



# California Wildlife Center

## Patient of the Week

### January 19th, 2024

#### Anna's Hummingbird



Iridescence in Anna's Hummingbird feathers.

The two most frequent species of hummingbirds we receive are Allen's and Anna's. Allen's are the most common in our area and have an iridescent green back and an orange throat. Last year we received 229 sick, injured, or orphaned Allen's Hummingbirds. On the other hand, we received just 53 Anna's Hummingbirds during the same time period.

Our 20th patient of 2024 was a male Anna's Hummingbird brought to us from Topanga. The finder had been out hiking and found the tiny bird stuck in the mud. When he arrived, he was covered in debris, unable to stand, and his wing was drooping. Wildlife technicians suspected that the mud was inhibiting his ability to perch, but that he also had a shoulder injury. They gently cleaned his feathers with a damp cotton swab over a period of days to remove the contamination. After the cleaning he was able to perch in a natural position. Luckily this patient was eating well and thermoregulating upon arrival. Not surprisingly, hummingbirds have very little body fat and need to constantly eat to stay warm and alive. When this Anna's Hummingbird arrived, he weighed just 4.4 grams, the same as a teaspoon of sugar.



Allen's Hummingbirds have orange iridescent feathers on their throats.

Our technicians gave the bird pain medication and allowed him to rest while giving him easy access to adult hummingbird formula. This allowed his wing perk to improve without intervention. Sometimes all that animals need is cage rest to heal—in the outside world, rest would not be possible as they would need to both evade predators and seek food. After just eight days, this hummingbird was released.

Like many other species of birds, Anna's Hummingbirds have spectacular iridescent feathers at the neck. The phenomenon is possible as their feathers have tiny melanosomes within their feather melanin that reflect and refract light from specific angles. Even in the bird world, hummingbird's feather iridescence is unique and especially colorful, and scientists are still trying to determine why and how hummingbirds developed these particularly shaped melanosomes, which evolved during the past 54 million years. The purpose of this feature is most likely to show territoriality and to attract mates, though it does make the birds more susceptible to predators. Hummingbirds are also tetrachromatic, meaning that they can see beyond the range of humans and that they can see ultraviolet rays. When they see the iridescent feathers, they are seeing even more than we can perceive.



Seen from various angles, the feathers appear to be different colors.



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Hummingbird's intense iridescence is unique, even in the bird world.

Many people feed hummingbirds at their feeders. For this we have a few rules: don't use commercial feeds or dyes and be sure to sanitize your feeder regularly. The formula for hummingbird nectar is a ratio of 4:1, so four parts water to one part plain white sugar (don't use brown, organic, confectioner's or cane sugar). You can heat the water to dissolve the sugar solids but be sure to cool it to room temperature before placing it in the feeders. This solution may be kept in the refrigerator for up to five days. We also recommend that the feeder be cleaned at least once every four to five days with boiling water—no heavy-duty cleaners and no bleach needed. Only fill the feeder up with as much liquid as is being consumed in 4-5 days to ensure freshness. Place the feeder at least four feet off the ground and away from any active nests.

We also encourage the planting of native bushes and flowers that will attract hummingbirds to your property.