

THE TEXAS



HUMMER

SPRING 2001

A NEWSLETTER FOR TEXAS HUMMINGBIRD ROUNDUP PARTICIPANTS

2000 HUMMINGBIRD ROUNDUP SUMMARY

The 2000 season is now behind us and, while I am still receiving the occasional report, the bulk of what we are going to get for this year is now in. The program grew considerably this year, with 1,145 people enrolled in the Texas Hummingbird Roundup by year-end. To date, 265 annual questionnaires have been received for a 23% participation in the report. This represents 101 counties or 40% of the counties in the state, including five of the eight Trans-Pecos counties or 62.5%. While this participation level is quite good, there is still room for improvement, especially in the Trans-Pecos and Panhandle regions where there are large stretches of land unrepresented in this year's survey.

Seventeen of our eighteen species of hummingbirds were reported this year, with only the Green-breasted Mango not appearing in the 2000 species list. A note inside this newsletter reports an early 2001 occurrence of this rare bird.

Winter hummingbirds were not lacking this year, with 68 observers in 44 counties

reporting that they kept a feeder active all year. Of these 68 observers, 38 (or 56%) had at least one hummingbird during the winter. Six species were observed during January, February or December. The most northerly report of winter hummingbirds in the state was from Lubbock County.

In the Trans-Pecos, Brewster and Presidio counties reported the greatest species diversity with eight species each followed closely by Jeff Davis County with seven species. These mountainous regions are obviously rich in flying jewels. In the rest of the state, Travis and Lubbock counties reported six species each while a number of counties reported five species. It is good to see the Panhandle reporting some diversity.

Some major developments in the program this year include the introduction of a workshop on hummingbirds including a brief introduction to the species, a program on gardening for hummingbirds, an identification session and closing with a pest and predator management program. For those interested, an additional pro-

gram at the end introduces the Roundup, the questions we are asking and what we hope to learn from them. While details are being worked out on some of the workshops for this year, Trans-Pecos workshops are finalized and referred to later in this report.

The 2001 survey is off to a good start with 520 participants already enrolled for the year. These are spread throughout the state with no real recruiting effort yet undertaken for this year. We have set a goal of more than 1,500 participants involved by year's end.

Our second goal is to increase survey returns to

more than 25%. Additional reminders sent after the Christmas season increased the percent return over that of 1999, and so will probably be continued. You can help by reminding friends who are also participants to get their reports in at year's end.

What can we expect this year? The wet winter and spring many of us are enjoying will probably bring an abundance of wildflowers, meaning that the birds will have more natural foods available. Hummingbirds may be scarcer around the feeders this year, and those seeing rare birds may have to look harder to find them. Good luck and enjoy our flying jewels.

MISSION STATEMENT

ELISHEA



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.

THE QUESTION OF ALLEN'S HUMMINGBIRD

The suggestion in last year's Hummer that we use the Rufous/Allen's (R/A) abbreviation for green-backed *Selasphorus* seen in surveys has received a mixed review. The change to R/A, in keeping with changes being made by other groups, was made to maintain the integrity of the data and even improve on some questionable responses we are currently receiving. I hope to address some of these concerns below.

While many of the early field guides and books written about hummingbirds have indicated that there are distinct differences between the two birds, researchers in the field are finding that it is impossible to reliably tell the difference between immature Rufous and Allen's hummingbirds. Since most of the Allen's we have seen and confirmed in Texas have been immature, this makes it very difficult to justify accepting reports of Allen's Hummingbird without measurements and photos to support the identification.

Equally confusing is the situation we are running into. Although birders accept the Allen's Hummingbird as an extremely rare bird, we continue to get a staggering number of unsupported reports each year. The Texas Bird Records Committee, (website members.tripod.com/~tbrc/about.htm) which is charged with reviewing and maintaining our official list of Texas birds, record only eight confirmed records ever, yet the first year of the survey

had 40 records for Allen's Hummingbird. Subsequent years have continued to see large numbers of reports and multiple bird occurrences on the record. Either we are seeing a lot of birds no one else is seeing, or there is a situation of misidentification.

One of the arguments we have heard against changing the coding has focussed on the "coppery" color that people report in the gorget of presumed Allen's Hummingbirds. Field work has shown repeatedly that this is not a unique character when trying to distinguish between the two species.

