

# First occurrence of Black-chinned Hummingbird in Alabama

With notes on identification

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*Photo/Greg D. Jackson.*

THE BLACK-CHINNED HUMMINGBIRD (*Archilochus alexandri*) has been reported casually from Florida (Hoffman 1983) and is an annual visitor to southeastern Louisiana (N. L. Newfield *pers. comm.*), but until January 1984 had never been recorded in Alabama. Besides the breeding Ruby-throated Hummingbird (*Archilochus colubris*), the only other member of this family recorded in Alabama is the Rufous Hummingbird (*Selasphorus rufus*), which is a rare visitor in migration and winter (Imhof 1976). The first documented occurrence of the Black-chinned Hummingbird in the state is from the Spring Hill district of Mobile in Mobile County.

In early January 1984, the author learned that two hummingbirds of unknown identity had been attracted to sugar water feeders at the home of Mrs. L. G. Connell and had been present all winter. The home was in a residential area with plentiful hardwood trees and evergreen shrubs. Mrs. Connell reported that only one bird was present after December 25, 1983, when the temperature fell to seven degrees Fahrenheit. The bird that had disappeared was in female or immature plumage, and had been attacked frequently by the other bird, an adult male.

On the afternoon of January 15, 1984, the author and Debra G. Jackson, both with prior experience with the genus *Archilochus*, observed and photographed the remaining bird over a two-hour period. The subject was studied at rest and in flight in the vicinity of the feeders at a distance of 15 to 20 feet. The sky was overcast with light rain and the light was fair but adequate for observation. Optical equipment included Bushnell 9 × 36 and 7 × 35 binoculars. Photographs were obtained with an Olympus OM-2N using a 400 mm lens.

The hummingbird remained until early April 1984 and was seen by 15 to 20 birders during this time; most of these observers were experienced with the genus *Archilochus*. All viewers verbally agreed with the identification of Black-chinned Hummingbird. On March 17, 1984, the author and D. G. Jackson again observed and photographed the bird under sunny skies and better lighting conditions. There was an adult male Ruby-throated Hummingbird in the area at that time, and the Black-chinned was very aggressive towards the Ruby-throated.

The following characteristics were

observed during the course of the hummingbird's stay. The bird was the same size as a Ruby-throated Hummingbird. The bill was longer than that of a Ruby-throated. The wings were pointed, but the outermost primary had an obtuse subterminal angulation and a broad, blunt tip. The tail, which was pumped constantly while feeding, had a moderately deep central notch when folded, and was rather square with a shallow notch when spread. The crown and face were dark gray-green. There was a short white stripe posterior to the eye. The dorsal surface of the tail showed black outer rectrices and dark green inner rectrices. The remainder of the upperparts were dark green. The throat was black with a transverse purple band on the lower portion. The breast below the purple band was clear white. The sides of the breast and flanks were gray-green, and there was a longitudinal central gray stripe on the lower breast and belly. Whitish undertail coverts were noted. The bill, iris, legs, and feet were black.

The throat color observed is specific for an adult male Black-chinned Hummingbird and rules out similar species (Robbins *et al.* 1983). Unfortunately, this color proved difficult to capture on film. However, the shape of the outer primary and tail, as well as the bill length and plumage characteristics such as the dark green upperparts and the clear white upper breast, are well shown in photographs of the bird. This combination of photographed features documents the presence of the species (Kimball L. Garrett *in* Farrand 1983; Scott 1983; N. L. Newfield *pers. comm.*).

Unusual hummingbirds such as the Black-chinned undoubtedly occur more frequently in Alabama, considering the variety of species frequently seen a short distance to the west in southeastern Louisiana (Myers and Muth 1984). In the winter in Alabama, Black-chinned is as likely as, or even more likely than, Ruby-throated (Scott 1983). The females and immatures of these two species are exceedingly difficult to separate except in the hand, and probably should not be assigned to species in the field in most cases. One should attempt to observe the longer bill, the curved and blunt-tipped outermost primary, the dark green rather than bright green upperparts and crown, and the "dirty" white instead of "clean" white underparts of the Black-chinned Hummingbird (N. L. Newfield *pers. comm.*). The

tail-pumping of the Black-chinned is very noticeable while feeding, and is generally more frequent and persistent than that shown by the Ruby-throated Hummingbird (N. L. Newfield *pers. comm.*). Immature males of either species can show some characteristic gorget color by early fall (Scott 1983).

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