



THE TEXAS

HUMMER

SPRING 2009

A NEWSLETTER FOR TEXAS HUMMINGBIRD ROUNDUP PARTICIPANTS

HUMMINGBIRD ROUNDUP 2008

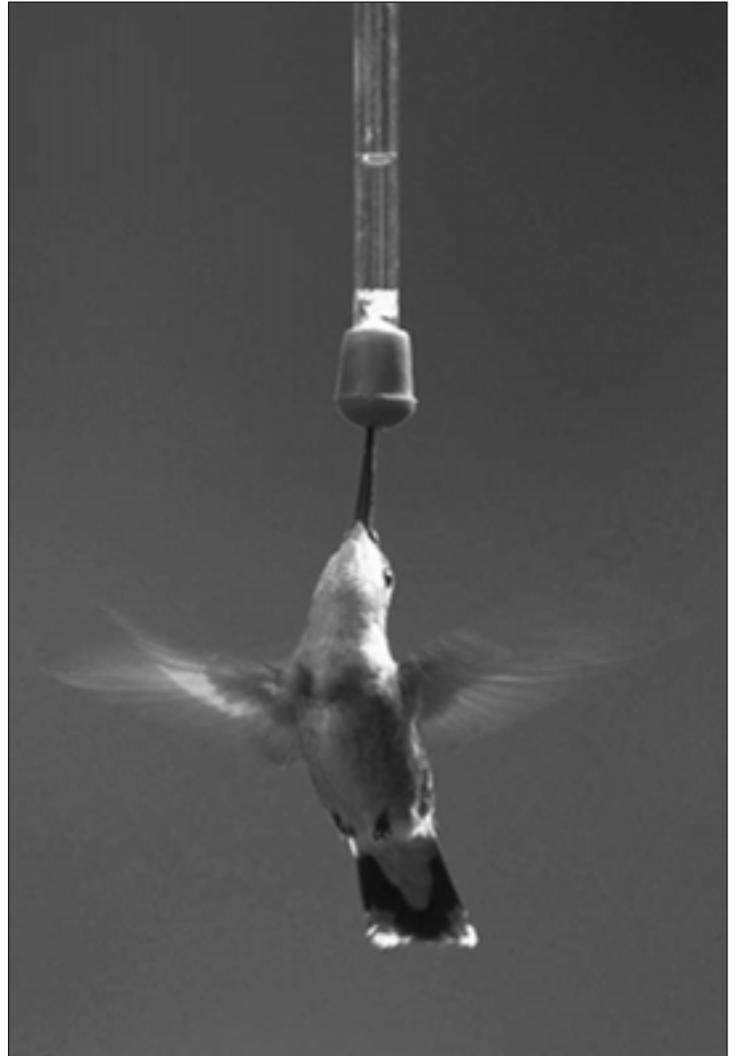
Another good year for hummingbird watching in Texas has drawn to a close with 15 species being reported through the Roundup and another species being reported to the Texas Bird Records Committee. The only species we did not receive reports of from anywhere in the state this year were Berylline Hummingbird and Green-breasted Mango—both review species with limited occurrence within the state.

Observer numbers were down a little again this year. In an effort to get more participation, we have started a series of hummingbird pins that one can only get if they submit a completed hummingbird survey. For 2008, the pin is a Ruby-throated Hummingbird and everyone who submits a report for 2008 will receive a pin. For 2009, the pin will feature a Lucifer Hummingbird, so get your survey sheets and start keeping those records!

Diversity remained high across the state. Parmer County in the Panhandle reported five different species while Hidalgo County in the Rio Grande Valley reported seven. In East Texas, Montgomery County reported four species while Harris County reported eight and Fort Bend County reported five. Surprises included a Magnificent Hummingbird not only photographed but also banded in Brazoria County. White-eared hummingbirds reported in both Brewster and Jeff-Davis counties, and a Blue-throated Hummingbird photographed in the Hidalgo County.

To date we have 190 reports in from 69 counties. We did not send reminders this year and no news releases encouraged participation, but the numbers are down across the state with the notable exception of Hidalgo County.

Remember to check the Hummingbird Roundup Web



page periodically. On the left side of the page we now have maps showing the 2006 data. We will be updating this through the year with more maps and reports. The Web site can be reached through

www.tpwd.state.tx.us/hummingbirds

So, fill the feeders, plant the plants, grab the binoculars and enjoy the hummingbirds.



