

**"Observations On The Courtship Behavior Of
The Ruby-Throated Hummingbird
(Archilochus colubris).**

-Dr. E. B. Sledge-

During the last week of August, 1968, I twice observed courtship and copulation of a pair of Ruby-Throated Hummingbirds. Observations were made on two successive days at approximately 1:00 p.m. through a window commanding a view of my courtyard (15' x 30') surrounded on three sides by the house and on the fourth by a 6' high board fence. Except for three flower beds, the largest 3' x 8' on the north side, the courtyard is paved with concrete. At the time the observations were made this flower bed was thickly planted red Salvia (*Salvia* sp.). Two female Ruby-Throated Hummingbirds were regular visitors to the salvia plants, during most of the first three weeks of August. During feeding activity these birds exhibited aggressive behavior in the form of chasing each other about through the foliage of the plants and around the environs of the courtyard. This activity was usually accompanied by twittering sounds and the loud hum produced by the wing action of the birds during hovering flight. The first appearance of a male was during the last week of August. When he arrived at the feeding site, the two females became highly agitated and one drove the other out of the courtyard. When this bird returned, immediately her antagonist again chased her away. During this time the male was feeding in a normal manner. When the dominant female returned to the feeding site, the male stopped feeding, the female began hovering in front of him. The pair then faced each other about one foot apart and to the accompaniment of much twittering, buzzing, and humming, flew rapidly up and down vertically. The female's tail was expanded during this activity but that of the male was not. The female darted at the male several times, each time he flew to the side and continued vertical hovering. The female appeared at all times to be the more aggressive of the two.

Contact was made in the air and was so rapid that I could not determine which bird made the advance. Upon contact, the female was dorsal to the male, the tails of both birds were fully expanded with the rectrices meshed. Thus attached, the birds flew about two feet above the ground for two rapid circuits of the courtyard. They came to rest on the concrete surface in the middle of the area. I timed the period during which the birds remained on the ground surface and it was slightly over one minute. The rectrices were still meshed and the male kept his wings fully extended and remained motionless during this entire time. The female held her wings partially extended and preened the feathers on the nape, crown, and forehead of the male. She also moved the tip of her beak back and forth along the entire length of the beak of the male. The pair then separated and flew to branches in a tree above the courtyard where each preened itself, then flew in opposite directions.

The following day, the same phenomenon was observed with no significant variations. It was not possible to determine whether or not the same pair of birds was involved in both cases.

Bent (U. S. Nat'l. Mus., 176:335-337) describes the flight patterns of the Ruby-Throated Hummingbird during courtship but does not give details concerning behavior during contact. On this subject, he states, page 337, "...observed a pair drop to the ground beside our driveway, where copulation took place." I found no other reference in the literature that describes contact during the courtship behavior of this species.

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