

# Notes

## Broad-billed Hummingbird: New to Ontario and Canada

The twenty-first of October 1989 dawned like any other, but there was a sense of urgency in my pace as I hurried to shave and shower. The night before, Doug Sadler had called to advise that he had spoken to a couple from Buckhorn who wanted advice on how they could save their little hummingbird from the inclement weather that prevailed throughout the past week. After querying them on its field marks, doubt certainly remained as to its identity. Regardless, he gave good advice on feeding and avoidance of disturbance. Their suggestion regarding capture was quickly thwarted, as the bird would likely die from the shock. The field marks offered indicated a Rufous Hummingbird (*Selasphorus rufus*), as it was described as having some small amount of brownish colouration about the lower tail area. Certainly, this would be the expected species at this late date.

The Rufous Hummingbird would have been new to the County of Peterborough, so it was with this thought in mind that we headed out at 0730h on that Saturday morning. Arriving at the small lakeside house just south of Buckhorn in Smith Township, we were met by a pleasant sylvan

setting, framed with tall white pines (*Pinus strobus*) and a scattering of lingering cultivated flowers, despite the recent killing frost. The owners, Rick and Laurie Morgan, were delighted to see us and welcomed us into their home to sit by the large picture window overlooking the lake and the hummingbird feeder that had been maintained with fresh food for the last few days. We soon learned that the bird had arrived in their yard on the previous Monday, 16 October, and had investigated their empty feeder. Obviously finding the site acceptable, it stayed to feed and rest.

Within minutes of our arrival, the drab hummer visited the feeder briefly, offering a tantalizing view. We knew immediately that it was not a Ruby-throated (*Archilochus colubris*) or a Rufous hummingbird. Its larger size, dark colouration, and long decurved bill led towards another species. But what was it? To our dismay, it promptly left... forever? During its absence, we scoured field guides to try to limit the possibilities, and plan a method of recording details in case our next look was equally brief, and our last!

By 0830h, the bird returned to the feeder, and continued to do so every five minutes for the next

hour. Each visit lasted about 1.5 minutes, with the bird sitting and feeding alternately. Doug attempted to photograph it through the window, while I sketched and made notes on field marks and behaviour. Finally, we agreed incredulously that it was most likely a female Broad-billed Hummingbird (*Cynanthus latirostris*), but we still hadn't been able to see the bright orange that was supposed to be so obvious on the lower mandible.

After brief discussion, I decided to go outside under better light conditions and see if we could add to the observed field marks. The bird proved extremely tame and allowed my approach within 10m. Almost immediately I saw the missing field mark. From below, the orange lower mandible was obvious, and I wondered how we could have missed it from inside. Other subtle colour patterns also became evident when viewed in natural light.

The bird fed every few minutes from the hanging hummingbird feeder. It hovered in front of the feeder with its tail broadly spread, fed for a few seconds, and immediately flew either to a perch above or to the side of the feeder and rested for about a minute. As it approached the feeder, it flew somewhat erratically and almost clumsily by hummingbird standards. Although the field guides describe it as a noisy flyer, no sound was ever heard by Doug or

me. It preferred to roost on or near the ground when not at the feeder. It frequently sat about 10cm above the ground in a small remnant flower garden to the south of the house. However, it most consistently roosted, and in fact slept, in a small "canyon" by the entrance to the basement. The owners had dug a 2m-deep trench into a steep embankment and lined it with fractured limestone to provide access to the basement. The bird was observed entering small crevices in the rock periodically and sitting on small ledges out of the wind.

The bird aggressively approached the feeder, but failed to interact with most other birds in the yard. Black-capped Chickadees (*Parus atricapillus*) and House Finches (*Carpodacus mexicanus*) were tolerated throughout. However, it seemed to become upset when approached by a White-breasted Nuthatch (*Sitta carolinensis*), at which times it uttered a soft and persistent call very similar to the Ruby-crowned Kinglet's (*Regulus calendula*) "je-dit" note.

The following field marks were noted by Sadler and myself. Generally, the bird was chunkier and slightly larger than the similar Ruby-throated Hummingbird. It was green backed, gray fronted, and sported a long decurved bill.

