

Notes

Black-chinned Hummingbird: New to Ontario

by
Nora M. Mansfield

About 1700h, Friday, 25 May 1990, a warm sunny day, Dr. and Mrs. A.A. Sterns of Rideau Ferry, Lanark County (on the Rideau Waterway, about 9 km south of Perth) spotted a strange hummingbird amongst the many Ruby-throated Hummingbirds at their feeders. It appeared to be "larger, with a black head and a bit of a crest". They thought it might be sick or dying as it sat much of the time without moving, only occasionally sipping from a feeder. And they noted that the Ruby-throats tried to chase it.

Dr. Sterns videotaped the strange hummer. Mrs. Sterns tried to locate an expert to identify it. First she called the *Ottawa Citizen* newspaper, but its staff was too busy with the Meech Lake Accord affair to help. Next she tried Lynne Thompson of the Perth Wildlife Reserve who, unable to, asked me to go. I drove from my Smiths Falls home pronto, arriving about 1915h.

The Sterns pointed the bird out to me, with other hummingbirds in the shrubby-bordered feeder area siding the house on the south. It was best seen from the windows overlooking this enclosure, but was mainly viewed amongst the foliage on top of and inside the hedge where the light was variable because of shadows. From the front, its head did

appear to be black, with the breast and sides darker than the Ruby-throats'. There was no crest. I too thought it looked larger.

I asked Ron Beacock of Perth, a sharp-eyed, experienced birdwatcher with remarkable surveillance skills, to come. From 2000h to 2045h, with the light waning, we caught glimpses of the bird in the feeder area, but these and the videotaped pictures were not clear enough to give us what we needed definitively concerning its colour. We decided to return the next day to obtain more details which might show whether it was a larger, darker Ruby-throated or prove that it was another species such as the Black-chinned Hummingbird (*Archilochus alexandri*). In that event, we would have to get an expert to confirm the identification.

By Saturday morning, after further studying our books, we concluded that of all the North American hummingbirds our bird was most like the Black-chinned. Ron returned by 0830h and I by 1000h, watching until noon with no luck. Back again at 1600h, I spied him immediately, sitting alone at a feeder -- right out in the open in bright sunlight! Within minutes, Ron arrived and took photographs of the bird from all sides. For 30 minutes

before it disappeared finally out of sight, we observed it with binoculars (10x50 and 8x40) from a distance of 3 to 6m, as it fed, rested, and flew.

We noted: the very green sheen of its back; dusky forehead; black chin and throat; white collar between throat and breast; breast a light grey with what appeared to be a darker grey wash on the sides (darker than the Ruby-throats' sides); the slightly downcurved bill approximately the same length as the Ruby-throats', and blackish-brown and shiny smooth; and tail moderately notched, but the same length as the Ruby-throats'. The overall length of the bird looked to be a few millimetres longer than many of the Ruby-throats at the Sterns'. The Ruby-throats' movements were very quick and light, while this bird's were sluggish; takeoffs and landings were slower, and all movements including flight were smoother. The Ruby-throats looked as if they were going about their business on breeding territory in a brisk, purposeful manner, while the stranger did not. No call or wing sounds were heard.

Then suddenly, I saw a momentary burst of a glorious iridescent blue-pink violet over the bottom of the throat in a narrow band (not elongated at the sides), unlike any colour I had ever seen before on a bird. I was absolutely stunned! Ron saw purple once.

Convinced beyond a doubt now that it was an adult male Black-chinned Hummingbird, we consulted with Gordon Pringle of Ottawa. He came out on Sunday afternoon (27 May), bringing Larry Nealy (who has personal experience with the species) -- but our bird was not about, nor

was it seen again after the 26th! Glad to help in any other way, the Sterns had asked that there be no publicity that would bring flocks of birdwatchers and photographers.

