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2003/SPRING

TEXAS PARKS AND WILDLIFE

THE TEXAS

# HUMMER

SPRING 2003

A NEWSLETTER FOR TEXAS HUMMINGBIRD ROUNDUP PARTICIPANTS



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## HUMMINGBIRD ROUNDUP 2002

This year was another year of optimism and excitement as we continued to see a Green-breasted Mango adult in the Rio Grande Valley, watched as some of our hummingbird festivals seem to have turned the corner toward continued success, and saw renewed excitement as people became more aware of the survey. The opportunity to download surveys from the web site has drawn some from the paid participation, but we are still showing people wanting the full "hummingbird roundup package."

We continue to get calls about low numbers of hummingbirds offset by calls from people reporting record numbers of hummingbird visitors. Why the difference? I believe we are seeing the results of the changing landscapes in Texas. Several years ago, individuals in Louisiana began landscaping specifically for hummingbirds,

with the result that two properties on the same block may see very different densities and diversities in these birds. In Texas, we are now seeing people who landscape their properties with the exclusive goal of attracting hummingbirds, while others continue to rely on the old standby of hanging a feeder and hoping they come. The result is that the birds move toward their optimum habitat, with the old feeder in the tree becoming an occasional stopover.

Changes continue for the Roundup. As we learn about these birds, new questions are asked and new ideas explored. Currently people are using the data to explore temporal distribution of Rufous Hummingbirds in Texas. Other questions persist, like the exploration of the origin of the wintering Rufous on the Texas Coast. Some contend these birds disperse north after arriving in Mexico, others that these birds have

come directly to the coastal region from the northwest. The answer may well be something in between.

In this issue, we continue to explore identification tips, this time focusing on the Blue-throated Hummingbird and the Magnificent Hummingbird, two western species that are often quite confusing. While reports and surveys continue to trickle in even at the writing of this newsletter, we need to produce a report and so the maps may not show every record we end with this year. To date 228 records have been received, many obviously downloaded from the web site.

Enjoy the newsletter and let us know when you first see birds at your feeders this year. Also, anytime you have questions or comments about the Roundup, they can be sent to us by E-mail to [mark.klym@tpwd.state.tx.us](mailto:mark.klym@tpwd.state.tx.us).

## 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 Branch in its mission to keep these tiny visitors returning each year.



# HUMMINGBIRD IDENTIFICATION

## BLUE-THROATED VS MAGNIFICENT

Two of the largest hummingbirds in Texas present a challenge for identification in poor light situations and when viewed from the back. These two species occur in the same regions of Texas concurrently, and so the opportunity to see and be called on to identify both species is quite possible.

These birds can be seen in the Davis Mountains of West Texas, in fact the Davis Mountains Hummingbird Festival actively looks for them each year. Typically West Texas species, both of these birds are highly unlikely and worthy of special note east of the Pecos River. The Blue-throated Hummingbird was recorded at Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge during the Texas Tropics Nature Festival a couple of years ago, causing some excitement among the birders in attendance.

In some cases, behaviors and habitat can provide you with some help in identification. Magnificent Hummingbirds tend to be more likely in open areas, while most of my experience with Blue-throated Hummingbirds has had the bird in more shaded areas, deep under trees and in poor light.

Generally, these birds are equal in size. While one author will show the Blue-throated larger than the Magnificent, the next author will show them reversed. The general build of the two species is similar. Magnificent Hummingbirds have much longer bills than Blue-throated Hummingbirds. Both genders of the Blue-throated may have white tips on the end of their tails, while only the female Magnificent will have these. A big distinction on these two species occurs when viewing them from the

back – the Magnificent will be a solid green color from top of the head to the tip of the tail, while the Blue-throated will be green from the top of the head to the top of the tail and blue/black from the top of the tail to the white tips on the end of the tail.

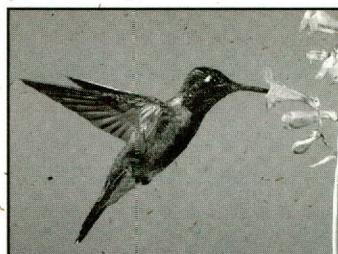
To have the greatest chance of enjoying these two birds in their West Texas range, find a feeding station in the canyons that includes feeders in both open and covered areas. Since some of these birds are quite secretive, quiet may be necessary to maximize your opportunity. These birds are a good reason to consider the Davis Mountains Hummingbird Festival.



