

Rufous Hummingbird *Selasphorus rufus*

The Rufous, the world's northernmost hummingbird, commutes annually between the Pacific Northwest and Mexico. It passes through San Diego County in both directions, taking advantage of the bloom of desert flowers like ocotillo in spring, of mountain flowers like the scarlet bugler in late summer, and of exotic plants like eucalyptus and tree tobacco at both seasons. Hummingbirds of the genus *Selasphorus* also occur as rare winter visitors, though hardly any of these are adult males. Distinguishing the Rufous and Allen's Hummingbirds in other plumages usually requires careful study of birds in hand.

Migration: The migrations of the Rufous Hummingbird are early, though not quite so early as those of Allen's Hummingbird. Spring migration begins in February (one at Quail Botanical Gardens, K7, 1 February 1999, R. Campbell; two at La Jolla, P7, 5 February 2000, L. and M. Polinsky), exceptionally late January (one male in Borrego Springs, G24, 23 January 1993, A. G. Morley; one at Valley Center, G11, 27 January 1974, AB 28:693, 1974). Migration peaks in late March and early April. Even then the species is usually uncommon, though large concentrations can be seen occasionally around flowering trees or shrubs. Our largest numbers during the atlas period—up to 40 at Yaqui Flat (I23) 7 April 1998 (P. K. Nelson)—were along the east base of the mountains, a line of concentration for migrants crossing from the desert to the coast. Rufous Hummingbird numbers in the desert, however, are irregular, perhaps varying with weather conditions. The species can be seen more consistently in spring in the coastal lowland. Most birds have continued north by the end of April, though stragglers have been seen as late as 12 May (1976, one male at Point Loma, S7, J. L. Dunn) and 16 May (1999, two at La Jolla, P7, L. and M. Polinsky). Spring specimens range in date between 1 March (1963, San Luis Rey, G6, SDNHM 3195; 1990, El Cajon, Q13, SDNHM 46608) and 30 April (1990, Point Loma, SDNHM 46887).

Though the bulk of the population makes a loop route, returning south along the Rocky Mountains after heading north along the Pacific coast (Phillips 1975), many Rufous Hummingbirds also go south through southern California. Because few of the birds at this season are adult males, especially after early July, the ratio between the Rufous and Allen's is uncertain. In the SDNHM collection, there are six specimens of fall migrant Rufous



Photo by Anthony Mercieca

from San Diego County, five of Allen's. Specimen dates of the Rufous range from 19 July (1934, Balboa Park, SDNHM 16536) to October (no exact date, 1968, Point Loma, SDNHM 37615). Sight records are as early as 22 June (1970, one banded at Point Loma, AFN 24:717, 1970) and 23 June (2000, one near Cutca Valley, C14, J. M. and B. Hargrove). After peaking from July to early August, numbers of *Selasphorus* hummingbirds dwindle, with the latest seen typically in early October. Fall migrants concentrate at patches of native wildflowers in the mountains (up to 30, including seven male Rufous, near the Palomar Observatory, D15, 12 July 2000, K. L. Weaver) and at exotic flowering plants in the coastal lowland (up to 65 at Quail Botanical Garden, K7, 7 July 1997, C. C. Gorman). There are a few fall records of *Selasphorus* hummingbirds in the Anza-Borrego Desert, the maximum being up to six coming to feeders near the Borrego Palm Canyon campground (F23) 26 July–6 August 1989 (L. L. Jee).

Winter: A few *Selasphorus* hummingbirds winter in San Diego County annually, in exotic flowering vegetation, especially eucalyptus. During the atlas period the number reported per winter varied from ten in 1998–99 to just one in 2000–01. Most wintering *Selasphorus* hummingbirds are in parks, cemeteries, and well-landscaped residential areas in the coastal lowland, with up to three in La Jolla 3 January 1999 (L. and M. Polinsky) and eight on the San Diego Christmas bird count 20 December 1975. A few wintering birds have been adult male Rufous, and an immature male from Carlsbad (I6) 14 January 1994 (SDNHM 48887) is a Rufous.

More surprising are three winter records from the Anza-Borrego Desert. One, of a male Rufous in Borrego Springs (F24) 19 December 1999 (M. L. Gabel), was from an ornamental planting, but two have been from natu-

ral canyons, Glorieta Canyon (H24) 29 December 1985 (L. Grismer, M. Galvan) and Hellhole Canyon (G23) 1 January 1999 (A. G. and D. Stanton).

Conservation: The introduction of diverse exotic flowering plants has augmented the food supply for

migrating hummingbirds and has allowed a few of the Rufous to cut short their long migration and winter in southern California. The county's first winter record of any *Selasphorus* hummingbird was on the San Diego Christmas bird count 2 January 1961.