

Hummingbird Roundup 2013

2013 was another good year for those who enjoy hummingbirds in Texas. We enjoyed fifteen of the eighteen species known to have visited the state—only the Berylline, Violet-crowned and Green-breasted Mango were not reported in the state last year. Unusual and exciting findings included the Buff-bellied Hummingbird being seen well into north Texas with records, including photographs, from Fannin County.

These “out of the norm” sightings always generate excitement, and offer a great opportunity to expand our outreach and engage new observers in reporting the hummingbirds they are seeing each year.

Our participation in 2013 returned to the high 200s. We had 286 participants from 108 counties, including reports from Culberson County for the first time in several years. Opportunities to schedule workshops are limited, but when we do get an opportunity they are very well received. If you know of a location that might be willing to host a workshop, please let us know early in the year so that we can make arrangements quickly. These observers are great, and they are reporting some interesting hummingbird activity.



Buff-bellied Hummingbird at Hornsby Bend in Austin

In general, hummingbird diversity this year was high with 83.3% of the hummingbirds known to have occurred in Texas being seen this year. While we had no double digit counties this year, the perennial leaders—Brewster and Jeff Davis counties - continued to lead the way with 9 species each. Culberson County, with a very active observer in Dog Canyon of Guadalupe Mountains National Park, reported 8 species while Harris County lead east Texas with 7 species. Three species were seen in several counties along the Red River and the southern panhandle checked in with 6 species. Great diversity as we are making changes.

The new electronic forms got a great

boost from a volunteer in Harris County who took the rough design I had created and revised them so that they work and look much better. These should be available on the web soon, but if you want to go digital sooner, send me an email and I will be happy to send them to you. Another change is our newsletter which we have had to produce electronically only. You are welcome to print as many as you need. We are collecting data from cloud sources this year with a “Hummingbirds of Texas” app on iNaturalist.org. If you are traveling in Texas, you can report hummingbird sightings immediately with this great tool. This newsletter reports on some of these changes.

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Identification Tips

Calliope Hummingbirds

The Calliope Hummingbird was recently moved into the same genus as the Rufous, Allen's and Broad-tailed hummingbirds, and



Calliope Hummingbird juvenile

Calliope with a longer bill and tail and a richer rufous wash to the underparts. The outer edge of their tails will show more rufous as well.

Your best identification though comes from looking at the bird itself, and not from comparing with others. The Calliope Hummingbird is the smallest of breeding birds in the United States, so it is going to appear small. This is the only hummingbird in Texas that has a distinctly *striped*—not spotted—throat area. The wine color of the male's throat, if it is visible is distinctive.

In general, this bird is going to be a diminutive hummingbird with uniquely shaped tail feathers resulting in a very short tail. The bill is black, short and straight.

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this makes sense since these are the three species most likely to be confused with the Calliope. The females of these species are all remarkably similar, and the challenge of reaching a specific identification can be daunting. While considerably smaller than any of their close relatives (Sheri Williamson



Broad-tailed Hummingbird female



Rufous or Allen's Hummingbird juvenile

shows them as 2.75—3.25 inches) these little gems show many of the same color patterns found in other *Selasphorous* species including the red-brown color dispersed across the body. So how can one confidently discern the difference between Calliope Hummingbird and other, similar birds?

Female and immature male Broad-tailed Hummingbirds are considerably larger than Calliope Hummingbirds, with a longer bill, larger tail and more rufous in the outer tail feathers. Rufous and Allen's females and juvenile males are slightly larger than a

Calliope Hummingbird is most common in the western part of the state during fall migration. It has been seen though throughout the state again in fall and winter months.



Calliope Hummingbird male photo by R. Hagan

Electronic Participation

Everything is moving to electronics, and the Hummingbird Roundup is no exception. This year we did not do any mass printing of our forms—they are available online as a pdf file and we print and mail them as they are needed.

You don't need a form to participate though—you can participate through email. A volunteer out of Harris County has worked with the forms and they look, and from what I hear work, great! This allows you to participate quickly, each week without keeping track of a piece of paper. This is much more environmentally conscious as well.

