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Bee hummingbird
(*Mellisuga helenae*)
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World's Smallest Bird

The bee hummingbird

Have you ever wondered which is the world's smallest feathered creature? It is, of course, a species of hummingbird. The Bee Hummingbird (*Mellisuga helenae*) inhabits Cuba (where people call it *zunzuncito*) and the Isle of Youth. The bird weighs 1.8 grams, having a length of about 5 cm (2 in). An unaware observer can take this bird for an insect. The bird flies with 80 wing beats per second, a rhythm at which the human retina cannot detect naturally details. During the courtship displays, the male flap his wings up to 200 times per second! Only high speed cameras can take pictures of this bird. And, in fact, the male Bee Hummingbird is the smallest bird, as he is smaller than the female. This bird has also the smallest number of feathers: about 1,000 feathers (in other bird species, there are up to 25,000 feathers). Its heart rate is the second fastest of all animals, to sustain the high metabolism (explaining its wing rhythm and body temperature). The body temperature is 40°C (104°F), the highest of all birds, but it drops during the night to 19°C (66°F) to save energy (as the bird would lose too much heat because of its small size). Bee hummingbirds eat half their total body mass and drink 8 times their total body mass in water each day. These birds are solitary, accepting each other's company only during the breeding period; in the rest of the time, they are fiercely territorial, defending their territories (represented by blossom trees) very aggressively even against much larger birds. The nest is attached to small branches using spider web threads. The nest is also world's smallest, no larger than the cup of a doll (3 cm or 1.2 inch in diameter). The nest usually hosts two minute eggs, smaller than two coffee beans. The chicks usually hatch in May-June. The appetite of this bird is the opposite of its size. This hummingbird consumes small spiders and mites, but especially the sweet nectar of the tropical vividly colored flower. Its high metabolism means this bird consumes half of its body mass and drink 8 times their body mass in water daily. This bird is crucial in ensuring the pollination and survival of several plant species. Once this bird was relatively common, but even if today it is protected, its numbers are dwindling. Amongst mammals (the only other warm-blooded group of vertebrates, besides birds) only the Etruscan shrew and the bumblebee bat compete with this species in size.