We were disappointed that the bird had vanished before confirmation by other observers, but our faith lay in Ron's transparencies for proof. Then tragedy struck. On Tuesday, he was informed that the wrong developing solution had been used, removing all pictures from the film! This hope gone, Gordon and Larry ran the videotape through in their respective labs, but were unable to get anything conclusive.

As designated report writer, I continued to document relevant facts. For example, I determined by colour chart the exact colours which we had seen on the throat, learning that Mrs. Sterns had seen a "blue-pink" in a very narrow band along its bottom twice on Friday, and Dr. Sterns had seen black only. I took colour prints of the habitat, which was ideal for Black-chinned's breeding (Stokes and Stokes 1989) -- lowland bordered by water on two sides, with willow trees along one shore. Weather reports which I obtained confirmed severe weather disturbances had occurred southwest of the U.S.A./Canada border 24 to 48 hours before the bird had been spotted, which might account for its presence and behaviour. I compared W. Earl Godfrey's (1986) tip of the bill to tip of the tail measurements for Black-chins and Ruby-throats, finding that our bird was possibly at the top of the Black-chin's range of 7.5 to 9.5 cm -- making it appear longer than many of the Ruby-throats.

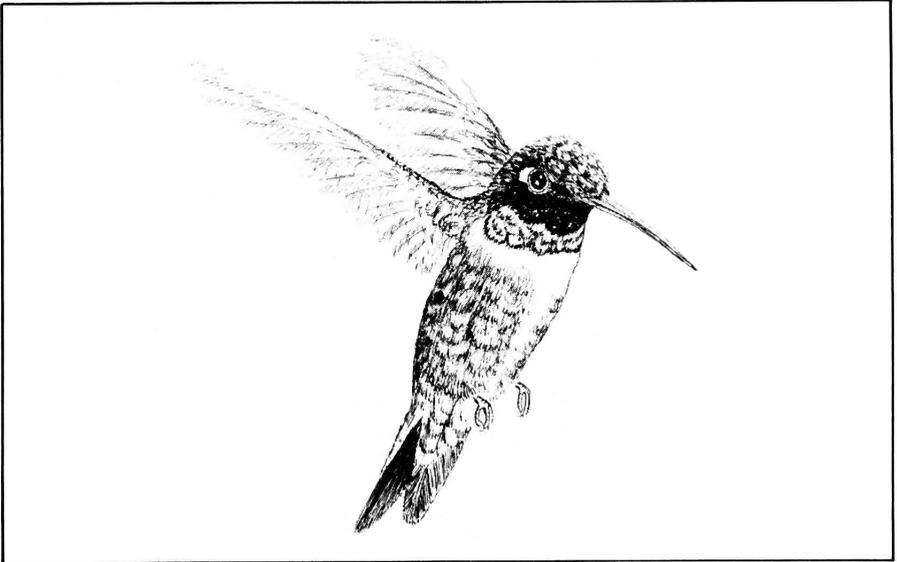


Figure 1: Black-chinned Hummingbird showing diagnostic flash of shiny violet on lower throat. Drawing by *Chris Kerrigan*.

Sustained by the support of Gordon Pringle and Bob Curry who guided us through procedures, and Ron D. Weir's spontaneous "I buy that!" when I described the find to him, we submitted a report of our observations to the Ontario Bird Records Committee (OBRC). The OBRC subsequently accepted the sighting (Curry 1991), as the first documented occurrence for Ontario. Thus, the tortuous tale, if ever there was one, of this Black-chinned Hummingbird has finally been told --as we observers saw it.

The Black-chinned Hummingbird breeds in the West from southwestern British Columbia and northwestern Montana south through California, Arizona, New Mexico and southern Texas, to northern Mexico (AOU 1983). Godfrey (1986) reported it as a casual visitant to southern Alberta (specimen), and southern

Saskatchewan (sight record). There were no Canadian records east of Saskatchewan prior to our observation, according to Desante and Pyle (1986). In the United States, it is a very rare vagrant eastward to Louisiana, Alabama, and Florida (Desante and Pyle 1986), and there is one record from Cohasset, Massachusetts -- the most easterly occurrence for the continent (AOU 1983).

