

THE TEXAS



# HUMMER

SPRING 2011

A NEWSLETTER FOR TEXAS HUMMINGBIRD ROUNDUP PARTICIPANTS

## HUMMINGBIRD ROUNDUP 2010

**D**iversity was down in 2010, with no reports coming to the Hummingbird Roundup noting any of the rarer species – Costa's Hummingbird, Berylline Hummingbird, Green-breasted Mango, Green Violet-ear or Violet-crowned Hummingbird this year. The Texas Bird Records Committee received reports of a Costa's Hummingbird continuing in Brewster County until February 2010, after first occurrence in October 2009. The more common species were all documented at some time during 2010, many occurring with widespread distribution across the state.

Our observer numbers and reporting counties were also down slightly this year. We heard from 291 observers in 91 counties across the state. Pins should be on the way to these participants shortly. For 2011 we will be using a Black-chinned Hummingbird as our pin model.

In 2010, hummingbird workshops were presented in

several communities around the state. Opportunities to present workshops in 2011 will depend heavily on budget dollars, but we do have opportunity to schedule these workshops if volunteers are interested. These workshops discuss hummingbird identification, hummingbird gardens and how to participate in the Texas Hummingbird Roundup. If you are interested, please contact [mark.klym@tpwd.state.tx.us](mailto:mark.klym@tpwd.state.tx.us).

Heaviest diversity this year was split, with high counts in Brewster and Jeff Davis counties in the west and Harris County in the east. These counties all recorded nine species, followed by Galveston, with eight species. We also showed good diversity north to south with Parmer and Lubbock counties in the north and Hidalgo County in the south, recording six species each. In Central Texas, Bastrop County recorded seven species for the second year in a row, while other counties in the area remained quite diverse with four to six species each. Texas remains very rich in hummingbird diversity this year.



Remember, if you are fortunate enough to see a Costa's Hummingbird, Berylline Hummingbird, Green-breasted Mango, Green Violet-ear or Violet-crowned Hummingbird, your report of this bird should be accompanied by a photo and a detailed description of when and where the bird was seen. These should also be forwarded to the Texas Bird Records Committee at [ecarpe@gmail.com](mailto:ecarpe@gmail.com).

While reviewing the frequency with which observers reported hummingbirds visiting plants in their gardens, I have noticed that some exotic plants like *Hamelia* species, *Cuphea* species and *Justicia* species are being reported more frequently. *Salvias* remain the most commonly reported plants, with Turk's cap, trumpet vine, coral honeysuckle and *lantana* following.

As this newsletter is being written, the media is full of reports of devastating wildfires in some of the most diverse and hummingbird-rich regions of the state. The fires in Fort Davis and Alpine may give many hummingbird observers cause for concern since Jeff Davis and Brewster counties are consistently among the most diverse counties in the state. At the time of writing, the fire appears to have been most devastating to grassland and brush habitats east of the heavily birded hummingbird habitat in these two counties. While this is good news for the birds, our hearts go out to the families who were displaced by these events.



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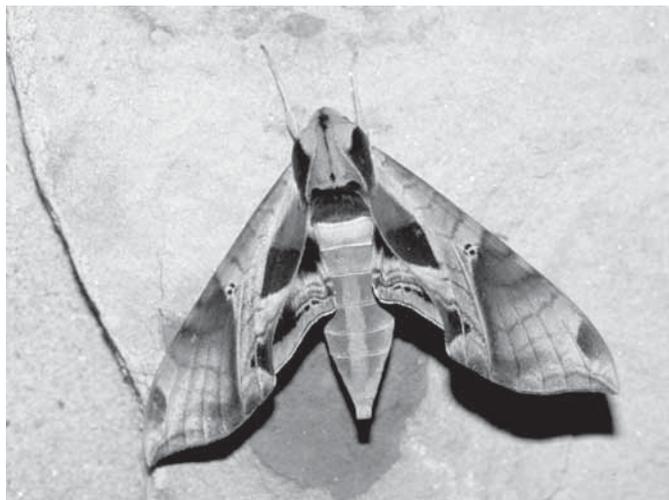
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*Pandora's Sphinx moth, USFWS.*

## IDENTIFICATION TIPS

### CONFUSING MISIDENTIFICATIONS

We are getting an increasing number of email about “bumblebee hummingbirds” or even some reporting “new species of hummingbirds” from across the state. These emails often contain a very cryptic description including lines like “the body was heavily striped like a bumble bee” or “a deep blue-green body with a dark tail.” A consistent characteristic in all of the descriptions though has been that this “hummingbird” was extremely small, so much so that they are sometimes called “baby hummingbirds.”

