

THE TEXAS



# HUMMER

SPRING 2008

A NEWSLETTER FOR TEXAS HUMMINGBIRD ROUNDUP PARTICIPANTS

*Ruby-throated Hummingbird*

## HUMMINGBIRD ROUNDUP 2007

All 18 species were reported at least once during the remarkable 2007 hummingbird survey. While observer numbers were down slightly, we had relatively good coverage of the state. While the possible Amethyst-throated Hummingbird was not able to be confirmed, the excitement it created resulted in more people watching for that “different” bird at their feeders.

Diversity continues to be high all across the state. While the rare species were reported in several counties across the state, we note that many of the rarities did not include a note that they had been reported to the Texas Birds Records Committee. This report is a vital factor in tracking and learning about rare birds in the state. A rare bird report form is included with each Hummingbird Roundup Survey. These should be completed and mailed with photos when a rare bird is seen.

Broad-billed Hummingbirds were seen in Brewster, Jeff Davis and Kleberg counties in 2007. Berylline Hummingbird returned to Jeff Davis County during the year while Costa’s Hummingbird was reported in Brewster and Parker counties. Green-breasted Mango was only reported from Hidalgo County in 2007 in Texas, although they strayed as far north as Wisconsin during the same season. Central and South Texas had visits from Green Violet-ear with reports from Bastrop, Cameron, Kendal and Wharton counties. Violet-crowned hummingbirds were reported in Brewster, Jeff Davis and Lubbock counties and White-eared Hummingbird was seen in Jeff Davis and Uvalde counties. Looking at the distribution of these birds, some rare sightings were reported from all regions except East Texas.

Density reports were mixed, with people reporting both more hummingbirds than usual and fewer hummingbirds than normal depending on locations.



While reports out of San Antonio mentioned being “very disappointed this year” a report out of Burnet County stated they had more birds than ever. Density will vary year to year, but overall the population of these birds seems to be stable.

Management of wildlife in Texas will be guided by the new Texas Wildlife Action Plan. Two hummingbird species were included in priority lists within the plan—the Lucifer Hummingbird as a high-priority species and the Buff-bellied Hummingbird as low-priority. Inclusion of these species in the plan indicates that ornithologists and other specialists within the state identified these birds as species of concern or species that we need to know more about.

At the time of writing, 282 observers had reported birds from 80 counties across the state. The drop is not surprising since we had a significant decrease in the number of surveys mailed out—only 151. It appears participants are taking advantage of the online option to download the forms.

Changes continue on the Hummingbird Roundup Web site. You can still download your survey sheets as well as see results from this and previous years. Check it out at [www.tpwd.state.tx.us/hummingbirds](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/hummingbirds)

Grab your binoculars and get set for a great year of hummingbird watching.



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Photo by Mark Klym  
Female Buff-bellied Hummingbird  
in mister.

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## WATER FOR HUMMINGBIRDS

The Partners in Flight international meeting in McAllen this February afforded an opportunity for hummingbird watching. There were certainly Rufous and Ruby-throated about, but my main goal was Buff-bellied Hummingbirds—an opportunity to see and photograph some of these beautiful birds.

Rounding a bend in the beautiful trails at Quinta Mazatlan, the World Birding Center site in McAllen, I stopped at a water mister spraying gently between the undergrowth and was soon rewarded with a beautiful female “buffy” enjoying the refreshing respite.

We often forget about water when we design our hummingbird habitats. Some authors and Web sites even go so far as to argue that hummingbirds do not need water since they get plenty in the syrup we fill their feeders with. This visit certainly reminded me of how great that mistake can be. Water is an essential of life and, like all other life, hummingbirds not only enjoy but require this staple.

In providing water for hummingbirds, we must remember some basics—shallow, moving and safe. Most birdbaths are not only standing water, but are also usually way too deep for these birds. Making them shallow can be as simple as using rocks to give them something to stand on in the birdbath. You want to create spots that are less than ¼-inch deep! This will allow the birds to use the birdbath, but if you want to attract them you have to get the water moving. A dripper (just a device that creates a slow rhythmic drip into the birdbath) works well. Similarly, a mister throwing the water into the air above the birdbath will attract them. “Water wigglers,” devices that sit in the water and vibrate, creating a current in the water, have been used successfully by some. Caution must be exercised with this and other electrical devices to be sure the electrical circuitry remains above the water line.

Finally, remember the safety of these birds. They should have a good visual field to see any predator approaching—on the ground or in the air. Escape features—open sky, trees and shrubs, should be available to them readily. Keep your water feature a welcome refreshment for these birds

Enjoy the hummingbirds!

