

THE TEXAS

## HUMMER

SPRING 2002

A NEWSLETTER FOR TEXAS HUMMINGBIRD ROUNDUP PARTICIPANTS

T

## HUMMINGBIRD ROUNDUP 2001

The 2001 Hummingbird Roundup produced excitement, concern, large numbers of birds, a drought of birds, lots of rain or no rain, depending on your individual perspective. Certainly the diversity we saw in 2000 was not repeated. We have no records for 2001 of White-eared Hummingbirds in Fredericksburg or the Berylline Hummingbird in Fort Davis. But the first ever North American record of an adult Green-breasted Mango created quite a stir in the Valley while the Costa's Hummingbird that showed up in Fort Davis and put in an appearance at the Hummingbird Festival in Fort Davis was well worth the trip. The Big Bend area did not experience their great diversity this year, probably because of the 5-inch total rainfall that they experienced at Terlingua.

The fall produced a lot of comments from urban areas about low numbers of hummingbirds. At the same time, rural participants were calling me with reports of more hummingbirds than ever at their feeders. The answer probably lies in the birds'

response to the weather much of the state experienced last year. Spring and fall last year were quite wet for most of the eastern half of the state. As a result, there were plenty of flowers still in bloom when the Ruby-throated Hummingbirds put in their appearance for the fall migration. This meant smaller numbers around our feeders but for those with an active hummingbird garden and lots of shelter, the scene was spectacular!

The roundup itself also experienced some changes. All of the previous year data has been combined onto a single database with a standard format, making the data much more useful. Efforts to increase participation and secure data from a broad spectrum of Texas continue. The introduction of Hummingbird Workshops, allowing us to reach new areas of the state and teach people about the diversity of Texas hummingbirds have brought new participants. Some are looking at the hummingbirds with new appreciation now that they realize we have more than one kind. Others

have started planting gardens and choosing plants with the definite purpose of providing nectar for birds.

These changes will continue through 2002. Recognizing that the need for data is important to a successful roundup program, we have made it easier for people to participate. The roundup page on our Web site can be accessed by [www.tpwd.state.tx.us/hummingbirds](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/hummingbirds) making it easier to share information. The survey forms are available off the Web site. Those paying for their kit will receive next year's newsletter as part of the package – those who download it off the Web will be asked to donate toward printing if they want the newsletter. This should bring in the participants that were limited by the requested donation or simply have too much of the salvia to plant more seeds.

In this issue, we continue the identification tips with a look at an unusual winter bird that was found near San Antonio this year. Taking the suggestion of some of the participants, we will include photos in the identification section this year, allowing you to not only read a description but also to see the features we are using to make our identification. The map reporting the number of participants and the number of species reported from each county continues to be something we struggle with. Numbers on the map are based on returned surveys – if we do not get a survey from your county we will not show a number there. Sometimes surveys are late arriving – we can base the number only on the number of surveys on hand when we create the map.



Occasionally we will get a call at the office asking us to identify a bird, something we are always happy to do, but something we always point out as guess work unless we can see a photo. Often, when asked for a photo, the caller is pleased to provide. Such was the case with a hummingbird identification call received in January from a birding enthusiast in New Braunfels (Comal County). In this case, the birder was hearing several conflicting reports about the identity of the hummingbird, so photos were going to be quite helpful in identifying the bird.

The photos arrived with a suggestion that the bird might be a Costa's Hummingbird. Having seen the Costa's at Fort Davis earlier in the year, I was quite excited. Some of the features I would look for in a Costa's, forgetting about the gorget color, would be a smaller bird with slightly curved short bill, short tail and a completely pale band isolating the gray behind the eyes from the green on the back of the head. Instead, the photos that had any truly diagnostic characters showed a bird with no size reference that shows a relatively long bill, no significant white separating the gray behind the eye, and a

longer tail. One photo even shows the tail extending beyond the tip of the wings significantly, while the Costa's Hummingbird has a tail that will end shorter than the wingtips. I would note that, even in the case of a young male where the color is beginning to develop in the gorget, there will be a significant white patch behind the eye that we are not seeing in these photos. As more photos were received, we noticed club shaped wings that ended well before the tail when the bird was at rest, a long tail when the bird was in flight and a proportionately long black bill.

