

# News, Notes, Comments

## Fall-Winter Temperature Tolerance of a Record Late Rufous Hummingbird (*Selasphorus rufus*) at a Feeder at West Phoenix, New York

A *Selasphorus* hummingbird, suspected to be an after-hatching-year male Rufous (*S. rufus*), appeared on 16 Sep 2012 at the feeders of Anne Dillon Gray and Jeff Gray at West Phoenix, NY, where it remained until 27 Dec 2012, finally departing after experiencing morning lows of 12°F on 26 Dec and 19°F on 27 Dec and a 14-in snowfall overnight 26-27 Dec (Anne Dillon Gray, pers. comm.). Climate data recorded nearby at Syracuse, NY, were reviewed to assess the conditions endured by this bird; and records of the New York State Avian Records Committee (NYSARC) were consulted to establish a record late date for this species in upstate New York.

The Grays' feeders were located at 9425 Pendergast Road, West Phoenix, Onondaga County, NY, at latitude/longitude of 43°13' 31.58" N, 76°18' 35.37" W, at 380 ft (116 m) elevation (Google Earth 2013). Three feeders were supplied and, as temperatures dropped below freezing in Nov, feeders were rotated from inside to outside to keep them thawed. Then, in Dec, one of them under an overhead deck protected from falling snow was equipped with a flood lamp to maintain the sugar water above freezing. I visited the site to capture, band and release the bird on 6 Dec 2012, temperature 30° F. Numerous data were recorded and submitted to NYSARC confirming species, age and sex of the bird. Photographs were taken by Anne Dillon Gray and Robert J. Pantle, who assisted me at the site.

The bird was captured within 10-15 sec after a Hall trap was in place at 1032. It was released at 1119, having been fed several times while in hand and was seen to return to the feeder at 1227 after my departure (Anne Dillon Gray, pers. comm.).

National Weather Service climate data were accessed on the Internet (National Weather Service 2013) from Hancock International Airport, Syracuse, NY, located 12 mi (20 km) SE of the Gray site

at latitude/longitude 43°06' 36.58" N and 76°07' 12.41" W, elevation 414 ft (126 m) (Google Earth 2013). Table 1 is a summary of selected temperature and snowfall data as recorded by the National Weather Service for Sep through Dec 2012. Table 2 summarizes the number of days where daily minima were at or below freezing; while Table 3 focuses on temperature and snowfall data during 21-28 Dec as daily minima dropped sharply and snow accumulated.

**Table 1. National Weather Service preliminary Monthly Climate Data at Hancock International Airport, Syracuse, New York, Sep-Dec 2012**

	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Max. Temperature, °F	87.8	62.6	47.1	41.7
Date	13 14	05 25	11	04
Departure from normal <sup>1</sup> , °F	+15	+16	+25	+35
Min. Temperature, °F	39	29	24	10
Date	24	13	7 16 18	26
Departure from normal <sup>1</sup> , °F	-15	-12	-9	-11
Average Max., °F	74.5	62.6	47.1	41.7
Departure from normal <sup>1</sup> , °F	+2.3	+2.6	-1.3	+5.3
Average Min., °F	52.7	45.8	31.6	28.9
Departure from normal <sup>1</sup> , °F	+0.8	+4.6	-1.2	+6.5
Snowfall, in	0	0	2.8	32.4
Departure from normal <sup>1</sup> , in	0	0	-6.7	-0.3
Greatest Depth, in	0	0	1	19
Date	-	-	25	30

<sup>1</sup> "Normal" refers to historical data collected 1981-2010.

The climate data (Table 1) indicate daily maxima were 15 to 35° F above normal, while daily minima were 9 to 15° F below normal for Sep-Dec, and average maxima and minima were 0.8 to 6.5° F above average except for Nov. Dec was the wettest Dec ever recorded (1902-2012) and was ranked the sixth warmest Dec average temperature (National Weather Service 2013). There was no snowfall above a trace until 24 Nov, totaling 2.8 in for the

month, 6.7 in below normal. Then a lapse of no snow above 0.3 in in Dec until 22 Dec when 7.6 in fell, followed by more major snowfall of 12.7 in 26-27 Dec, when the daily minimum dipped to 10° F on 26 Dec. Winds averaged 5.8-20.5 mph primarily from the NW, with peak winds 16-45 mph during 22-27 Dec (National Weather Service 2013). The first days of the fall-winter seasons when the daily maxima stayed below freezing (Table 3) were 25-27 Dec.

