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# HUMMER

A NEWSLETTER FOR TEXAS HUMMINGBIRD ROUNDUP PARTICIPANTS

## MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Texas 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 with the use of native plants, 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 Nongame and Urban Program in its mission to keep these tiny visitors returning each year.

## NEW HUMMINGBIRD SURVEY LAUNCHED IN TEXAS

Four down and one to go! With just one more year left in the Texas Hummingbird Roundup Survey, people are starting to ask, "What's next?" The answer is "PLENTY." The past four years of the Roundup have been great and we've accomplished much of what we wanted to do, but this is really just the beginning. At the end of 1998, after the last survey is in, we will be devoting ourselves to compiling the information you've helped us collect, stories you've shared with us, and the things we've learned about hummingbirds and the people who admire them in Texas. This important data was intended to help guide future research efforts and assist us in producing a book about Texas hummingbirds - and it will do just that. In addition, we have launched a special focus survey for the Roundup for Texas residents in counties west of the Pecos River. The "Treasures of the Trans-Pecos" focus survey is set to last two years and enroll many new hummingbird watchers in this area in our project. Participant enrollment began in early Spring 1998 and will continue through 1999.

Why the Trans-Pecos? That's easy - the Trans-Pecos ecological region has the highest hummingbird diversity in the Texas. Throughout the Roundup, we've had few observers in the region. We intend to change that, because the Trans-Pecos region is an important wildlife resource in our State. Out of the fifteen species of hummingbirds which have been documented in the Trans-Pecos, four breed in the region and occur nowhere else in the State! The diversity in the Trans-Pecos is due to the complex mosaic of eleven different microhabitats found in the area. These varied habitats range from Chihuahuan Desert to the high mountain habitats of the Davis, Chisos, and Guadalupe Mountains. Elevations in the region range from 2,500 to over 8,700 feet! Though we know that the Trans-Pecos provides some very unique opportunities to see hummingbirds in Texas, this area has not yet been studied extensively. Big thanks to our few, but devoted, current Trans-Pecos participants. We hope that all of you will stay with us for the next two years and encourage others in your area to join.

To the rest of our participants all over the State, THANK YOU so much for your help! We couldn't do it without you, so continue sharing your feeder observations with us for the 1998 calendar year and enjoy the birds!



Illustration by Clemente Guzman III

Don't forget to return your 1998 survey by January 10, 1999 to:  
**Texas Hummingbird Roundup**  
Texas Parks & Wildlife, 4200 Smith School Road, Austin, Texas 78744







Most people who provide nectar feeders to hummingbirds have had some annoying run-ins with feeder pests such as bees and wasps at some time or another. Some problems are more severe than others. Our participants' methods for dealing with ant and flying pest problems are often very inventive, original, and sometimes downright entertaining! Hummingbird Roundup participants report using methods from swatting bees with dish-towels and badminton rackets, to offering up an enticing bowl of caramel popcorn to discourage flying pests from competing for feeder space with the hummingbirds. The method we recommend is... whatever method works best for you. While we can offer some general suggestions and guidelines, you can't argue with results. However, there is one method that we absolutely discourage anyone from using, never use pesticides and/or insect repellents on or around your hummingbird feeder!!!

The following is a list of interesting pest deterrent methods reported by our participants in 1997:

- ◆ observed that ant problems were lessened when feeders were hung from house or porch eaves instead of trees
- ◆ found that keeping the feeders very clean and preventing drips was prevention enough for their problems
- ◆ providing an alternate nectar or plain water source for flying insects, such as in an open dish was helpful
- ◆ using canopy feeder decreased bee and wasp problems

Illustration by Rob Fleming



**RUFIOUS HUMMINGBIRDS IN TEXAS**

If you've ever had a Rufous Hummingbird at your feeder – you know it. Not only is the bird distinctive in appearance, but this fierce little fighter is always a noticeable force at the feeder. All hummingbirds are very territorial, but the Rufous takes this reputation to the extreme. They can even become a temporary nuisance to those who like their hummers to share the nectar more peaceably. However, this little tyrant has some very good reasons for its territorial behavior.

