

February 12, 2019

Greetings,

We have still not had any really cold weather this winter to reduce the number of flowers that are blooming so it has been really difficult to catch the hummers that are spending the winter here. This is especially true of suspected return birds that recognize my traps. I've spent many hours watching my trap while hummers either ignore it or refuse to enter it and head to the flowers instead. In about 2 weeks we should be seeing the first of the northbound male Ruby-throats that are returning from the Tropics on their way to their breeding grounds further north.

I won't be banding Ruby-throats after March 1<sup>st</sup> since we are concentrating our research on hummingbirds that spend the winter in the southeast. I will always band any other species any time they show up since they are not normally in this area. The next three weeks will probably be the end of this year's banding season.

This has been the slowest winter I have had since I began banding in 2009. Part of it is because there are not as many birds, but the other part is that the birds have so many more options for feeders and flowers that they are not as dependent on the feeder that I have in my trap.

While it has been a very slow year, I did have a chance to add a new species of hummingbird for the area, bringing the total up to nine species. On January 13<sup>th</sup> I banded a young male Broad-tailed hummingbird at a home east of Tallahassee. This is the 6<sup>th</sup> species of hummingbird that has been banded in his yard which ties him with Jody Elliott and Claudia Mason for the most species in the area. Both hosts have had five species in common; Black-chinned, Buff-bellied, Calliope, Ruby-throated and Rufous but one has had an Allen's and the other now has a Broad-tailed. Here are some photos of the Broad-tailed hummingbird.



There have been 7 previous Broad-tailed hummingbirds banded in Florida but this one is 150 miles east of one banded in Niceville making it the easternmost Broad-tailed ever banded. You can see on the range chart where these birds are normally found, and we continue to add to the reports of hummingbirds in the southeast.

On January 15<sup>th</sup> I banded a female Ruby-throated at Fran Rutkovsky's great yard that is sporting a new look backyard thanks to hurricane Michael. Fran has hosted five different species of hummingbirds in her yard over the years and has often had birds that I have banded in other locations show up in her yard, including one of my birds. Any year I expect her to jump into the six species club.

The next day I went to Nico Wiender's home near Myers Park and banded a female Rufous that is likely sharing yards with Susan Lorch who lives just across the street.

On January 26th I gave a talk to a full house at Native Nurseries, one of our long-time supporters, and after the talk two people came up to me and said they had hummingbirds coming to their feeders. On the 28<sup>th</sup> I went to Walt Land's home east of town and banded a female Ruby-throated and found out that he had a second hummer at his feeders as well. I had marked the first bird with a pink dot on her head, so I let it feed when it came to the feeder and I caught the other bird when it went into my trap. It was another female Ruby-throated and now both are color marked so he can tell if another bird shows up at his feeders.

I left Walt Land's home and went to Kiki Ball's home near Lake Ella where I caught a young male Rufous and a female Ruby-throated in her yard filled with flowers. It is possible that there is another bird in the yard as well, so I'll be back later on to check it out.

I got a note from Native Nurseries that a customer had called and said they had hummingbirds at their feeders. I called and it turned out that David and Helen Jones live just down the street from me, so I went by and left a "trainer" trap on one of their feeders. This is simply a piece of hardware cloth folded in a rectangle that goes around the feeder and gets the bird used to having something around the feeder with an easy way in and out. I went back a few days later and caught two birds in about 5 minutes, love those trainer traps when they work like that. Both were young male Ruby-throats and I banded, took measurements, photos and let them release the birds

I had left my trap door slightly open just in case there happened to be another bird in their yard. When I returned, sure enough there was a bird in the trap, so I quickly shut the door and went to check it out. When I checked its legs, I found it was already wearing a band! I keep a file with all the birds that Fred Bassett and I have banded in the last 20 years on my phone. I entered the band number and it turned out to be a bird I had banded at Charlotte Watkin's house, just one street over. Charlotte was a dear friend of so many people, including David and Helen, and had many hummingbirds over the years in her wonderful yard. Unfortunately, we lost Charlotte in the fall of 2017 and I had not been back to her yard. This female Rufous was one I banded in February 2014 as an adult bird. This means that she is at least 6 ½ years old. I checked further and discovered I had recaptured her at Charlotte's in 2015 and 2016 and I remember sitting in the cold several times in early 2017 watching her perch in a flowering peach tree and refuse to go in my trap. I'm sure the bird then headed to her neighbor's house to feed, leaving me out in the cold. It was a wonderful feeling to see Charlotte's friend again after so many years. Here she is in 2014, 2015 and 2019.



On February 8<sup>th</sup> I went to Diane Hamilton's home. She had also mentioned to me at my talk that she had a hummingbird and she was correct. I caught and banded a female Ruby-throated there.

In my presentations on winter hummingbirds I have a photo of an adult male Anna's hummingbird that was taken by a good friend of Hummingbird Research, and amazing photographer/videographer, Lew Scharpf, from Auburn, Alabama. He often came to our banding sessions at Fort Morgan, Alabama and is good friends with fellow bander Fred Bassett. Here is a video he put together of a banding trip he took with Fred Bassett.



Tracking Wintering Hummingbirds in the Southeastern U.S.

This video is about the quest to learn more about wintering hummingbirds. Fred Bassett began researching winter hummingbirds in the Southeastern U.S. in 1997 with a primary focus on South Alabama and Florida. Fred leads Hummingbird Research, Inc, a non-profit organization which has banded over 35,000 "hummers" in 1,000 locations from Miami Florida to Haines, Alaska.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kR9wta9XIXs>

It is getting to the end of our season but if you had contacted me about a bird earlier that is still around but I haven't been able to get to or it would not go in my trap, let me know and I'll make another effort to try and get to your house and see if I can catch it. We should be seeing our first returning Ruby-throats in the next 3 weeks so be on the lookout for them.

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