



THE TEXAS

HUMMER

SPRING 2012

A NEWSLETTER FOR TEXAS HUMMINGBIRD ROUNDUP PARTICIPANTS

HUMMINGBIRD ROUNDUP 2011

Despite fires in some of the "hummingbird hotspots" around the state, hummingbird watchers in Texas enjoyed some great diversity in 2011. Two species, Berylline Hummingbird and Green-breasted Mango were not recorded in the state during the year, but some very rare birds, like Violet-crowned Hummingbird were. These rare birds create a lot of excitement, but a common bird like the Lucifer Hummingbird can also generate interest, especially when it is outside its usual range.

Participation was down again, probably because the extended drought made seeing hummingbirds a little difficult. We enjoyed participation from 256 individuals across 76 counties in 2011. Through the winter, 130 observers or 51% of the participants continued to observe in 61 counties (80% of the counties contributing to this year's survey!)

Diversity across the state remained high. This year, our most diverse county was Brewster with 11 species,

followed closely by Presidio with 10 species. Jeff Davis County, a perennial leader, dropped off slightly this year with Blue-throated Hummingbird and Ruby-throated Hummingbird (both summer species so the fire may have impacted them) not showing. Total diversity in Jeff Davis County was 9 species. Harris County reported 9 species this year as well. In south Texas, Nueces County recorded 8 species while Hidalgo County reported 7 species. North Texas was not lacking for diversity either, with Lubbock County reporting 6 species and Pamer County reporting 5 species.

A change this year that has generated a lot of interest is in the options you have to report your sightings. Until this year, every sighting required you to fill out a diary manually, and you had to keep track of the diary all year. You now have the option to submit your observations electronically each week. This has allowed us to update the records faster and should allow us to produce the 2012 newsletter sooner. If you are



interested, please send an email to mark.klym@tpwd.state.tx.us.

An interesting surprise this year was a White-eared Hummingbird being reported in Comal County. This is primarily a mountain bird, but has been recorded in some unusual locations across the United States.

A workshop planned and presented by the Texas Master Naturalist chapter in Amarillo late in the year was well attended and we have had several people from that area indicate interest in participating in the 2012 survey. In addition, the new Volunteer Management System at Texas Parks and Wildlife Department has generated some eager, new recruits.

I hope you have checked the Hummingbird Roundup pages

recently. We have been able to add a few features that will keep you informed of the results we are getting from your data. Right now the data shows 2009-2011, but we hope to expand on that soon. We also hope to produce some species specific information in the near future.

Just a reminder, birds you do not normally see should always be accompanied with a photograph or at least a detailed description. This not only includes birds that are rare to the state, but also some species that, while found every year in the state, are not normally found in your ecoregion. More on this can be found in the Identification Tips article.



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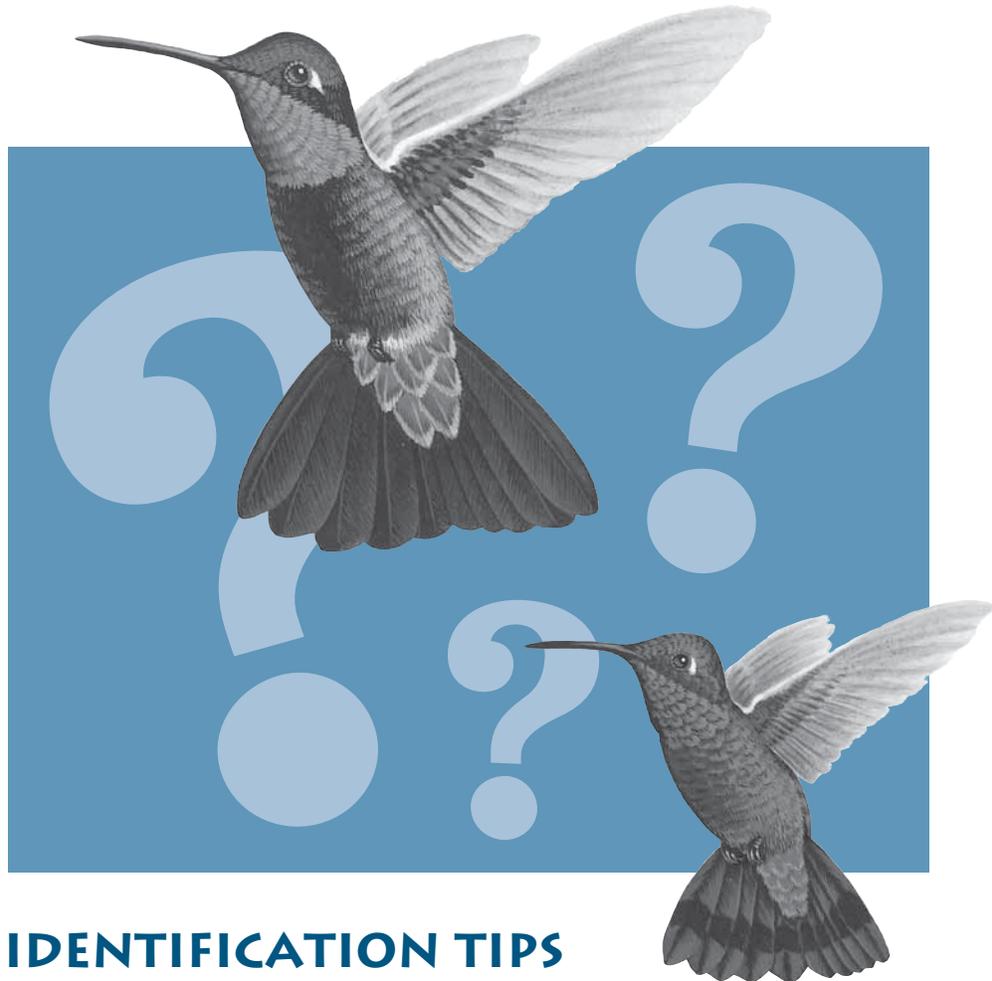