Executive Director
Carter P. Smith

Editor, *The Texas Hummer*
Mark Klym

COMMISSION

Peter M. Holt, Chairman
 San Antonio

T. Dan Friedkin, Vice-Chairman
 Houston

Mark E. Bivins Amarillo

J. Robert Brown El Paso

Ralph H. Duggins Fort Worth

Antonio Falcon, M.D. Rio Grande City

Karen J. Hixon San Antonio

Margaret Martin Boerne

John D. Parker Lufkin

Lee M. Bass, Chairman-Emeritus
 Fort Worth

TEXAS PARKS AND WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT MISSION STATEMENT

"To manage and conserve the natural and cultural resources of Texas and to provide hunting, fishing and outdoor recreation opportunities for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations."

You may view this publication through the TPWD Web site. If you wish to have your name and address removed from the printed version mail distribution list, please notify us by completing a request form at www.tpwd.state.tx.us/enews/. Once verified, we will notify you by e-mail when a new version of your selected newsletter is posted at www.tpwd.state.tx.us/newsletters/

FOR MORE INFORMATION

All inquiries: Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, 4200 Smith School Rd., Austin, TX 78744, telephone (800) 792-1112 toll free, or (512) 389-4800 or visit our Web site for detailed information about TPWD programs:

www.tpwd.state.tx.us



© 2009 Texas Parks and Wildlife Department PWD BR.W7000-242J (2/09)

In accordance with Texas State Depository Law, this publication is available at the Texas State Publications Clearinghouse and/or Texas Depository Libraries.



TPWD receives federal assistance from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and other federal agencies. TPWD is therefore subject to Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, the Age Discrimination Act of 1975, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, in addition to state anti-discrimination laws. TPWD will comply with state and federal laws prohibiting discrimination based on race, color, national origin, age, sex or disability. If you believe that you have been discriminated against in any TPWD program, activity or event, you may contact the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Division of Federal Assistance, 4401 N. Fairfax Drive, Mail Stop: MBSP-4020, Arlington, VA 22203, Attention: Civil Rights Coordinator for Public Access.



PLANTS AND HUMMINGBIRDS – THE AMAZING INTERACTION

As we watched the birds flitting furtively through the garden, one set of whirling wings repeatedly drew our attention—the feisty Rufous Hummingbird visiting the trumpet creeper. Why would the plant give up the desperately needed energy to attract this feathered messenger of a new generation? Why would the bird bury its head, and most of its shoulders, in the blossom just to get a drink of sugar water? The amazing interaction between plant and pollinator is repeated thousands of times each year in our gardens, and understanding this unique relationship will help us plan an effective hummingbird garden.

We all learned very early in our study of biology that plants produce sugar as a means of storing energy by combining carbon dioxide and water in the process of photosynthesis. This sugar is then used to feed the various cells of the plant and ensure the plant's survival. Why, then, would the plant give up a vital resource like sugar in a tiny drop of nectar?

Looking at the structure of a hummingbird feeding plant may help us to understand. Most hummingbird-attracting plants have a long corolla (cluster of petals) creating a tubular shape. Inside the corolla is usually a cluster of long, highly flexible stamens tipped with abundant pollen. The pistil is usually just below the stamens and conveniently interrupting ready access to the treasure of nectar at the base of the corolla. This structure ensures that every animal that wants a drink of that precious sugar water is going to be forced past the stamens with the result of pollen being brushed onto their shoulders, throat, head and bill and past the pistil, probably depositing some of that same pollen. The sugar is the bait the plant uses to draw the birds to it.

Looking at the bird's structure and physical abilities, we see a design that maximizes each opportunity to secure this nectar. The long bill allows the bird to reach deep into the flower, even when its head is right up against the pistil. The even longer, agile tongue can then reach down into the flower and lap—not suck—up the nectar. All this is possible because of the bird's unique ability to move its wings in a figure-eight pattern allowing it to hover.

Hovering on fast-moving wings, though, is very energy-demanding, and this is where the hook is really set. The high-energy content (nothing but sugar and water) of nectar makes it a rich prize the birds can not resist!

These two organisms in very different families are remarkably built to complement each other!

IDENTIFICATION TIPS

LUCIFER, ANNA'S AND COSTA'S HUMMINGBIRDS

There were several reports of Costa's hummingbirds in Central Texas after a photograph of one that visited Hays County was circulated on some of the birding lists. Costa's hummingbirds are review species in Texas, so reports to the Roundup are likely to result in a request for photos, even if the bird has already been reported from the area. How would we identify these three species, especially since they all have some version of red to purple coloring in the head and neck region?