Another unreliable characteristic for distinguishing the two birds is the vocalization. National Geographic Field Guide to the Birds of North America has consistently indicated that the song and call of the Rufous Hummingbird are identical to those of the Allen's Hummingbird. Wing trills are equally nondiagnostic.

People have tried to use "characteristic" flight to distinguish between the two species. While this works when you have a distinct, and consistent behavior in the animal – like the Sprague's Pipit with its stair-step flight and sudden drop pattern when flushed, no such patterns – both distinct AND consistent – have been found in Rufous or Allen's Hummingbirds.

Does this mean we should never report Allen's Hummingbird on our form? Not at all. As the field guides clearly

note, mature males with a fully mature tale and full gorget, can reliably be called an Allen's. Since this is an extremely rare bird in Texas, we would still require a detailed description and a photograph. For juveniles and females, if you think they might be Allen's it is better to say *Selasphorus* – and isn't R/A easier to write anyway?



IT'S FESTIVAL TIME!

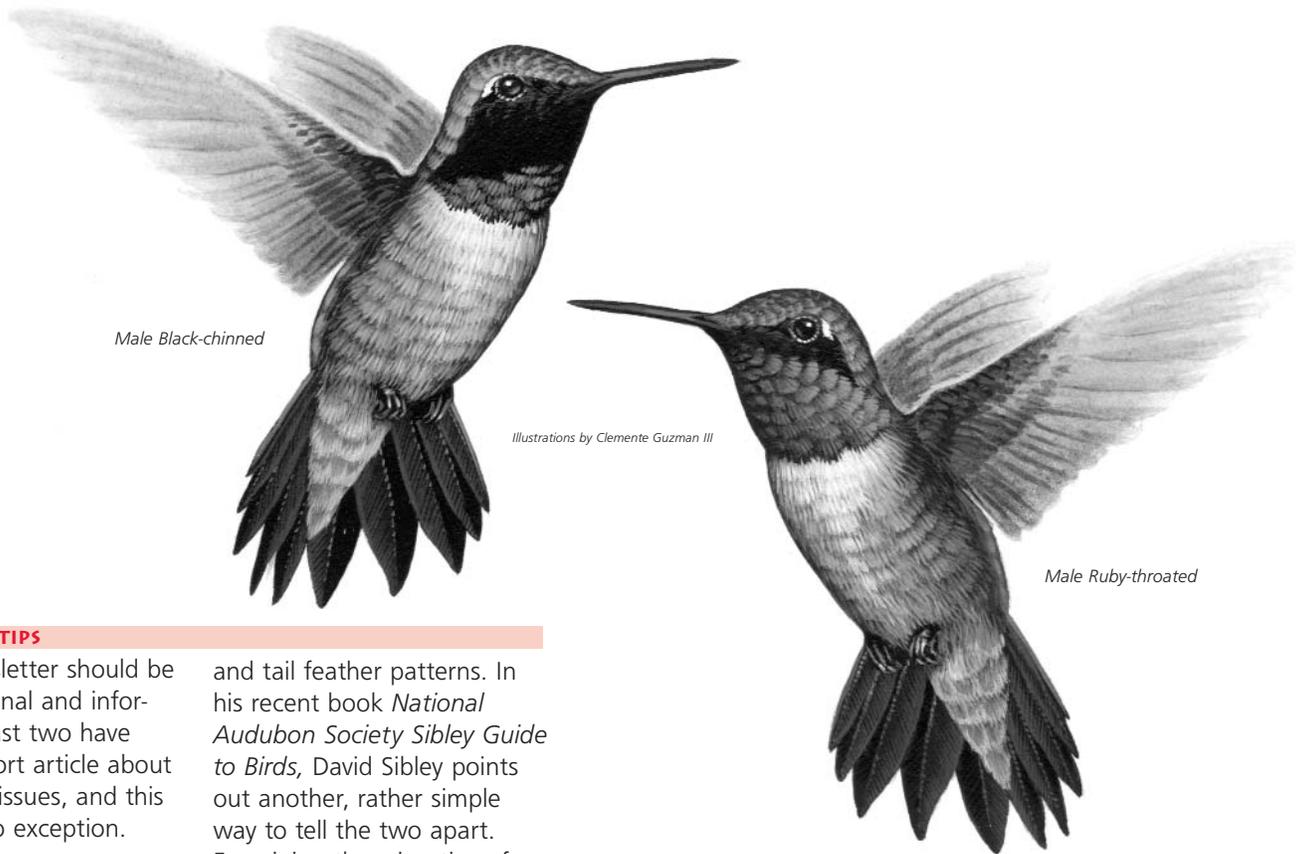


Last year's newsletter included an article about nature tourism and the two communities in our state that have festivals focussed on hummingbirds. Both Rockport–Fulton and Fort Davis continue to sponsor these festivals, and people attending them have a great opportunity to see hummingbirds.

