

## COLORADO FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS - SIGHT RECORD FORM

NEW STATE RECORD \_\_\_\_\_ UNUSUAL RECORD X

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Species: Ruby-throated Hummingbird (*Archilochus colubris*)

Date: 14 September 2000

Number seen: one

Sex: male

Plumage: immature

Locality: Linda Paulsen's house (corner of Rd SS &amp; Rd 7)

Elevation: 3600 feet

Nearest town: Lamar

County: Prowers

Time observed: 8:45 to 10:30 AM

Duration of observation: about 3 minutes total

**Description:** There were reports of 2 adult male, one female, and one immature male Ruby-throated Hummingbird having been seen at this residence. I saw only the immature male during my visit and no other hummingbirds of any variety.

Upon first seeing this bird, I immediately attributed it to the genus *Archilochus* due to its small size, green upperparts, and white underparts. I observed it feeding twice [while looking at the feeder through a scope (full-frame image)] from the hummingbird feeder. During this time I had several good looks at the gorget, which had a few iridescent feathers (~5-10% of total gorget area) near the base of the throat that always appeared bright red. The upperparts were metallic medium-green. There was a slight greenish wash that extended along the flanks and under the wings. The underparts were bright white. Immediately behind each eye was a small white spot (~1/4 the size of the eye). The squared tail was the same green as the upperparts, except for the large, white tips to the outer 2-3 rectrices. There was no rufous coloration in the tail. The slim bill was entirely dark and of medium length with barely a noticeable downward curvature.

**Separations from similar species:**

The other *Archilochus* hummingbird, Black-chinned Hummingbird (*A. alexandri*) can be readily dismissed by the red gorget feathering in the observed bird (purple in *A. alexandri*).

The lack of rufous coloration rules out members of the *Selasphorus* genus (Broad-tailed *S. platycercus*, Rufous *S. rufus*, and Allen's *S. sasin* hummingbirds). Anna's Hummingbird (*Calypte anna*) is slightly larger, with underparts that are a dingy white to grayish.

**Describe the bird's song and call, if given, including method of delivery (i.e. from perch, in flight, duration):** None heard.

**What is your prior experience with this and similarly-appearing species?** I have seen dozens of Ruby-throated Hummingbirds while living and working in the east. I have become very familiar with the other hummingbird species mentioned above since moving to Colorado in 1999 or from living in California (*S. sasin* and *C. anna*, specifically) during 1998.

**Light conditions:** Slightly overcast with the sun above and to mine and the birds left.

**Optical equipment used:** Zeiss 7x42 binoculars, Kowa scope 20-60x

**Distance, and how estimated:** estimated closest distance at 15 meters

**Other observers who saw the bird with you:** None

**Other observers who saw the bird independently:** If my memory serves me, this bird as well as 2 adult male RTHU and an immature female RTHU were present at this location within a 2 week span (not all birds were present at the same time) that were seen by dozens of birders. I'm not sure who saw the immature bird.

**If photographed, type of equipment and film:** Canon Elan II, 28-75mm through Kowa 20-60x scope with Fuji Sensia 200 speed film. Scanned photos submitted.

**List books, illustrations, recordings, other birders, etc. consulted and how this influenced your identification:**

a) at time of observation: none

b) after observation: none

**Reporting observer:** Doug Faulkner

**Signature:**

Doug Faulkner

**Address:** Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory, 14500 Lark Bunting Lane, Brighton, CO 80601

**Date report was written:** This report was written on 5 February 2001 from notes taken during observation.

## FIELD NOTES

**Species reported:** Ruby-Throated Hummingbird *Archilochus colubris*, immature (hatch year) male

**Number of individuals:** one

**Location:** Linda Paulson's Yard, Prowers County at the intersection of

**Date of sighting:** September 17, 2000

**Time:** 9:15 AM – 10:30 AM

**Reporting observer:** John W. Vanderpoel  
7583 Estate Circle  
Niwot, CO 80503

**Other observers:** Peter Gent  
Boulder, CO

**Light and weather conditions:** Sunny and warm

**Optical Equipment:** Zeiss 10 X 40B, Kowa Telescope, JVC Video camera

**Distance to bird:** We were 20 feet from the bird/feeder initially, later slowly approaching to perhaps 8 feet from the feeder. I first watched the bird through my binoculars, wanting to make sure of the gorget color. Once I was certain of the color I began videotaping the bird during each of the perhaps 8 visits it made to the feeder. My viewfinder is high resolution, but black & white. Therefore some of my description is from the attached video, though size shape and behavior (tail pumping) was all apparent through the viewfinder.

### **Description:**

**size** – The bird was a medium sized “small hummingbird”. “Small” hummingbird being defined as one of the eight species of small “gorgetted” hummingbirds in table 2, PG 135 of Peter Pile's book *Identification Guide to North American Birds*. The size of this individual was about the same as the Black-chinned Hummingbirds I videotaped in New Mexico & Arizona earlier in the month.

**Tail- size, forking & pattern** – On at least three occasions the bird spread its tail enough for me to observe the tail pattern through the viewfinder. I have frozen several of these moments in the video for you to see the pattern and shape. The size of the tail is rather large, typical for an *Archilochus* sps. The outer three retrices r6-4 had white tips that connected to extensive black. No rufous was observed in the tail at all.

## FIELD NOTES

While looking through the viewfinder, I never noticed a fork in the tail and the video does not show a fork **when the tail is fully spread**. However when the tail is slightly spread (see video freeze) a slight fork is visible, but note the slightly forked tails of several of the Black-chinned Hummingbirds (hereafter BCHU) I've included in the attached videotape. This fieldmark is not useful in the field for separating BCHU and RTHU.

