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THE TEXAS

HUMMER

SPRING 2004

A NEWSLETTER FOR TEXAS HUMMINGBIRD ROUNDUP PARTICIPANTS



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 ROUNDUP 2003

The 2003 Hummingbird Roundup saw continued excitement over our great diversity of Texas Hummingbirds. Workshops held across the state were well-attended as Texans and our guests hungered to learn more about our avian friends. Numbers of participants in the Roundup getting their reports in on time to be included in the newsletter remain steady – 130-140 participants. Counties represented continue to be heavily skewed to the eastern portion of the state. A notable addition this year was a contribution from one of our State Park hosts, who provided information on hummingbird observations from four state parks in three different ecoregions throughout the year.

Anecdotal notes added to the reports indicate a diversity of opinion in overall hummingbird numbers again this year. Comments from the Hill Country and from counties to the east

generally reported increased hummingbird activity over previous years while comments in west Texas, from the Davis Mountains and El Paso, seem to indicate a decline in hummingbird numbers. Personal observations, in traveling into that western region over the past four years, would probably confirm that decline at feeders I repeatedly visit.

The new hummingbird database created from the data submitted over the years is making comparisons easier. Standard queries I use every year to create the newsletter have been designed to compare regions, time periods and even species from year to year. The bottleneck still seems to be getting the data into the database (the beginning of the calendar year seems to be a rough time for data entry) and generating the news articles. Hopefully this will improve in 2004.

In this issue we will continue the identification tips. Several people requested more help in identifying Ruby-throated and Black-chinned hummingbirds without the benefit of gorget color, so we will return to these tricky species. Drawings and photographs will also be used to help identify these birds. Again, some reports are still trickling in, even in April, so the map may not represent every report we get for this year.

There may be some big changes coming to the TPWD Web site so keep your eyes on www.tpwd.state.tx.us/hummingbirds over the next few months. Enjoy the hummingbirds and any time you have questions or comments feel free to send them to mark.klym@tpwd.state.tx.us.



HUMMINGBIRD IDENTIFICATION

BLACK-CHINNED AND RUBY-THROATED HUMMINGBIRDS – OVERLAPPING RANGES AND SIMILAR SHAPES MAKE DIFFERENTIATION TRICKY

The two most common hummingbird species in Texas are also two of the trickiest to distinguish when they are buzzing around your feeders. Range can not be used as a definitive identifier – while Black-chinned hummingbirds generally occur west of IH 35 in central and western Texas they have been reliably recorded as far east as Orange County in Texas. Similarly, the eastern breeding Ruby-throated Hummingbird has been confidently photographed as far west as El Paso County despite being described as a bird occurring east of IH 35. Range is clearly not definitive.

The two species are almost identical in size. Body shape, as would be expected with congeneric species, is also nearly identical. This puts the observer at a real disadvan-

tage if the light is such that the only color you are really seeing is black, white and deep green. There are some distinguishing characteristics, however – both structural and behavioral – that can be reliably used to differentiate these birds.

It is always a good idea to have a good field guide to the birds around – even if the only birds you will ever use it for are your hummingbirds. These guides all give specific characteristics about the birds that make identification easier. Go COLOR BLIND when looking at the throat of these birds – most of the time you will only see black! Look for other characteristics.

The Black-chinned Hummingbird is a long billed bird – the bill projects almost a third the length further than that

of the Ruby-throated Hummingbird. This means that, when feeding at the same feeder or the same flower, the Ruby-throated will have to get his head much closer to the food source than will the Black-chinned.

The tails of these birds are very different as well – the Ruby-throated Hummingbird has a long tail with a deep fork in flight. On the other hand, the tail of the Black-chinned Hummingbird is relatively short with a much more shallow fork. The length of the tails can best be seen when the females are perching – the Black-chinned hummingbirds will have a tail that extends to or JUST beyond the tip of the wings while that of the Ruby-throated Hummingbird will extend clearly beyond the tip of the wings.

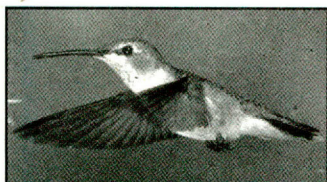
Females of these species display slightly different coloration on the crown, with Black-chinned Hummingbird females being generally described as gray colored and Ruby-throated hummingbirds being greenish. The backs of Ruby-throated hummingbirds are generally brighter in color.

Another big distinction comes in the wing shapes, with Black-chinned Hummingbird wings being generally broader and more rounded at the tips (club shaped?) and Ruby-throated Hummingbirds being much more tapered.