Fort Davis will celebrate their hummingbird festival this year on August 17–19. Centered on the Prude Ranch and Davis Mountains State Park, this festival will feature field trips in which as many as nine species of hummingbird are possible. Speakers will talk about hummingbirds, hummingbird research, wildlife habitats and general nature themes. For information on this year's festival, contact the Prude Ranch at 915-426-3202.

The Rockport–Fulton Annual Hummer/Bird Celebration will run September 15–17 on the central coast. This festival, always a big and exciting event, offers the opportunity to see hundreds of Ruby-throated Hummingbirds, with the occasional Buff-bellied Hummingbird or Rufous Hummingbird, as well as speakers, a bird banding station and much more. More information on this festival is available through the Rockport–Fulton Chamber of Commerce at 800-826-6441.

Why not get out and enjoy some of Texas' nature and birding festivals this year?



Male Black-chinned

Illustrations by Clemente Guzman III

Male Ruby-throated

IDENTIFICATION TIPS

A newsletter should be both educational and informative. The last two have included a short article about identification issues, and this one will be no exception.

Most of our identification issues center on the two *Archilochus* species common to Texas – the Ruby-throated Hummingbird (RTHU) and the Black-chinned Hummingbird (BCHU). This is because these birds are the most common and widespread species in the state. They can also be two of the most difficult species to identify.

Female *Archilochus* hummingbirds are often identified by the males they accompany. This doesn't always work, especially in areas where the two species occur simultaneously. Previous attempts to identify the two have focussed on color differences

and tail feather patterns. In his recent book *National Audubon Society Sibley Guide to Birds*, David Sibley points out another, rather simple way to tell the two apart. Examining the wing tips of the two birds at rest shows that BCHU has a clubbed appearance while RTHU has a tapered appearance. As with almost all identification tips for the female *Archilochus*, this is still a relative description, but it should be easier than examining tail feather color patterns.

Please send any comments on this field identification technique.

Thanks to Cliff Shackelford, nongame ornithologist with Texas Parks and Wildlife, for calling this tip to my attention.

THE FIRST U.S. RECORD OF AN ADULT GREEN-BREASTED MANGO FOUND IN TEXAS

While not part of the 2000 Texas Hummingbird Roundup record, February of 2001 brought another first for Texas. While we had previously enjoyed the presence of the Green-breasted Mango in our state, all seven previous records had been birds that had appeared late in the fall migration, and all were juveniles. When a late winter posting on TEXBIRDS listserve mentioned a Green-breasted Mango in McAllen, we could only hope this was an adult bird.

As a photo, taken and scanned by Ray Beiber, one of the birders that first identified it, appeared on my computer screen, this was indeed Texas', and the nation's first confirmed record of an adult Green-breasted Mango. The bird spent about 10 days at various feeders in McAllen and was not seen again.

The natural history of the Green-breasted Mango makes appearances in Texas possible, but appearances by adult birds less likely than those of juvenile birds. The breeding range of this bird in Mexico is about 300 miles south of the Texas border. Fall records are probably young birds that get disoriented during migration and fly north into the southern part of Texas.

This late winter bird was probably an early migrant that over flew the breeding grounds, and made its way to South Texas where it briefly stopped over.



Rolling Plains
and High Plains

**BLACK NUMBERS
INDICATE NUMBER OF
PARTICIPANTS PER COUNTY
WHO RETURNED THEIR
2000 SURVEY
AS OF FEBRUARY, 2001**

**COLORED NUMBERS INDICATED
WINTER SPECIES SEEN**

WINTER FEEDERS

Twenty-six percent of those returning reports kept their feeders active all winter. Of these, 56% reported seeing hummingbirds in January, February or December.

