BROAD-TAILED HUMMINGBIRD (SELASPHORUS PLATYCERCUS), FIRST FOR ALABAMA

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When Dot Grove of Anniston (Calhoun Co.) looked out her window on 8 December 1994 and saw a hummingbird feeding on flowers in her back yard, she didn't realize she was looking at a bird never before seen in Alabama. But she did think that seeing a hummingbird in December was unusual enough to mention the experience to friends.

When word of the winter sighting reached Homer McMaron, he called Bill Summerour of nearby Jacksonville, as he occasionally does to talk about birds in the Anniston area. Summerour called Mrs. Grove to inquire about the sighting, but was told that she had seen it only the one time at her Salvia (Salvia sp.) and she was not aware of hummingbird feeders in the neighborhood. She had taken her feeder down at the end of the summer, but decided to put it back out and call Summerour if the bird reappeared.

Four days later, on the morning of 12 December, Mrs. Grove telephoned Dr. Summerour to inform him that the hummingbird had reappeared and was using her feeder. That afternoon Summerour tentatively identified the hummingbird as a Broad-tailed. The next morning he returned with a Questar spotting scope to study in more detail the gorget feathers and the pattern of rufous color in the tail. This confirmed that the hummer was indeed a Broad-tailed, the first recorded in Alabama and the fourth east of the Mississippi River.

The Broad-tailed is the eighth species of hummingbirds known to occur

in Alabama. Five of them have been identified since 1988. The others are the Magnificent (Eugenes fulgens), Ruby-throated (Archilochus colubris), Black-chinned (Archilochus alexandri), Anna's (Calypte anna), Calliope (Stellula calliope), Rufous (Selasphorus rufus) and Allen's (Selasphorus sasin). In addition a Buff-bellied (Amazilia yucatanensis) was seen by the senior author at Fort Morgan (Baldwin Co.) on the Alabama coast on 8 April 1991, but is listed as hypothetical.

On 14 December we met Dr. Summerour at the Grove residence in Anniston and soon observed the bird at the feeder and at several perches where it was hawking insects. As we prepared our trapping gear we were approached and scolded by this very active and vocal hummer. The vocalizations were completely different from the harsher notes common to the other two members of the genus, the Rufous and the Allen's. The bird also gave a series of chipping notes that Martha (my wife) and I recognized as being the same as those from a Broad-tailed we had captured and banded on 4 December. A single distinctive chip note was also heard. Interestingly, the bird displayed very aggressive behavior toward songbirds present in the yard. In the course of observing this behavior, we were able to observe flashes of the distinctive rose-magenta color present on the gorget feather that had been so well described previously by Dr. Summerour. The rufous at the base of the tail feathers was difficult to see in detail, but appeared to be confined to the outer retrices. There also appeared to be an unusual amount of black visible in the partially spread tail and it seemed to be uncharacteristically long and wide

(Figure 1). The blue-green color that was prominent on the back changed to mostly green on the wide central retrix. As the bird acquires it's adult plumage, it will molt all of the flight feathers present at fledging. The outer, or tenth sub-adult primary, will be replaced by a feather having a distinctive excurved tip. This excurved tip will enable the adult male to produce a very loud metallic trill used in courtship displays and to defend it's breeding territory.

Dr. Summerour made note of the deeper wing sound and a barely audible muted trill produced by the outer primaries. The deeper wing sounds are normal for a hummingbird having long wings.

Figure 1. Immature male Broad-tailed hummingbird banded in Anniston. Note the wide tail, broad, all green central retrices, rufous at base of the outer retrices and extensive black in tail. A combination of size, rufous in the tail, and rose-magenta in the gorget feathers identified this hummer as a Broad-tailed.

Once the bird was trapped and positively identified while within a wire cage, it was placed in a small cloth bag and taken indoors for banding (#8000 T82529) and measuring. Measurements recorded were: wing-48.81mm; tail-30.90mm; exposed culmen-19.38mm; and weight-3.31 grams. There were no detectable fatty deposits, but the bird appeared normal in all other respects. The overall condition was excellent.

Adult males are readily identified in the field by their wing trill, large size, blue-green back coloration, iridescent rose-magenta gorget and rufous at the base of the tail feathers. Females and immature are more of a challenge, but can usually be field identified by a combination of their large size, blue-green back, rufous at the base of the outer retrices and the rose-magenta iridescence in the gorget feathers.

It was determined that this bird was a hatching year male (calendar year 1994) based on the accepted standard of bill striation being the best indicator of immature hummingbirds (Baltosser, 1987, *North American Bird Bander* 12:151-166). The techniques used for sexing hummingbirds are generally governed by the species involved. In the Broad-tailed, the amount of color on each individual gorget feather is a prominent indicator. In females the rose-magenta color is confined to the very tip of the feather and is less brilliant than that of the male. As in other hummingbirds, the female is normally larger than the male and will have a longer wing. The measurement of 48.81mm put our subject in the range expected for a male. The culmen was long for a male, but the measurement may not have been reliable since many of the tiny

feathers were missing at the point of the measurement where they impinge on the upper mandible. The extensive green on the sides, immediately under the wing, was also an additional indication for a male.

The only other banding records for Broad-tailed hummingbird east of the Mississippi River have been from Tifton (Tift Co.) and Atlanta (Dekalb Co.), Georgia, and a single bird from Carriere (Pearl River Co.), Mississippi. All were banded in the winter and were young males. Approximately twenty Broad-taileds have been documented by Nancy Newfield (Louisiana State University) as part of a pioneering study of hummingbirds in Louisiana (pers.comm). On 30 January 1995 a female was seen by the authors in Gulfport (Harrison Co.), Mississippi, and a second year male was sighted in another yard in Diamondhead (Hancock Co.), Mississippi on 31 January. Both were identified by the field marks described and vocalizations.

Broad-tailed hummingbirds winter mostly in the mountain regions of Central America and migrate northward into Southern Arizona by late February and early March. They reach Northern Arizona by early April and arrive in Colorado from late April through May (Calder, et al, 1994, *The Birds of North America*, No. 16). Most young are fledged in June and July and migrate south shortly thereafter. During this time they are common in the high mountain meadows, feeding heavily on a variety of flowers that are available during the shortened blooming season at higher elevations. Like most hummingbirds, an essential part of their diet is small bodied insects. Calder, et al, 1994 (*The Birds of North America*, No. 16) found certain flowers were favored as a source

of food such as Delphinium nelsoni, Ipomopsis aggregata, Castilleja miniata and Delphinium barbeyi

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to the members and supporters of the Hummer/Bird Study Group, Inc. that continue to make our hummingbird research possible. We would also like to acknowledge the assistance of Dr. Bill Summerour, who not only located and identified this Broad-tailed, but offered suggestions regarding the preparation of this paper. **Robert R. and Martha B. Sargent**, P.O. Box 250, Clay, Alabama 35048-0250

OSPREY (PANDION HALIAETUS) FEEDS ON CARRION WITH TURKEY VULTERS (CATHARTES AURA)

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On 28 July 1994, while driving north on highway 39, Stewart Co., Georgia, with a van-load of ornithology students, six turkey vultures were observed on the road opposite the entrance to the Eufaula National Wildlife Refuge, Bradley Unit. As we approached, some of the vultures flew, exposing a light-colored bird feeding among them. An approaching car from the north caused all of the vultures to fly, leaving the light-colored bird, that we identified as an Osprey in sole possession of the remains of a badly decomposed opossum (Didelphis virginiana). The Osprey flew off with the opossum, but dropped it.

Although the osprey is known to eat dead fish, it does not usually feed