# IDENTIFICATION TIPS

## SMALL BIRDS WITH PURPLE THROATS

When photos of a Lucifer Hummingbird were recently posted to a bird discussion board on the Web, a comment came back that “I’m glad you posted them. I don’t know if I would be able to tell the difference between him and a Black-chinned Hummingbird if I saw them.”

While they are generally slightly larger than a Black-chinned Hummingbird, you are usually not going to notice the Lucifer Hummingbird based on size alone. The shape, however—a more rounded, plumper appearance with a long tail and no noticeable neck—will often catch the eye. Often striking a hunched pose when perching, this bird’s posture frequently calls attention. They generally hold their long, forked tails closed when perched. Once you are seeing the Lucifer Hummingbird, there are some distinct features that obviously distinguish it from the Black-chinned Hummingbird.

The very long, definitely curved bill of the Lucifer Hummingbird resulted in

some early writers saying it was the North American Hummingbird with a down-curved bill. The Black-chinned Hummingbird does have a downward curve, but the bill is neither as long nor as distinctly curved.

The sides of the breast and belly of both genders of the Lucifer Hummingbird will have a distinct cinnamon-rufous wash while the undersides themselves will be a cream color. This differs markedly from the dull green sides of the Black-chinned. The bronze-green back of the Lucifer is also distinctive. Both genders have a notable pale cinnamon eye line that connects with a white “collar” created by the sides of the neck and breast.

The striking gorget of the male Lucifer is seldom seen glowing with the brilliant

fluorescence that generated the specific name. The large colored area, though, with its uneven edge and long “wings,” makes the male Lucifer hard to miss. If the light is hitting these feathers right, the brilliant purple—often described as magenta or violet—is captivating.

The Black-chinned Hummingbird, on the other hand, has a more subdued gorget. Smaller, and mostly velvety black, its purple area is restricted to only the very base of the throat. The edge of the gorget is smooth, and the color, when seen, is violet to amethyst. The colorful gorget of the Black-chinned Hummingbird seems in this

writer’s experience to be seen much less frequently than that of the Lucifer Hummingbird.

The throat area of a female Lucifer Hummingbird will be pale creamy-white washed with cinnamon, while that of the Black-chinned is unmarked or variously streaked or spotted. She, too, has a pale cinnamon eye line blending with her cinnamon flanks.

Lucifer Hummingbird is generally found in the mountains of West Texas. Scattered occurrences east of the Pecos River have been noted.



Photo by Mark Klym  
*Male Lucifer Hummingbird*



Photo by Mark Klym  
*Male Black-chinned Hummingbird*

**WINTER OBSERVERS AND DIVERSITY**  
**JANUARY, FEBRUARY, NOVEMBER AND DECEMBER 2007**

County	Observers	Species
Anderson	1	1
Austin	2	2
Bandera	1	2
Bell	1	1
Bexar	1	2
Blanco	1	1
Brazoria	4	5
Brazos	1	2
Brewster	3	4
Cameron	1	1
Chambers	1	1
Comal	2	2
Dawon	1	1
De Witt	1	3
Fayette	1	2
Fort Bend	6	8
Galveston	3	4
Harris	8	8
Hays	3	3

County	Observers	Species
Hidalgo	14	5
Jeff Davis	1	2
Kendall	3	3
Kerr	1	1
Kleberg	1	1
Lampasas	1	1
Lubbock	2	2
Montgomery	3	4
Nueces	1	1
Parker	3	1
Presidio	1	2
Rains	1	1
Tarrant	1	1
Travis	5	2
Uvalde	1	1
Victoria	1	3
Washington	2	2
Williamson	1	3
Zapata	1	1

**NUMBERS INDICATE NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS PER COUNTY WHO RETURNED THEIR 2006 SURVEY AS OF FEBRUARY 2008**

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



**COUNTIES REPORTING REVIEW SPECIES IN 2007**

County	Species
Bastrop	GRVE
Brewster	BBLH / COHU / VCHU
Cameron	GRVE
Hidalgo	GRMA
Jeff Davis	BBLH / BEHU / VCHU / WEHU
Kendall	GRVE
Kleberg	BBLH
Lubbock	VCHU
Parker	COHU
Uvalde	WEHU
Wharton	GRVE



See pg. 7 for hummingbird abbreviations reference.