FAVORITE PLANTS

- Salvias 22%
- Lantana 10%
- Honeysuckle 9%
- Hummingbird Bush 8%
- Hibiscus 6%
- Turk's cap 5%
- Trumpet vine 5%

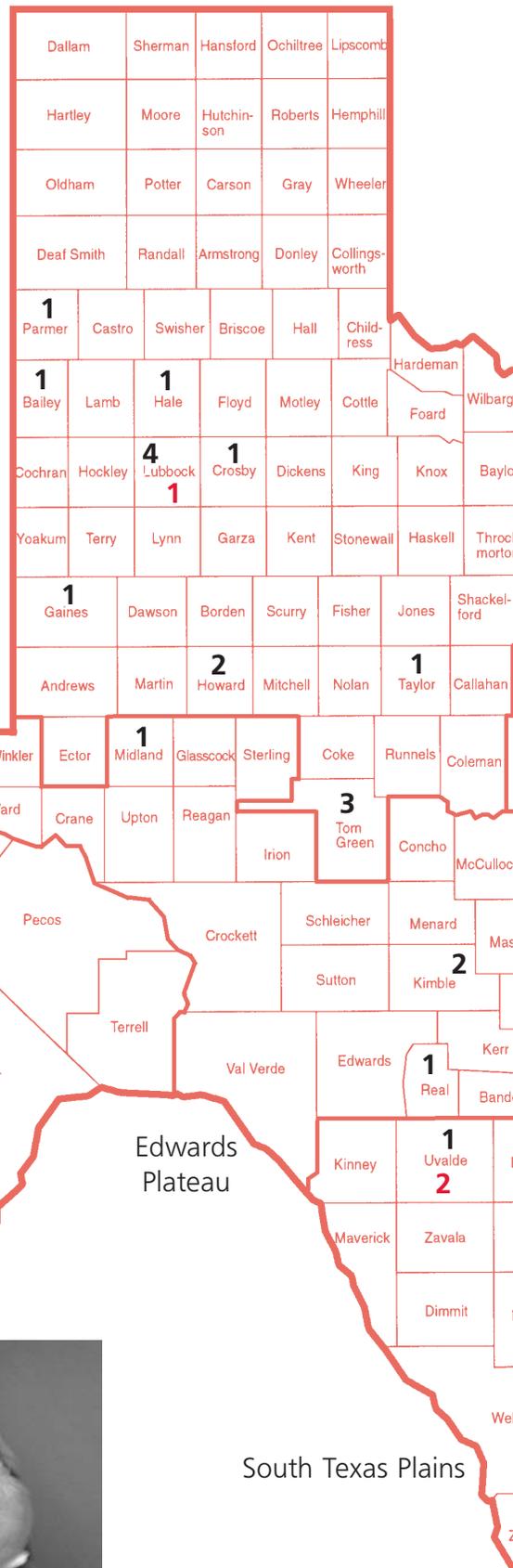
(Natives with the exception of Hummingbird Bush)

SPECIES (decreasing order of abundance)

	Number of Counties Reporting
Ruby-throated Hummingbird	88
Black-chinned Hummingbird	64
Buff-bellied Hummingbird	11
Broad-tailed Hummingbird	19
Rufous Hummingbird	39
Anna's Hummingbird	14
Magnificent Hummingbird	3
Lucifer Hummingbird	5
Calliope Hummingbird	11
Blue-throated Hummingbird	3
<i>Selasphorus</i> species	6
Broad-billed Hummingbird	2
Green Violet-ear	3
Costa's Hummingbird	1
White-eared Hummingbird	1
Allen's Hummingbird	2



Rufous Hummingbird



South Texas Plains



TREASURES OF THE TRANS-PECOS

High in the Christmas Mountains of Brewster County, **Carolyn Ohl-Kolb** is working hard to create habitat that is friendly not only to hummingbirds, but to birds in general. She writes: "I've planted about 100 trees and shrubs, made several large ponds, a stream, etc., and am on my way to having a desert oasis high in the Christmas Mountains." It is paying rewards. This year Carolyn recorded seven hummingbird species, including a Costa's Hummingbird, one of the rare species we request detailed information about.

Melvin Walker La Follette of Presidio County makes an interesting correlation of

rains, wildflowers and bird activities in the desert regions of the Trans-Pecos, noting: "Interestingly, a period of rains began on 11 June and continued through the week-end of the 24th. Lots of rain for the desert, over four inches in all. Many wildflowers and desert plants started to bloom during that period. During the latter half of June, no more than a dozen Black-chinned Hummingbirds were observable each day, with an occasional female Broad-tailed Hummingbird." Before this period, Mr. La Follette had recorded 40 or more BCHU. The presence of the natural food source appears to have pulled the birds off the still available feeders during this time. Similar reports were received from **Frank and Carol Avent** in Jeff Davis County. In June, they reported 35 or more BCHU with other species until the week of June 25 when the numbers dropped off drastically after the rains.

