

## Hummingbird — Kumlurngaq

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### KUMLURNGAM MANAIT NAKERTUT. – HUMMINGBIRD EGGS ARE LUCKY.

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Photo: Rufous Hummingbird, courtesy of the USF&WS National Digital Library.

Rufous hummingbirds (Latin: *Selasphorus rufus*) are the world's northernmost hummers. These tiny birds are about three inches long, with a dark, straight bill, and bright orange and green plumage. Males have a shimmering splash of red or purple feathers on their throats—a swatch of color known as a gorget. Like a dragonfly, these hummingbirds beat their wings very fast—up to 60 beats per second. This allows them to hover over nectar-rich flowers. They also eat bugs, which they captured as they fly. The birds return to feed at the same places each year, and will even visit the same plants. Though tiny, they are spunky and territorial and will attack larger birds.

The rufous hummingbird has the longest migration of all hummers in the United States. These solitary fliers arrive in Alaska by early May. They spend just three months in the north laying eggs and raising their young. In the fall, they return south, flying thousands of miles to warmer climates. Some travel to Mexico. Others head for places like Florida, an annual round trip of roughly 8,000 miles!

Kodiak lies at the far western limit of the rufous hummingbird's range, but birds are known to visit in the fall. Local birders believe that many of these individuals are immature birds, inexperienced migrators who stray accidentally into the archipelago. Perhaps due to their rarity, Alutiiq hunters prized hummingbirds, and their tiny nests and eggs, as amulets. Dead birds were dried kept in hunting bags for luck, besides bits of bear hair, colorful stones, and other personal talismans.

Kodiak Alutiiq speakers refer to hummingbirds as *kumlurngaq*. However, in other parts of the Alutiiq world speakers may use the term *megtarpak*—from the word *megtaq* for bumblebee. This word reflects the tiny, buzzing-like characteristics of the hummingbird.