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IDENTIFICATION TIPS

BE CAREFUL WITH THOSE RARITIES

Hummingbirds are mobile creatures, and as such can sometimes show up in unusual places. This can create a lot of excitement as you watch a bird you would not normally get a chance to see in your garden. When you go to report that bird though, there are some basic guidelines you should keep in mind.

This year, we received a record of a Magnificent Hummingbird well east of the Pecos River. We are quite sure the bird was a Green Violet-ear, but since there was no photo or description with the bird, we could not add Green Violet-ear to the record for that county.

Why would we think this bird was more likely a Green Violet-ear? While the Magnificent Hummingbird is the more common bird statewide, being reported every year, they have only been recorded with confidence 3 times in Texas east of the Pecos River and once in Louisiana. Green Violet-ear on the other hand is becoming quite common in the Hill Country and are recorded almost yearly in several counties in Central Texas.

So, when should you include a photo? While it does not hurt to include one at any time, if you are reporting a bird you would not normally expect in your county at that time, I would suggest including a photo to make it a little easier for the biologists to confirm the bird. Even a poor photo can often show or omit a key identification point.

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



PLANTS ARE MORE THAN A SOURCE OF FOOD

This was sent to us in 2009 by an observer in Edwards County. We are just getting a chance to include it in the newsletter.

I am seeing at least one hummingbird with a large swath of bright orange/red under its throat. It doesn't look like the ruby red of the hummingbird coming to the friend's feeder four miles down the river at Camp Wood, TX.

I have seen it and the Black Chinned hummingbirds gathering little white stuff (perhaps the seed) from a weed in my yard. I had the plant identified by the United States Agriculture Department Consolidated Farm Service Agency at Rocksprings, Texas. The agent said the plant is called Sow Thistle or by the name, Prickley Thistle. The hummingbirds have been diligently gathering and flying away with it. Perhaps to line their nests? I saw another small bird, perhaps a finch type, gathering it also. It would sit there and spit some out; then get some more. Then flew off with what it gathered.

These observations reinforce the need to have plants other than "common hummingbird plants" in your garden. The shelter provided by these species, whether a soft place to lay an egg or a screen to prevent observation by a predator, are critical elements that are not necessarily provided by red, trumpet shaped flowers.

In designing your hummingbird garden, think lasagna. Just as you would lay down layer upon layer in creating a lasagna, do so with your plants – tall trees are above short trees

which are above shrubs and tall grasses above wildflowers above ground cover. While all of these layers do not need to be all over the garden, they should be somewhere in your garden.

The food plants are also very important, and can be incorporated into the shelter in ways that allow the hummingbird to feed without being easily seen. Please ensure the plant is appropriate for the area and that you can provide the basic needs of the plant.

