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THE TEXAS

HUMMER

SPRING 1999

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A NEWSLETTER FOR TEXAS HUMMINGBIRD ROUNDUP PARTICIPANTS

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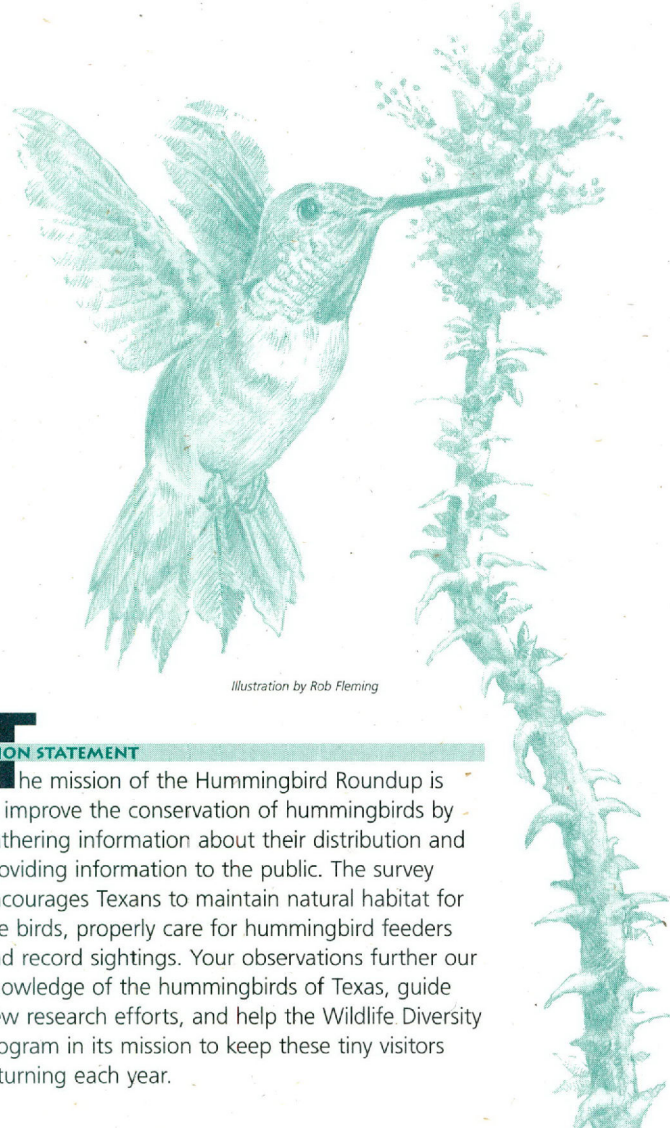


Illustration by Rob Fleming

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 sign up for the Hummingbird Roundup, please send a \$6 donation with your name address, county and telephone number to:
Hummingbird Roundup
Texas Parks and Wildlife
4200 Smith School Road
Austin, TX 78744

Please remember to return your 1999 survey data by **January 14, 2000** to the address above.

THE ROUNDUP CONTINUES

Five years of very successful Hummingbird Roundups in Texas have produced an abundance of valuable data that can be used to help preserve habitat and increase our knowledge about these beautiful flying jewels. When Texas Parks and Wildlife introduced the Roundup in 1994 we anticipated five good years of data would follow and then a wrap up. Two years ago we anticipated continuing the roundup only in the Trans Pecos region. Your interest, the quality and the quantity of the data we are receiving has convinced us that you want this program to continue and that we need the information.

This past year saw a decrease in the number of data sheets returned, but it certainly was not because of a lack of interest. Due to staff shortages we were unable to send out reminders at Christmas time asking for their return. We had no one answering voice mail so calls went unattended. Many probably thought the roundup ended early or simply forgot to forward the data. We're back now and looking forward, not only to the 1999 and 2000 returns, but also any late data from 1998.