For hummingbird watchers, the size should be your first clue that this is not a bird. While there are a few hummingbird species in Mexico that are smaller than the Calliope Hummingbird, no birds occur anywhere in the world that is 2 inches in size. The size often quoted for these “birds” is 1 to 2 inches. Anytime you are seeing a flying animal of this size range you should not be thinking bird.

When confronted with a very small “bird” at your flowers, take the time to observe very carefully. Chances are you will, at some point, note two long antennae coming off the head of the animal – something that is never observed in birds but is very common on all moths and butterflies. If you observe carefully, you will probably notice six legs instead of two – again a common insect characteristic. Careful observation should take you quickly to the insect family and away from the birds.

So, why are these animals so confusing? These observers are seeing moths in the sphinx or hawk moth family. Unlike most of their kind, these moths tend to be active during the day – often seen in bright sunlight attending flowers usually thought to be “hummingbird plants.” They also have a habit of flying with their proboscis extended – giving the animal the appearance of a bill. Their very rapid wing beats closely resemble those of a hummingbird.

We have then a large moth – close to but slightly smaller than a hummingbird – flying and hovering with rapid wing beats at a frequency similar to that of a hummingbird, with their tongue sticking out to look like a hummingbird's bill. Is it any wonder some people, when they take a quick look only, mistake it for a hummingbird?

A web search for “hummingbird moth” will give you more information, and access to photos, of these amazing creatures.

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# WINTER HUMMINGBIRD STUDY PRODUCES HIDDEN JEWELS ON THE TEXAS COAST

By Brent & Sue Ortego



Landowners enjoy the spectacle of the massive Ruby-throated Hummingbird migration along the Gulf Coast in the fall when millions of birds migrate through the area by managing gardens and maintaining hummingbird feeders. Landowners typically stop maintaining feeders after October when almost all migrants have passed. The relatively few birds remaining do not attract much attention. However, this small wintering hummingbird population is relatively large by United States standards and is comprised of 8 species, mostly from western states and Canada. This diverse winter assemblage of hummingbirds largely goes unnoticed by the public.

We conducted a winter hummingbird study at our bird banding station near Victoria, Texas. The site generally supported about 100 individuals each winter from eight species on a 6-acre suburban property. The banding station borders the floodplain of Coletto Creek and has some riparian woodlands at the lower elevations, live oak covered lawn with over 100 feet of flower beds on the high end, and a mixture of bull mesquite and dense saplings/vines on the remainder of the property.

Banding in this area started as opportunistic activities to learn more about birds and later expanded because the site had great potential for monitoring hummingbirds and songbirds. The net result was **47,000 birds were banded along with 21,000 recaptures of 161 species since 1993. Hummingbirds represented 44% of the banded birds.** Captures per winter varied with a high of 160 hummingbirds to a low of 76. These

winter captures of hummingbirds were the highest reported in the eastern United States.

Data from the site indicated that hummingbird density was directly related to number of feeders. We started with 12 feeders and typically captured about 12 hummingbirds each winter for four years. We then progressively increased the number of feeders over another four-year period and the number of hummingbirds over-wintering consistently increased with feeder numbers. We finally reached a limit of the number of feeders we were willing to maintain at 75 and caught over 100 hummingbirds most winters.

Many wintering hummingbirds at the site survived and returned during following years. The makeup of hummingbirds each winter typically comprised 40 percent returnees from previous years. It was not unusual to have a hummingbird return for three

or more winters. Record longevity/site fidelity for individual birds at the banding station was 11 years for Buff-bellied, eight for Black-chinned, six for Rufous, four for Ruby-throated, and three for Allen's and Calliope.