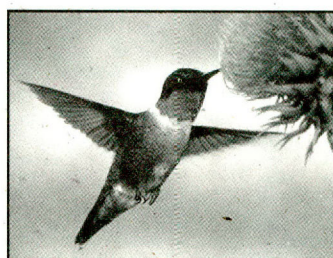
These tips should help. Remember that identification over the internet or through the mail is always much easier if the description is accompanied by a photo.



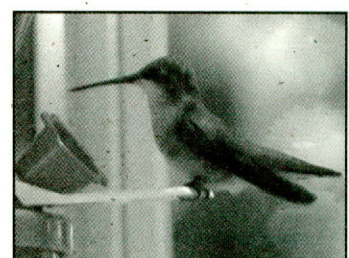
Black-chinned Hummingbird, male
© Rob & Ann Simpson
Photo from www.enature.com



Black-chinned Hummingbird, female
© Betty Randall
Photo from www.enature.com



Ruby-throated Hummingbird, male
© Ron Austing
Photo from www.enature.com



Ruby-throated Hummingbird, female
Photo by Mark Klym, taken in Lake Jackson

	Black-chinned	Ruby-throated
Bill Length	• Long – often half again the width of the head	• Moderate – about the width of the head
Wing Length & Shape	• Long, club-shaped wing extending to the tip of the tail	• Shorter, tapered wing extending less than the length of the tail
Tail Shape	• Forked, but not as sharply as the Ruby-throated	• Deeply forked
Behavior	• Pumps tail when hovering	• Tail almost still when hovering

NOTES FROM HUMMER WATCHERS

"Our hummers left very early this year – September compared to usually October or November. A large area of native scrub across the street is having a large corporate office built on it – unsure if this is the cause of dramatic changes in our backyard bird population."

— Suanne Schafer,
Bexar County

Probably, Suanne. Since birds do not recognize our property lines, often we will have done nothing but suddenly the bird numbers will drop off. This is very confusing to people, so I tell them to have a look in a one-mile radius around your home – have there been any changes? The other possibility is that the wet spring and fall in 2003 produced abundant food supplies and the birds did not need to come to feeders.

"January and February hummers were the most I've ever had during any past winter."

— Thomas Collins,
Brazoria County

So that is where they all were! Congratulations on what I know is a great habitat. While this habitat is coastal, other habitats as far inland as Amarillo had winter birds this year.

"This is the first full year that our patio home's landscape was converted from a concrete 'non-jungle' to a yard 90% devoted to birds and butterflies. We had many more butterflies than hummers."

— Paul & Deloris Sellin,
Harris County

Glad to hear the habitat installation is working. In Harris County you are in a wonderful area with lots of butterfly opportunities. Glad to hear the hummingbirds found you, too! This helps illustrate the impact installing a 'wildscape' can have on the wildlife seen in your area.

"We had several 'waves' of RTHUs in the fall. Numbers started building in August and by the 30th they swarmed the feeders. Then a cool front caused a decline 8/31 and the next couple of days. New wave arrived 9/6 and peaked the following week. Cold front 9/14 resulted in sharp decline 9/15..."

— Laney Rickman,
DeWitt County

And you had your feeders active all along. What better evidence that feeders do not keep the birds from migrating?



Immature Rufous Hummingbird, Fort Davis. Photo by Mark Klym

"One day I turned on my sprinkler. The water reached high into a bottle-brush tree where a hummingbird was sitting. He took a long bath, preening and enjoying it so much."

— Dorris Smith,
Hidalgo County

We stress the importance of moving water in all of our programs and your story drives home the message. I have witnessed many hummingbirds enjoying a spring rain or a sprinkler/mister and the impact of the moving water cannot be overstated.

"The first bird I saw came to the feeder that had been hanging empty since fall of 2002."

— Maureen Bencal,
Lavaca County

This illustrates one of the reasons I recommend keeping a feeder active with just a little

food in it even when birds are not being seen. What often happens in these cases is a mad rush to refill the feeder – much more relaxing if the bird enjoys the little bit that is there then you refill between the drinks.

"Would like to see a Texas license plate with the hummingbird to go along with the bass, deer, toad and bluebonnets."

— Barry Mace,
Anderson County

Well Barry, there are no plans to expand the number of specialty license plates in that direction to my knowledge. Each of these plates funds a different effort with funds from the horned lizard (toad) plate funding non-game work which includes the Hummingbird Roundup.

