

## Two Records of Green Violet-Ear for North Carolina

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In the fall of 1987 and 1995, observers in western North Carolina documented the occurrence of individual Green Violet-ears (*Colibri thalassinus*) at feeders. On 21 October 1987 an unusual hummingbird visited the feeders of Barbara Whitaker in Asheville, NC. She checked her Field Guide to the Birds of North America (National Geographic Society 1983), and identified the bird as a Green Violet-ear. She wanted confirmation of the hummingbird from veteran birders, so she contacted Jerry Young, who lives near Asheville. He examined the hummingbird closely and photographed it at close range. He also identified it as a Green Violet-ear, which is a tropical species ranging from Mexico to northern South America.

Prior to this report, the Green Violet-ear had been observed in the United States only in Texas and Arkansas. Thus, when news of the Green Violet-ear spread later that day, birders from all over the country came to the Whitaker home over the next several days to observe and photograph the bird. The senior author observed the bird on 24 October, and it was last reported on 25 October. According to Young, approximately 150 visitors saw the hummingbird, based on the names signed in a logbook provided by Whitaker.

The hummingbird appeared to be about an inch longer than a Ruby-throated Hummingbird (*Archilochus colubris*). However, no Ruby-throats were present for size comparison; thus, the overall size impression is simply speculative. The Green Violet-ear was a metallic green color over most of its body, with gray-brown wings that when folded extended to the tip of the tail. The undertail coverts were buffy and showed some green metallic flecking on the tips. A prominent violet to indigo blue patch on the breast began immediately below the gorget and faded into the green of the sides. The violet-indigo ear patch extended from the malar area into the auricular area and continued as a thin band around the

nape. The chin lacked violet-indigo color. The bill was black and slightly downcurved and was a little longer than the width of the head. The greenish tail had a dark blue or blackish-blue subterminal band. Because the sexes are similar, we did not determine if the bird was a male or female.

Remarkably, another Green Violet-ear was observed at a feeder in the mountains of North Carolina in the fall of 1995. Bob and Martha Sargent were able to capture, band, and release an adult bird, probably a male, at Burnsville, Yancey County, on 5 September. Measurements of the bird were: wing — 65.31 mm, tail — 41.20 mm, exposed culmen — 20.40 mm, and weight — 5.58 grams. The bird showed no fat deposits, but it otherwise seemed robust and healthy. It showed signs of wear on the wing and tail, but no evidence of molt was noted; no parasites were detected.

The bird had been at the feeder of de Jarnette Wood for a day or two before it was banded. Rather than providing a written description to the N.C. Bird Records Committee, Bob Sargent submitted to the Committee a series of over 25 color prints of the bird, held in the hand immediately after banding. The photos show a medium-length, somewhat evenly decurved black bill. The crown, back, chin, throat, and lower belly were a dark, iridescent green. The sides of the head, extending from the bill to well beyond the cheeks, were a deep indigo or violet-blue. This same violet-blue color was present as a broad patch on the mid-breast. The wings were a dark brown color. A wide blackish bar covered the lower portion of the tail feathers, creating a conspicuous tail band. The outer tail feathers were turquoise blue, with the central feathers a plain green, somewhat matching the green of the back. In poor light, the dark green and the violet-blue colors merged, so that the hummingbird seemed almost black in overall appearance.

The Field Guide to the Birds of North America (National Geographic Society 1983) might give the birder the idea that any hummingbird with a mostly green body and deep indigo or violet cheeks and breast is a Green Violet-ear. However, the Sparkling Violet-ear (*C. coruscans*), limited completely to South America, is quite similar to the Green Violet-ear. The Sparkling Violet-ear is over an inch longer than the Green Violet-ear and would probably be at least 1.5 inches longer, in total length, than a Ruby-throated Hummingbird. Hilty and Brown (1986, p. 260) give bill measurements of Green Violet-ear at 20 mm and Sparkling Violet-ear at 25 mm. Like the Green Violet-ear, the Sparkling Violet-ear also has violet-indigo patches on the cheeks and the mid-breast

and belly; however, the latter species has the violet-indigo color of the face extending under the chin. The Green Violet-ear has a green chin/gorget region. Unlike the Green Violet-ear, which has been recorded on a number of occasions north of Mexico, mainly in Texas, the Sparkling Violet-ear apparently does not wander extensively. There are no records of the latter species from the United States. In addition, the senior author has seen numerous Sparkling Violet-ears in Ecuador since the Asheville sighting, and believes that the Sparkling Violet-ear is considerably larger than the bird that showed up at the Asheville feeder.

The N.C. Bird Records Committee accepted the 1987 Green Violet-ear record to the Official List in 1990 (N.C. Bird Records Committee 1990), and it also accepted the 1995 record also (Chat, 60:139). The Committee considered whether the birds might have been escaped individuals, but as there are other reports of the species from north of Mexico, the Committee believed that both hummingbirds were legitimate vagrants to Asheville and to Burnsville. Color prints of both Green Violet-ears are in the photograph collection at the N.C. State Museum of Natural Sciences for permanent documentation.

#### LITERATURE CITED

- Hilty, S.L., and W.L. Brown. 1986. A Guide to the Birds of Colombia. Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey.
- National Geographic Society. 1983. Field Guide to the Birds of North America. National Geographic Society, Washington, D.C.
- N.C. Bird Records Committee. 1990. Report of the North Carolina Bird Records Committee. Chat 54:53-58.

#### **First North Carolina Record of Western Gull**

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Beginning on the Christmas Bird Count of December 30, 1994 and continuing into January and February of 1995, many observers in the Cape Hatteras Point area (Buxton, Dare County, NC) reported seeing strange adult gulls resembling Herring Gull, but with oddly dark gray mantles that