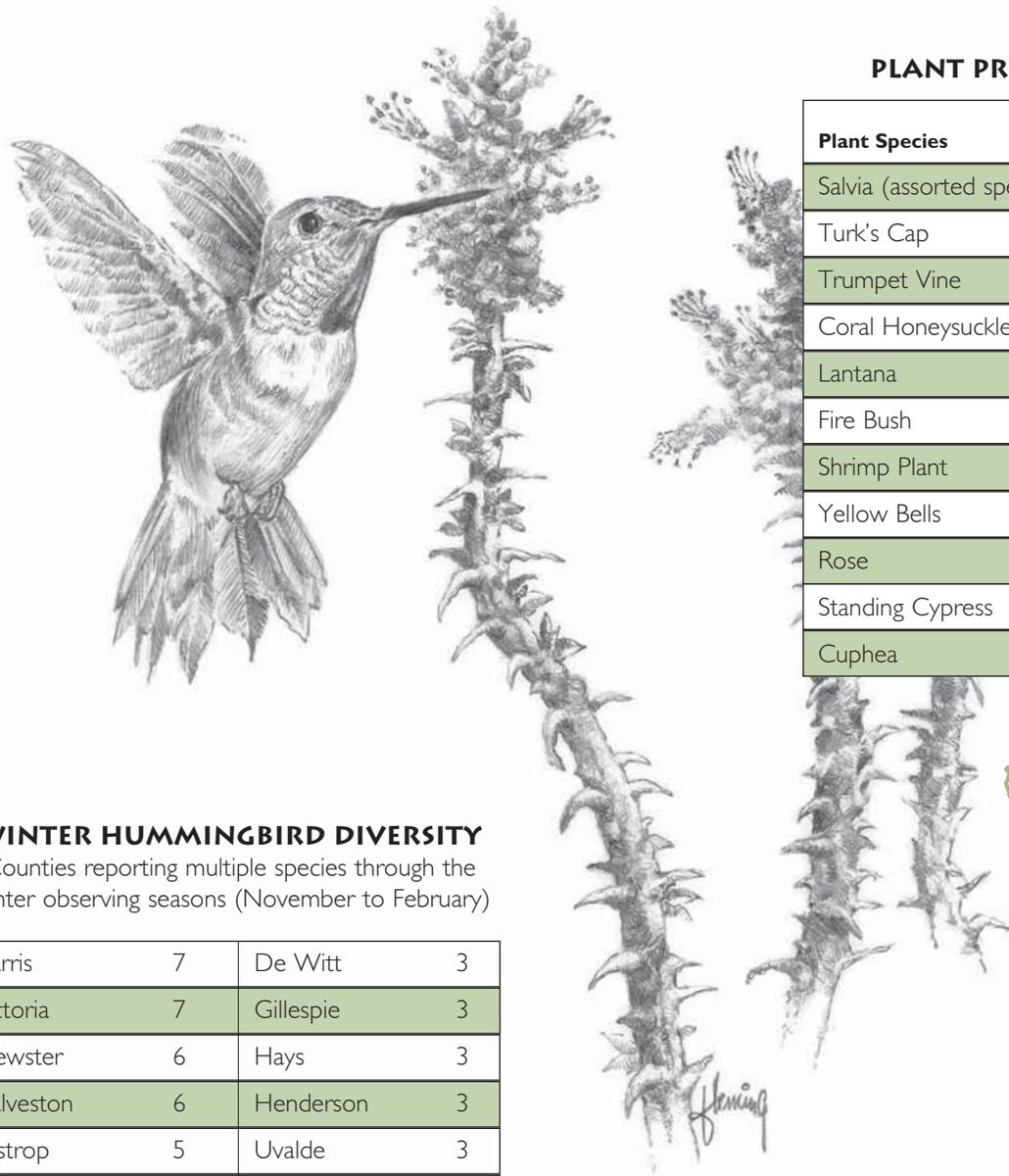
HABITAT MANAGEMENT for hummingbirds throughout Texas mostly involves discussions of flower beds and feeders in landscaped yards. It seldom involves looking at habitats used by the birds. Our banding station was unique in that most of the birds preferred to be in native habitat rather than the classical managed landscape for hummingbirds (flower beds/lawns). We examined frequency of four major habitats on the property to try to determine which sites were used at greater rates in this setting of very high winter hummingbird density and constant fighting amongst individuals and species.