Does this mean the Jewels of the Trans Pecos project is over? Not at all. The two surveys compliment each other. The unique biological and geological features of the Trans Pecos make it necessary for us to provide a focus there, but the dispersal and the diversity of hummingbirds found in the rest of Texas help us realize we still have a lot to learn here as well. The Trans Pecos data will be included with the rest of the state, as well as undergoing an analysis of it's own.

If you have not already ordered your 1999 kit and want to receive one, please don't wait. With this newsletter coming out so late in the year, we need to get kits in your hands now so that we do not lose data. Fall migration is one of the richest seasons for data collection is fast approaching and we want to know what you are seeing. If you have already ordered your kits, or have decided to sit it out for a year, thank you for your marvelous support and good birding - we hope your gardens are humming.



Photo of Berylline Hummingbird courtesy of Cliff Shackelford, Davis Mountains.



VISIT BY A BERYLLINE HUMMINGBIRD

While preparing the "Texas Hummer" for publication this year, a call to a participant in Brewster County brought reports of an interesting visit three years ago by a bird he could not identify at the time. He recalls that a bird with a vivid green head. Puzzled by the bird, he continued trying to identify it.

Recently the mystery was solved. Looking at a new field

guide he recently purchased, the observer found himself looking at the same bird - a Berylline hummingbird.

This very rarely reported bird has only been known in Texas from Brewster County and Jeff Davis County. More reports of this beautiful bird visiting feeders in the Trans Pecos would be good news.



The Hummingbird Roundup continues to generate a large volume of data that is recorded for use by those interested in hummingbird research. Through these studies we hope to learn more about these charming birds that thrill us with their presence each year. Your help in providing the data needed to develop and maintain this data base makes this possible.

CLEANING YOUR HUMMINGBIRD FEEDER



While we all like to watch the hummers, it is important to keep the feeders clean.

Clean the feeder every 2 to 3 days to avoid fermenting the nectar. This is especially important when the temperature begins to rise into the high 80s.

Clean your feeder with a solution of hot water and vinegar. For the tough spots add a little baking soda and scrub. If you choose to use bleach, and this is not recommended, make sure all parts of the feeder are thoroughly rinsed before the feeder is reused.

Clean the feeder ports carefully. A bottlebrush or old toothbrush works well for this. A dishwasher will effectively sterilize glass bottle feeders.

Again remember to rinse your feeder well. Wipe your feeder ports carefully to avoid spillage and reduce pest problems.

HUMMINGBIRDS ARE A BIG PART OF TEXAS ECOTOURISM

The flying jewels we all love are becoming a virtual treasure chest for Texas ecotourism operators. The Rockport/Fulton Hummer/Bird Celebration will enjoy their eleventh annual run when the doors open on Friday, September 17th. This festival features coastal fall migrants and offers the hummingbird enthusiast the opportunity not only to see feeders buzzing with migrating Rubythroats, but also the opportunity to see the rare bird that is not always seen in Texas. There is usually the early migrant Rufous in the crowd.

hummer festival! The Davis Mountains experience a wide variety of hummingbirds each year - in April 1999 we had a telephone report of a male Broad-billed hummingbird at a feeder. The caller knew of a female of the same species visiting a feeder down the road and was hoping for a nest this year. The rich fall migration that starts in August usually holds rare sightings for those that watch. Several years ago one feeder reported as many as 10 species in a single day!

Why not take the time to visit one of these great events?

This year, for the second time, Fort Davis will host a



37% OF PARTICIPANTS ARE USING FEEDERS YEAR ROUND.
89% OF PARTICIPANTS DID NOT USE FOOD COLOR IN THIS YEAR'S FEEDINGS.