Lucifer Hummingbird will not have gorget-like color on the head. The male is generally green to bronze-green from

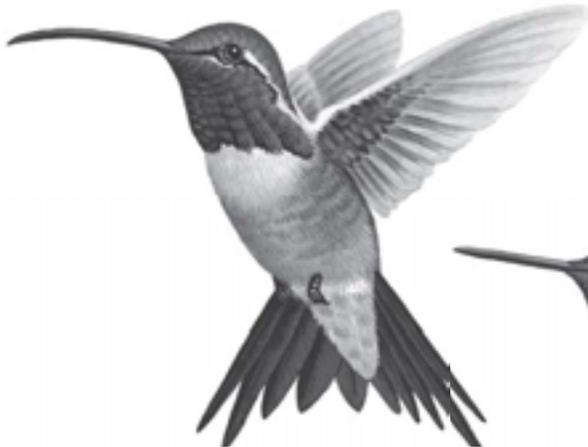
the crown to the tail. His gorget area is large, with color extending onto the breast. The edge of the gorget is ragged looking, and the outer edge extends down into the "armpits." His flanks are bronze-green to pale cinnamon, and he may have a tan "belt." The tail is green to black with the two short central feathers green and the thin outer feathers black. While these short feathers create a forked-tail appearance, it is seldom seen since the bird tends to carry his tail closed to a point—especially when perched.

The adult male Costa's Hummingbird, on the other hand, is

likely to have color on the crown. These birds are deep green above, and their gorget is large, including a patch on the crown, separate patches behind the eyes, and a long flowing gorget that hangs down like a mustache or sweeps back over the shoulders. The breast is very white and wraps around the shoulders to join a white eye line, creating a distinct purple, white, green pattern on the face. The outer tail feathers are gray, and darker at the edges giving the short, notched tail a black appearance.

If seen in good light, the rose red or coppery red gorget of the adult male Anna's Hummingbird should distinguish him from the two mentioned previously, although this is light dependent. The male Anna's is bluish-green above with color patches on his crown, behind the eyes and on his throat. The gorget extends only moderately on the corners. The breast will appear scaly. The long, deeply notched tail extending beyond the tips of the wings is dark, often appearing black.

continued on page 4



Lucifer – male



Anna's – male

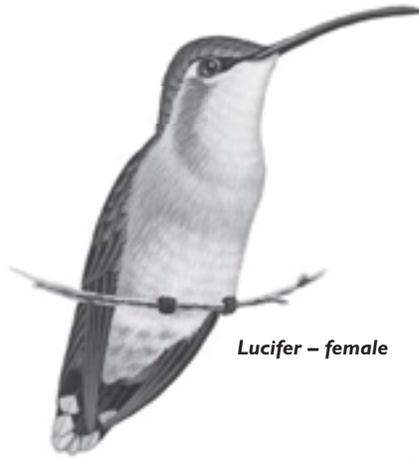


Costa's – male

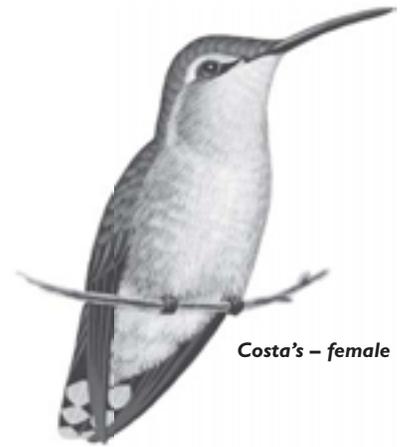
Artwork by Clemente Guzman III
from the *Hummingbirds of Texas* available
through Texas A&M University Press

IDENTIFICATION TIPS CONTINUED

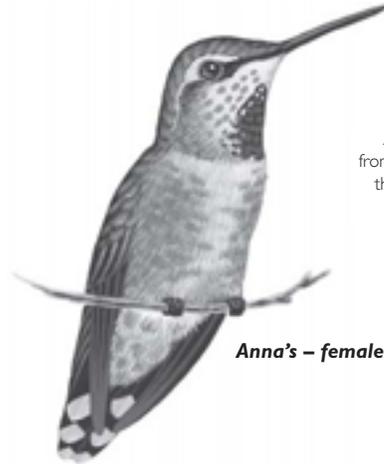
Females of these three species are easier to distinguish than are Ruby-throated and Black-chinned females. The Costa's and Anna's females may have some gorget markings in the throat but will not have color on the crown. On the Anna's female, gorget markings vary from bronze-gray to rose-red or coppery, often in an oval or diamond pattern. Her slightly notched double-rounded tail extends beyond the wing tips. A Costa's female may have a small patch of iridescent purple color in the bottom center of her gorget. She is bright-green to golden-green above, and her long wings extend to or slightly beyond her short, notched tail. Lucifer females are bronze-green to golden-green above with a white throat washed with cinnamon. She sports a creamy-white to cinnamon eye line and has that distinctive long, curved bill of the species. Her forked tail extends well beyond the wing tips.



