

Ruby-throated Hummingbird (RTHU)

Sighting Protocol Field Guide (U.S. and Canada)

Task

To observe and record one or more of the following:

- Early arrival date of RTHUs in Spring
- Final date RTHUs are observed in Autumn
- RTHU sightings between early arrival and final sighting
- Color-marked or unusual RTHUs, or other species of hummingbirds (vagrants)

What You Need

- Pencil or pen
- Binoculars (optional)
- Bird identification guide
- [Ruby-throated Hummingbird Sighting Data Sheet](#)

In the Field

1. Every day about two weeks before the expected arrival of RTHUs, begin looking for RTHUs in your neighborhood and schoolyard. In most U.S. locations, the first RTHUs arrive in March and depart by early October.

Record observation times even if hummingbirds are not seen.

2. If possible, determine sex (and age) of each RTHU that is observed.
3. Record date of first RTHU Spring sighting—including sex and age (if known)—on the *Hummingbird Sighting Data Sheet*.

Note: In Spring through mid-May, RTHUs are easily aged and sexed; only adult males have a full red throat and only adult females have white throats.

4. In Spring, Summer, and Autumn, look for RTHUs every day. Record:
 - Each date a red-throated adult male is observed (March through October)
 - Each date an adult female is observed (white throat, March and April only)
 - Each date an undetermined sex is observed (if throat is not observed)
 - Each date an undetermined sex (adult female/young female/young male) is observed (May through October, if throat is unmarked)
 - Each date a young male is observed (May through October, if throat is heavily streaked in green or black and/or has one or more red feathers)
5. After no more RTHUs are seen, record final date of:
 - Adult male (March through November)
 - Undetermined sex (if throat is not observed)
 - Undetermined sex (adult female/young female/young male, if throat is unmarked)
 - Young male (if throat is heavily streaked in green or black and/or has one or more red feathers)
6. In the protocols above, Observation Start Time and Observation End Time may be the same for an individual sighting.

Note: If you see a color-marked or unusual RTHU, other species of hummingbirds (vagrants), or ANY hummingbird from mid-October through mid-March, describe the color markings and shape of beak. Record your observations on the [Ruby-throated Hummingbird Sighting Data Sheet](#). Contact Hilton Pond Center for Piedmont Natural History at research@hiltonpond.org or (803) 684-5852 as soon as possible.