A second method of electronic participation is an app for your cell phone or to use on your computer. It is built on the framework of the www.iNaturalist.org website, and is titled "Hummingbirds of Texas." This site will allow us to capture species presence or absence, but does not offer us the opportunity to gather habitat, predator or torpor information.

The iNaturalist application allows you to take a photo and submit observation data (where, when and what you think it was) for anything you see anywhere



in the world. People familiar with those birds will comment on your observation, confirming what you saw or making another suggestion, and you can offer your data to a wide variety of projects.

"He's Still Here!"

"What can I do? It's the end of October and I have a hummingbird that just will not go away! He's going to freeze!" This call comes in just about weekly during the late fall and, while a great testimony to our love for hummingbirds, it also demonstrates the amazing ability of

these hummingbirds to withstand the unpredictable weather of our late fall and early winter.

Several hummingbird species are much more likely in Texas in the later months of the year. Migrants from the north and west flood into our state during August, September and even October. Some of these birds, having flown thousands of

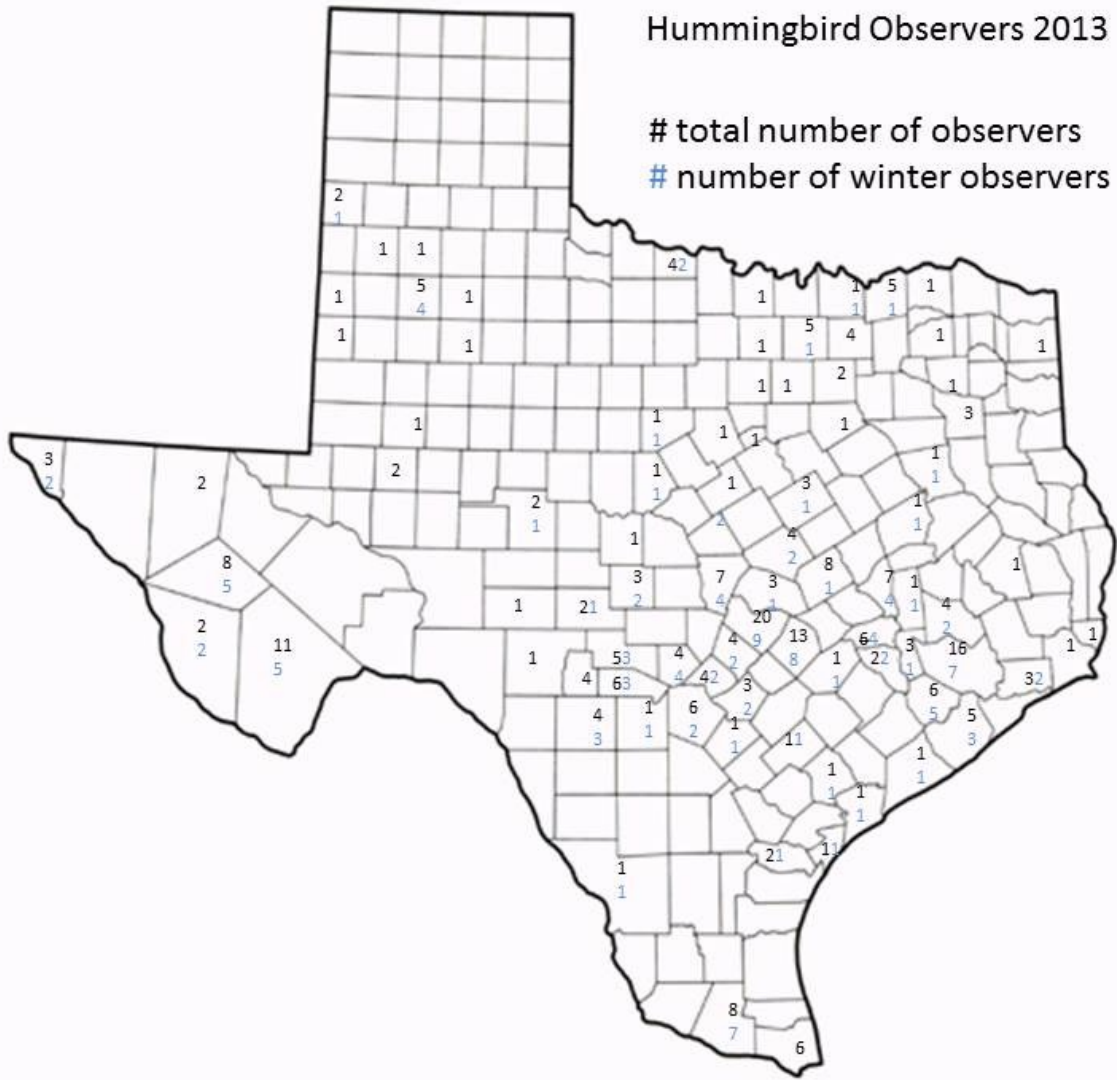
miles to arrive here, will linger late into the year, possibly even staying through the holidays and into the new year.

