





11/20/01

495-01-2001

Rufous Hummingbird, Northampton County

At 1 p.m. on November 9, 2001, a hummingbird appeared at a feeder outside of my kitchen window. Because of the time of the year I assumed it was a Selasphorus, although at first glance I didn't see much rufous on it. However, it then went to a second feeder right outside the kitchen door where the light was better and it was obviously a Selasphorus sp. hummer.

The next morning Scott Weidensaul caught and banded this bird. He determined it to be a hatching year male rufous hummingbird. After its release it took about 3 hours but it came back to the feeder where it was caught and then stayed for another 7 days.

The lack of obvious rufous on its back and head had some visiting birders questioning Scott's ID but that it their problem. All measurements pointed to its being a "rufous" and there was rufous in the rump area and on the tail feathers, *and above its eyes.*

Enclosed is a photo taken by Dave De Reamus on November 9, 2001, from a third feeder on the front porch that the hummer only visited on rare occasions.

Interesting is the fact that this bird had almost no fat accumulation when it was caught. But the morning it left, Saturday, November 17, it visited the feeder by the kitchen door many times between 6:30 and 8 am. Having observed it many times, it seemed to me like it was tanking up for the continuation of its journey. And it was because that's the last time it was seen.

Arlene Koch
1375 Raubsville Road
Easton, PA 18042
Northampton County
Davidlene@aol.com
610 253-6377

Next → for PORC records.

Re: tail. As concerns Scott's original thoughts that the bird's rump was rusty (as I said in my first writeup), he changed his mind because he

Nancy L. Newfield
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495-01-2001

15 March 2002

Thought he mistook rectrices' bases for rump color.

I didn't want to include that in the article however.

Please include this with original PORC writeup

Arlene Koch
1375 Raubsville Road
Easton, PA 18042-9503

Dear Arlene,

Thanks for sending the pictures. Along with the other data, they present a very interesting puzzle. As you no doubt know, differentiating among adult female, immature female, and immature male Rufous Hummingbirds *Selasphorus rufus* can be a genuine challenge, especially in early autumn. I've taken the measurements at face value, assuming they are correct.

Thank!
Alma

My first impression of your bird was that it is an adult female because of the green rump and the fairly large semi-triangular throat patch. Some immature males also show such a pattern, but most immature male Rufous that I've seen also have rusty-colored rumps by early October. Females show sometimes show a bit of rufous on the rump because of wear to those feathers. The bases of the green dorsal feathers on Rufous Hummingbirds are rusty, so they show a bit of rust if the dorsal feathers are worn or broken. Your bird doesn't show any rusty color on the rump. I have seen a few immature males with green rumps in October, but the rufous coloration usually begins to show soon after that.

The extent of corrugations on the maxilla - 75% - clearly classifies this individual as an immature bird. Under ordinary circumstances, one might then assume that the presence of an iridescent throat patch identifies the bird as an immature male because immature female Rufous Hummingbirds usually have no or very few colored feathers on their gorgets. However, measurements of the exposed culmen [17.3 millimeters] and the wing chord [44.91 millimeters] strongly suggest that this bird is a female. Immature males generally exhibit shorter measurements than females of either sex. Measurements of the widths of rectrices 1, 2, and 5 would also be helpful, but I don't see those in the information you've provided. I also note that the wing chord measurement is refined to the hundredth millimeter while the exposed culmen measurement is only given to the tenth millimeter. I suspect that the exposed culmen measurement was taken with a ruler rather than a caliper and it is therefore less accurate. In my experience, the measurements are the best evidence of a bird's sex and the measurements of the exposed culmen and the wing chord are the two most compelling.

