

# How the Hummingbird Got Its Colors

Belize  
Mayan  
North America



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Before time was counted and before stories were written, the world was held in balance by breath, water, and light. The people rose with the first birdsong, tending their milpa fields of corn, beans, and squash. They spoke thanks to the earth before planting and left offerings of water at the forest's edge, because everything—stone, tree, bird, and wind—had its place and spirit.

In those days, the birds wore plain feathers, the color of ash and rainclouds. Even the hummingbird, quick as thought, was dressed in gray. Each morning, the Sun climbed from the eastern sky, following the sacred path that keeps time moving. But one dawn, the Sun did not rise. The air grew heavy. The ceiba tree, tall and watchful, creaked as if uneasy. Flowers closed their mouths. The people lit no cooking fires, for the day had lost its warmth.

The birds gathered beneath the ceiba, whose roots reach the underworld and whose branches touch the heavens. "The Sun has lost his way," said the Owl, who knows the night. "We must send a messenger," said the Eagle, who knows the sky.

The great birds flew first—strong-winged and proud—but the winds at the edge of the world were fierce. They returned exhausted, feathers singed by heat and cloud. From the low branches came a quiet voice. “I will go.” It was the hummingbird. Small enough to rest on a fingertip. Light enough to slip between moments.

The others doubted him, but the hummingbird did not seek permission. He drank from the last open flower, carrying its sweetness for strength, and lifted himself into the air. He flew past rivers that remember the moon, over limestone hills and deep green forests, through clouds thick with rain. When the wind pushed him back, he did not fight it—he turned sideways and passed through.

At the place where sky thins and time slows, the hummingbird reached the Sun. The Sun, old and powerful, paused when he saw the tiny bird hovering before him. “Why do you come so far, little one?” the Sun asked. The hummingbird did not boast. He bowed his head.

“The people are waiting. The corn bends without warmth. The children are cold. Your light is needed.” The Sun felt the truth in the hummingbird’s words. He reached out—not with fire, but with care—and brushed the bird’s feathers.

Where his fingers passed, green bloomed like new leaves, red like ripe fruit, blue like deep water, gold like dawn. The colors did not weigh the bird down; they lifted him.

“Go,” said the Sun. “I will follow.”

The hummingbird returned faster than before, a flash of living light. And when he reached the forest, the Sun rose once more along his sacred path.

Since that day, the hummingbird carries the colors of the world—not because he was the strongest, but because he listened, served, and moved in harmony.

And the elders say:

*When a hummingbird passes close, pause.*

*It may be carrying a message between worlds.*

**This story reflects Belizean Maya values through milpa life, where corn is both sustenance and sacred responsibility, the ceiba tree as a bridge between worlds, and the Sun as a living force of balance. It emphasizes harmony with nature and respect for the land—its rivers, forests, and limestone hills—as central to daily life and spiritual understanding in Belize.**

