

(Jeff Lemons)



Trochilidae the HUMMINGBIRDS and ALLIES

Hummingbirds fascinate us all. These fast-flying birds have been variously described as colorful, lovely, hardy, lightning-fast, fierce, feisty, agile, animated, and boisterous. Their spring arrival to our yards and gardens is anticipated and celebrated each year. Millions of dollars are spent annually on plants and supplies designed to attract and feed hummingbirds. While the nectar of red, tubular-shaped flowers and a wide variety of insects are preferred foods, Piedmont homeowners know well that a red feeder—filled with clear sugar water—can quickly entice a hummingbird into their yard.

The Ruby-throated Hummingbird is the familiar hummingbird of the Carolinas. It is the only species of hummingbird that regularly nests in the eastern United States. Surprising to many, however, is that in the past 25 years, an astounding 11 other species of hummingbirds have made a pilgrimage from the West to visit us here in the Carolinas. Six of these rare hummers have been confirmed in the Central Carolina region. Four of these rarities are presented below and the remaining two are described in the Supplementary Bird List.

These “winter vagrants” are part of a larger trend of western hummingbirds wintering in the eastern United States. In 1997, Ricky Davis, while editing field records in *The Chat*, wrote “It seems that more and more hummingbirds are reported from the Carolinas each winter. They have become almost too numerous to mention in detail. They can be broken down into two obvious classes—*Archilochus* and *Selasphorus* types.” In the winter of 1998–1999, it was noted that at least 75 *Archilochus* and 25 *Selasphorus* hummingbirds were present in both Carolinas. Numbers have been continuing to increase. During the winter of 2013–2014, there were over 30 visiting feeders just in the Charlotte region, and today an assortment of hummingbird species can be expected to show up in the Carolinas each winter.

You may be able to attract a winter hummingbird to your yard if you leave your feeders up all year long. Be sure to keep them clean, the sugar water fresh, and provide a heater or bring them inside at night during icy weather to be sure they do not freeze. Many people also grow various types of salvia (*Salvia* spp.), like pineapple sage, or other fall-blooming flowers that are very attractive to hummingbirds. If a winter hummingbird shows up, take a photograph of the bird, and report its arrival on the website eBird. Other birders may want to see it, and a hummingbird bander may want to visit and band the bird. Be sure to keep your winter visitor well fed until spring. Don’t worry about cold spells. These hardy birds enter a state of “torpor,” allowing them to survive sub-freezing temperatures. They’ll be back to your feeder first chance they get.