

General Field Notes

General Field Notes briefly report such items as rare sightings, unusual behaviors, significant nesting records, or summaries of such items.

First, second, or third sightings of species in either state must be submitted to the appropriate Bird Records Committee prior to publication in The Chat.

First Record of Anna's Hummingbird in North Carolina

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An unusual hummingbird was discovered by Walker on Sunday, 29 November 1998, around 13:30, in her yard in Charlotte, NC. The weather was exceptionally warm (approximately 75°F), with a partly sunny sky. The bird was first discovered in an oak tree chasing kinglets, which were about the same size. It was then observed feeding on pineapple sage and hawking insects in the air.

On the day of discovery, Taylor Piephoff and David and Marsha Wright came to observe the bird and verify the identification as an Anna's Hummingbird (*Calypte anna*). Bob and Martha Sargent banded the bird on Monday, 14 December. They indicated that the bird, a male, was quite young because 70% of its bill was still corrugated.

The forehead was basically dark with one or two feathers on the crown that shone iridescent pink when the light hit them. The area of pink on the crown increased over the weeks the bird was present. The throat had a dark triangular gorget which appeared iridescent pink or fuchsia when the light hit it. Several dark feathers appeared along the side of the throat that had a pinkish cast to them in the light; this was assumed to be the side of the gorget beginning to come in. There were also many fine dark streakings above the gorget that eventually filled out and became part of the gorget. From a distance the bird exhibited a grayish collar beneath the gorget that extended up nearly to the nape. This is a characteristic mark of immature and female Anna's.

The bird's nape, back, and rump were basically green with a yellow iridescent overcast, which in certain light appeared a bit golden-colored. The bird's breast and belly were light gray with darker gray streaking. The flanks were also light gray with darker grayish/green streaking. The vent area was also light gray.

The tail feathers were darker than the rest of the body, but were not really black. The outer tail feathers had white on the tip, whereas the others were dark green. In the hand when banded, the bird was noted to have tail feathers that were very worn and to be beginning to molt. The wings were black and extended almost to the tail when the bird was sitting. There appeared to be a white patch at the wrist when it was sitting, and this patch became more noticeable over time. However, the patch appeared to be very “fuzzy” – more like body/contour feathers than secondary or primary wing feathers – and was probably only a by-product of the bird’s molting into adult plumage.

The eye was dark. There appeared to be a faint partial eye ring over the top of the eye with a distinct white dot or patch behind the eye. On one side of the head, the eye-spot lengthened into a faint eyeline. The other side did not show the eyeline. The bill appeared thin, very straight, and pointed. It was completely black. In proportion to the bird it appeared neither short nor long to Walker. However, several observers commented that they thought the bill looked short.

The bird’s vocalization was what caused Walker to discover it. It was a very high, persistent series of rattles, chips, and other notes. When she first heard it, she thought it sounded like begging of baby birds. It could also be likened to the rustle of leaves, the sound of a baby’s rattle, or a rattlesnake. It was neither rhythmic nor did it exhibit any constant pattern like the Rufous Hummingbird (*Selasphorus rufus*) “song”. The hummingbird had two chip notes. One was very high and faint, similar to that of a Dark-eyed Junco (*Junco hyemalis*) or a Carolina Chickadee (*Poecile carolinensis*) but not as robust. This chip note was given when the bird was sitting. A louder, more emphatic and harsher, series of chip notes was given when the bird was alarmed or defending its territory.

The habitat at Walker’s suburban yard contains a variety of plantings designed to attract birds and other wildlife. The herb garden contained pineapple sage, on which the bird often fed. Many oak and sweetgum trees are present in and around the yard, and a number of evergreens are also available for roosting. The bird was partial to the oak trees and hydrangea, where it hawked insects. During its stay, it was seen at a feeder in a crabapple tree; hawking insects in the air, trees, bushes and leaf litter; feeding from sapsucker holes and flowering trees; and chasing a variety of birds from the yard.

The hummingbird was observed defending its territory from other birds. It was first seen chasing kinglets but also took on Yellow-rumped Warblers (*Dendroica coronata*), Carolina Chickadees, Eastern Phoebes (*Sayornis phoebe*), House Finches (*Carpodacus mexicanus*), Northern Mockingbirds (*Mimus polyglottos*), and Carolina Wrens (*Thryothorus ludovicianus*). Several observers watched the bird practice a display of some type.

Most of this activity was observed during unusually warm weather. When the weather cooled, the bird settled into a quieter routine. It seemed to associate with the insect-eating birds (the Carolina Wren and kinglets in particular). It seemed to have taken some clues from them as to where to find

insects once it got cooler. It did not appear to be dependent on the feeder except in the extreme cold weather. Instead, it spent much time hunting insects and frequenting the sapsucker holes. The bird was most regularly seen at the feeder early in the morning and then late in the afternoon. However, it was usually somewhere in the yard most of the day.

Over 120 people observed the bird during its long stay. It was seen daily until 4 March 1999. By that time it had developed most of the gorget, and the entire top of the head was fuchsia-colored.

This is the first record of Anna's Hummingbird for North Carolina. The North Carolina Bird Records Committee accepted a written description by Walker and photos taken of the bird in the hand by the Sargents. As a result of being documented by photographs, the species was placed on the Official List (North Carolina Bird Records Committee 2001). Anna's Hummingbird has not yet been reported from South Carolina (South Carolina Bird Records Committee 2004).

Literature Cited

North Carolina Bird Records Committee. 2001. 1999–2000 Report of the North Carolina Bird Records Committee. *Chat* 65:83–89.

South Carolina Bird Records Committee. 2004. The South Carolina bird list. *Chat* 68:9-18.