A POSSIBLE BLACK-CHINNED HUMMINGBIRD IN NEW YORK STATE

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On 7 Dec, 2001 at the Lenoir Preserve in Yonkers, (Westchester Co.) New York, Hugh Martin noticed a "second hummingbird" in a patch of Salvia that had been used by a first year male Rufous Hummingbird since 17 Nov 2001. Observation and identification of this second bird was hampered by "aggressive interactions" between the two birds. The second bird was ultimately identified as an *Archilochus* species hummingbird based largely on the lack of rufous in the tail. This would make the bird either a Ruby-throated Hummingbird (*Archilochus colubris*) or a Black-chinned Hummingbird (*Archilochus alexandri*). The bird was observed again the following day by several observers. This time Andrew Guthrie obtained digital photographs of the bird. Guthrie's photographs and an excellent discussion of the bird in question can be accessed at: *http://home.earthlink.net/~andyguthrie/ny_archilochus.htm*

Although no one has claimed to have positively identified the mystery *Archilochus*, the general consensus among several experienced birders is that the bird was probably a Ruby-throated Hummingbird.

On 18 Dec 2001 Ben Cacace, Phil Jeffrey and I saw the mystery *Archilochus*. We observed the bird for more than an hour as it fed low in the Salvia and perched deep within it. It seemed tired and was frequently chased by the aggressive first-year male Rufous Hummingbird. Phil Jeffrey and I were able to obtain several photographs of the bird in question. Jeffrey's equipment consisted of a tripod mounted Canon 500mm f4.0 IS telephoto lens with a 2X tele-converter, a Canon EOS 3 camera, a Canon 550 EX flash, and a flash extender. My equipment was similar and consisted of a tripod mounted Canon 600mm f4.0 IS telephoto lens with a 1.4X tele-converter, a Canon EOS 1V camera, a Canon 550 EX flash, and a flash extender.

My field impression of the bird was that it exhibited many of the characteristics of Black-chinned Hummingbird. The major reason for this determination were the very wide outer primary feathers, easily viewed as the bird sat low in the Salvia. The relatively gray head, gray nape, dull overall color, and tail movement while feeding, also impressed me. I was able to view and photograph the underside of the primaries from a vantage point about eighteen (18) inches off the ground. Inspection of the images and further study on the Black-chinned/Ruby-throated species duo helped to confirm and enforce my initial impression. Not only do I think the mystery *Archilochus* is a Black-chinned Hummingbird, it is most likely a first-year female based on the lack of gorget feathers and the distinctive primary shape.

I present several images here (Figs. 1-4) as well as a discussion of my reasoning for claiming that the mystery *Archilochus* is a Black-chinned Hummingbird. I will be extensively referencing Steve N.G. Howell's *Hummingbirds of North America: The Photographic Guide* (Academic Press 2002),

and Peter Pyle's *Identification Guide to North American Birds* (Slate Creek Press 1997). Also, I reference several web sites on the subject.

My opinion that the Lenoir *Archilochus* is most likely a Black-chinned Hummingbird is based on two major and several minor field marks:

Outer Primary Shape: This is probably the best single field mark for separating female/immature Black-chinned and Ruby-throated. Howell notes (on page 137) that the "Best feature is wing shape, especially the shape of P10: Ruby-throated has relatively narrower and more tapered primaries throughout, often most noticeable on P8-P10 such that wing tip appears relatively narrow and tapered on Ruby-throated, broad and blunt-tipped on Black-chinned." Pyle echoes the importance of the outer primary shape in separating female/immature Black-chinned from Ruby-throated. Pyle's "Figure 97" and "Table 2" (pages 134-135) demonstrate the variation in the width and shape of the outer primaries by species, age, and sex.

The quality of images I obtained of the Lenoir *Archilochus* as it perched deep within the Salvia suffer from the low light conditions and obstructions present there (Figs. 3, 4). Despite these shortcomings, the images clearly demonstrate the broad and blunt-tipped shape of the outer primary feathers. The feather shape is not only consistent with that expected on Black-chinned, but is also most consistent with a first-year female Black-chinned, which demonstrates the broadest and most blunt-tipped outer primaries.

It should be noted that the primaries are not seen as well on Andy Guthrie's images for a number of reasons, the most important being perspective. I was photographing the bird from below as it held its wings below its tail. Guthrie probably photographed it from near eye-level. The importance of the perspective from which one views the primaries of an *Archilochus* hummingbird is illustrated in Figs. 5 & 6. These are images of an adult female Black-chinned Hummingbird taken in December 2000 at the Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park in Texas. In Fig. 5 the outer primaries are edge-on and give the impression that they are narrow and tapered as would be expected in a Ruby-throated Hummingbird. In Fig. 6 the primaries show more aspect and one can see that they are very broad and blunt-tipped. I e-mailed Fig.5 of the Bentsen Black-chinned Hummingbird to several of the birders who saw the Lenoir *Archilochus*. Interestingly, two of the birders suggested that I had misidentified the Bentsen bird based on the outer primaries...they had not seen Fig. 6!!