Lucifer – female

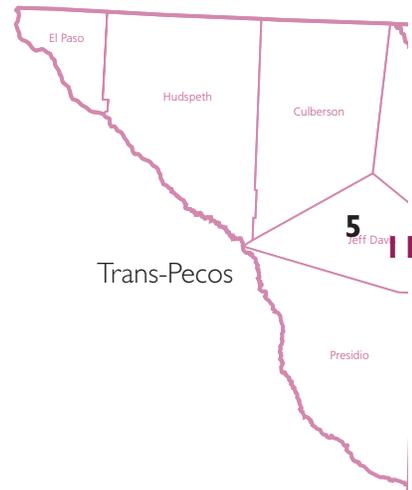


Costa's – female



Anna's – female

Artwork by Clemente Guzman III from the *Hummingbirds of Texas* available through Texas A&M University Press





TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY PRESS



Hummingbirds of Texas
with their New Mexico and Arizona Ranges

Second Edition.

Clifford E. Shackelford,
Madge M. Lindsay, and C. Mark Klym

87 color photos. 47 color illus. 20 color maps.
\$24.95

College Station, Texas • Orders: 800-826-8911 • Fax: 888-617-2421

www.tamu.edu/upress

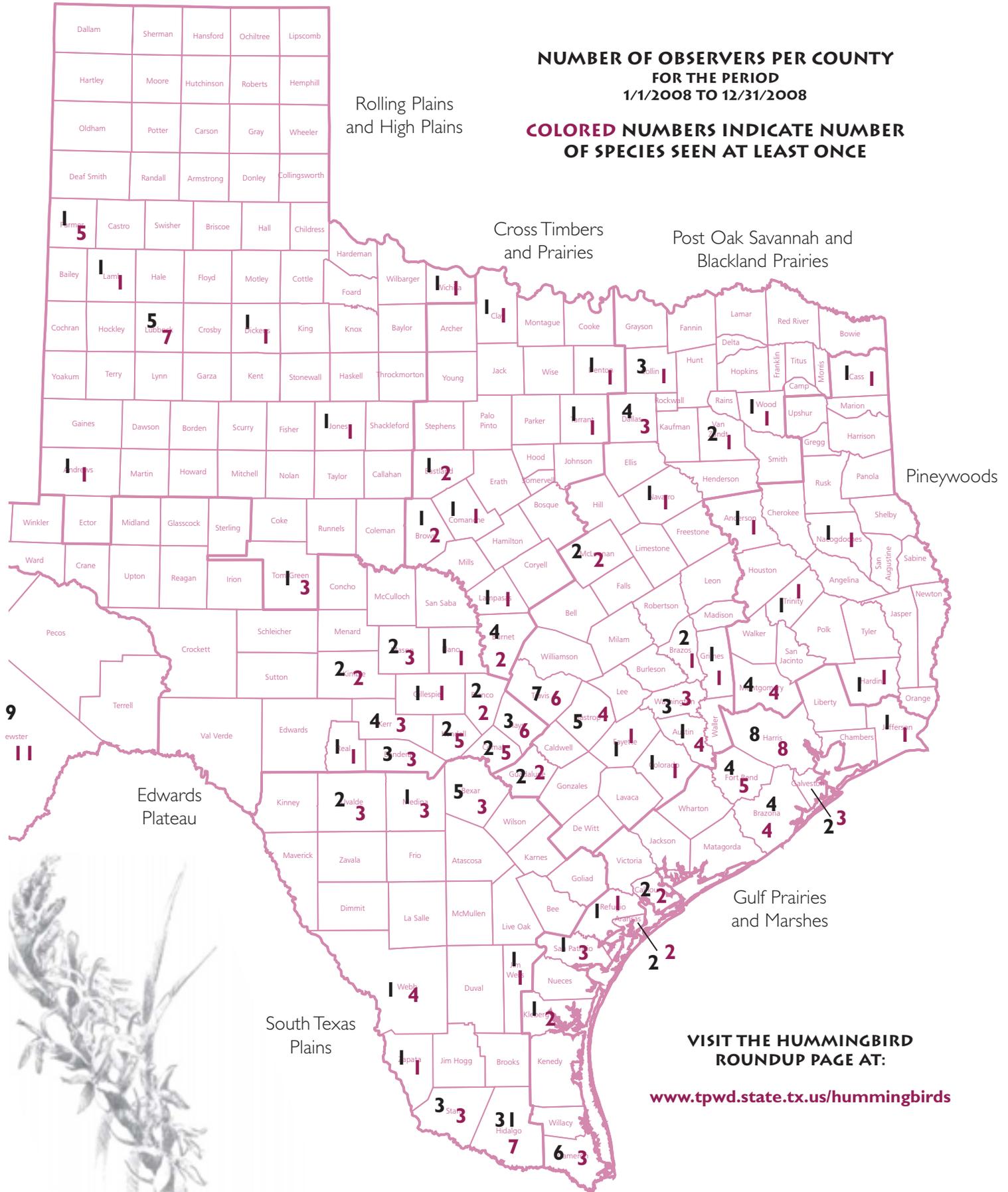
PLANT PREFERENCE FOR 2008

Salvias	37 observers
Lantana	14
Turk's Cap	9
Flame Acanthus	9
Trumpet Vine	8
Morning Glory	8
Coral Honeysuckle	8
Hibiscus	7
Hamelia*	7
Crossvine	6
Shrimp Plant*	5
Red Yucca	5

*non-native

**NUMBER OF OBSERVERS PER COUNTY
FOR THE PERIOD
1/1/2008 TO 12/31/2008**

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



**VISIT THE HUMMINGBIRD
ROUNDUP PAGE AT:**

www.tpwd.state.tx.us/hummingbirds



OBSERVERS' COMMENTS

This page was set aside for comments from those of you participating in the Roundup and for responses from Roundup staff. As might be expected, many of the comments centered around Hurricane Ike and its impact on the birds.

From Montgomery County:

"1 to 2 days following Hurricane Ike hummers swarmed. As many as 16 to 18 birds viewed before most moved on."

From Denton County:

"After hurricane Ike and the cool front came through over the weekend of Sept. 13-14, I saw fewer hummers."

This would be expected. After the storm ripped through, there was very little to no vegetation left with leaves, let alone flowers. The hungry birds had no where to feed, and so would swarm the feeders. Since the birds move on fronts, the arrival of the cold front the same weekend (which moved the storm to Galveston instead of the coastal bend) would move the birds on.

From Fort Bend County:

