

# A Review of Rufous Hummingbird Records in Ontario

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## Introduction

The Rufous Hummingbird (*Selasphorus rufus*) is a hardy species native to the western United States and Canada, breeding primarily in the northern Rocky Mountains and Cascades from Montana and Oregon north through Alberta and British Columbia to the Alaska panhandle (61° N), and migrating to its wintering grounds in central and western Mexico (Calder 1993). Rufous Hummingbirds undergo the longest-distance migration of any species of hummingbird, and they are particularly cold-hardy due to their northerly and high-elevation nesting areas, where they experience freezing temperatures at night quite frequently.

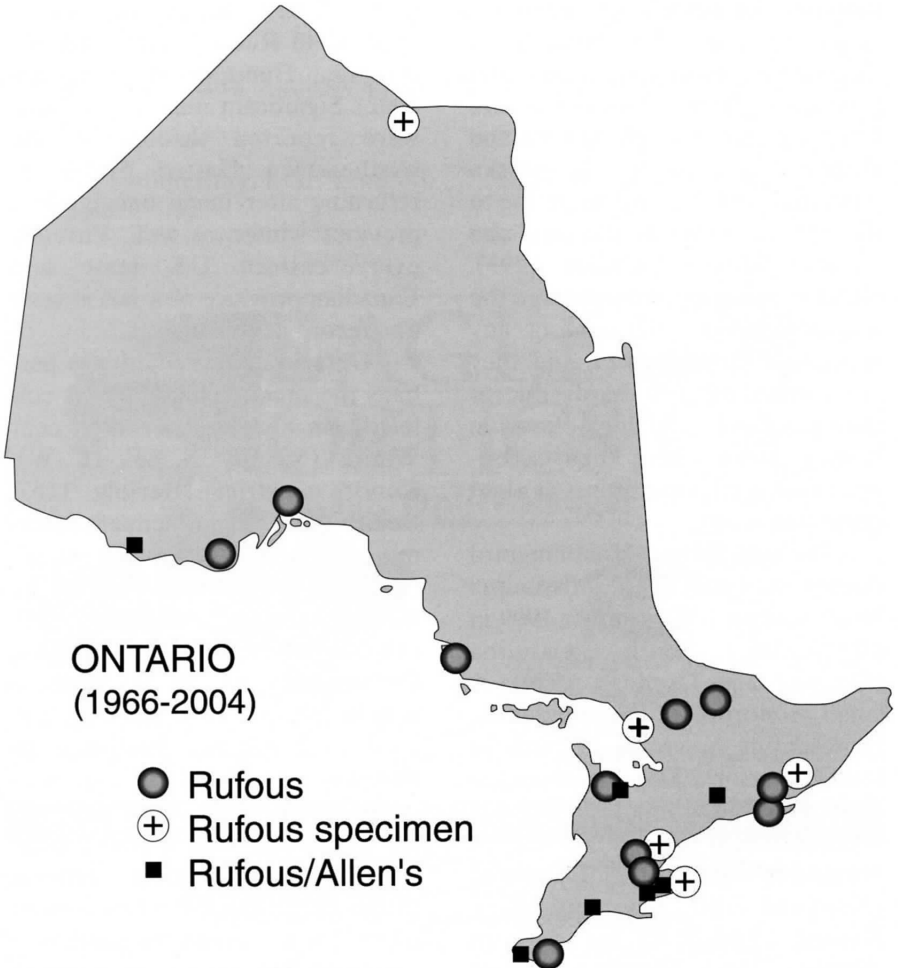
The first Rufous Hummingbird documented east of the Mississippi River was on 18 December 1909 in Charleston, South Carolina (Conway and Drennan 1979). A small proportion of the population, representing hundreds of birds at least (Peterson 2002), winters in the Gulf States. During winter 2001-2002, Newfield banded 305 Rufous Hummingbirds in Louisiana (Newfield 2002, Peterson 2002), Bassett banded 85 in southern Alabama and Florida (Bassett 2002), Sargent banded 32 in north-

ern Alabama and 19 in Mississippi (Sargent and Sargent 2002a, 2002b), and Sloan banded 12 in Tennessee (Sloan 2002). Georgia reported a total of 46 Rufous Hummingbirds (Georgia Hummer Study Group 2002). Significant numbers of birds were reported throughout the southeastern United States as returning after being banded in a previous winter, as well. Virtually every eastern U.S. state and Canadian province now has at least one record of this species.

