

The First Record of Xantus's Hummingbird (*Hylocharis xantusii*) in British Columbia.

By Rick Toochin. Submitted: April 15, 2018.

Introduction and Distribution

The Xantus's Hummingbird (*Hylocharis xantusii*) is an endemic to central and southern Baja California, including islands in the Gulf of California, in Mexico, south of 29°N, mainly at elevation of 150–1,500 m (Grinnell 1928b, Howell and Webb 2010). Although it is an endemic species with a restricted range, it is fairly common within its range (Howell and Howell 2000). The Xantus's Hummingbird has wandered out of range into North America (Howell and Howell 2000). This species can be found in open montane forest, clearings, brushy hillsides, canyons, second growth, gardens, orchards, and arid montane scrub, often near fresh water in its home range (Howell and Howell 2000). The Xantus's Hummingbird is found down to near sea level, usually in small numbers (Brewster 1902b). On the southern Baja Peninsula, this species breeds at least from Sierra San Lorenzo (23°20'N) north to Sierra de San Francisco (27°35'N), in northern Baja California Sur (Howell and Howell 2010, Hamilton *et al.* 2007).

The migratory tendencies of the Xantus's Hummingbird are not well known (Howell and Howell 2000). There are local movements that apparently occur in response to the distribution and abundance of flowering plants (Howell and Howell 2000). In the northern mountains of Cape District at around 28°N, large numbers occur from the months of September-November, coinciding with the peak of flowering following the late summer rains; perhaps part of regular northward migration, but observations at other seasons needed (Howell and Howell 2000, Howell 2003). The Xantus's Hummingbird has been documented breeding in different months for different latitudes (Howell and Howell 2000). Although nests of the species have been found and a few have even been briefly monitored, descriptions of the actual nest cycle and of the young are lacking (Howell and Howell 2000). As with other hummingbirds, breeding activities probably vary with the availability of nectar resources, but this has not been directly examined in Xantus's Hummingbird (Howell and Howell 2000). There are some descriptions of the plants it uses for nectar sources, including an endemic madrone that appears to require the hummingbird for pollination (Arriaga *et al.* 1990).

The Xantus's Hummingbird breeds mainly in arid subtropical scrub, oak (*Quercus* spp.), and pine (*Pinus* spp.)-oak woodlands found in the lower foothills and canyons and also extends to the upper slopes of the mountains (Howell and Howell 2000). This species has also been reported in orchards (Belding 1883a). Nests found by Lamb (1925a) in northern breeding areas were generally near water, but not in southern breeding areas. Within the southern breeding areas, male Xantus's Hummingbirds were seen in open valleys and females were found in the forest which is where they nested (Lamb 1925a).

The range of the Xantus's Hummingbird in the non-breeding season probably overlaps its breeding range (Howell and Howell 2000). The non-breeding range of this species may also extend down to sea level in lowland desert, town gardens, and feeders at coastal trailer parks near Mulege (Howell and Howell 2000). The Xantus's Hummingbird is occasionally found at high-elevation habitats and on mountaintops in the winter, sometimes in abundance (Bryant 1889). It is likely that this species tracks nectar resources (Howell and Howell 2000).

In North America, the Xantus's Hummingbird is an accidental vagrant species (Dunn and Alderfer 2011). The only records come from California where there are 2 accepted records by the California Bird Records Committee (Hamilton *et al.* 2007). All records come from southern California with the first record a male found at Yaqui Well, San Diego on December 27, 1986 and a female that twice attempted to breed from Ventura, in Ventura County, from January 30–March 27, 1988 (Hainebach 1992). Incredibly, the Xantus's Hummingbird is an accidental vagrant species in British Columbia with a single long staying bird found and photographed in Gibsons, on the Sunshine Coast (Toochin 1997b).

Identification and Similar Species

The identification of the Xantus's Hummingbird is covered in some North American field guides, however, specialized books on hummingbirds are recommended as these give more detailed information. Such publications as Howell and Howell (2000), Howell (2003), and Howell and Webb (2010) give detailed information on the identification of this species. The Xantus's Hummingbird is a fairly stocky, medium-sized hummingbird measuring 8-9 cm in length (Howell and Webb 2010). In the context of British Columbia, there are no other hummingbirds that commonly occur that look anything like this species.

The following description is taken from Howell and Howell (2000) unless otherwise stated. The adult male has dull-greenish crown, black chin, black forehead and auriculars, glittering-green lower gorget, green nape and upperparts, a cinnamon belly (mottled greenish at sides of chest), rufous-tipped uppertail coverts, and rufous-chestnut tail with central rectrices edged green. The adult female has a dull-greenish crown, dark auriculars, green nape and upperparts, rufous-tipped uppertail coverts, pale cinnamon throat and underparts, and a dark rufous tail with green central rectrices and outer rectrices with paler tips. The bill is straightish and broad across the base. The broad tail is slightly notched. The bill of the male is bright red with a black tip. The female and immature have restricted reddish colour at the base of the bill. Both sexes have dark brown to black eyes and blackish legs and feet.