Rufous Hummingbirds breed in northwestern North America (from northern California, southern Idaho and Oregon to Alaska) and winter mostly in northwest and central Mexico. According to research done by Bill Calder at the University of Arizona (discussed informally in Nature Conservancy Magazine, March/April 1998), the annual Rufous migration is almost 49 million "body lengths" long. This is the longest migration of any bird, when considered in proportion to body size. Even if size is not a factor, the Rufous migration feat rivals those of much larger birds. In data obtained from the recapture of banded

hummingbirds, the Rufous has all top five records for distance, the top record being an adult female recaptured 2,788 kilometers from the point where she was originally banded! One banded Rufous was known to have traveled a minimum distance of 2211 kilometers, averaging 53 kilometers per day on her journey between Vancouver Island and Tijeras, New Mexico!

Rufous Hummingbirds defend feeding territories during migration as well as on breeding grounds, and it's no wonder! These refueling stops are critical as they continue the race to the north to breed and south for winter feeding territories. This aggressive behavior is equipment for survival, and we have reason to be as concerned as they are. The Rufous Hummingbird is one of the 14% of bird species which breed in the U.S. and seem to be showing trends of population decline, according to the current National Audubon Society Watchlist. So, if the Rufous becomes a bully at your feeder this year, you may consider just adding another feeder to try to keep the peace, and help them on their way.



One of the primary goals of the Roundup is to gather information that will eventually guide new research efforts concerning hummingbirds. Our extensive database is available to biologists who wish to use it for designing scientific studies that will help us learn more about these charming, wondrous birds. Presently, the data that we have collected from our participants over the past four years is being used for just that purpose – assisting in the selection of study sites for a Texas A&M University research project.



**WINTER FEEDERS HAVE HIGH SUCCESS**

Winter Rufous sightings have been steadily increasing in the southeastern US since the 1970s. They are now considered regular winter visitors along the Gulf Coast from Texas to Florida. Texas Hummingbird Roundup data has reflected this increase in sightings. In 1997, of the 116 Roundup participants reported maintaining a feeder year-round, 50 reported having at least one overwintering hummingbird. The great majority of these birds were Rufous Hummingbirds.

**Winter Hummer Statistics**

Forty participants reported having a wintering Rufous, (30 of these had a Rufous hummingbird only), 4 participants had winter Black-chinned hummingbirds, 10 had Ruby-throated hummingbirds, 6 people reported winter Buff-bellied hummingbirds, and 1 participant reported a winter Broad-tailed.

**SHADED COUNTIES INDICATE OVERWINTERING BIRDS REPORTED. GREEN NUMBERS ARE NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS WITH OVERWINTERING HUMMINGBIRDS.**

