

THE TEXAS



HUMMER

SPRING 2013

A NEWSLETTER FOR TEXAS HUMMINGBIRD ROUNDUP PARTICIPANTS

HUMMINGBIRD ROUNDUP 2012

Another dry year in most of the state did not seem to discourage hummingbird diversity this year. Sixteen of the 18 species known for Texas were reported from the 66 counties that reported hummingbirds this year. Only the Berylline and the Green-breasted Mango were not reported in Texas this year. Unusual occurrences, like the White-eared Hummingbird seen early in the year in Wilson County or the Buff-bellied Hummingbird that was still in Austin early in 2013, create excitement and interest in these brilliantly colored aerobic wonders.

A look at our participation numbers shows that I have a lot of work to do, especially in West Texas, to generate new interest in the Hummingbird Roundup. Turn out at presentations and festivals remains high, but the number of individuals actually submitting a diary, or providing an anecdotal observation was down considerably. We received 176 reports from different individuals across the state. If you know of someone who might be interested in the project, please encourage them

to get involved. An interesting note is that, while participation in general was down, those reporting during the winter months, 134 individuals, were up slightly from last year and were a considerably greater percentage (76%) of the total participants (last year they represented only 51% of the total). And the winter observers did see birds! Harris County lead the winter count with eight species, but our perennial West Texas participants in Brewster and Jeff Davis counties were not far behind.

Three workshops held in the Dallas area this year were extremely well attended, with two having more than 80 participants each and the third hosting close to 50 participants. This shows that people are in fact interested in hummingbirds. Travel money is limited, so if you know a group interested in hosting a workshop, please have them contact us early.

Diversity in general was high this year with the vast majority of counties reporting multiple species. Brewster County was most diverse this year with 12 species being recorded. Most surprisingly, a Buff-bellied Humming-



*Ruby-throated
Hummingbirds
in Rockport*

bird was banded in the Christmas Mountains in mid-October. This eastern species was certainly not a bird the Brewster County participant was expecting to see at her feeders. While a West Texas county lead the way, East Texas was not without its diversity. Nine species were recorded in Harris County, and eight of them were seen through the winter! Other very diverse counties included Jeff Davis, Presidio, Travis, Brazoria, Nueces and Kendall. Surprisingly, the counties in the Lower Rio Grande Valley that are usually very diverse did not report many hummingbird species this year.

The new, electronic reporting method still has a few bumps that need to be ironed out, but it is working well enough that we have decided to continue with it. Essentially, you will receive three email forms each year, two when you start and one at the end of the year. Most of these forms are filled

out only once each year and returned. The third, a weekly diary, is filled out each week and sent back. If you are interested in participating this way, please send an email to mark.klym@tpwd.state.tx.us and the forms will be sent. We hope to have all the problems people are encountering with the last form cleared up soon and be able to post these forms for download on the website.

The message about the need to photograph unusual birds from your region has generated several new records for various counties this year. Remember, if it is in fact the first sighting in your county, we need either a photo or a very good description. If it is a bird that the Texas Ornithological Society seeks information about (White-eared, Costa's, Violet-crowned, Berylline, Green-breasted Mango, Green Violet-ear) then we also ask for a photo. Even a poor photo can give us enough information to confirm the bird.



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SHELTER – A KEY TO OVERWINTERING HUMMINGBIRDS

At one time I thought it was really easy to describe a “hummingbird garden.” All you needed was a bunch of flowering plants that produced a red, tubular flower. The birds would do the rest. After all, “if we feed them they will come,” right?

Well, if you really want to have a reliable hummingbird population in your garden, there is a little more that has to be done – especially if you want hummingbirds over the winter months.

What is so special about these homes in Brewster, Harris, Jeff Davis and other counties that have hummingbirds all year round? One thing I have noticed watching the Buff-bellied in Austin this winter and other wintering hummingbirds around the state is that, where we find winter hummingbirds, we almost always find lots of evergreen shelter.