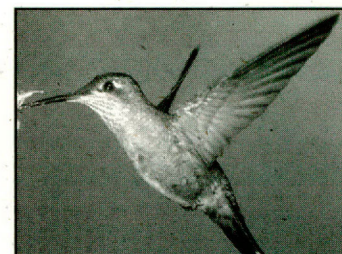
Blue-throated Hummingbird, male  
© Betty Randall



Blue-throated Hummingbird, female  
© Betty Randall



Magnificent Hummingbird, male  
© Charles W. Melton



Magnificent Hummingbird, female  
© Betty Randall

Photos from [www.enature.com/fieldguide](http://www.enature.com/fieldguide)



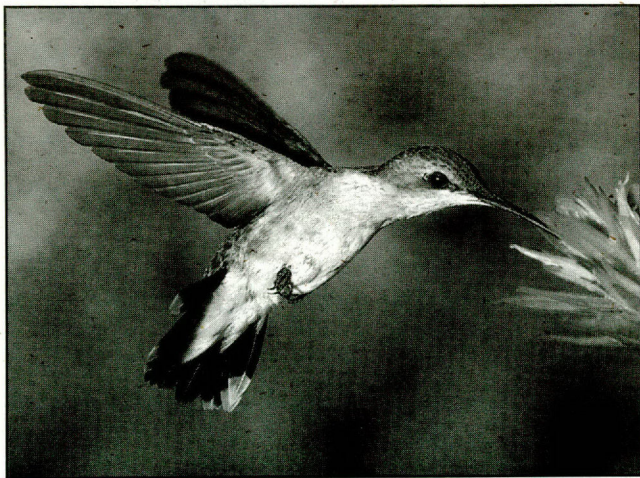
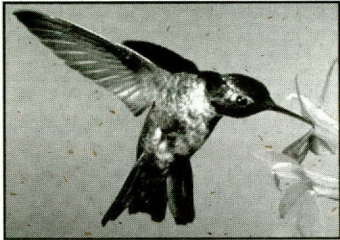


## HUMMINGBIRD WATCHING IN TEXAS

Hummingbirds. When you mention them, most people think of Arizona, where some canyons are noted for concentrations of hummingbirds of diverse species. Texas, the most hummingbird diverse state in the union, has many sites where both diversity and density of these playful gems can be found.

The Trans-Pecos region of the state, with its mountains, valleys, canyons, desert and brush lands, is probably the most hummingbird diverse region – especially during migration. An August or September visit to state parks and national parks in the Big Bend region, or to the Davis Mountains of Jeff Davis

*Anna's Hummingbird*



*Black-chinned Hummingbird*

County or the Franklin Mountains in El Paso County can reliably produce such species as Black-chinned, Rufous, Lucifer, Calliope, Magnificent, Blue-throated and Broad-tailed hummingbirds. Other possible species include Ruby-throated, Costa's, Berylline, Anna's and White-eared hummingbirds. Often the more common birds can be found in large numbers. Be sure to explore all elements of this diverse ecoregion – the canyons, brush lands, forests and even the gardens to optimize your opportunities to see more birds.

Moving down the river to the Lower Rio Grande Valley, presents another hot spot for hummingbirds. Buff-bellied Hummingbirds are the highlight of the region, and August or September finds other opportunities including Ruby-throated, Rufous, Anna's, Broad-billed, Costa's and Blue-throated hummingbirds. Still rarer birds include the Green-breasted Mango – the Lower Rio Grande Valley is the only place north of Mexico where this bird has been seen as an adult – and Green Violet-ears. Again it is important to explore all the various microhabitats within the region. The national

wildlife refuges, state parks and the new World Birding Center will offer some excellent opportunities, but if you are going to look for birds on private property be sure to ask the landowners permission. While there are no hummingbird festivals in the valley, the many birding and nature festivals that are sponsored in that area present some wonderful opportunities to see these birds.