**At peak density, we were over-wintering 26 hummingbirds per acre of habitat.**

Habitats were categorized as WILLOW, which was a riparian woodlands of multi-layered forest, LIVE OAK as open lawns, flower beds and tree canopy, MESQUITE as large old-growth mesquite with dense native ground cover and little mid-story, and BRUSH, which was a dense sapling/brush/vine tangle generally less than 10 feet in height. All habitats contained a grid of trails spaced at 10- by 40-yard intervals, had uniform hummingbird feeder density which was generally one feeder per 10 yards of trail within the habitat.

We documented winter habitat use for 285 Buff-bellied Hummingbirds, 147 Rufous Hummingbirds, 90 Black-chinned Hummingbirds, 39 Ruby-throated Hummingbirds, 25 Allen's Hummingbirds, 20 Broad-tailed Hummingbirds, and 19 Calliope Hummingbirds from 2000 through 2006. Buff-bellied was the most abundant, largest and most aggressive

*Continued on page 8*



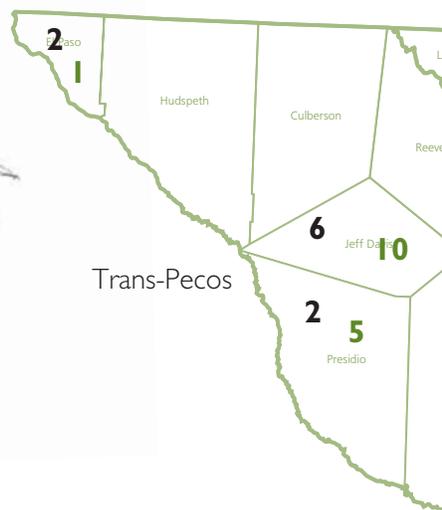
## PLANT PREFERENCE FOR 2010

Plant Species	Percent of Observers Reporting
Salvia (assorted species)	21.3%
Turk's Cap	7.9%
Trumpet Vine	6.2%
Coral Honeysuckle	5.5%
Lantana	4.8%
Fire Bush	4.1%
Shrimp Plant	3.1%
Yellow Bells	2.4%
Rose	2.1%
Standing Cypress	2.1%
Cuphea	2.1%

## WINTER HUMMINGBIRD DIVERSITY

Counties reporting multiple species through the winter observing seasons (November to February)

Harris	7	De Witt	3
Victoria	7	Gillespie	3
Brewster	6	Hays	3
Galveston	6	Henderson	3
Bastrop	5	Uvalde	3
Hidalgo	5	Wichita	3
Jeff Davis	5	Blanco	2
Kendall	5	Brazos	2
Brazoria	4	Brown	2
Fort Bend	4	Burnet	2
Kimble	4	Denton	2
Presidio	4	Grimes	2
Aransas	3	Guadalupe	2
Austin	3	Jefferson	2
Bandera	3	McLennan	2
Bexar	3	Medina	2
Cameron	3	Montgomery	2
Comal	3	Travis	2



**A&M nature guides**  
**Hummingbirds of Texas**  
by Clifford E. Shackelford, Madge M. Lindsay, and C. Mark Klym  
 Photographs by Jim and Nancy Starnes Illustrations by Christine Anderson Ph.D.