The pointedness of the individual rectrices also seemed to point to the bird being an immature male until I compared the images to a handful of rectrices from among those I collected this past winter season. The rectrices of immature females are rounded, while those of males are rather pointed. However, many adult females also have pointed rectrices. And the distribution of rufous coloration in your bird's rectrices matches the adult females better than it does any immature males. Immature males have much more

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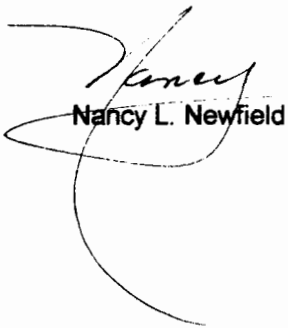
extensive rufous coloration in their rectrices than do any adult females. In fact, they have little or no green coloration such as is visible on the rectrices of your bird.

In immature hummingbirds of every species I've studied, when rectrices are lost ahead of the ordinary molt schedule, they are immediately replaced with adult-type tail feathers. For immature males, it is always very obvious because the shapes and color patterns are so different, and I see adult rectrices on immature males frequently. So, there is no reason to believe that an immature female might not lose her immature rectrices adventitiously for the same reasons an immature male might. And, there is no reason to believe that her replacement rectrices would not also be adult-type.

My conclusion, therefore, is that your bird is an **immature female Rufous Hummingbird with a full set of adult rectrices**. The quantity of iridescent gorget feathers seems extreme for an immature female, but the other evidence seems to strongly suggest that identification. Of course, this conclusion is a bit speculative, but the preponderance of evidence [measurement of exposed culmen, measurement of wing chord, green rump, shapes of rectrices, distribution of green in rectrices] suggests strongly that it not an immature male.

You may use my letter or any part of it in the article you are writing. Hopefully when your next red-letter hummer appears it will be an adult male!

Yours very truly,


Nancy L. Newfield

495-01-2001

PA BIRDS
Article

A PUZZLING RUFOUS HUMMINGBIRD

Arlene Koch

Northampton County, November 9 – 17, 2001

Shortly after noon on a beautiful fall day in early November 2001, a Rufous Hummingbird (*Selasphorus rufus*) showed up at a feeder outside my kitchen window. When I saw it I was so shocked and thrilled that I screamed for my husband David at the top of my voice. Thinking I had somehow once again hurt myself, he came running out of the bathroom pulling up his pants, and he gave me an extremely disdainful look when he realized I was just yelling about another bird. He changed his tune, though, when he saw what it was.

Ironically, I had just about given up on ever getting this species on our property. The day before I had almost taken the three remaining hummingbird feeders down. The last Ruby-throated Hummingbird (*Archilochus colubris*) of the year had left the yard on October 2, and I'd been looking at unused feeders ever since. But I kept them up anyway, knowing that it's often in November that vagrant western hummers are found in the East. I also vividly remembered that just last year on November 15, 2000, an immature male *Selasphorus* hummer showed up at Rick Wiltraut's feeder in nearby Nazareth.

My first impression of this hummer was that it was definitely a *Selasphorus* sp. and probably an adult female Rufous. It had what appeared to be an all green rump and a heavy orange/red triangular throat patch (gorget). That first look at the bird was from the side and clearly showed rufous lines over and slightly in front of its eyes. It also had a light cinnamon/rufous band across its chest and similar color down its flanks that got darker and heavier toward the bottom.

I really didn't get a good look at its tail until it flew around the corner of the house to a second feeder that hung 10 feet away from the kitchen door. There it perched and began to feed facing away, giving me a great look at rufous coloring at the base of some its tail feathers (rectrices). This view also clearly showed that the middle and second rectrices (R1, R2) were triangular and pointed in shape, not broad and rounded.

After I got a good look at the tail I began thinking that maybe I was wrong about it being a female bird. Unless I was mistaken, in addition to the shape of R1 and R2, I saw what I thought was a notch in the inner web of R2. That would make it a young male Rufous, not an adult female, and at that point I was really confused. I also knew that I was out of my league, so I quickly called Scott Weidensaul. Scott had recently gotten his hummingbird bander's certification under Bob Sargent in Alabama.