"But he has to go to Mexico! If he doesn't he will freeze." This is the usual response



when I say that there is nothing at all for you to do to "force" that hummingbird to leave. You can not make him leave. Your feeder did not keep birds from migrating in September, and it is not keeping them from migrating in December. If "he's still here," then please maintain your feeder and enjoy the bird. And please, don't forget to add him to your Hummingbird Roundup report.





Species	Percent obs
Salvias	20.7
Turk's Cap	10.6
Lantana	7.3
Trumpet vine	4.5
Flame acanthus	3.4
Honeysuckle	3.4
Hamelia	3.4
Crossvine	2.8
Hibiscus	2.8
Yellowbells	2.8



Preferred Plants in 2013

Not everyone turns in a list of plants that the birds seemed to prefer in their garden. When you do though, it opens a vault of possibilities that help us in giving advice to new hummingbird enthusiasts who might want to start a hummingbird garden.

Red indicates an exotic plant. There may also be exotic species within some of the other groups, but this was the first definitive exotic again this year.

How Diverse Was Your County?

time that we need to become concerned.

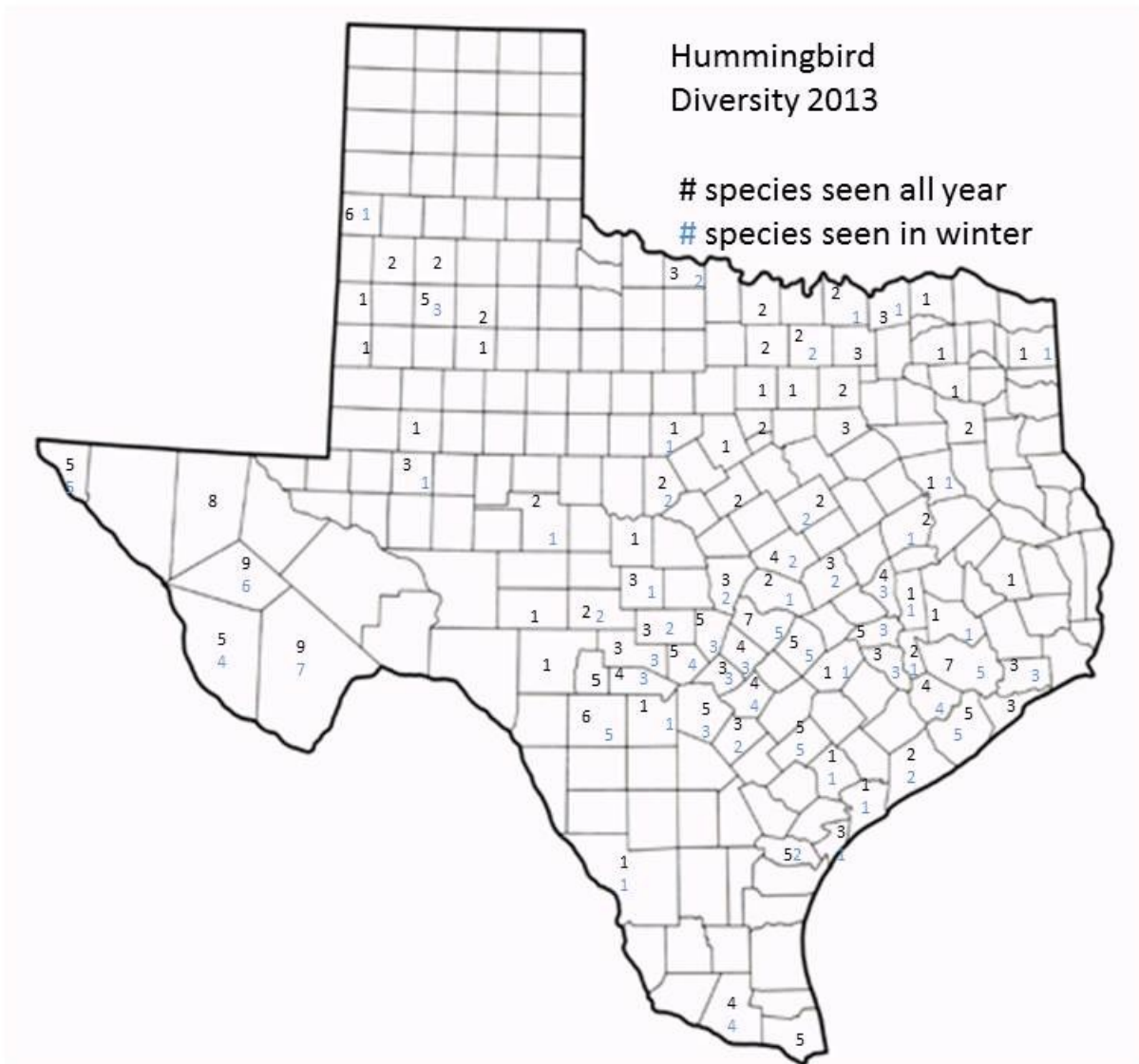
Diversity dropped in many of the counties across the state this year, but the most diverse counties remained consistent, with the one note that for the first time in many years Culberson County is back in the survey. Diversity can be affected by a wide variety of factors including climate, changes to the habitat (both yours and those around you), weather conditions that change the course the birds are following and many more. While declines in diversity or density need to be taken seriously, it is only when they show over a period of

