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Three Long-Distance Recaptures of Rufous Hummingbirds that Overwintered in the Southeastern United States

Rufous Hummingbirds (*Selasphorus rufus*) breed from the Pacific Northwest north to Alaska, with the majority migrating to Mexico for the nonbreeding season. However, the species was first documented overwintering in the southeastern United States in 1909 (Conway and Drennan 1979). Hill et al (1998) investigated the increase in the numbers and distribution of Rufous Hummingbirds (hereafter, Rufous) in five states of the Southeast during the 1990s. A study of wintering hummingbirds from 1998 to 2008 in Alabama and Florida (Bassett and Cubie 2009) found Rufous to be the most common species (824 of 1,598 individuals or 51.6 %).

A total of 37 short- to medium-distance recaptures of Rufous (53 to 1,437 km) were documented by Bassett and Cubie (2009). The only long-distance recapture of a southeastern Rufous reported to date in the literature was a male banded in Baton Rouge, LA, on 5 Dec 2000 and recaptured in Black Creek, British Columbia, on 19 May 2001, a straight-line distance of 3,517 km (Finlay 2007). Here we report

on three long-distance recaptures (5,632 km, 3,621 km, and 3,106 km) of Rufous that overwintered in Florida or Alabama.

The first bird was a second-year female Rufous banded at a private residence in Tallahassee, FL, by Fred Dietrich on 13 Jan 2010. On 28 Jun 2010, she was recaptured by Katherine McLaughlin in Chenega Bay, AK, a straight-line distance of 5,632 km. This is the longest distance between banding and recapture for any hummingbird species. She did not return to the home in Tallahassee, or to the location in Alaska, in subsequent years.

The second Rufous recapture was an adult female banded in Dunster, British Columbia, on 19 Jul 2011 by Curtis and Bonnie Culp. The bird was recaptured by Fred Bassett on 28 Dec 2011, in Foley, AL, a straight-line distance of 3,621 km between banding and recapture. The bird returned to the same residence the following winter and was recaptured again on 19 Dec 2012. She did not return to the yard in Alabama during the winter of 2013-2014.

The third recapture was a second-year male Rufous banded by Fred Dietrich in Tallahassee, FL, on 20 Jan 2014. The bird had completed approximately 70 percent of its flight feather molt when it was captured. It was color marked with a pink dot on the forehead and was observed in the yard until the first week in February. It was recaptured by Katie Allen in the Tijuana River National Estuarine Reserve near Imperial Beach, CA, on 17 Apr 2014, a straight-line distance of 3,106 km.

The female Rufous recaptured in Chenega Bay, AK, on the west side of Prince William Sound, was likely at or near her breeding grounds. In their study of migratory connectivity in Rufous using feather deuterium, Moran et. al (2013) suggest it is not likely that Rufous overwintering in the southeastern US come from the far western breeding grounds. However, this female Rufous clearly did. It is not known whether the second recapture, the female Rufous banded in Dunster, British Columbia, was a breeding bird at that location or a migrant. She did, however, demonstrate strong site fidelity to her wintering location.

The third Rufous is more of a puzzle, although it is possible the immature male was returning to the species' traditional spring migration route, which is north along the Pacific Coast. The migration of Rufous from their breeding grounds to Mexico and back has been well documented (Phillips 1975, Healy and Calder 2006) with most birds following a southeast-west-northward elliptical path. Among Rufous wintering in the Southeast, Bassett and Cubie (2009) documented five birds that moved west in the late winter/early spring. These individuals were banded in Florida or Alabama and recaptured in Louisiana. There are no spring recaptures of Rufous moving north or northwest out of the southeastern US.

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A national study of individuals who handle migratory birds for evidence of avian and swine-origin influenza virus infections. 2012. Shafir S.C., T. Fuller, T.B. Smith, and A.W. Rimoin. *Journal of Clinical Virology* 54:364-367.

Prior to and during the time bird banders were taking cloacal swabs to test birds for avian influenza (AV), there was a concern that bird banders would contract AV. The authors tested 401 U.S. bird banders, who also worked at international sites, for the avian influenza virus (AIV). Demographically, most subject had banded for more than five years. The sex ratio was 50:50 and banders worked the four seasons with the summer having the most banding. Exposure was primarily from handling wild migratory birds, from bird banding and bleeding. The majority (85.79%) of handling were passerines. Most banders came from the eastern or inland U.S., and one-third of the banders had banded internationally.

The results were that only one individual tested positive (0.25%) for AIV, one for the particular virus H5N2 and none for H5N1. Transmission of AIV to humans who handle wild birds seems a relatively rare event, but still a real and dangerous possibility. The paper concludes by suggesting everyone handling wild birds follow the U.S. Ornithological Council published guidelines.

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