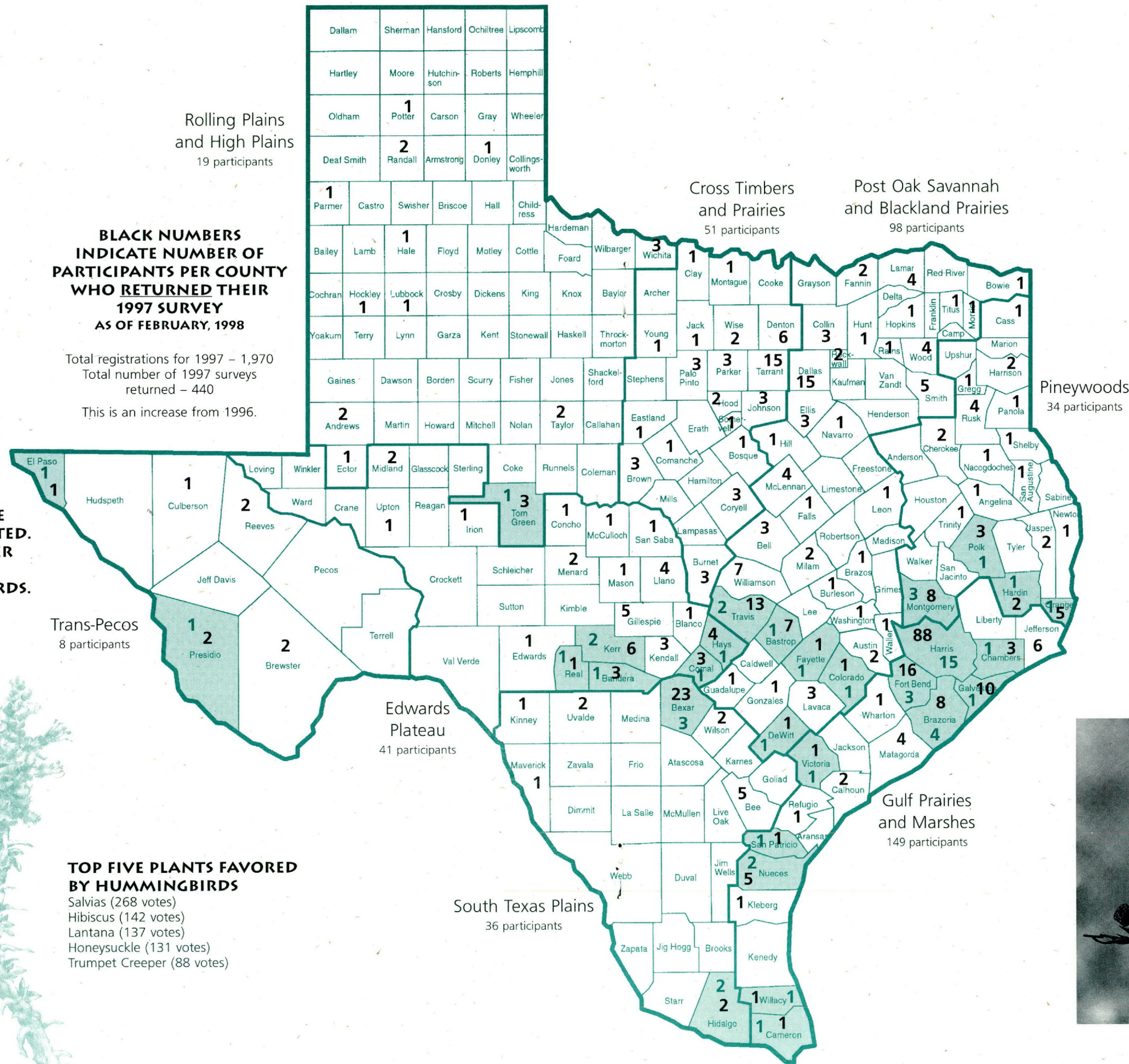


Illustration by Rob Fleming

**BLACK NUMBERS INDICATE NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS PER COUNTY WHO RETURNED THEIR 1997 SURVEY AS OF FEBRUARY, 1998**

Total registrations for 1997 – 1,970  
 Total number of 1997 surveys returned – 440  
 This is an increase from 1996.

**TOP FIVE PLANTS FAVORED BY HUMMINGBIRDS**  
 Salvia (268 votes)  
 Hibiscus (142 votes)  
 Lantana (137 votes)  
 Honeysuckle (131 votes)  
 Trumpet Creeper (88 votes)



**HUMMINGBIRD ATTACK CULPRITS**

The top culprits in hummingbird attacks according to our 1997 participants (excluding fights with other hummingbirds) were:  
 Bees/wasps – 75 participants reported incidences  
 Cats – 29 participants reported incidences  
 Shrikes – 3 participants reported incidences

**Keeping Cats Indoors -- For the Birds**

While cats were number 2 this year as perpetrators of hummingbird attacks, run-ins with cats are much more likely to be fatal than battles with bees and wasps. It is estimated that there are over 100 million pet and free-ranging cats in the U.S., and as excellent predators, cats collectively have a huge impact on wildlife. Approximately 20% of cats' prey are birds. A cat's natural instinct is to hunt and attempts to dampen this instinct by keeping them well-fed have been shown to be futile in numerous studies. A well-fed outdoor kitty is still as effective a predator as his hungrier counterpart, maybe more effective. Many other attempts to lessen cats' impact on birds and other wildlife, such as belled collars, have also proven to be ineffective. The best solution overall, is to keep your cat indoors and away from the birds. If you have questions or problems regarding cats at feeders, feel free to contact the Nongame and Urban Wildlife Program.

**SOME OTHER BIRDS REPORTED USING HUMMINGBIRD FEEDERS IN 1997**

Orange-crowned Warbler, Scarlet Tanager, Wood Thrush, Golden-fronted Woodpecker, Townsend's Warbler, Scott's Oriole

**Pests listed as #1 at feeder**

- Wasps – 38%
- Bees – 27%
- Ants – 21%
- House Finches – 9%



Photos courtesy of Linda S. Riner, Kerr County







Illustration by Clemente Guzman III

**NOTES FROM HUMMER LOVERS**

**"***In Sept. 10, an albino female showed up and stayed until Sept. 17. She came in early in the morning and late in the evening. The other hummingbirds tried to chase her away.*

*Barbara Summars (Jack Co.)*

*"On Sept. 20, we had a male hummingbird whose beak was bent downward. He was very territorial and wouldn't let other birds feed. He had to stick his beak all the way in the feeder to eat."*

