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Documented Occurrences of Rufous Hummingbirds in North Carolina

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The Rufous Hummingbird (*Selasphorus rufus*) has generated much interest among birders in North Carolina since the middle 1970's when a female was identified "in the field" in suburban Raleigh, North Carolina, on 2 November 1976 (Hader & Howard 1976). Since this sighting there have been a multitude of unsubstantiated North Carolina sightings that have found their way into print in *The Chat*, publication of the Carolina Bird Club. These reports have become so numerous that keeping up to date with them is difficult. However, seven have sufficient supporting evidence to be considered authentic, all since 1985. One of these seven has been documented by banding, one by a specimen (#17659) in the Museum of Natural History in Raleigh, North Carolina, and the other five by photographs (see Table 1).

The species winters in coastal southern California (rarely) and from Sinaloa, Chihuahua, southern Texas and the Gulf coast (in small numbers regularly from southeastern Texas east to western Florida), south to Oaxaca, the state of Mexico, Distrito Federal and western Veracruz. It migrates regularly through the southwestern United States, Baja, California, and northern New Mexico, casually east to eastern Alberta, southern Saskatchewan, southern Manitoba, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Missouri, Oklahoma and Texas. It is casual east across the Great Lakes region (recorded in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, southern Ontario, and northern New York State), and along the Atlantic coast (from Nova Scotia south to central Georgia and southern Florida (A.O.U. 1983). In recent years, there have been a growing number of records along the Atlantic coast (Conway and Drennan 1979). It is especially worth noting that the 2-4 November 1976 record is listed as "possible," and not as a confirmed record, causing North Carolina to be mapped with a "?" only. At the time of the review, there had been only one

verified record in the adjacent state of South Carolina, a 1909 specimen, whereas the species has since been banded there (Foy 1990).

Sight records are impossible to determine as too many observers, eager for an identification, call hatching year (HY) and females "Rufous" without sufficient evidence and with insufficient consideration of other members of the genus (Foy 1990; 1992). The sightings of this species reported from North Carolina both in the past and the present are questionable. Indeed, female and HY males of Allen's (*Selasphorus sasin*) and Rufous are impossible to identify in the field (Stiles 1970; Johnsgard 1983; Baltosser 1987 and other references). For this reason, I agree with Conway and Drennan (1979) that the Hader/Howard record cannot be considered valid.

Of all the HY and females supposedly seen of this species in North Carolina, none have been documented previously. My communications with people seeing these birds have produced no irrefutable identification criteria (Foy 1990).

There is a common misconception that Rufous Hummingbirds are brown-backed. This is true only of the male and not of all males, so a hummingbird with a brown back is a male Rufous, but one with a green back may be a Rufous (Phillips 1982; Jones 1992).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