Rolling Plains and High Plains

BLACK NUMBERS INDICATE NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS PER COUNTY WHO RETURNED THEIR 1998 SURVEY AS OF FEBRUARY, 1999

GREEN NUMBERS INDICATED SPECIES REPORTED

RARE HUMMINGBIRD CAUSES EARLY VISITS TO NEW AUDUBON SIGHT

An unexpected visit by a Violet-crowned hummingbird and a Blue Mockingbird caused an Audubon Society refuge to open for visitors earlier than expected.

Workers at the new facility in Hidalgo County noticed the two visitors and, as word got around, small crowds began to visit the park hoping to see the rare visitors. Both birds have since left the facility.

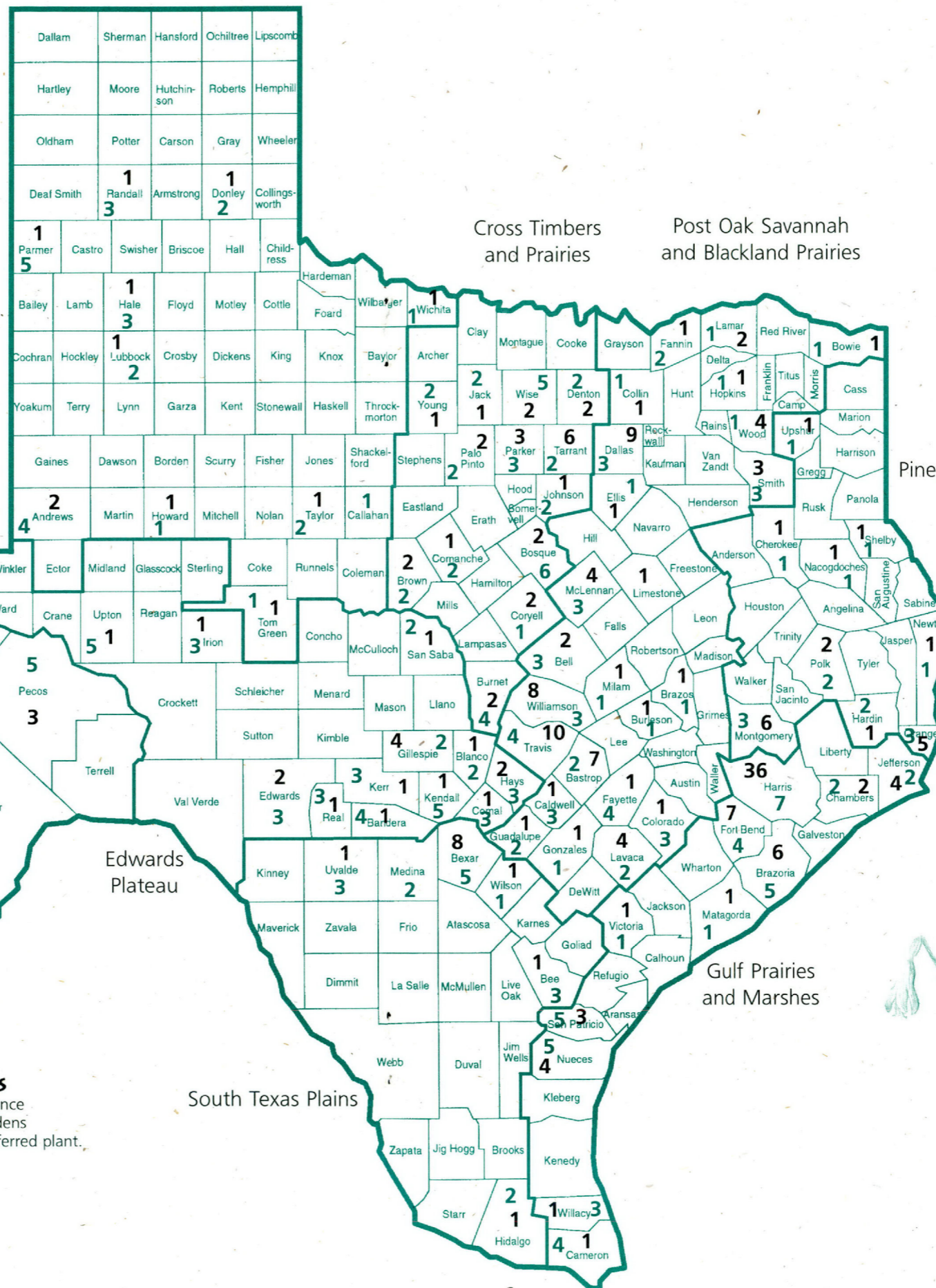
Violet-crowned hummingbirds had previously been known in Texas only from El Paso County and very rare, brief visits to other sites.