*Josie Schoolcraft (Cherokee Co.)*

*bushes but another hummer knocked it out and onto the ground. That may be the way it ended up in the skimmer in the first place."*

*Margie, Marshall, and Erin Roberson (Harris Co.)*

*"In late July, I noticed a female Black-chinned drinking at the feeder in a peculiar way. She would stick her bill way down into the feeder, then put her head back to swallow... Then on August 31st, I saw her again. It appeared that her bill had broken off and her tongue was exposed."*

*Jan Alexander (Tom Green Co.)*

*"An extraordinary thing happened one Saturday afternoon in August 1995. My husband was cleaning the skimmer in our swimming pool and found a drenched hummingbird in the basket. He quickly got it out and he and our daughter held it while the little creature dried out... We placed it in one of our*

*"I rescued 3 hummers from our swimming pool. I followed your instructions on helping injured birds and all three made the recovery fine."*

*Carole Emerson (Orange Co.)*

*Glenn and Carolyn Haluska (McLennan Co.) also reported that the hummers will skim the surface of the water in their swimming pool.*

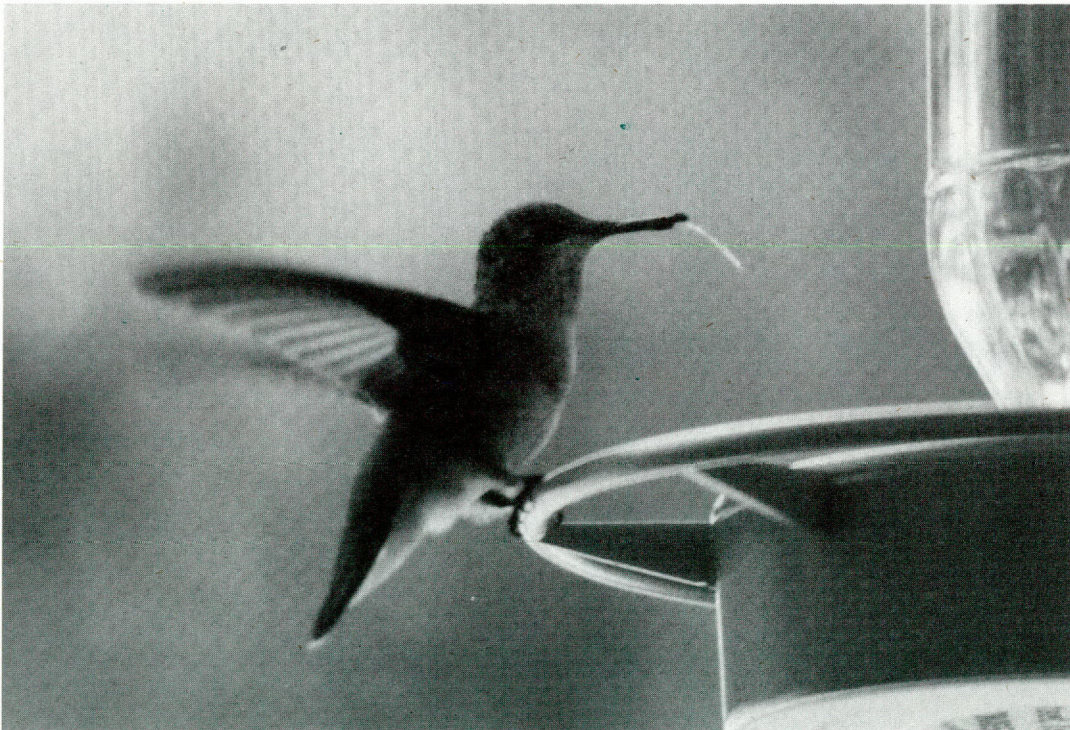


Photo courtesy of Jan Alexander, Tom Green County

*"One evening this summer I was watering in my backyard when I glanced at the hummingbird feeder hanging nearby. There I saw a tiny black-chinned hummer dangling between the feeder and perch, it's beak in the feeder hole. My first thought was that the poor thing was dead. It wasn't moving. Its eyes were closed and feathers were all ruffled and bedraggled. When I began to carefully extricate the bird's beak from the feeder hole and it's body from the perch, it never twitched a feather. After getting the tiny body freed, I was holding it in my hand, thinking to perhaps bury it by some flowers. Imagine my surprise when the little bird suddenly opened its eyes, fluttered its wings, and flew away!"*