Photos received from Jeff Davis County showing a Magnificent Hummingbird displayed very little color, yet they were enough for us to confirm with the participant that they did have a Magnificent. On the photos we see a very large bird with a remarkably long bill, wings that end at the tip of the tail and a single solid color the full length of the bird – all features we would definitely expect in a Magnificent. In the case of these photos, a beautiful glowing green gorget only helps to confirm the species identification.

This points out some of the difficulties in identifying birds, but it also points out some of the features we need to have to help in identification of birds. Since the Costa's is a review species, when the possibility of a Costa's was raised the observer was careful to take photos that provided us with clues that were able to allow the conclusion that the bird was not a Costa's. While the Magnificent is not a review species, the occurrence of a Magnificent at feeders they had not previously been seen at, caused the observer to snap a photo. When the Lucifer showed up in Fredericksburg last year, several photos were taken. Should you see a bird you think is one of our eight review species, or a bird you think is out of place, please take photos. Even a poor photo, may provide the identification we need.

tion decisions. Bill shape and length, tail shape and wing/tail perspectives are not always easy to determine on a moving, active target. A non-hummingbird example of this was provided by a Central Texas wildlife photographer this year when, in reviewing and discarding slides he was not happy with, he came across a bird not previously known in the state. The photograph had been taken many months previous to this event. In taking photographs of your birds, aim for shots that provide perspective (something in the photo you can compare size and color to), diverse angles and good views of head, tail and wing tips. These will help most in your identification efforts later.

Good (humming) birding and let's hope we see more photos of these unusual birds!

Photos are also a great way for you to study the bird and make reasonable identifica-

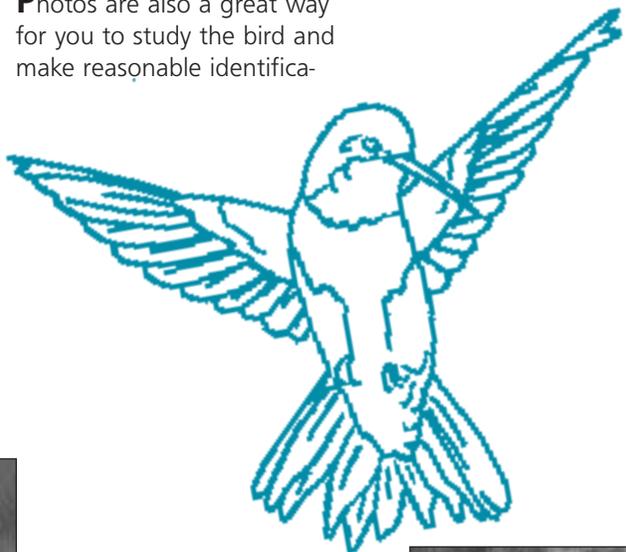
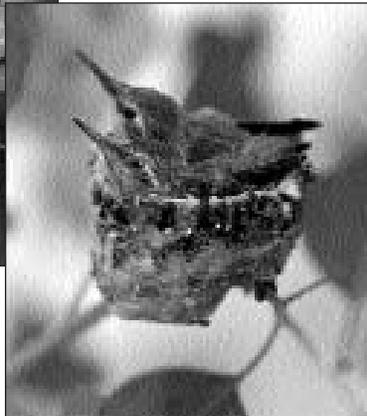


Photo of Magnificent Hummingbird courtesy of Mary Dutchover.



Photos of mystery hummingbird courtesy of Susan Schaezler.





