

Rare hummingbird visits feeder in Allendale

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Earlier this month, an exceedingly rare hummingbird visited a North Jersey feeder for several days.

The female rufous hummingbird that visited Bob and Lisa Safier's backyard feeder in Allendale was a tiny beauty: green wings and tail, reddish-orange patches, and a dash of iridescent orange on her throat when it caught the sun's reflection.

The hardy hummer, which weighs less than two-tenths of an ounce, typically breeds on the West Coast as far north as Alaska and winters in northern Mexico.

The Allendale sightings are the second ever recorded for this bird in Bergen County. The only other report was in Oakland almost 23 years ago. No rufous sightings have ever been reported in Passaic County.

"We could tell right away she was different," says Lisa Safier. "It took a minute to identify her as a rufous."

The overwhelming majority of hummers in the Northeast are ruby-throats,



This female rufous hummingbird, rarely seen in North Jersey, hung out an Allendale feeder earlier this month. Her throat showed a dash of iridescent orange when it caught the sun's reflection. COURTESY OF JIM WRIGHT

which breed here and are a popular backyard visitor in the warmer months.

The West Coast girl appeared one afternoon and returned frequently to fuel up on sugar water for her presumed 2,000-mile-plus migration southwest of the border.

Though seen rarely in these parts, rufous hummers are becoming more frequent visitors to the Garden State for reasons that have not yet been deter-

mined.

According to Rob Fanning, a bird-walk leader for NJ Audubon, more than 40 of them have been recorded in the state in recent years — in addition to another 32 sightings that were either rufouses or Allen hummingbirds (a nearly identical West Coast cousin).

Why the uptick in sightings?

"Stray hummingbirds from the West and other areas are turning up more frequently in the East," says Fanning, a Waldwick native who lives in Monmouth County — and drove 70 miles to see the hummer. "This can be linked to folks keeping their feeders/flowers out longer, and/or changing migration patterns."

What makes the rufous special? "It's one of the more colorful hummingbirds in the U.S.," he adds. "The adult male is a vibrant rufous all over."

The Safiers are among those who leave their hummingbird feeder up longer than most. Most folks tend to take their sugar-water feeders down by late October, after peak migration, but the Safiers keep theirs filled in case a ruby-throated straggler or a stray rarity like the rufous hummingbird needs a pit

stop.

They've put up a sugar-water feeder for more than two decades for one simple reason — they love ruby-throats.

"They have distinct personalities, and you get to know them," Bob says. "The females are much more friendly and inquisitive. They'll fly right in front of your face and look at you for a few minutes, while the males just chase everyone else away."

How long will the Safiers keep hanging their sugar-water feeder this year?

"It depends on the weather and how many hummingbirds we have coming through," Lisa says. "We try to wait until two or three weeks after we see the last one, but hard-core birders say you should leave from feeder out later if you want to attract errants and migrants."

The rufous was just the latest treat for the two long-time bird-watchers.

"Birding is such a great thing because you can do it anywhere, almost anytime, whether you're or old," says Lisa. "You never know what you'll see — even in your backyard."

The Bird-watcher column appears every other Thursday. Email Jim at celeiryfarm@gmail.com.