Coastal Texas is also a hummingbird hot spot during fall migration. The huge Hummer/Bird Celebration in Rockport-Fulton and the new Hummingbird Xtravaganza at Gulf Coast Bird Observatory in Lake Jackson, both in early September, offer two of many opportunities to enjoy the wonder of thousands of hummingbirds staging to cross the Gulf of Mexico. The vast majority of these birds will be Ruby-throated, but one could also see Rufous, Buff-bellied, Calliope, Green Violet-ears and more.

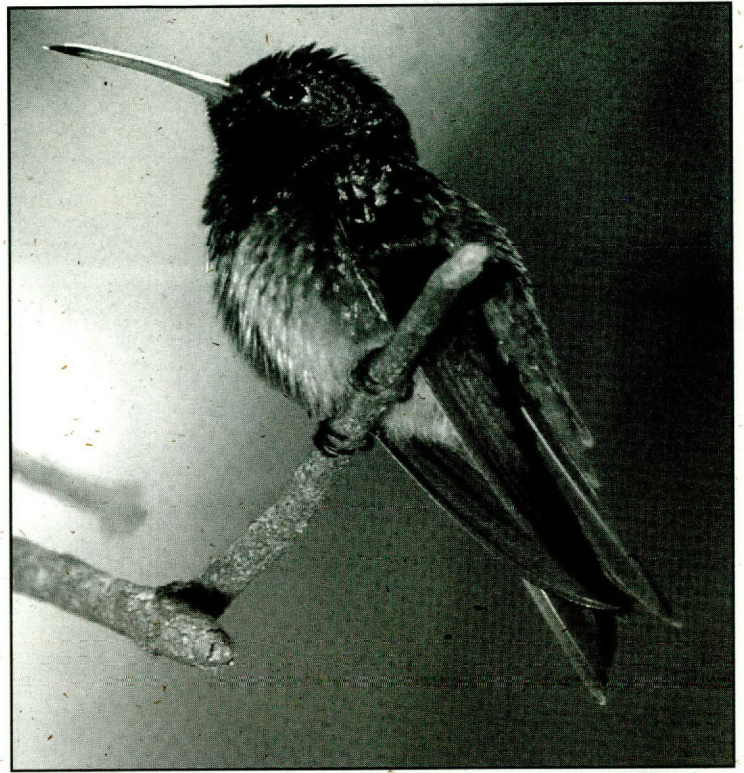
Get out and enjoy some of these wonderful hummingbird viewing opportunities in Texas this year!

## NOTES FROM HUMMER WATCHERS

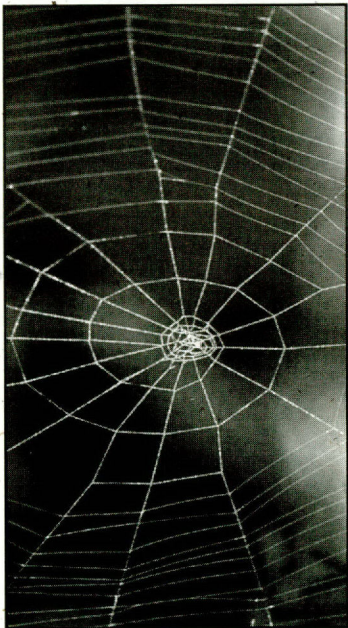
"I highly recommend *The Sibley Guide to Birds* for anyone who truly wants to identify birds. It is especially helpful in being able to identify between the BCHU and RTHU females. I was also able to identify a juvenile BCHU sub-adult male."

—Kathryn Dodd,  
Denton County

*A very good recommendation Kathryn. David Sibley does an excellent job of breaking out these differences and many of the recommendations in our identification tips come from his book and from experienced birders who provide suggestions.*



Buff-bellied Hummingbird



"I had read about the possibility of hummingbirds getting caught in spider webs and experienced this horror this summer. I was able to free the hummingbird after it had been wrapped but I hoped before the spider injected its venom. After I unwrapped the hummingbird, it flew quickly away. I caution all to keep webs cleared around feeders."

Kathryn Dodd,  
Denton County

*Another good suggestion. We recommend that watchers not allow spiders to develop webs on or near feeders, but that spiders be encouraged elsewhere in the habitats to allow the birds' needed webbing for nests.*

"One day a hummer just hit our porch when it flew by, with a thud. We picked it up, thinking it had died, but it was still alive. It just lay still in my hand, when I put a drop of nectar in my hand, its little tongue darted out to drink it. After 3 drops it zoomed away and seemed to be fine!"

