

Ruby-throated Hummingbird (RTHU)

Sighting Protocol Field Guide

(for Mexico, Central America, and Caribbean)

Task

To observe and record one or more of the following:

- Early arrival date of RTHUs in Autumn
- Final date RTHUs are observed in Spring
- RTHU presence between early arrival and final sighting
- RTHUs that are color-marked or with unusual plumage

What You Need

- ☐ Pencil or pen
- ☐ Bird identification guide
- ☐ Ruby-throated Hummingbird Sighting Data Sheet
- ☐ Binoculars (*optional*)

In the Field

1. Every day about two weeks before the expected arrival of RTHUs, begin looking for RTHUs in your neighborhood and schoolyard. In Mexico, the first RTHUs probably arrive in early to-mid August and begin departing by late February or early March. Precise early arrival and final departure dates for Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean are not known, so please be alert for RTHUs from August through April, perhaps even through mid-May. *Record observation times even if hummingbirds are not seen.*
2. If possible, determine sex and age of each RTHU that is observed.
3. Record date of first RTHU Autumn sighting—including sex and age (if known)—on the *Hummingbird Sighting Data Sheet*. **Note:** January through mid-May, RTHUs are easily aged and sexed; only adult males have full red throats and only females have completely white throats; a few males that hatched very late the preceding summer may have incomplete red throats.
4. In Autumn, Winter, and Spring, look for RTHUs every day. Record:
 - Each date a red-throated adult male is observed
 - Each date an adult female is observed (white throat, January through mid-May only)
 - Each date an undetermined sex is observed (if throat is not observed)
 - Each date an undetermined sex (possible adult female/young female/young male) is observed (August through December, if throat is unmarked)
 - Each date a young male is observed (August through December, and perhaps later, if throat is heavily streaked in green or black and/or has one or more red feathers)
5. After no more RTHUs are seen, record final date of:
 - Adult male
 - Undetermined sex (if throat is not observed)
 - Undetermined sex (possible adult female/young female/young male, through December, if throat is unmarked)

- Young male (if throat is heavily streaked in green or black and/or has one or more red feathers)
6. In the protocols above, Observation Start Time and Observation End Time may be the same for an individual sighting.

Note: If you see a color-marked RTHU, describe the color markings and attempt to observe whether the bird is banded and on which leg. If you see a RTHU with unusual colors (albinism, leucism, etc.) make note of the colors and patterns and get a photo if possible. Record your observations on the *Ruby-throated Hummingbird Sighting Data Sheet*. Contact Hilton Pond Center for Piedmont Natural History at research@hiltonpond.org or (803) 684-5852 as soon as possible.