

Greetings,

Although there may be a few winter birds still around, it looks like our winter season has come to a close. It has proven to be a very trying year with lots of hours waiting for birds to show up and then wait for them to go in my trap. The last three years have been very slow, but I think the birds are here its just that more people have feeders out and have planted lots of winter blooming plants, so the birds are not dependent on one feeder. When this project started, if you had a winter hummer there was no other feeder within a mile of you, so it was going to stay in your yard. It was rare not to see a bird within 15 minutes of setting up the trap. Now it has been more like an hour to get a glimpse of your hummer. That is good for the birds and they seem to be doing fine so we'll just have to be patient and wait them out.

For the year I ended up banding 54 birds of 6 different species so while the numbers were low there were some interesting birds around this winter. Picking up from my earlier report, on January 21st I went to Fran Rutkovsky's yard where she had been seeing several hummers, but they were elusive. I had left a trainer trap there to get the birds used to going in and out while feeding and it paid off as I caught a second year male Ruby-throated, her third winter hummingbird this winter. From there I went over to Ann Bruce's home where I had banded a Black-chinned 7 years earlier and I quickly caught two Ruby-throats, a second-year male and a second-year female. Ann has so many birds in her yard it's hard to pay attention to the trap and not get distracted by the Orioles and other birds. The following day I went to Annalise Whipple's wonderful yard and banded an adult male Ruby-throated hummingbird but could not catch a second bird that was too interested in the flowers.

It was a good year, again, at Jody Elliott and Claudia Mason's house where I ended up banding 9 birds this winter. Jody's son and his family had come down all the way from North Dakota to enjoy the sun and warmth of Florida only to be met with rain and cold and her grand daughter caught the flu. I thought I could make it a little better by catching a hummer so she could hold it after I had banded it. I waited two hours in the cold and never saw a bird, so disappointing for everyone and maybe the only chance since they were heading to the beach the next day.

I did manage to squeeze in one more try before they headed back north, and it became a great day as I caught and banded a beautiful second year male Rufous.

After banding and measuring the bird her grand daughter got to hold it in her hand and it stayed quite a while before realizing it was free to go and off it zoomed.

Finally, a good hummingbird day on their vacation.

A few days later I went back and banded an adult male Ruby-throated, the ninth bird of the year. That afternoon I made a second trip out near Havana to Jill Blackman's house. On my first visit the bird buzzed me as I set up the trap and Jill said, "This is going to be easy." I have learned never to say that and an hour later the bird proved me right as it ignored the trap. I left a trainer trap there on my first visit and it worked



perfectly as I had to open the trap door to catch a hungry second-year male Ruby-throated. The next day I went to Heather Conn's house where she had been seeing a couple of birds. It had caught birds there in 2008 and 2014 so she was due since it had been another 6 years. This time I caught two birds, a second-year male Black-chinned and an adult male Ruby-throated. I guess I'll see her in 2026. That afternoon I got a call from Ann Bruce who had a 3rd hummer in her yard so I went there just in time to beat the rain and caught a second-year male Ruby-throated.

Hummingbirds all share January 1st as their birthday. In the fall when we catch a bird that still has juvenile characteristics, we know that it was hatched that summer and we designate it as a Hatching Year bird. Birds without those characteristics are called After Hatching Year birds. After the new year young birds are called Second Year birds since they are in their second calendar year. Generally, all adult birds look the same year after year so unless we are able to catch a bird as a juvenile, we can't tell its exact age.

On February 2nd I went to Carrabelle Beach where Jeff and Beth Petit thought they had an Allen's at their house. I arrived early and caught two birds, a young male Ruby-throated and Jeff was right, the other bird was a young male Allen's. This bird had tail feathers and the shape of R2 and width of R5 proved the species. Two days later I went to Trey Goldman's house, where we have banded 15 birds in the past, and banded a second-year male Black-chinned. There was another bird there but I could not catch it so I left a trainer trap there. Two weeks and three trips later I finally caught the other bird an adult female Ruby-throated.