Ontario's first record was perhaps the most unusual. It was collected on 8 September 1966 near Winisk (55° 16' N, 85° 12' W), Kenora District (Barlow 1967, Baillie 1968). This specimen, determined to be a "subadult male" (Barlow 1967), was identified by Barlow through comparison with other specimens at the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM), where it is held (preserved in alcohol), and based on criteria published in Ridgway (1911). Some measurements taken (wing chord and tail) are consistent with a male, using current identification criteria (Stiles 1972). The bill measurement (gonys) is not taken the same way currently, but rather an exposed culmen is taken; so Barlow's meas-

urement cannot be compared with current criteria. The term subadult male likely refers to an immature male (hatch year) that shows rufous back coloration instead of green, but the fact that these birds molt in the fall (pers. obs.) is even to this day not documented in the literature.

From 1966 to 2004, a total of 16 Rufous Hummingbird records have been accepted by the Ontario Bird Records Committee (OBRC). In addition, there are seven records accepted by the OBRC as *Selasphorus* sp. Three species of *Selasphorus* hummingbirds occur in North America: Rufous, Allen's (*S.*



**Figure 1. Distribution of records of Rufous and Rufous/Allen's Hummingbirds in Ontario.**

*sasin*), and Broad-tailed (*S. platycercus*). Since in all cases, Broad-tailed can be eliminated for these seven records, they are treated here as Rufous/Allen's Hummingbirds.

These records are summarized below, with some personal annotations (ATC). The geographic distri-

bution of these records, which not surprisingly reflects the distribution of the human population (and hummingbird feeders) in Ontario, is shown in Figure 1. Unless otherwise noted, all documentation and photos have been deposited in the OBRC files housed at the ROM.

### Ontario Rufous Hummingbirds (1966-2004)

Immature male on 8 September 1966 at Winisk, *Kenora* (55° 16' N, 85° 12' W).

Description: Found/collected by Daniel Kostachin.

Specimen: spirit/alcohol (ROM #99044).

References: Barlow 1967, Baillie 1968, Wormington 1987.

Adult male from 7-12 August 1972 at Wheatley, *Essex*.

Description: Norm Chestefield, Bob Curry.

Other observers: George Bryant, George North, John Olmsted, "Red" Mason.

References: Kelley 1978, Wormington 1986.

Adult female from 31 October - 10 November 1985 at Parry Sound, *Parry Sound*.

Description: Found/collected by Norma Curry.

Other observers: R. L. Bowles, M. P. Whelan.

Specimen: skin (ROM #151880).

References: Weir 1986a, 1986b; Wormington 1987.

[Taken into captivity, apparently without showing signs of injury or sickness, and placed in a greenhouse at a local flower shop on 10 November. Bird was found dead on 11 March 1986; greenhouse was sprayed with insecticide in spring. This would be about the appropriate time for this species to be released, based on the latitude they reach in migration in the West by this date. – ATC]

Adult male from 30 July - 3 August 1986 at Algonquin Provincial Park (East Gate), *Nipissing*.

Description: Ron G. Tozer, Michael W. P. Runtz, D. James Mountjoy.

Other observers: Mark W. Jennings, Alan Wormington, A. Geoffrey Carpentier, F. Hicks.

Photos: On file, Alan Wormington, A. Geoffrey Carpentier.

References: Weir 1986c, Wormington 1987, Wormington and Curry 1990.

Immature male from 16 September - 19 December 1987 at Battersea, *Frontenac*.