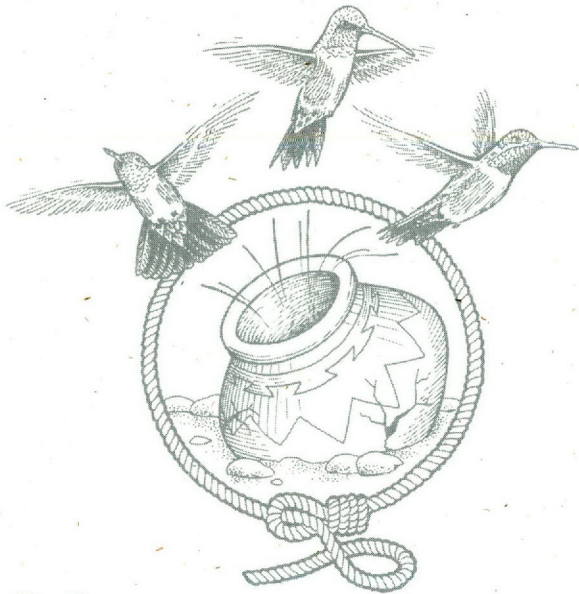


Illustration by Clemente Guzman III

PLANT PREFERENCES

Of those indicating a preference by birds feeding at their gardens 39% indicate Salvias the preferred plant.
 8% honeysuckle
 7% trumpet creeper
 6% hibiscus
 4% turks cap





TRANS PECOS FOCUS

With the addition of the Treasures of the Trans Pecos project beginning in 1999, a report on the results from the Trans Pecos in 1998 is in order.

Of the 9 counties in the Trans Pecos region – El Paso, Hudspeth, Culbertson, Reeves, Pecos, Terrell, Brewster, Presidio and Jeff Davis – participants in six counties returned surveys. Only Terrell, Culbertson and Hudspeth were not represented in the returns.

A total of 16 observers reported from those 6 counties including 2 from Reeves county, Presidio 1, Pecos 3, Jeff Davis 4, El Paso 2 and Brewster 4.

Ten of the fifteen species documented from the Trans Pecos region were reported last year. Only Broad-billed, Berylline, Costas, White-eared and Violet-crowned hummingbirds were not reported by our participants from the area. A Broad-billed hummingbird was reported by park workers from Fort Davis dur-

ing the spring season both last year and again this year.

By far, the most common species reported was the Black-chinned hummingbird, the dominant breeding hummingbird in the area. Only two observers located in Reeves and Pecos counties reported seeing Ruby-throated hummingbirds more often. First hummingbirds of the season ranged from Anna's hummingbirds and Rufous hummingbirds in January to Black-chinned and Ruby-throated hummingbirds in May and June. First birds of the season were most frequently reported in March and April, usually Black-chinned.

We hope to learn, through longer study and more observers, if the five species we did not record last year are only casual or accidental visitors to the area or if we simply are not seeing them because we do not have observers in the areas they frequent. This and other questions can be answered by continued observations.

VERY RARE BIRD SIGHTING

When a Hummingbird Roundup participant in Gillespie County checked his feeders between May and September 1995, he was treated to a very rare site – a large almost solid green hummingbird with slightly down curved bill and blue to almost violet patches on the sides of the face. The Green Violet-ear hummingbird was only the 21st sighting ever officially recorded in Texas and only the 26th of 27th ever recorded in the United States.

