

THE TEXAS



HUMMER

SPRING 2006

A NEWSLETTER FOR TEXAS HUMMINGBIRD ROUNDUP PARTICIPANTS

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HUMMINGBIRD ROUNDUP 2005

The nesting season hummingbirds are beginning to show for the 2006 season, and it is time to summarize the results of the 2005 survey. There were a number of positive notes for the 2005 season – 16 of the 18 species known for the state were seen (with a 17th reported early in 2006!), our participation numbers were up, more counties were reporting in and, in general, most regions reported a very good hummingbird year.

Diversity for 2005 was certainly significant across the state. Several areas reported new species – certainly one of the highlights in this regard was the White-eared Hummingbird reported from Lubbock County. Across the state, very few counties reported only one species of hummingbird. The county with the greatest diversity for the state shifted significantly to the east. It appears the festival in Fort Davis was held on the right weekend – they reported 9 species for the weekend and the county recorded 10 species for the

year! The two species missing for this year were Berylline and Costa's hummingbirds – with Costa's being reported early in 2006 (that's one that should be an addition next season!)

Participation climbed significantly this year. Through the season, 376 reports were received from counties encompassing every ecoregion of the state. In the Trans-Pecos, no reports were received from Hudspeth, Reeves, Pecos or Terrell counties, but other counties saw some fluidity in their numbers. People visiting the region and reporting hummingbirds significantly increased the numbers from Brewster and Jeff Davis counties. Clearly more emphasis is needed in the Trans-Pecos, the southern end of the great plains and the panhandle.

Most of the state reported significant increases in hummingbird numbers, often associated with specific weather events. See the notes from observers about the impact of hurricanes on



Photo by John Davis
Hummingbird at Turk's Cap

the hummingbird numbers. While we certainly do not wish another devastating hurricane season, the excitement created by swarming hummingbirds was certainly a welcome diversion.

Some changes have been made to the Hummingbird Roundup web site! Designed to make the page more user friendly, the changes include diversity lists for various ecoregions, identification tips, gardening advice and more. Changes will continue, with plans to make data available online (for review only), plans to make it possible to submit reports online (especially for rare birds and out-of-range occurrences). A listserve

managed out of the University of Houston has been very helpful. Those who like to share their birding experiences online might want to subscribe to TX-Hummer (listserv@listserv.uh.edu).

The big news of the year though is something many have waited more than five years to hear – book is in print! Some of you must have purchased it already, since sales are reported as very strong, but each of you contributed to the effort in some way. For those that have not seen it, information is available online at <http://www.tamu.edu/upress/BOOKS/2005/shackelford.htm>.



IDENTIFICATION NOTES

"I would like to know how to identify males, females and immature bird" writes an observer from Nueces County. Another, from Harris County notes "the addition of the category "J" for juvenile is confusing. We used "J" for immature males, exclusively."

This was one of the concerns we had with the addition of the juvenile category – people would find it confusing. Realistically, the only birds easily identified in the field as juveniles are the young males as their gorget molts and develops the adult male coloration. Young females, for the most part, resemble their adult counterparts. Even very young males will have a very "female" like appearance.

Female hummingbirds are generally less colorful than the males. Gender differentiation, with the exception of the Buff-bellied/Berylline and Green Violet-ear species is generally quite easy, although as an observer from Travis County pointed out *"I had a very difficult time trying to figure out if I had RTHU or*

BCHU" – differentiating the species of female or juvenile can be quite difficult.

In general, the "J" should reflect males for the most part. If you are seeing color in the throat area (other than a small (about four feathers) cluster directly in the middle of the throat), it is probably safe to assume you are looking at a juvenile male. White tips to the tail, and an overall duller coloration than the adult males and a smaller size than the females can also indicate a juvenile male.

The only species of hummingbird that has white on the tip of the tail as an adult male is

the Blue-throated Hummingbird, so for most of the state if you are seeing white on the tip of the tail of a bird, you are looking at a female or a juvenile male. Female hummingbirds, like that gender in most birds, are generally a more subdued color pattern than the adult males. While adult male Ruby-throated hummingbirds will often show as a rich deep gold green color, the same species of female will generally be a paler green gold color. By the end of the summer, when migration is at its peak, juvenile males will generally show some color in their throat area.