Description: Ian L. Jones, Robert H. Curry. Found by Mr. and Mrs. R. Bennett.  
 Other observers: Many. Randy Marinelli (MNR), Kathy Nihei (rehabilitator).  
 Specimen: skin at Canadian Museum of Nature, Ottawa (CMNAV #89040).  
 References: Weir 1988a, 1988b, 1988c; Wormington and Curry 1990, Crins 2005.  
 [Bird taken into captivity, apparently with no visible injury or sickness, on 19 December, and transferred to Ottawa where the bird died on 21 December. This bird had survived a number of cold nights when the temperatures fell to  $-15^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $\sim 8^{\circ}\text{F}$ ) (Weir 1988a). Photos of specimen from Michel Gosselin (CMNAV) show back with about 70-80% rufous. – ATC]

Adult male from 24-26 July 1989 at Oxtongue Lake, McClintock Twp., *Haliburton*.

Description: R. Dan Strickland.  
 Other observers: Al May (homeowner).  
 Photos: Al May. No photos in OBRC files.  
 References: Wormington and Curry 1990.

Adult male from 19-25 August 1990 at Alton, *Peel*.

Description: Terry Osborne.  
 Other observers: Many. Mr. and Mrs. Underhill (homeowners), Lyne Tyler.  
 Photos: Wilf Yusek. One print, two slides on file. Also printed in black-and-white in *Ontario Birds*.  
 References: Weir 1991, Curry 1991.

Adult male from 28-29 August 1992 at Flamborough and Westover, *Hamilton-Wentworth*.

Description: Anna-Marie Galan (also Flamborough homeowner), Lyn Hanna-Folkes (Westover).  
 References: Henshaw 1992, Ridout 1993, Bain 1993.  
 [Apparently observed on two consecutive days at locations 15 km apart, a home in Flamborough and a plant nursery in Westover. I would have a tendency to consider this two separate birds as there is precedent for this in the region (pers. obs.). – ATC]

Adult male from 21-30 July 1994 at Lappe, *Thunder Bay*.

Description: Nicholas G. Escott, Don Graham.  
 Other observers: Found by Ann Christianson.  
 Photos: On file.  
 References: Ridout 1994, Richardson 1994a, Pittaway 1995.

Adult female from mid September – 30 October 1995 at Oakville, *Halton*.

Description: Found by T. Sysiuk.

Specimen: skin (ROM #159603).

References: Dobos 1996.

[No age information is given by Dobos (1996). Bird was decomposed and mummified. According to ROM specimen database, bird was sexed by presence of ova, and Mark Peck (pers. comm.) indicated that a portion of the maxilla examined with 40x microscope did not show characteristic corrugations of an immature bird (Stiles 1972). – ATC]

Adult male from 12 October – 28 November 1995 at Owen Sound, *Grey*.

Description: David W. Fidler, Shawn Gilck. Found by Doug and Agnes Yeo.

Photos: On file. William Waterton (via newspaper article).

References: Bain and Holder 1995; Ridout 1996a; Dobos 1998; Wright, unknown date.

[First observed date was listed incorrectly as 17 October in Dobos (1998). – ATC]

Adult male on 7 May 1999 at Sault Ste. Marie, *Algoma*.

Description: Found by Robert and Joanne Knudsen (*vide* ONTBIRDS).

References: Bain and Shanahan 1999a, Hofmann 1999, Roy 2000.

[This is listed as the first accepted spring record for Ontario, but it also appears to be one of only two spring records in the entire Great Lakes region to date (pers. obs.)! Given the typical timing of spring migration of this species, it was still rather far south. – ATC]

Immature male from 31 July – 2 August 2000 at Nipigon, *Thunder Bay*.

Description: Sketch by Lola Grimes. Timothy Grimes.

References: Bain and Shanahan 2000, Hofmann 2000, Roy 2001.

[Record only lists sex of bird, not age. Drawing clearly shows a bird with entirely rufous back and no iridescent gorget feathers. This seems rather early for an immature male to have an entirely rufous back; usually they are entirely green early in the season and molt in rufous coloration in September-November (pers. obs.), but adult males show full iridescent gorges. Apparently molting early. Bain and Shanahan (2000) listed the locale as Everard, not Nipigon, and Hofmann (2000) listed the locale as Red Rock. According to Mark Peck (pers. comm.), Nipigon was closest town, but locale was probably closer to Red Rock. – ATC]

Adult male on 1 September 2002 at Point Petre (Milford) and 10 September 2002 at Wellington, *Prince Edward*.

