

THE FIRST COSTA'S HUMMINGBIRD RECORD FOR SASKATCHEWAN

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On 27 October 2022, a hummingbird appeared in the yard of Angela and Randy Schmidt in the Lawson Heights area of Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. Hummingbirds, which in Saskatchewan are almost always the Ruby-throated Hummingbird (*Archilochus colubris*), had departed the province by the first week of September. To have a hummingbird this late in the year was extraordinary! The fall in Saskatoon was unseasonably warm and sunny.

The day the hummingbird arrived the daytime high temperature was 11.8° C with a low of -0.3° C. It is unsurprising that this rash hummingbird appeared at the Schmidts' yard as they have a goal to keep flowers and hanging fuchsia baskets going as long as possible each fall and still had petunias in bloom on 27 October.

After consulting with Randy's niece, Carly Schmidt, and being concerned for the bird's welfare, the Schmidts contacted Living Sky Wildlife Rehabilitation (LSWR) for advice. The Schmidts borrowed one small hummingbird feeder from their neighbours. The bird fed heavily on sugar water and flowers for the next two days, then was not seen 30-31 October. It reappeared 1 November and then left again until late in the day on 2 November.

On 2 November, with deteriorating weather conditions and a winter storm in the forecast, Randy decided to lure the hummingbird into their heated garage. A second larger hummingbird feeder was borrowed and hung from a step ladder. The bird preferred the larger feeder with roosting perches as it could rest while feeding. To get the bird inside,

Randy steadily shifted the larger feeder from in front of the garage to inside the garage through the open car door. By 3 November, the bird had learned to use the smaller, more secure back door of the garage. During this process, the smaller feeder was kept outside in a large semi-heated box that had to be somewhat enclosed to keep it from freezing.

On 4-5 November, the snow storm and colder temperatures arrived. The bird would not roost inside the garage overnight, despite many spruce boughs and flower baskets in the rafters, but continued to come and go from several nearby large spruce trees in the Schmidts' and their neighbour's backyards. On the morning of 6 November, with the snow storm continuing, Randy closed the back garage door. While Randy shovelled snow in front of the garage, the hummingbird appeared, flew to the closed back door, and immediately returned to buzz him at the front door of the garage. Randy raised the front door a few feet and the hummingbird flew in right past him. He pushed the door down quickly and didn't see a small blur fly out.

Checking an hour later, the hummingbird was indeed inside the garage.

Ron Jensen, a permitted hummingbird bander in Saskatoon, was contacted by Jan Shadick, Executive Director of LSWR, on 7 November inquiring if he would try to catch the hummingbird so it could be taken to the LSWR facilities.

On 8 November 2022, Ron contacted Randy to make arrangements to come that afternoon to attempt to capture the hummingbird using his hummingbird trap. Upon quietly entering the Schmidts' garage, the hummingbird was observed sitting on a peg above the workbench (Figure 1). The banding trap was set up with the larger feeder placed inside of it. Randy and Ron moved toward the resting hummingbird, which immediately flew toward, into and out of the trap, then right back into the trap where it rested on the feeder and began to feed. Ron closed the trap, catching the bird. An easy catch! The bird resumed feeding after the trap closed (Figure 2).

With the hummingbird in hand, it was now possible to determine the



FIGURE 1. The young male hummingbird sitting above the workbench in Randy Schmidt's garage. Photo credit: Ron Jensen.



FIGURE 2. Hummingbird sitting on feeder after being captured in a banding trap. Photo credit: Ron Jensen.

species of the bird. Ron confirmed the hummingbird was young (buffy edges to head feathers with scattered violet gorget feathers) male hatched in 2022. Based on previous other hummingbirds reported in Saskatchewan, Anna's (*Calypte anna*) or Rufous Hummingbird (*Selasphorus rufus*) were the expected species. Upon consulting *A Field Guide to Hummingbirds of North America*, Ron saw that photographs of young males of both species have rectrices (tail feathers) with white tips.¹ This bird's tail feathers did not have white tips (Figure 3). It was not either of the expected species!

After concluding that he had no idea what species of hummingbird was in his hand, Ron collected standard banding measurements: wing cord (43.3 mm), tail length (23.4 mm) and culmen (17.7 mm). In addition, the bird's bill was checked for striations (which indicates a younger bird) and its weight was measured (3.7 g). There were no striations in the bill, suggesting an older hatch year bird. During these in-hand observations and measurements, the bird was amazingly calm, not struggling at all compared to Ruby-throated Hummingbirds caught during summer banding months.

LSWR had provided a transport box into which the hummingbird was placed. Randy and Ron carefully wrapped the container in a sheet, keeping the box dark and warm for transport to LSWR.

Once home, Ron consulted a number of resources but none of the

measurements matched a species. In an effort to determine the species, he sent pictures and measurements to Jared Clarke, a fellow hummingbird bander, and to HUMBAND, a private website for North American hummingbird banders. Jared replied that measurements in Pyle² matched perfectly for a Costa's Hummingbird. A member of HUMBAND, with 20 years of experience, replied "Holy Smokes!! Congratulations!! A Costa's." Sheri Williamson, author of *A Field Guide to Hummingbirds of North America* was also contacted through Guy Wapple. Her response was: "... the photos alone confirm that it's a juvenile male COHU, no measurements required."

These three sources affirmed, without a doubt, that the hummingbird caught in the Schmidts' garage was Saskatchewan's first record of Costa's Hummingbird!

The home range of Costa's Hummingbirds is the Sonoran Desert of Arizona and southern California.³ A review of eBird records from 2012 to 2022 reveals that males — immature and adult — wander from their desert habitat March through December. In Canada, British Columbia has 13 records, while Alberta has two records. In the USA, records exist in Utah, Nebraska, Colorado and Michigan. Some states have multiple year records and Utah reported an immature male in September 2022.

At the time of writing this account, the hummingbird was doing well at LSWR on a specialized sugar water and



FIGURE 3. The bird's rectrices (tail feathers) are all black. Photo taken 11 November 2022 at Living Skies Wildlife Rehabilitation. Photo credit: Phil Taylor.

fruit fly diet (Jan Shadick pers. comm.). LSWR has been in contact with wildlife rehabilitation organizations and zoos that house hummingbirds to learn about the best possible methods and products to keep this little rash hummingbird alive over the winter. The hope is that it can be released in the spring of 2023.

Acknowledgements

There are many people involved in the capture, identification, and care of the Costa's Hummingbird. Thank you very much to you all.

1. Williamson SL (2001) *A field guide to Hummingbirds of North America*. Houghton Mifflin Company Boston.
2. Pyle P (1997) *Identification Guide to North American Birds Part 1 Columbidae to Ploceidae*. Slate Creek Press, Bolinas, California.
3. *Birds of the World* (2022). Digital edition. Edited by S. M. Billerman, B. K. Keeney, P. G. Rodewald, and T. S. Schulenberg. Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology, Ithaca, NY, USA 🐦