## HUMMINGBIRD FESTIVALS INCREASE

Last year at this time, we were encouraging you to participate in two festivals – the Rockport / Fulton Hummer-Bird Celebration and the Davis Mountains Hummingbird Roundup. This year a new celebration – the Gulf Coast Bird Observatory will continue their Xtreme Hummingbird Xtravaganza – joining our list of annual Hummingbird related celebrations across the state. There may be yet a fourth festival on the horizons – Texas City experimented with a hummingbird butterfly event this spring. If it becomes an annual event, we will let you know.

Once you've recovered from the excitement of a multi-species weekend, (the Berylline and the White-eared Hummingbirds were two other possibilities at the Davis Mountains), why not join the folks at the Gulf Coast Bird Observatory as they celebrate hummingbirds on September 7? This festival promises hundreds of Ruby-throated Hummingbirds preparing to cross the Gulf of Mexico and some great related activities. For more information, contact the observatory at 979-480-0999.

The Rockport / Fulton Hummer – Bird Celebration has got to be the grand daddy of all hummingbird festivals in Texas. This festival has routinely produced very large concentrations of Ruby-throated Hummingbirds (thousands of birds) with the occasional Buff-bellied Hummingbird or Rufous Hummingbird. Celebrating their 14th annual event this year, this festival boasts a wide assortment of programs, speakers, banding sites and more. To find out more about this festival contact 800-826-6441.

These festivals present the hummingbird enthusiast with lots of opportunities to view birds, learn more about their habits and rub shoulders with authors and researchers working with these amazing birds. Why not join us at one this year?

Fall seems to be the time of year for hummingbird events – everyone wants to enjoy the spectacles of thousands of “flying jewels” making their leisurely journey south. In the mountains, the events start early. August 15-17 is the date for this year's Davis Mountains Hummingbird Roundup centered at the Prude Ranch. Last year, participants at this festival enjoyed 9 species of hummingbird (the Costa's being a highlight) as well as great presentations and an overall great time! Because of the way this festival is organized, they do request early registration. Contact the Prude Ranch at 800-458-6232 for more information.

## ARE THEY NESTING?

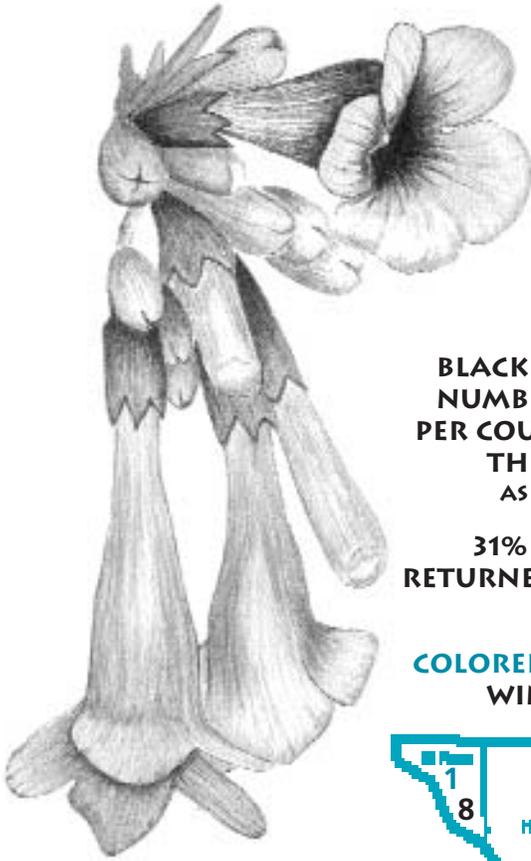
One area of hummingbird watching that seems to draw a lot of attention is the concept of these tiny birds building an intricate nest, laying eggs and raising young. This becomes particularly interesting when we are talking about a species of hummingbird that may not have been known to nest in that region previously. Two interesting reports came to the attention of the Roundup coordinator this year, reports that may cause us to rethink our definition of nesting ranges for two species.