Description: Found by Bill Vloeberghs and Cheryl Reed. Madeline Kimmett.

References: Bain 2002, 2003a; Crins 2003.

[The OBRC treated this as one record involving the same bird, as the two locations were less than 20 km apart. But, in fall 2005 alone, there were two instances of Rufous Hummingbirds occurring close together in Ohio; two about 30 km apart, and two others less than 5 km apart (pers. obs.). The latter two were both banded. Given the early fall departure of adult males (Calder 1993), it is not at all surprising that both would be of that age and sex. – ATC]

Immature male on 21 November 2003 – 7 January 2004 at Kingston, *Frontenac*.  
Description: William J. Crins.

Other Observers: At home of Mildred R. (finder) and Phill Yendt.

Photos: Several posted on OFO website (Harold Stiver, Carol M. Horner, Phill Yendt).

References: Bain 2003b, Crins 2004, Currie 2004, Elder 2004.

[This bird was observed to molt out green back feathers and attain more rufous back coloration during its stay, as seems to be typical with this age/sex class (pers. obs.). – ATC]

Immature female from 2 September – 18 December 2004 at Niagara Falls, *Niagara*.

Description: Found by Janice and Art Haines. Allen Chartier (banded, first in Ontario), Cindy Cartwright, Willie D'Anna, William W. Watson.

Photos: Allen Chartier (in-hand), Janice Haines, Brandon R. Holden (published in *North American Birds* 59: 190).

Specimen: skin (ROM #96755).

References: Bain 2005, Crins 2005, Haines 2005.

### **Ontario Rufous/Allen's Hummingbirds (1983-1997)**

Female or immature male from 14-17 September 1983 at Sapawe, *Rainy River*.

Description: David H. Elder.

Photos: Nancy Blogg.

References: Weir 1984, James 1984, Wormington 1987, Elder 1994.

[Weir (1984) indicated this was thought to have been an immature male; does not include a photo. Drawing by Elder suggests some rufous in upper tail coverts, which would support immature male. – ATC]

Female or immature male from 1-4 October 1984 at Grimsby, *Niagara*.

Description: George D. Meyers. Expert commentary from Jon L. Dunn.

References: Weir 1985.

Adult male on 25 August 1988 at Holiday Beach Conservation Area, *Essex*.

Description: Michael A. Kielb.

References: Coady and Wormington 1989.

[This appears to represent the only eastern North American record of a *Selasphorus* species from a migration station, away from feeders, and the bird's direction of movement was perpendicular to the known fall migration path of the species. – ATC]

Immature male from 1 October – 10 December 1990 at Grimsby Beach, *Niagara*.

Description: Robert Curry, George Naylor. Found by Patricia and Stephen Gilbert.

Photos: James N. Flynn.

References: Weir 1991, Curry 1991.

[Naylor described rufous upper tail coverts, which is consistent with immature male (Williamson 2001, Howell 2002). Description of rufous feathers among the green feathers of the back, nape, and scapulars (above the wing) is very suggestive of Rufous, and inconsistent with Allen's. – ATC]

Immature female from 20 October – 15 December 1996 at Union, *Essex*.

Description: Alan Wormington. Found by F. Gladys Fisher.

Photos: Four prints by Jim Flynn.

References: Bain and Holder 1996, 1997a; Ridout 1996b, 1997a, 1998a; Dobos 1998.

[The bird is definitely a female based on color of rump and upper tail coverts, and restricted (not visible) rufous on the central rectrix, but age cannot be reliably determined by plumage characters alone. Using buffy edges on upperparts (Heidcamp 1997) to age these birds is not completely reliable. Fresh adult upperpart feathers are also edged with buff (Pyle 1997), and their presence can be difficult to differentiate from bright iridescent feather edges. – ATC]

Adult male from 4-27 July 1997 at Lakefield, *Peterborough*.

