returning to favored branches where it sits upright and alert. Whether perched or in flight, as shown here, the Violet-crowned Hummingbird maintains a sense of composure—its form and color held together in a way that feels both precise and quietly distinctive within Arizona's hummingbird assemblage.

BERYLLINE HUMMINGBIRD

Saucerottia beryllina



THE BERYLLINE HUMMINGBIRD is a species of wooded canyons in southeastern Arizona, where it moves through oaks, sycamores, and mixed vegetation with a steady, deliberate presence. It is less about sharp contrast than about richness of tone—greens layered with warmth, subtle shifts of color that become more apparent the longer one looks. In the perched bird shown here, that quality is clear: the plumage carries a textured, almost scaled appearance across the throat and chest, with the green catching light in small, shifting highlights rather than broad flashes.

The bill is distinctive, with a red base and darker tip, and in profile it adds a strong line to the otherwise rounded form of the bird. The posture is composed, the bird balanced lightly on a thin branch, allowing the detail of the head and upperparts to dominate. The eye is set cleanly within the green of the face, and the overall impression is one of cohesion—no single marking overwhelming the rest, but all working together to define the species.

purposeful flight that carries it between flowers and perches.



In flight, a different set of features emerges. The wings catch the light in warm tones, and the tail shows a rich rufous coloration that contrasts with the green body. This combination—green above, warm rufous in the tail and wings—is one of the most useful field marks, particularly when the bird is in motion. The structure appears slightly more robust than many other hummingbirds, with a steady, purposeful flight that carries it between flowers and perches.

The female is very similar to the male, as the species shows limited sexual contrast. She shares the same green upperparts, scaled throat, and red-based bill, along with the rufous tones in the tail. If anything, her coloration may be slightly less saturated, but the overall pattern remains consistent. Identification rests on this combination of features—especially the warm rufous tail and the textured green plumage—rather than on strong differences between the sexes.

BLUE-THROATED MOUNTAIN-GEM *Lampornis clemenciae*



THE BLUE-THROATED MOUNTAIN-GEM is one of the largest hummingbirds in Arizona, a species of cool, shaded canyons where water and dense vegetation create a markedly different environment from the surrounding desert. In flight, as shown here, its size is immediately apparent. The wings sweep broadly and evenly, and the body holds steady in the air with a controlled, almost unhurried motion. There is a sense of weight and presence that distinguishes it from smaller, more flickering species.

The male is defined by the deep, saturated blue of the throat, which in this view forms a solid, luminous panel against otherwise subdued plumage. Unlike many hummingbirds, the color reads clearly even without a precise angle of light, giving the bird a more consistent and grounded appearance. The rest of the body is grayish below with green upperparts, allowing the throat to remain the visual focus. The tail is long and dark, with bold white corners that are visible even in flight, adding a strong graphic element as the bird hovers.



The female shares much of the same structure but lacks the blue throat. Instead, her underparts are pale gray, and her upperparts a softly iridescent green that catches the light along the back and shoulders. The tail pattern remains an important feature: long and dark with distinct white tips on the outer feathers, often visible as she adjusts her position in the air. Her face is open and clean, with a pale area behind the eye that helps define the head. In separating her from a female Rivoli's Hummingbird, size alone can be misleading, as both are large species of similar habitats. The tail is the most reliable distinction: the

Blue-throated Mountain-gem shows bold white corners that flash clearly in flight, whereas the Rivoli's has a darker, more uniform tail without strong white markings. The female Blue-throated also tends to appear cleaner and grayer below, with less of the deeper, more diffuse green tones often seen in Rivoli's. In the field, these differences—tail pattern first, then overall tone—provide a consistent way to distinguish the two.

Together, the two birds shown here emphasize the defining character of the species—less about fleeting flashes of color, and more about form and scale.

LUCIFER HUMMINGBIRD

Calothorax lucifer

THE LUCIFER HUMMINGBIRD is a bird of dry, rocky canyons, and in this view its distinctive structure is immediately clear. Perched lightly on a bare, twisting branch, it shows a slim, elongated body and a strongly decurved bill—an adaptation for feeding from long, tubular desert flowers. The posture is alert but restrained, the bird held upright with a sense of balance that reflects its precise, economical movements. Even at rest, there is a feeling of lightness, as if it might lift away at any moment.

The male's gorget is the defining feature. Here it burns with a saturated magenta, the color concentrated into a narrow, vertical panel that contrasts sharply with the pale throat and underparts. The iridescence shifts subtly across the feather surface, revealing fine structure rather than a broad wash of color. Above and behind it, the plumage is comparatively muted—greenish upperparts and a lightly marked underside—so that the eye is drawn again and again to the throat and the elegant curve of the bill. The overall impression is one of refinement: a hummingbird defined as much by line and proportion as by color.