Amazingly, Scott was home when I called and, even more amazing was the fact that he was able come over the next morning with his banding equipment. He caught the hummer almost as soon as he had set up his trap by the kitchen door. He had to freeze in place at one point because the bird came in to feed while he was trying to put the feeder into the cage, which is operated by a remote control device.

After weighing, measuring, and banding the bird, Scott's best determination was that it was an immature male Rufous Hummingbird. But, while he was sure of the species, he had some nagging doubts about its age and sex. And he wanted to confer with Bob Sargent about a few things.

The bird's weight at 3.46 grams was average but could or should have been heavier for a bird in the middle of migration. It had 0 (none) fat accumulation, indicating that it would probably stick around for a while to feed and fatten up. There were heavy (75%) corrugations on its maxilla or upper bill (culmen) that definitely made it a young bird. However, both the culmen (17.3 mm) and wing chord (44.91 mm) measurements were puzzling because they pointed to it being a female, not a hatching year male (HYM) bird. Females almost always have longer wing lengths than do males. But then there were those pointed rectrices to consider.

After reviewing the photos and data, Bob mirrored Scott's thinking that this was probably a HYM Rufous, although a puzzling one. However, after a middle of the night epiphany a few weeks later, Bob changed his mind on the bird's sex based on the shape and coloration of its rectrices. Saying that his initial call had bothered him all along even though it was his best conclusion, he now said that he thought this bird was an immature female Rufous Hummingbird.

A few months later I sent copies of the photos Scott had taken of this hummer to Nancy Newfield in Louisiana. I know her well and I also knew that Bob wouldn't mind because it was Nancy who had trained him many years ago. And even before she made her final call, she emailed me and said that this bird was indeed a difficult individual to properly age and sex.

495-06-2001

This hummer was puzzling to her too, although she had no doubt that it was a Rufous. When she first looked at the photos, she thought it was an adult female because of the amount of color on its throat. But no adult bird, male or female, would have 75% bill corrugations. And, muddying up the waters even more, were those darned rectrices. Tail feathers this pointed usually make the bird a male, but not always. Although immature female Rufous hummers have rounded rectrices, many adult female Rufous hummers have pointed rectrices like this one had.

Nancy compared the photos of the bird's tail to some of the feathers that she had taken from adult female Rufous birds that she had recently banded and came up with a very interesting conclusion. Based on the facts she was given and the photos in hand, she said that this bird was most likely an immature female Rufous Hummingbird with a full set of adult rectrices. And if you're not confused by now, you should be.

Nancy went on to say that in all the immature hummingbirds of every species that she has studied, rectrices that are lost ahead of the bird's normal molt schedule are immediately replaced with adult-type tail feathers. She also said that although she mostly had experience with young males doing this, there was no discernible reason it couldn't happen to a female too.

Obviously it's clear that sometimes even the experts don't have all the answers, especially when it comes to hummingbirds. Anyone who has ever banded will tell you that having a bird in the hand reveals plumages, colors, and other characteristic that would never been seen or known about when the bird was on the wing.

I'm very grateful to Scott, Bob, and Nancy for all the help they've given toward identifying this hummingbird. It is through their efforts, and, I should say, the efforts of many other hummingbird banders, that knowledge is learned and then passed on to the rest of the birding world.

I guess the only way I'll ever know for sure just exactly what age and sex this Rufous Hummingbird was would be if it were recaptured somewhere down the line. It would be great if someone in the ever-expanding group of certified hummingbird banders across the country would solve the mystery for me. But it would be even better if next fall the same bird shows up again outside my kitchen window.

Subject: Re: Rufous Hummer at Arlene's
Date: Mon, 31 Dec 2001 10:59:29 -0500
From: sweidnsl@pottsville.infi.net (Scott Weidensaul)
To: Nick Pulcinella <nickpul@bellatlantic.net>

495-01-2001

Dear Nick,

With apologies for the tardiness, here are the details and photos of the rufous hummingbird that I banded at Arlene Koch's home Nov. 10, 2001; the delay was caused, in part, by confusion over the bird's gender, which was only solved by having Bob Sargent (an expert on wintering western hummingbirds) examine the photos and two plucked tail feathers -- there were several ambiguous features about this bird that made it a puzzle.

