



**Direct morning sunlight enhanced iridescence
in this male Broad-billed Hummingbird**



**He remained calm during his
multistage ordeal**

Brunswick Wildlife Winter Hummers Redux

A very rare visitor to New Bern prompted me to revisit my September article on attracting winter hummingbirds. Not to correct it...but to reinforce the need and potential joy of watching for these avian jewels.

The Broad-billed Hummingbird is a Mexican species that breeds north to Southeastern Arizona. Mexican birds are mostly non-migratory while Arizona and northern Mexico birds migrate south. This guy did not head south.

There have been two records in South Carolina and this male is the third record in North Carolina, having been around since early August. But wait! He is the same bird that was banded in the Charleston area back in January...so he is a double record holder!

North Carolina's first Broad-billed Hummingbird was also found near New Bern, on October 10, 2001. Then an adult male was observed July 15–16, 2005 near Kill Devil Hills.

I was honored to join Susan Campbell, a very experienced, licensed hummingbird bander and Research Affiliate with the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences, during her capture of this rare westerner.

Normally attaching a metal band with a unique number is the first stage of the banding process. Since this guy already had a band, Susan captured it and moved on to measuring

and recording information to enter into the Bird Banding Laboratory's database at the USGS Patuxent Wildlife Research Center in Laurel, Maryland.

Susan measured its wing, tail, tail notch, and bill length and then checked its fat stores. She used a straw to blow back the bird's chest and belly feathers to note fat content under the skin.

Next he was weighed on a postal scale to confirm his level of fat. The weight of a non-migrating hummer is about the weight of a penny; however, they build up fat for consumption during a grueling migration, doubling or tripling their weight to approximately that of a nickel.

Susan also closely inspected him using a magnifying eyepiece to check his bill for corrugations. A bird hatched in the current year may have significant corrugation, not present in adults.

After the process was complete, Susan placed the bird in the homeowner's outstretched hand and then raised her hand. The bird was still for a couple of seconds until it realized it was free. Then it zoomed away so fast I could not photograph its departure. I have a photo showing two hands with nothing but air in between.

Afterwards, I felt guilty for having "used" the little guy for my photography so I waited to ensure he would come back. Shortly, he was back but to another feeder, still wary of the feeder where he was captured.

Having excellent morning light, Susan's help, and a very cooperative bird aided my photography. Iridescence in hummingbirds results from the structure of their feathers. You may have noted that your backyard Ruby-throated Hummingbird's gorget will range from red to black depending on the direction of light. As my subject turned its head, I was able to record many levels of brilliance.

Many extreme vagrants return to their breeding area, coming back to the out-of-range winter site they imprinted on. The Rufous Hummingbird from the earlier article returned to the Carolina Shores area this August for the fifth straight winter. Since this guy is in a different winter location it is questionable whether or not he returned to the west to breed or has just wandered around the Coastal Carolinas between January and the first of August.

I encourage you to try to attract winter hummers, honoring the same rules that apply during the summer. One added precaution: be sure to take the feeder inside when the temperature is expected to be below twenty-eight degrees to keep the water from freezing. A feeder located under trees or the overhang of your house also offers protection from freezing.

What if you have a hummer at your feeder after November 1? Submit a report to Susan at: <http://naturalsciences.org/nchummers/reportform.html>. Also, notify me by email and I'll visit to photograph, help identify your bird, and email a photo to Susan for confirmation. If warranted, Susan will ask permission to visit and document your little jewel.

John Ennis



**Banding activities include weighing, measuring wing and bill length,
and checking for amount of fat stores**