"At approximately 8:30 a.m. in 40 to 50 mph sustained winds with gusts to 60 to 70 mph at least 6 to 10 RTHU were working the

feeders almost unaffected by the wind."

This would coincide with a report from our ornithologist Cliff Shackelford, in Nacogdoches County, who reported:

"Sustained winds were 35 to 40 mph throughout the storm yet gusts reached 70 to 80 mph. Trees were downed all over town (and across East Texas) including atop many houses, businesses, roadways, and power lines. ... What amazed me most was that the Ruby-throated hummingbirds didn't miss a beat during the entire storm—they continued to feed at our feeders as if everything was normal."

Other comments, such as the following, focused on pests:

From Bexar County:

"The honey bees were very bad this year; they would take over the bird bath with 25 to 40 bees at a time, all day. ... Some times the bees would take over a feeder."

Yes, the bees were notably heavy this year.

From Mason County:

"On May 23 I go to check the feeders and much to my dismay a snake was coiled through the trellis about 6 feet from the ground."

The Texas Ornithology list included links to a Web site this year that included two photographic records from Atascosa County of rat snakes capturing and eating hummingbirds.

And here is our one **Treasures of the Trans-Pecos** comment this year

From Jeff Davis County:

"A tarantula was on the window just below one of the feeders. The hummers acted nervous so we relocated the tarantula."

I don't doubt the hummingbirds were acting nervous. In the tropics, tarantulas are noted bird eaters!

From Travis County:

"Have now had hummingbirds year round since March 2002"

Reports like this one are becoming more and more common this year. I had observers in Bastrop County report verbally that they had had Buff-bellied hummingbirds year round for a couple of years (no formal record yet). Interestingly the same Travis County observation contained a note:

"... saw a Buff-bellied hummingbird on April 26."