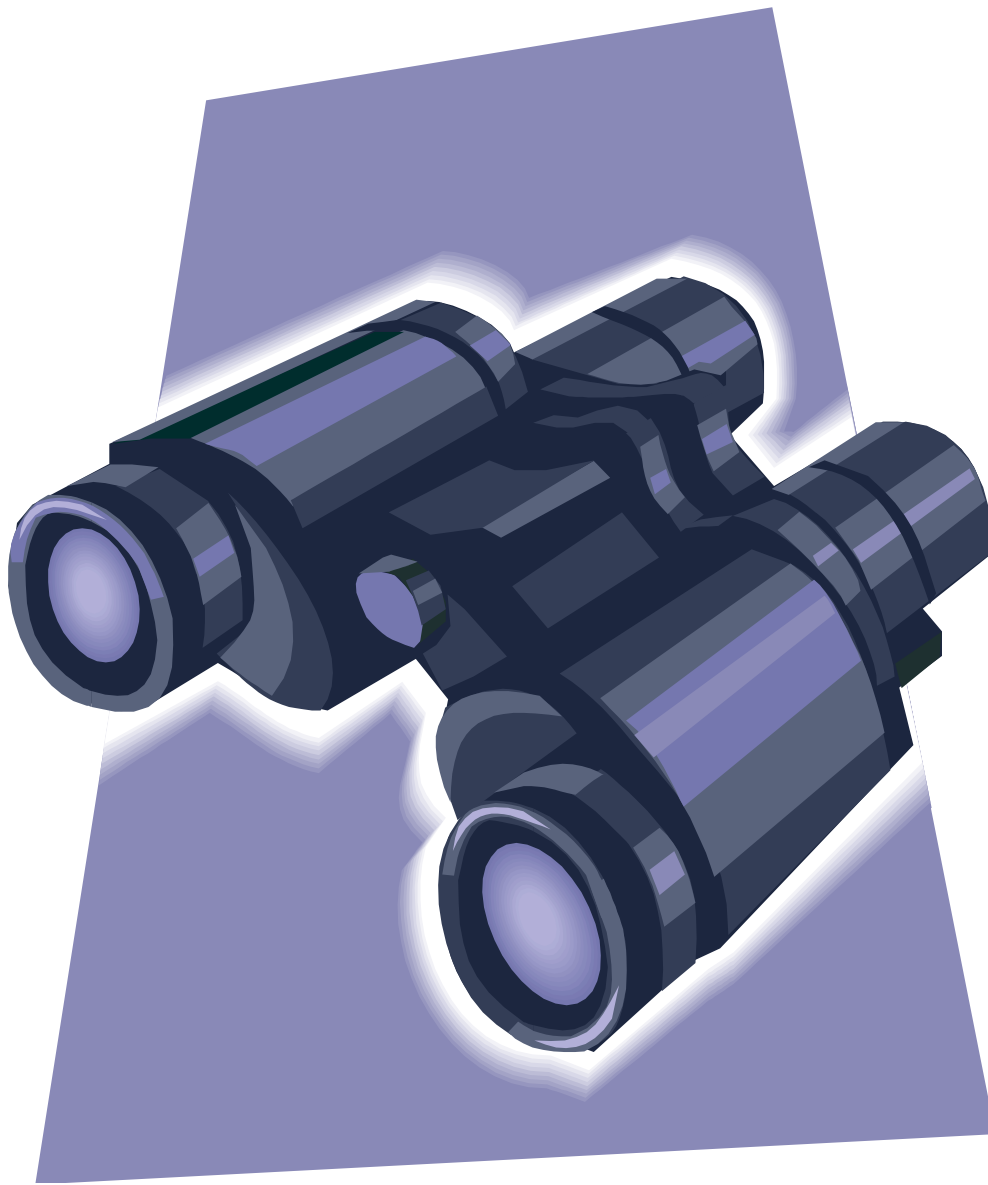
The counties with the most diversity in 2013 were:

Brewster County	9
Jeff Davis County	9
Culberson County	8
Harris County	7
Travis County	7
Parmer County	6



Broad-billed Hummingbird photo by R. Hagan, Brewster County





Observers' Comments

This is your space, where your questions and comments posed on page three of your survey are posted and answered, commented on and acknowledged. The more questions you pose the more we have to work with.

A visit from an unexpected species might generate a lot of interest. From Parmer County this year:

Seen an Anna's male. Had short bill, red crown and distinct white eye ring.

Remember that when an unusual species is noted a photo is always appreciated. Fortunately in this case this is not the first time Anna's has been seen in Parmer County, but a photo is still a good idea.

Numbers always seem to get our attention, especially when they seem lower. From Fort Bend County this year:

Significantly lower number of birds this year, fewst ever for me since starting to report.

From Bexar County:

This is the worst year we have ever had for hummingbirds. Sometimes they would be gone for days at a time.

And from Wilson County:

We noticed fewer hummers ... not nearly as many Rufous during the cold season.

Not knowing more than what we have, it is difficult to be certain, however hummingbirds like other species tend to go through peaks and valleys in their populations. The coastal area may have been in one of those valleys.

We did get two interesting comments from people on the opposite end of the spectrum. From Bastrop County:

This year I saw many more hummingbirds during migration than in past years—filling feeders daily.

And from Parmer County in the Texas panhandle:

Seemed to see more birds than usual the first part of the season.

Again, without knowing more than we do, we can not very easily answer this question with confidence. In general though, we watch for long term trends in population numbers, and not changes from year to year. Changes may come from changes to habitat nearby, from weather or climate conditions, changes in population density near you, or any number of other causes not necessarily indicating a decline in the overall population of the birds.