Description: Found by Nancy Hanes.

References: Ridout 1997b, Dobos 1999.

[This appears to be the earliest arrival date of a presumed fall migrant in the entire Great Lakes region. – ATC]

Immature male from early November – 24 December 1997 at Owen Sound, *Grey*.

Description: Found by Vern and Dorothea Anschuetz. David Fidler, David Tannahill, Matt Fidler.

Photos: Three prints taken by William Waterton on file. Photo by James Masters published in *The Sun Times* (Owen Sound, Ontario).

References: Diebel 1997, Dobos 1999.

[Written description called the bird an immature male based on “a very small gorget located in the centre of the throat”, but Rufous/Allen’s Hummingbirds of all age and sex classes can show an incomplete gorget. Throat pattern, though extremely variable, actually suggests female in this case. By December, an immature male should be showing some rufous feathers on the back, but more importantly, the bases of the central rectrices should show rufous beyond the upper tail coverts regardless of molt status. Photos show no rufous visible at base of central rectrix, and entirely green back and upper tail coverts, which is consistent with female. Age cannot be reliably determined in the field. – ATC]

### **Seasonal Patterns and Age/Sex Ratios**

Adult male Rufous Hummingbirds begin departing the breeding grounds as early as July (Calder 1993), and some arrive on wintering grounds in the Gulf States by early August (pers. obs.). These earliest individuals (mainly adults of both sexes) tend to stay on-site only for short periods, while later arriving individuals tend to remain on-site longer (pers. obs.; B. Sargent, pers. comm.).

The seasonal distribution of Ontario records of Rufous and Rufous/Allen’s Hummingbirds spans the period from early July through early January. The length of stay at single sites on the main wintering grounds in southern Mexico is 12-75 days, averaging 32 (Calder 1993), which coincides well with lengths of stay of many individuals in the Great Lakes. Data gathered between 2001-2004 of 61 Rufous and Rufous/Allen’s Hummingbirds in Michigan, Ohio, and Indiana (unpubl. data) shows a mean length

of stay of 58 days (range 1-160, S.D. 38.29). Average length of stay, average arrival, and average departure have varied by year (see Table 1).

Many wintering Rufous Hummingbirds in the Gulf States move on to a secondary wintering site in late December or early January (B. Sargent, pers. comm.), which is also consistent with observations in the Great Lakes (pers. obs.), though there is a tendency for observers here to presume the birds have died. Recaptures of banded individuals (2 in Michigan, 3 in Ohio, 1 in Indiana, hundreds in the Gulf States) have proven that this is not always the case.

The 23 Ontario records (Rufous and Rufous/Allen’s combined) have an average arrival date of 7 September (range 4 July – 21 November), average departure date of 18 September (range 26 July – 7 January), and average length of stay of 28 days (range 1-108, S.D. 32.46). These data suggest that Rufous Hummingbirds migrate through Ontario mainly earlier than other



**Table 1: 2001-2004 average arrival date, average departure date, and average length of stay by year for 61 Rufous and Rufous/Allen's Hummingbirds in Michigan, Ohio, and Indiana.**

Year	Number of birds	Average arrival date	Average departure date	Average length of stay
2001	5	25 October	29 November	36 days
2002	18	14 October	08 December	57 days
2003	24	12 October	11 December	61 days
2004	14	01 October	30 November	62 days

areas in the Great Lakes, with few remaining on-site to winter. However, a similar pattern could be caused by a relative lack of public awareness of the possibility of occurrence of Rufous Hummingbirds (most do not show up at the feeders of experienced birders), and inexperience in how to recognize them as different from Ruby-throated Hummingbirds (adult males excepted of course). Misinformation is still often published in newspapers throughout North America about when to take hummingbird feeders down, perpetuating the myth that leaving them up will prevent hummingbirds from migrating. Hummingbird migration is genetically and hormonally controlled, of course, but homeowners following the advice of taking feeders down in early September (often the peak of Ruby-throated Hummingbird migration!) could skew the detection of Rufous Hummingbirds in Ontario, especially non-adult males.