Here are the details:

Band # R547603
Species: RUHU
Age/sex: HY-F
Wing: 44.91 mm
Tail: 28
Culmen: 17.3
Percentage of bill grooving: 75 (indicates HY bird)
Number of iridescent gorget feathers: 20 (more typical of an AHY female)
Weight: 3.46 g
Fat: 0
Rufous back/rump feathers: None

Ordinarily, rufous vs. Allen's (ALHU) are distinguished by measuring the width of the R5 rect -- a feather which, in this case, had been freshly molted on both sides of the tail, and the replacement feather was only 50 percent emerged from its sheath. However, enough of the new feather was exposed to note its white tip (confirming that the bird was a female), and to permit measuring the width, which was 4.71mm, well above the 3.3mm minimum for an HY female rufous. In addition, the tip of the R2 rect showed slight but distinct emargination, typical of rufous but not found in ALHU.

If you or the committee have any further questions, please don't hesitate to contact me. I do have in-the-hand photos, if you need them in addition to the measurements. I hope this is the first of many western hummers that whose ID we can confirm through banding in the future.

Cheers,

Scott

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March 3, 2002

Nick Pulcinella
Penna. Ornithological Records Committee
210 Welcome Ave.
Norwood, Pa. 19074

Dear Nick,


Enclosed -- at long last -- are the photos of Arlene Koch's HY-F rufous hummingbird, which I banded 11/10/01 (PORC #495-01-2001). I apologize for taking so long to get the photos to you; your email asking for them arrived just as all hell broke loose with the Ned Smith Center (Marie Smith's death, a major grant presentation by the governor), then I was in Belize with Kevin Loughlin for three weeks.

I also apologize for the quality of the photos, which was due to a dumb-ass move on my part, opening the back of the camera before rewinding (I've only been photographing professionally for, what, 20 years?), thus ruining a lot of the photos after the bird had already been released. However, the four photos clearly show the appropriate RUHU characteristics, especially the emarginated and notched R2 rectrices.

Sex was a bit of a puzzle at first; bill grooving indicated the hummer was an HY, and the number of gorget feathers at first suggested a male, though the absence of any rufous back or rump feathers so late in the year was unusual. However, both R5 rects were growing in with white tips, which clearly indicate a female.

I hope this clears everything up for the committee, and again, I'm sorry you had to wait so long for these photos.

Best,


Scott Weidensaul

Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

Tabulation Form - Round One

Species: Rufous Hummingbird (Selasphorus rufus)

Date of Sighting: 9 November 2001 to 17 November 2001

Location: EASTON

County: NORTHAMPTON

Observer(s): Arlene Koch, Scott Weidensaul

Date of Submission: 2001

Submitted by: Arlene Koch, Scott Weidensaul

Written Description: Yes

Photo: Yes

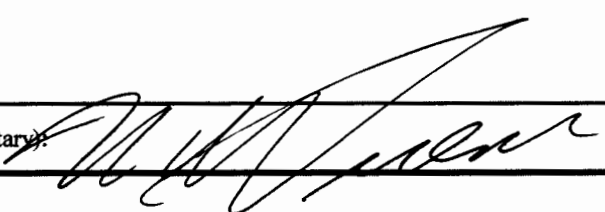
Specimen: No

Recording: No

Member	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV-A				Abstain
					Class IV-B	Class IV-C	Class V	
G. Armistead	X							
D. Heathcote	X							
P. Hess	X							
J. Stanley	X							
E. Witmer	X							
R. Leberman	X							
M. Sharp	X							
TOTALS	7							
DECISION	X							

Comments: 7/0

Signature (Secretary):



Date: 2/5/03