Differentiating within close species is more a matter of looking for characteristics that remain constant in the

birds. In the case of RTHU and BCHU, I prefer to look at the wing to tail ratio. Female BCHU will have a tail that ends very close to the tip of the wings while the RTHU tail sticks out beyond the tip of the wings. A Lubbock County resident reported a bird that had *"wings were longer than tail."* This would have lead me to the same conclusion she reached – Calliope Hummingbird.

This series of photos shows some male/female comparisons for RTHU and BCHU.



Photo by Larry Goodman
Male juvenile Ruby-throated Hummingbird



TPWD Photo
Adult male Ruby-throated Hummingbirds



Photo by Susan Schaezler
Female Black-chinned Hummingbird



Photo by Larry Goodman
Juvenile Black-chinned Hummingbird



Photo by LeeAnn Sharp
Male Black-chinned Hummingbird

OBSERVERS COMMENTS

An observer in Fort Bend County notes:

"I did not put down observation hours – I watch whenever I am in view of the feeder."

Another observer, in Burnet County notes:

"I rarely just sit and watch them – my feeders are visible from my kitchen work area."

This is probably the case with most of us – recording observation hours often has to be an estimate more than a hard number. The observation hours help us in a number of ways. They help to correlate the effort to the number of birds observed. They help us to understand what features in the population trigger more effort – are we more likely to observe when numbers are high or when the population is on a down swing? If you can estimate hours, it certainly adds to the data.

A McLennan County observer states:

"On Aug. 24, 2005, I took photographs of a "larger hummer" that "just looked different." When looking at the digital photos on my computer, I saw red feathers

on top of the head. I sent two photos of the bird to Mark Klym via email."

The photos certainly help in documenting an unusual bird, like this Anna's Hummingbird in a county they do not normally appear in. This was certainly the year for Anna's though, with several documented around the state including at least five individuals in Harris County most of the winter.

A Hidalgo County participant relates a nice story.

"On May 22, I was called to see a hummingbird nest in a tree in my front yard. The man who mows my lawn discovered it. The nest contained two tiny eggs. I am 84, but he insisted I climb a ladder, to see this

wonderful sight.... He was so excited about the "chiparosa" nest!"

This story again shows what we all know – the wonder and attraction of these beautiful birds.

And then there is the storm and its effect on bird numbers, our visitors and possibly the birds themselves. A McLennan County participant writes:

"Sept. 25th – Banged up hummers. Many missing flight, chest feathers. (hurricane weather injuries?)"

While many, as we see below, reported increased numbers, this is the only report I have received of possible injuries. If others noted injuries, I would like to hear about them.

Other hurricane-related notes:

From Shelby County:

"I had 12 Hurricane Rita evacuees staying for a couple of weeks. What they remember is not cramped lodgings, strange cooking arrangements and no air conditioning. The hummingbirds arrived, or were driven back, en masse (around 30!) and that is what my friends' memories are."

From Chambers County:

"I was feeding approximately 30 to 40 birds until shortly after Louisiana was struck by Hurricane Katrina. Following that, the number of birds increased dramatically to between one and two hundred. I was maintaining 12 feeders and was refilling some to all of them daily. This is in addition to the many plants I had blooming ... This continued until southeast Texas, including the Chambers County area was struck by Hurricane Rita... We cleaned and refilled the feeders and the birds returned."