Hummingbirds, like any other wildlife, require protection from predators, places to nest, and places to rest. During the winter months, we could also add protection from the elements – especially cold and wind. Plants that remain green year round, like liveoaks, juniper, etc. will be valued as places they can retreat to and find the protection they need. In addition, these plants may well be the only screening they can find to protect them from predators.

When designing or enhancing your garden this year, why not consider adding a bank of evergreen shelter to protect your birds through the winter. Who knows, you may soon be thanked by the beauty of hummingbirds in the cool winter months.



IDENTIFICATION TIPS

THOSE CONFUSING FEMALES

We received a question this year from an observer in Blanco County wanting assistance in identifying Ruby-throated and Black-chinned juveniles and females. When trying to separate females to species, I often look at:

1. **The overall color.** Black-chinned Hummingbirds generally show a more gray-green appearance than Ruby-throated Hummingbirds who are a more golden-green.

Continued on the next page



Costa's Hummingbird



Buff-bellied Hummingbird



Broad-billed Hummingbird

THREE GREAT HUMMERS IN 2012

By Carolyn Ohl-Johnson

2012 was a great year for hummers at my two homes. I have a house in Alpine, besides a house in the Christmas Mountains, 70 miles south of town, adjacent to Big Bend National Park.

In late June, I discovered a Broad-billed at my feeders in Alpine. Then, on October 19, as I was puttering around my habitat in the Christmas Mountains, I heard the unmistakable wing beat of a large hummer. When I located it, I thought it looked like a Buff-bellied, but knew that species had never been recorded in West Texas. Unbelievably excited, I called the hummingbird expert, Kelly Bryan.

"I've got a rare hummer here," I gushed. There's nothing like getting right to the point. (I only have an expensive long-distance calling card from there, so hardly ever make a long-distance call.)

He, of course, politely, and patiently, inquired, "What is it?"

"I don't know," I replied, truthfully, wanting to say "Buff-bellied," but lacking the temerity to do it. "Maybe a Berylline," I added, knowing he would know I was knowledge-

able enough to at least have some idea of what it was. "But it doesn't have a red bill." I figured that caveat would explain to him why I wasn't sure about the identification.

To my relief, he immediately said, "maybe it's a Buff-bellied." (It's always reassuring to know you're not crazy, or if you are, you're in good company.) I agreed, and informed him I was downloading pictures and would email them to him asap.

When he got the photos, he emailed me back that it was indeed a BUFH, probably a young male. The next day he came and banded it. The bill underside was indeed red, but it didn't show up in flight very well.

As if those two species weren't enough wonderful sightings for one year, on November 6, when Kelly arrived to do a routine banding session at the Christmas

Mountains place, he immediately spied a Costa's Hummingbird. We trapped and banded it, a molting male. Before we quit trapping, the bird went back into the trap a second time, something that doesn't happen very often. We fed it again and released it. This individual became the 42nd record for Texas. The following week we decided that if it went into the trap again we'd just not close the trap door. When that happens the birds feed and leave ... usually. However, this not-so-bright bird, couldn't find its way out of the trap, so Kelly was forced to reach in and put it out by hand. The bird stuck around through the 17th of November, then left before it finished molting, so I never did get photos of it with a beautiful new gorget.

I can only imagine what 2013 will bring, but I don't see how it could be more exciting than 2012 was.

IDENTIFICATION TIPS, CONTINUED

- 2. Tail to wing ratio if I can see it.** Ruby-throated Hummingbirds in general have a longer tail than to Black-chinned Hummingbirds. In Ruby-throated females the tail will often extend beyond the tip of the wings
- 3. Crown color.** Black-chinned Hummingbird females will almost always have gray color in the crown where Ruby-throated Hummingbird crowns will be green. Incidentally,

Black-chinned males will have this same trait only much darker with the whole head often appearing black.

