

# Hummingbirds of West Texas

*A Quick reference guide to status and distribution*

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With the unexpected addition of Buff-bellied Hummingbird found in the Christmas Mountains of Brewster County in the fall of 2012, West Texas can now boast 17 of the 18 species that regularly occur in Texas today. Only Green-breasted Mango has not been documented from this region. However, this list includes 18 species because one species, Cinnamon Hummingbird, did occur in the region but not within Texas itself (details listed below). With the highest diversity of any region in Texas and one rivaling that of southeastern Arizona, West Texas is the place to go for hummingbird watching. Late summer and early fall can provide unforgettable experiences especially in places like the Davis Mountains. It is just a matter of time before a new species is added to the state list from this region. Plain-capped Starthroat would be a prime candidate for that inclusion.

- ⇒ **Green Violet-ear\*** - {Normally below 6,000 feet} Two records for the region; an immature bird was present in upper Limpia Canyon of the Davis Mountains 1-8 July 2003, a second immature bird was present at the same location and observed periodically from 16 May through 3 July 2006. Both birds were documented with photographs and/or recordings.
- ⇒ **Magnificent** – {Usually above 6,000 feet} *Spring, Summer and Fall:* Uncommon to rare in the higher elevations of the Davis and Guadalupe mountains. Very rare in the Chisos Mountains. Four records from El Paso. Conspicuously most abundant in the Davis Mountains where it breeds annually. Has lingered until late November in fall. *Winter:* Two records including mid-December records from the Davis Mountains and from El Paso. During the extreme drought of 2011 many individuals were observed at lower elevation locations. Also, the recent drought affected the abundance status of this species—it is now rare at most locations.
- ⇒ **Blue-throated** – {Normally above 6,000 feet} *Spring, Summer and Fall:* Uncommon summer resident and breeding species in the higher elevations of the Chisos Mountains in Big Bend National Park. Increasingly less common in the Davis (where breeding has not been confirmed) and rare to accidental in the Guadalupe Mountains. Three old records from El Paso have recently been judged hypothetical due to lack of documentation. Has lingered until mid-November in fall in the Davis Mountains. Several birds were observed in the Davis Mountains in the spring of 2011, including a female captured and banded on 11 May. That banded bird was last observed in mid-August. Perhaps providing the first documented records from the lower desert, an adult male was photographed making a brief stop at the Christmas Mountains Oasis on 8 May 2011, and a second adult male was captured, banded and photographed near Willow Mountain just east of Terlingua on 10 July 2011. The extreme drought of 2011 was likely responsible for these vagrant records due to a lack of food and nectar resources in the upper portions of the Chisos Mountains. During normal to wetter years do not expect this species to be found at lower elevations or anywhere out of the Chisos Mountains. *Winter:* Providing a first record for the region and only the second documented winter record for the State, a male was found and photographed at Lajitas, Brewster County, on 17 December 2013. He was captured and banded on 8 January 2014 and was last observed on 14 January 2014.
- ⇒ **Lucifer** – {Usually below 7,000 feet} *Spring, Summer and Fall:* Uncommon breeding species in the canyons and foothills of the Chisos Mountains of Big Bend National Park and adjacent suitable desert habitat especially the Christmas Mountains of Terlingua Ranch. Probable isolated breeding populations in the Glass Mountains, Chinati Mountains, Sierra Vieja, southern Presidio County (Big Bend Ranch State Park), and Davis Mountains. Also, recent spring and summer records exist from the lower canyons of the Rio Grande and along the Pecos River just south of

Sheffield, Texas. Only three records from El Paso, two from July of 2011 and one from October. Arrives by early March in spring and can breed as late as early October depending on climatic patterns and the abundance of food resources; some individuals can linger at feeders into early November. *Winter*: one record of an adult male trapped, banded and photographed at Study Butte, Brewster County, on 9 December 2013. This record also represents the only winter occurrence for the US.