Roger and Vickie Francis,  
Ellis County

*Roger and Vickie describe an event many of us have experienced, and the best first aid for these situations. If the bird does not revive within 15 to 30 minutes, we recommend calling a licensed rehabber. Lists of rehabilitators by county can be found at [www.tpwd.state.tx.us](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us) and they must be called if the bird needs to be housed for any reason.*

"It looks like hundreds of hummingbirds came during the migration season. Several times I have had to replace all five feeders in one day. We used 10 lbs. of sugar in one week."

Virginia Huntress,  
Bandera County

*The Texas Hill Country is one of the under-recognized areas for hummingbird watching in the state. You are not far as the bird flies from a hummingbird hot spot – Dan Brown's Texas Gems Hummer Haven. Dan feeds 500 pounds of sugar each year – about the same weekly average as you report in this heavy week!*

*(more hummer watcher notes continued on back page)*

## UPCOMING FESTIVALS AND WORKSHOPS

The list of festivals in Texas that are focused on or include hummingbird watching activities continues to grow. Currently, three festivals are included in the annual itinerary, all focused on the fall migration:

### DAVIS MOUNTAINS HUMMINGBIRD FESTIVAL

August 15-18, at the Prude Ranch in Fort Davis

This festival offers opportunities to see an amazing diversity of hummingbirds in a very limited area. Past festivals have recorded nine species for the weekend, though not the same nine species each year! For a new festival, the Davis Mountains group puts on a great program with such notables as Bob and Martha Sargent, Sherrie Williamson, Kelly Bryan and others. Register early, since spaces at this festival are limited to allow everyone an opportunity to enjoy the rarities.

### XTREME HUMMINGBIRD EXTRAVAGANZA

September 6, at Gulf Coast Bird Observatory in Lake Jackson

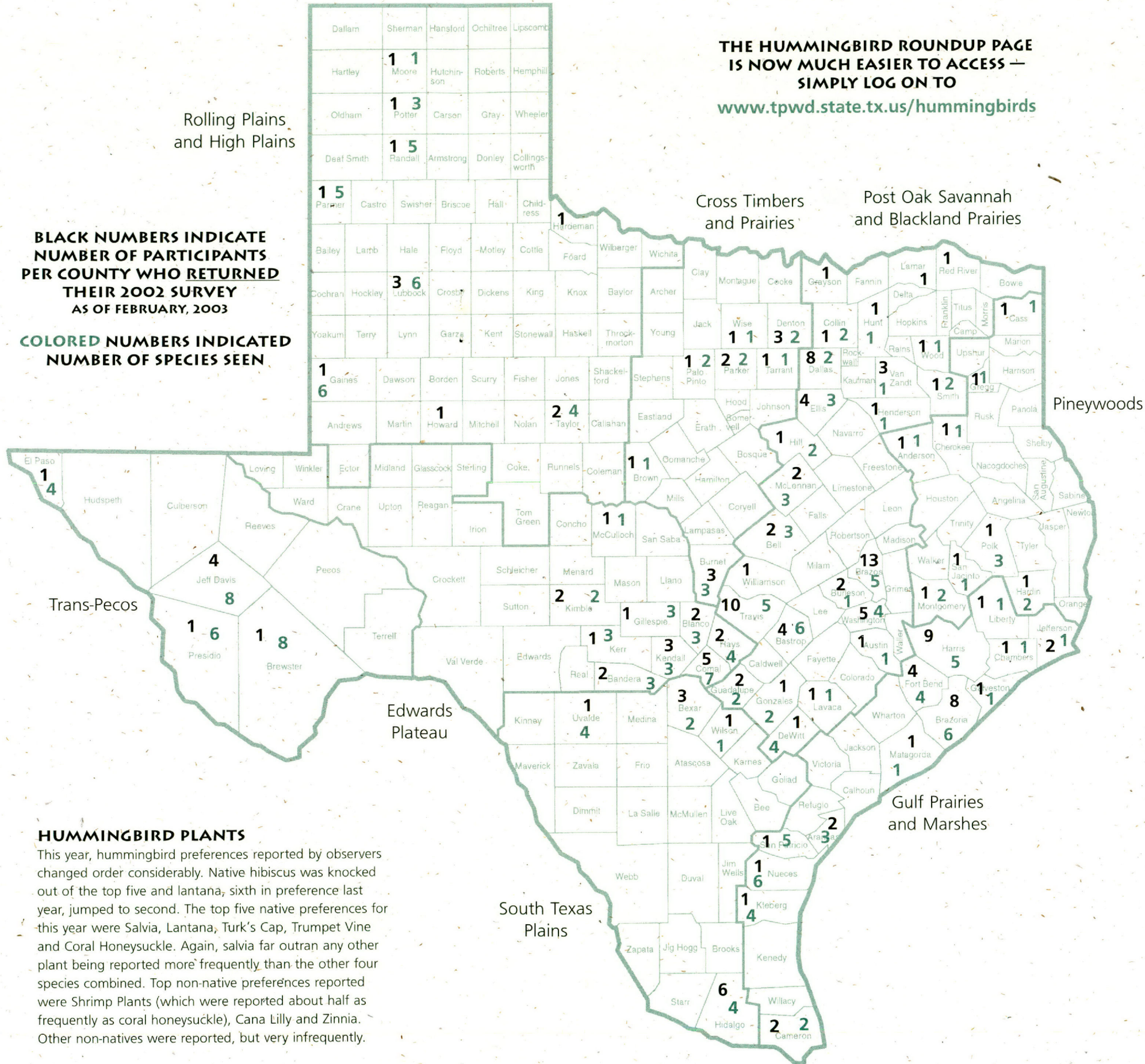
Hundreds of Ruby-throated Hummingbirds make a stop at this birding hot spot on the Gulf Coast each year, prior to crossing the Gulf for the winter. The Extravaganza offers an opportunity to learn more about this amazing bird and its ecology during migration along the coast. Banding demonstrations present up close and personal observation of this bird, and maybe the chance to see a Rufous, Buff-bellied or other rarity for the region.

