

First breeding record for Allen's Hummingbird in the Central Valley

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Julian Wood of Point Reyes Bird Observatory (PRBO) found a female hummingbird coming to a nest in the southern part of the Tall Forest parcel of the Cosumnes River Preserve (CRP) in southern Sacramento County on 1 May 2002. He thought the bird was an Anna's Hummingbird (*Calypte anna*) and reported his discovery to one of us (JC) who was responsible for following nest success in that portion of the forest as part of a long term study by PRBO. The nesting bird afforded no opportunity for careful study until JC found her feeding young at the end of May and reidentified the adult female as a *Selasphorus* hummingbird, a taxon unknown as a breeder in the Central Valley. She then informed JT of the location of the nest. For reasons noted below, we believe this to be the first documented Central Valley nesting of Allen's Hummingbird (*Selasphorus sasin*).

The position of the nest precluded close examination of its structure and the nestlings within it. JT studied the adult female, the nest (Figure 1), and the nestlings through a 20-60x spotting scope on 2 June, 3 June, and 6 June. The adult bird was fairly easy to study on half of her nest visits, when she landed at the south side of the nest. She also came to a feeder placed near the nest on 6 June. Compared to Black-chinned Hummingbird (*Archilochus alexandri*), the common hummingbird in the woodland, the nesting bird was a more sturdily built hummingbird, thicker particularly in the neck and chest. The bill was medium length for a hummingbird, fairly straight and appeared entirely dark. The crown, nape and back were iridescent green. A dark line ran from the bill to the eye. The face was mostly washed with rufous, dappled with some small grayish spots on the ear coverts, particularly posteriorly. A small, bright white postocular spot set off the dark eye. The throat had a whitish ground color on which more or less linear arrays of small grayish green spots radiated away from the chin area, except in the midline of the lower throat. Here there was a prominent wedge of larger, iridescent, deep-orangish gorget feathers. A white forecollar and white ventral midline set off solid, strongly rufous sides and flanks. The tips of the folded wings fell well short of the tail tip. The wing coverts were green and the folded flight feathers appeared dark grayish brown. The rump and uppertail coverts were a mix of iridescent green and rufous, the latter especially notable on the uppertail coverts. The tail appeared fairly strongly graduated. The visible portions of the central rectrices (R1) were strongly rufous for their proximal 20-25 percent, bright green for about 25-30 percent, and strongly blackish tipped. The lateral rectrices (R3-R5) were extensively (50-60 percent) rufous basally, with white spots terminally and black in between. The lateral rectrices (R5) appeared fairly narrow when the tail was "flipped" on approach to the feeder. The paramedian rectrices (R2) were never seen

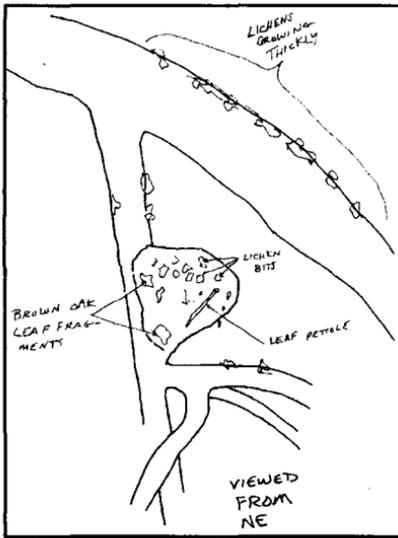


Figure 1. Nest and surroundings of an Allen's Hummingbird (*Selasphorus sasin*) at the Cosumnes River Preserve, Sacramento County. The sketch was made on 6 September 2002, after the nest had been abandoned.

sketch by John Trochet

the supporting branch. The scope view afforded was fairly good. The nestling was very like the adult, though the rufous wash on the face and the rufous of the sides were somewhat less intense. The throat spotting was paler and finer and there was no wedge of large iridescent feathers in the lower midline. While the rather hunched posture precluded getting a look at the entire back, the lowest portion was solidly green. The rump and uppertail coverts were extensively, almost solidly, rufous. The rectrices were very short and mostly still in sheath. The white terminal spots of the lateral three pairs were conspicuous. The undertail coverts appeared to be a pale cinnamon. By 6 June the tail had grown out sufficiently to see some rufous laterally. Either the same young bird was seen repeatedly on that nest edge or the plumages of the young were indistinguishable. JT saw nothing to suggest that these were hybrids.

The Tall Forest in this area is predominately large Fremont Cottonwoods (*Populus fremontii*), 20-30 m in height, with a prominent admixture of somewhat smaller Valley Oaks (*Quercus lobata*) and lesser numbers of small and medium ashes and Box Elders (*Acer negundo*). Saplings of ashes, in places developing into thickets, were fairly numerous, but by Tall Forest standards the understory was relatively poorly developed, consisting mostly of Sticktight (*Bidens frondosa*), with lesser quantities of dock (*Rumex* sp.), California Blackberry (*Rubus ursinus*), California Wild Grape (*Vitis californica*) and others.

