

**SECOND RECORD FOR THE CALLIOPE HUMMINGBIRD
(*STELLULA CALLIOPE*) IN ALABAMA**

Robert R. and Martha B. Sargent



Figure 1. This Calliope Hummingbird overwintered south of Birmingham near Montevallo. (Photo by Paul Franklin)

On 22 February, 1991, my wife, Martha, and I received a call from Mrs. Martha Reid of Birmingham, informing us of a hummingbird that was wintering at a feeder about 30 miles south of Birmingham in Shelby County. We investigated the location at 5303 Highway 119 South on 23 February, but found neither the hummingbird nor the homeowner at home.

I returned to the location on 26 February and met the homeowner, Mr. Taylor Hill. Immediately upon our arrival, the hummingbird made an extended feeding trip to the feeder and my first impression, when viewed from about 75 feet away with 8x42 Elite binoculars, was that of a very small female plumage bird with a very short bill and tail. Mr. Hill had described the bird as a "baby hummingbird," because of its similarity to the familiar Ruby-throated (*Archilochus colubris*), but the overall size was much too small even for a male Ruby-throated, which is smaller than

ALABAMA BIRDLIFE

the female.

I immediately set up my trapping apparatus and the bird returned and perched in a dogwood tree (*Cornus florida*) within 20 feet of my viewing position. This much closer look with eight power binoculars again revealed a very short, needle-like bill, small head, green back shimmering with a faint bluish cast, and a very dark tail contrasting with the green back. The tail appeared black with white tips on the outer retrices. No other color was noted in the retrices at this time. A striking feature noticed when the bird was perching was a cinnamon-buff wash that extended from the sides of the breast back along the sides and flanks. The wash on the undertail coverts was a pale cinnamon color. The throat had dusky bronze-green spots on an almost white to grayish white background. A small triangular black spot was observed in front of the eye. The bird continually chirped and scolded with a very high pitched tinkling, slightly metallic twittering. I was again struck by the overall tiny appearance and had no doubt that the bird was a Calliope.

With the permission of Mr. Hill the bird was trapped and banded (band # 8000 T1 7069) and the following measurements recorded: wing - 41.37mm, tail - 21.9mm, exposed culmen - 15.02mm, weight - 2.89 grams. In addition, photographs were taken and a millimeter rule placed by the bird for size comparison. The measurements were very close to other Calliope Hummingbirds banded east of the Mississippi River. The following are shown for comparison: band # 8000 T1 6425, banded at Fort Walton Beach, Florida 18 December, 1989 (first state record): wing - 41.2mm, tail - 22.8mm, exposed culmen - 14.7mm, weight - 2.80 grams. Another bird, found dead (frozen) 24 December, 1989, near Mobile (first state record, *Alabama Birdlife*, Vol. 37, No. 2) had the following measurements: wing - 40.5mm, tail - 22.3mm, exposed culmen - 15.3mm, weight - 2.37 grams. All three of these birds appeared to be females.

In hand, the description noted prior to capture was supplemented with the following data: central retrices #1 and #2 subspatulate in shape, (Figure 2), their width at the widest point being 5.47mm and 5.71mm respectively. The color of the distal one third of each of the feathers was a deep purple-black, changing to green which tapered sharply toward the base. The constricted basal one third was a light to reddish-buff, with the buff color in an arc-shaped indentation toward the shaft, which was dark purple with a reddish tone. *These very narrow subspatulate retrices having a rich buff arc of color are diagnostic of Calliope Hummingbirds.*

Retrices #1, #2, and #5 were taken for documentation prior to releasing the bird. In addition, two sample feathers were taken from the breast and undertail coverts for further documentation.

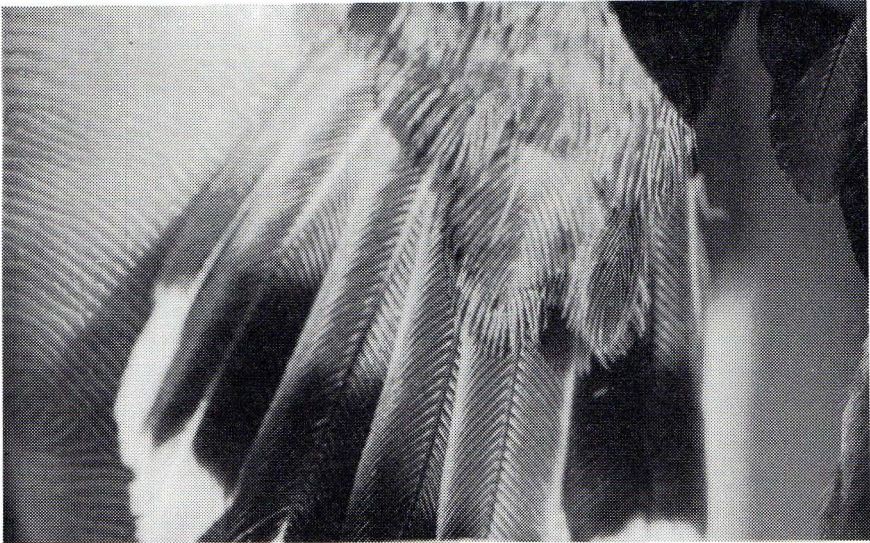


Figure 2. Tail of Calliope Hummingbird showing diagnostic subspatulate shape of central retrices. (Photo by Robert R. Sargent)

The bird appeared at Mr. Hill's feeder apparently as early as 15 October, 1990, and was the only hummingbird present after the exodus of southward migrating Ruby-throateds. As stated in the previous issue of *Alabama Birdlife* (Vol. 37, No. 2), the Calliope is no stranger to cold weather since it nests in the Rockies when snow is still on the ground and nightly temperatures can be near or below freezing.

The Calliope Hummingbird summers in the northwestern United States and western Canada and like the Rufous (*Selasphorus rufus*) and Black-chinned (*Archilochus alexandri*), is probably a winter visitor to the southeastern United States more often than previously thought.

All wintering hummingbirds at your feeders are best identified in the hand unless they are adult males. Your continued assistance in locating these wintering birds is both appreciated and solicited.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Mr. Taylor Hill for his hospitality to hundreds of observers from all over the southeast and for allowing us to band and study this special bird.

Robert R. and Martha B. Sargent, Route #1 Box 558-G, Trussville, Alabama 35173.