### HUMMER/BIRD CELEBRATION

September 11-14, Rockport - Fulton

The grand-daddy of Texas Hummingbird Festivals, over 19 speakers, outdoor exhibits and a fantastic market place highlight this fall hummingbird festival. The real magnet though is thousands of Ruby-throated Hummingbirds, with the occasional Rufous thrown in.

There are also opportunities to learn about specific hummingbird populations at the **Songbird Festival** in Lago Vista around the first part of May. Folks in the Texas Hill Country are also planning to add a festival shortly that may include a spring look at hummingbirds. Workshops continue to be popular, as people become increasingly aware of the beauty and charisma of these avian wonders. Upcoming workshops include one in Eagle Pass, June 1-2 and one in Fort Worth, August 30. There will probably be early spring programs in the Panhandle next year as well. If you know of a group interested in helping plan such a workshop in your area, please let us know.



### HUMMINGBIRD PLANTS

This year, hummingbird preferences reported by observers changed order considerably. Native hibiscus was knocked out of the top five and lantana, sixth in preference last year, jumped to second. The top five native preferences for this year were Salvia, Lantana, Turk's Cap, Trumpet Vine and Coral Honeysuckle. Again, salvia far outran any other plant being reported more frequently than the other four species combined. Top non-native preferences reported were Shrimp Plants (which were reported about half as frequently as coral honeysuckle), Cana Lilly and Zinnia. Other non-natives were reported, but very infrequently.

### SPECIES OBSERVED IN WINTER

Bandera County	3
Bastrop County	2
Bell County	1
Bexar County	1
Brazoria County	5
Brazos County	2
Brewster County	2
Cameron County	1
Chambers County	1
Comal County	1
DeWitt County	3
El Paso County	2
Gillespie County	1
Fayette County	1
Fort Bend County	4
Hardin County	1
Harris County	3
Hays County	2
Hidalgo County	3
Jeff Davis County	4
Kendall County	2
Kerr County	1
Kleberg County	4
Lavaca County	1
Lubbock County	2
Matagorda County	1
Nueces County	5
Polk County	2
Randall County	2
San Patricio County	3
Tarrant County	1
Taylor County	1
Travis County	2
Uvalde County	2
Van Zandt County	1
Washington County	2

# TREASURES OF THE TRANS-PECOS

## WHY THE TRANS-PECOS?

A new slide program has been developed that explores the question of why hummingbirds seem to prefer the Trans-Pecos region of the state. The program explores the remarkable geography and biological diversity of this region that seems to serve as a magnet for these birds, and has become the introductory program for workshops held in West Texas.