**tail pumping** – The bird pumped its tail often and regularly, perhaps not quite as emphatic and as rapid as some of the BCHUs I'd seen earlier in the month, but this is probably subjective and I doubt that it is a reliable field mark. I have included some video clips of BCHU tail pumping at the end for comparison.

**head** – The forehead was green though certainly duller than the green of the upper surface of the bird. (see video). It seems that the hatch year male BCHUs that I'd videotaped all have a duller grayish brown cast to their forehead (see example in video). There was a small post ocular white spot.

**throat** – The throat was mostly white, with a few dusky markings running laterally down the throat (see diagram & video). There were perhaps three iridescent red feathers in the gorget area, two were together in the lower central region of the throat (see video) and one iridescent red feather on the left side of the throat. The color was clearly not violet as in BCHU, but red as in Ruby-throated or Broad-tailed.

**bill -** Before I describe the bill a few facts/observations are worth mentioning. Males of all eight of the "small" hummingbirds have shorter bills than females of the same species, though there is some overlap. (fact). It seems to me that immature males, hatch year males (hyr) have slightly shorter bills than they will have as adult males. (observation). BCHU have distinctly longer bills than RTHU:

	<u>RTHU</u>	<u>BCHU</u>
Males	13.4-17.2 mm	16.0-20.5 mm
Females	15.2-19.0 mm	17.9-22.9 mm

Measurements from Pyle

Because of this fact, I think that BCHU bills are more decurved than RTHU

The bill on this hatch year male bird appears short and straight with hardly any curve to it, probably less than 15 mm. This puts it well within range of RTHU and

## FIELD NOTES

out of range of even the shortest BCHU. This observation is important as it should also help to distinguish a RTHU hyr male from a Black-chinned X Broad-tailed hybrid male. One note of caution would be a BCHU hyr male who's bill was not fully grown, but I'm suspicious of this still being the case in the middle of September

**chest, belly & flanks** – the chest is white, but washed with grayish-green on the flanks.

**Voice:** The bird never really made any sound, perhaps a chip or two.

**Previous Experience:** I've seen hundreds of RTHU in the Midwest & East. But never **with species** really studied them closely. I've just returned from a 2 week trip to New Mexico & Arizona, where I was videotaping hummingbirds as well as carefully observing Black-chinned and the three Colorado *Selasphorus* hummingbirds, as well as Anna's.

**Identification Aids: (list of books, illustrations, video or other birders consulted in identification)**

**at time of observation** - none

**after observation** – Peter Pyle's **Identification Guide to North American Birds**, Slate Creek Press 1997

**Conclusion:** Before concluding that this individual is indeed a Ruby-throated Hummingbird, there are four very similar "species" that must be eliminated from consideration.

1) Costa's Hummingbird – Male Costas have violet gorgets not red. Also the white tip on r4 is broader in Costa's females and hyr males than in RTHU, this bird fits the latter (see examples in video). To my knowledge Costa's do not pump their tail like *Archilochus* hummingbirds.

2) Broad-tailed Hummingbird (BTLH) – Hyr males have female tail patterns, thus if the bird were a BTLH it would display a prominent amount of rufous in the tail on r6-4. We would also have heard the typical whine that male BTLH make in flight. BTLH have longer bills than RTHU, in fact average almost as long as BCHUs. BTLHs do not pump their tail like *Archilochus* hummingbirds.

3) Black-chinned Hummingbird (BCHU) – The other *Archilochus* species in North America is very similar to RTHU and females cannot be separated in the field without much field experience and very close views. However this bird was a hatch year male and definitely had several red gorget feathers in the throat. They were not violet as in BCHU males. Two other field marks also supported RTHU. The bill length was shorter than

## FIELD NOTES

BCHU and I felt that the forehead was very slightly greener than the gray-brown foreheads of the BCHUs I'd seen in Arizona earlier in the month.

4) Black-chinned X Broad-tailed Hybrid – The trickiest “species” to eliminate is actually a hybrid. Hybridization in hummingbirds is quite common. This is the result of hummingbird behavior where the females arrive on the breeding grounds, build the nest by themselves and then go out and look for a mate. Pyle references Broad-tailed hybridizing with BCHU as well as 4 other species. Sherrie Williamson, the hummingbird expert in Arizona, felt that a BTLH X BCHU hybrid in the front range was at least as likely as a RTHU in the front range, and in fact suggests that the Pueblo record should be reexamined by the Colorado Rare Bird records committee. I'll assume for this argument that a BTLH X BCHU hatch year male hybrid could have a large tail with little or no rufous in the tail and not be capable of making the BTLH whining song with its wings, yet have a red gorget.

However, I think that a BCHU X BTLH hybrid wandering this far east on the plains would be no more likely than a RTHU. Logically the tail pumping, wash to the flanks and tail color should have some BTLH traits. Would a hybrid have a pure red gorget?

Also, once again using Pyle's measurements for bill length, both BTLH and BCHU have longer bills than RTHU thus any hybrid would also fall within this range.

	<u>RTHU</u>	<u>BCHU</u>	<u>BTLH</u>
Males	13.4-17.2 mm	16.0-20.5 mm	16.0-19.0 mm
Females	15.2-19.0 mm	17.9-22.9 mm	17.4-20.3 mm

This individual seemed to have a bill closer to 15 mm in length and not as long as the minimum length of 16 mm that fits for BCHU and BTLH.

The individual is a hatch year male Ruby-throated Hummingbird.