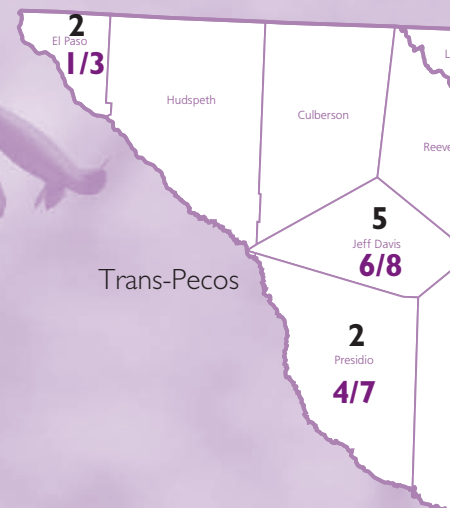
To diagnostically differentiate juveniles from females, look for the buff color on the edging of the body feathers. This trait gives very young birds a "scaly" appearance, and gradually wears paler as the season progresses. By the time the trait is gone though, you should easily be identifying juvenile males by the developing gorget.

PLANT PREFERENCE FOR 2012

Plant Species	Percent of Observers Reporting
Salvia (assorted species)	18.05%
Turk's Cap	9.46%
Lantana	8.3%
Honeysuckle	5.94%
Flame Acanthus	5.54%
Trumpet Vine	3.96%
Shrimp Plant (non-native)	2.77%
Hamelia (non-native)	2.77%
Crossvine	1.98%
Cypress Vine	1.98%
Desert Willow	1.58%
Yellow Bells (Esperanza)	1.58%
Four-o'clock	1.19%
Texas Star Hibiscus	1.19%
Zinnia (non-native)	1.19%
Butterfly Bush (non-native)	1.19%
Canna (non-native)	1.19%
Firecracker Fern (non-native)	1.19%
Holly Hock (non-native)	1.19%

TOP 17 MOST HUMMINGBIRD-DIVERSE COUNTIES IN 2012


Brewster	12	Bandera	5
Harris	9	Cameron	5
Jeff Davis	8	DeWitt	5
Presidio	7	Fort Bend	5
Brazoria	6	Hidalgo	5
Kendall	6	Lubbock	5
Nueces	6	Parmer	5
Travis	6	Uvalde	5
Walker	6		



A&M nature guides

Hummingbirds of Texas

By Clifford E. Shackelford, Madge M. Lindsay, and C. Mark Klym. Photographs by Ted and Nancy Arnold. Illustrations by Clarence Swanson III.



