

Greetings,

This year has the potential to be a good one for wintering hummingbirds. We have had some slow years lately but early reports west of here have lots of birds moving through. Keep your feeders up and let me know if you have a winter visitor.

Just to let you know I am the proud owner of a new hip as of December 11th so I am going to be taking it easy for a few weeks and may not be able to get to you very quickly. I already have a list of places that have birds that are here but not consistently using the feeders. As the flowers die back the feeder use should increase. If you have a bird, please let me know and I will get to you as soon as I can.

I have gotten a couple of birds through Facebook reports so far and that has helped a lot. The first bird was reported in September by Mike Hanson who is staying at the Newport Campground near the St Marks National Wildlife Refuge. He posted some photos, and it was clearly a young male Rufous. These early arrivals are usually still migrating and just stay for a day or two. I spoke with Mike and he agreed that I could go and see if I could catch and band his bird. I went down on September 22nd and quickly caught the bird, and it hung a few days before moving on. I really appreciate when people allow me to come and band their birds even when we have only talked on the phone.

On October 3rd I got an early morning call from Melissa Forehand up near Havana. She was watching a large hummingbird that had just arrived in her yard. She was describing the bird and giving a play by play as it went to the flowers and finally discovered the feeder. As soon as I heard that I jumped in my truck and was on my way. After several visits to the trap, it went in and fed. I was a beautiful adult male Buff-bellied.

On October 5th we were taking our first camping trip in our new RV when I got a call from Jeff and Beth Petit in Carrabelle. They were seeing a brown hummingbird at their feeder and thought it might be the one I banded there last year. I was just a few miles away, and had my banding gear with me, so I headed over and quickly banded a young male Rufous. This was not their last year bird which was as Allen's and now they have another bird I need to band.

Back in Tallahassee on November 16th I stopped at Tom and Helen Roth's home off Lake Shore Drive and banded an adult male Ruby-throated and a first year male Rufous. Four days later I went to Susan Thompson's house, a little farther down Lakeshore Drive, and banded an adult male Ruby-throated and a hatch year male Black-chinned.

On December 1st I went to John Armstrong's house in Indianhead Acres where I banded two first year male Rufous. His yard has always been productive. When Fred Bassett was banding in Tallahassee and having a slow day we would head to John's house and usually band a bird there. These two moved him to 51 birds banded as part of our research project. John heard another bird in the backyard, so I moved the trap back there and caught the first Rufous again and then recaptured a male Ruby-throated that I banded on December 5th, 2016.

The next day I started at Jody Elliott and Claudia Mason's home in Killlearn and banded a first year male Black-chinned. It is sometimes hard to tell these birds from Ruby-throated, especially when they do not have any iridescent feathers. Fortunately, there are a couple of wing feathers that have unique characteristics for each species, and it was easy to identify.

I went to the east side of Killearn to check out Annaliese Whipple's yard where she had been seeing several birds. After I set up my trap and backed away, I noticed a Rufous coming out of her garage after feeding on the flowers that were there. It sat in a tree near me and was content to fly-catch bugs rather than investigate the trap. After waiting a while, I noticed Annaliese waving at me from inside the house. I waved back to say hi, but she was trying to tell me the bird was in the trap. After making sure it was in the trap, I closed the door and caught her young male Rufous. After banding her Rufous, I caught and banded a male Ruby-throated that we showed to her neighbor and let her feel its heartbeat.

I had one more stop at the home of Jana Davis in Woodgate. I set up my trap in her back yard and it was not long before a male Ruby-throated flew up and went in the trap. After banding the bird, I went back to see if there was any more activity in the back yard. It was not long before two more Ruby-throats were actively feeding on flowers and ignoring the feeder in the trap. I often wonder how many hummingbirds know what a feeder is. We may only be seeing half of the hummingbirds that are in the area and only feeding on flowers.

The next bird that I banded came by way of a Facebook post on the Georgia Ornithological Society page where a bird in Boston, Georgia was being reported as a possible Calliope. Through several mutual friends on Facebook, I connected with Janell Cleveland where the bird was coming to the feeder. The bird had just arrived, and Janell was interested in having it identified and banded. I asked her to call me the next morning if the bird was still around and I would come up there and try my luck with the bird. In the morning Janell called and I was on my way, trusting my GPS knew where it was going. I arrived, set up my trap and after a short wait the bird arrived making a loud wing buzz to let me know it was not happy with what I had done with his feeder. After a look at the trap the bird went in and I closed the door behind it. After looking at the measurements, tail and gorget feathers it was easy to identify as a first year male Calliope. After banding, I let her daughter feel its heartbeat and release the bird. It was not too long before the bird was back at the feeder and a number of birders were able to get nice views and photos of the bird. I understand there may be another hummingbird at the house now. The Calliope is sharing the yard with a spectacular male Vermillion flycatcher that is quite the showman.