*Cheryl Huddleston (Bexar Co., daughter of T.H.R.U. participant Enayee Gassaway)*

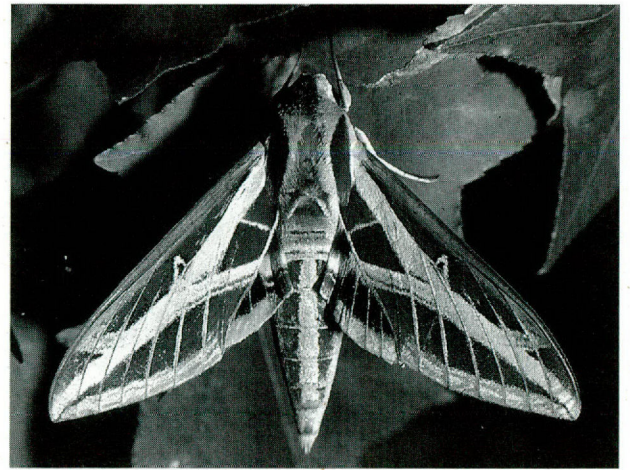


## CHEMICALS AROUND THE FEEDER



In 1997 surveys, there were 30 reports in which feeder pest control methods involved the use of chemical insecticides or repellents near hummingbird feeders. This is a very serious issue that we would like to address in detail. We recommend using a **minimum** of chemical pest control agents, herbicides, or fertilizers in your yard, if any at all and these substances **should NEVER be used anywhere near your feeders or baths**. This conscientiousness is especially important for those people who invite wildlife to use their yard as a place of refuge and sustenance. When you apply chemicals anywhere in your yard, the negative effects of that substance reach much farther than just the area where they are applied. These chemicals do not disappear, and can be carried by wind, soil, animals, and water to other areas. Using chemicals to deter pests anywhere near your hummingbird feeder, even if it is not near feeding ports, can be extremely harmful to the birds that use it. Remember that hummingbirds can, and often do, perch on hanging wires above feeders and other available perches and could thereby coat feet, feathers, or other parts in poison. In addition, any chemical broadcast into the environment with the intention of killing feeder pests will also affect many other insects as well. Hummingbirds eat insects to provide the protein in their diet, and eating an insect tainted with poison, poisons the hummingbird. Even a seemingly "mild" insect repellent such as Avon Skin-So-Soft or "OFF," which were mentioned many times in the surveys, would certainly be bad for you if you ate it, and could cause serious illness to a tiny hummingbird. Any oil-based product can also harm a bird's feathers. Remember that once you put it out there, it doesn't go away and the wildlife will have to deal with it.

There are many safe alternatives to chemical insecticides or repellents which are effective. Preventing ant problems is as easy as purchasing or constructing a simple **ant moat**, filled with water or vegetable oil to hang above the feeder. (Be careful that the birds don't come in contact with the oil.) Commercial **bee guards** are also very inexpensive and effective in most cases. Please see your Hummingbird Roundup "Feeder Care Bulletin" for detailed information or call (512) 389-4470 to request this publication or for more information.



### THE SPHINX MOTH

Have you ever seen what appears to be a striped hummingbird at dusk? There's an explanation for that, and it's not your eyesight or your sanity, it's a sphinx moth. It may sound unlikely that a moth could be mistaken for a hummingbird, but it happens all the time. These large, fat-bodied moths (Family Sphingidae) have wings that buzz like a hummingbird's as they move from flower to flower, foraging for nectar. They also have an extremely long proboscis (insect tongue) which resembles a hummingbird's beak from a distance. The proboscis can be up to four inches long in adults and is adapted for lapping nectar from tubular flowers. Sphinx moths, also called "hawk moths" and "hummingbird moths," are adapted to utilize flower nectar just like hummingbirds and can hover as hummingbirds do while they feed. Hummingbird moths may utilize a variety of bee, but-

terfly, and hummingbird flowers. During times of flower scarcity, the sphinx moth becomes dependent on datura flowers because they are a reliable nectar source which is unavailable to other animals because of their toxicity.

There are at least seventy-five species of sphinx moths in Texas. Most are nocturnal and they are often observed by hummingbird watchers at dusk. The larval forms of sphinx moths are better known as tomato or tobacco "hornworms." Although sometimes not appreciated by gardeners because of their larval appetite for tomato plants, just like hummingbirds, sphinx moths are important flower pollinators. As they feed, the proboscis becomes sticky and pollen easily adheres to it. This pollen is carried to the next flower, thereby propagating many species of wildflowers for the benefit of all nectar-dependent animals.



