

Hummingbird Roundup 2014

2014 was another great year for the Texas Hummingbird Roundup and those who enjoy hummingbirds in the Lone Star State. While the species count was down slightly—we saw 14 of the 18 species known for Texas—all regions of the state saw some diversity. A highlight would be the sighting of a White-eared Hummingbird in Jeff Davis County where they are known to have nested. Species richness remained high through the winter months with 13 species being reported somewhere in the state in the January-February and November-December time periods. Only the Broad-billed Hummingbird was not reported during the winter months after being seen in the year-round report.

Participation remains in the high 200s again this year, with 279 participants from 86 counties. Take a look at the maps beginning on page 4 though—there are still large areas of the state for which we are not getting information of the hummingbird population. If you can help by also monitoring in a nearby county, or by recruiting someone to monitor in those areas, it would be appreciated..



Male Broad-billed Hummingbird, the only species not seen during the winter months this year, feeding at penstemon flowers. Photo by Richard Hagen in Alpine, Brewster County.

Species detection rate across the state was down—72% of the known hummingbird species were seen, but we did have some counties return to double digit counts this year. Brewster and Jeff Davis Counties each reported 10 species while Harris County was knocking on the door with 9 species. We still have a number of counties reporting only one species, even when surrounding counties are reporting multiple species.

Electronic reporting is getting easier, and should decrease the turn around time between receiving your reports and the release of the annual newsletter. This will also make it easier for researchers to quickly find and use material from your reports. If you are still using the paper forms, we would encourage you to consider the electronic reporting methods—either Texas Nature Trackers app or the email report.

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Identification Tips

The Role of Location in Identification



Green Violetear photographed in Bastrop County by Sharon Finlay.

“Mark, I have a Magnificent Hummingbird at my feeder just up the road.” That was the call I came home to one evening, and it did get my pulse going. A Magnificent hummingbird in Bastrop County would be amazing, but what is the likelihood this would happen?

Everyone would like to see that rare hummingbird! It would “make your day” if you could step outside your back door and see a hummingbird that has never been recorded in Texas before. But the probability of that happening is extremely low. For most of us, the most we can hope for is a

hummingbird that has never been seen in our county, or in our region, before. But that does not mean we should simply abandon the possibility that we might see something different. We should always take into consideration the location when we are identifying a bird though.

A large, green bird with purple features on the head and dark wings could indeed be a Magnificent Hummingbird. However in central Texas another species, the Green Violetear, is much more likely to occur. Even though the Magnificent Hummingbird is the more likely bird state wide, it becomes less likely when we bring the location into the equation.



Magnificent Hummingbird photographed by Mark Lockwood.

So, what exactly can location tell me? Location can not rule out a bird, and the simple fact that a map or a book tells you that bird is not found there is not a reason to rule out an identification—but it is reason to take another look. Geographic location and checklists simply tell us

where the bird has been seen historically—not what is possible in the future. So don’t rule a bird out because of a map or a list.

A more important consideration is the habitat in which you see the bird. Consider the two birds in this story. The Magnificent Hummingbird is much more likely in mountainous regions, in relatively dry canyons. While pine forests can be part of the picture, this bird has not been documented east of the Pecos river more that 4 times. The Green Violetear, on the other hand, is found in canyons and openings in pine forests, lower down the mountainsides. The pine forests found in Bastrop are not the same as those found in the mountains, but the shelter they offer is similar.

Use habitat and location carefully when you are identifying a “different” bird.



What is Happening in My Garden?

We get email and calls quite frequently asking us “what is this plant?” or “Is this really a Turk’s cap?” The question arises when the plant does something unexpected—like growing too tall.

Clifford Shackelford, the lead author on the book “Hummingbirds of Texas”, provided us with a little different perspective on the situation. He sent an email in October saying:

“Please see the attached photo (photo to the right).