The female Lucifer Hummingbird is much more subdued. She lacks the magenta gorget, showing a pale, lightly patterned throat and similar green upperparts. The long, curved bill remains the most reliable field mark, along with the slim profile and relatively long tail. In the field, she can appear understated to the point of being easily overlooked, blending closely with the dry vegetation she inhabits.



THE PLAIN-CAPPED STARThROAT is a large robust hummingbird, and in this perched view its structure is immediately apparent. The body is full and upright, the head carried high, and the long, straight bill projects cleanly forward. Notice the chip out of the upper mandible. The plumage is restrained and functional: grayish underparts, green upperparts, and a plain, non-iridescent crown that gives the bird a composed, almost austere appearance.

In this individual, a faint patch of color is visible on the throat, suggesting a developing or partial gorget, but it remains subtle and secondary to the bird's overall form. The face is open and uncluttered, and the eye stands out clearly against the soft tones of the head. The tail is relatively long and dark, extending beyond the folded wings, reinforcing the bird's length and presence even while perched.

The female Plain-capped Starthroat is similar in overall appearance, as the species shows limited sexual contrast. She shares the plain crown, pale underparts, and long, straight bill, with identification relying on size, structure, and the absence of strong iridescent color. The species as a whole is defined less by brilliance than by proportion and clarity of form, qualities that are evident even in a quiet, resting pose such as this.

HUMMINGBIRD NESTS



Hummingbird nests are among the smallest and most finely constructed of any bird, built entirely by the female with careful attention to placement and materials. The nest is typically set on a slender horizontal branch, often in the shelter of leaves, where it is both supported and partially concealed. Construction begins with a base of plant fibers—soft, pliable material gathered from seeds, grasses, or down—and is bound together with spider silk. This silk allows the nest to stretch as the young grow, a subtle but essential feature of its design. The outer surface is often decorated with lichen, bark fragments, or other natural elements, creating a surface that closely matches the surrounding branch.

The role of the male ends with mating. He does not assist in nest building, incubation, or the care of the young. All aspects of reproduction beyond courtship fall to the female: selecting the site, constructing the nest, laying and incubating the eggs, and feeding the chicks once they hatch. The result is a structure that reflects both precision and necessity, built quickly but with remarkable effectiveness.

The image on this page shows a female hummingbird gathering soft material—my dog's fur—to line the nest. This behavior is typical, with hummingbirds readily using available fibers from a variety of sources, including plant down, feathers, and animal hair. The bird here is most likely a Costa's Hummingbird, a species well adapted to urban and suburban environments where such materials are accessible. The fine strands are carried in the bill and woven into the inner cup, creating a soft, insulating layer for the eggs and nestlings.

The smaller images opposite illustrate the progression of the nest itself: a newly completed structure cradled in a fork of branches, a close view of the interior showing the delicate lining and tiny white eggs, and finally the nestlings, already filling the space as it expands around them. Despite its fragile appearance, the nest is durable and flexible, holding together through wind, growth, and repeated visits by the female. It is a temporary structure, used for a single brood, but built with a level of care and efficiency that defines the breeding cycle of hummingbirds.



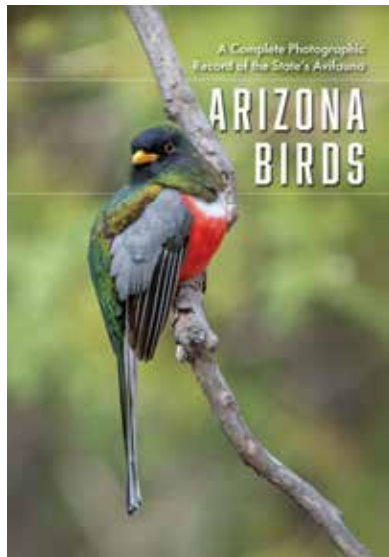
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ARIZONA BIRDS

A Complete Photographic Record of the State's Avifauna

This guide introduces the 14 regularly occurring hummingbirds of Arizona.

A larger work, Arizona Birds: A Complete Photographic Record of the State's Avifauna, extends this approach to all regularly occurring species in the state, with additional coverage of rarities.



Orders and Information:

ArizonaBirds.com



A short video companion

A video of Arizona's hummingbirds is available online, showing field behavior and habitat.

youtube.com/@ArizonaBirds