

Notes based on Joe Morlan's Ornithology class lecture November 4th, 2009.
Joe Morlan is not responsible for these notes, any errors or omissions in them are mine.

In Hummingbirds there are more recorded intergeneric hybrids (between members of different genera) than there are intrageneric hybrids (within the same genus). A reason may be that intergeneric hybrids are more likely to be recognized.

Where there are lots of hummingbird feeders in one spot it becomes inefficient for a single hummingbird to defend those territories. The energetic costs of defending the superabundance of food would be too high. The birds have social plasticity and adapt, they become social instead of being territorial.

The same thing occurs in Sanderlings, which are often seen in flocks on the wintering grounds. This happens only where there are high food densities. In areas with lower food densities they become territorial.

Hummingbirds are very small and it is difficult for them to maintain a high body temperature in cold conditions. They can become torpid. They lower their heart rate and body temperature.

Size illusion: When viewed through magnifying optics objects behind other objects appear to be larger. The vanishing point stays the same, but because the binoculars make you think the whole setup is closer than it really is, the proportions of the amount of foreshortening of the back side is wrong for how close it appears to be.

August is a good time to visit Arizona. The monsoon rains come. The grass turns green and all of the sparrows are singing.

Broad-billed Hummingbird

OCCURRENCE

Found in oak woodland habitats at middle elevations in southeastern Arizona as well as some upper elevation sites. Migratory, generally found in Arizona only in the breeding season, arrive usually around April and are present into the fall.

Places like Ramsey Canyon, really common at the Santa Rita Lodge in Madera Canyon in the Santa Rita Mountains.

Nat Geo also shows a small area of permanent residence in parts of southeastern Arizona.

About 60 CA records.

Almost all of the CA records are from the wintertime or late fall.

90% of those records are from southern CA.

Is on the California Bird Records Committee review list.

Two records from Oregon.

FIELD MARKS

Bill long, curved, red with dark tip, the amount of red varies somewhat with age.

Bill wide at the base which is hard to see from most angles.

A number of hummingbirds that had a red bill have been thought to be Broad-billed Hummingbirds but where not. There has been an Anna's Hummingbird that had a red bill all the way to the tip.

Adult Male

Very shiny blue gorget.

Some males have a little bit of a white line behind the eye.

Blue-green underparts, dark all the way down onto the belly.

White undertail coverts.

Tail black with a deep notch.

Female

Much duller, do not have the iridescent shiny blue gorget.

Underparts dingy gray.

Not necessarily much red on the bill, contrary to what the field guides show.

White line behind the eye.

Bluish central tail feathers.

VOCALIZATIONS

Very distinctive call notes, quite different from any other hummingbird that we have.

More like the loud chittering call note of a Ruby-crowned Kinglet, but sharper, dryer and with a faster cadence.

White-eared Hummingbird

OCCURRENCE

Abundant permanent resident at higher elevations in the Sierra Madre, where it outnumbers Broad-billed Hummingbird which tends to occur at somewhat lower elevations.

Used to be almost impossible to add to your NA list.

There were very few records in places like the Chiricahua Mountains, mostly in early spring.

By April or so when the Broad-billed Hummingbirds were coming in, these White-eared Hummingbirds were nowhere to be found.

Over the years people have continued to feed hummingbirds. Some places now get White-eared Hummingbirds regularly during the summer months, most notably Beatty's Guest Ranch in Miller Canyon.

No CA records.

FIELD MARKS

Bill much shorter bill than Broad-billed Hummingbird, straight.

Male bright red base to the bill (just the proximal half).

Prominent long white postocular stripe on both male and female.

Males have a darker throat, often glittering a little bit blue, but usually not as intense as that of the Broad-billed Hummingbird.

Belly pale in the center with freckled green sides.

Blue-throated Hummingbird

OCCURRENCE

Quite common in pine-oak woodlands and at feeding stations in southeastern Arizona. Gets just barely into Big Bend in Texas.

Only one record in CA, a female in Tulare County that nested and raised babies, probably hybrids with Anna's Hummingbird or maybe with Black-chinned Hummingbird. A detailed account of this nesting is here:

<http://elibrary.unm.edu/sora/wb/v14n01/p0017-p0030.pdf>

FIELD MARKS

One of the largest hummingbirds that occur regularly in NA.

(The other one is the Magnificent Hummingbird.)

Completely dwarves the Black-chinned Hummingbird, which is the most common hummingbird at feeders in Arizona. Those will constantly chase each other away. The big Blue-throats don't get chased away as easily, they just sit there.

Fairly long, straight bill, but not as long as on Magnificent Hummingbird.

Long wings and tail.

Adult male has some blue color on the throat.

Pretty gray below.

On both males and females a pattern of a white supercilium and sometimes a little bit of a second white stripe, a pale narrow throat stripe below the dark mask. Usually more white on Blue-throated Hummingbird than on Magnificent Hummingbird.

Fairly extensive white spots on the tip of the tail.

(Magnificent Hummingbird females have much smaller white spots)

Xantus's Hummingbird

OCCURRENCE

Endemic to southern Baja California.

Two records from southern CA, one of them a female that attempted to nest.

One record from a feeder in British Columbia. Some question about its natural occurrence. People do keep hummingbirds in captivity.

FIELD MARKS

Similar to White-eared Hummingbird.

Bill a little bit longer and more curved.

Cinnamon-buffy underparts.

Magnificent Hummingbird

OCCURRENCE

Range rather similar to that of the Blue-throated Hummingbird.

About as common as it in Arizona at places like Ramsey Canyon or Beatty's Guest Ranch or Madera Canyon.

Was for a long time thought to be overdue in CA. Now there are two records.

FIELD MARKS

Big, slightly larger than Blue-throated Hummingbird.
Very long bill.

Adult Male

Black on the belly.
Green gorget.
Purple crown (hard to see).
A little white spot behind the eye.

Female

Gray, looks a lot like Blue-throated Hummingbird with smaller white corners to the tail and less white in the face.
Looking at photos it is really difficult to tell a female Manificent Hummingbird from a female Anna's. It has twice the bulk, but size is hard to judge, especially in a photo.
One was claimed recently at the Kern River Preserve. A photo showed this big hummingbird on the back side of a feeder looking twice the size of a Black-chinned in front of it. But it turned out to be a Black-chinned Hummingbird, it was size illusion.

VOCALIZATIONS

Call note a loud popping chip.

Plain-capped Starthroat

Called starthroat because the gorget is confined to a rather small spot in the middle of the throat.

OCCURRENCE

Mexican species.
A relatively recent visitor to Arizona, usually one or two records a year.
No records elsewhere in NA.
Likes agaves.
One place where it has been seen in Arizona is Ash Canyon Bed and Breakfast. Lucifer Hummingbirds come there also. Those two lowland desert species are hard to find in other places.

FIELD MARKS

Same size as Blue-throated Hummingbird.
One of the longest bills of any of these hummingbirds.
Bold white malar stripe.
Various amounts of red on the throat.
White on flanks and rump.
Tail with a terminal band of white spots just broken at the central pair (two feathers). The field guides do not show enough white. The spots are also more equal in size than shown.
Seems to have contrasting speckles or spots on the undertail coverts (black or dark green against a gleaming white background).
(Magnificent or Blue-throated also have spots but gray against a pale gray background and not contrasting.)

VOCALIZATIONS

Somewhat similar to Magnificent Hummingbird.