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FIELD IDENTIFICATION OF FEMALE ALLEN'S AND RUFIOUS HUMMINGBIRDS

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Probably no other pair of North American bird species poses greater field identification problems than the Rufous (*Selasphorus rufus*) and Allen's (*S. sasin*) hummingbirds. Observations of anything other than rufous-backed adult males (at least outside of known breeding ranges and breeding seasons) are usually lumped as "Rufous/Allen's," since even a small percentage of adult male Rufous are fully green backed, matching the pattern of adult male Allen's (McKenzie and Robbins 1999). Females and immatures are generally considered unidentifiable to species in the field although, with excellent views and comparative experience, some immature males may be distinguishable by details of rectrix width and shape (Stiles 1972, Pyle 1997). While researching identification criteria for a photographic guide to North American hummingbirds, I found two features helpful in the separation of adult female Allen's and Rufous hummingbirds.

The most striking feature pertains to the race *sedentarius* of Allen's Hummingbird, which is endemic to southern California. This taxon is distinguished from nominate *sasin* by measurements, especially bill length, which averages longer in *sedentarius*, but no consistent plumage differences have been reported (Grinnell 1929, Stiles 1972, Mitchell 2000). Examination of adult female museum specimens revealed that *sedentarius* ($n = 24$; upper photo) has relatively dull and poorly contrasting cinnamon-rufous sides and flanks with moderate to extensive mottling of iridescent green spots. By contrast, nominate *sasin* ($n = 60$; lower photo) has brighter cinnamon-rufous sides and flanks that contrast more sharply with a white forecollar and white median stripe on the underparts. Only about 30% of nominate *sasin* ($n = 60$), as well as 30% of adult female Rufous Hummingbirds ($n = 50$), have one to a few iridescent green spots on the chest sides, rarely if ever approaching the extent of spotting on *sedentarius*; most have solidly cinnamon-rufous sides and flanks that lack iridescent green spotting, a pattern not shown by *sedentarius*.

Sedentarius is resident on most of the California Channel Islands, whence it spread in the 1960s and 1970s to the adjacent mainland coast (Wells and Baptista 1979). In recent years, its range has expanded inland through much of the coastal slope of Los Angeles County and parts of Orange County (Hamilton and Willick 1996, Gallagher 1997), and resident populations of presumed *sedentarius* also occur along the coast nearly to the edge of the breeding range of nominate *sasin* in Ventura County (K. L. Garrett pers. comm., D. E. Mitchell, pers. comm.). There is also some post-breeding movement of *sedentarius* upslope into nearby mountains (Stiles 1972), and the taxon has occurred casually south to San Diego County (Unitt 1984). Identification criteria proposed here may help document the nesting ranges of these two subspecies, and also the detection of wintering *Selasphorus* hummingbirds other than *sedentarius* in southern California. I encourage observers and banders in a position to examine known *sedentarius* (e.g., on the Channel Islands) to test the usefulness of flank color and pattern and to examine whether this feature is helpful for immatures (of which I did not see adequate samples); immatures of nominate *sasin* do not show extensive green mottling on their sides and resemble adult females in flank color.

A second feature worthy of critical examination in the separation of adult female Allen's and Rufous hummingbirds is uppertail-covert pattern and color. About 30% of specimens of both *sedentarius* and nominate *sasin* show relatively extensive rufous

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edgings on their uppertail coverts (forming a distinctive rufous “rump patch”), in contrast to narrow or virtually absent rufous edgings on adult female Rufous ($n = 50$). Thus, on adult females, extensive rufous on the uppertail coverts suggests Allen’s Hummingbird, a difference illustrated, although not mentioned specifically, by Sibley (2000). A smaller sample suggests the same trend in immature females, but because 10% of immature female Rufous ($n = 20$ specimens) have fairly distinct rufous fringes on their uppertail coverts, the presence of a rufous “rump patch” is not diagnostic of immature female Allen’s. Also note that immature males of both Allen’s and Rufous hummingbirds typically have extensively rufous uppertail coverts, so correctly determining the age and sex of any bird is a prerequisite to specific identification (see Pyle 1997).

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