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Ruby-throated Hummingbird feeds on pear

by John G. Palis

Ruby-throated Hummingbirds (*Archilochus colubris*) feed principally on flower nectar and small invertebrates (Robinson et al. 1996), but will also feed on tree sap at Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (*Sphyrapicus varius*) sap wells (Smith 1954, Miller and Nero 1983). Herein, I describe an observation of a Ruby-throated Hummingbird feeding on a novel food item, an over-ripe pear, during autumn migration.

On 28 September 2009, I observed an adult female or juvenile Ruby-throated Hummingbird flying amid the branches of a feral pear tree (*Pyrus communis*) on the Cache River State Natural Area, Johnson County, Illinois (37°19.182N, 88°57.151W). The sky was cloudless and the air temperature was approximately 18°C. The bird focused its attention on an over-ripe pear ca. 2.5 m above the ground. It hovered adjacent to the upper half of the pear, completely inserting its bill into a small hole near the top. While at the pear, the bird inserted its bill into the pear multiple times, for 2-9 seconds at a time (a mean of 5.25 seconds during eight, timed beak insertions). After feeding, it flew to a nearby branch on an adjacent black locust (*Robinia pseudoacacia*) where it wiped its bill and rested. While resting the bird appeared drowsy, abruptly nodding its head downward several times. The bird repeated this feeding/resting behavior several times while under observation from a distance of ca. 2 m from 1055-1110 CDST.

The following day, I detached the pear from the tree, cut a slit in the skin from the hole downward, and examined the interior. The feeding shaft was ca. 1-2 mm in diameter and ca. 10 mm long. The shaft terminated in a juicy, semi-solid,

fermented mass of pulp. Because I did not observe adult or larval fruit flies (*Drosophila*) on or in the pear, I assume the hummingbird had been feeding on the fermented pear pulp. The bird's head-nodding behavior while perched suggests that it may have been exhausted from migration travel or experiencing ethanol intoxication from consuming fermented pulp. This, I believe, is the first report of a Ruby-throated Hummingbird feeding on the juicy pulp of a domestic pear.

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