

## FEATURED PHOTO

### A HYBRID HUMMINGBIRD IN SOUTHEAST ARIZONA

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Hybridization in hummingbirds is relatively frequent (e.g., Banks and Johnson 1961, Short and Phillips 1966, Wells et al. 1978, Pyle 1997), posing potential pitfalls for banders and other field ornithologists working with the Trochilidae. Adult males excepted, most North American hummingbirds are similar enough that most hybrids will almost certainly escape detection, even in the hand; moreover, only males showing a markedly “wrong” combination of characters are likely to stand out as hybrids. Just as hybrids must be considered prior to the identification of a rare gull, so must they be with hummingbirds.

Heindel photographed the hummingbird on the back cover in August 1999 in Miller Canyon, Huachuca Mountains, southeast Arizona. Even a quick glance suggests the subject is not one of North America’s regularly occurring hummingbirds. This hummingbird appears large and lanky; in the field it looked similar in size to the Magnificent Hummingbirds (*Eugenes fulgens*) with which it shared the feeder. The crown, face, and back are moderately bright green. There is an obvious white postocular spot. The bill is of average length, appears to be all dark (but the base of the mandible appeared pinkish from directly below), and is generally straight and thick, with perhaps the slightest droop. The lower throat and the sides of the upper breast and lower neck are a deep green, noticeably richer and more intense than the surrounding color. In some lights, there was a bluish tinge to this color. The remainder of the underparts are paler, with a green lower breast merging into a grayish brown belly and gray undertail coverts. The angle of this photograph does not allow the middle of the back, rump, or tail to be assessed. Barely visible is some bronzy tone to the upper tail coverts. An important feature (often hard to see in the field) is a limited area of pale rufous across the secondaries, just inside the primary coverts. The tail and upper tail coverts were entirely bronzy, a stunning feature made all the more attractive by its absence from hummingbirds normally found north of Mexico. In the field, the throat appeared brighter and the wings more rufous than is evident in the photo, and the underwing coverts were laced with rufous brown. Because it does not conform with any expected species, one must ask if the bird is a hybrid. If so, what were its parents? Where would interbreeding of the parental species occur? How prevalent is hybridization among hummingbirds?

This bird’s characters suggest a hybrid Magnificent × Berylline Hummingbird (*Amazilia beryllina*). The size, postocular spot, and general plumage color are those of a Magnificent Hummingbird, and its vocalizations were similar to that species’. The pale rufous in the wings, the bronzy tail and upper tail coverts, pinkish-based mandible, and the intensity of color on the lower throat and sides of the neck are marks in favor of the Berylline. Determining parentage of hybrids can be exceedingly difficult. Hybrid offspring may resemble either parent, show a blend of characters, demonstrate a mosaic of the parents’ characters, or show features absent in either parent. Usually, conclusions must be tentative unless the parents’ breeding was monitored. Even so, in this case the combination of characters fits rather nicely with the hypothesized parentage, and other potential combinations seem unlikely. Among the few hummingbirds with rufous in the wings, only the Berylline has reached the

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United States; the rest are southern species extremely unlikely to get here. Similarly, few North American hummingbirds approach the size of a Magnificent, and no giants occurring north of the tropics share the male Magnificent's distinctive postocular spot. The extensive throat and neck patch and the occasional tinges of blue might suggest a Broad-billed Hummingbird (*Cynanthus latirostris*), a species reported to hybridize with the Magnificent (Phillips et al. 1964, Short and Phillips 1966), but both of these species lack rufous in the wings and on the upperparts.

Given that the Berylline Hummingbird has bred in the U.S. (Anderson and Monson 1981), one might speculate that a wandering Berylline paired up with a Magnificent somewhere near the international border; alternatively, these two species could have paired in Mexico and their offspring wandered north to the U.S. What is presumed to have been the same bird returned to Miller Canyon late in the summer of 2000, looking much as it does in the featured photo, and was banded at that time (George West pers. comm.).

We thank Michael A. Patten and George West for discussions of this bird and for other interesting conversations about hummingbirds. Robb Hamilton significantly improved this paper, and we thank him for his input.

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*Philip Unitt*

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