

## Rufous Hummingbird *Selasphorus rufus*



**Folk Name:** (none)

**Status:** Winter Vagrant

**Abundance:** Rare

**Habitat:** Hummingbird feeding stations and fall-blooming flower gardens

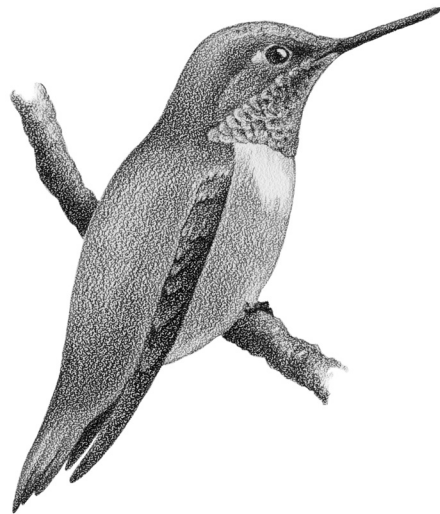
If you are lucky enough to discover a hummingbird visiting your backyard feeder between November and March, there is a very good chance that it will be a Rufous Hummingbird. We have many more reports of this species here during the winter than any other type of hummingbird, including the Ruby-throated. Like our other rare hummers, the Rufous Hummingbird is a western migrant that just visits here on the East Coast. It breeds in the Pacific Northwest. Most birds that show up are females or “hatch year” birds, but adult males are found here in winter as well.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, scientists documented “a large and accelerating increase” of Rufous Hummingbirds wintering in the Southeast. Numbers went from a few sporadic eastern records before 1980, to close to 50 sightings in the late 1980s, to almost 800 sightings in 1995. Numbers in the Southeast (including the Gulf Coast) are believed to exceed that today.

Though they remain an unusual find, Rufous Hummingbirds are now regularly seen in the Charlotte region each winter. In fact, some banded birds have returned to the same feeders for four years in a row. Watch for a hummingbird that exhibits obvious rufous (reddish-brown to orange-rust) coloring on its flanks and tail. Males show the color on their back too. This coloring immediately distinguishes the Rufous Hummingbird from our *Archilochus* hummers (Ruby-throated and Black-chinned), which lack rufous coloring and generally appear more drab.

The earliest report of a Rufous Hummingbird in Charlotte comes from 1988. Harriett Whitsett discovered a hummingbird visiting her feeder in Myers Park on 16 November. The bird was identified as a *Selasphorus* species and appeared to be a female. Many local birders were excited to get a chance to view this western rarity and add Rufous Hummingbird to both their life list and state list. In November 1991, Bill Hilton Jr. caught and banded another female Rufous Hummingbird in Charlotte. That December, David Wright reported one visiting a backyard feeder at a home in Charlotte. Since that time, we’ve had over 150 reports from the Central Carolinas, and over 50 of these birds have been banded.

The earliest record of a Rufous Hummingbird arriving in this region is a bird banded by Bill Hilton Jr. on August 6, 1994, in Sharon, SC, 18 miles southwest of Mecklenburg



County. Our records indicate that most arrive after Thanksgiving and leave our feeders to head west by Valentine’s Day. A few of our Rufous Hummingbirds have remained with us into late March and even until the first week of April. In recent years, numbers have ranged up to 30 or more birds present in this region during a single winter season.

Rufous (*Selasphorus* type) hummingbirds have been reported on 80% of the Charlotte Christmas Bird Counts conducted in the past 10 years with four counted in 2008 and a high count of six in December 2012. They have been found on 60% of the Southern Lake Norman Christmas Bird Counts in the past decade with a high count of two



Wintering Rufous Hummingbird. (Jeff Lemons)

birds present in December 2013.

The Rufous Hummingbird is listed on the Yellow Watch List of birds of the continental United States. It is a species with both “troubling” population declines and “high threats.” It is in need of conservation action.

*Note: Sight records of the birds described in this account are designated as “Rufous” for ease of discussion, but technically these sight records can only be identified as being*

*a Selasphorus species. Most Rufous Hummingbirds cannot be differentiated from Allen’s Hummingbird (Selasphorus sasin) without capturing and measuring the specific bird. Fortunately, many Rufous Hummingbirds have been banded here and their identity was confirmed in hand. Allen’s Hummingbird has been confirmed twice in the Carolina Piedmont. It is described in the Supplementary Bird List.*