At the site, 14 in of snow fell overnight 26-27 Dec, the morning low on 26 Dec was 12° F and that day was very cold, windy and blustery as the hummer stayed close to the feeders and fed repeatedly. It was heard twice near the feeders at 0650-0700 on 27 Dec, having survived the night, morning low temperature 19° F, and was not seen thereafter on that date, nor on 28-29 Dec, presumed to have departed after feeding early on 27 Dec (Anne Dillon Gray, pers. comm.).

**Table 2. National Weather Service preliminary Monthly Climate Data for number of days of minimum temperatures at or below 32° F at Hancock International Airport, Syracuse, NY.**

	Month			
	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec <sup>1</sup>
Days at 32-30° F	0	1	6	5
Days at 29-25° F	0	0	11	8
Days at 24-20° F	0	0	3	1
Days at 19-15° F	0	0	0	1
Days at 14-10° F	0	0	0	2
Total	0	1	20	17

<sup>1</sup>. Through 27 Dec, the day of the bird's presumed departure.

**Table 3. National Weather Service preliminary Monthly Climate Data on temperature and snowfall for the period 21-28 Dec 2012 at Hancock International Airport, Syracuse, NY.**

Date	Temperature ° F				Snowfall, in.	Snow Depth, in.
	Max.	Min.	Ave.	Departure <sup>1</sup>		
21 Dec	39	33	36	+8	0.3	0
22 Dec	34	27	31	+4	7.6	4
23 Dec	36	30	33	+6	3.4	9
24 Dec	37	27	32	+5	0.2	7
25 Dec	29	12	21	-5	1.8	7
26 Dec	29	10	20	-6	4.6	6
27 Dec	29	19	24	-2	8.1	1.5
28 Dec	29	25	27	+1	T <sup>2</sup>	15

<sup>1</sup>. Departure from normal where normal represents data collected 1981-2010.

<sup>2</sup>. T indicates trace amount.

New York State Avian Records Committee (2013) acknowledges 28 submitted reports of Rufous sightings for 1980-2010. Five of those submissions were not accepted, eight were accepted as *Selasphorus sp.* or *Selasphorus rufus/sasin*: four from Jul-Sep and four from Nov; and 15 were accepted as Rufous Hummingbirds: six in Aug-Oct, six in Nov and three in Dec (in some cases a bird was reported in an earlier month, but lingered into a later month and the later month is used here in this tally). The three Dec records from among the 15 reports accepted as Rufous Hummingbirds extended to 17 Dec 2009 in Richmond County and 10 Dec 2009 in Suffolk County in the New York City/Long Island area, while the third came from Cambridge, Washington County, at latitude/longitude 43°01' 42.21" N and 73°23' 13.36" W, elevation 493 ft (150 m) (Google Earth 2013). It is listed in NYSARC's records as reported 12 Nov 1994. I banded this bird on 3 Dec 1994 and it was taken into captivity for the winter but died there on 9 Dec 1994 (Yunick 1994). At the time, it represented the second verified state record for the species as well as the first ever banded in New York state. It exists as a specimen in the collection at Columbia-Greene Community College, Hudson, NY.

The West Phoenix Rufous described here occurred at the farthest northern latitude (43°13' 31.58" N) and latest date (27 Dec 2012) so far published for New York state.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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### Some Observations on Flight Feather Molt of Rufous Hummingbirds (*Selasphorus rufus*) in Northeastern United States

Detailed published data on flight feather molt of Rufous Hummingbirds are scarce. I conducted two searches in SORA (Searchable Ornithological Research Archive, 2013): one for "Rufous Hummingbird," the other for "hummingbird molt" for the period 1930-2012 covering 13 major ornithological journals. Several molt studies were found on species other than *S. rufus*, but no detailed data were found on *rufus* flight feather molt. Healy and Calder (2006) indicate that complete molt occurs "primarily on winter grounds" and they present data on percentages of males and females in flight feather molt at Estado Jalisco, Mexico, in Jan 1989, 1990 and 1991, but offer no details. Aldrich (1956) examined male *rufus* specimens dated 29 Feb through 29 Jul and concluded: "Time of acquisition of the adult plumage is not known, but is probably assumed sometime in the early part of the calendar year while the birds are on their winter range." Phillips (1975) contended: "Most of the primaries are replaced in late autumn," by male *rufus* based on specimen data, but no further details were offered. Baltosser (1995) offered a summary of molt literature on North American and Mexican hummingbirds, but included no additional information on *rufus* beyond that in Aldrich (1956).