A CAUTION ON PLANT SELECTION

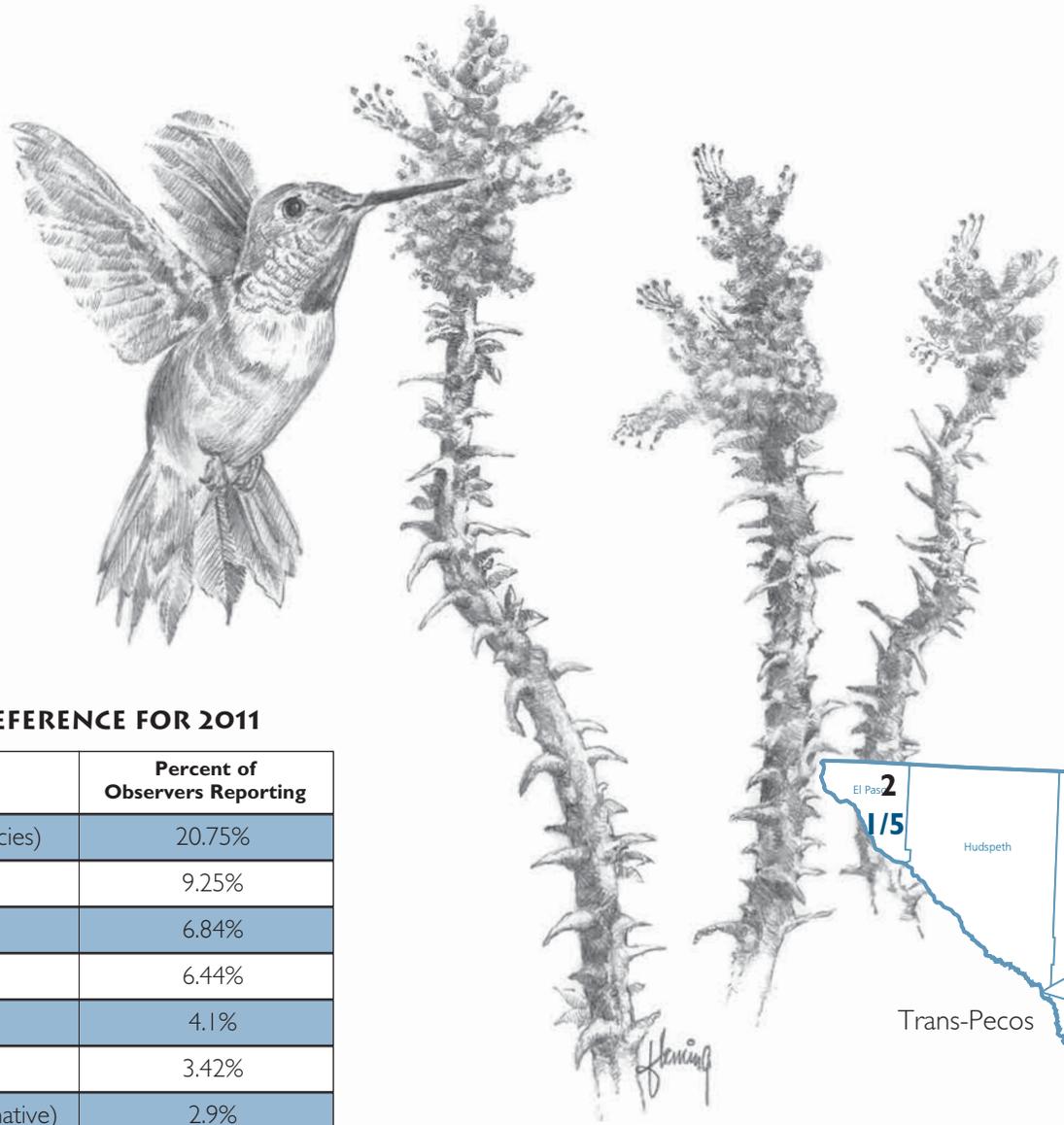
An observer from Gillespie County sent this to us. I had never heard of it, and our entomologist was unaware of it, but given the source and the fact that several bee species are in trouble I thought we should pass it along. From the Flora of North Central Texas account on Carolina Jessamine.

"Numerous alkaloids including sempervine, gelsemine and gelsemoline are found throughout the plant; a tea made from as few as three leaves has been reported to cause death; children have been poisoned by chewing on leaves or sucking nectar; honeybees can also be poisoned."

We did check some online research regarding honey bees and there does not seem to be a consensus on the toxicity of this plant, but the information is provided so that those considering use of this plant can include it in their decision.