Two nestling still occupied the nest in the early morning of 7 June, but by noon only one remained. The adult fed this bird a few times during the following

satisfactorily. The vent and undertail areas were not seen well. The tiny legs and feet appeared dark.

The nest was built approximately 14 m up in an Oregon Ash (*Fraxinus latifolia*) of 17 m height and 22 cm dbh. The nest was built against a pendant branchlet such that the overhanging limbs, their leaves, or the leaves of an oak limb overtopping the ash tree nearly always shaded it. The nest was anchored to its support at the side of the nest and not supported from below (Figure 1). The structure appeared light olive gray from a distance, matching the surroundings well, a fact enhanced by the placement of bits of lichen and other plant material fragments on the nest perimeter.

When first seen by JT on 2 June, both nestlings fit into the nest cup. By 3 June the shorter-billed young bird perched on the nest edge adjacent to

two hours. Accompanied by Jeanne Hammond of PRBO, JT watched the second nestling fledge about 1400. JC saw the adult female a couple of times in the area beneath the nest in the first few days after the fledging of the young, but we saw no subsequent activity at the nest itself.

Three *Selasphorus* hummingbird species — Allen's Hummingbird, Rufous Hummingbird (*S. rufus*), and Broad-tailed Hummingbird (*S. platycercus*) — are of regular occurrence in the western United States. Of these, Broad-tailed Hummingbird was rather easily ruled out as a possibility on the basis of the color and shape of the tail and upper tail coverts.

The separation of Rufous Hummingbird from Allen's Hummingbird is more challenging, often requiring having the bird in hand (Kaufmann 1990, Pyle 1997). Identification of individuals of these species that are not rufous-backed adult males is sometimes possible with exceptionally informative photographs. We have neither. We feel, however, that the overwhelming probability is that this was a nesting Allen's Hummingbird. Allen's Hummingbird nests on the Pacific coastal slope from southwestern Oregon to Los Angeles County and probably Orange County (AOU 1998). Rufous Hummingbird nests in an area roughly bounded by far northwestern California, Yellowstone National Park and southeastern Alaska. The closest known Allen's Hummingbird nests are about 60 km away on the slopes of Mt. Diablo, Contra Costa County (sparingly, *fide* Steve Glover) and about 70 km away at Benicia State Park, Solano County (Robin Leong pers. comm.). They may also nest near Vacaville at Pena Adobe Park, Solano County, some 55 km from the Tall Forest (Robin Leong pers. comm.). Yolo County has no nesting records (Michael Perrone pers. comm.). While conducting surveys as part of the Sacramento County Breeding Bird Atlas Project of 1987-1992, June Persson observed this species near Walnut Grove and saw a pair and observed territorial behavior in April 1990 near Ryde, meeting the standard for probable nesting in the latter instance (*fide* Tim Manolis). This is only 13 km just south of due west from the Tall Forest. Arvil Parker reported in 1968 that Allen's Hummingbirds had for several years remained in the vicinity of Courtland, Sacramento County, for the entirety of the breeding season (Lynch and Ames 1970). Mitchell (2000) states that virtually all Allen's Hummingbirds nest within 32 km of the coast, but clearly this is not true of the greater San Francisco Bay region. The Cosumnes nest site is approximately 105 km from the Golden Gate and 50 km from Suisun Bay. The closest Rufous Hummingbird nesting area is about 350 km to the north-northwest (Calder 1993). That the nest was anchored to its supporting branch at its side and not from below is a common characteristic of Allen's Hummingbird nests, but is not typical of nests of Rufous, Anna's, or Black-chinned hummingbirds (Bent 1940). The adult hummingbird reported here had significant rufous color in her uppertail coverts, a feature seen on some 30 percent of adult female Allen's Hummingbirds and rarely found (about one percent) on Rufous Hummingbirds of the same age and gender (Howell 2001). The narrowness of the outer rectrices also suggested Allen's Hummingbird, but this feature is difficult to assess in the field and exhibits some overlap between the

two species, so we do not feel confident about its applicability in this case. We thus base our assertion that Allen's Hummingbird nested at the Cosumnes River Preserve in 2002 on proximity to known nesting distributions, nest construction, and to a strong inference from plumage.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We wish to thank Steve Glover, Robin Leong and Michael Perrone for sharing their knowledge of the breeding distribution of Allen's hummingbird in Contra Costa, Solano and Yolo Counties, respectively. We also thank Tim Manolis for providing the relevant Sacramento County Breeding Bird Atlas Project data and the hybrid hummingbird reference. JT salutes the PRBO 2002 team of JC, Jeanne Hammond, Andy Pfeffer and Julian Wood for continuing that organization's great work regarding the breeding birds of the Tall Forest and vicinity, and he thanks Ramona Swenson, Rick Cooper, Mike Eaton and the past and present staff of the Cosumnes River Preserve for the many courtesies extended him over the last eight years.

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