Photo by Mark Klym
Buff-bellied Hummingbird



Photo by John Davis
Hummingbird at Red Yucca



FAVORED HUMMINGBIRD PLANTS FOR 2005

Coral Honeysuckle • Lantana
Salvia • Trumpet Vine • Turk's Cap

MOST DIVERSE COUNTIES OF SPECIES OBSERVED

Aransas County	8
Brazoria County	9
Brewster County	9
Cameron County	8
Harris County	11
Jeff Davis County	10
Lubbock County	8
Nueces County	11
Victoria County	9

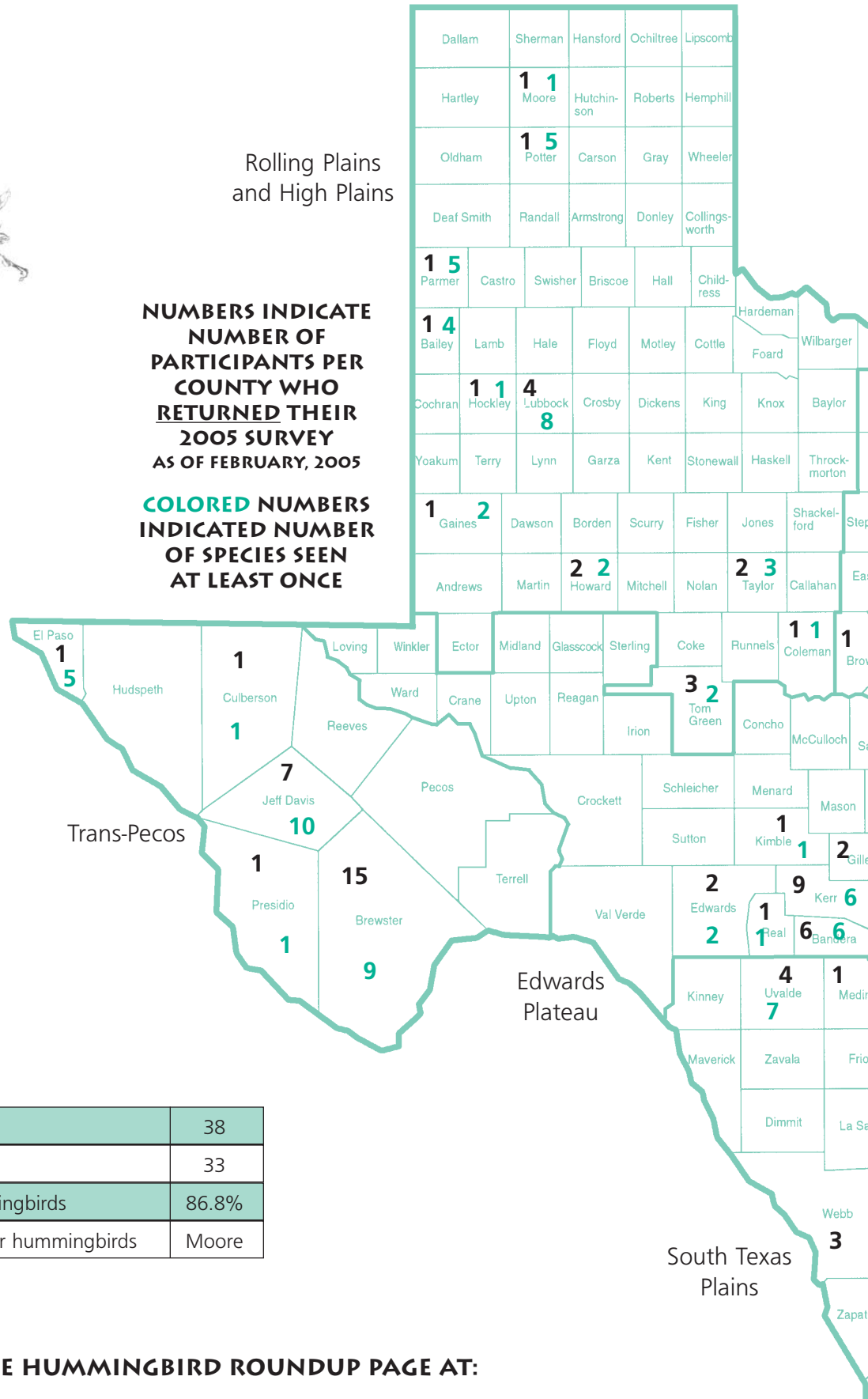
WINTER OBSERVATIONS

Counties with winter observers	38
Counties with winter observations	33
Percent counties seeing winter hummingbirds	86.8%
Farthest county north reporting winter hummingbirds	Moore