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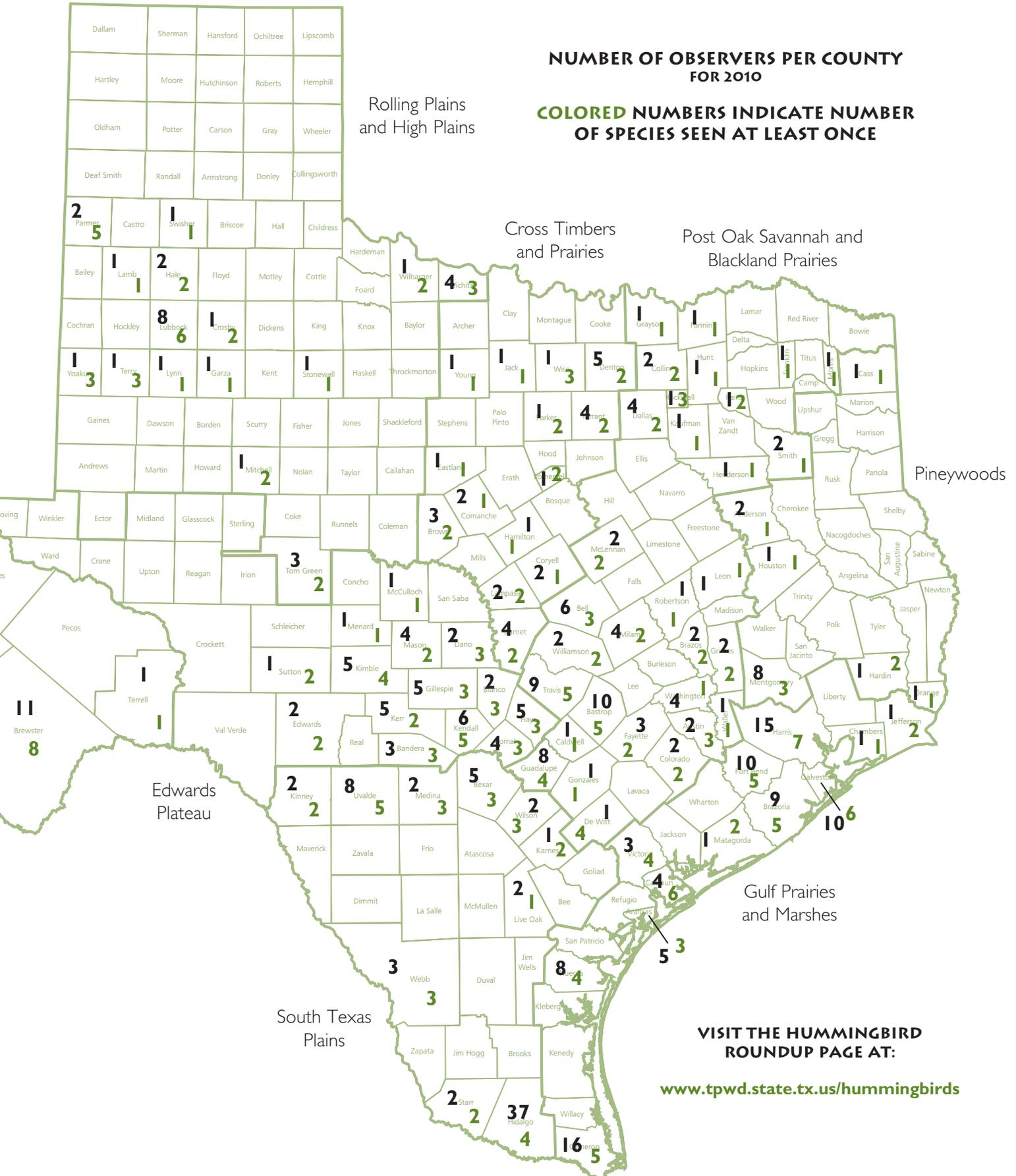
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**NUMBER OF OBSERVERS PER COUNTY FOR 2010**

**COLORED NUMBERS INDICATE NUMBER OF SPECIES SEEN AT LEAST ONCE**





## OBSERVERS' COMMENTS

*This page is set aside for comments from those of you participating in the Roundup and for responses from Roundup staff.*

From an observer in Lubbock County:

**“Due to fewer hummingbirds visiting this location, I didn’t sit outside watching as much as I have in previous seasons.”**

And from Harris County:

**“Can’t remember not having any hummers in March and April until this year. Very, very dry in March and April.”**

Both the density, and the diversity of birds visiting any given site will change seasonally, as is noted in some of the reports we got from other locations such as...

From an observer in Austin County:

**“Many more Ruby-throated during a two-week-plus migration than I can ever remember.”**

From Mitchell County:

**“Once they show up, I consistently have four to six birds.”**

And from a long time observer in Gillespie County:

**“We have three feeders with 10 ports each. With 30 ports it is really hard to count all**

**25+ birds & tell what they are since they are displacing each other constantly.”**

This is a difficulty, and often leads people to simply count the “female-like” birds as females – avoiding differentiating females from juveniles. If you can break out the juveniles it is certainly helpful.

