

## Ohio's First Rufous Hummingbird

### Rick Counts

It seems that when the birding is sailing along on an even keel, with all sightings common or expected, the phone rings with word of a rarity. Thus was the case on August 16, 1985, when Esther Reichelderfer called me at 2:30 PM to tell me about a Rufous hummingbird that was found at a feeder in Westerville, just outside of Columbus. Mr. and Mrs. Perry Van Sickle had found the bird while watching Ruby-throated hummingbirds at the sugar water. They called the right birders, who checked the sighting, and, after it was confirmed, spread the word. It went state-wide.

After throwing my glasses and scope in the car, I met Kirk Alexander at his house and we started our half-hour car trip. We arrived at 3:20 PM and Esther was there saying that the bird had recently been seen. We sat in chairs furnished by the Van Sickles and faced two feeders near the back of the yard where the bird was last seen. Mrs. Van Sickle said that he was seen feeding at the red salvia to our right.

At 3:30 PM we saw our first hummingbirds in the yard: two female Ruby-throateds feeding at the salvia. The Van Sickles told us to keep a lookout for the Rufous since he was very aggressive and had been chasing other hummingbirds out of the yard. No sooner said than a peculiar sounding hummingbird entered the yard, chasing the Ruby-throateds out of the area. It was the Rufous, a brilliantly colored male with the orange visible with the naked eye! He fed at the salvia and soon came to a feeder no more than ten feet away from us where we obtained excellent views. A Rufous hummingbird in Westerville, Ohio! What a bird! What a year 1985 had been so far. I had already added eight birds to my Ohio list. The Rufous was #306.

The next three days the bird was seen by some 120 birders. I spent nearly all of my time at the Van Sickles watching it. It was like being a tenant at their home, complete with coffee and donuts every morning. Midge and Perry Van Sickle were the nicest birders I had met in a long while. Their hospitality was unbelievable. Every birder was welcome to their backyard and received help locating the bird. The Rufous certainly knew where to show up. I would like to thank the Van Sickles for all of their help and kindness while I was at their home.

Page after page could be written about all I saw while studying the bird. The feeding habits, for instance, really varied: picking bugs from spider webs; flycatching in the high branches of an elm tree; feeding at the berries of a mountain ash; feeding on red salvias eighteen inches above the ground; and of course visiting four different sugar water feeders distributed in two backyards.

It was interesting to notice the different colors on the throat depending on how the light was hitting the feathers. Most of the time the throat was a bright orange-red. But in poor light or shade it

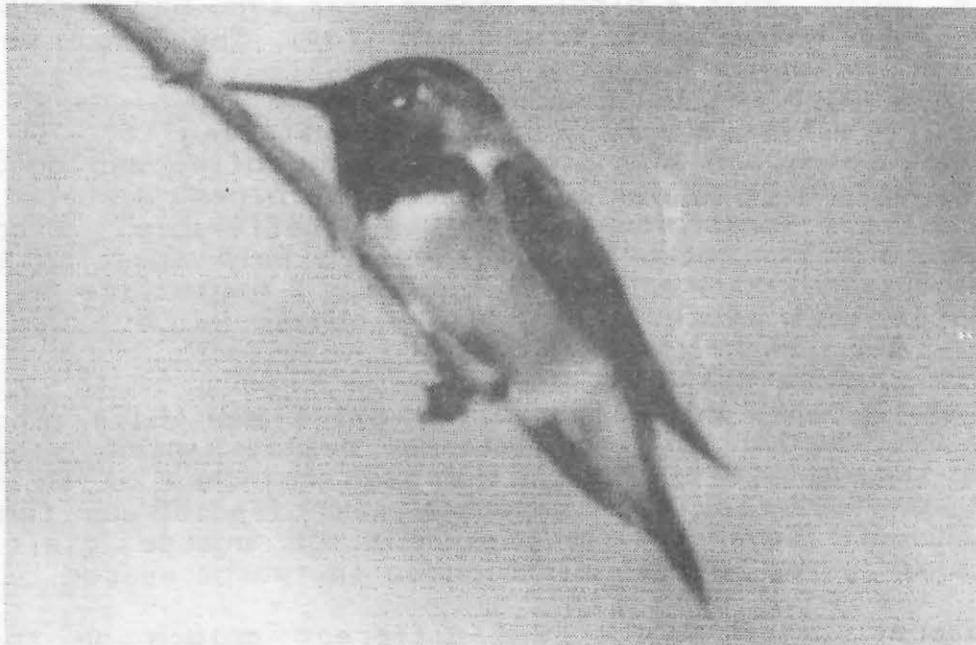
would sometimes appear green, black, gold, or dark blue. It is easy to see why the male hummingbird's throat color can sometimes be deceiving.

The most interesting times for seeing the Rufous were when he would rest in various deciduous trees and preen. He scratched his head with his foot, similar to a dog. His feathers were rearranged with the long bill, sometimes showing his long, green tongue. Once while he was in the mountain ash he sat motionless for nearly 45 minutes which enabled viewing through a spotting scope. This was quite a view through a 20X scope at about 25 yards.

The Rufous was seen a total of four days, 15 August 1985 through 18 August 1985 [Thursday through Sunday]. He was last seen Sunday evening at 7:35 PM by Mike Flynn and me as he left a feeder and flew southeast. This last view was the best: seven feet away at the feeder.

Monday came with no sign of the bird. All neighborhood feeders and flower gardens were checked with no luck. Sharon Woods Metropark, which bordered the rear of the Van Sickle's property, was also checked with no luck. Extensive habitat within the park would have made it very difficult to locate him. The thrill was over. Four days was a good stay, though, for a bird never before seen in Ohio.

Nearly everyone who traveled to see the bird was blessed with fine views, the exception being the few Monday morning birders. If 1986 is anything like 1985 for unusual sightings, those unfortunate birders who missed seeing the Rufous hummingbird in 1985 may find him a year later in the Van Sickle's yard. It will be interesting to see if he does reappear at the same location.



Male Rufous Hummingbird, Westerville, Ohio. August 15-18, 1985.  
Photographed by Mike Flynn.