

SELASPHORUS SP. HUMMINGBIRD

September 3, 2005, Northampton County

Report submitted by Arlene Koch

Around 10 AM on what was a very bright, sunny day with cool temperatures and winds from the NNW, a *Selasphorus* sp. hummingbird flew in and fed at a feeder outside of my kitchen window. Unfortunately I was not inside at the sink at the time. Had I been I could've gotten a great look at it, but I was instead walking across the lawn toward the house when I saw the bird land. I was between 20 and 25 feet away and had my Brunton Epoch's 10.5 X 43 binoculars with me. I am reporting this as a *Selasphorus* species only. I am aware that we really don't need to write up or report *Selasphorus* species any longer (or at least I think I'm right about that) but I'm doing so because I believe this bird was either an adult female or immature male Broad-tailed hummingbird (*Selasphorus platycercus*). However, since this would be a state record and I can never prove it without proper documentation, I am, in effect, just reporting my qualified suspicions here so that they are on file. I strongly believe that eventually someone will get a Broad-tailed documented and accepted by PORC.

When the bird landed in full morning sun on the eastern side of the house my first impression was that it was bigger than a Ruby-throated hummingbird. I've been watching and studying Rubythroats for many years and have probably looked closely at thousands of them. That said, I immediately acknowledge that that still doesn't mean I can't be wrong or fooled. But here is what I saw.

The bird's head appeared somewhat flattened with a sloping forehead. Its bill was heavier and much straighter than what I normally see on Rubythroats, but this is a relative thing dependent on the observer and angle. I saw no discernible rufous color on the head or around the face, although there were some lighter spots on the back of its head. That by itself doesn't mean a whole lot since young Rubythroats have buffy edges to their wings. The head and back were a light green color. I was immediately drawn to the bird's face. It lacked the contrast between the auricular area and the throat that I'm used to seeing on Rubythroats. The throat was lightly stippled with either beige or greenish spots, but I saw no definite color there. Nor did I see any large dark areas that would indicate color on the throat area. Its sides and flanks were cinnamon/rufous, but that doesn't negate Rubythroat because I often see them with a lot of buffy or cinnamon color in that same area. I knew to look as closely as I could at its wings, which was possible because it was perched angled sideways. They were shorter than its tail, which was, relatively speaking in comparison to its body, long. Its primaries were different than those Rubythroats have. They were more evenly spaced and broader, especially the inner primaries. This again, I realize, is a relative thing dependent on the observer, angle, and degree of knowledge. To me, if I may be permitted to use a completely unscientific phrase, the inner primaries of a Rubythroat look like they're "bunched together." They weren't on this bird.

All of what I've just reported really wouldn't mean much were it not for what I saw when the bird flared its tail. Through the years I've seen Rubythroats look smaller or bigger than other Rubythroats depending on where and how they're sitting. I've seen "short" tails suddenly morph into much longer ones when a bird lifted off its perch and hovered at a feeder. I've seen curved bills suddenly become much straighter depending on the angle you look at them. But this bird's flared tail showed undeniable rufous color at the base of rectrices 1 - 3 although there wasn't a lot of it. But it was most definitely rufous, not beige or washed out green. I was viewing the bird from the back in strong sunlight. Often when Rubythroats are backlit with flared tails the tops of their tail feathers look light, so light in fact that they look beige or light gray. Bob Sargent once told me that some Rubythroats actually have a cinnamon tone to the base of some of their tail feathers at times, but it's very rare. However, this bird's tail definitely had rufous on it, although not much. I didn't get a good enough look at the tips of the R4's to see if there were any light or beige spots there. Had I thought to do that it would've helped a lot. But I didn't. I've seen quite a few Rufous hummingbirds but I ruled that one out because of the bird's size and the fact that there didn't appear to be any rufous color anywhere on this bird but on its tail. I hosted a rufous here some years back for 8

days. Allen's is always a possibility but I doubt the rufous on the bird's side was dark enough and I don't think there was nearly enough rufous on its tail feathers for it to be an Allen's.

Knowing that announcing a possible Broad-tailed hummingbird would bring people running, I chose instead to only tell a few selected birders. I was hoping it would come back so I or someone else could get photos or videos or, at the very least, someone else would see it. Devich Farbotnik came up and a few hours later this bird came into the same feeder and perched at the same spot. By this time 5 hours had passed. It didn't stay long and all Devich could say was that it wasn't a Rubythroat. It didn't flare its tail while it fed this time and Devich was so intent on looking at it that he didn't get his video camera on it before it flew away. And I never saw it again. There was a lot of hummingbird activity in the yard this day. A cold front with NNW winds was moving them through at a strong clip. Sometimes four or five were in view or chasing each other at the same time. I had 11 feeders out at this time and we were only able to see five of them in the back yard. The feeders in the side and front yards were out of view from where we were sitting so it's possible this bird visited one of them without our knowing it. So other than being sure this bird was a *Selasphorus* of some kind, I'll always wonder what it was.

Arlene Koch
1375 Raubsville Road
Easton, PA 18042
Northampton County
610 253-6377

Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

Voting Tabulation – Round One

Species: *Selasphorus species* (Selasphorus)

Date of Sighting: 3 September 2005 to 3 September 2005

Location: WILLIAM'S TOWNSHIP

County : NORTHAMPTON

Observer(s): Arlene Koch

Date of Submission: 2005

Submitted by: Arlene Koch

Written Description: Yes

Photo: No

Specimen: No

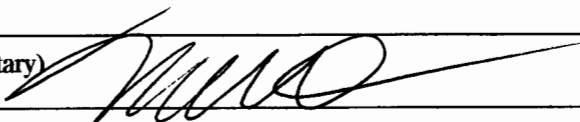
Recording: No

Member	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV-A	Class IV-B	Class IV-C	Class V	Abstain
R. Wiltraut								
A. Guarente			X					
P. Guris			X					
J. Stanley			X					
E. Witmer			X					
J. Heller			X					
M. Sharp			X					
TOTALS			6					
DECISION			X					

Comments:

c/o

Signature (Secretary)



Date:

7/25/06