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The World of the Hummingbird by Robert Burton

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BOOK REVIEW

The World of the Hummingbird by Robert Burton. Firefly Books (U.S.) Inc., Buffalo, New York. 2001. \$40.00, hardback; 158 pages, 151 color photographs. ISBN 1-55209-607-6.

The World of the Hummingbird is a large, 9 × 11 inches, coffee table sort of book that in addition to beautiful photographs also affords great insights into the private lives of hummingbirds. It is printed on glossy, 100-lb., acid-free paper. The author has accumulated color plates from scores of internationally renowned wildlife photographers, some of the finest hummingbird photographs available in book form. No fewer than 88+ hummingbird species are shown, along with photographs of habitat and other critters that do much the same as hummingbirds, i.e., bats, Old World sunbirds, and insects.

Robert Burton has written several other books dealing with bird behavior, bird flight, and bird migration. In this book he deals with some interesting and complex topics relative to hummingbirds that make delightful reading for the scientist and lay person alike. He has divided the book into 7 chapters in which he introduces hummingbirds and then discusses their flight, their relationships with plants and humans, nesting behavior, migration, myths and legends about them, trade and commercial use of hummingbird feathers, and lastly current threats to their habitats, the latter of great concern to conservation biology.

Some photographs particularly caught my eye. First was a dorsal view sequence, by Stephen Dalton, of 7 figures of the same hummingbird showing flight and illustrating how the wings make the more-or-less figure of 8 pattern; a newly hatched Black-chinned Hum-

mingbird in a nest with a second egg about to hatch, photo by Sid and Shirley Rucker; a hummingbird drinking tree sap, photo by Jack Wilburn; a White-bearded Hermit showing the great extent of the tongue, photo by Luisa Mazariegos; and a Magenta-throated Woodstar showing digested nectar passing out the cloaca as the bird feeds on a blossom, photo by Michael and Patricia Fogden.

I was fascinated by the chapter on human interactions with hummingbirds. The earlier Peruvian cultures of 1500 years ago apparently had a particular interest in them. A 300-foot symbol on the ground of a hummingbird was made by the Nazca of the Peruvian plateau. The Nazca also made wood carvings of them. I learned that the Taino people of the Caribbean, at the time of Columbus's first encounter, called their warriors *colibri*; they were impressed with how hummingbirds fought to protect their territories. That term now forms a hummingbird genus name.

Because hummingbirds are so speciose, many have small ranges often where unique habitats occur. Today, with the loss of habitats, the Hook-billed Hermit may consist of fewer than 250 individuals in a 40-square-mile fragmented region of Brazil's lowland Atlantic forest; they were formerly abundant over a range of 13,500 square miles.

This book has much to offer both the scientist and lay person, and the price makes it an attractive purchase. It has a sturdy binding of lasting quality. I highly recommend it.

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