At the urging of the roundup coordinator at the time, necessary paperwork was completed to get this recording recognized by the Texas Birds Records Committee of the Texas Ornithological Society. This ensures that future publications that report the range of the Green Violet-ear hummingbird in Texas will at least mention the sighting in Gillespie County.



Illustration by Rob Fleming

FEEDERS AND FOOD



A few brief notes on food and feeders come to mind from the 1998 survey forms. It was interesting to note that the vast majority mix their own food. A participant from Chambers County passes on a tip for remembering the recommended mixture that he picked up at the Rockport/Fulton Hummer/Bird Festival last fall. You have 4 fingers and one thumb, thus 4 parts to one. To remember the sugar portion of the formula remember that the baby sucks on the sweet one (this apparently was not demonstrated at Rockport!).

Care in the daily maintenance of your feeders – avoiding drips and seepage, will reduce your problems with both ants and flying insects. Several participants mentioned this. Additional ant control methods that were popular included petroleum jelly on the hangers, hanging the feeders from positions other than tree limbs and ant traps (home made or commercial) above the feeders. Oily products used to prevent pests must not get on the feeder perches.

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CARING FOR THAT INJURED HUMMER

We have all experienced the heartache of seeing wildlife that has been hurt or orphaned. We've all experienced the urge to reach out and help a helpless creature. While this can sometimes be the right thing to do, it can just as easily cause harm or injury to the animal. A couple of simple questions may help you determine if it is really necessary or wise to help that bird.

First, ask yourself if the bird looks okay. Is it obviously injured or is it showing obvious signs of disease or infection? If not, it may only need a rest or be momentarily stunned before flying off to resume a normal life.

If you are looking at an orphaned bird, is it crying for

its parents? If you did not see the parent injured, it may be nearby watching from a perch.

If you choose to get involved in a wildlife rehabilitation, please remember first that it is a very time and energy demanding effort. Here are a few simple guidelines you might consider to help minimize the trauma to the bird.

Disturb the bird as little as possible. Place it in a sheltered area with little traffic and remove all pets from the area. Line the bird's container with soft material and ensure

that it has enough ventilation to breathe easily. Turn out lights and darken the cage to allow the bird to rest.

Do not try to feed or offer the bird water. Wash your hands thoroughly both before and after handling the bird. Once the bird is comfortably settled, go immediately to the phone and contact your local wildlife rehabilitator and arrange for the birds ongoing care. If you do not know how to reach a rehabilitator in your area, a call to TPW can arrange that contact.

Illustration by Elishea Smith



Wildlife rehabilitators, licensed by Texas Parks and Wildlife, have the knowledge and experience necessary to effectively care for injured or orphaned wildlife. If you encounter such an animal, please contact the Wildlife Diversity Program at 1-800-792-1112, ext. 4403 or (512) 389-4403, and we will provide you with the name of your nearest rehabilitator.



ELISHEA

The widespread range of the Black-chinned hummingbird makes it one of the most common species reported in the Hummingbird Roundup each year. Although we have far more participants in traditional Ruby-throat territory, Black-chinned hummingbirds are frequently the most common birds reported in our surveys. Often, the observers reporting Black-chinned hummingbirds report taking their feeders down in late fall. Those that don't, particularly in the southern reaches of the Black-chinned range, will occasionally report the pleasure of a lingering Black-chinned companion throughout the winter season.

Black-chinned hummingbirds are common throughout the western half of Texas. Occasional reports in the Tarrant, Denton and Parker county areas become more common as we progress west. While the Panhandle does not report as many birds, they are reported to breed in the Hartley County area.