The immature male is similar to the female except for some male colours on the head and gorget.

All sex and age plumage classes have boldly contrasting white postocular-stripe, blackish auricular mask, a cinnamon belly (whole underparts in female), and a mostly rufous tail.

The most commonly heard call is a fast, dry high metallic “*chi-ti*” or “*ti-tink*” or “*chi-tink*” rattle often given 2-3 times (Howell and Webb 2010).

Species that are superficially similar looking all occur well outside British Columbia in Mexico. The White-eared Hummingbird (*H. leucotis*) has a similar face pattern. The colour pattern of the Xantus’s Hummingbird is shared with the plain-faced Cinnamon Hummingbird (*Amazilia rutila*). Overall plumage patterns of the Xantus’s Hummingbird are unique and this striking species should be unmistakable.

Occurrence and Documentation

The Xantus’s Hummingbird is an accidental vagrant species in British Columbia with a single record of a long staying bird that was originally an immature female that matured into an adult female (Toochin 1997b, Tyson 1998, Campbell *et al.* 2001). This bird was found by Gerrie Patterson who had the bird in her yard coming to a nectar feeder in Gibsons, on the Sunshine Coast. The bird stayed from November 16, 1997-September 21, 1998 (Toochin 1997b, Tyson 1998, Campbell *et al.* 2001). It was seen and photographed by people from all over British Columbia, and North America (D. Cecile Pers. Comm.). Though not known to be migratory, there is some evidence of movement into northern breeding areas in the fall (Howell 2003). Interestingly that is when the bird initially showed up in British Columbia. It is not likely that this species will occur in British Columbia again in the future.



Figure 1: Record #1: Xantus’s Hummingbird immature November 17, 1997.
Photo © Thomas Plath.

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank Tom Plath for graciously allowing E-Fauna BC the use of his photo of the Gibsons Xantus's Hummingbird. I also want to thank Don Cecile for editing the original manuscript and providing extra information of the Gibson bird. All photos are used with permission of the photographer and are fully protected by copyright law. Photographs are not to be reproduced, published or retransmitted on any website without the authorization of the photographer.

References

- Arriaga, L., R. Rodriguez-Estrella and A. Ortega-Rubio. 1990. Endemic hummingbirds and madrones of Baja: are they mutually dependent? *Southwest. Nat.* 35: 76-79.
- Belding, L. 1883a. Catalogue of a collection of birds made near the southern extremity of the peninsula of lower California. *Proc. U.S. Natl. Mus.* 5: 532-550.
- Brewster, W. 1902b. Birds of the Cape region of Lower California. *Bull. Mus. Comp. Zool.* 41: 1-242.
- Bryant, W. E. 1889. A catalogue of the birds of lower California, Mexico. *Proc. Calif. Acad. Sci.* 2: 237-320.
- Campbell, R. W., N. K. Dawe, I. McTaggart-Cowan, J. M. Cooper, G. W. Kaiser, A. C. Stewart, and M. C. E. McNall. 2001. *The Birds of British Columbia – Volume 4 (Passerines [Wood-Warblers through Old World Sparrows])*. Vancouver: UBC Press.
- Dunn, J. L. and J. Alderfer. 2011. *National Geographic Field Guide to the Birds of North America*. National Geographic Society, Washington D.C. 574pp.
- Grinnell, J. 1928b. A distribution summation of the ornithology of Lower California. *Univ. of Calif. Publ. Zool.* 32: 1300.
- Hainebach, K. 1992. First records of Xantus's Hummingbird in California. *Western Birds* 23: 133-136.
- Hamilton, R. A., M. A. Patten, and R. A. Erickson. 2007. *Rare Birds of California: A work of the California rare bird record committee*. Western Field Ornithologists, Camarillo, California. 605pp.
- Howell, S. N. G. 2003. *Hummingbirds of North America: The Photographic Guide*. Princeton University Press, New Jersey.

Howell, Christine A. and Steve N. Howell. 2000. Xantus's Hummingbird (*Hylocharis xantusii*), version 2.0. In The Birds of North America (P. G. Rodewald, editor). Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, New York, USA. [Online Resource] Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.2173/bna.554> [Accessed: December 27, 2017].

Howell, S. N. G. and S. Webb. 2010. A guide to the birds of Mexico and northern Central America. New York: Oxford University Press.

Lamb, C. C. 1925a. Observations of the Xantus's Hummingbird. *Condor* 27: 89-92.

Toochin, R. 1997. A Xantus's Hummingbird in British Columbia: a first Canadian record. *Birder's Journal* 6: 293-297.

Tyson, D. 1998. Xantus's Hummingbird: First Canadian Record. *Vancouver Natural History Society Discovery* 27: 101-103.