- ⇒ **Ruby-throated** – {Usually below 6,000 feet} *Spring*: Accidental to very rare throughout central portions of the region from mid-April through mid-May; however, not yet recorded west of the Davis Mountains. First known spring record obtained 25 April 1999 in Fort Davis. Likely more common in eastern portions of the region along the Pecos River corridor and in Del Rio. One unprecedented early spring record, a sub-adult male in arrested molt was captured, banded and photographed at the Christmas Mountains Oasis on 30 March 2012; *Fall*: Common to rare, mid-August through mid-October, primarily in the eastern one-half of the region. Banding data suggests the species is very regular in fall. One mid-October record for the Davis Mountains, a female photographed in upper Limpia Canyon in 1998; one late October record, an adult female was captured and banded in Alpine on 31 October 2009. During the fall of 2009 an unprecedented 101 birds were captured and banded 10 August through 31 October, including 32 individuals on a single day (4 September) in Terlingua Ranch. Only four records from El Paso, all in September (1994 and 2009) and October (2009 and 2011). *Winter*: three documented records; single females in Fort Davis during the winters of 2005-06 and 2007-08, and an adult male photographed in Presidio County on 12 December 2009.
- ⇒ **Black-chinned** – {All elevations} *Spring, Summer and Fall*: Abundant throughout the region in most all habitats; during wetter years, less abundant than Broad-tailed Hummingbird at the highest elevations of the major mountains; during drier years more abundant at the higher elevations. Arrives mid to late March in spring; in fall individuals typically leave by early October. *Winter*: first documented winter records obtained in 2010 with adult females in Marathon and the Davis Mountains in mid-December. Finally, three additional documented records, two from the winter of 2012-13 with single birds in Terlingua Ranch on 17 January and the Davis Mountains on 3 February, and an adult male captured and banded at Study Butte on 10 January 2014.
- ⇒ **Anna's** – {Usually below 6,000 feet} *Spring*: Accidental, primarily in March (over-wintering birds and/or birds moving west); however, the first Texas nesting record was obtained from Musquiz Canyon, Jeff Davis County, in April of 1976. Two additional nesting records have now occurred in El Paso, one in late-February/early March 2000 and the other in mid-March of 2007. One documented late spring record of an adult female photographed at the Christmas Mountains Oasis on 24 May 2011; *Fall*: normally arrives in mid-September (single birds occasionally by early August), becoming common through early December especially in the Davis Mountains and lower Big Bend region; *Winter*: Uncommon in winter through at least early February primarily in the Big Bend area, Davis Mountains and El Paso. *Summer*: a single bird in El Paso 30 June to 1 July 2006; an adult female lingering in the Davis Mountains, June to August 2007; one to two birds at the same location in July of 2008; and an adult female at another location in the Davis Mountains from 12 July to 28 August 2013.
- ⇒ **Costa's\*** - {Below 5,000 feet} 25 of 32 accepted Texas records are from this region, 7 of which are from El Paso. Recorded there in March in spring; September through November in fall; and in December and January (in 1995, up to 7 birds present). Only Jeff Davis County record obtained in 2001, an adult male present in Limpia Crossing from 10 June through 1 September (this individual also represented the first and only Texas summer record). More recently an adult male returned for three consecutive years (2008 to 2010) to the same feeder in the fall in Alpine, Brewster County. Single birds were captured and banded in the Christmas Mountains on 19 October 2008 and 31 October 2009. The latter bird, an adult female wintered in 2009-

2010, then returned for a second winter on 17 October 2010 and stayed until 15 February 2011. Finally, at least two birds present during the winter of 2012-13, a sub-adult male in the Christmas Mountains 6-17 November and an adult female in Study Butte 14-19 January.

- ⇒ **Broad-tailed** – {Breeds above 5,500 feet; migrants at all elevations} *Spring, Summer and Fall*: Common to abundant during migration in the mountains. Uncommon to occasional in urban habitats and at lower elevations. Breeding confined to pinyon-juniper and pine-oak habitats found at the higher elevations of the major mountain ranges. Can arrive in spring in late February; in fall can linger into early December but has wintered in the Davis Mountains since 2005. Two winter records from El Paso. Migrants can occur in small numbers in all types of habitats outside of the three major mountains ranges.
- ⇒ **Rufous** – {All elevations} *Spring*: Rare but consistent reports of individuals passing through the region in March and early April. Observations of this species in spring undoubtedly involve individuals that winter east of the region and are returning to their breeding ranges in the west. Not documented as occurring in spring after mid-April; *Fall*: Early fall migrants would be considered accidental as early as the last week of June. Common to abundant throughout, arriving the second week of July. Common through September. Less common in October and November; *Winter*: Regularly overwinters through February at many locations.
- ⇒ **Allen's** – {All elevations} Removed from the Texas Review List in 2004 primarily due to the efforts of hummingbird banders who have encountered this species with regularity especially along the Texas Gulf Coast. Rare but regular fall migrant from mid-July through November in the region. Peak numbers occur in August and September. Rare in winter—three birds present in the winter of 2011-12 in Alpine and Marathon, and three birds in the Terlingua Ranch/Lajitas area in the winter of 2012-13. One Hundred six individuals have been captured and banded in the region since August 2007. One adult male captured and banded in Alpine on 31 October 2009, was recaptured in the Davis Mountains the following year on 30 July, then returned a month later to the neighborhood in Alpine where it was originally banded and stayed until November. An adult male banded in Fort Davis on 7 August 2009 lingered through November then returned to the same feeder on 13 August 2010, lingering until 10 December. He did not return in 2011. One bird, banded as a juvenile in Alpine on 11 October 2010 returned as an adult on 11 August 2012 to the same location.
- ⇒ **Calliope** – {Normally above 5,000 feet} *Spring*: Accidental throughout the region; *Fall*: Common to rare, arriving in early July. Adult males are normally south of the region by early September while juveniles and females are still passing through in late-September. Unprecedented late fall invasion occurred in the Davis Mts. in 1995 and again in 2010, with many females/juveniles lingering through the end of October. One other late fall record from El Paso on 30 November 2000. *Winter*: at least four records all from El Paso, 22 December 1995, the winter of 2000-01, the winter of 2001-02 and the winter of 2012-13.
- ⇒ **Broad-billed** – {Below 7,000 feet} Through 2003, when this species was removed from the Texas Review List, over half of the accepted records for the state occurred in the West Texas region. *Spring*: Rare but regular visitor to the region beginning as early as March; *Summer*: reported nesting along the Rio Grande in the mid-1930s; however, the presence and documentation of multiple males, females and newly fledged juveniles in the Davis Mountains in 2008 and 2010 has finally confirmed the species nesting in Texas; *Fall*: much rarer than in spring; *Winter*: accidental, primarily in the El Paso area; first winter record for the Big Bend area obtained in 2014 with a female observed and photographed on 1 January, captured and banded on 8 January, and last observed on 18 January. Very scarce during the drought of 2011/2012.
- ⇒ **Berylline\*** - {Above 6,000 feet} Five accepted records for Texas all from this region. One accepted sight record from BBNP in Boot Canyon prior to August 1997; first fully documented Texas record was a bird present 17 August through 4 September 1997 in upper Limpia Canyon of the Davis Mountains; and the third and fourth records were obtained in 1999 and 2000 at the