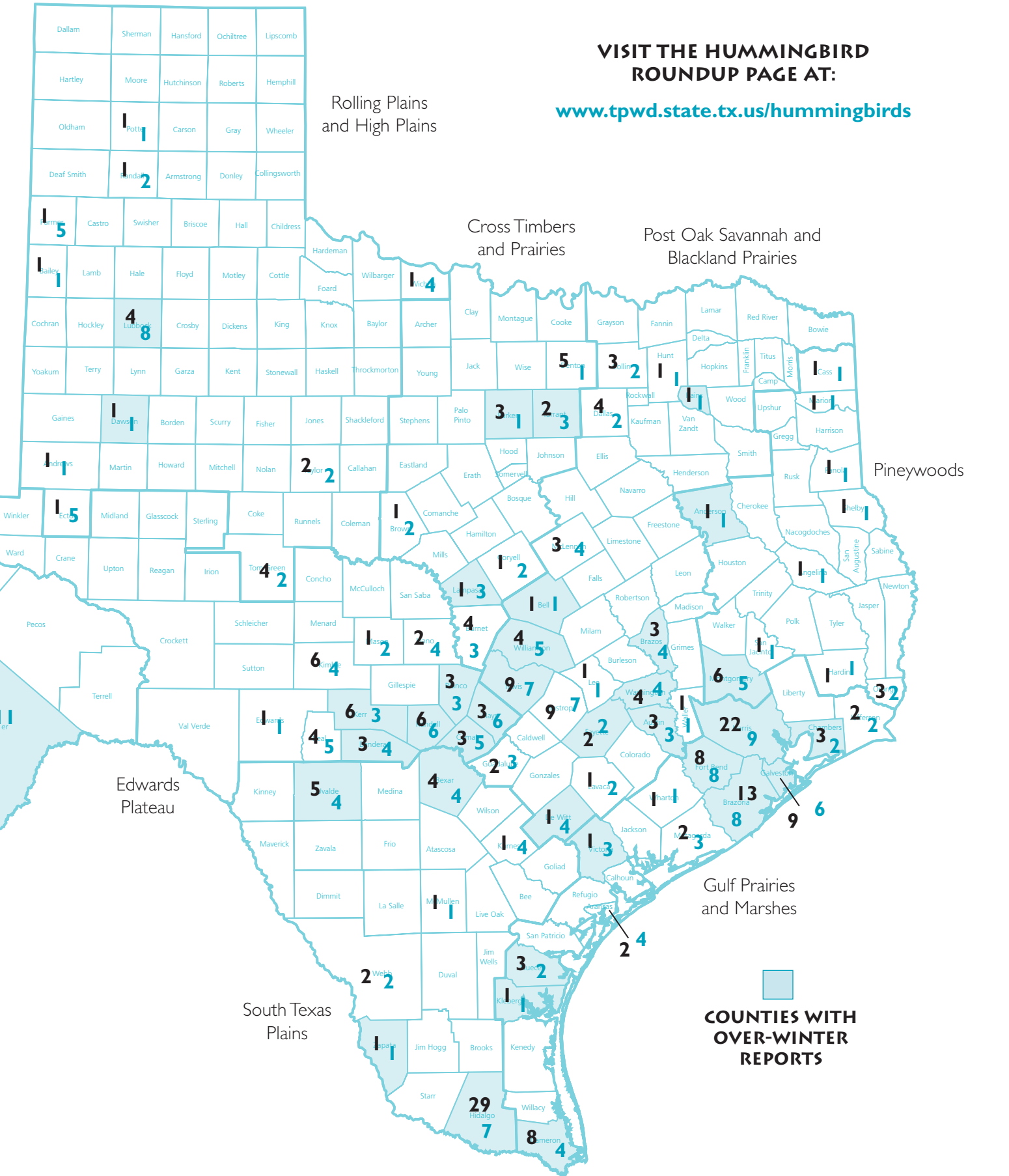
**PLANT PREFERENCE FOR 2007**

Salvias	22.05% of all reports
Turk's Cap	6.42%
Hamelia*	5.76%
Lantana	5.37%
Trumpet Vine	4.06%
Honeysuckle	4.06%
Shrimp Plant*	2.03%
Hibiscus	2.03%
Penstemon	1.70%
Pentas*	1.69%
Crossvine	0.68%
Coral Bean	0.68%

\*non-native

**VISIT THE HUMMINGBIRD  
ROUNDUP PAGE AT:**

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



## OBSERVERS' COMMENTS

This is the page we set aside in each newsletter for comments from those of you who are participating, as well as answers from the Roundup staff.