What appears to be growing out of the top of this 8 foot ladder is a Turk’s cap stem that’s actually behind the ladder and standing over 10 foot tall. It’s growing in our backyard and leaning up against our wooden fence. Stunning! It’s the Shaquille (“Shaq”) O’Neill of Malvaviscus!

We also have a native lantana stem that’s about the same height as it’s supported by growing up through a decorative metal tree.”

Many of our readers might have reached the



conclusion that “I must have gotten the wrong thing—the book says Turk’s cap only grows to 3 foot by 3 foot, so this can’t be Turk’s cap.” The difference in the garden Cliff is talking about is the support. Turk’s cap, lantana and many other hummingbird favorites are not woody plants, and so the stems fall over when

they reach about 3 feet tall. If the plant is provided support, such as a trellis or a tree, the plant may reach many unexpected heights. This probably has benefits to the birds by providing nectar sources at heights they prefer to work.

Predators

It’s a jungle out there! The hummingbirds we love face a lot of challenges in their daily lives—not the least of which is staying alive. One of the predators that often surprises people at our workshops is the spider.

I remember working at a banding station in Tom Green County one day, watching

the banding staff patiently remove spider webbing from the same hummingbird three different times before the bird finally flew away from the web. A similar experience greeted an observer in Harris Creek in August. She reports coming home to find a Rufous Hummingbird caught in an argiope web. She was able to remove the web and the bird flew away.

While we want to keep our hummingbirds safe, we must also remember that spider web is an important part of their life history. Without it, no female could build their delicate nests.

You can decide how tolerant you will be for spider web. Personally, if the web is between my feeders, I assume the spider has decided that a hummingbird might make a nice meal. At that point, I remove

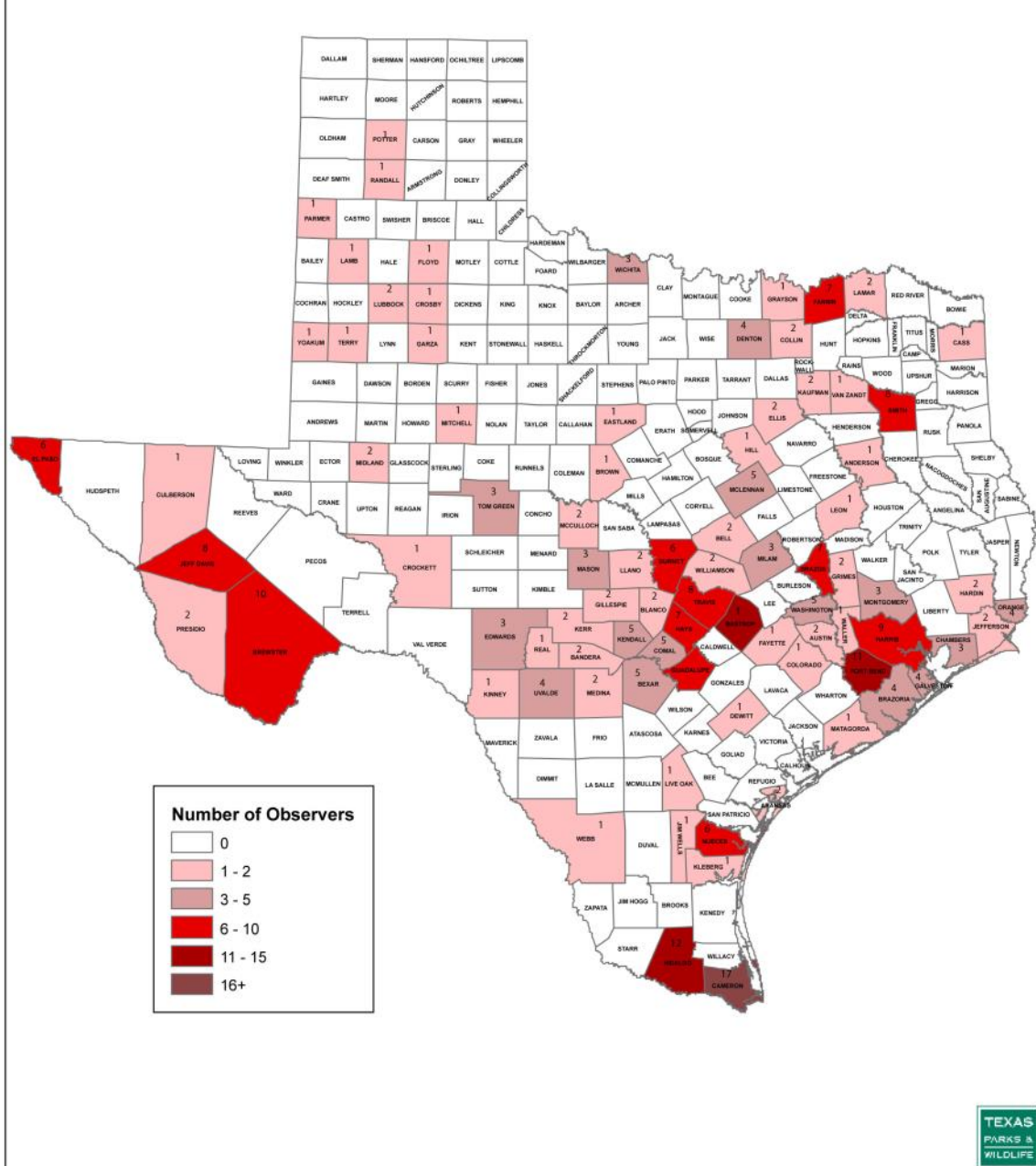
the web, allowing the spiders to set up housekeeping anywhere else in my garden.