An interesting note about Trey Goldman's house. It previously had been owned by Gene and Mary Louise Ellis, the owners of Tallahassee Nurseries and is wonderfully landscaped. In January 2002 Fred Bassett and I were trying to catch a Rufous there and after an hour had decided to call it quits for the day. As he was explaining to the hosts that we could not catch the bird and was getting ready to pack up his truck, the bird came up and flew into the trap. It turned out that the bird was already wearing a band, but it was not one that Fred Bassett had used. This was back before you could check with the Bard Banding Lab using the internet, so he had to submit the information manually. When he heard back from the BBL it turned out that this bird had been banded two years earlier in Ingram, TX. That is 893 miles due west of Tallahassee and at the time was the longest east-west recapture of a hummingbird, quite an amazing datapoint.

On February 9th I got another call from Ann Bruce where she was seeing another hummer. I set up my trap and soon caught her 4th bird of the winter, an adult female Ruby-throated. As I was getting ready to band the bird, we noticed a couple were walking their grand daughter around the block and asked them if they would like to watch. They had no idea that there were hummingbirds here in the winter and were anxious to see how this was done. Not one to miss a chance to introduce grandchildren to nature, I recruited their grand daughter to record the data for me. I explained each step as I went through the process and she entered the data on the data sheet as we went along. When I was finished, I took several photos of the bird for documentation, let everyone feel the bird's heartbeat as it was going a calm 250 beats a minute. Then I let her hold the bird in her hand where it stayed for some time before taking off. Something I'm sure she will remember the rest of her life.



That afternoon I got word that there was a banded Buff-bellied in Apalachicola at Julie O'Malley's home where Fred Bassett had banded one last year so I made arrangements to head over and see if I could catch it to see if it was the same bird. I spent several hours there in the small back yard and never did see the Buff-bellied, but I did catch and band 4 other hummingbirds, a female Black-chinned and three Ruby-throats.

Back in Tallahassee I got a call from Walt Land who had just seen a hummingbird at his feeder. Last year Walt had attended my talk at Native Nurseries and let me know that he had hummingbirds and I banded two Ruby-throats there. I had noticed that his yard was perfect for bluebirds and asked him if he would like a bluebird box. He said sure and quickly had a nesting pair in his yard. Chances are that if you have a yard that is good for hummingbirds it will be good for bluebirds. That year I gave boxes to three people and they all had them used by bluebirds.

This year at Walt's I set up my trap and very shortly had a hummer check out and go in the trap. Shortly after a second nearly identical bird showed up and I caught him too. They were both second-year male Rufous and each one was carrying about 20% extra weight as they likely were on the way to their breeding grounds. The return migration is over land, so the birds don't need to put on as much as the Ruby-throats do in the fall. The fall Ruby-throats must fly 500 miles non-stop across the gulf so they can almost double their body weight before their journey.

On February 19th I banded a Ruby-throated at Harry Hooper's house which had been featured on the Audubon's Wildlife Friendly Yard Tour where 60-70 people had visited and were treated to a winter hummingbird.

On March 2nd I went to Debra Virgin's home near Myers Park and banded a female Ruby-throated. At each of these homes I got to introduce young people to winter hummingbirds and took their photos with the birds.



The male Ruby-throats are returning from the tropics and are heading to their breeding grounds where they will set up a territory and hope to attract one of the females that began returning about two weeks after the males departed. Since our research only involves wintering hummingbirds it looks like our season is over unless a western hummingbird that spent the winter in the southeast happens to come through the area.

For the year I banded 54 birds of 6 different species and had one return Ruby-throated that was back for its 4th winter here. The species I banded were Allen's, Black-chinned, Buff-bellied, Calliope, Ruby-throated and Rufous. I had 7 new locations and caught birds at 25 different homes. 14 of the homes had multiple birds including Jody and Claudia with 9, Bill Libby with 5, Ann Bruce and Julie O'Malley with 4 and Fran Rutkovsky with 3. Thanks to everyone that shared their birds with me and I hope to see you all again next year.

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