The peak of occurrence of Ontario records appears to be skewed slightly earlier in the season than adjacent areas, but the records

also show a subtle peak in occurrence from early October through early December, similar to Michigan, Ohio, and Indiana (Figure 2). Another trend is that there seem to be fewer records overall from the more northern areas, of Ontario and Michigan, than there are for Ohio and Indiana. Again, level of observer awareness in these respective states and provinces could significantly bias these data.

Comparing the age/sex ratios of Ontario records with those from Indiana (Gorney 2004, and unpubl. addenda for 2004; pers. obs.), Michigan (Michigan Bird Records Committee; pers. obs.), and Ohio (Ohio Bird Records Committee; Whan, unpubl.; pers. obs.) may show some interesting trends.

Since not all individuals are confidently aged and/or sexed precisely, for practical purposes the only way we can make such a comparison is by looking at the easily recognized adult males versus all other age/sex classifications (i.e., adult female, immature male, immature female). This comparison is shown in Figure 3. It is interesting that the ratio of adult males is sig-

**Figure 2: Timing of Rufous (and Rufous/Allen's) Hummingbird occurrence in Ontario compared to Michigan, Indiana, and Ohio.**

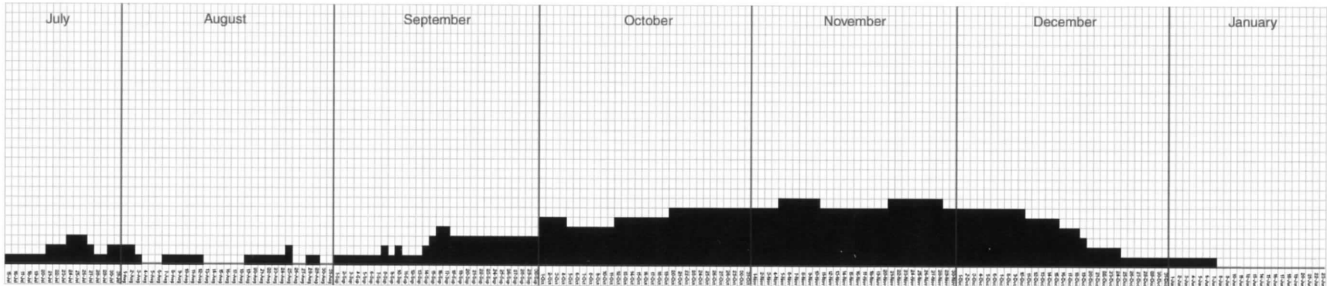


Figure 2a: Ontario 1966-2004 (n=22) (Ontario Bird Records Committee). [plus one spring record] 23 accepted records from 1966-2004 (16 Rufous, 7 Rufous/Allen's), (11 adult male, 12 female/immatures).

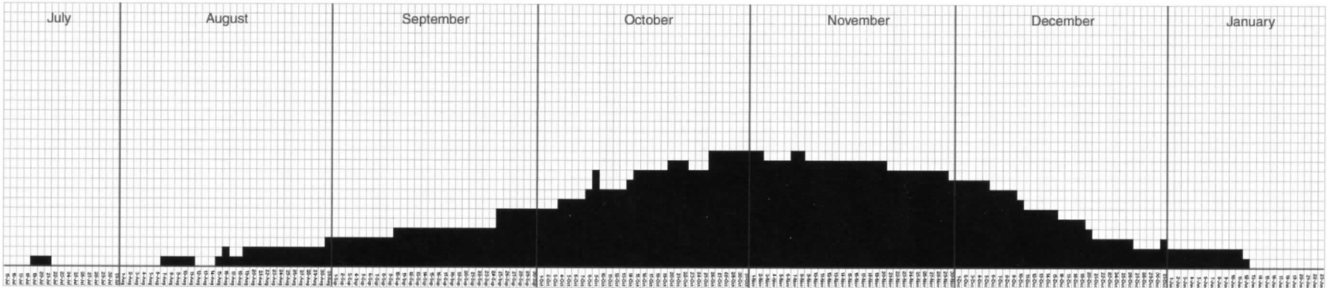


Figure 2b. Michigan 1974-2004 (n=21) (Michigan Bird Records Committee). 21 accepted records from 1974-2004 (16 Rufous, 5 Rufous/Allen's), (16 adult male, 5 female/immatures).