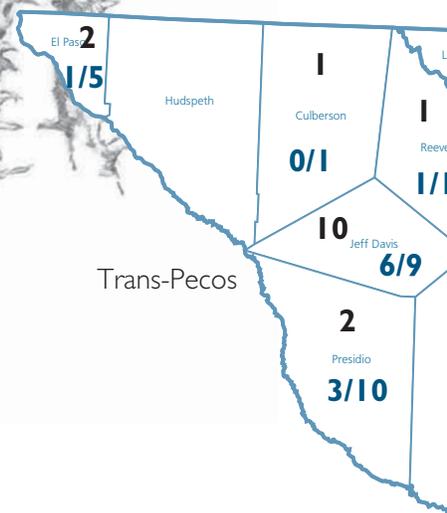


Joseph A. Marcus, Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center



PLANT PREFERENCE FOR 2011

Plant Species	Percent of Observers Reporting
Salvia (assorted species)	20.75%
Turk's Cap	9.25%
Lantana	6.84%
Coral Honeysuckle	6.44%
Trumpet Vine	4.1%
Flame Acanthus	3.42%
Shrimp Plant (non-native)	2.9%



TOP 20 MOST HUMMINGBIRD-DIVERSE COUNTIES IN 2011

Brewster	11	Lubbock	6
Presidio	10	Aransas	5
Harris	9	Cameron	5
Jeff Davis	9	Comal	5
Nueces	8	El Paso	5
Hidalgo	7	Fort Bend	5
Bandera	6	Kendall	5
Bastrop	6	Kerr	5
Brazoria	6	Parmer	5
DeWitt	6	Uvalde	5

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

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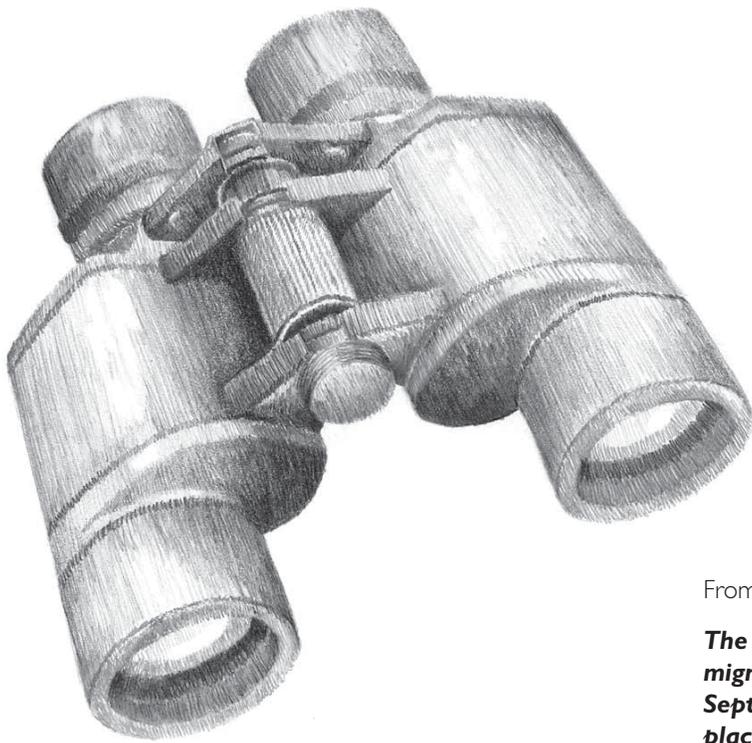
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OBSERVERS' COMMENTS

This page is set aside for comments from those of you participating in the Roundup and for responses from Roundup staff. The big topic in the comments and questions section at the end of the survey this year was the drought.

A participant in Gillespie County comments:

Birding for 2011 has been good all year. Most of the birds observed have been around the water and birdfeeders. ... No rain and very little natural food.

These are exactly the conditions we would expect in a year when rainfall was virtually non-existent in most of the state. Hummingbirds were no different. When I got calls asking where the hummingbirds were, I added the question of "do you have water" to my usual "what plants do you have" response. Invariably, those that had water also had birds.

From Jack County:

They worked me to death April, May and June cleaning and filling feeders. There were so many I had to refill even big ones every 1 to 2 days.

From Fort Bend County

After a slow start the birds showed up first in July, then in force in mid August. By mid-September I would have 30 to 40 birds at my six feeders and plants, too many to identify.

From Waller County:

Almost double to almost triple the number of birds in April 2011 compared to 2010. Drought may have brought them to the feeders.

While an observer in Wilson County had just the opposite effect:

Drought reduced drastically the observed number of hummingbirds.

But they added a favorable observation:

Ants were no problem this year.

From Wise County:

The "big wave" of the fall migration, which occurs here Sept. 9 to 11, did not take place for the first year since I've been here.

Predicting behavior of any animal based on what we observe in a "normal" year is difficult. We usually give a general time (on the coast the big numbers are seen around the third week in September) but this can vary, sometimes by several weeks. Last year, some people got big numbers early, while others were surprised by a late movement.

And from DeWitt County

The drought was difficult for hummers this year, yet it was fun to observe hummers feeding in the spray from the lawn sprinklers.

