



USC



Native Species Project

Californian nature information & conservation
Newsletter, January 2026

Next hike: January 31, Aliso Canyon (subject to change). Email sigurdse@usc.edu

Hovering hummers. Hummingbirds (Fam. Trochilidae) are a colorful specialty of the Americas. The smallest of all birds, they belong within the Apodiformes together with swifts (Fam. Apodidae). Both swifts and hummingbirds have tiny legs and a specialized wing morphology. They are also both “aerial acrobats”, but in very different ways. While swifts often glide at high speed, hummingbirds have a high-energy flight style with rapid wingbeats (hence the humming). This allows movement in any direction, as well as hovering in place. Hummingbirds are important pollinators and get much of their energy from sugar-rich nectar from flowers, but they also eat small insects for protein. They build small nests from spiderwebs and plant materials, sometimes including man-made fibers.

Anna’s hummingbird (*Calypte anna*). This mostly green and gray hummer is a frequent visitor to gardens and hummingbird feeders. It is a medium-sized hummingbird, weighing around 4 grams. The adult males have iridescent pinkish or purple head and throat. Sound: high pitched, metallic “tzeec-tic tic tic”. **Fun fact:** Anna’s hummingbird ranges quite far to the north and is the official bird of Vancouver, Canada.



Anna’s hummingbird male hovering at the feeder and female at the nest, photos: Trond Sigurdson.

Allen’s hummingbird (*Selasphorus sasin*). Smaller than Anna’s hummingbird (around 3 grams), this species is a striking and colorful bird in our neighborhoods. Mostly green on the back, they have a lot more brown and orange in their plumage compared to Anna’s (similar to the close relative rufous hummingbird which is usually found much further north). Males have shiny orange throats. Sound: metallic, repeated “tzee, tzick-a tzick”, sounds a bit like an old video game. **Fun fact:** Allen’s hummingbirds are surprisingly aggressive territory holders, often chasing away larger birds from their favorite patch of flowers.



Allen’s hummingbirds, female (photo: Trond Sigurdson).

Supporting local flora and fauna: Planting native flowering plants, such as e.g. sages (Gen. *Salvia*), will attract hummingbirds. Hummingbird feeders also work, as long as fresh sugar water is provided. According to famous ornithologist David Allen Sibley, 4 parts water and 1 part white sugar is best (avoid any other additives).



<https://dornsife.usc.edu/bisc/undergraduate/usc-native-species-project/>