Mr. La Follette also brings up an interesting point in reporting a dead Rufous Humming-

bird he found at his feeders in August. He specifically noted that this bird was not banded. This is not surprising since less than 1% of banded nongame birds are ever recovered or recaptured. Hummingbird banding and research associated with it is becoming very popular and, in August 1999 Fort Davis hosted a meeting of hummingbird researchers from across the world. They banded a number of birds in the Davis Mountains. Should you recover a banded bird of any type, the data is important to the research community. In these events, please call 1-800-327-BAND for further direction.

The Trans-Pecos region also had reports of the birds apparently leaving early. **Frank and Carol Avent**, in Jeff Davis County, record: "Hummers left early this year, usually stay through December." Others, including **Dr. David Kruzich** in El Paso County, **Carolyn Ohl-Kolb** in Brewster County and **Melvin La Follette** in Presidio County had birds into or through December.



Illustration of a Blue-throated Hummingbird
by Clemente Guzman III

HUMMINGBIRD OBSERVATION BRINGS RARITIES, UNEXPECTED BIRDS

Many believe that the drought last year caused the hummingbirds to disperse considerably more than normal, and there is certainly some indication of that in the records and photographs received this year. A number of birds that we can not expect each year were seen. Equally surprising was the number of birds reported well outside their traditional ranges.

Hummingbird enthusiasts and birders descended on Nueces County after reports of a Green Violet-ear were received early in the year. The location, which had enjoyed a visit from the same species five years earlier, is ideal habitat for this bird, riverine with steep slopes immediately adjacent to water. This heavily forested area allowed the birds plenty of cover. This species was also reported in Travis County though the observers were unable to get a good photograph.

Gillespie County was particularly active, reporting and photographing both Lucifer Hummingbird and a White-eared Hummingbird, both rare east of the Pecos River.

A Broad-billed Hummingbird was reported and photographed from Howard County in October. This photograph, although taken through a screen over the window, showed all of the key features of a Broad-billed.

The Berylline Hummingbird made its almost annual (three of the last four years) appearance in Jeff Davis County this summer. While there are never any guarantees, this may be just the excuse you need to attend the Hummingbird Festival in Fort Davis this August.

A Costa's Hummingbird showing up in mid-December in Brewster County was a pleasant surprise for observers there. This, again is a bird we need careful and detailed documentation on. **Carolyn Ohi-Kolb** was alert and ready, getting a photograph for the Texas Birds Records Committee and a good diagram for the Roundup.

A juvenile Blue-throated Hummingbird was observed by participants at the Texas Butterfly Festival in Mission (see www.texasbutterfly.com for details) this November. While not a Review Species for the TBRC, this bird was well out of range. Similarly, a Calliope Hummingbird in Bexar was photographed and documented this year.

Documenting rare birds is important to help researchers learn more about them. All Texas Hummingbird Roundup kits contain a form for documenting rare species. They were revised for the 2001 survey, with the 10 common species separated from the eight uncommon species requiring more information. Please be careful to take notes on weather conditions, what type of binoculars you are using, other birds present and any other observers. When you see these birds, it is also a good idea to post a note on your local rare bird hotline, so that others can confirm what you are seeing.

HUMMINGBIRD WORKSHOPS PLANNED

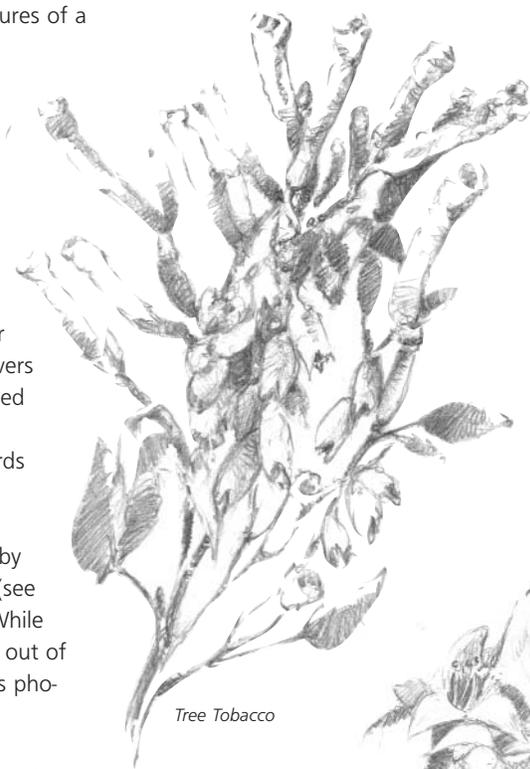


Hummingbird Workshops are currently planned for mid-August in the Trans-Pecos region of the state. Focussing on identification, gardening and pest management, the workshops are interactive with slide presentations, activities and question answer opportunities.

