

KLEPTOPARASITISM OF INSECTS BY A BROAD-TAILED HUMMINGBIRD

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Abstract.—A female Broad-tailed Hummingbird (*Selasphorus platycercus*) was observed to kleptoparasitize insects from a spider web during a period of late flowering by plants in an alpine region of Utah. The observation is only the second described account of such foraging behavior by hummingbirds, and the only documented observation north of the tropics. Systematic study of kleptoparasitism among hummingbirds during critical foraging periods could help to remove speculation concerning alternative foraging behavior of this type.

CLEPTOPARASITISMO DE INSECTOS POR *SELASPHORUS PLATYCERCUS*

Resumen.—Una hembra de *Selasphorus platycercus* fue observada removiendo insectos de una tela de araña. El acontecimiento ocurrió en una región alpina de Utah durante el periodo tardío en la florecida de 1986. Las flores y capullos disponibles para zumbadores al momento de las observaciones eran mínimas. Este, constituye el segundo registro de este patrón de conducta en zumbadores y el primero informado al norte de los trópicos. El estudio sistemático de cleptoparasitismo entre zumbadores durante periodos de escasez de alimento podría dar fin a especulaciones referentes a este patrón alimentario.

Kleptoparasitism in birds can take many forms and is particularly associated with certain ecological conditions such as visible food items and periods of food shortage (Brockmann and Barnard 1979). However, descriptions of such behavior in hummingbirds are not well represented in the literature.

On 27 May 1986 at 0945 (MDT) in the Sundance Recreation Area in Utah County, Utah, near Timpanogos Lodge (elevation approximately 1926 m), I observed a female Broad-tailed Hummingbird (*Selasphorus platycercus*) flying <0.5 m above the ground in an aspen (*Populus* sp.) woodlot. The bird cautiously approached a small group of rocks, stopping to hover several times. Encountering a spider web stretched between two rocks, the bird began to remove and ingest insects trapped in the web. The bird hovered and meticulously picked 10–15 insects from the web with its bill. After removing insects from the spider web for a period of approximately 30–45 s, the bird departed. At no time during the observation was a spider seen on the web, and no other webs were observed in the immediate area.

During May of 1986, foliage emergence in the area was delayed considerably more than in 1984 and 1985. The number of blossoms available to hummingbirds was minimal, and short periods of snowfall were not uncommon. The Broad-tailed Hummingbird and the Black-chinned Hummingbird (*Archilochus alexandri*) are the only trochilids inhabiting the region during the nesting season, which usually begins in mid to late June. Broad-tailed Hummingbirds outnumber Black-chinned Hum-

mingbirds in the area approximately two to one (C. M. White, pers. comm.).

Kleptoparasitism of insects from spider webs has been documented anecdotally for only seven avian families (Bent 1940, Brockmann and Barnard 1979, Johnsgard 1983, Tiebout 1986, Waide and Hailman 1977, Wolf 1970) including Trochilidae. However, kleptoparasitism among hummingbird species (see Waide and Hailman 1977) has been reported only from the tropics. Burtt et al. (1976) suggested that the phenomenon is rare based on the scarcity of detailed observations in the literature. Inasmuch as the phenomenon may not be so unusual (lack of descriptive observations notwithstanding), systematic study of hummingbird kleptoparasitism of this type during critical foraging periods could help to remove speculation with regard to such alternative foraging behavior.

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