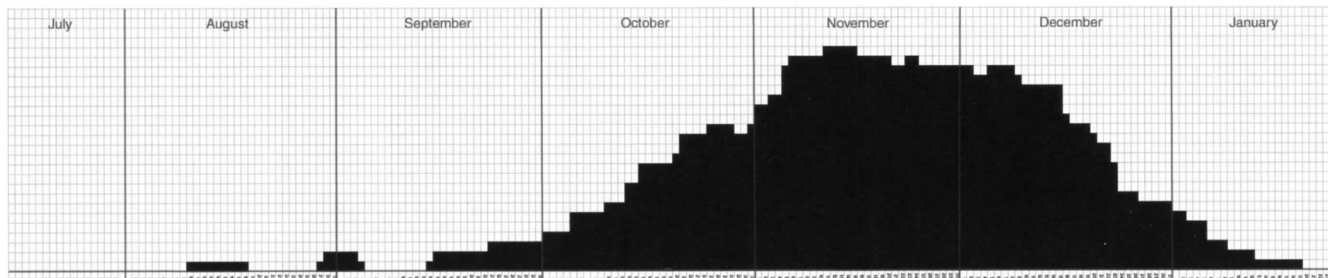


Figure 2c: Indiana 1980-2004 (n=31) (Indiana Bird Records Committee; Gorney 2004; D. Gorney, unpubl.). 31 accepted records from 1980- 2004 (15 Rufous, 16 Rufous/Allen's), (5 adult male, 26 female/immatures).

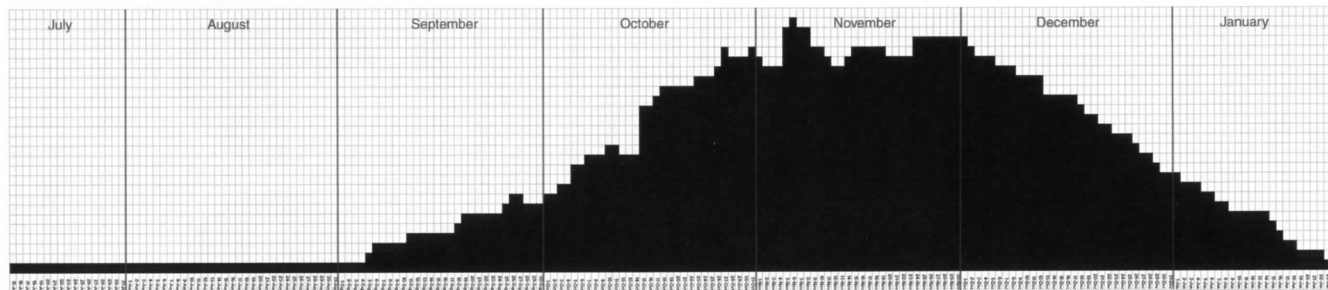


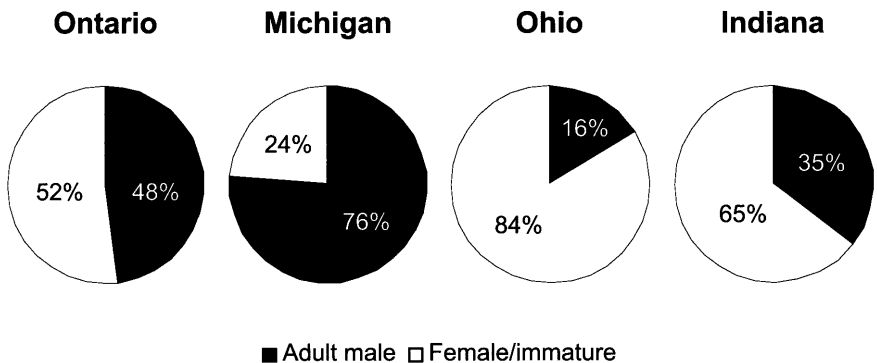
Figure 2d: Ohio 1985-2004 (n=49) (Ohio Bird Records Committee; B. Whan, unpubl.). [Plus one spring record, one record of uncertain dates.] 51 records from 1985-2004 (33 Rufous, 18 Rufous/Allen's), (18 adult male, 33 female/immatures). One "spring" record (8-10 June 1997).