We expect the birds to leave at a certain time, and when they don't do so we ask why. From Bastrop County this year:

Have observed hummingbirds all the way through December. (In past years did not see past the 1st week of October).

We can not say why it happens one year, then not the next year, but hummingbirds definitely can stay in Texas through the winter. See our article on page 3 ("He's Still Here") for notes on how to respond to this unusual situation.

From Fort Bend County:

For the 3rd year in a row I have had 1-2 juvenile Rufous over winter, staying until late Feb / early March.... I am happy to have them, but find this pattern curious. Do you think they are late nesting near me.

From Presidio County:

Observed two Rufous, at least that is what they looked like to me. I think that a rumped bird perched on a limb with its mouth open and an adult female hovering over it is probably a juvenile.

Rufous Hummingbirds nest in the Pacific northwest—extreme north in Alaska and British Columbia. To confirm nesting we would have to see a female on the nest. The report from Presidio County is interesting, but he does report Anna's in the area at the same time. Anna's Hummingbird is known to nest in November to January.

Many people are interested in identifying individual birds. This is almost impossible unless the bird is banded or somehow marked in a way no other bird is marked. From Brazos County:

In Jan. & Feb. I took photos of the R/A and was able to identify 4 individuals over the 2 months, although I only ever saw 2 individuals on a daily basis.

Rufous Hummingbirds are in Texas during a period when they can go through a lot of changes in a period of a couple of months. Unless you can mark the birds in a way no other bird is marked (the principle behind banding), we can only assume that they might be the same birds day to day.

Two species that are not reported very often were seen regularly in one county. From Culberson County:

We had regular sightings of Magnificent and Blue-throated.

These big hummingbirds always generate excitement when they are found at the feeders.

When the birds don't respond as we expect, it sometimes causes concern. From Montgomery County:

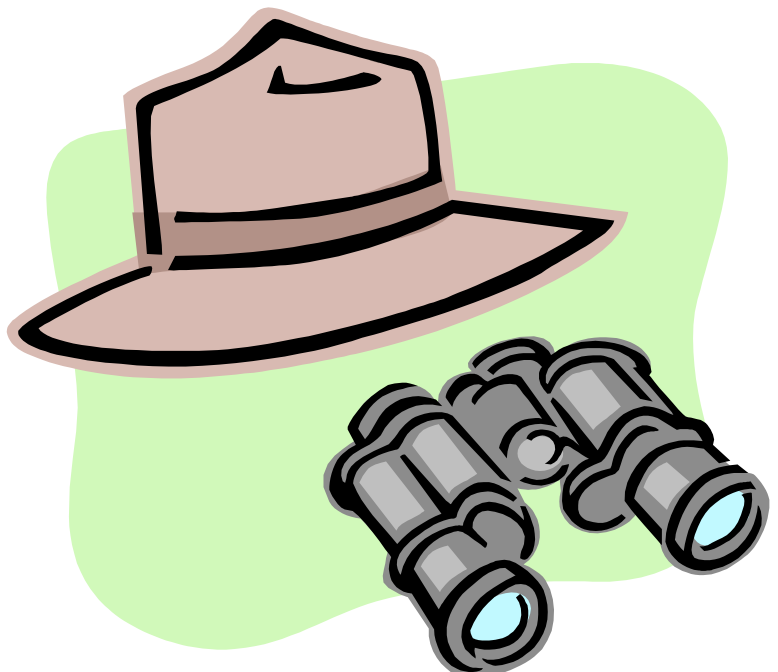
I had an argument with my sister about taking down feeders to force the birds into migration.

Taking down the feeders will not force a bird that is not ready to migrate to move, and if we get a surprise freeze, could cause the bird's demise. Please do not take the feeders down if you still have birds.

Site fidelity questions are common. From Bastrop County:

Is it likely the same individual for the last 4—5 years? Would the young male that was here in Oct. / Nov. be her progeny?