An easy way to report hummingbird sightings.



Number of Observers in 2014



279 observers reported hummingbird observations from 79 counties in 2014.

How Do I Make My Own Hummingbird Food?

This question is asked quite often and the recipe is surprisingly simple. Take a quantity (volume) of water, for example 4 cups.

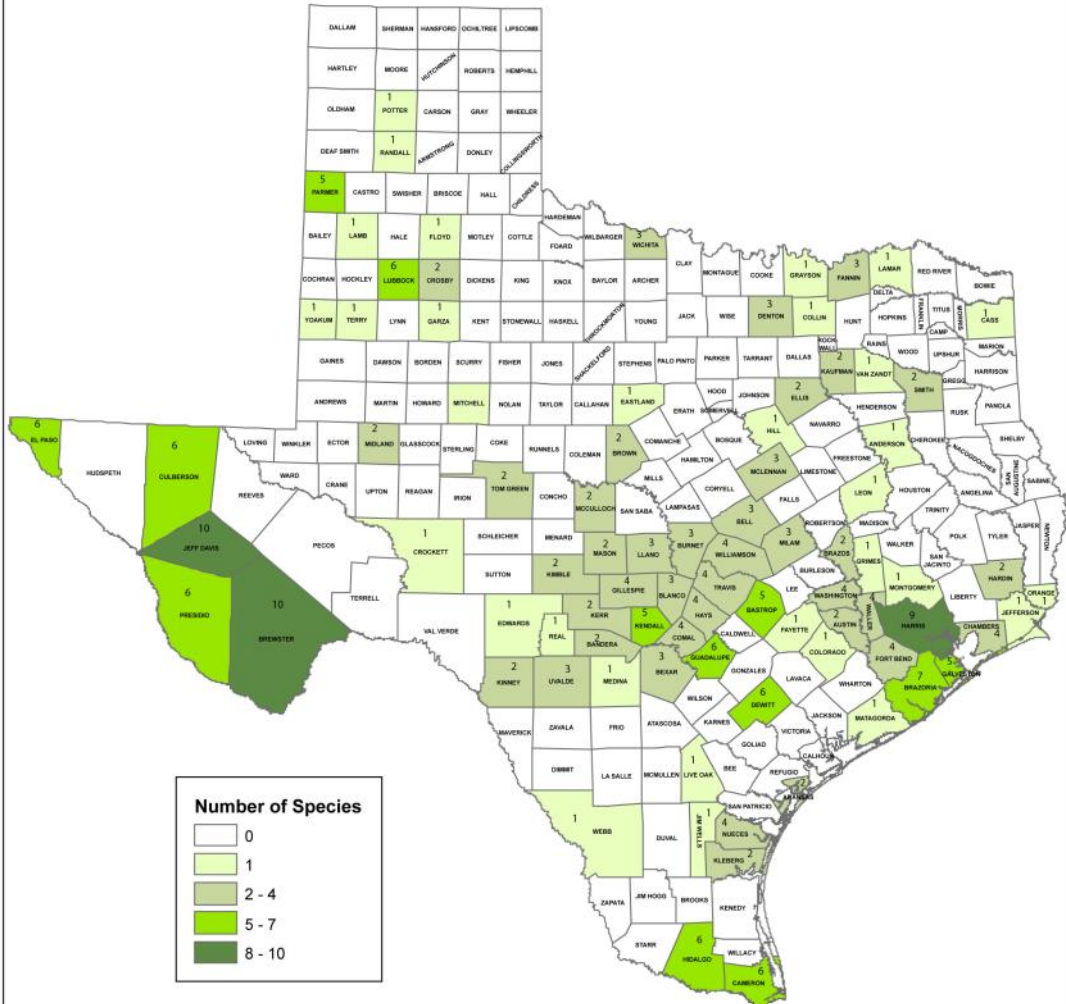
Add 1/4 of that volume in sugar, in this case 1 cup. Use plain table sugar please—no honey, molasses or brown sugar and definitely no “sweet and low.” You can boil the water if you wish, but it is not necessary. Mix the two ingredients well and pour the solution into your feeders. This combination is as close to the average nectar concentration as we can get. Please do not use food color at any time.



Turk's cap is a hummingbird favorite and is a great example of how you have to be careful about what you read on the internet. This plant is often cited as being unusable for hummingbirds with the claim the plant is too tightly closed for a hummingbird to get its bill into. Someone forgot to tell this Blue-throated Hummingbird that!



Hummingbird Species Seen in 2014 by County





A quote to remember!

For the first time in its history, gardening has taken on a role that transcends the needs of the gardener. Like it or not, gardens have become important players in the management of our nations wildlife. It is now within the power of individual gardeners to do something that we all dream of doing: to make a difference.

Douglas W. Tallamy "Bringing Nature Home."

Favorite Hummingbird Plants of 2014

Again this year we asked our participants "List, in order of frequency, the five plants hummingbirds fed from most often in your garden." Answers to this question help us to help others wondering what they can do to encourage more hummingbirds in their gardens. While we analyze the results here for the state wide data, we can also pull reports for specific counties, allowing us to tell your neighbors and friends what is working in your county.

Once again this year, Salvia species were by far the most popular plant with more than 15% of responses showing it. Second was Turk's cap with 10.6%. The first non-native plant that we saw was Hamelia with 4.3%. Shrimp plant, a long-time exotic favorite often promoted in the hummingbird literature showed up on 2.13% of the reports.

Hummingbirds are using native plants. This makes sense given the fact that these birds were here before humans started "messaging with" the environment. These are the plants they would use naturally.