Current schedules for the Trans-Pecos region are:

El Paso	August 14–15 (evening)
Fort Davis	August 16–18

Check local media for more information and confirmation of these dates.



Tree Tobacco

PREFERRED PLANTS – TRANS-PECOS

There was a three-way tie for the most popular plants in the Trans-Pecos. These were Tree Tobacco, Honeysuckle and Salvias. Close behind these were Trumpet Vines and Morning Glory.

Illustrations by
Rob Fleming



Coral Honeysuckle

NOTES FROM HUMMER WATCHERS



We received several comments about the drought. Some reported more birds around the feeders, others reported birds being driven away by the dry weather and extremely high temperatures. Participant **Mildred Rohmer** of Frio County commented: "I am now down to two feeders and they get refilled two times a week, even if they still have feed. I'm sure it can't taste good after a few days." I don't know about the taste, but we do recommend frequent maintenance in hot weather. During that extreme heat last year, two to four days may have been too long in between changes.



In keeping with the drought theme, **Karen Sanford** of Denton County reports: "This year we had a drastic weather change, a severe drought and, by July, triple digit temperatures. Ironically – or maybe not so – our first bird came earlier this year, but by September we had seen our last hummers, in spite of the plethora of plants I had blooming for the birds at that time." Many people commented that the drought seems to have dispersed the birds more, possibly explain-

ing some of the rarities and unusual situations mentioned elsewhere.



Richard Myers of Taylor County suggests a method for saving your hummingbird feeders and reducing conflict between hummingbirds and House Finches with a taste for nectar. He records "I keep an oriole nectar feeder for the finches. With the bee guards removed, the feeding orifices are large enough to allow the nectar to slosh out into the bell-shaped feeding stations, allowing the finches easy access to the nectar. The finches ignore the hummer feeders, and the hummers usually ignore the finch feeder." This tip may work for any other birds that frequent hummingbird feeders.



Barry & Brenda Mace of Anderson County reported watching a hummingbird apparently flicking the end of pine needles to flush out bugs. This is a very interesting observation in hummingbird behavior.



Michael & Cheryl McGehee in Uvalde County saw an example of the need for shelter for winter hummingbirds this year. They watched an Anna's Hummingbird at a feeder until the landowner removed all the shrubs on the property. The ANHU immediately left.



Tommy Kelly of Harris County records: "My first time to see a hummingbird moth. At a glance it really could be mistaken for a hummingbird. Seen once in the early morning feeding on my very large hummingbird bush and twice in late evening feeding on lantana and salvias. Very interesting to watch."



Several participants reported unusual use of their Christmas lights by the hummingbirds. **Roxana Kornhauser** of Hays County reported: "I noticed the hummers resting on my year round icicle Christmas lights under the eaves of the porch in hot summer months." Meanwhile, **Jim Messinger** of Palo Pinto County reports: "we left up Christmas lights and the hummers tried to eat them." Guess they were a little hungry last year!



Kelly Heath of Bexar County reports: "I noticed that they seem to enjoy sitting on a bare branch more than one with leaves. A snag near the house was a popular resting spot, with plenty of branches for more than one hummer at a time." Their size, and the general shape of their bodies, makes them look like leaves on the "dead" branch.



Several observers asked about bee control. **Linda Keese** of Hays County reported "honey bees really bad in September. Had to put out dishes of sugar water for them." Bees locate food by smell while hummingbirds do so by sight. Dishes of sugar water, preferably a little sweeter than the 4:1 solution are a great trick, as are rags soaked in sugar water. Planting Mexican Heather away from the feeders is another great control since bees seem particularly fond of this plant.

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 4200 Smith School Road Austin, TX 78744

Please remember to return your Roundup 2001 survey forms by **January 15, 2002** to the address above.

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Written by Mark Klym

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