

The Spinneret

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My wife has decided that the next time I go on vacation by myself she's just going to call FEMA and give them a heads up. The last time I did that, Aberdeen was completely cut off from the rest of the state by floods and landslides. Apparently things fall apart when I leave town and don't take the boss with me. Hopefully April's showers don't bring anything but May flowers. - Ed. ■

Hummingbirds:

Hummingbirds are exclusive to the Americas and have no European counterpart.

In fact when Europeans first encountered them they thought they were insects.

Most of our local hummingbirds have spent the winter down south in California and Mexico but one hearty bunch chooses to tough it out rather than migrate.

As early as the 1930's the Anna's Hummingbird, named for Anna Masséna, Duchess of Rivoli (Italy), was common only in the southwest. With the advent of nectar feeders and the proliferation of flower gardens they have extended their range from the Baja peninsula all the way to Alaska.

Most of us know that hummingbirds feed on nectar but they also consume large numbers of insects. They will grab flying insects like midges while in flight and they are also known for stealing bugs from spider webs and grabbing them from the undersides of leaves.

This hummingbird is one of the heaviest of the North American species and is able to consume more insects than it's smaller cousins allowing it to store energy better and put on fat for lean times.

The smaller an animal is, the greater it's surface area is relative to its mass. Small animals lose heat much faster than large ones so they expend most of their energy just generating heat. This is why some small animals need to consume as much as two times their body weight daily just to stay warm.

Anna's hummingbirds meet their energy needs by pursuing the high energy found in sugars like nectar. They also conserve energy when the weather is cold or food is scarce by slowing their metabolism to a crawl.

From a normal temperature of a toasty 107 degrees a hummingbird can allow its body temperature to drop to a chilly 48 degrees. This condition, called "torpor", is not hibernation or sleep just a state of very low energy use.



Anna's Hummingbird - Male^[1]

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Honey Do:



Around here having a house is a lot like having a boat. It's going to spend a lot of time in the water. After a long wet winter, now is a good time to take a close look at the exterior.

Just like a boat, cracked paint and caulk will let in just enough water to get the rot started. If it's not dealt with early and often the damage can be severe.

Obviously caulk around doors and windows is important but don't neglect joints in the siding and along edge trim.

Also, look closely at thresholds for exterior doors. Especially if there is no storm door. Discoloration of the wood at the bottom of the door frame can signal greater damage in the floor below the door. Damage is often hidden by tile inside the entry. ■

Book Lice:



Psocid (pronounced "so-sid") Actual size about 1mm.

Here in Western Washington we are blessed with a lot of things and one of the more obvious is an ample supply of rain. In fact if you ask anyone from just about any corner of the country the first thing they will note is that it rains a lot here.

Of course they are right and all this water supports our green and verdant forests. It also supports fungus and mold and along with that mold come psocids, commonly known as book lice.

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Female Anna's hummingbird hovering^[2]

From this state it can rouse itself in just a few minutes to forage.

In spite of their size, male Anna's hummingbirds are extremely territorial and will aggressively drive other males off.

With the return of spring we will soon be treated to their unique courtship displays. These start when a female visits a male's territory.

The male hummingbird is the consummate show off. Presenting himself before the

female he will fly straight up to heights of as much as 130 feet. From that height he dives straight down at speeds approaching 60 miles per hour. As he approaches the ground he pulls up sharply, experiencing forces as high as 10 times the force of gravity in a maneuver that causes his tail feathers to vibrate like the reed in a clarinet. These vibrations create a distinctive chirping, buzz that can be heard for hundreds of feet. He then circles back around to check the reaction of the female.

Assuming his efforts are successful the female will lay two eggs which will hatch in about 16 days.

Like most birds, the young are fed by the adults regurgitating partially digested food. The young are fed every 20 minutes and they are flightworthy in just 20 days. While in the nest the young actually participate in housekeeping by hanging their bottoms over the side of the nest before relieving themselves.

With the young leaving the nest so soon it is not unusual for couples to rear 2 to 3 broods in a summer.