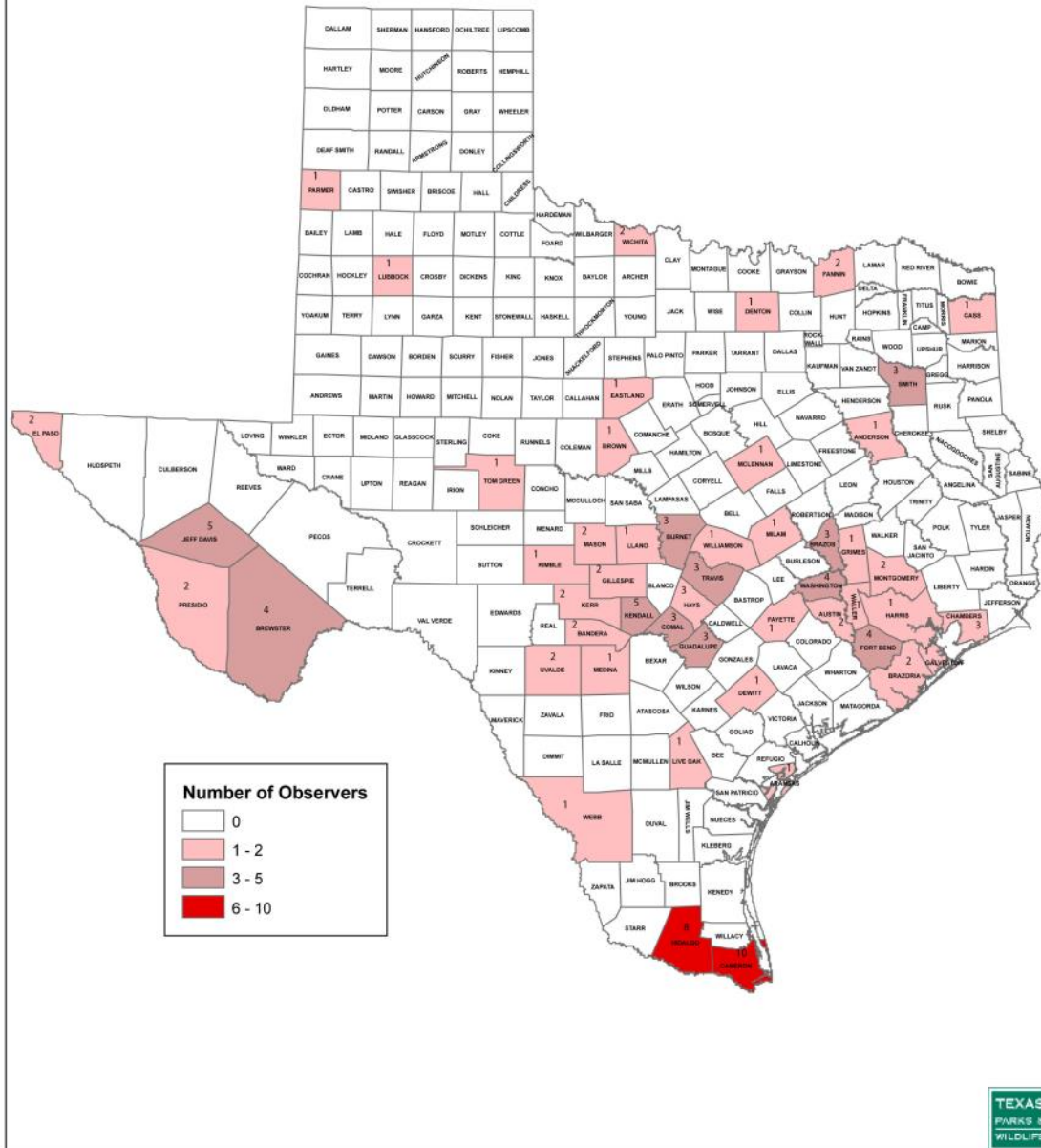
Favorite Hummingbird Plants

Native Species	Percent of Reports
Salvia species	15
Turk's cap	10.6
Lantana	4.79
Flame Acanthus	4.26
Four – o – clock	2.66
Zinnia	2.13
Crossvine	2.13
Non-native Species	
Hamelia	4.26
Canna	2.13
Vitex	1.6
Rose of Sharon	1.6
Butterfly Bush	1.6

An interesting note, the first exotic plant on the list is tied for the fourth position in the overall list.