From Fort Bend County:

**I noticed that hummingbirds are very territorial and protective of feeders. A solitary female RUHU stayed until late Oct. '07 and perched on the same bare branch of a guava tree close to a hamelia shrub and salvia flowers. Other hummingbirds came but were driven away by this female RUHU.**

This is a common note about Rufous hummingbirds. Often, when they are around, no other birds can reach "their" feeder(s). This can sometimes be solved by spreading feeders and needed resources out (I have seen other species of hummingbirds fight over water).

From Bexar County:

**Very disappointing year—very little activity; sometimes the birds may be gone for a week at a time.**

But, from Burnet County:

**This was a really wonderful year full of very colorful hummingbirds and we had more Ruby-throats than ever.**

What can we say? That is the reality of nature—and several other things. "Location, location. ..."

From McLennan County:

**Snowed all day—hummingbirds kept accumulating all day to a peak at 6 p.m.—at which time I added four feeders to six already up. Birds were perching close to the ground in the thick foliage. ... The back of our mobile home does not have skirting and they were also going under the house.**

These birds certainly have the skills to find the resources they need to survive. This also shows that these birds can survive a snow event.

From Lubbock County:

**A telephone wire running from my house to the back alley crosses my fence and flower bed. The HB uses the wire as a "lookout"...**

Hummingbirds are known to prefer a bare perch at times. A dead limb on a tree would serve as a natural perch.

From Parmer County:

**No Broad-tailed males observed or heard this year.**

Well, they must not have been around, because when they are, their wing trill makes them hard to miss!

A unique Christmas gift in Lubbock County:

**On Dec. 24 and 25, the Violet-crowned Hummingbird regularly used my feeder. While I watched the Violet-crowned on Dec. 24, an Anna's was also observed coming regularly to my feeder. The two hummingbirds were the best Christmas gift I could ever want. The Anna's has endured 16-degree nights and days of cold wind, but**

**has remained as of Jan. 3, 2008.**

And this note from Hays County:

**Have had hummingbirds continuously since March 2002 (70 months)**

This is great—in Central Texas, too, not on the coast. I have had verbal reports recently of Buff-bellied hummingbirds in Bastrop County for 36 straight months.



# TREASURES OF THE TRANS-PECOS

Notes from our observers in West Texas

From Brewster County:

**May 1 – found nest with one baby BCHU.**

They are indeed fun to watch, and finding a nest is always exciting. We do caution, though, not to disturb the nest as the young are quite vulnerable while in the nest.

**Nov. 24 – Big snow. Froze the feeder. Male RUHU still there. Female BCHU came once. Defrosted feeder with hair dryer Nov. 25. By 12 p.m. snow melted.**

Hummingbirds surviving the cold seems to be a theme this year.

Also from Brewster County:

**May 17 – female BCHU gathering soft, fuzzy spent acacia blooms.**

From Presidio County:

**Five species observed in 2007 – ANHU, BCHU, RUHU, RTHU, CAHU. This is the smallest number in very many years.**

This is certainly interesting in a year when Texas recorded all 18 species for the first time in many years and when both Jeff Davis and Brewster counties had high diversity.

From Jeff Davis County:

**Our female Rufous stayed with us until Apr. 22, long after the Black-chinned had arrived.**

This is a late occurrence, but not a late record for the state. Rufous has been recorded the last week in May in Central Texas. Early April seems to be the latest record for your region though.

**Hummer numbers dropped mid-June – Century plants bloomed later this year due to freeze. ...**

Plant blooms do have an impact on the number of hummingbirds we find around our feeders.



## IN WEST TEXAS, GEOGRAPHY MAKES A DIFFERENCE

Not everyone in West Texas will have great diversity or density of hummingbirds around their feeders—elevation is a critical factor determining hummingbird concentrations for some species. At lower elevations, Black-chinned hummingbirds will be the predominant species. Not terribly elevation dependant, this bird will concentrate in areas of short trees and shrubs, along riparian forests and in pine/oak, pinyon/juniper woodlands or chaparral. Mountain woodlands, conifer forests and meadows are the home of Broad-tailed hummingbirds. Dry oak woodlands, dry canyons and desert washes between 3,800 and 5,700 feet are the home of Lucifer hummingbirds, while Magnificent hummingbirds are more at home in dry pine/oak forests above 5,000 feet. Moist habitats created by cool shady canyons at mid to high elevations may produce Blue-throated hummingbirds.

So, when you are in West Texas, it is often necessary to move around and maybe even do some hiking to find the bird or birds you are looking for.