Rolling Plains and High Plains

NUMBERS INDICATE NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS PER COUNTY WHO RETURNED THEIR 2005 SURVEY AS OF FEBRUARY, 2005

COLORED NUMBERS INDICATED NUMBER OF SPECIES SEEN AT LEAST ONCE



VISIT THE HUMMINGBIRD ROUNDUP PAGE AT:

www.tpwd.state.tx.us/learning/texas_nature_trackers/hummingbird_roundup/

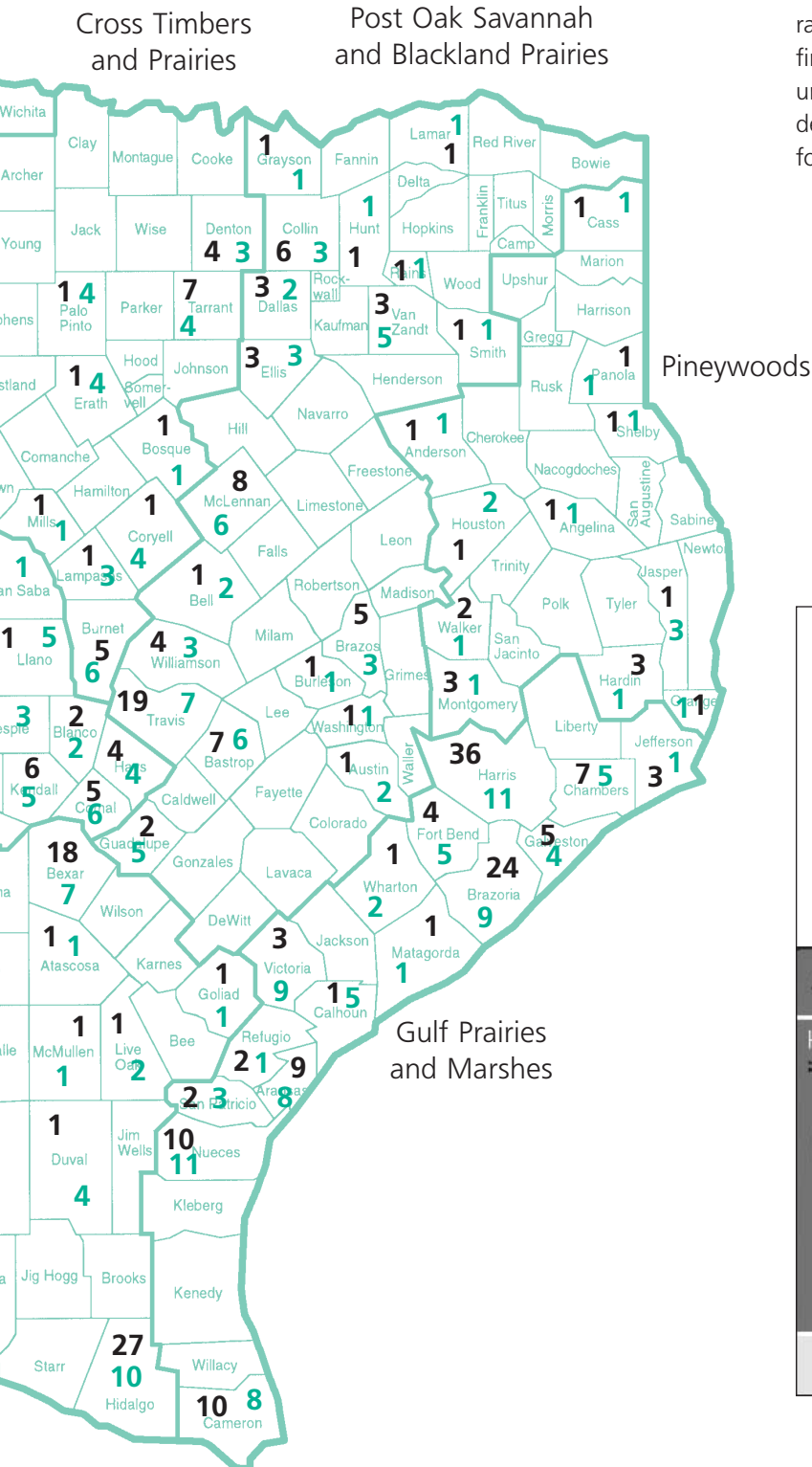


THE BIG SURPRISE OF THE YEAR

Excitement rippled through the birding world and newspapers from across the nation grabbed the story when Lubbock, Texas recorded their first ever White-eared Hummingbird this summer. Photos of the bird were published in papers across the nation after the Associated Press ran an article outlining the find. This bird was in an urban garden, but the garden was well landscaped for hummingbirds!




Photo by
Brandon Best




IT'S HERE

One of the goals introduced early in the Roundup was the plan to use some of the information we received through the roundup to produce a book on the hummingbirds of the Lone Star State. In September, at the Hummer-Bird Celebration, Texas A&M Press unveiled *Hummingbirds of Texas*, and it is selling fast. Throughout the book are quotes, statements and stories provided by participants in the Roundup.



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NESTING HUMMINGBIRDS

An Anderson County participant writes: *“Where is the best places to look for hummingbird nests here in East Texas?”*

Hummingbird habitat is probably best described by the shelter available to the birds. Sheri Williamson in *The Peterson Field Guides Hummingbirds of North America* describes this bird as nesting in... *“Breeds in hardwood (maple, birch, oak, poplar), pine and mixed forest, woodlands, forest edges, and clearings, orchards, gardens.”* The common theme in surveys that have reported finding nests in the Roundup is the presence of mature

trees on those properties. Ruby-throated hummingbirds, being a more eastern species where mature trees often mean plants of greater than 30-foot height, have been known to nest high in the canopies making their nests more difficult to observe. That said, we have had Ruby-throated hummingbirds nest within view of the main entrance doors at the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department headquarters in Austin, in trees that were not mature