Observers During Winter Months

(November, December, January, February)



Winter Hummingbird Observation

More of our participants are observing during the winter months and, as a result, more people are seeing hummingbirds during times when traditionally no hummingbirds were

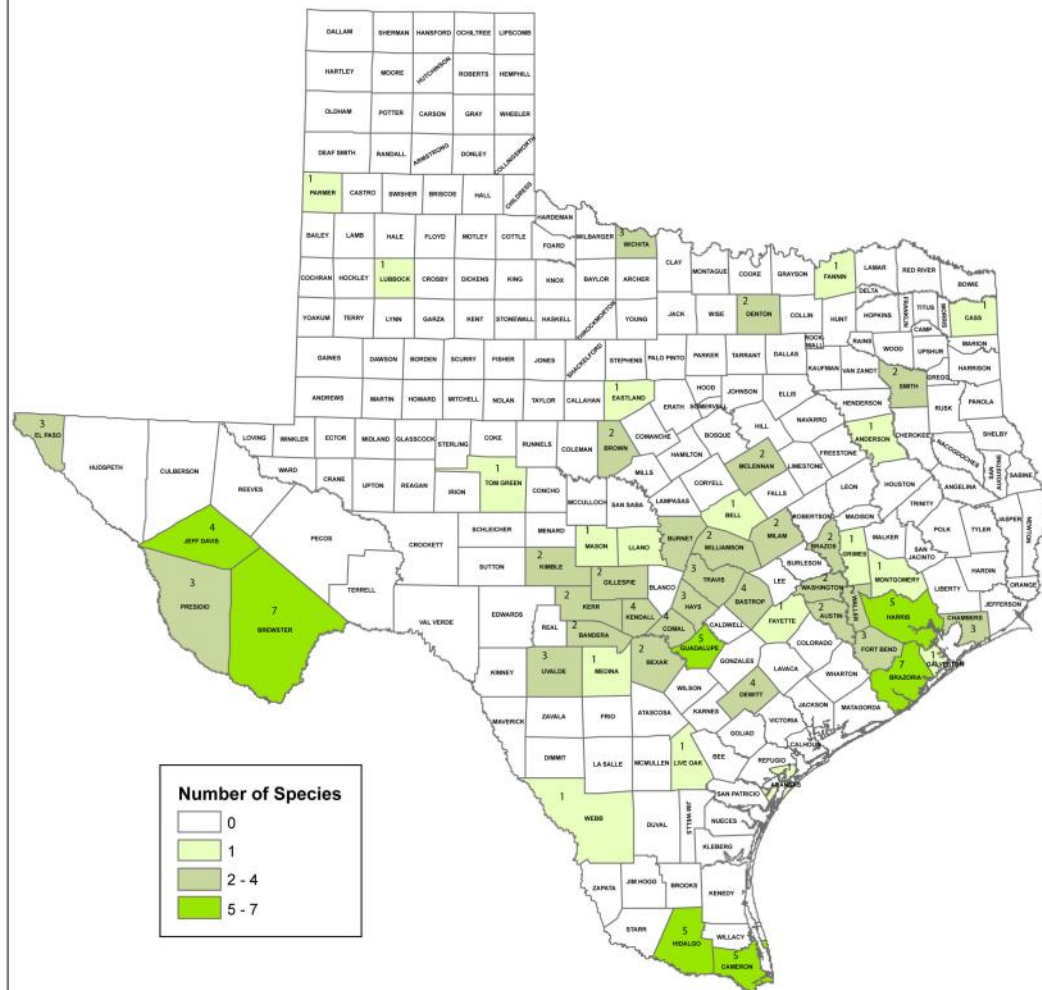
This photo shows an immature hummingbird of the genus *Selasphorus*, which includes the Rufous, Allen's, Broad-tailed and Calliope species. This is probably a Rufous, but Allen's can not be ruled out. Photo by Sue Kersey.