Additional information on primary shape can be found at:
<http://www.losbird.org/188_99nov_fig5.htm>

Tail Length: Black-chinned has a much shorter tail than Ruby-throated. This is a relatively invariable characteristic. Bob Sargent *<(http://www.hummingbirdsplus.org/black.html)>* notes that "When Black-chinned is perched and the wings are folded, the tips of the folded wing will almost always extend beyond the tip of the tail. Occasionally

they will appear to be the same length. Unless the tail feathers are just emerging and do not have their full length, the tail of Ruby-throated will always extend well beyond the folded wing. "

In the Lenoir *Archilochus* the tail is short (Figs. 1 & 2) and the primaries clearly project well beyond the folded tail (Figs. 3 & 4). This is very suggestive of, if not diagnostic for, Black-chinned Hummingbird. Note in Figs. 5 and 6 of the Texas Black-chinned that the wings do not quite extend to the tail. Examination of the photos of Black-chinned in Howell's book demonstrate that this degree of extension is well within range for this species.

Bill Shape: Black-chinned tends to have a longer and more decurved bill than Ruby-throated. This tendency is not invariable and there is much overlap, especially in young birds where the bill may not be fully gown (Pyle p.138). The curvature of the bill is probably more important than length.Though not overly long, the bill of the Lenoir *Archilochus* is very decurved and most consistent with Black-chinned (Fig. 2). Careful attention to the many photographs of Ruby-throated and Black-chinned in Howell illustrates this point. My images of a Black-chinned Hummingbird in Texas (Figs. 5 & 6) show a bill typical of this species.

Coloration: While both Black-chinned and Ruby-throated are described as having "emerald-green backs," Black-chinned tends to be duller and flatter in overall back color. In addition, Black-chinned tends to be dingier below than Ruby-throated. This duller back coloration combined with a dingy belly makes the Black-chinned appear less contrasted than Ruby-throated. (Howell p. 125; see also the Sargent web site). Characteristics of plumage coloration, however, are subject to great variation within a species. Moreover, our perception of color is strongly influenced by the viewing conditions. Again, a close inspection of the new Howell book will illustrate this point. Compare the images of Ruby-throated on pages 130-133 and the Black-chinned photos on pages 142-145 to get a sense of the variation within the species. Compare also image 16.11 of an immature female Ruby-throated with image 17.11 of a probable female immature Black-chinned; now review the image of the Lenoir *Archilochus* (Figs 1-4) which is very dull above and dingy, almost buffy, below. The overall plumage is most consistent with Black-chinned Hummingbird.

Head color: Ruby-throated tends to have a greener head, crown, and nape then Black-chinned. Green on the forehead may be diagnostic of Ruby-throated. As with back color, however, this is a highly variable characteristic (review the same images suggested above in Howell). The Lenoir *Archilochus* clearly has a significant amount of gray on the forehead, crown, and nape. The pollen staining on the forehead is also quite obvious but there is no green there. The head color is not particularly helpful here but is very consistent with Black-chinned Hummingbird.

Head pattern: Ruby-throated may tend to have a somewhat bolder facial pattern with more and darker blackish coloration below and behind the eye. Again, this is a markedly variable characteristic and is not diagnostic or particularly useful for either species. (Compare Howell 17.7, 17.8, and 17.9 with images 17.6 and 17.11). The Lenoir *Archilochus* clearly has some blackish coloration below and behind the eye but no more than the immature male Black-chinned illustrated in Howell (17.7) and considerably more than shown in several of the Ruby-throated photos (16.4, 16.5, and 16.6) The facial pattern, while not overly helpful, is consistent with Black-chinned Hummingbird.

Tail-bobbing: Black-chinned tend to bob their tails while feeding. This is a helpful characteristic when it is quite obvious. The lack of tail-bobbing, however, does not rule out Black-chinned Howell (p. 136) notes that "Male Black-chinned often wags its tail strongly, while Ruby-throated's tail is usually held more stiffly and quivered rather than wagged or pumped, but this is not diagnostic." Behavioral traits are subject to tremendous variability.

The Lenoir *Archilochus* definitely moved its tail while feeding (note the blurred tail in Figs. 1 & 2). I am not sure if it was bobbing the tail as aggressively as I have seen in other Black-chinned. It may be that the presence of a very aggressive, dominant, and territorial Rufous Hummingbird defending the only good flower patch in the vicinity, or other factors, blunted the tail-bobbing behavior.

In summary, the photographs taken on 18 Dec 2001 at the Lenoir Nature Preserve in Yonkers, New York suggest that the *Archilochus* hummingbird present was a Black-chinned Hummingbird. This conclusion is based on the diagnostic shape of the outer primaries and the diagnostic primary extension relative to the tail. Other supportive field marks noted such as the bill shape, bill length, back color, under-part color, head color, nape color, facial pattern, and tail-bobbing behavior are all consistent with my diagnosis of Black-chinned Hummingbird.