This species, whose Latin name is *Archilochus alexandri*, is the only North American species with a truly black throat. Other species may appear black in certain light conditions but you can be sure you have a Black-chinned hummingbird at your feeder if you notice the violet band right above the white collar on the male. The female may have an all white throat or show faint dusky or greenish streaks in the throat

area. Immature birds begin to show the violet throat in the fall.

Peterson, in his *Birds of Texas*, reports the Black-chinned hummingbird habitat in Texas as "semi-arid country, cedar-oak countrysides, streams, flowering plants and towns". This describes a wide range, making opportunity to view this flying jewel quite good.

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Photo of Buff-bellied Hummingbird courtesy of Marcia Effinger, Washington County.

The Hummingbird Wheel is a beautiful 10" full-color identification wheel that will help you recognize the hummingbird species found in Texas and North America. The front of the wheel has color illustrations and descriptions of 16 North American hummers. The back contains more information on other hummer species, a nectar recipe, and fun hummingbird facts. Your purchase of the wheel will help fund research, habitat conservation, and management for these enchanting birds. The wheel is \$11.95 and can be ordered by sending a check to:

The Hummingbird Wheel
 TPW Wildlife Diversity Program
 4200 Smith School Road
 Austin, Texas 78744

NOTES FROM PARTICIPANTS

A participant from Bowie County notes: "One male landed on the ground near the feeders. He sat there very still and watched the sky and perch near the feeder. When a rival approached he zoomed up and chased off the intruder."

A Wood County observer writes of the first hummingbirds that arrived this year: "they hovered where the feeders were hanging last summer and seemed to be looking into the window. As I hung the feeder they buzzed very close & immediately started feeding." Good reason for us to continue feeding once we start.

The weather and migration patterns seem to have been quite different in 1998. While most participants were reporting dramatically reduced numbers of birds, Polk County observers write: "The summer of '98 was a great year for "Hummers" at our place. ...I had to buy sugar in 10 lb. bags and make food a gal. and a half at a time. It was great!"

Several observers noted a definite effect from the tropical storm last year, but a five year participant in Comal County, noted "I have observed and recorded, however, that storms, "Northers", but primarily tropical storms, cause an increase in the number of hummingbirds at my feeders. I have counted an increase in numbers 5 to 20 hummingbirds just before the storm arrives."

Several long time observers expressed regret that the survey was ending. "I have enjoyed participating in the Hummingbird Roundup for

the past 5 years. It has made me more observant of all the birds that frequent my back yard." "It has been my great pleasure to be a participant in the Roundup and watch the dear little Hummers. Of course, survey or not, I'll be feeding the hummers and keeping track of them..."



11th Annual HUMMER/BIRD CELEBRATION September 17-20, 1999 Rockport/Fulton, Texas

The Texas Hummingbird Roundup joins the Rockport/Fulton Chamber of Commerce in inviting everyone to attend the 1999 Hummer/Bird Celebration. This is a unique opportunity to view thousands of hummingbirds as they begin their fall migration back to their wintering grounds in Mexico and Central America. In addition, seminars, booths, field trips and workshops will offer opportunities to learn more about many species of Texas birds.

Some of the most renowned ornithologists and amateur birders will present programs that provide unique educational opportunities for birders. Children's workshops will also be held at the festival which provide the chance for kids to see live hummingbirds, raptors and other wildlife up close.

For more information about the 11th Annual Hummer/Bird Celebration, contact the Rockport/Fulton Area Chamber of Commerce at 1-800-826-6441.

Illustration by Rob Fleming



Recipe for Making Your Own Hummingbird Food

Ingredients: 4 parts water, 1 part sugar
Directions: Bring water to boil, stir in sugar, and boil for 2-3 minutes. Let cool and store excess in refrigerator.
Reminders: Do **not** substitute with honey. Feeders should be cleaned and refilled every few days, and remember it is necessary to clean the feeder more frequently during the warmer months than in the winter.



THE TEXAS HUMMER is a publication of Texas Parks and Wildlife's Wildlife Diversity Program.

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