OTHER MONITORING PROJECTS AT TEXAS PARKS AND WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT

Ever wondered how many monarch butterflies your backyard houses? How many Texas horned lizards might make your county home? What different amphibians are around your home? Then Texas Nature Trackers is just the project for you.

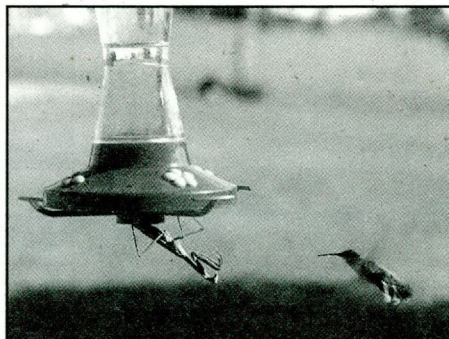
In addition to the Texas Hummingbird Roundup, Texas Nature Trackers encourages Texans to monitor Texas horned lizards, the monarch butterfly, amphibians, bald eagles and prairie birds across the state. For more information on these projects see the web site at <http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/nature/education/tracker/>.

TEXANS IN OTHER SURVEYS

Texas was well-represented this year in the annual Great Backyard Bird Count and several hummingbird species were reported from our state during the three day count in February. The next Backyard Bird Count is scheduled for Feb. 18-21, 2005. This is just one of the projects coordinated by Cornell University and the Audubon Society. To learn more about these counts please see www.birdsource.org.



© E.R. Degginger/Color-Pic, Inc.
Monarch butterfly photo from www.enature.com



© Tom Meister

BE AWARE!

Praying mantis are a wonderful natural pest control in your garden, but once in a while they decide they need a more substantial meal. When these insects begin using your feeder as a place to hunt their meals – your hummingbirds could be their next target. In this case, the mantis was quite happy with the outcome of this encounter – I am not sure the hummingbird shared those sentiments. When praying mantis set up on your feeder, I recommend relocating them to a portion of your garden where their services are needed.