The first interesting report was at the hummingbird festival in Fort Davis in August. Kelly Bryan displayed slides showing very young White-eared Hummingbirds taken in the Davis Mountains. Considering that the normal nesting range for this bird is

hundreds of miles south of Fort Davis in Mexico, it is highly unlikely the birds hatched in the traditional range and flew to the Davis Mountains. To confirm nesting of the White-eared Hummingbird in Texas would require observation of a bird on a nest, but this sighting would certainly make the possibility intriguing.

On a similar note, Brent Ortego in Victoria County has banded very young Buff-bellied Hummingbirds on several occasions. Have these birds been nesting in Victoria County, considerably north of Nueces County on the Central Coast?

These questions will only be answered through observation. Look for nests in appropriate habitat around your home.

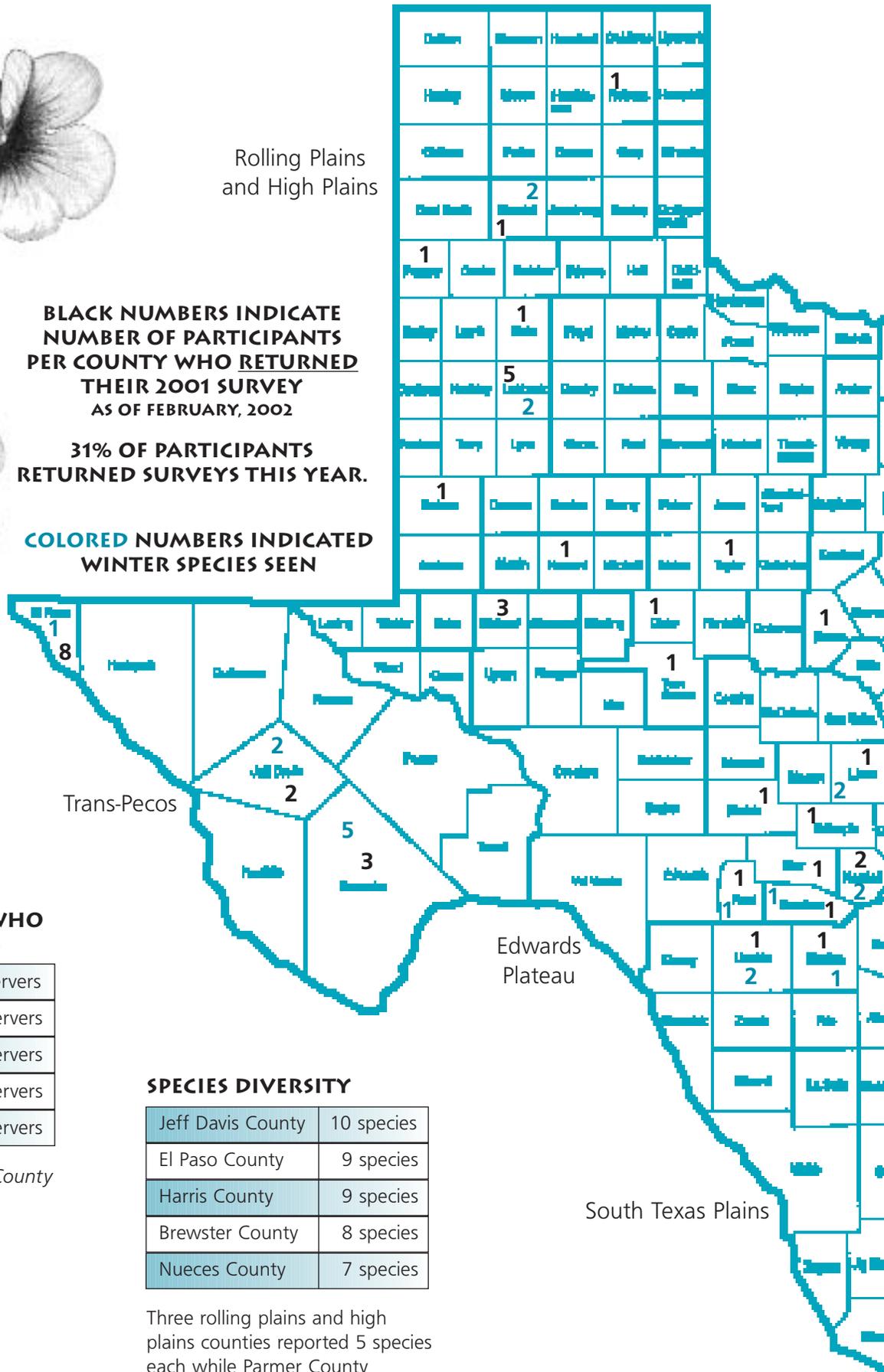


Rolling Plains  
and High Plains

**BLACK NUMBERS INDICATE  
NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS  
PER COUNTY WHO RETURNED  