The crown was basically green, with some small amounts of dark feathering apparent. The green

extended down onto the face to a point slightly above the superciliary line. A distinct white eye-stripe was apparent from just in front of the eye to the leading edge of the nape. It seemed to get slightly wider as it approached the back of the head. The eye was dark and surrounded by an area of dark feathering that gave the impression of a mask, extending onto the upper part of the cheek. The cheek was white to the malar zone, while the centre of the throat was distinctly gray. The combination of the cheek and throat colour gave the impression of a tri-coloured throat when viewed from below.

The bill was very long, perhaps 1.25 to 1.5 times the length of the head. The bill was obviously and noticeably decurved along its entire length. The upper mandible was black and unmarked. The lower mandible was quite dark when viewed from the side. However, when seen from below, a bright orange colour was obvious at least at the basal part of the bill. The broadening of the bill was evident only when viewed from below.

The back appeared quite mottled in appearance. Generally, it was green overall down onto and including the rump area, but individual gray feathers showed through, presumably as the feathers were ruffled against the wind.

The breast was gray overall, with no apparent streaking or spotting anywhere. A small area of green feathering, similar to the back

colour, was noted in the area of the shoulder. The undertail area seemed whiter than the rest of the breast.

The primaries were long and blackish in colour. At rest, the wings extended to the tip of the tail. No wing bars, spottings, or other markings were noted on them, however a whitish line was noted along the edge of the wing. Closer observation revealed that it was in fact the edge of the underwing showing, contrasting noticeably with the gray breast.

The tail was slightly forked, but appeared squarish when spread. It showed a metallic blue-black colour, evident only when it perched low to the ground and under good light conditions. It was tipped with diminishing amounts of white on the outer two or three feathers with the largest spots noted on the outer tail feathers.

As expected, females of many species of hummingbirds are very similar. With this thought in mind, Sadler and I set about trying to eliminate all possible species. The Ruby-throated sports a totally different face pattern, has a much shorter bill, and does not have a blue-black metallic coloured tail. Lucifer Hummingbird (*Calothorax lucifer*) has buffy underparts and does not have orange on the lower mandible. The White-eared Hummingbird (*Hylocharis leucotis*) is heavily streaked underneath, has a straight bill, and a totally dark unspotted tail. The Blue-throated

Hummingbird (*Lampornis clemenciae*) has dark undertail coverts, a straight bill without orange colouration, and is a larger hummer. The large Magnificent Hummingbird (*Eugenes fulgens*) has dark cheeks, a streaked throat, and no orange on the mandibles. The Black-chinned Hummingbird (*Archilochus alexandri*) has a different call note, short straight bill, white breast, and no orange on the mandible. Costa's

Hummingbird (*Calypte costae*) has a short straight bill, unmarked tail, and lack of orange on the mandibles. Anna's Hummingbird (*Calypte anna*) has a streaked throat, dark cheeks, and straight bill without orange highlights. The Broad-tailed Hummingbird (*Selasphorus platycercus*) has buff flanks, a short straight bill, and lacks orange on the mandibles. Finally, the Rufous Hummingbird sports various amounts of rufous over parts of the body.

The Broad-billed Hummingbird is not known to wander far from its summering or wintering range. The AOU *Check-list of North American Birds* (6th Edition) states that it breeds primarily in Mexico northward to southeastern Arizona, southwestern New Mexico, and western Texas. It winters from central Sonora southward. Extralimital records seem virtually non-existent. Reportedly, it wanders occasionally to California in winter. Utah has a single recorded sighting.

A previously accepted record in Florida is now considered invalid. Thus, this is a significant extralimital record and the first record for eastern North America.

How this little bird ended up in Buckhorn is anybody's guess. However, by so doing, it represents the first documented record for Ontario and Canada. The record has been reviewed and accepted by the Ontario Bird Records Committee.

Ultimately, the little bird left of its own accord on October 26th. We can only hope that it somehow managed to migrate to a more hospitable locale somewhere to the south.

#### Literature cited

*American Ornithologists' Union*. 1983. Check-list of North American Birds. 6th Edition. Allen Press Inc., Lawrence, Kansas.

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