Back in Tallahassee I went to Susan Lorch's house near Myers Park. The warm weather has turned her yard into a small version of the tropics with everything in bloom and lots of monarchs. It did not take long for me to catch and band an adult female Rufous, the 6th bird I have banded there over the years.

On December 21st I stopped by Jody Elliott and Claudia Mason's home in Killearn that is a hummingbird magnet. Seems there are always hummingbirds there and they have had 6 different species banded there. This day I saw four birds one of them being the male Black-chinned I banded there nine days earlier. In addition to the Black-chinned I banded three adult female Ruby-throats. Her neighbors stopped by and got to watch the banding process and hold the birds before they were released. I was busy banding and Jody reminded me that I caught one bird and she caught the other three. Always nice to have good help. With the four birds banded there this winter they are up to 69 birds banded in their yard! Pretty amazing, and I hear there is another new bird there now.

Back in Boston, GA Janell Cleveland's Calliope has moved on, but she is now hosting a Rough-legged Hawk and a possible Black-chinned. On the day before Christmas eve, I drove up early and met several birders that were there to photograph her wonderful birds. It did not take long to set up my trap and catch her hummingbird. The bird had some traits of Ruby-throated and Black-chinned but by closely examining the shape and length of the outer wing feather, P10, it was clear that this was a female Black-chinned. Cannot wait to see what shows up there next.

On the way back I stopped at Laninda Sandee's home near Havana and banded a female Rufous, her first in several years. We were both happy to see her back in the hummer business. I continued to Havana where Rhonda McEwen had been seeing a hummingbird. I waited by my trap on the front porch for an hour and never saw a bird except the 9 or so wild turkeys that were feeding across the street. I packed up my trap and when I got to my truck, I saw a hummer fly up from the flowers in the side yard. I watched for several minutes as I flew from the trees to the flowers and back. I will be back for that bird which I think is a female Black-chinned I banded there last year.

In Tallahassee on the 27th I went to Pam Flynn's house where she was seeing two hummers. Pam as you might know is the one who hosted a female Rufous in 2010 that was recaptured 5 months later in Chenega Bay, Alaska. This day I caught and banded a young male Rufous just as her friends showed up and got to watch. I need to go back and see if I can catch her other bird.

Just down the street from Pam, Marie and Guy Prentice were seeing a banded Ruby-throated that had been there for a couple of weeks. In the past they have taken videos of the bird at the feeder and been able to reconstruct the band number. They noticed that this bird was already wearing a band, so they started the video camera. It was taking a little longer this time and they had recovered the letter M and the number 74. That left 3 more numbers to go. I checked my files and did not find any birds containing those combinations, so I went by and caught the bird. I read the band number and it was not one that I recognized but was in the same series that Fred Bassett was using. I called Fred and he said, "Talk to me". I just said "M59974". Fred said "that's one of mine, I'll call you when I get to my next stop".

It turned out that the bird had been banded in Pensacola, FL on December 4th and had shown up at Marie's house 10 days later. It is 175 miles between the two locations, so the bird had averaged about 20 miles a day before settling down in Tallahassee. In the Spring as the northbound Ruby-throats head north, the leading-edge advances about 20 miles a day so this is very consistent with that rate. Interesting stuff that we find out when we band and recapture hummingbirds.

Today I banded a young male Rufous at Linda Massey's home in Killlearn Acres. She had been to our local Wild Birds Unlimited and the staff gave her one of my cards and said she needed to call me and that I would band her bird. Thanks to the store for helping spread the word about our research. Linda was on the phone with her veterinarian while banded the bird, so I came back and just put it in her hand while she was talking. I would say she was a happy camper.



I know a lot of you have let me know you had birds and I have not been able to get to everyone or the birds were not using the feeders. Now that we finally got some freezing weather the birds should be coming to the feeders more frequently.

Let me know if you are seeing your birds at the feeders and I hope to see you soon.

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