nificantly higher than might be expected for the northern regions, of Ontario (48%) and Michigan (76%). This might be attributable to the fact that adult males are more easily recognized as different, regardless of observer experience, thus skewing the reports in these regions toward adult males. But, the lower ratios in the more southern regions, of Ohio (16%) and Indiana (35%), would then suggest that observers are more experienced or more aware of Rufous Hummingbirds. While the records committees in both of these states do indeed make substantial efforts to increase awareness among birders, and promote the reporting and documentation of these birds, it seems that this is not likely the entire explanation for the difference, particularly among the general public who casually feed birds (the source of most reports). There

may indeed be differences, possibly correlated with latitude and geography, but at this point this is unknown.

### **Records Published But Not Reviewed by OBRC**

These records are presented below without judgement as to their validity, and are not included in the prior summary since none has been reviewed by OBRC to date. Such records are often published due to short publication deadlines, with the presumption that documentation would follow. In most of these cases, written or photographic documentation was not provided to the committee. Anyone in possession of written documentation or photos of any of these birds is encouraged to submit them to the OBRC, as even historical records have value in improving our understanding of the occurrence of Rufous Hummingbirds in Ontario.



**Figure 3: Comparison by state/province of the proportion of adult male Rufous and Rufous/Allen's Hummingbirds to all other age/sex classes (female/immature).**

Adult male Rufous Hummingbird on 30 June 1985 at Westport, *Leeds and Grenville*, was referenced by Weir (1988a, 1989b). No documentation on file with OBRC. Wormington (pers. comm.) indicated that this record was in 1985, not 1975 as published. Weir (1989b) provided a brief synopsis of the record, and indicated that the Rare Birds Committee of the Kingston Field Naturalists accepted the written description from the observer as a valid record of Rufous Hummingbird.

Immature male Rufous Hummingbird from 7-15 November 1988 at Waterford, *Norfolk* was published by Weir (1989a). No documentation on file with OBRC.

Rufous Hummingbird (age/sex?) from 15-16 August 1994 at Delaware, *Middlesex* (A. Liversage, various observers), was published by Richardson (1994b) and by Ridout (1995). No documentation on file with OBRC.

Rufous Hummingbird (age/sex?) from October – 19 December 1996 at Goderich, *Huron* (M. Williamson), was published by Ridout (1996b) and by Bain and Holder (1997a). No documentation on file with OBRC.

Adult male Rufous Hummingbird from 30-31 July 1999 at Rebecca Lake, *Muskoka* (*vide* Ron Tozer), was published by Bain and Shanahan (1999b) and by Elder (1999). No documentation on file with OBRC. Tozer (pers. comm.) indicated the bird was described as an adult male.

Adult male Rufous Hummingbird from 9 August – 7 November 2004 at Marathon, *Thunder Bay* (Pat Chadwick, Cheryl Vosburgh), was published by Bain (2005). Documentation and photos have been submitted, and this record is currently under review by the OBRC.

*Selasphorus* hummingbird (immature/female) on 2 October 1989 from Pt. Pelee, *Essex* (G. Tom Hince), was published by Weir (1990). No documentation on file with OBRC.

*Selasphorus* hummingbird (age/sex?) on 1 November 1993 from Elginburg, *Frontenac* (*vide* R. D. Weir), was published by Weir (1994). No documentation on file with OBRC.

*Selasphorus* hummingbird from 9 November – 21 December 1997 at Tecumseh, *Essex* (G. Fraser, C. Fraser, et al.), was published by Bain and Holder (1997b, 1998), and Ridout (1998b). No documentation on file with OBRC.

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