*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 Nongame and Urban Wildlife Program at (512) 389-4403, and we will provide you with the name of your nearest rehabilitator.*



## W FEEDER CARE QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Why NOT use honey in your nectar solution? Many people believe that using honey in their feeder nectar is a more natural source of sugar for hummingbirds than the traditional household white sugar, but is it? To most closely match the hummingbird's natural nectar source, we recommend using a solution of 4 parts water to 1 part plain old, household sugar. Seem too simple? Well it is simple, but it's also the best thing you can do for your hummingbirds.

Household sugar is extracted from plants (usually sugar cane) and is every bit as "natural," and much more beneficial, than honey. There are many different types of sugars. The sugar in honey is in the form of **dextrose** and is not as useful an energy

source to hummingbirds as the **sucrose** sugars found in regular white sugar. The hummers' wild food source, nectar from flowers, contains mainly sucrose and this is the natural energy source that hummingbirds are adapted for. The sugar concentration in flower nectar varies, but it is usually somewhere between 15% and 30% sucrose. This is the reason that we recommend approximately a 20% sugar solution in your feeder. In addition to being a less usable form of sugar for hummingbirds, honey tends to spoil much faster in feeders than does sugar, and this can pose a serious health hazard to birds. By the same token, using any artificial sweeteners in a hummingbird feeder may well attract hummingbirds, but offers no caloric value to meet their energy demands.



### 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.

### RECENT BOOKS ON HUMMINGBIRDS

Nancy Newfield and Barbara Nielsen's new book, *Hummingbird Gardens*, provides information on a broad range of related subjects including hummingbird species, their preferred nectar sources and specific tips for all the major regions of the U.S. Autographed copies are available from the author. Send your check or money order to: Nancy Newfield (nln01@www.gnofn.org), Casa Colibri, 3016 45th Street, Metairie, LA 70001. Be sure to include your name, address, city, state, zip code and a note as to whom the book should be inscribed. Hardcover \$34.95 plus \$3 S&H. Softcover \$19.95 plus \$3 S&H.

The new edition of *Hummingbirds of North America*, by noted ornithologist Paul A. Johnsgard came out in 1997. This is the most comprehensive, detailed account of hummingbird biology and is now available at your local bookstore.

*A Quick Reference Guide to Texas Hummingbirds*, by Jereme Phillips, Texas Parks and Wildlife Nongame and Urban Program, contains identification tips for all eighteen species and updated range maps – based partly on your observations! Additional copies available. Send a postcard to Texas Hummingbird Roundup, TPWD, 4200 Smith School Rd., Austin, TX 78744.

### 1997 RARE BIRD SIGHTINGS



August 17, 1997

A **Berylline Hummingbird** (*Amazilia beryllina*) was sighted at a private residence in the Davis Mountains. The Texas Ornithological society has confirmed this sighting and it is now Texas' first Official State Record of this species.

November 4, 1997 - January 1998

A **Green-breasted Mango** was confirmed in Corpus Christi, TX also at a private residence.

Note: A possible **Violet-crowned Hummingbird** was reported in early March 1998 in Lake Jackson, TX, but has not been confirmed.



### 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  
 TPWD Nongame and Urban Program  
 4200 Smith School Road  
 Austin, Texas 78744



## 1994-1998 PARTICIPANTS

The Nongame and Urban Wildlife Program would like to recognize the following people who have participated in all four years of the Texas Hummingbird Roundup. We apologize for any names that have been erroneously omitted from this list and we would like to express our sincere gratitude for the dedicated efforts of all of our Roundup participants.



### 10th Annual HUMMER/BIRD CELEBRATION September 17-20, 1998 Rockport/Fulton, Texas

The Texas Hummingbird Roundup joins the Rockport/Fulton Chamber of Commerce in inviting everyone to attend the 1998 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 10th Annual Hummer/Bird Celebration, contact the Rockport/Fulton Area Chamber of Commerce at 1-800-826-6441.

Mr. and Mrs. K.E. Arnold  
San Patricio County

Colonel Lola Ball  
Kendall County

Janelle Betts  
Hunt County

Mr. and Mrs. R.O. Branam  
Harris County

Marilyn Brewer  
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Donna Burrows  
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Ken and Mary Dollar  
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Willard and Charlene Johnson  
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John Witt  
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