trees, and relatively close to the ground.

In general, wildlife that produces a successful nest is going to produce it in a location that is not easily found and is well protected. Shrub and brush nesting species that tend to nest close to the ground are more likely to nest in a thick shrub, like elbow bush, huisache, cat claw, than in an open shrub like American beauty-berry. A Buff-bellied Hummingbird nest I encountered at the Valley Nature Center in McAllen was in brush so thick that, although the bird was nesting less than six feet in front of me and right at eye level, I did not see it until it was pointed out to me – three times!

So how do you find a hummingbird nest? While there are some who are relatively successful at looking for hummingbird nests in unfamiliar locations, generally the best time to find these nests is in the spring when the female is constructing the nest. Follow

her (with your eyes or binoculars – not physically please) while she is carrying materials and watch where she repeatedly enters the tree or bush. The nest is not going to be THERE, but it will be relatively close. If you find a nest, take a quick look, take photos and then leave the nest alone – this will ensure the greatest chance of success.

Parks, woodlands, nature centers and similar facilities offer the greatest chance of seeing a nest away from our own gardens. Often the naturalists at these facilities will have known nests to feature on their nature walks and similar tours. The Hummingbird Bed and Breakfast in Christoval, Texas (Tom Green County) flags nests when they are located so that their visitors can find them easily.

Where can I find nests? Look for areas of thick cover within one mile of a feeder that is active during the nesting season. When you see females entering the cover repeatedly, the nest is going to be close.



TPWD Photo
Black-chinned Hummingbird



TREASURES OF THE TRANS-PECOS

Observers in Brewster and El Paso counties reported hummingbirds present at the start of the 2005 season. In El Paso County these were Broad-tailed and Anna’s hummingbirds while in Brewster the carry over from 2004 was a Rufous Hummingbird. Both counties also carried birds into 2006, in both cases an Anna’s Hummingbird. Jeff Davis county had both Rufous and Anna’s Hummingbirds well into December, but they were not present at the New Year.

