

# Rufous Hummingbird: First Illinois Record and Specimen

by Ellen B. and Sherwin Strauss

Each year starting in mid-August, migrating Ruby-throated Hummingbirds (*Archilochus colubris*) stop in our yard to partake from our hummingbird feeders. Some days we see three to four females or immatures performing their aerial maneuvers and zipping around us when we work in the yard.

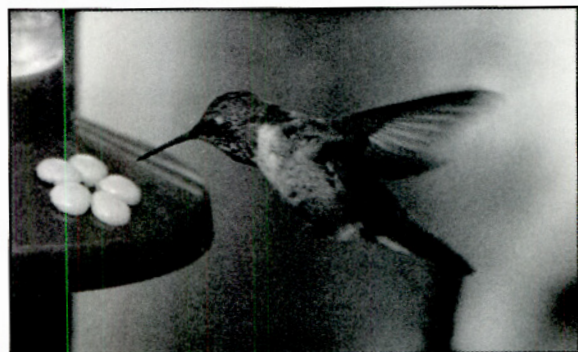
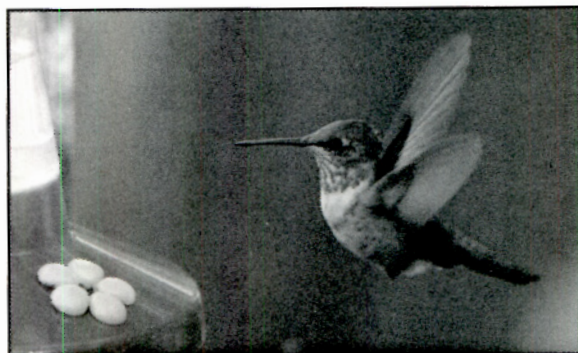
At about 8 a.m., 14 October 1993, I was watching a ruby-throat on its usual perch outside our patio window on the lilac bush near the feeder when I noticed a strange little "hummer" nearby. The bird was brown, not green as expected even in juvenile ruby-throats (Peterson 1980, Robbins 1983). Furthermore, this hummer was aggressive. It chased juncos and chickadees as well as the Ruby-throated Hummingbird.

When I checked the field guides, the bird most closely resembled a Rufous Hummingbird (*Selasphorus rufus*). I called Peg Walsh of the Thorncreek Audubon Society; she was excited because this might be the first confirmable sighting of a species considered hypothetical in Illinois (Bohlen 1989). Walsh called Joe Milosevich and Jeff Chenoweth, who lived nearby, to photograph the bird and document its identity. They agreed the bird was an immature male *Selasphorus* hummingbird. There were some doubts as to whether it

was an immature female or male Allen's Hummingbird (*Selasphorus sasin*) or a Rufous (*S. rufus*) since it is impossible to separate the two in the field (Stiles 1972, Goetz 1987). Rufous seemed more likely; yet Allen's Hummingbird had been recorded recently in Texas and Louisiana and as far east as Massachusetts (Andrews and Baltosser 1990).

Word of this unusual bird traveled fast. During the weekend almost 100 birders came to see the hummingbird, setting up their tripods, telescopes, cameras, and videos and "oooing and ahhing" over the little brown bird. For some it was their first sighting of a probable Rufous Hummingbird, and for most it was the first one they had seen in Illinois. Everyone who came got to see the bird; many animatedly discussed whether it was an immature rufous or Allen's. But that didn't matter to us. We were just happy having such an unusual bird in our backyard and delighted to meet so many enthusiastic, interesting, and informed birders.

On 21 October the ruby-throated fluttered its tail and left for warmer climes. We assumed the rufous would migrate, too, but it did not. I



contacted officials from zoos and nature centers asking if they would take the bird. Not only did they tell us, "No," but they also emphatically directed us to remove the feeders to force the bird to leave. Reluctantly, we did.

On the third morning after the feeders were removed, Sherwin Strauss saw the rufous flying around the yard. After much agonizing, we hung up a feeder. It was obvious the bird was not leaving and we were then just starving him.

We needed help, so I contacted David Johnson who referred us to a hummingbird authority, Nancy Newfield, in Louisiana. She was reviewing Milosevich's photographs to determine if a positive species identification could be made.

Newfield said we should not have removed the feeders since the bird had already migrated hundreds of miles to our house and was going no farther. The next day we experienced bitter weather and a snow storm. Our flowers died in the frost, and early the