



WILDLIFE NOTES



Broad-billed hummingbird

A flash of iridescence, an electric buzz, and it's gone. Hummingbirds, these noisy sparks of color, are not strangers to the avian world. They simply extend its boundaries.

These birds are diminutive. A hummingbird's intestines are hair-thin and two inches long. Its feathers could barely tickle a grasshopper's nose. The two eggs in the average female's clutch are the size of peas.

Adult males of the broad-billed hummingbird (*Cyananthus latirostris*) are recognizable by their orange-red bills, dark green underparts, black wings, and blue throats.

Females and immatures have a small, white line behind the eye.

Descriptive details

The broad-billed hummingbird has black feet and dark eyes. The tail is slightly forked, and wings are about two inches long. The tail, slightly longer in males, averages a little over an inch in length.

The hummingbird's tongue is adapted to its needs, curling into tiny tubes which are split and frayed at the end to form brushes capable of lapping up sweet nectar or flicking an insect from the heart of a flower.

The hummingbird is like a helicopter, able to hover, fly backwards and even maneuver sideways. This is due to a special ball-and-socket joint, which enables a "hummer" to rotate its wings in extreme arcs to remain stationary while drawing nectar from a flower, then zip away tail first if threatened.

To fuel itself, this bird must eat constantly. At night, when feeding is not possible, hummers are able to lower their body temperature and go into a lifesaving torpor.

Distribution

The broad-billed hummingbird is found from southern Arizona and southwestern New Mexico southward throughout most

of Mexico to Chiapas state. In New Mexico this species summers regularly in Guadalupe Canyon (Hidalgo County), which is its main habitat area in the state. Birds have been on occasion reported

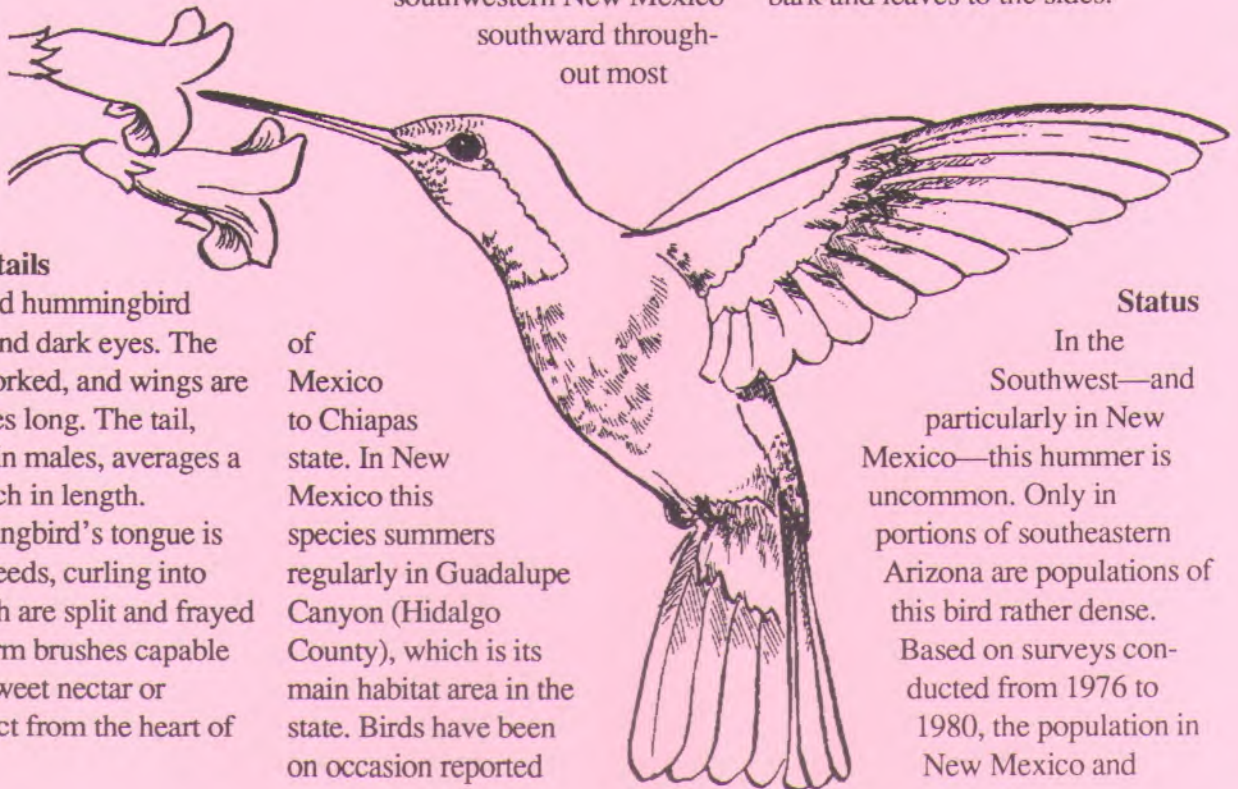
near Los Alamos and Bandelier National Monument, Las Vegas, Truth or Consequences, Las Cruces, and Carlsbad Caverns National Park.