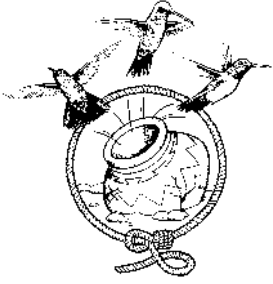
Hummingbirds in the Winter in Texas

Each year we find more observers who watch hummingbirds in the winter, and this year we noticed a surprising statistic—of the 14 hummingbird species recorded this year in Texas, 13 were seen during the winter months! The only species seen during the year but not during the winter months was the Broad-billed Hummingbird. For the observers who are seeing only one species, maybe you need to look at a different time of year!

Hummingbird Species Seen During Winter Months 2014 by County
(November, December, January, February)



Treasures of the Trans Pecos



We have a few notes from one of our observers in the Trans Pecos (west of the Pecos River in Texas) but some of the comments are very interesting, causing us to bring back the “Treasures of the Trans Pecos” corner.

Our observer in Redford started his report on a very familiar tone for the year: “This year in Redford (Presidio County) was another year of small numbers and limited diversity.” Presidio county recorded six species for the year, with most of them coming from this observer. Many of us would be thrilled to report five species on our roundup reports, but having seen some of the previous records from the Redford property, we know that this was, in fact, a down year there. It would be difficult to track the cause of a down year, and we hope this is not an indication of things to come. We comment on species richness in the Observers Corner.



The next paragraph of the report was the interesting one though: “In January, the Anna’s Hummingbirds produced one fledgling who was last to leave, with his mother, in the first week of February. “ This is of note because there are only a handful of nesting records for the Anna’s Hummingbird in the state of Texas. This fledgling represents a new county for nesting in the region—previous nests were in El Paso and Jeff Davis counties. The timing is right for a nest from this bird as well, with them often nesting late in the winter. The fledgling probably did not migrate with its mother, as they usually migrate alone.

Observers Corner



This is your space—your opportunity to comment or ask questions that may help everyone on who is observing hummingbirds for us. On the survey sheets you will find the question “Add any other comments or questions you might have regarding this year’s survey.” That is where we pull our comments and questions from. We try to include as many comments as possible in our newsletter. This year’s comments include:

Presidio County was not the only county experiencing a decline in species richness this year:

From Harris County we have:

“Only one non-RTHU bird; worst year for diversity since 2013”

While we do not have enough information to determine what might be contributing to a lack of species richness, we have to remember that:

** some of our hummingbird species we should not expect to see every year. Berylline, Violet-crowned, Costa’s, Green Violetear, Green-breasted Mango and more are rare in Texas*

** In the case of Harris County, it is on the extreme east end of the range of some popular hummingbirds.*

** Diversity in animals is often a reflection of diversity in plants, so if you want to attract more hummingbird species to your garden, you could add more plants that they prefer. Page 6 of this newsletter would be a good place to start looking for ideas..*



Photo of adult male Anna’s Hummingbird by Tom Rust

Observer Notes Continued



Comments about the number of hummingbirds once again showed that it was site dependent rather than state wide. We noted that Presidio County commented on the light numbers. We got similar comments from:

From Burnet County:

"This year it seemed our numbers were down ..."

On the other hand we heard from some that:

From Mason County:

"This year 145 lb of sugar was fed to the hummingbirds."

From Washington County:

"When the count of birds exceeds 30 or 40, it is impossible to count them"

And from Milam County:

"I had a lot of birds this year, never really a down time like last year. Why populations vary from one area to another (notice Burnet County and Mason County are both Hill County), I do not know, but it does seem to vary seasonally and from year to year. We do become concerned when we see numbers declining year over year in a pattern though."