same location. Finally, a single bird was observed and photographed two miles west of the above location in the heart of the Davis Mountains from 25-28 August 2007.

- ⇒ **Buff-bellied** – {normally below 5,000 feet} A tropical species normally found along the Texas coast. In an unexpected and astonishing event a juvenile female of this species managed to wander across hundreds of miles of desert to find the Christmas Mountains Oasis in south-central Brewster County 19-20 October 2012. It was discovered and photographed on the evening of 19 October and recognized as an *Amazilia* species. The next morning it was trapped and banded confirming the species identification, age and sex; it stayed at that location through early evening but was not relocated the next morning. This encounter represents the first record of the species in the Trans-Pecos Region and the western most record for the US.
- ⇒ **Cinnamon** – {A tropical species found along the Pacific Coast and in the Yucatan region of Mexico} “Oh so close”. A single bird present and photographed 18-21 September 1993, in Santa Teresa, New Mexico was within one mile of the Rio Grande and the Texas border in the northwestern El Paso area. This individual represented only the second record for the U. S.
- ⇒ **Violet-crowned\*** {Below 6,000 feet} - Now 19 accepted Texas records, sixteen of which are from the region; 2-14 December 1987 from El Paso; 31 October 1996 at Lake Amistad, 30-31 March 1996, along the Rio Grande in Big Bend National Park; a single individual wintered in El Paso from 6 November 2001 through January 2002; a single bird was observed at the Clay Miller Ranch west of Valentine 24 May through 6 June 2002; and a bird found in northeast El Paso on 30 October 2010. Eleven records all occurring from 2007-2011 in the Alpine, Fort Davis and Fort Stockton areas including five more winter records 1) a bird that succumbed to freezing weather in Fort Davis, Jeff Davis County on 2 January 2008; 2) a bird that wintered in Fort Stockton, Pecos County from mid-November 2008 through early January 2009; 3) a bird in Fort Davis from 13 January through 13 February 2009; 4) a juvenile male was captured and banded in the Davis Mountains and was present from 8 November through 21 December, 2010; and finally, 5) a probable juvenile bird photographed at the Christmas Mountains Oasis from 30 November to 6 December, 2011.
- ⇒ **White-eared\*** - {Above 6,000 feet} 22 of the 25 Texas records come from this region covering the period April through October; only two records from the El Paso area including a bird present 12-20 October 1994 and a bird found in the nearby Franklin Mountains on 30 June 2002. One record from the Guadalupe Mountains on 31 May 1996. All other records are from the Chisos and Davis Mountains. The first record of multiple individuals (three birds) obtained from the Davis Mountains in June 1993. No known records from 1998-2001; but multiple records have occurred since including an unprecedented 11 birds in 2005 and 15-20 individuals in 2007 in upper Limpia Canyon of the Davis Mountains. A gravid female captured and banded there on 29 May 2009 provided the first conclusive evidence of nesting in Texas; a sub-adult male banded in August of 2007 was recaptured as an adult male on 3 July 2009. Additional evidence of nesting obtained in the fall of 2009; just fledged juvenile males in fresh plumage with fleshy gapes were captured and banded 9 August and 8 September. Extreme drought and fires resulted in only two brief sightings of this species in 2011, none in 2012 and only one in June of 2013.

\*Texas review species requiring written details and/or documentation for acceptance. All other species listed for U.S./Mexico have *not* been recorded in this region. If you find a species not listed above in West Texas please attempt to photograph the bird and share your discovery with the birding community.

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