

## *Patient Tale: A Jewel from Mother Nature*

It was an average day in June, meaning animals were being admitted left and right and we were struggling to keep up with the hourly baby songbird feedings, when a citizen arrived with another baby bird. She had been trimming branches when she suddenly noted a tiny creature on the ground. An ornithologist friend of hers had identified the baby as a hummingbird.



The little hummer weighed one gram on admission, barely enough to register on our scale. We do a pretty good job of keeping our baby birds fed hourly but I knew this little one would need to be fed every 15 to 20 minutes throughout the day to have any chance of surviving. Hummingbirds have such a rapid metabolism that they have to go into a semi-hibernation just to survive each night! The baby quickly became known as my "appendage" as it was, basically, attached to my hip. Where I went, it went, even on my days off. I fed it faithfully every 15 minutes from 8 am to 8 pm, or later. Appropriately nick-named "Piglet", the little one ate enthusiastically.



My "appendage" was doing quite well but I began to worry that I may have "won the battle but lost the war." We always try to raise our babies with others of their own kind to prevent human bonding. We rarely receive baby hummers and had no other to put with my baby and I was concerned that it might not learn how to be a proper hummingbird. It was flying and beginning to eat from the nectar dispenser all by itself but seemed to like me way too much. When I returned to the Center after a weekend off in late July, you can imagine my delight to find another young hummer had been admitted. My "appendage" finally had a friend!

As small as hummingbirds are, they are very territorial and quite feisty. By early August, the new "friend" was declaring dominance over the cage and was not being very nice to my baby. On a beautiful, clear day, we decided it was time for our little jewels to make their own way in the world. We hung three hummingbird feeders outside to ease the transition, crossed our fingers and sent our little ones back to the wild where they belong. We have enjoyed watching them come to the feeders and wish them the best of luck on their migration across the Gulf of Mexico. Releases are always gratifying but especially so when we get a specie as delicate as a hummingbird back to nature.

*by Chris Montuori, staff*

*Author's Note:* SCWC uses a specialized nectar formula designed to provide all the nutrients and protein hummingbirds need; sugar water just does not do the job. Additionally, as I have said in the past, if you have a life, you do not have time to raise a baby bird. They are VERY labor intensive and should be delivered to a licensed wildlife rehabilitator as soon as possible.