



Audubon at Home in Northern Virginia

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Hummingbird Clearwing Moth (*Hemaris thysbe*)

The Hummingbird Clearwing Moth gets its name from its resemblance to hummingbirds and the transparent “windows” in its wings where scales are absent. Unlike most other moth species, Hummingbird Clearwings are active during the day. Their chunky, reddish brown torpedo-shaped bodies are held aloft by wings spanning 1½ to 2¼ inches. The wing margins are brown. Adults are seen between April and November, often hovering, just like a hummingbird, while sipping nectar with their long proboscis. In the process of visiting multiple flowers, they pollinate their food sources, helping to propagate future generations of our local plants.

What Hummingbird Clearwings Need

Food: Adults feed on a variety of local plants, including beebalm, phlox, blueberry, mints, joe pyc weed and milkweed.

Breeding: Females lay small green eggs on the underside of leaves of hawthorn, cherry, and plum trees in spring. The larva has a prominent horn on the rear.

Shelter: The pupal stage is spent in a dark brown cocoon in leaf litter.

Other: Wind can present problems for hovering flyers.

Resources:

Herbaceous nectar plants—available at Nature By Design, Hyla Brook Farm, Merrifield Garden Center, DeBaggio Herbs and other local nurseries

Trees—available from Musser Forests, Inc, Nature By Design

Model Hummingbird Clearwing Moth Habitats:

Meadowlark Gardens Regional Park—www.nvrpa.org/meadowlark.html

Riverfarm—www.ahs.org/river_farm/index.htm

Hollin Meadows Elementary—www.fcps.edu/HollinMeadowsES/

How You Can Help

- Plant a pollinator garden. These nectar plants are available from local nurseries and are easy to maintain.
- Avoid cultivars, which may be sterile and will not produce berries or seeds, and thus will not self propagate.
- Plant host trees for larvae such as Washington hawthorn, Black cherry, American wild plum, Chickasaw plum and choke cherry.
- Avoid using pesticides, which could kill larvae that are feeding on the leaves of their host trees.
- Let the host tree's leaves collect on the ground under the tree's canopy from year to year so that the pupae will have a protected place to overwinter.
- Provide a wind screen of thick shrubs or evergreen trees. Consider summersweet, Virginia sweetspire, southern bayberry, rosebay rhododendron, inkberry and eastern red cedar. A fence or trellis covered in crossvine, trumpet honeysuckle, or native grape will also do the trick.

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