THEIR 2001 SURVEY  
AS OF FEBRUARY, 2002**

**31% OF PARTICIPANTS  
RETURNED SURVEYS THIS YEAR.**

**COLORED NUMBERS INDICATED  
WINTER SPECIES SEEN**



**WINTER OBSERVERS WHO  
SAW HUMMINGBIRDS**

|                 |              |
|-----------------|--------------|
| Harris County   | 12 observers |
| El Paso County  | 4 observers  |
| Hidalgo County  | 4 observers  |
| Lubbock County  | 4 observers  |
| Brazoria County | 4 observers  |

*Interesting to see Lubbock County  
in this group.*

**SPECIES DIVERSITY**

|                   |            |
|-------------------|------------|
| Jeff Davis County | 10 species |
| El Paso County    | 9 species  |
| Harris County     | 9 species  |
| Brewster County   | 8 species  |
| Nueces County     | 7 species  |

Three rolling plains and high  
plains counties reported 5 species  
each while Parmer County  
reported 6 species.

**THE HUMMINGBIRD ROUNDUP PAGE  
IS NOW MUCH EASIER TO ACCESS —  
SIMPLY LOG ON TO**

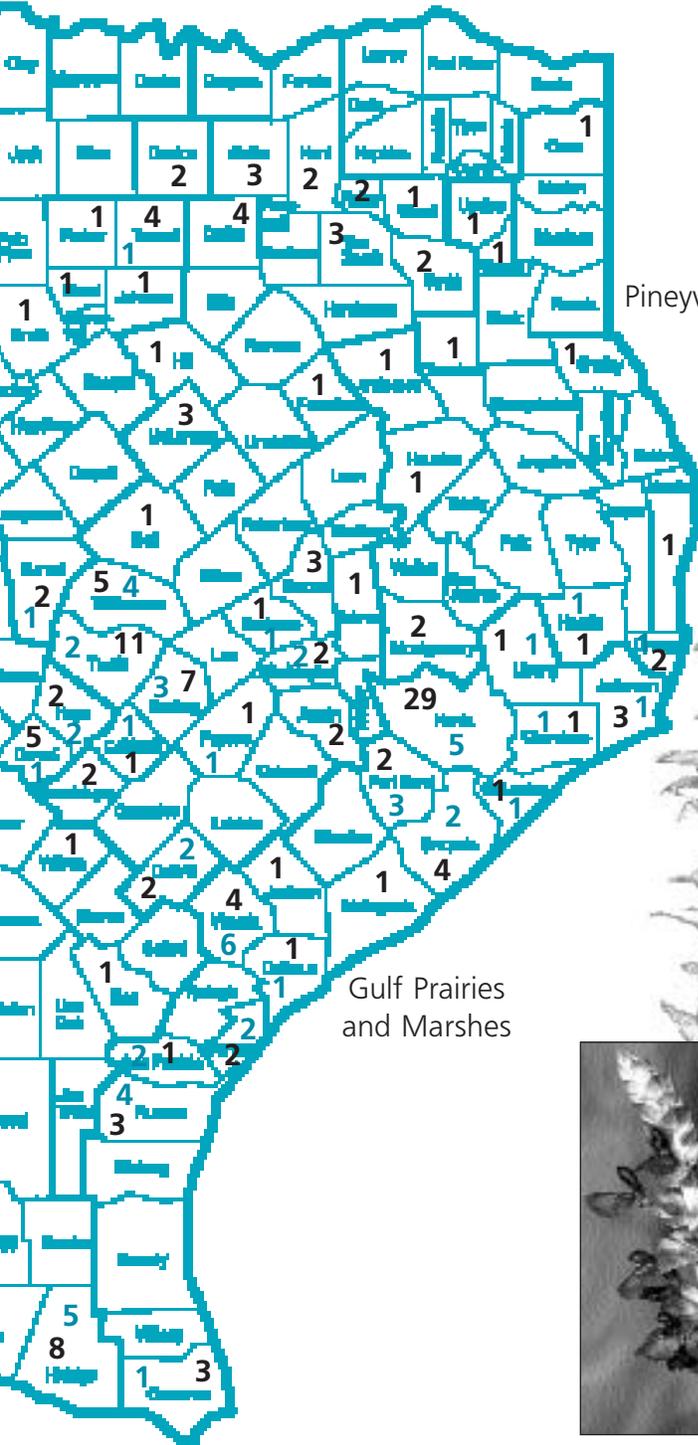
[www.tpwd.state.tx.us/hummingbirds](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/hummingbirds)