West of the Pecos River, Texans can enjoy a very unique, but diverse region. Treated as a single ecoregion by Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, the region is so diverse it has been described as a combination of as many as 15 different ecoregions – more than the rest of the state combined. Much of this diversity can be attributed to the mountain islands in the desert sea. These mountains create dramatic changes in elevation, create canyons and cliffs, and allow the development of forest, grassland and riparian systems within the region.

Biological diversity is reflected in the flora of the region, floral diversity that in turn allows for faunal diversity – including the avian fauna we are exploring.

Another contributing factor is the proximity of the Trans-Pecos region to the mountainous regions of central Mexico. This is where new species for this region are likely to come from, and where some of the rare species we currently enjoy – like the White-eared Hummingbird, the Berylline Hummingbird and others are traditionally found.

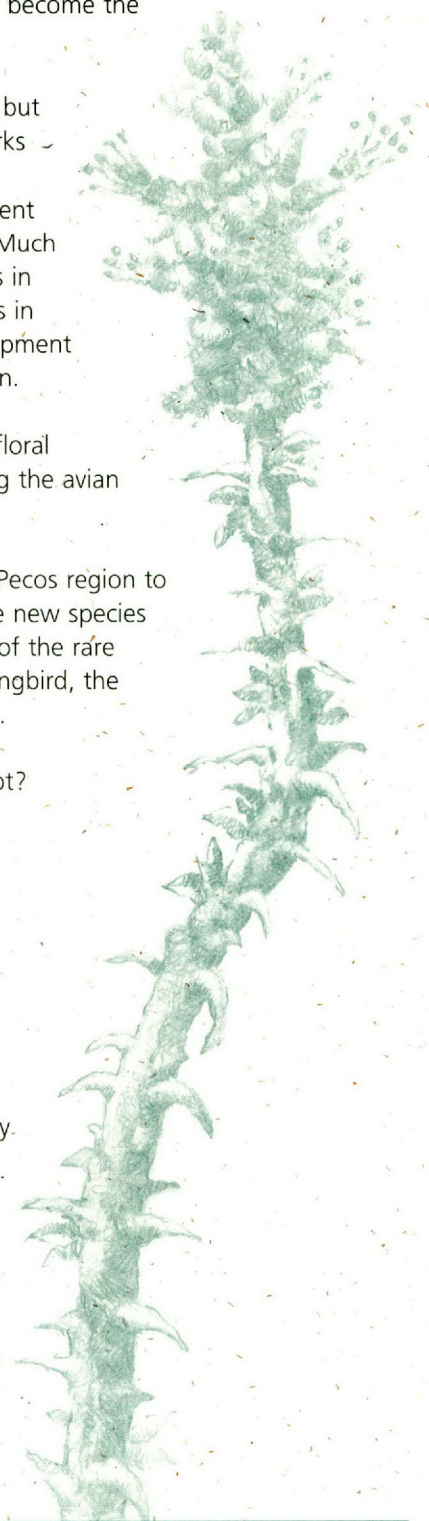
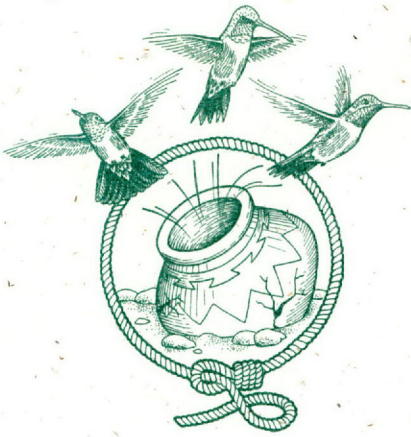
Why the Trans-Pecos? With all this working for it, why not?

## COMMENTS FROM A TRANS-PECOS HUMMER WATCHER

After ocotillo quit blooming LUHU came to penstemon, never to feeders. In past years when I didn't have penstemon they came to feeders.

Carolyn Ohi-Kolb, Brewster County.