The only way we could know this for certain would be if she, or the young male, or both were wearing a band. Studies have shown historically that these birds are very loyal to their nesting site, but banders on the migration routes seldom recapture birds from year to year. In fact, catching one creates a lot of excitement. What is happening is that banders not associated with the original banding are capturing migration banded birds, but not in the same sites.



Observers' Comments

Continued from page 7

Some people saw the density of the hummingbirds in their gardens change over the season. In Harris County:

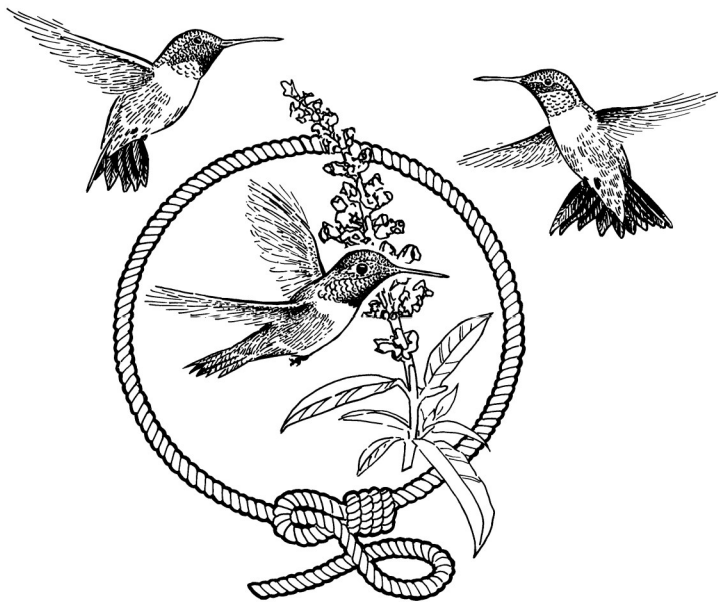
Incredible start to 2013 with the most ever wintering birds. Almost “no show fall.” First time since 2008 having 0 December birds.

Again, I will go back to the “peaks and valleys” nature of wildlife populations. Without seeing the situation, I can not say with certainty that that is why the numbers were down in the fall, but that would be most likely.

Sometimes even our best laid plans fall victim to circumstance. From McLennon County:

Grasshoppers defoliated Turk’s cap, Lantana, yaupon, coral honeysuckle...

Well, I really do not know what to say. Yes grasshoppers have to feed too, and they are an important part of our natural environment, but when they take apart a year’s work, it is frustrating indeed.



To participate in the 2014 Texas Hummingbird Roundup send your donation to:

Texas Hummingbird Roundup
4200 Smith School Road
Austin, TX 78744

Please don't forget to send your 2014 surveys back before January 23, 2015.

Hummingbird Festivals

2014

Hummingbird festivals are a great way to learn about these amazing birds—and Texas has a lot of these opportunities.

For hummingbird diversity, the **Davis Mountains Hummingbird Festival** offers your greatest opportunity. In the mountains of west Texas at one of the best times of the year, you have an opportunity to see “more than just the typical Black-chinned and Ruby-throated.” This festival is scheduled this year for **August 21 –23**.

For sheer number of hummingbirds, you can not beat the “grand-daddy of them all,” the **Rockport-Fulton Hummer Bird Celebration**. During the fall hummingbird migration, these two communities on the central Texas coast become a major staging ground for migrating hummingbirds preparing to make their way to Mexico. While stopping to “tank up,” these birds present quite a show that the very hospitable



Rufous Hummingbird by Glen Robertson, Curoo, TX

communities make available to visitors to enjoy. Always the second full weekend after Labor Day, this year the spectacle is moved back a week to **September 19—21**.

Not to be left out, the upper Texas coast has its festival too. At Gulf Coast Bird Observatory in Lake Jackson, **Xtreme Hummingbird Xtravaganza** features hummingbird banding and is spread over two weekends—**September 13 and September 20**.

Whether you prefer mountains or sea level, get out and enjoy the hummingbirds this year because—Life's Better Outside!