Illustrations by Rob Fleming

Cross Timbers  
and Prairies

Post Oak Savannah  
and Blackland Prairies

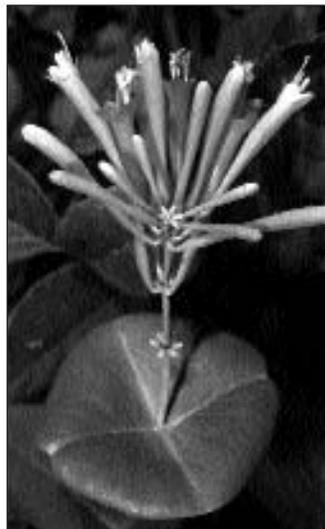


Pineywoods

Gulf Prairies  
and Marshes

**FAVORITE PLANTS USED**

|                   |     |   |     |
|-------------------|-----|---|-----|
| Natives:          |     | Non-Natives:                            |     |
| Salvia            | 31% | Tropical Hibiscus                       | 16% |
| Hummingbird Bush  | 11% | Shrimp Plant                            | 13% |
| Lantana           | 11% | Honeysuckle species<br>(excluding cape) | 11% |
| Turk's cap        | 9%  | Canna Lilies                            | 10% |
| Trumpet vine      | 8%  | Cape Honeysuckle                        | 8%  |
| Coral Honeysuckle | 6%  | Zinnia                                  | 8%  |





## TREASURES OF THE TRANS-PECOS

It certainly can get cold in the West Texas mountains. Observers Frank and Carol Avent in Jeff Davis County report having to thaw the water for the birds in November and December, but they still had their Anna's Hummingbird, as well as a Rufous throughout that period!

Observer Patsy Culver in Brewster County reports seeing hummingbirds drink from her birdbath while hovering. While this is a great observation, it is easy to modify your birdbath for hummingbirds by placing a rock in the bath to create a shallow area.

### TREASURES OF THE TRANS-PECOS REMAIN HIDDEN

As can be seen from the comments above and from the numbers on the participants map, considerable effort is needed to increase participation in both West Texas and along the Rio Grande River where new species of hummingbirds for the state, and the greatest hummingbird diversity is most likely to be observed. While I can hold more seminars and promote the roundup from my end, the best way to promote this project that we enjoy so much is by word of mouth from happy participants.

The most important aspect of the roundup is the data. To that end, we have made participation in the roundup as easy as possible, we no longer even require the donation. Those wanting to participate free can do so by downloading the data sheets from [www.tpwd.state.tx.us/hummingbirds](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/hummingbirds). These people will not automatically receive the newsletter each year. To receive the newsletter they will be asked to send \$3 donation with their completed data sheet in the new year. Those wanting the complete information kit can still purchase it for \$6.