*Carolyn, this is a very interesting report. I have observed Lucifers at feeders in the Trans-Pecos, so it is not a generalized behavior within the species. Of course, the little oasis you have developed in Brewster County (mentioned in previous issues of Texas Hummer) provides plenty of natural alternatives so that they do not need to approach a feeder. Incidentally, several hummingbird researchers contend that some hummingbirds never "learn" to feed from feeders.*



## TRANS-PECOS SPECIES DIVERSITY

Brewster County	8 species
Jeff Davis County	8 species
Presidio County	6 species
El Paso County	4 species

## TRANS-PECOS PLANT PREFERENCES

Salvia
Penstemon
Texas Sage
Yucca
Century Plant
Morning Glory

The preference for salvia species was not as significant in West Texas as it was in East Texas.



## NOTES FROM HUMMER WATCHERS

"It was a lot tougher to recognize the different species than what I thought it was going to be."

Amanda Dorland,  
Travis County

*Yes Amanda, these birds can be challenging. The identification tips in the booklet, as well as the identification tips in the hummingbird workshops can be very helpful.*

"We used "red devices" to attract migrating hummers to our yard. We took clear red, plastic plates, attached them to hangers and hung them in trees where they were visible. We could spot new arrivals because they would approach the plates first. Then they were close enough to discover the feeders and flowers below. It may be a coincidence, but more species came here."

Laney Rickman,  
DeWitt County

*It happens too often to be coincidence Laney.*

"We were sitting on the back porch when Mike noticed a Black-chinned Hummingbird on the porch floor. It had apparently fallen out of a nest. We put it on an oak tree ledge and began feeding it "nectar" with a syringe and

eventually were able to catch gnats and mosquitoes for it. We fed it at 2-hour intervals until dark. The next morning it was able to fly up into the tree branches but when it heard/saw Mike, it came back down to the ledge for him to feed it."

Mike and Cheryll McGehee,  
Uvalde County

*This is a great story, but the bird's reaction is one of the reasons we have to encourage calling a rehabilitator. While Mike and Cheryll are not a threat to the bird, other humans may be. We do not want the birds becoming dependent on humans for their food.*

"I found a hummer trapped between the feeder and the "T" on the perch. I pulled the perch away from her body and had a hard time getting her beak out of the hole. The beak had a lump at the middle point. I couldn't tell if it was broken or just bruised. Because it was raining and windy, I put it in a protected place. Later when I checked, it was gone."

Lynelle Sikora, Polk County

*Lynelle, the bird probably had broken the bill in a previous incident. Hummingbird banders see these injuries at times.*

"We didn't have many birds this year, and we wondered if all the wildfires had something to do with it."

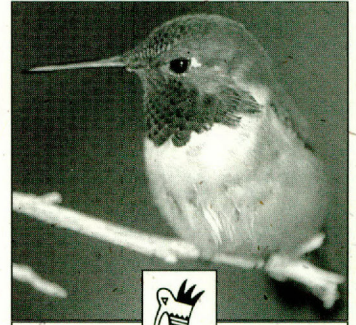
Sonja Wilburn,  
Parmer County

*Sonja, I am not sure if you are referring to wildfires in your immediate locations or the wildfires to the northwest of you. Generally, people observed an early migration in Texas as birds moved faster due to lack of habitat because of the fires in the western U.S. If you had fires in your region, you may well have seen birds bypass the area.*

"How is the best way to locate a hummingbird nest?"

Barry and Brenda Mace,  
Anderson County

*As with any bird, the surest way to find a nest is to follow a female when she is carrying nesting materials. She will not fly directly to the nest, so you may have to follow for a few minutes. Please do not disturb nesting birds with extended visits or by approaching too close to the nest. Nesting may occur more than once in a year. The first young of the year can be expected in May.*



Texas reported 106 Rufous Hummingbirds in the **Great Backyard Bird Count** coordinated by Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology. This was the highest count in the nation. Texas also leads all counts with 8 Broad-tailed Hummingbirds and 20 Buff-bellied Hummingbirds. The Great Backyard Bird Count is a 3-day count and birds must be seen during those three days to be recorded.

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 2003 survey forms by **January 17, 2004** to the address above.



### THE TEXAS HUMMER

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