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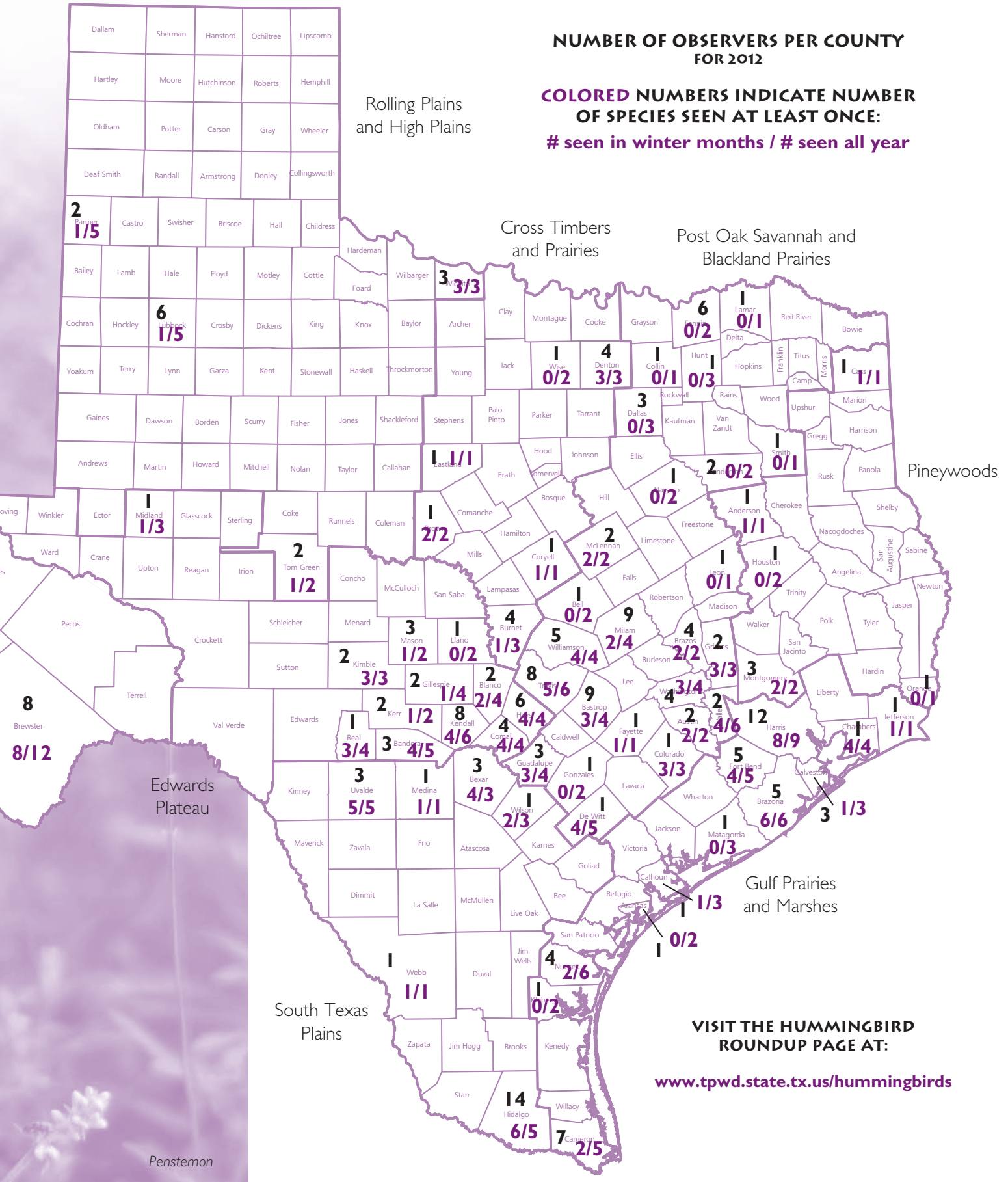
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NUMBER OF OBSERVERS PER COUNTY FOR 2012

COLORED NUMBERS INDICATE NUMBER OF SPECIES SEEN AT LEAST ONCE:

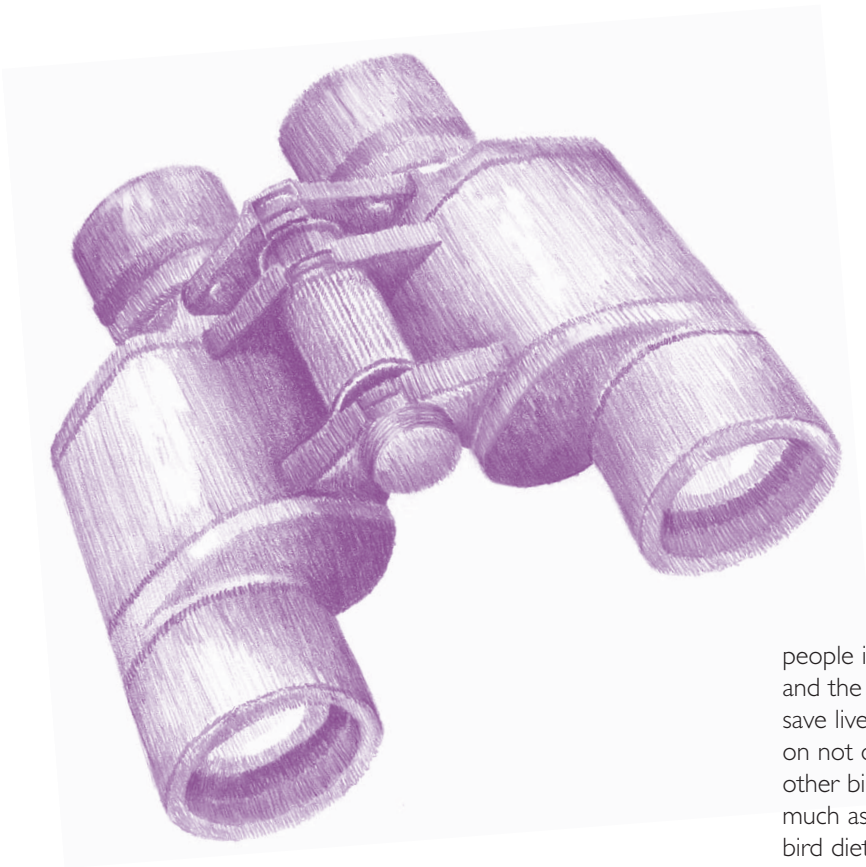
seen in winter months / # seen all year



VISIT THE HUMMINGBIRD ROUNDUP PAGE AT:

www.tpwd.state.tx.us/hummingbirds





OBSERVERS' COMMENTS

This page is set aside for comments from those of you participating in the Roundup and for responses from Roundup staff. The big topic in the comments and questions section at the end of the survey this year was the drought.

The first comment, from a Fannin County observer:

Did you field test the calendar form?

We have had some observers who have had difficulty with the form, but most seem to do okay with it. Basically, we are asking for only one report per week for each species. The species code (found at the bottom of the last page) should be entered and then the highest number each of males, females and juveniles you saw that week. As you use it, it becomes easier. Where we usually have problems is when people have more than three species in their garden during the week. Most of them simply copy the form and continue filling in on the next page.

Also from Fannin County:

I did not have as much time to observe this year. Is this amount of hours helpful to you or do you really need two hours a week?

Any time you can give us is important, since any data we receive is more data than we have now. Please, unless you are reporting the hours to another group, be sure to include your volunteer hours on your report, since they are important in securing grant money.

From Denton County:

We did not see many hummers this year. West Nile was very bad in Denton County and our town decided to fog and later aerial spraying.

I understand the reasoning for the county electing to spray. The virus took the lives of many

people in North Texas in 2011 and the action was taken to save lives. However, the impact on not only hummingbirds but other birds was significant. As much as 60% of the hummingbird diet is insects, and if the pesticide killed insects, the birds had nothing to eat.

We had a couple of questions asking for identification help.

From Lubbock County:

Repetitive behavior used to identify a particular hummingbird is interesting. Even though I begin to observe a certain bird that uses the same perch for two months...

This has been shown by banders on many occasions to be an unreliable means of identifying an individual bird, and the reasoning is simple – if the perch was good for one bird, would it not be good for another bird? Banders, on marking individual birds, have found that the bird that goes to the same perch repeatedly turns out to be several different birds – especially during migration.

Also from Lubbock County:

I don't notice much change in their feathers, throat, etc. How gradual is the immature to mature status?

Most of the molt from immature feathers to mature plumage occurs during the winter months, when most of these birds are not in Texas. This transition is gradual – a few feathers at a time. The bird cannot be without feather protection, so it can not shed them all at once.

From Montgomery County:

I need experiencing in determining a juvenile bird.

I am going to answer this two different ways. I do not spend much time in workshops on how to know a juvenile bird. By the peak of migration, most juvenile males are pretty easy to spot – they are the ones with the incomplete gorgets! This does not help early in the year or with juvenile females though. Young birds are the ones that have a scalloped or scale like appearance to their back caused by the pale edges on their feathers that wear gradually as they approach that first winter.

As far as how to determine what species they are, they carry features very similar to the females of their species, so look for the female characteristics.

A lot of observers commented on numbers, associating numbers with the weather.

From Bexar County:

Hummers have had a tough time the last two years, due to the drought.

From Gillespie County:

Birding for 2012 was odd all year due to weather – rain in spring and dry the rest of the year.

From Burnet County:

We loved this year's hummers but sure saw a lot less.

And from Milam County:

We had fewer birds this year than last.

From Fannin County:

The dry summer seems to have reduced the hummingbirds.

And from Wichita County:

Dry conditions — we had few plants or flowers even in the pastures. Mostly Texas sage and autumn sage blossomed.