There has been a request for Hummingbird Roundup gift packets. While we would like to develop such kits, we would like more information on what you would like in a kit you would

give to a business associate or friend. Send suggestions to [mark.klym@tpwd.state.tx.us](mailto:mark.klym@tpwd.state.tx.us).

Any suggested locations for workshops or programs would also be appreciated. While we can not guarantee we will always hold one there, recommendations from local residents carry more weight than an event planned from Austin.

### WHY THE TRANS-PECOS?

Why is West Texas such a richly diverse area? Why does this area, seemingly in the middle of nowhere consistently attract a great variety of hummingbirds? These are questions I field quite often from curious hummingbird enthusiasts, especially in the eastern part of the state.

Texas as a state is blessed with beautiful scenery that includes very diverse ecoregions. Within these ecoregions are some very specific and diverse habitats that meet the needs of a great variety of wildlife. In the Trans-Pecos region this diversity is multiplied many times over, producing canyon and mountain habitats, basins, desert and even some "alpine" habitats that allow different species to make use of the resources.

The diverse geography of the region allows a diverse biology including different plant species and different wildlife using these plant species. The location of the region, on the flyway that most of the hummingbirds of western North America would use during their migration also contributes to this hummingbird diversity. Rufous Hummingbirds from Alaska, or an Anna's from California coming south finds suitable habitat and sets down for a day or two of refreshment before moving on.

Other somewhat diverse regions do occur in our state. Certainly the Lower Rio Grande Valley recorded a good share of hummingbird species this year – probably due to their close proximity to the most diverse state in Mexico – Tamaulipas. Habitat certainly had a factor in this diversity though, as all the rarer species were seen in well developed hummingbird gardens.



## WHERE SHOULD I PUT MY FEEDER?



This is probably the most frequently asked question at hummingbird workshops, and it reflects one of the major errors in thinking by new enthusiasts to hummingbird watching. It also reflects on some of the problems people are experiencing when they say “where are all the birds.”

Feeders should be a supplement to a well developed hummingbird garden, and should never replace the natural sources available in your yard. Nectar producing plants like salvias, coral honeysuckle, turk’s cap, lantana or trumpet vine will produce color and natural food resources for the birds to feed on. They will also serve as a source of insects the birds will need for protein. The observers that showed the largest numbers of hummingbirds, and the greatest diversity of hummingbirds consistently reported a native plant density of at least 60% on their surveys. Invariably, observers reporting low numbers of birds, while having hummingbird feeders, had few if any

plants in the yard. This in itself would tend to show the importance of natural food sources.

While food is essential, water is also important in hummingbird habitats. Most bird baths are not built for hummingbirds, but you can make it effective by placing a large rock in the middle of the birdbath. Making the water move by creating a dripper or mister above the birdbath, but please remember that water conservation is also important in Texas.

The third vital element to hummingbird habitat is shelter. Evergreen trees are important during the winter months while any tree will serve as a nesting area if it provides camouflage for the birds. Open sky is important for the birds to escape predation.

Combining these elements will greatly increase your chance of seeing hummingbirds this year.

## HUMMINGBIRD WORKSHOPS — GETTING THE MESSAGE OUT

The first hummingbird workshops, held last year, were surprisingly well received when accompanied by even limited publicity. The workshops in El Paso were overwhelming with more than 100 people in attendance the first day and nearly as many the second day! The local newspaper was very supportive, providing full page articles about hummingbirds that featured the workshops, and the University of Texas at El Paso provided wonderful facilities.

Since last year, additional workshops have been done in Tyler and at Brazos Bend State Park. Both were well attended and interest in hummingbirds is certainly there.

This year, workshops are planned in May at Wichita Falls and at Palo Duro Canyon State Park, for the summer in El Paso and for the fall at Goliad State Park. Watch local media for news releases or contact the Hummingbird Roundup for details about these events.