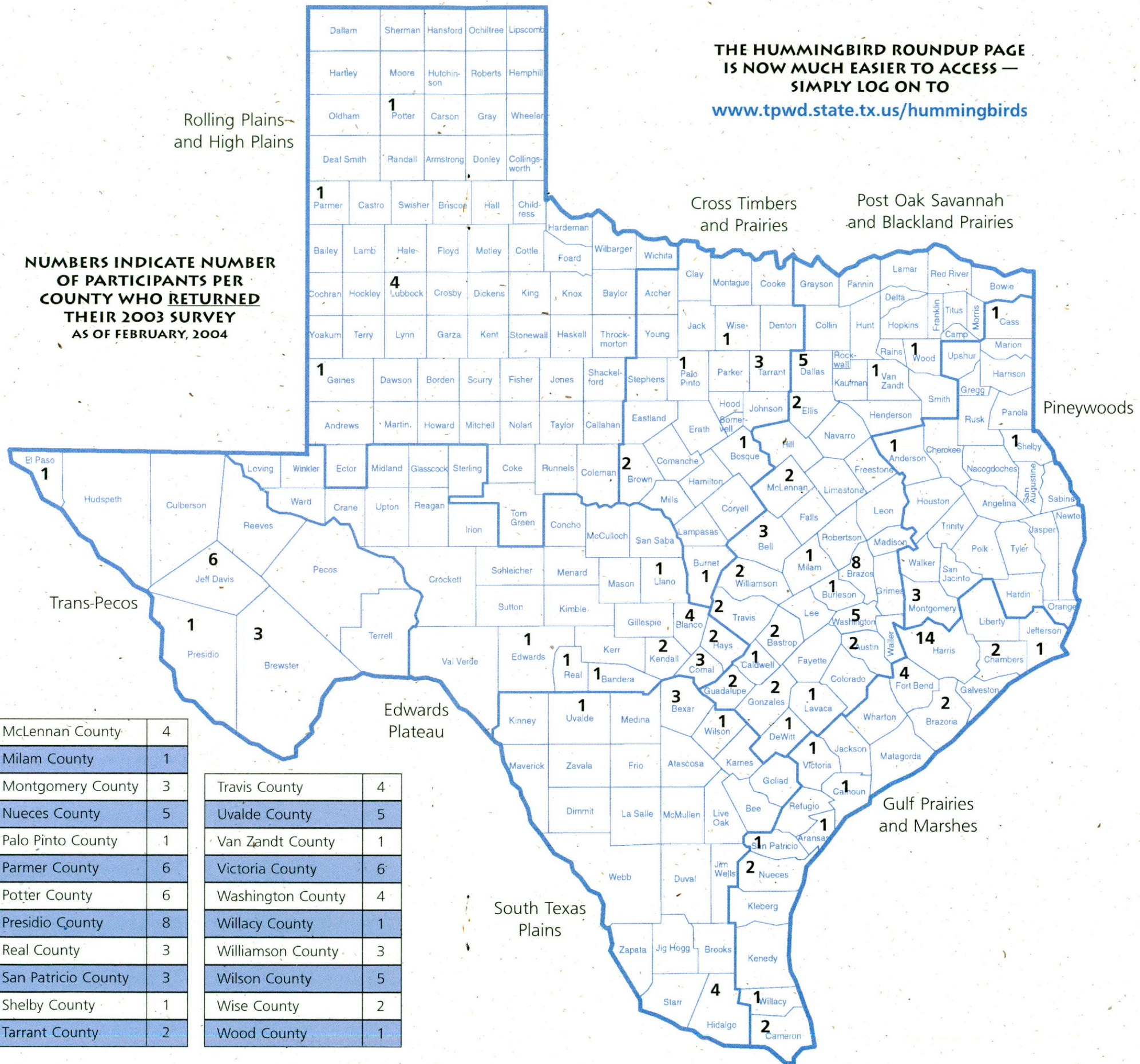
TOP HUMMINGBIRD PLANTS FOR 2003

Coral Honeysuckle • Hibiscus
Lantana • Morning Glory • Salvia
Trumpet Vine • Turk's Cap

DIVERSITY OF SPECIES OBSERVED

Anderson County	1	Chambers County	3
Aransas County	3	Comal County	5
Austin County	2	Dallas County	2
Bandera County	3	De Witt County	4
Bastrop County	3	Edwards County	3
Bell County	5	El Paso County	6
Bexar County	4	Ellis County	2
Blanco County	4	Fort Bend County	5
Bosque County	5	Gonzales County	4
Brazoria County	7	Guadalupe County	2
Brazos County	2	Harris County	6
Brewster County	8	Hays County	6
Brown County	3	Hidalgo County	5
Burlson County	1	Jeff Davis County	11
Burnet County	3	Jefferson County	1
Caldwell County	3	Kendall County	3
Calhoun County	1	Lavaca County	1
Cameron County	3	Llano County	6
Cass County	1	Lubbock County	8

NUMBERS INDICATE NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS PER COUNTY WHO RETURNED THEIR 2003 SURVEY AS OF FEBRUARY, 2004



McLennan County	4	Travis County	4
Milam County	1	Uvalde County	5
Montgomery County	3	Van Zandt County	1
Nueces County	5	Victoria County	6
Palo Pinto County	1	Washington County	4
Parmer County	6	Willacy County	1
Potter County	6	Williamson County	3
Presidio County	8	Wilson County	5
Real County	3	Wise County	2
San Patricio County	3	Wood County	1
Shelby County	1		
Tarrant County	2		

THE HUMMINGBIRD ROUNDUP PAGE IS NOW MUCH EASIER TO ACCESS — SIMPLY LOG ON TO
www.tpwd.state.tx.us/hummingbirds

WINTER SPECIES OBSERVATIONS 2003

Aransas County	2
Bandera County	2
Bastrop County	2
Bell County	3
Bexar County	1
Blanco County	1
Brazoria County	7
Brazos County	1
Brewster County	3
Burnet County	1
Chambers County	1
Dallas County	1
DeWitt County	3
El Paso County	2
Fort Bend County	3
Guadalupe County	1
Harris County	5
Hays County	3
Hidalgo County	2
Jeff Davis County	3
Jefferson County	1
Kendall County	1
Lubbock County	1
Nueces County	5
Presidio County	2
Roberts County	1
San Patricio County	2
Tarrant County	2
Uvalde County	2
Van Zandt County	1
Victoria County	3
Washington County	4
Williamson County	1
Wilson County	2
Willacy County	1



TREASURES OF THE TRANS-PECOS

There was lots of excitement in West Texas last year as birders monitored a pair of White-eared Hummingbirds in Big Bend National Park through most of the spring and summer. While no nest was recorded, birders continue to be optimistic that this bird may in fact be nesting in West Texas.

Another stir in this area was the presence of Broad-billed Hummingbirds, again in the spring, around feeders in Fort Davis. Hummingbird watchers in this area should always be expecting something different around their feeders.



