

Ruby-throated Hummingbird in New Mexico

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IN THIS ERA of transcontinental vagrancy, the Ruby-throated Hummingbird (*Archilochus colubris*) remains among the rarest of eastern North American land birds in the western part of the continent. This is somewhat surprising when one considers the wide range, general abundance, and highly migratory habits of the species, which breeds westward to the Prairie Provinces and the Great Plains regions (American Ornithologists' Union 1983:355-356).

The general lack of more westerly occurrences of Ruby-throated Hummingbirds appears to be real, although a contributing factor in females and immature males is the difficulty of distinguishing them from western species—especially the Black-chinned Hummingbird (*A. alexandri*). In addition, a trivial problem for serious birders in the West is the casual application of the name "ruby-throated hummingbird" by neophytes to any member of the family—much as is done with the term "blue jay" for any bluish corvid—thus clouding the issue to some degree. Two specimen occurrences of *Archilochus colubris* in New Mexico provide the first credible records for the state and establish only the second place of verified occurrence in the Southwest.

The two New Mexico specimens of the Ruby-throated Hummingbird were both birds found dead or dying in Portales, Roosevelt County, in the plains region of the extreme central-eastern part of the state. While both specimens were sexed as females, they are almost certainly males, having scattered red feathers on the throat. By virtue of the plumage and the striations on the bills, both are birds of the year. One was taken on October 4, 1974, and the other on September 26, 1976. Preparation was by Joe Silva in 1981. Both specimens have been deposited in the bird collection of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C.

There are no credible previous records

of the Ruby-throated Hummingbird from New Mexico, although a few unacceptable reports have been received from time to time. The records at Portales are certainly from the most logical area for the species to occur in New Mexico. However, Oberholser (1974:482) gives no confirmed reports in the adjacent Panhandle of Texas, the only record verified for the western part of that state being of a male taken in the Guadalupe Mountains, Culberson County (Burleigh and Lowery 1940:105), some 185 miles south-southwest of Portales.

Actually, hummingbirds of any species are generally rare in the Portales area, although both the Black-chinned and Rufous (*Selasphorus rufus*) have been verified in the vicinity. In addition, there are a few instances of breeding there by *Archilochus* hummingbirds, with the supposition—perhaps open to question—being that they were all Black-chinneds.

Besides the absence of verified records of Ruby-throated Hummingbirds from the Panhandle of Texas (Oberholser, *op. cit.*), there seem to be none from the Panhandle of Oklahoma (Sutton 1967:285-286; 1974:22) or from Colorado (Bailey and Niedrach 1967:86; Kingery and Graul 1978:27; Andrews 1980:84). In regard to the latter state, a sight report from Beulah, Pueblo County, on August 31, 1980, appears to be a first state record (Kingery 1980:186). Farther north, the species has apparently been verified by specimens west to Alberta and as a vagrant at St. Michaels, Alaska (American Ornithologists' Union 1983:356). More recently, a photographic record was obtained of a male near Campbell River, Vancouver Island, in the period of May 3-6, 1977 (Crowell and Nehls 1977:1039). Probably the same bird was also present there in late May of 1978 (Mattocks and Hunn 1978:1048) and 1980 (Rogers 1980:799).

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