The drought of 2011 will long be remembered, but for hummingbird and wildlife enthusiasts the message was quite clear – if you want wildlife in your backyard, a feeder is simply not enough. Habitat includes water, and we need to provide a source of water to help maintain our hummingbird numbers.

Other notes about the weather included notes on temperature.

From Fort Bend County:

In August, when the temperature reached 100°F nearly every day and we had only one light rain, we saw a RTHU in the mister and another in the birdbath.

Again, the importance of water.

From another Fort Bend County observer:

The Calliope Hummingbird visited my feeders on January 21 and 22, 2011, when dawn temperatures were 31°F and 29°F, respectively. This is the first sighting of a Calliope at my home in Richmond, Fort Bend County, in 19 years.

Freezing temperatures may cause problems for the feeders, but the birds generally seem unaffected unless the freeze is extended. Interestingly, I read a note from a bander in PA indicating they had two Rufous Hummingbirds stay through the winter this year – and the freeze is extended there!

Another overwinter bird reported from Fort Bend County included two Rufous Hummingbird juvenile males that stayed through the New Year after first appearing in November.

We did have a couple of identification notes.

From Lubbock County we got a note asking about two juveniles from the genus *Selasphorus*. They describe near mature males that are still retaining the green back. These young are always a challenge to differentiate to species, but new "tricks" are being learned every day. I would suggest though that, until you feel comfortable you use the R/A species code for these birds. While it would impact any research that was looking specifically at Rufous only or Allen's only, most of the research done to date on this group has looked at the genus in general.

Another option was mentioned by an observer from Fort Bend County. This observer used photography and a well known, respected hummingbird researcher to gain his identification. Texas has a number of great bird researchers most of whom are more than willing to offer identification opinions on a photographed bird. Descriptions often leave out key features though.

Yet another suggestion from Presidio County says:

For question 26 (Identification Guides) I suggest you also ask about Internet use in future years, as this is a valuable resource.

This is simply an oversight on our part. We will be adding a section for Internet and wireless apps next year.

And speaking of the Internet, from Fort Bend County:

Why does your website show survey results for only 2006?

And it did until recently. Changing personnel over the last few years have kept us from being able to decide on an effective way to post results. This year we added maps showing distributions in 2009 through 2011. More results will be going up as they become available. Thank you for your patience in this matter.

Three comments about the "number of hours observing" from Victoria, Washington and Midland counties indicated this was difficult to estimate. We do need the numbers, as we mentioned in a previous article, and if you can come to a reasonable estimate for a week and use that as an average, this is acceptable.

It is better though if you set aside some time to deliberately look for hummingbirds, then simply insert any unusual birds you see at other times.

Rufous Hummingbirds are often reported as aggressive as in this note from Bastrop County:

R/A often chased other birds from the feeders – Chipping Sparrows, American Goldfinch, etc.

A note from Jeff Davis County commented on the aggressive behavior of another species:

We had a strange Lucifer this year. VERY vocal and aggressive. We thought it was a Costa's at first as the gorget was wider and more purple than magenta, but we never saw any purple on top of the head.



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COUNTING VOLUNTEER HOURS

Funding for a number of Texas Parks and Wildlife programs is possible only with federal grants. These grants sometimes require a match of funds or in kind services from the state, and volunteer hours used on some projects can be used to meet this match – but only once.

This is why Texas Nature Trackers (including Texas Hummingbird Roundup), Texas Master Naturalists and other programs ask that you keep track of the hours you spend on the programs. We do have to ask however that you report these hours only once. The forms for 2012 and forward will have a question “Will your hours be reported to Master Naturalists?” Please answer that question yes, or simply leave your hours blank if you are reporting them anyplace other than Texas Hummingbird Roundup.



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 2012 survey forms by **Jan. 18, 2013**, to the address above.



FESTIVALS AND WORKSHOPS

Workshop June 2, Paris, TX will focus on hummingbird identification and habitat needs. Contact 903-732-9904 for information. This is put on with the support of the Red River Chapter of Texas Master Naturalists.

Training evenings of August 7 and 14 in Austin will focus on hummingbird identification. This training is provided by the Travis Audubon Society and you should contact them for information on registering.

Workshop September 8 in Livingston supported by the Master Naturalist Chapter.

Rockport-Fulton Hummer-Bird Celebration September 13 to 16.

This is always a fun filled and educational weekend. Contact the Chamber of Commerce in the Rockport area for details.

Festival September 25 at Kleb Woods in Houston.

Xtreme Hummingbird Xtravaganza September 8 & 15 at Gulf Coast Bird Observatory in Lake Jackson.

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.

