

ALABAMA BIRDLIFE

The statistics show that there were declines in three of the four counts examined. Only one count showed an increase, Pensacola, the most urbanized of the four. The cause of decline in the three counts is not apparent, although it has been suggested that the House Finch (*Carpodacus mexicanus*), a recent invader into the region, is out-competing the House Sparrow for food and nesting resources. Indeed, the first House Finches did not occur on a CBC until 1989 when 14 were reported on the Pensacola CBC. Since then they have been reported with increasing frequency and have exceeded House Sparrow numbers on some counts in some years (i.e. Gulf Shores, 1993, 292 House Finches, 27 House Sparrows). I speculate that greater numbers of House Sparrows on the Pensacola CBC in recent years may be attributed to increased urbanization of the count circle, or that this species is leaving the countryside to find haven within the inner city. In the future, House Sparrows may become "Rara avis" if this cursory analysis indicates a permanent region-wide trend.

Robert A. Duncan, 614 Fairpoint Dr., Gulf Breeze, Fl. 32561.

BUFF-BELLIED HUMMINGBIRD (*AMAZILIA YUCATANENSIS*)

FIRST BANDING IN ALABAMA

Robert R. Sargent and Martha B. Sargent

The Buff-bellied hummingbird is a native of Eastern Mexico and the northern part of Belize. As described by Johnsgard (1983, *The Hummingbirds of North America*, Smithsonian Institution Press) it is found in a variety of habitats from dense thickets, overrun with vines and tangles at lower elevations

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to deciduous forest at higher elevations. It is also found in moist riparian streamside areas (Johnsgard, personal communication) and in semi-arid scrub along the Gulf of Mexico. In the United States, it breeds in the lower Rio Grande Valley and often disperses northeastward, all along the Gulf Coast at least as far as the panhandle of Northwest Florida. In recent years, the increase in sightings and bandings of this species may be attributed to an increase in the winter population, or increased observations at winter flower gardens and hummingbird feeders.

Our nearly ten-year study of wintering hummingbirds in Alabama has produced some remarkable discoveries, but the Buff-bellied hummingbird has been difficult to find. We believe that this species regularly winters along the Alabama Gulf Coast. Similarly to the Alabama Gulf Coast, they are rare but regular winter residents in Northwest Florida and coastal Mississippi. Almost every year we capture and band two or three individuals of this species along the coast, but never before in Alabama.

On 16 November 1995, Tom and Judy Quinby reported to us that someone had noted a large green hummingbird, believed to be a Buff-bellied, at her backyard feeder. We arrived at the residence of Bernadette Devery, 1255 Peabody Drive, Mobile, Alabama, the next morning. Ms. Devery said that the bird had been there since approximately 14 November 1995, and that it normally fed each morning beginning around 10:30 hours. By 10:00 hours on 17 November 1995 we had our cage-trap set up and at 10:30 hours, a big, shimmering green hummingbird arrived, but did not immediately enter the cage-

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trap. We had ample time to observe and identify this Buff-bellied hummingbird prior to actually capturing it. At 11:00 hours we captured and banded it with band # 8000T83382. (This was the second state record for this species: the first was sighted by the authors on 8 April 1991 at Fort Morgan in Baldwin County).

Before photographing it, the following measurements were taken: wing-49.84mm, tail-29.80mm, exposed culmen-20.22mm and weight-4.31 grams. This was smaller than any of the Buff-bellied hummingbirds that we had banded in the past. It had a shimmering green head and back. The rump was green with some chestnut color (Figure 1). The central rectrices were shorter than the outside pairs giving the tail a slightly forked look and were bronze-green with darker bronze at the tips. The outer rectrices were chestnut with some black on both inner and outer webs of each rectrix. The gorget area of the throat was a brilliant iridescent green with buffy edgings on some of the feathers (Figure 2). This shiny green extended down to the upper breast. The center of the belly was pale buff in color, fading to white on the lower belly. The sides and flanks were a richer buff. The undertail was a more muted buff color. The base of the undertail was covered by two fluffy white femoral tufts. The undersides of the rectrices were soft chestnut.

Although both the wings and the tail showed signs of wear, it was not extensive. It appeared that the bird was just starting a general body molt, as the loosely textured belly feathers were easily dislodged during handling. The bill (Figure 3) showed a little or no striations which might have suggested an

adult bird, but the mostly black upper mandible implied an immature bird. The base of the upper mandible was a dull blackish red. The lower mandible was red except for a dusky-black tip. These confusing aging keys clearly indicate that this species needs study. We speculate that the red upper mandible in adults may well occur only if they are on their breeding grounds and in a heightened breeding state. The number of Buff-bellied hummingbirds that we encounter makes it difficult to draw conclusions from such a small sampling. However, this may be corrected soon through our studies and those of Professor Felipe Chavez-Ramirez of Texas A&M University.



Figure 1. Dorsal view, Buff-bellied hummingbird.
Photo by Martha B. Sargent.

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Figure 2. Head and bill, Buff-bellied hummingbird. Photo by Martha B. Sargent.



Figure 3. Ventral view, Buff-bellied hummingbird. Photo by Martha B. Sargent.

Like many hummingbird species, the Buff-bellied has been poorly studied, and there is little literature available for reference. To date, we do not know how to sex these birds in winter. This and the conflicting data available

for aging will probably be resolved after we have banded a greater number of immatures and recaptured them later as adults. This is one of our main objectives as banders. As of this writing we have banded ten new Buff-bellied hummingbirds during the 1995-1996 winter season. **Robert R. Sargent and Martha B. Sargent**, 7570 Mack Hicks Road, Trussville, AL 35173

**GREEN VIOLET-EAR HUMMINGBIRD (*COLIBRI THALASSINUS*)
FIRST RECORD FOR ALABAMA**

Robert R. Sargent and Martha B. Sargent

Duane J. Berger and Donna G. Berger

On 31 October 1995, our daughter, Donna Berger, read on *America Online* of a *violent-eared* hummingbird. She succeeded in locating the sender, Jerry Moulder of Pascagoula, Mississippi, and the people who currently had the bird at their hummingbird feeder, Jim and Barbara Heath of 12931 Shady Drive, Grand Bay (Mobile County), Alabama. My conversation with the Heath's convinced us that they had a big hummingbird with blue feathers. Although Mrs. Heath was convinced it was a Green violet-ear, we considered the Blue-throated (*Lampornis clemenciae*) and Broad-billed (*Cyanthus latirostris*) as being a slight possibility. None of the three possibilities have ever been seen in Alabama. However, we were aware of sightings in Texas, Arkansas, and North Carolina.