Acknowledgements

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Bat as Food of Northern Shrike

by

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About 1100h on 26 January 1992, we observed an adult Northern Shrike (*Lanius excubitor*) holding a bat (*Chiroptera*). The observation was made near Nephton, Peterborough County, Ontario. The morning was sunny and cold, with an overnight temperature of -20°C. The shrike was first noted when it flushed in front of us. It flew low for a short distance, holding the bat with its feet. When the shrike perched, the bat could be clearly seen in our telescope.

An extensive review of the literature revealed no reports of Northern Shrike preying on bats. Ross James (pers. comm.), of the Royal Ontario Museum, also was unaware of any instances of bats being taken by this shrike. However, Bent (1950) reported two separate cases of the Loggerhead Shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus*) attempting unsuccessfully to capture bats in flight.

The two most cold-hardy bats that hibernate in central Ontario are the Big Brown Bat (*Eptesicus fuscus*) and the Small-footed Bat (*Myotis leibii*) (Ed Poropat, pers. comm.). The relatively large size of the bat held by the shrike we saw suggested to us that it was probably a Big Brown. This species often hibernates in buildings, and is occasionally active in winter. In fact, Banfield (1974) states that "when disturbed in hibernation, the bats (Big Brown) awaken, raise their body temperatures by shivering, and after a period of about five minutes take to shaky flight about their winter quarters".

Our observation was made near several mine buildings and residences. We speculate that the bat may have been disturbed in a nearby building, and then caught by the shrike when it attempted to move to a new location. Another possibility

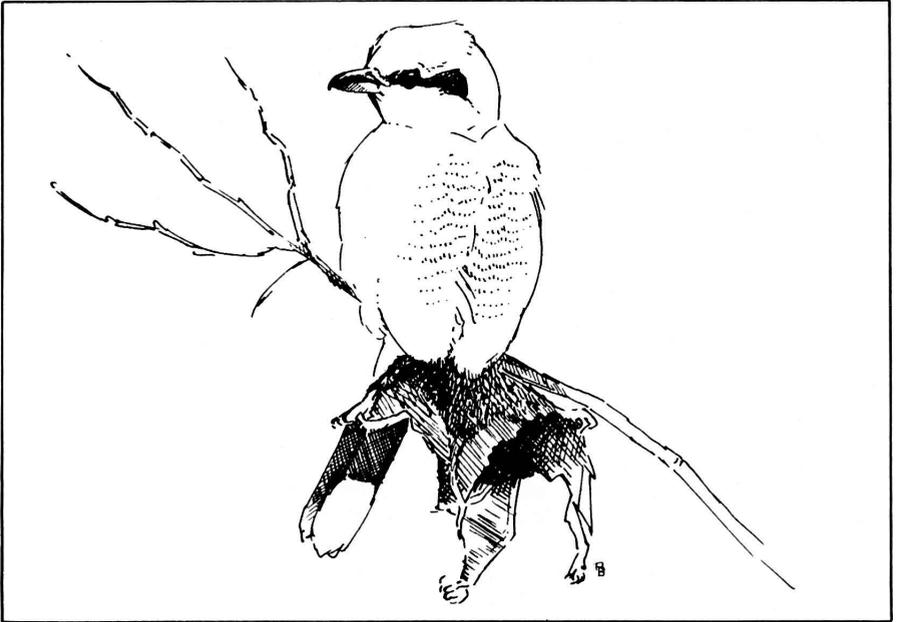


Figure 1: Northern Shrike holding probable Big Brown Bat.
Drawing by Peter Burke.

is that the bat was found dead by the shrike. Previous reports of Northern Shrike scavenging on carrion involved a domestic cow (Bent 1950), and an American Red Squirrel (*Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*) (James 1987).

This observation apparently constitutes the first report of a Northern Shrike preying or scavenging on a bat in North America.

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