

Hughie Jones - March 2018

**Cape Fuchsia (*Phygелиus*)
Figwort Family (*Scrophulariaceae*)
in the Bird Garden at VanDusen**

Anna's hummingbird was named Vancouver's official city bird in 2017. The city describes this hummer as 'classy, urbane, and stylish with the heart of a tiger'.



“With their iridescent emerald feathers and sparkling rose-pink throats, Anna's hummingbirds are more like flying jewelry than birds, but they are also fierce defenders and enforce their turf with tenacity,” says a city statement.

And the city likes the fact that their housing needs are modest and that they could easily live in a potted plant in any Vancouver neighbourhood.

But there is no time for reflection for Anna's hummingbird - with a heart rate as high as 1,260 beats per minute in flight, they must constantly feed, consuming more than their own weight in food.

But inside their fast beating hearts, they just might be thankful for Cape Fuchsia (*Phygелиus*). This easy to grow and dependable perennial from South Africa flowers from summer to the end of fall. Hummingbirds have good memories and remember long flowering food sources from previous years.

Hummingbirds must visit hundreds of flowers daily as they are only hours away from starving. And they look for a flower shaped to accommodate their whirring wings. The corolla (overall structure of flower petals) has to be thick enough to resist the beaks of other birds.

The hummingbird bill fits perfectly into the long tube-shaped flowers of these plants. While bee flowers are scented, hummingbird flowers usually have little or no fragrance. Cape Fuchsia with its bright colours of orange, red, yellow and pink is made to attract the hummingbird to its nectar. When hummingbirds feed, their forehead rubs against the stamens and pistils collecting pollen. They then move from flower to flower, pollinating as they go.

The hummingbird has its origin in the Americas. It was around 22 million years ago that the ancestral species of current hummingbirds became established in South America. Then 6 millions years ago they showed up in North America. The Aztecs understood the hummingbird and felt its essence - the Aztec god of war Huitzilopochtli is often shown as a hummingbird. The sound of the Nahuatl word 'huitzil' for hummingbird is the hummingbird's wings-beats and zooming flight.



Phygelius 'Moonraker'



Phygelius capensis

A yellow cape fuchsia and an orange one in my garden. Likes a sunny and well-drained spot. Grows up to one meter tall. Hardy and begins to invade after a few years. Root pulls up easily and a quick cut off controls plant. Pest and disease resistant.

https://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/galveston/beneficials/beneficial-62_pollinators-hummingbirds.htm; <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/annas-hummingbird-vancouver-bird-1.4122817>; Perennials Volume 2 - Phillips & Rix https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hummingbird#In_myth_and_culture