

2020/2021 Winter Hummingbird Banding Summary

Our Hummingbird Research banding team has completed our twenty-third winter hummingbird banding season in the Southeast. The surge in western hummingbirds we have been expecting for several years finally happened, and we had the fourth best total in the past 23 years. We banded 281 hummingbirds of seven species. Those include 171 Rufous, 47 Ruby-throated, 42 Black-chinned, 8 Buff-bellied, 7 Calliopes, 4 Broad-tailed, and 2 Allen's.

Fifteen of our previously banded hummingbirds of three species returned to or near the original banding location. Ten Ruby-throated returned including six back for the second winter, three back for the third winter, and one back for the fifth winter. Four Rufous returned including one back for the second winter, one back for the third winter, and two back for the eighth winter. One Black-chinned returned for the third winter. We can expect the number of returns to increase significantly next winter with the large number banded this winter.

Five of our banded hummingbirds were encountered at locations other than where they were banded:

July 27, 2020 – A lady in Colorado Springs, CO took enough pictures of the band on a Rufous to read the band number. Fred Bassett had banded the bird January 16, 2019 in Atmore, AL at the home of Paula and Ralph Wright. 1100 miles between encounters.

December 3, 2020 – A bander in Ashville, NC caught a Rufous banded by Fred Bassett November 23, 2018 in Mobile, AL at the home of Velma and LJ Britain. 460 miles between encounters.

December 28, 2020 – In Tallahassee, FL at the home of Marie Prentice, Fred Dietrich caught a Ruby-throated Fred Bassett banded December 4, 2020 in Pensacola, FL at the home of Glenda and Dean Bowman. 175 miles between encounters.

December 28, 2020 – In Mobile, AL Fred Bassett caught an Allen's hummingbird at the home of Sandra and Peter Kerr banded December 14, 2020 in Fayetteville, TN. Fred recaptured that bird again February 22, 2021 at the same home. 320 miles between encounters.

Comparisons with the five previous winter seasons are:

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

2019/2020 – 139 banded with 14 returns and 7 foreign recaptures

2020/2021 – 281 banded with 14 returns and 5 foreign recaptures

This winter we banded at 178 homes of which 60 were first time hosts. That large increase in hosts was probably due to two factors. More people were home maintaining feeders and watching because of the COVID virus, and more hummingbirds wintered in the Southeast.

Twenty-three years of banding data show the population of wintering hummingbirds is cyclical with a spike occurring every few years. There are too many possible variables to determine the cause of the spikes, but it is nice to know during lean winter seasons that numbers will rebound as they did this winter.

Our long-term research about wintering hummingbirds documents cycles and trends and works to educate people about how to attract and take care of wintering hummingbirds. The data for our research is totally dependent on the many hosts who allow us to include their winter visitors in our research. We thank you and look forward to seeing you and your special wintering hummingbirds again next winter.