If accepted by the New York State Avian Records Committee (NYSARC), this will be the first New York State record for Black-chinned Hummingbird.

NOTE: The photographs referred to in this article, which are here reproduced in black-and-white because of budgetary restrictions, may be viewed in full color on the Federation website: www.fnysbc.org

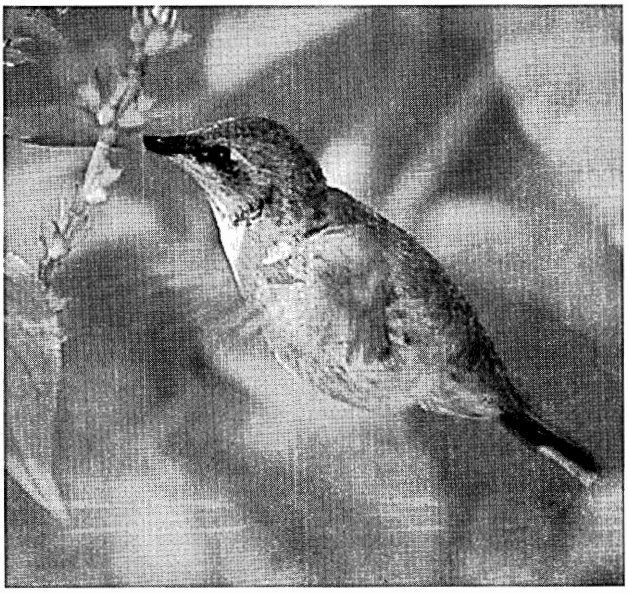

Fig. 1 – *Archilochus* feeding in Salvia
18 Dec 2001 ©Stubblefield

Fig. 2 – *Archilochus* hovering Lenoir Preserve
18 Dec 2001 ©Jeffrey

Fig. 3 – *Archilochus* perched Lenoir Preserve
18 Dec 2001
Note primary extension
©Stubblefield

Fig. 4 – Close-up of tail showing primary extension
©Stubblefield

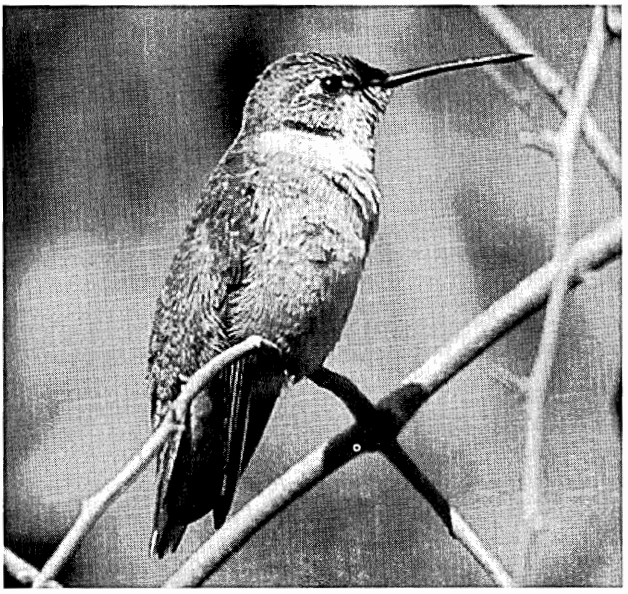

Fig. 5 – Black-chinned Dec 2000 Texas
Note outer primaries appear narrrow and tapered.
©Stubblefield

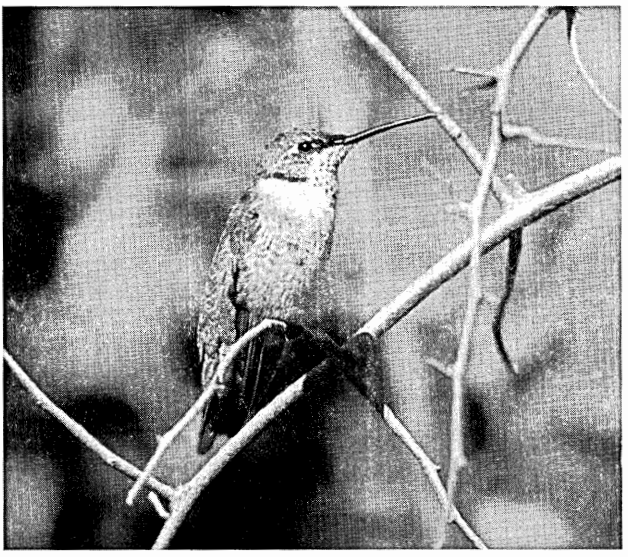

Fig. 6 – Same individual as Fig. 5
Note change of angle causes outer primaries
to appear much broader.
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