

AN EXEMPLARY NYSARC REPORT FROM 2006

Rufous Hummingbird 2006-49-B

DATE(S) OF OBSERVATION: November 23-26, 2006, December 1-3, 8,10, 18, 23, 30, January 6, 2007.

LOCALITY: Beverly E. Smith Butterfly and Hummingbird Garden located at the Lenoir Nature Preserve in Yonkers, Westchester County.

TIME & LENGTH OF OBSERVATION: Numerous observations varying from 20 seconds while visiting feeder to 15 minutes while resting on a perch.

OTHER OBSERVER(S): Ed Higgins, Kelli Jewell, Joe O'Connell, Tom Burke, Gail Benson and many others.

LIGHT CONDITIONS: Initially in a light rain, but subsequently in bright sunshine with direct lighting of the hummingbird.

DISTANCE IN FEET: 6-30

OPTICS: Bausch and Lomb 10X42 Elites and Kowa scope (32X)

NUMBER/SIZE/SHAPE: I received a phone call from Ed Higgins on a rainy Thanksgiving morning November 23, 2006. He had a hummingbird that looked "brownish" at the Beverly E. Smith Butterfly and Hummingbird Garden located at the Lenoir Nature Preserve in Yonkers, Westchester County. I arrived at the preserve around 11:30 AM in a light rain and met up with Joe O'Connell, Kelli Jewell, Tom Burke and Gail Benson.

A small hummingbird eventually came into a feeder. In profile the shape of the bird was somewhat stout, not elongated and the tail extended well past the wingtips.

COLOR & PATTERN: The hummingbird was seen a few times drinking from one of the four feeders in the garden, the one above the blooming Pineapple Sage. The hummingbird was green on the upperparts and had fairly bright rufous sides extending into the belly, the upper chest was whitish and the throat had a small gorget patch in the center. The rest of the throat was whitish with small flecks of dark. There was noticeable rufous in the face. Flashes of rufous were seen in the tail as it flew to and away from the feeder. Based on this we knew we had Lenoir's third selasphorus hummingbird in six years (2001, 2002). Due to time constraints (turkey dinner waiting) and an uncooperative bird, I did not get a look at the tail (feeder blocking it when sitting).

The next day was bright and sunny. I finally got great looks at the bird including its tail. In profile the shape of the bird was somewhat stout, not

elongated and the tail extended well past the wingtips. The back, uppertail coverts and nape were a bright green with some rufous on the sides of the lower back. The crown seemed darker green than the nape. In the face a small white spot was immediately behind the eye and this was surrounded by some rufous. The rufous in the face was most prominent on the cheek and below the eye. The center of the throat had an orange/red gorget patch in good light. The rest of the throat was fairly clean, whitish with only a few small darker marks. When sitting and facing away I saw that the center tail feathers (R1) had no rufous visible. R1 was green blending to black at the tip. We were dealing with a female Allen's/Rufous Hummingbird. The bird briefly spread its tail when leaving one of the feeders. R2-R5 had rufous bases sharply followed by black, R3-R5 had very prominent white tips. The tail was graduated with R5 shorter than R4, and R4 shorter than R3. All rectrices were wide and surprisingly rounded at the tip. In this brief flash of the tail feathers, R5 looked to be about 2/3 as wide as R4 and about 1/2 as wide as the center tail feathers R1.

BEHAVIOR: Vocalized rarely; a series of plaintive twittering notes, usually as feeders were being filled.

Fed from hummingbird feeders and blooming Pineapple Sage. Frequently seen catching small insects by hovering over the garden and surrounding area and stabbing at the small gnats.

HABITAT: Butterfly and Hummingbird Garden with four feeders and Pineapple Sage in bloom. The garden is located at the edge of a large sloping open field and adjacent to a White Pine stand.

HOW IDENTIFICATION WAS DETERMINED: Steve Walter took a great digital image of the tail spread out; most comments after this are based on my own observations as well as this photograph.

The tail extending well past the wingtips and extensive rufous in the base of the tail feathers ruled out Calliope Hummingbird.

The stout profile, rufous in the face, rufous extending across the base of R4 eliminate Broad-tailed Hummingbird.

That leaves Rufous/Allen's. To attempt to correctly identify the bird one must sex and age the bird first. The lack of rufous in center tail feathers eliminated both adult male and immature male Rufous /Allen's and clearly point to a female.

The throat at first suggested adult female. The center gorget patch was fairly prominent (9-12 feathers). But the tail feathers were all wrong. Adult female Rufous/Allen's should have tapered tail feathers, narrowing toward the tips. All tail feathers were quite blunt and rounded. Most adult females have nearly all green center tail feathers to the tip with some having just a small black tip. On this bird there was a fair amount of black at the tip extending down the sides. R4 is also tipped with white. The white tips of R3-5 were extensive. All this strongly points to an immature female.

The throat bothered me for a while. Some guides indicate that immature females have unmarked throats with some having a small center gorget patches. But given the late date for the discovery, and if this bird was hatched relatively early in the year, these things could account for the size of the patch. Immature females will develop the center gorget feather through the fall and winter. Allen Chartier's web page on a Niagara Falls 2004 bird had the hummingbird developing four gorget feathers by late fall, "where a week ago she was showing none": <<http://www.ofo.ca/photos/rufoushummer/>>. Sheri L. Williamson's *Hummingbirds of NA* states "Females tend to acquire more iridescence in gorget with each molt." and "immatures begin molting shortly after arrival on wintering grounds, often extending into spring migration" (p 226).

Another website <<http://www.hiltonpond.org/ThisWeek061022.html>> has pictures of two hatch year females, one with three metallic throat feathers (this bird returned four years in a row) and another with seven. There is also a nice comparison of the tapered tail feathers of an adult female vs. the rounded tail feather of a hatch year female Rufous.

Immature females pose the greatest challenge for separating Rufous from Allen's. The widths of all tail feathers are the widest for each species for this sex and age. The field mark for Rufous on R2, the indentation on the inner side towards the tip, is "lacking or poorly developed ... on most immature female Rufous" (Steve N.G. Howell's photo guide).

Steve Walter's picture of the spread tail shows a hint of an indentation on the farther R2. The R2 tail feather is shown at a shallow angle and the indentation appears as a straight edge in the picture.

R1 and R2 are very broad, strongly suggesting Rufous over Allen's. R5 is also quite broad (notice in Steve Walter's photo that part of the white tip is missing which at first glance suggests a narrow tail feather but the far edge of R5 shows where the white is partially missing). All this points to an immature female Rufous Hummingbird.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

The bird was never in view with other species. I am very familiar with Rufous Hummingbirds having studied the two that were here in 2001 and in 2002.

In my trips to Arizona, I spent much time becoming familiar with similar species such as Broad-tailed Hummingbird and other species. I've seen Allen's Hummingbird in California.

OTHER EVIDENCE

Digital photos attached.

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