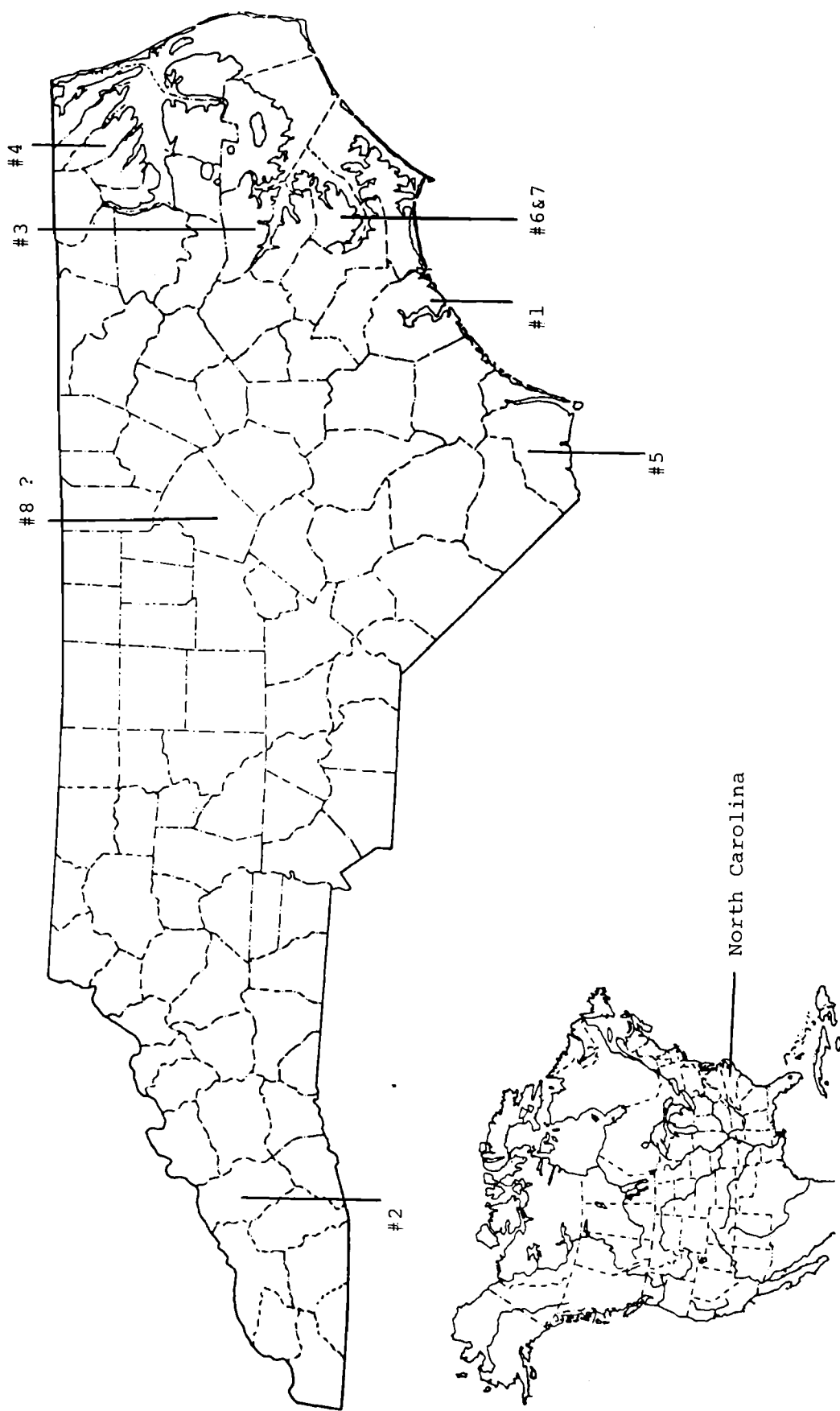
A thank you to John Gerwin of the Museum of Natural History in Raleigh, North Carolina, for his help. Thank you to my husband, Roger, for his proof reading, the map and unending patience. Dr. Martin McNicholl deserves a special thank you for his critical reading and suggestions in making this manuscript worthy of publication in *N. Am. Bird Bander*.

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Table 1. Documented records of Rufous Hummingbirds in North Carolina.

- 1) **1985** - 2 & 3 September. Cedar Point. AHY-M. At the home of Dr. Henry Haberyan (a bander). Photographs (#062, 063) are on file at the Museum of Natural History in Raleigh, North Carolina.
- 2) **1986** - 5 November. Hendersonville, AHY-M. This bird is now a specimen (#11674) in the museum in Raleigh, North Carolina.
- 3) **1988** - 30 January. Washington, AHY-M. At the home of Mr. and Mrs. F. Pepper. Five 35mm color slides (#055 through #059) along with two color photos are on file at the Raleigh museum. This author also has two color photos.
- 4) **1988** - 6 December. Elizabeth City. AHY-M. At the home of Judge and Mrs. Thomas S. Watts. Two color photos are on file at the Raleigh museum (#064, #065). A third picture is in this author's file.
- 5) **1992** - 15, 16 & 17 September. Shallotte. AHY-M. Pictures were taken by David Harper (#303, #304) and are on file in the museum in Raleigh. This author also has two color pictures.
- 6) **1992** - 21 November. Oriental. It measured out to be a HY-F. It was banded (#T-41587) at 1455 by the author and husband. Pictures are on file at the Bird Banding Laboratory, Laurel, MD. This writer/bander also has several color photos and pictures from a camcorder. Weather was partly cloudy, temperature 16-23°C (60-74°F).
- 7) **1993** - 20 January. Oriental. This one measured out to be a Rufous AHY-F. After a bad storm, it was found dying on my back deck. It is now a specimen (#17659) in the museum in Raleigh.



Map showing location of the Rufous Hummingbird in North Carolina