In Gillespie County in the fall, which is when this situation would be most likely to develop, differentiating Ruby-throated and Black-chinned could be a challenge. Behavior and crown color can be very telling.

From Fort Bend County:

**“How is our sighting info used?”**

This is a very important question, since it makes no sense at all to collect data if it is only going to be stored. The Texas Conservation Action Plan, which guides research and management practices relating to wildlife in Texas, recognizes this and specifically requires that data collected in research activities be shared.

The data collected to date is available in a database that is being used to create papers and reports on hummingbirds in

Texas. One of the reports at the Rockport Hummer-Bird Celebration this year is developed entirely from the data on *Selasphorus* hummingbird species collected over the first 15 years of the roundup. The data also served as a significant part of the publication *Hummingbirds of Texas* available through Texas A&M University Press.

From Aransas County:

**“If you want this mailed by Jan. 21, why do you include February?”**

The data sheets are prepared once a year – usually by August of the preceding year so that those who wish to can order their kits in the fall and be ready to start counting by January first. We want you track data from January 1 until December 31 and then turn your sheets in by the third Friday in January (in 2012 it will be January 20). The January and February on your sheets are the January and February a year before you turn your sheet in.

Also from Fort Bend County:

**“How should I count the same bird observed visiting a feeder multiple times in one observation session?”**

And From Dallas County:

**“On the next page I only listed the number of birds I could confirm (I had to see them at one time since they are all the same variety).”**

This last example is how we want the counts done – how many birds of each species and gender you saw at once. This will not allow us to count every bird, or even every species, since some birds will get by, but it will give us a basis for identifying population trends. Our greatest concern is whether or not hummingbird numbers are declining, and we can get this by looking at density reports over the years.

From Fayette County:

**“During migration I may refill feeders two to three times a day.”**

It sounds like you have a very high density of birds moving through Fayette County during migration. I am just west of you, in Bastrop County, and I fill feeders about once a day during migration – but the number of feeders I use increases significantly at that time. You may want to increase the number of feeders, or even consider buying a couple of

larger volume feeders. While they are not generally available in local stores, several manufacturers make larger feeders that will fit on your same feeder base.

A similar question from Gillespie County:

**“During periods of heavy populations, we keep track of the quarts of fluid put out per week. Can you estimate the number being fed by the per day amount of syrup consumed? Where can I get that info?”**

This goes back to a report on some research that was being done a couple of years back. One of the hummingbird banders in Texas was interested in trying to extract the number of birds being fed by looking at the amount of syrup being used each year. Unfortunately the results showed that there were so many variables – species of birds feeding, temperature, concentration of the syrup, presence or absence of insects, density and diversity of insects, other animals using the syrup, etc. – that there was virtually no way to adjust for all the variables and so no concrete formula was developed.

An observer in Lubbock County reports:

**“Our visiting hummingbirds seem to like to ‘hang out’ in the neighbor’s apple tree in August and September, when the apples had already matured.”**

This is not surprising. Fruit trees often offer a number of very good perches on which these birds can “hang out” and observe what is happening in

the garden around them. Even when the fruit has been harvested and the blossoms have not yet developed, these trees can offer a banquet of insects for the birds to enjoy.

And looking at diversity...

From Denton County:

**“In April we had a hummingbird visitor with deep red head markings visit our cross vine and land on a sun catcher.”**

A couple of possible species come to mind, but without a photo we are very hard pressed to identify any bird from descriptions. This was definitely not a bird we would expect in Denton County in April though!

From Fort Bend County:

**“Except for one Buff-bellied male in March, I only saw or identified Ruby-throats this year.”**

This is what would be expected in most of East Texas in a typi-

cal season, although certainly a lot of other species are possible. In Brazoria County, just south of Fort Bend County, there were a few other hummingbirds seen, but not the amazing diversity that has been noted the past couple of seasons.

The Rufous Hummingbird data this year is mixed. As many know, this hummingbird is one that National Audubon and other non-governmental organizations are quite interested in since the trend data does seem to show a decline.

