

Natural Light & Hummingbird Photography

Some Basics:

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Here are some general / basic tips with regard to photographing hummingbirds using nothing but ambient / natural light:

LIGHT:

Like most nature photographers, I generally avoid photographing during the full, harsh light of midday. But with hummingbirds I make an exception to this strategy since you need plenty of light to get these incredibly fast birds as sharp as you can. Also, with more light hitting more angles more iridescence will show up (*not just on the gorget but the other places hummingbirds sparkle as well, such as the tops of their heads & backs*).

YOUR POSITION:

Keep in mind where you'll be positioned when positioning that feeder. You will want to photograph with the sun coming from behind you, with your shadow pointing toward the bird (obviously not shading the bird, but pointing *toward* it). This allows you to capture the iridescence of the throat gorget as it catches the sun.

CONSIDER the BACKGROUND:

Be sure to look for large shadows, bright spots, and uneven tones in the background that distract from the star of your image. Bright spots, especially, will attract the viewer's eye so I suggest taking a few test shots to make sure you don't have any such distractions. Leaves between branches are particularly bad about creating them. An easy way to create nice, even greens behind the bird is to lower the feeder and use a distant lawn as the background.

CAMERA SETTINGS:

You generally want as fast a shutter speed as you can get when photographing hummingbirds in natural light.

- Start with a fairly large aperture ~ f/4 or f/5.6.
 - ◆ I wouldn't go down to f/8 unless I *really* had lots of light.
- ISO ~ in the 400-800 range.
- If your background is dark your camera will tend to overexpose the bird and vice versa.
- Don't forget to check that histogram after the first couple shots & adjust your exposure as necessary.