These comments may give hope to others, like the comment from Collin County:

"I have never seen a hummingbird in my yard after mid October, although I have much in bloom for them."

continued on page 7



OBSERVER'S COMMENTS CONTINUED

There were several comments about the time birds arrived and disappeared this year.

From Uvalde County:

“Rufous hummingbirds usually come by July but were late this year.”

Actually, looking at strict first-occurrence records for Uvalde County, the average first occurrence in the 15 years of the survey appears to be the week of September 1, making the mid-August occurrence on the early side of the norm.

From Bastrop County:

“Had lots of hummingbirds at beginning of summer. Numbers dropped dramatically after a while for no known reason.”

Looking at your diary, the numbers dropped right at the time we would expect the birds to be migrating, if not a little late.

This season did seem to have birds lingering a little longer than recent years.

There were some who had a disappointing year:

From Grimes County:

“There seem to be fewer h-birds this year.”

And from Lubbock County:

“Worst year for observation since feeding. One Rufous in Fall in neighbors yard.”

But, from Anderson County:

“This is the first year to see hummingbirds in January and February... Sept. 8-21 too many to count—lots of hummingbirds.”

From Mason County:

“Used 108 pounds of sugar this year.”



FESTIVALS

Unfortunately, weather situations cancelled the Hummer-Bird Celebration in Rockport and the Xtreme Hummingbird Xtravaganza in Lake Jackson. Both festivals are planning for 2009, and are looking forward to a recovery after the disappointments of 2008.

Rockport–Fulton on the coastal bend hosts the **Hummer-Bird Celebration** each year on the second weekend after Labor Day. This is a great place to meet other hummingbird enthusiasts, visit an active hummingbird banding station, hear programs presented by some of the best in the hummingbird field, and enjoy lots of whirling wings. Most of the birds you will see will be Ruby-throated hummingbirds, with a sprinkling of Buff-bellied and Rufous. Occasionally some other rarities (an Allen's, Anna's or even a Costa's) may show up too. Join us September 17-20. Stop by the Parks and Wildlife booth and say hi.

Gulf Coast Bird Observatory in Lake Jackson hosts the **Xtreme Hummingbird Xtravaganza**. This year, as was planned for last year, it will be each weekend in September and offers the opportunity to see hummingbirds banded up close. Check with the observatory (www.gcbo.org) about programs or speakers. You are likely to see Ruby-throated hummingbirds. Other possibilities include Rufous and Buff-bellied hummingbirds; however, the Lake Jackson area has hosted a wide variety over the years.

Show Your Support for Wildlife!



Help protect native non-game species like hummingbirds with the purchase of the Horned Lizard license plate. The cost is just \$30, with \$22 going directly to benefit the conservation of wildlife diversity in Texas.

**Order online today and get your plate in just two weeks!
www.conservationplate.org/hl**





OBSERVATION TIPS

How can I see some of the less-common hummingbirds? I live in East Texas and I really want to see a Magnificent Hummingbird. I'm from Lubbock and will be in the Valley in March—where can I see a Buff-bellied Hummingbird?

Does any of this sound familiar? While being in the range of the bird is important, as the person traveling to the Valley notes, it is not the only consideration one should have. Taking a few steps before you travel can make the trip much more successful for the hummingbird lover—whether you are traveling to Big Bend or Costa Rica!

You are much more likely to think the trip was successful if you can check a few birds off a target list than if you simply go with the idea of looking for hummingbirds. Find out what is probable when and where you are going, and make sure a few of these are on your list. I can never get too many Rufous hummingbirds, so they are sure to be on my list anytime I travel. Adding a few birds you have seen before helps ensure you are going to be successful—even if you don't get that lifer that is also on your list!

Learn where the birds you are looking for are likely to be—not just the Rio Grande Valley, but *where* in the valley? What are their habitat needs? Are you going to look for them in the thorn scrub or the riparian forest? Prepare for the trip by knowing where to look when you get there.

Has the bird been seen recently? If it is a rarity in the area, check the hot lines. Talk to birders who have been to the area recently. Did they find your targets? Where? And where did they strike out? This might save you some time and frustration.

Ask the locals. State parks are a great place to find birds, but if you do not find what you are looking for, ask the staff if they can suggest a hot spot. Talk to other birders visiting the site.

Expect the expected, enjoy the rarity. If you go out every day expecting to see the Green-breasted Mango, disappointment is not going to be hard to find. We value the rare gems because they are rare, but the common birds can be just as entertaining!

Enjoy the birds!



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 2009 survey forms by **Jan. 18, 2010**, to the address above.

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.