Biology

In the United States this hummingbird is found in riparian woodlands at low to moderate elevations. In Guadalupe Canyon these woodlands are characterized by cottonwoods, sycamores, white oaks, and hackberries. Nests found in Guadalupe Canyon have been in a variety of trees, shrubs, and even forbs. Nests invariably appear "ragged," as the female attaches bark and leaves to the sides.

Status

In the Southwest—and particularly in New Mexico—this hummer is uncommon. Only in portions of southeastern Arizona are populations of this bird rather dense. Based on surveys conducted from 1976 to 1980, the population in New Mexico and



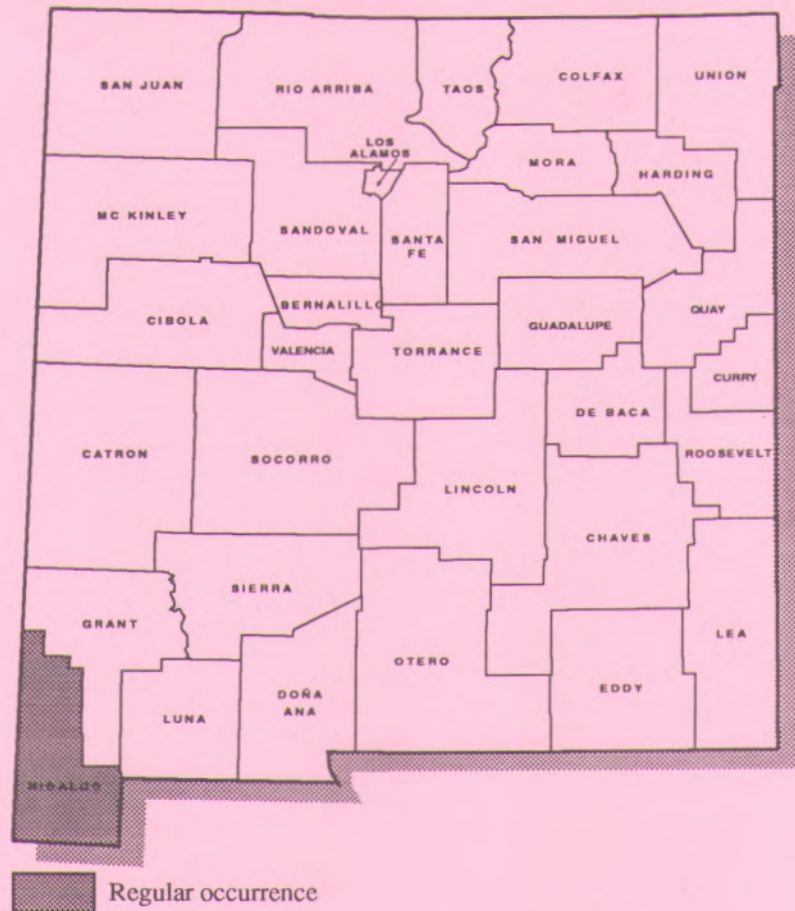
Arizona portions of Guadalupe Canyon was generally fewer than 25 individuals.

Biologists in New Mexico and other states have come to view the hummingbird as an environmental gauge. Unlike larger animals, the hummer is delicate and sensitive enough to react to slight changes in its surroundings. By keeping track of hummingbird populations, food availability and competition, scientists may be able to detect the first slight tremors of ecological shock waves that will one day have an effect on other creatures.

Conservation

Habitat preservation for this hummingbird is crucial to conserving this species in New Mexico. Maintaining riparian woodland and adjacent dryland habitats in Guadalupe Canyon is necessary. Collecting and other forms of taking in this area should be carefully regulated, if not banned.

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