

Instructions for Feeding Hummingbirds in Hugh Ramsey Nature Park

Tony Henehan is our local TPWD wildlife biologist and now licensed hummingbird bander. He asked for help with hummingbird feeders placed in Hugh Ramsey Park to attract more hummers and has held several banding sessions in the park.

Since starting the feeder program, we have found the best routine through trial and error.

1. The best feeder for Ramsey is the “Best – 1” made in Poteet, Tx. It can be purchased at HEB stores. The feeder ports are on a flat base which some say is not the best for the hummer’s neck but the benefits outweigh this detail. It does not spill water from the flat surface in the wind or when orioles, woodpeckers and even warblers use them as a nectar source. This is also the only feeder we tried that bees could not enter the ports and drown in the sugar water. Even the bee proof guards did not work with our smaller than average RGV bees. The glass container is not as easy for raccoons, possums and squirrels to destroy as the plastic varieties.
2. Shepherd’s hooks are used for hanging in Ramsey Park. They can be placed away from trees that make easy access for varmints. Greasing the pole with Vaseline helps and it is known that famed hummingbird bander Kelly Bryan prefers to use axle grease. Only grease the pole not the curved top.
3. The best sugar water recipe is 1 part granulated sugar to 4 parts water. The water doesn’t need to be boiled but hot water does dissolve the sugar better. Think sweet tea made in the South. Tap water is fine to use. Store any unused solution in the refrigerator; however, the longer it stays in the refrigerator the quicker it will sour once put in a feeder outside. Once filled, attach the base to the reservoir but leave the feeder upside down until you are ready to hang it. Wipe off any solution spilled on the feeder.
4. The heat and humidity of the RGV creates fast fermentation of any sugar water. Add ants and gnats into the mix and the result is even faster spoiling. It is best to change out the water every other day if signs of floating mold and insects appear in the water. Ant traps filled with water

work as a good deterrent. Fill feeder with only one cup to a cup and a half to prevent waste of sugar water. During spring and fall migration, April and September, if the feeders are being drained that can be increased but only by enough to feed for a couple of days.

5. Cleaning is essential to the health of the birds feeding from the feeders. Swapping a dirty feeder for a clean newly filled one is most convenient. Taking them home and cleaning in the kitchen sink with a bottle brush and small brush such as a well cleaned mascara brush for the portals is recommended. If there is mold in the base and bottle that is clinging add a little Clorox or vinegar to the water and soak for an hour while you watch your favorite TV nature channel. Rinse thoroughly and let air dry.
6. One last tip from hummingbird expert Carolyn Ohl. "It has been determined that hanging feeders in clusters attract more hummers; group 3 or 4, or more, together at each location to make a cluster. Having more than one cluster in your yard will give more individuals an opportunity to take advantage of the sugar-water energy source. How does this work? Aggressive birds that try to dominate a single feeder will typically give up trying to defend all the feeders in a cluster opening access to the other birds present. "
7. There are three "seed feeder" areas in Ramsey Park with two or three hummingbird feeders in each area. Hidden Pond on Indigo Trail feeder area, Retama Trail feeder area, and Hummingbird Trail feeder area.
8. Tony and the TPWD supply the feeders and sugar for the project.
9. The Ramsey Hummingbird Brigade is an ongoing project. If you would like to help with this project please email Norma Friedrich at acaskiskadee@yahoo.com or call or text 361-676-6416. Or TMN volunteers please call or text Ruben Arteaga at 956-203-9780