

## **Rufous Hummingbird *Selasphorus rufus***

Rufous Hummingbird is the most common and widespread of Oregon hummingbirds. This rusty-red, and fearless nectar feeder is a popular yard bird inspiring even the most modest of nature lovers to set up a feeder of sugar water and become a bird watcher. Rufous Hummingbird may also be the most wide ranging hummingbird in N. America. It has occurred in every state and most Canadian provinces. Increased awareness by feeder watchers to hummingbird fieldmarks, and capture efforts, mostly by avocational banders, are largely responsible for this change in our understanding of distribution patterns for the species (Heidcamp 1997).

**General Distribution:** Breeds from s. Alaska south to just north of the California line, and east to Idaho and Montana. Occurs throughout the w. U.S. in postbreeding dispersal. Most winter in c. Mexico, but a few regularly winter along the Gulf Coast; casual elsewhere in the U.S. during migration and Winter. Monotypic (AOU 1957).

**Oregon Distribution:** Common transient and breeder throughout most of w. Oregon, especially in forested regions. It is uncommon on the east slope of the Cascades, uncommon at higher elevations of the Blue Mtns., and uncommon to fairly common in the Willowa Mtns. (Evanich 1992a, Gilligan et al. 1994, OBBA). Summering birds are rare in arid se. Oregon (Littlefield 1990, Gilligan et al. 1994, OBBA) where they are usually found in areas with trees, deciduous shrubs, flowers, and water (Gilligan et al. 1994, MGH). Breeding has not been confirmed in Harney and Malheur counties (Contreras and Kindschy 1996), the Columbia Plateau, or c. Oregon (OBBA). Most winter records of *Selasphorus* hummingbirds in w. Oregon have been assumed to be this species, but no thorough documentation of these individuals has been obtained.

**Habitat and Diet:** Found in a wide variety of habitats, though it shows a breeding preference for wooded areas with a fairly high canopy and well-developed understory. Nests are usually built between near ground level and 16 ft (5 m) in understory foliage or low branches of evergreen trees (Johnsgard 1997). The nest is typically constructed from fine plant material, animal fur, and spider webs. The outside is camouflaged with bits of lichen, moss, and bark (Baicich and Harrison 1997). Nests are regularly reused from year to year though it is not clear that they are reused by the same individual (Calder 1993).

Many sources tie spring arrival to early blooming plants such as flowering currant, salmonberry, and pacific madrone (Johnsgard 1997). While these are undoubtedly important nectar sources, neither currant nor salmonberry regularly bloom until mid-Mar (Haskin 1934), though the latter has been found in bloom by late Jan on the Oregon coast in some years (M. Denny p.c.). Birds are probably dependent on insects gleaned from willow catkins and beneath leaves in the first few weeks after arrival and are also more likely to take advantage of hummingbird feeders (Calder 1993).

A state of torpor can be induced when air temperatures drop below 50°F (10°C), reducing energy requirements to about 7% of active body temperature. Entry into torpor is regulated by energy reserves and is more likely to occur during periods when food resources are low. Arousal to a higher metabolic rate is triggered by daylight (Calder 1993).

Dispersal to higher elevations and into c. and e. Oregon may be more closely tied to the availability of nectar-producing plants (Calder 1993). Preference is shown for tubular flowers, including paintbrushes, columbine, and penstemons, which are more likely to contain nectar. Grant and Grant (1967) were able to demonstrate a significant benefit to scarlet gilia from cross pollination by Rufous Hummingbirds.

**Seasonal Activity and Behavior:** In most years, they begin to arrive in w. Oregon in mid-Feb. First

detections are invariably along the s. Oregon coast; the earliest arrival date is 19 Jan 1998 at Coos Bay, Coos Co. (Thomas 1999). The average arrival date for Curry Co. is 2 Feb; Lincoln Co. 10 Feb; and 3 Mar for Clatsop Co. (composite of data from Oregon Birds field notes, MP). Western interior valley arrival dates fall behind coastal dates by about 1 wk. Peak migratory movements occur from late Mar through the first wk of Apr (MP). There are very few first detection reports e. of the Cascades, but arrival is probably discretionary and weather dependent, ranging from late Mar through Apr (Littlefield 1990a, Calder 1993). Arrival in the Blue Mtns. is typically during the first week of Apr (M. Denny p.c.).

Males arrive about 2 wk before females, presumably to set up territories. Males select a prominent perch from which to watch a territory and vigorously defend it. Territory size is determined by availability of food resources. Males are polygynous and do not participate in nesting (Calder 1993).

Males move away from breeding territories as early as Jun. Some females and immature birds begin dispersal in Jul but a female has been found feeding young in the nest as late as 28 Jul 2001 near Zigzag, Clackamas Co. (B. Altman p.c.). Postbreeding dispersal has confused the issue of breeding ranges somewhat and many high Cascades, Willowa, and se. Oregon montane records may be of dispersed birds rather than breeders. Males will use displays generally associated with breeding purely in defense of feeding territories (Calder 1993). Most leave the state by late Aug, though a few are encountered into Sep (composite of Oregon Birds field notes).

There are scattered winter records of *Selasphorus* hummingbirds from CBCs, most in the Willamette Valley (Shipman 1998). All recent winter records are associated with hummingbird feeders.

Detection: Separation from Allen's Hummingbird should be done with care. Adult males with mostly rufous backs may be safely identified, but some males may have significant amounts of green in the back (Patterson 1990, McKenzie and Robbins 1999). It is generally believed that green-backed males are second-year birds, but ageing of this species needs more investigation (Pyle 1997).

Most field guides published before the late 1990s describe the Rufous display as oval (e.g., Johnsgard 1997). This is incorrect. The display is more properly described as a series of J-shaped high dives (e.g., Sibley 2000) with a loud "zubbing" sound at the bottom of each arc. The upward return from each dive also approximates a J-shape, but is a less strictly held pattern (Hunn 1983, Calder 1993, MP).

Rufous females and immature birds have wider rectrices than Allen's, but this is extremely difficult to see in the field (Stiles 1972, Heidcamp 1997). Female and immature *Selasphorus* hummingbirds cannot be safely sorted except by range or in-hand measurements.

Population Status and Conservation: They were first recorded by Lewis and Clark at the mouth of the Columbia R. in 1806 and were well studied by Kobbe there in 1900 (Gabrielson and Jewett 1940, Johnsgard 1997). A downward trend in population for Oregon is indicated by BBS data (Sauer et al. 1997). Reasons for this are unclear and deserve further study. Artificial feeders provide supplemental food in times of low availability of natural resources, but may also increase potential for predation, disease, and window collision (Calder 1993).—Mike Patterson

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