There is a note in the reports from Jeff Davis County that may indicate that the unusual spike in population that was experienced that third week in September may have been statewide. *“...our hummers peaked in late July this year. Many, many hummers in swarms around all feeders. Another Big Surge 3rd week in September. Almost as many as in July.”* Interestingly the species diversity in these two surges is very similar with only the addition of the Magnificent Hummingbird in the September list that was not reported in July and August.

While no counties in West Texas had more than 10 species reported this year, the region reported eleven different species.

SPECIES REPORTED AND COUNTIES REPORTING

Allen’s	Jeff Davis
Anna’s	Brewster, El Paso, Jeff Davis
Black-chinned	Brewster, El Paso, Jeff Davis
Blue-throated	Brewster, we had verbal reports from Jeff Davis but no written record
Broad-tailed	Brewster, Culberson, El Paso, Jeff Davis
Calliope	Brewster, El Paso, Jeff Davis
Lucifer	Brewster, Jeff Davis
Magnificent	Jeff Davis, Presidio
Ruby-throated	Jeff Davis
Rufous	Brewster, El Paso, Jeff Davis
White-eared	Brewster, Jeff Davis

PREFERRED PLANTS IN WEST TEXAS

Honeysuckle (not specified) • Native Morning Glory
 Penstemons • Salvias • Scarlet Guara
 Tree Tobacco • Trumpet Vine

REFLECTIONS ON A HUMMINGBIRD SEASON

January 1, 2005. I was fortunate to welcome the dawn of a new year with four hummingbirds of three species visiting my garden. A walk through the garden this winter unfailingly brought the chatter of a Rufous Hummingbird blended with the songs of cardinals, finches and wrens.

Spring was unusually wet this year, and promised a great summer. Then came the storms. In August we were already witnessing the fourth major hurricane of the season, and it was a dandy. Between the storms, hummingbird numbers climbed. We got reports of amazing hummingbird activity in East Texas, the Hill Country, the Rio Grande Valley and even some hints from Dallas. September brought yet another storm to East Texas, and

hummingbird numbers skyrocketed – but another number, rainfall, was plummeting!

The drought really set in at the end of the year for most of the state. Without rain, wildflowers, and thus nectar, are essentially non-existent. Our hummingbird habitats will be increasingly important this year. Is this why the big number of Anna's in East Texas this year? Is this why White-eared hummingbirds were wandering this summer? We can not say for certain, but it is definite that, as water and thus water related resources become scarce our habitats should become more popular.

The new year is already bringing some interesting and exciting bird reports. Maybe this year the Berylline?

FEELING FESTIVE?

Why not plan to attend one of the hummingbird festivals Texas will host this year?

August 16-20 will be the Davis Mountains Hummingbird Festival in Fort Davis. Information can be found at <http://www.cdri.org/DMHBFestival/10th.htm>. This festival may fill up fast this year, so you will want to watch their site and register early.

September 9 is the date for this year's Xtreme Hummingbird Xtravaganza at the Gulf Coast Bird Observatory in Lake Jackson. Information is not yet available online but should be found at <http://www.gcbo.org/xhx.html> shortly.

September 14-17 is the Rockport-Fulton Hummer-bird Celebration in Rockport on the Gulf coast. Thousands of hummingbirds will be staging there for the migration south, and this festival always offers some wonderful hummingbird experiences. Information is not yet available but should be found at <http://www.1rockport.org/>.

THEY CAUGHT US

Arizona documented its 18th species of hummingbird this year, and of all species it was the Ruby-throated Hummingbird. So Texas can still say we have the most hummingbird species in the nation, but we are in a tie for first!

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 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 2006 survey forms by **Jan. 19, 2007**, to the address above.


THE TEXAS HUMMER
is a publication of
Texas Parks and Wildlife Department's
Wildlife Diversity Program
Written by Mark Klym, Editor



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PWD BR W7000-242J (4/06)