## 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.

## COMMENTS FORM THE ROUNDUP

*From the Editor: Your comments on the survey often serve to educate others to some of the challenges and concerns of hummingbird watchers. Here is a collection of comments from the roundup this year:*

The Christoval area of Texas is certainly a hot spot for Black-chinned Hummingbirds. Those familiar with this part of Tom Green County will know of Dan Brown's Hummingbird Haven where he is reported to feed 500 pounds of sugar annually. Well, observer Vickie Buttery would be right up there with him as she notes that in 2001 she fed 184 pounds of sugar to the hummingbirds! Way to go Vickie!

Along the same lines, long time observer Mildred Hausinger in Burleson County reports:

"I have never seen so many Ruby-throated Hummingbirds from the middle of August to the middle of September. I had 6 feeders out and they needed refilled every day."

Observing in Anderson County, Barry and Brenda Mace note:

"on Sept.15, 2001 lost 1 female hummingbird in a large spider web."

*Spider webs are used by hummingbirds in developing their nests, but as this note demonstrates, they can be equally hazardous if not closely watched. We generally advise discouraging spiders from nesting near your feeders.*

In Bell County, Marilyn Brewer reports a different observation:

"the last 2 years we've had 3 to 4 hummers... we have had a good bit of home building since '94, and there are many more feeders so I suppose some of the hummers at my house have gone to theirs."

*I suspect there are more forces working here but see the article about hummingbird feeding for more details.*

In Bexar County, Becky Thompson writes:

"Early in 2001, I replanted many of my

gardens just for hummingbirds. It was a great success. I had more hummers this year than ever."

*I am confident the gardens had a lot to do with it.*

In Brazos County, Pearl Orts was very observant in commenting:

"The number of hummingbirds appearing was much less than in years past. Perhaps they had more food sources since we did have an abundance of wildflowers."

*Brazos County experienced fairly heavy rainfalls in both the spring and the fall. Anytime we have lots of wildflowers, lower number of hummingbirds should be expected since the birds do have food resources elsewhere.*

A very observant Howard Williams in Dallas notes:

"the year 2001 marked the first time I observed three different species in my yard... RUHU's were immatures that showed up in late summer. Of the three separate individuals I observed, none that

used the feeders – they fed from my hummingbird garden only."

In Denton County, Kathryn Dodd makes this note about shelter:

"Hummingbirds really do like dead branches to perch. I had a dead mimosa tree close to their feeder and I left it for them to use. I suppose the hummers can keep a close watch on other birds on bare branches."

*Not only the hummingbirds, but lots of other wildlife will love you for leaving this tree Kathryn!*

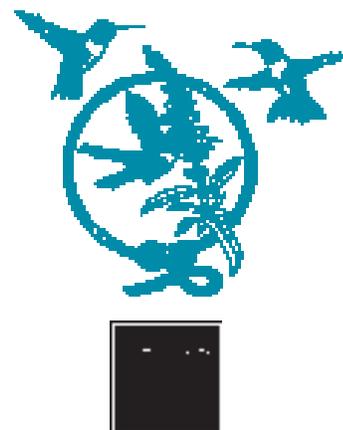
Like many people, Laney Rickman in DeWitt County noted:

"RTHU's migrated earlier in the fall. In 2000 they were here in large numbers through October. In 2001 they were gone in mid-September."

*Any ideas?*

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 2002 survey forms by **January 17, 2003** to the address above.



4200 SMITH SCHOOL ROAD  
AUSTIN, TEXAS 78744  
1-800-792-1112  
www.tpwd.state.tx.us

PWD BR W7000-242J (5/02)

### NOTICE

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department receives federal financial assistance from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Under 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, and Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, the U.S. Department of the Interior and its bureaus prohibit discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability or sex (in educational programs). If you believe that you have been discriminated against in any Texas Parks and Wildlife Department program, activity, or facility, or if you desire further information, please call or write: The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Office for Diversity and Civil Rights Programs - External Programs, 4040 N. Fairfax Drive, Webb 300, Arlington, VA 22203, (703) 358-1724.