Dry conditions are one of the times when features in your garden become critical. As the Wichita County observer noted, native plants will still bloom and produce nectar, even when it is dry. The Bexar County observer went on to talk about how he puts out water for the hummingbirds, but all of the birds use it. It is important to think of more than just food as we provide for these birds.

In keeping with the weather theme...

From Montgomery County:

Cold front in late September caused most of the migrating hummers to move on.

This would be what we would expect. Cold fronts have winds out of the north – favorable winds for a tiny bird that is likely to fly around the Gulf of Mexico.

Several comments were received about Rufous Hummingbirds.

From Brazos County:

I observed my first Rufous Hummingbird of the year. He only stayed for 12 days, but throughout November and December there have been several R/A hummers.

From Bastrop County:

4th winter for the Rufous Hummingbird.

And from Harris County:

An incredible year for RUHU and R/A. Usually we have 0 to 1 bird per year since the late 1990s. Best overwintering number of species with 4 in January and February.

I saw this last location. It was phenomenal for the diversity.

And in keeping with the diversity theme...

From Jeff Davis County:

Slim year – no Lucifer or Calliope, although more Anna's.

As we mentioned in the introduction, the numbers for Jeff Davis County were lower than expected – possibly due to the impact of the 2011 fires.



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COUNTING VOLUNTEER HOURS

Funding for a number of Texas Parks and Wildlife programs is possible only with federal grants. These grants sometimes require a match of funds or in kind services from the state, and volunteer hours used on some projects can be used to meet this match – but only once.

This is why Texas Nature Trackers (including Texas Hummingbird Roundup), Texas Master Naturalists and other programs ask that you keep track of the hours you spend on the programs. We do have to ask however that you report these hours only once. The forms have a question “Will your hours be reported to Master Naturalist?” Please answer that question yes, or simply leave your hours blank if you are reporting them anyplace other than Texas Hummingbird Roundup.



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 2013 survey forms by **Jan. 17, 2014**, to the address above.

HOW TO PROPERLY HANG YOUR HUMMINGBIRD FEEDERS

By Carolyn Ohl-Johnson

One would think you just fill up a clean feeder, flip it over, and hang it, but without guidelines nine out of ten people do it wrong. Not that long ago I was in the larger group.

What difference does it make? It makes all the difference in the world. If not hung properly, you'll eventually have so many bees at your feeders, you'll probably just quit feeding hummers.

The good news is that doing it right is just as easy as doing it wrong. So here goes:

First, have the hanger in place, preferably with an ant guard hanging from it. Then fill your feeder, and do not flip it until you get to the spot you intend to hang it. Once there, flip the feeder over quickly without letting the basin fill with solution. Hummers can reach far deeper into the feeder for sugar water than bees, so it's important to keep the solution out of the bees reach. If you hear the liquid gugging into the basin as you're hanging it, you're doing it wrong. One or two gurgles probably won't make a difference, but any more than that probably will.

That's all there is to it. Of course, you want to keep your feeders clean and have no sugar water on the outside. Use a four parts water to one part sugar mixture with no food coloring added.

If your feeders get tipped by high wind, people, animals or whatever, the best remedy is to empty the solution into a bowl or pitcher, rinse the feeder good, and start over. It's not nearly as much aggravation as dealing with bees is. And if you do have bees, you might need to relocate the feeder to a new location for a while, being sure to adhere to the above guidelines.

Note: Some feeders are more bee resistant than others. For more information go to <http://westtexashummingbirds.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/Proper-Care-and-Feedingv2.pdf>

FESTIVALS AND WORKSHOPS

The **Rockport** festival is always the second full weekend after Labor Day, putting it the weekend of September 12 to 15. This festival offers great educational and hummingbird viewing opportunities. It is centered out of the school complex. Information can be obtained through the Rockport Fulton Chamber of Commerce.

The **X-treme Hummingbird X-travaganza** will run again this year each weekend in September. Bird banding and educational activities abound at the Gulf Coast Bird Observatory in Lake Jackson. Contact GCBO for more information.

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.

