

2018/2019 Winter Hummingbird Banding Summary

Our Hummingbird Research banding team has completed another winter hummingbird banding season covering Alabama, Florida, and South Georgia. We combined to band 151 hummingbirds of six species. Those include 93 Ruby-throated, 43 Rufous, 11 Black-chinned, 2 Allen's, 1 Calliope, and 1 Broad-tailed.

Nineteen of our previously banded hummingbirds of four species returned to or near the original banding location. Ten Ruby-throated returned including eight back for the second winter, one back for the third winter, and one back for the sixth winter. Seven Rufous returned including one back for the second winter, three back for the fifth winter, one back for the seventh winter, and one back for the record tying ninth winter at the home of Jan and Ken Taylor in Foley, AL.

We recaptured three hummingbirds at locations other than where they were originally banded:

January 9, 2019 – Fred Dietrich caught an immature male Black-chinned at Debra Vergin's home in Tallahassee, FL that Fred Bassett banded November 28, 2018 at Dick Mowbray's home near Hartford, AL. 100 miles between banding and recapture.

January 20, 2019 – Fred Bassett caught an immature male Rufous at Debra Werner's home in Alachua, FL that was banded by Nancy Newfield in Covington, LA on September 1, 2018. 450 miles between banding and recapture.

March 7, 2019 – Fred Dietrich caught an immature male Ruby-throated at Debra Vergin's home in Tallahassee, FL that Fred Bassett banded November 28, 2018 at Sandra Kerr's home in Mobile, AL. 228 miles between banding and recapture.

Comparisons with the five previous seasons are:

2013/2014 - 289 banded with 46 returns and 11 foreign recaptures

2014/2015 - 121 banded with 47 returns and 6 foreign recaptures

2015/2016 - 132 banded with 31 returns and 6 foreign recaptures

2016/2017 - 100 banded with 21 returns and 3 foreign recaptures

2017/2018 - 145 banded with 20 returns and 3 foreign recaptures

2018/2019 – 151 banded with 19 returns and 3 foreign recaptures

Total banding numbers increased this winter to the most in the past five years, but we are seeing big changes in the species banded. During the first ten years of our winter banding, western hummingbirds comprised about 90% of birds banded, and Ruby-throated were less than 10%. This winter Ruby-throated were 60%, and numbers of all western species continues to drop. This may be normal variation as we have seen in the past or a permanent trend. Only time will tell.

Other factors influenced banding numbers this winter. The lack of a significant freeze meant gardens with flowers all winter along the coast. Good numbers of hosts had winter birds that seldom or never used feeders. The continuing increase in people maintaining winter feeders also means neighborhoods where hummingbirds feed over a large area and do not settle in at one feeder. That is good for the birds but makes it difficult to catch and band them.

This winter marks twenty-one years of our continuing study of wintering hummingbirds in the Southeast providing valuable information about hummingbird population cycles and trends. We can only get that data because of the many hosts who allow us to add their winter visitors to our research. It is a treat each winter to see old friends with their winter birds and introduce new hosts to the wonderful world of winter hummingbirds.

Thanks

Fred