NOTES FROM THE TRANS-PECOS

"In August, my wife and I went to Fort Davis for their Hummingbird Festival. We observed eleven different species, many were my first time to see them."

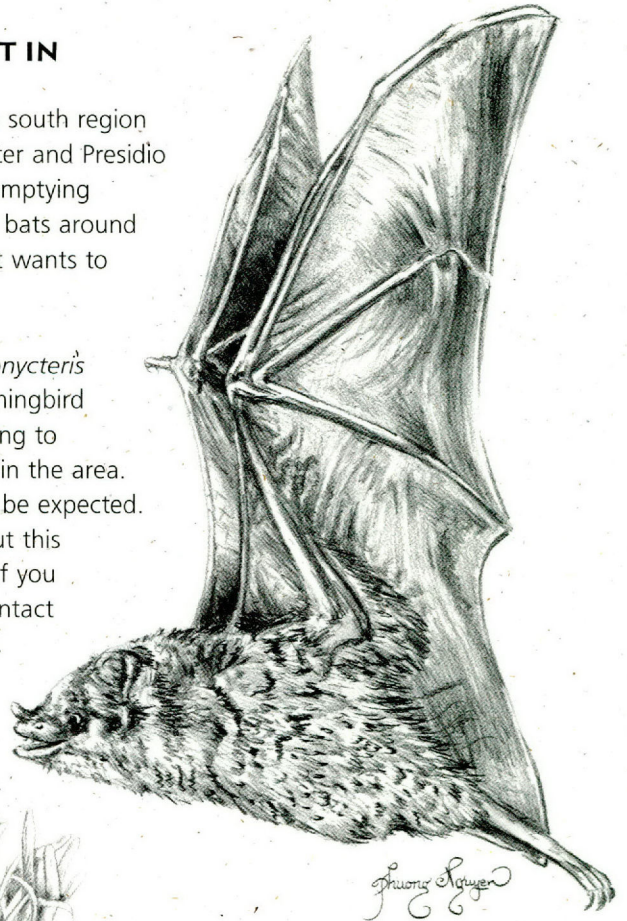
—Mike Wright

Glad to hear you enjoyed the Davis Mountains Hummingbird Festival. It is indeed a treat to see many birds that are new to us. That festival offers this diversity every year!

NEW MONITORING PROJECT IN EXTREME SOUTHWEST

Attention volunteers in the extreme south region along the Mexican border in Brewster and Presidio counties. Ever notice your feeders emptying mysteriously overnight? Do you see bats around your feeders? Then our new project wants to hear from you!

The Mexican Long-nosed Bat, *Leptonycteris nivalis*, is a frequent visitor to hummingbird feeders and our bat specialist is trying to determine if they are using feeders in the area. May to August is when they would be expected. The survey should tell us more about this species range and foraging habits. If you can help with this project please contact meg.goodman@tpwd.state.tx.us.





UPCOMING FESTIVALS AND WORKSHOPS

The list of Texas hummingbird festivals is ever growing. The three major events that focus on hummingbirds during fall migration are:

DAVIS MOUNTAINS HUMMINGBIRD FESTIVAL

August 19–21, Fort Davis, Texas

See Mike Wright's note about this festival on the Treasures of the Trans-Pecos page. This great festival offers diversity with an opportunity to see the birds in small groups on guided tours to popular sights. Register early, since this festival is gaining in popularity.

XTREME HUMMINGBIRD XTRAVAGANZA

September 11, Gulf Coast Bird Observatory, Lake Jackson, Texas

No, it is not a spelling mistake – this is a real extravaganza! Hundreds of Ruby-throated hummingbirds preparing to cross the Gulf are the big attraction at this festival. Banders, programs and lots of activities keep you active all day long. Rufous and Buff-bellied hummingbirds are the other possible rarities that could show up.

HUMMER/BIRD CELEBRATION

September 16–19, Rockport, Texas

The grand-daddy of all hummingbird festivals, this program offers more than 19 well known speakers from across the nation talking about hummingbirds, birds and the great outdoors. Fantastic outdoor exhibits, a well-stocked market place and great social opportunities combine with thousands of Ruby-throated hummingbirds (and the occasional Rufous or Buff-bellied to round things off) make this a great event.

There are also a number of other events that are beginning to take note of these flying wonders across our state. Upcoming workshops include Eagle Pass – May 27-31, Amarillo – July 31 and Waco – November 6-7.

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 2004 survey forms by **January 21, 2005** to the address above.



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