Hummingbirds have plenty of natural predators including insects and other birds that will raid their nests but one of the most common predators of adult animals is the domestic house cat.

As always, I advocate against feeders for wildlife, but if you choose to put up a hummingbird feeder, it is best to place it in a shaded area at least 6 feet off the ground to avoid predators. You should place it well away from buildings to avoid having birds die from crashing into windows. Also, feeders can attract wasps that can drive off or injure the birds.

There are many other ways to interact with these birds that can be beneficial. Adding shrubs and flowering plants provides nest sites and food that avoid the problems associated with feeders. Also, bird baths and water features are just as attractive to them.

The Washington Dept. of Fish & Wildlife has 2 excellent books entitled "*Living with Wildlife in the Pacific Northwest*" and "*Landscaping for Wildlife in the Pacific Northwest*" both of which are available through their website at:

<http://wdfw.wa.gov/living/> ■

^[1]"Calypte anna -San Luis Obispo, California, USA -male -flying-8" by Alan Vernon - Anna's hummingbird (Calypte anna) in flight ... 1 of 2Uploaded by Snowmanradio. Licensed under CC BY 2.0 via Wikimedia Commons - http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Calypte_anna_-_San_Luis_Obispo,_California,_USA_-_male_-_flying-8.jpg#mediaviewer/File:Calypte_anna_-_San_Luis_Obispo,_California,_USA_-_male_-_flying-8.jpg

The name book louse dates back to old Europe where psocids would infest poorly heated libraries feeding on the wheat paste used for book bindings.

Until very recently psocids were thought to be little more than a nuisance. Today they are considered a food pest because of their proclivity for infesting grain products.

Part of the reason for concern is that these insects reproduce very quickly under favorable conditions and have shown the capacity to develop strong resistance to pesticides in just a few generations.

This creature is only about 1mm long, wingless and mostly translucent. Individual insects can live up to 6 months and lay about 100 eggs in their lifetime.

They frequently feed on processed flour and they have a strong attraction to humid conditions that support mildew.

It doesn't take much additional moisture to support mildew even in a modern home. Often these conditions are enhanced by poor ventilation or failure to maintain or use exhaust fans when cooking and bathing. Throw in a little heat and it takes just a few weeks for them to overrun the pantry.

Kitchens, laundry rooms and bathrooms are where infestations commonly occur but if conditions are good, they can infest mulch outside and invade other rooms by moving in through exterior walls.

The best defense against Psocids is prevention.

To avoid infestations in the kitchen, avoid buying processed grains in quantities greater than you can consume in a couple of months. Keep all processed grains in sealed containers away from heat (our ancestors called it cool, dry storage). Always use exhaust fans when cooking or running the dish washer (all that steam has to go somewhere).

If you do get an infestation in the kitchen don't panic. Any infested materials should be thrown away. Sealed packages can be thrown in the freezer over night to kill any psocids or eggs that may be on the packaging. Wash the cabinet with soapy water and allow it to dry thoroughly. Try to determine what condition caused the infestation. Remember they need heat and humidity. Take away either of these and they can't proliferate.

For infestations elsewhere in the home it's almost always moisture causing the problem and it usually boils down to inadequate ventilation. Either the exhaust fan doesn't work, it's clogged, or it's too small. If the fan is in good shape did you cover your foundation vents last winter? Did you remember to uncover them before April? Is the vapor barrier under your home in good repair? If not, 1 square yard of exposed soil can release 2 quarts of water vapor a day.

Lastly, are you using bark mulch in the planting beds near the foundation of your home? This material supports the mildew these insects evolved to consume. If populations get high they can invade the house from outside.

If you are not able to determine what the source of the infestation is or if it persists, get professional assistance.■

^[2]"Female annas hummingbird hovering" by Mfield, Matthew Field, <http://www.photography.mattfield.com> - Own work. Licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0 via Wikimedia Commons - http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Female_annas_hummingbird_hovering.jpg#mediaviewer/File:Female_annas_hummingbird_hovering.jpg