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THE BLACK-CHINNED HUMMINGBIRD IN WEST-CENTRAL OKLAHOMA

BY INA S. BROWN

THE hummingbirds of the western half of the main body of Oklahoma have long been thought to be Ruby-throats (*Archilochus colubris*), but some of them are Black-chins (*A. alexandri*). The latter species was not even mentioned by Mrs. Nice in her "Birds of Oklahoma" (1931); Sutton (1967, Oklahoma birds, p. 236) called it a "transient and summer visitant in western Oklahoma" but cited no breeding record. Of 38 carefully identified Ruby-throat specimens (13 adult males;



HUMMINGBIRD NEST IN ELK CITY, OKLAHOMA

The female hummingbird that built this nest (shown here actual size) was a Ruby-throat, a Black-chin, or a Ruby-throat x Black-chin hybrid. The only male hummingbird seen in the vicinity that season (May 1971) was a Black-chin. The two eggs were knocked out by a hailstorm. Photograph by James R. Purdue.

nine males in first winter feather; 16 females, several of them in first winter feather) in the bird collection at the University of Oklahoma not one was taken west of Oklahoma, Cleveland, McClain, and Marshall counties. Hummingbirds seen in midsummer in "Woods, Canadian, Caddo, Comanche, and Love counties" (Sutton, *op. cit.*, p. 285) have been assumed to be breeding Ruby-throats, but fully documented sightings from these counties and from the vast area west of them are surprisingly few, and virtually no such sighting has been fully reported in print.

In Clinton, Custer County, west-central Oklahoma, J. H. Pedigo and his wife Harriet have been seeing adult male Ruby-throats summer after summer since about 1940. During the same period I, too, have been seeing them not only in Clinton but also in Elk City, Beckham County. The Pedigos and I have assumed right along that female hummers seen by us were also Ruby-throats. The thought crosses my mind that, having seen what we knew to be male Ruby-throats from time to time, we assumed (without checking carefully) that all dark-throated birds were Ruby-throats. In any event, I now know that the Black-chin must be watched for in our area.

At Elk City I first saw what I knew to be a Black-chinned Hummingbird on 24 April 1968. The male bird was feeding about the tubular flowers of red trumpet honeysuckle (*Lonicera sempervirens*) only a few feet from my kitchen window. I saw a male bird there again on 26 April. On 4 May, in Clinton, the Pedigos and I saw a male Black-chin at red trumpet honeysuckle flowers at the Pedigo residence. Since 1968 I have seen at least one male Black-chin in Elk City on several occasions each summer, chiefly between 25 April and 25 May, but occasionally in July or August.

From mid-May to mid-July 1969, in Clinton, the Pedigos regularly observed a male Black-chin and a female bird that they assumed to be a Black-chin. The birds visited red trumpet honeysuckle flowers and a sugar-water feeder at their house. On the evening of 30 July 1971 I saw an adult male Black-chin and two hummers that were obviously females or young birds feeding about red sage (*Salvia* sp.) in my yard in Elk City. The adult male chased the other two a great deal. All three of them rested occasionally on the clothesline.

The above-cited midsummer sightings gave the Pedigos and me the feeling that the Black-chin might be nesting in our part of Oklahoma.

On 7 April 1971 my friend Eva Cheesman observed a male Black-chin feeding about wild currant (*Ribes odoratum*) 6 miles west and 2 miles north of Elk City. On 9 May Mrs. Cheesman observed a female hummingbird building a nest near the end of a slender drooping twig about 4½ feet from the ground in a climbing rosebush close to a small entry porch and about 3 feet from a picture window on the north side of the Paul Hughes residence at 324 West Country Club Drive (the house next to the Cheesman residence). On 12 May I closely inspected this nest myself. It appeared on that date to have no lichens, but lichens were added later. We tried

taking photographs, but these did not turn out well. Mrs. Cheesman watched the bird and its nest closely. One egg was in it on 16 May, two eggs on 17 May. For a day or so the bird was suspicious and excitable, but by 20 May it had settled down to steady incubation.

On 29 May, George M. Sutton and Troy L. Best inspected the nest and tried taking photographs of the bird. These were not good, though they showed the bird to be very long-billed—a character of *A. alexandri*.

On 30 May, at about 17:00, a light hailstorm, followed by heavy rain, then by more hail, struck Elk City from the west. The nest and devoted bird came through it all unscathed. Then another hailstorm struck, this time from the north, and, even as Mrs. Hughes watched from the window, a hailstone hit the nest. The bird clung to the tiny structure and resumed her position in it, but the eggs must have been knocked out, for they were not in the nest the following day. On 1 June the bird was observed to visit the nest several times, on 2 June once; after that she was not seen by anyone.

At no time during the period from 9 May to 2 June did anyone see a male Black-chin at or near the nest. On 6 June, however, Mrs. Cheesman saw a male bird at hollyhock flowers in her yard. She was out of town from 7 to 17 June. On her return she saw no hummingbird of any sort in her neighborhood. Convinced that the nest was not to be used further, we collected it on 1 August. It is now in the collection at the University of Oklahoma.

Taxonomists may well question whether the female bird discussed above was actually a Black-chinned Hummingbird. At least one known-to-be-breeding female specimen should, of course, be collected in west-central Oklahoma and carefully measured. If the Elk City female was a Ruby-throat, then interbreeding of the two species might have been taking place, a phenomenon that would explain such allegedly hybrid adult males as that reported from Oklahoma County, central Oklahoma, by Vacin (1969, Bull. Oklahoma Orn. Soc., 2: 15) and mentioned by Mayr and Short (1970, Publ. Nuttall Orn. Club, No. 9, pp. 53-54).

106 SUNSET, ELK CITY, OKLAHOMA 73644, 30 SEPTEMBER 1971.

CASSIN'S SPARROW IN NOBLE COUNTY, OKLAHOMA

BY JOHN GRULA

The Cassin's Sparrow (*Aimophila cassinii*), a "transient and summer resident in western Oklahoma," has not heretofore been seen in the state farther east than Grant, Oklahoma, Cleveland, McClain, and Love counties (Sutton, 1967, Oklahoma birds, p. 616); it has not been known to occur regularly in any of these counties, however, and its breeding has been documented for only one of them, Cleveland (Johnson, 1956, Wilson Bull., 68: 75-76; Sutton, *op. cit.*). The species inhabits flat or gently rolling, semi-arid, comparatively treeless country.

During the spring and summer of 1971 I repeatedly observed a small population of Cassin's Sparrows in southeastern Noble County, about 5 miles north-