### HUMMINGBIRD APPREVIATIONS

ALHU = Allen's	GRMA = Green-breasted Mango
ANHU = Anna's	GRVE = Green Violet-ear
BBLH = Broad-billed	LUHU = Lucifer
BCHU = Black-chinned	MAHU = Magnificent
BEHU = Berylline	R/A = Rufous/Allen's type
BLUH = Blue-throated	RTHU = Ruby-throated
BTLH = Broad-tailed	RUHU = Rufous
BUFH = Buff-bellied	VCHU = Violet-crowned
CAHU = Calliope	WEHU = White-eared
COHU = Costa's	

# TORPOR REPORT

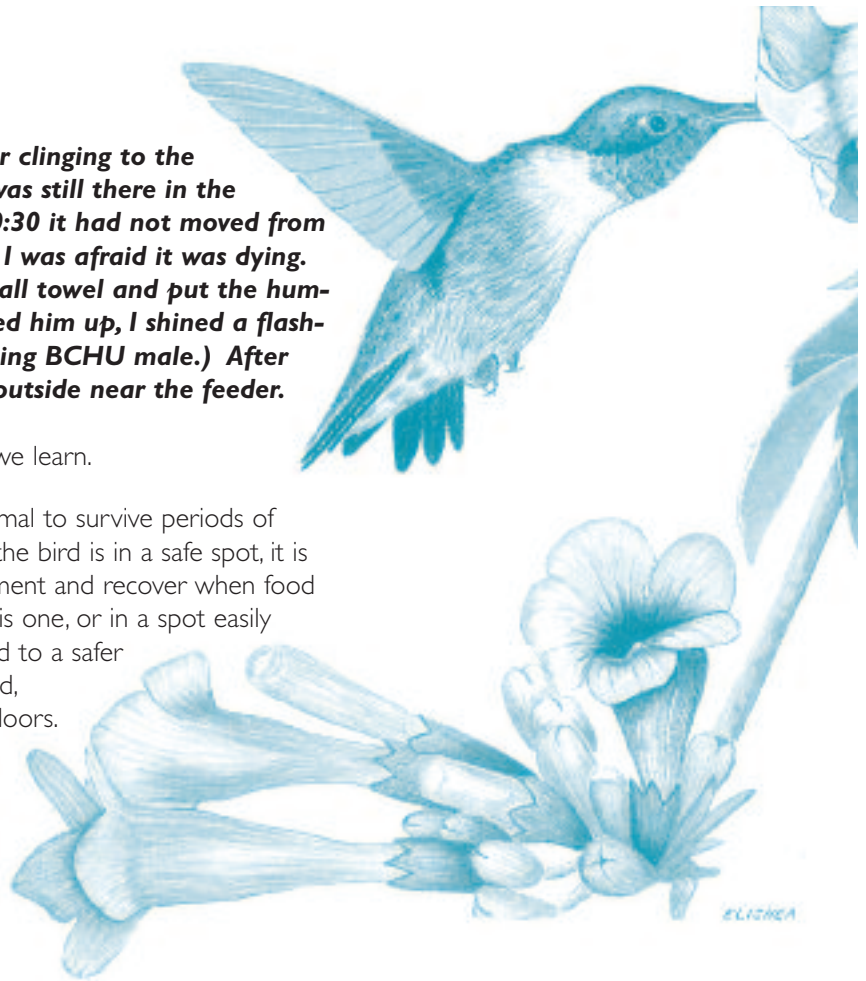
From Kerr County:

***On Apr. 7 at 7:15 p.m. I saw a hummer in torpor clinging to the stone wall of the house on the front porch. It was still there in the morning. The ice storm kept it very cold. By 10:30 it had not moved from the cement floor where it fell during the night. I was afraid it was dying. I lined a plastic (name omitted) cage with a small towel and put the hummer in it and brought him inside. (When I picked him up, I shined a flashlight on his gorget and it was amethyst, confirming BCHU male.) After five minutes inside, he revived and I let him go outside near the feeder.***

This is the type of report about torpor from which we learn.

Torpor is a fascinating mechanism that allows the animal to survive periods of stress — extreme cold, storms, extreme heat, etc. If the bird is in a safe spot, it is best left alone, allowing it to warm with the environment and recover when food resources are available. A bird on the ground, like this one, or in a spot easily accessed by predators may benefit from being moved to a safer location. Taking the bird indoors is not recommended, especially if the temperatures are still quite cold outdoors. Placing it on a limb near where it was found is probably best.

Should you find a hummingbird in torpor, watch and learn from this amazing phenomenon. And please, send us a note!



## 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.

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 2008 survey forms by **Jan. 19, 2009**, to the address above.

