

## ROADRUNNER CATCHES HUMMINGBIRD IN FLIGHT

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Published accounts of feeding habits of the Roadrunner (*Geococcyx californianus*) (Zimmerman, Condor 72:475-476, 1970; Binford, Calif. Birds 2:139, 1971) include the fact that the species is known to capture small birds on the ground. A. C. Bent (U.S. Natl. Mus. Bull. 176:45, 1940) briefly mentioned observations of the capture of a swift and a House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) in flight by Roadrunners, which leaped into the air from the ground. However, I find no detailed description in the literature of the aerial capture of a bird.

On 28 April 1974, my husband and I were watching and photographing hummingbirds of several species at our window feeders in Portal, Arizona. We became aware that one of our resident pair of Roadrunners was crouched on the roof of a small porch nine feet above ground, just above the hummingbird feeders which hang from wires from the eaves (fig. 1). We had seen it on the ground below the feeders, occasionally leaping into the air in an unsuccessful attempt to catch a bird. Several times the Roadrunner changed position and made tentative passes at the birds. Suddenly it leaped off the roof and snapped up a Black-chinned Hummingbird (*Archilochus alexandri*) in flight, landing on the ground with the bird in its beak. I quickly took one picture and then we followed the bird as it ran off, but shortly lost it in brush. Forty minutes later I noted either this same Roadrunner or another running across the yard with another bird in its beak, this one sparrow-sized. The unusual aspect of this incident is that the Roadrunner attacked its flying prey from an elevated perch rather than the ground.

On 20 June 1974, we saw a Roadrunner pounding something on the ground by our brush pile, where we have several sugar-water feeders for orioles and hummingbirds, hanging from low branches. We approached the Roadrunner, which ran a short distance and dropped its prey—a Black-chinned Hummingbird that died in less than a minute. We speculate that the Roadrunner caught this hummingbird by jumping into the air from the ground.

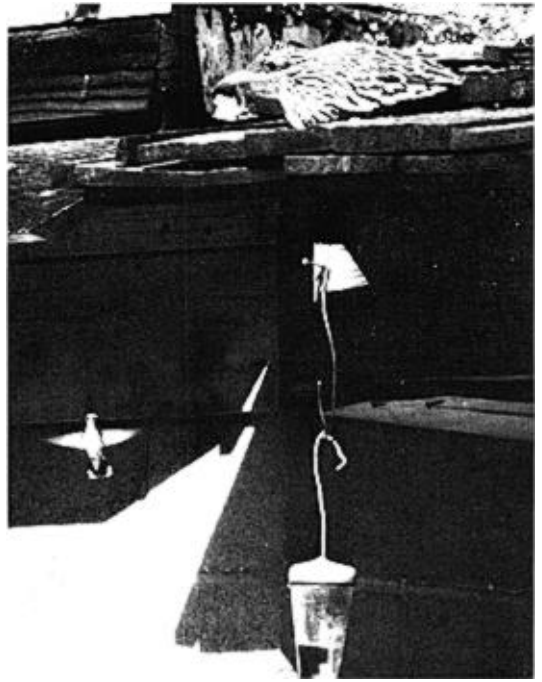


FIGURE 1. Roadrunner crouched on the roof of a porch, above a hummingbird attracted to a hanging feeder.

One week later we found all the tail feathers of a female Blue-throated Hummingbird (*Lampornis clemenciae*) on the ground under our feeders, and later that day saw a tail-less bird. This may well have represented another attempt by the Roadrunner, which this time succeeded in grabbing only the tail of the hummingbird.

I have not found the Roadrunner listed as a predator on hummingbirds, but these observations clearly show that it does catch them occasionally, perhaps when they are feeding on low flowers.

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## FALL DIET OF LESSER PRAIRIE CHICKENS IN WEST TEXAS

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The Lesser Prairie Chicken (*Tympanuchus pallidicinctus*) is considered a threatened species (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Serv. 1973:134), yet its populations in west Texas and elsewhere are subject to limited hunting. The loss of vast undisturbed prairie habitats, interspersed with patches of shinny oak (*Quercus havardii*), has imperilled these birds. Martin et al. (American wildlife and plants—A guide to wildlife food habits, p. 97, McGraw-Hill, New York, 1951), although noting the importance of "oak" as 52% of the birds' diet in Oklahoma, stated that data on food habits of this species were very limited. Other work in Oklahoma described the importance of insects

(74%), seeds (20%), and leafy green material (5%) in the October diet (Jones, Southwest. Nat. 9:111-117, 1964). Copelin (Oklahoma Wildl. Conserv. Dept. Tech. Bull. 6, 1963) believed that grain sorghum was taken only when native foods were insufficient. However, virtually no data for the foods of Lesser Prairie Chickens are available for west Texas. Accordingly, we undertook this study, using only birds collected during the hunting season for our sample.

We randomly selected 30 crops each year for three years (1971-1973, inclusive) taken from birds logged at the Lehman Check Station in Cochran County during the two-day mid-October hunting season in west Texas. The 90 crops represented a 10% sample from the legal harvest for the 3-year period; of this sample, 27 crops (30%) later proved empty.

We stored the crops in foil wrappers for later analysis. The materials from each crop were oven-dried at 77° C for 72 hrs, then separated, weighed,