

tanagers and orioles (the state's first Scott's Oriole spent three weeks at a feeder in Stark County in January and February 2000) represent other sources of rarities you may find while feeder watching – if you're really lucky. For the past decade or so, the Rufous Hummingbird, still a real rarity in Illinois, has been reported nearly every year at feeders in fall, and the most unusual discovery of a Broad-billed Hummingbird was photographed at a feeder in Trivoli, Peoria County, in November 1997.

Rarities like these are not your only potential eye-openers. Exotic, aka non-countable, birds can also liven up a feeder-watching day. Doug Stotz, the IORC Secretary, loves to relate the story of the Senegal Parrot who appeared in his backyard a few winters ago. Or remember that pair of Great Tits at a feeder in Harvard (McHenry County) in May 2003. Surely escapees, but nonetheless quite a sight! Our own yard list footnotes a few non-countable species, like a Chukar, Budgies, Cockatiels, a couple of unidentified parrots, and European Goldfinches (twice). But our best exotic was a bird we couldn't even identify at first – a

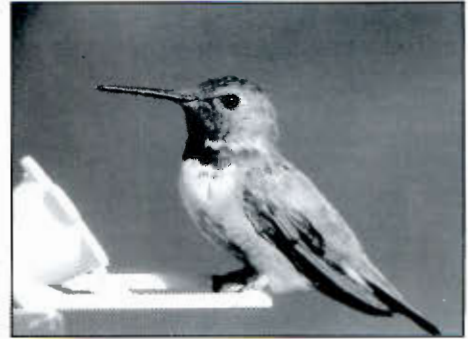


sparrow-sized, ground-feeding bird with a fairly hefty bill, all tan underneath, with two really bold white wing-bars and a hint of gray on the top of its head. The bird was quite shy, but we got a couple of poor pictures, pored over various field guides and finally made the identification – a Common Chaffinch. Not very common to us!

Given the widespread popularity of casual backyard bird feeding, there's a multitude of feeder watchers out there who may lack a comprehensive capacity to identify the expected (or unexpected) birds at their feeders. It makes you wonder what other first-of-state species has been missed because a casual feeder watcher didn't realize what was at their sunflower seeds, or their nectar feeder. Or maybe they did identify the bird, but just weren't aware it was

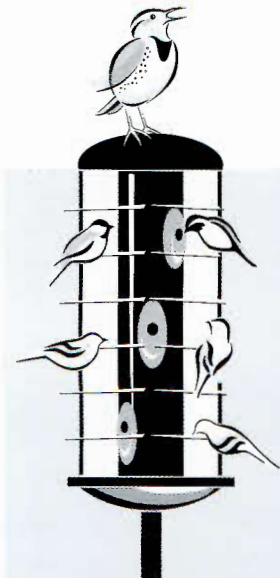
*A female Painted Bunting visited a feeder in Gurnee, Lake County, 21 April 2000. Photo by Richard Biss.*

*Rufous Hummingbirds make appearances nearly every year at backyard feeders in Illinois. This one was photographed by Dennis Oehmke 19 November 1998 in Springfield, Sangamon County.*



unusual. Some of our neighbors also feed the birds; I plan to ask them to call me when a bird they can't identify shows up. You never know...

Think I'll stop writing and go check the brushy fence line behind our creek, separating our yard and feeders from our neighbors. Who knows, there may be a state first Plain Chachalaca lurking there. Heck, I'd be satisfied with a yard first Spotted Towhee!



Artwork by Jenny Vogt.

## Yard Birds

I'd welcome your feedback on this column, as it may become a regular feature in the Meadowlark. I'd especially like your yard and feeder bird stories and observations, which we can build into future columns. The editor and I both hope we can make this column a place where IOS members who enjoy backyard birding can share their experiences. Send me your observations, interesting visitors and the like. That's why the column subtitle is: Reflections on backyard birding throughout Illinois.

You can reach me at: [bfisher928@aol.com](mailto:bfisher928@aol.com) or by phone at 630-985-2956. Tell me your story and I'll write it down. I look forward to hearing from you.

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