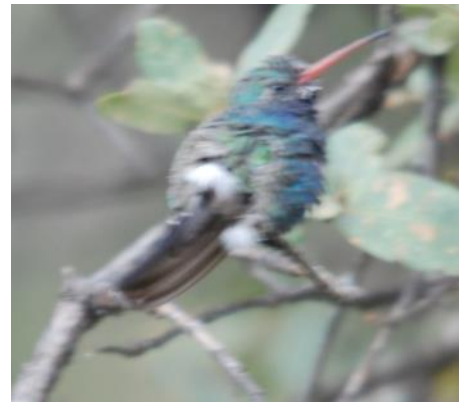


There were some comments about the amount of time the hummingbirds spent in the area this year:

From Harris County:

"Span of time for feeding shorter than previous years, arrived earlier and departed earlier than previously."

The trigger for hummingbird departure at the end of the season is still being explored, however it seems to be related to daylight. In general, it seems to occur at about the same time each year.



From Washington County:

"We had a Buff-bellied Hummingbird visit us in the spring, but could not determine the sex."

BUFH are difficult to sex. Generally, females show a duller color and have more black on the bill.

Hummingbirds Seen in 2014

Allen's Hummingbird
Anna's Hummingbird
Black-chinned Hummingbird
Blue-throated Hummingbird
Broad-billed Hummingbird
Broad-tailed Hummingbird
Buff-bellied Hummingbird
Calliope Hummingbird
Green Violetear
Lucifer Hummingbird
Magnificent Hummingbird
Ruby-throated Hummingbird
Rufous Hummingbird
White-eared Hummingbird



Blue-throated Hummingbird from a photo by Mark Lockwood

Observer's Comments Continued

From McLennan County:

We had another year with extensive grass --
hopper damage.
This could explain some low number reports. If
there is limited food available, the birds will
move to find it.

From Collin County:

"This year a lot of my neighbors put up hummingbird feeders."

This is what we like to see, although if they would create a hummingbird garden they would probably see more birds and it would be better for the environment. Incidentally, we could use more reports from Collin County!



Broad-tailed Hummingbird photographed in Jeff Davis County by Nancy Klym

Observer's Comments



From Collin County:

After a two week break ... did not see any more hummingbirds in my yard this year. On May 17th I decided to take my feeders down because the hummingbirds were not using them. I did not put them back up....

This is a chance we always take when we decide to (or as in this case are forced to) stop feeding—the birds may find a better “restaurant” to visit and so stop coming to ours. It does not happen often, but it is a chance we take.

Our feeders should be a supplement to a great hummingbird garden, and not a replacement. A look at page 6 can help you select some great plants for your garden

I would note though that the timing of the decision to stop feeding comes right at the time when bird visits typically take a hiatus for a couple of weeks. Usually it picks up again in late June. Also, by not putting the feeders back up, most of the winter hummingbirds are ruled out.

From Llano County:

“The females / juveniles are hard to differentiate—I am fairly confident but not 100%. Any helpful hints would be appreciated.

This is probably one of the harder things to learn with hummingbirds—identification of females and juveniles to species and to age / sex. Here are a few tips on the latter.

When looking at a bird and trying to determine if it is a female or a juvenile, notice the feathers on the back. If they present a scale-like appearance, the bird is a first year bird. At that point, for the survey, your work is done. The juvenile Calliope above shows another tip that works if it is a male and it is late enough in the year—a juvenile male often begins to show gorget color by mid to late August.

If you are trying to determine the sex of a juvenile bird, I strongly recommend Sheri Williamson’s book “Peterson Field Guide; Hummingbirds of North America.””

And an observer from Guadalupe County gave a new meaning to the phrase “winter Texans.”

“Both the Rufous and Allen’s males were here last summer starting around late July / early August and stayed all winter. We had a male Rufous and a male Allen’s the winter of 2012 that stayed late July / early August and left to go north in February. These birds are our “Winter Texans.”

Do you notice the dates? Although we are talking different years, the arrivals and departures are almost identical. This is one of the facts that makes us think migration is triggered by photoperiod (the amount of light the birds see).