From Lubbock County:

**“No Rufous at our feeders this year observed. My fall migrants are generally more rufous than BCHU. Also not BTLH identified this year.”**

Both Rufous and Broad-tailed Hummingbirds were seen in Lubbock County this year, and some birders have noted that Rufous reports during the spring migrations are actually increasing. It may be that this observer

is in one of those cyclical periods when the numbers are very low or, as noted above, it may be the bird is actually in a decline. Continued reports will be important.

From Fayette County:

**“I have one Rufous male who has visited the last two years, only in the fall migration for a couple of days (end of September).”**

This is when Rufous would be most likely in Fayette County. Extended stays invariably occur where there is a lot of evergreen shelter for the birds.

And from Wise County:

**“A few people see RUHU every year in Wise County – this was my first time to see one.”**

It is always great to hear someone saw a bird for the first time. Hopefully, both for your enjoyment and for the Rufous Hummingbird species, you will be able to continue enjoying this bird.

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## FESTIVALS

Once again, **Xtreme Hummingbird Extravaganza** at the Gulf Coast Bird Observatory in Lake Jackson will be spread out over a two weekend period. September 10 and September 17 this conservation area will host hummingbird banding demonstrations and the opportunity to adopt a hummingbird in support of their work.

The big festival of the year, **Rockport-Fulton's Hummer-bird Celebration** will be held September 15 to 18 this year in Rockport. This event is held at the peak of Ruby-throated Hummingbird migration on the Gulf Coast, and always brings numerous hummingbirds and hummingbird enthusiasts together. Activities including banding demonstrations, a vendors' market and programs by some of the nations leading speakers on hummingbirds and hummingbird related subjects. I particularly enjoy visiting the "hummer homes" where Ruby-throated and Buff-bellied Hummingbirds are sure to please, and occasionally an unexpected other species will wander in.



To join the Hummingbird Roundup, please send a \$6 donation with your name, address, county, telephone number and e-mail address to:

Hummingbird Roundup,  
Texas Parks and Wildlife Department  
4200 Smith School Road  
Austin, TX 78744

Please remember to return your Roundup 2011 survey forms by **Jan. 20, 2012**, to the address above.



## WINTER HUMMINGBIRD STUDY, CONTINUED

species and tended to occupy all habitats at uniform density. Rufous showed a higher percent of use for brush habitats and less use of the forested, park-like settings. Black-chins tended to use the forested park-like settings at higher rates, Ruby-throats tended to be caught at higher rates in the live oak/lawn/flower bed setting than the other habitats. Allen's avoided the park-like forested settings and was mostly found in dense vegetation. Broad-tails and Calliope were primarily found in brush settings. Anna's and Broad-billed occurred too infrequently to interpret habitat use.

While we managed extensive flower beds to attract hummingbirds to our yard (live oak setting), by far the greatest densities of birds occurred in adjoining native habitats comprised of dense brush, vines and saplings. This live oak setting was typically what most landowners provided as hummingbird habitat, and had a normal component of feeders and over 100 feet of flower beds dominated by shrimp plant which is a great winter bloomer. The other habitats at the banding station had no flowers during winter. They seasonally had large numbers of flowers from spring through fall depending on rainfall. This live oak site was only most frequently used by Black-chinned and Ruby-throated during winter. Brush less than 10 feet in height with varied structure, but high density of vegetation appear to be important for Calliope, Rufous and Allen's Hummingbirds at this site. Dense, early successional stage saplings/brush/vines are seldom managed for hummingbirds, but should be given serious consideration.

We have shown through this study that relatively high densities of a diverse array of hummingbird species can be maintained through the winter near the Gulf Coast. Hummingbirds have strong site fidelity and will live much longer than previous expected.

## MISSION STATEMENT



The mission of the Hummingbird Roundup is to improve the conservation of hummingbirds by gathering information about their distribution and providing information to the public. The survey encourages Texans to maintain natural habitat for the birds, properly care for hummingbird feeders and record sightings. Your observations further our knowledge of the hummingbirds of Texas, guide new research efforts and help the Wildlife Diversity Program in its mission to keep these tiny visitors returning each year.