

## THE VILLAGE BIRDING LIFE

“ Hummer Paradise”

*by HSV Audubon*

Late summer and fall means that migrating Ruby-throated Hummingbirds are moving through the Village. If you have a nectar feeder up you've probably noticed that the activity level has increased lately. At our house we're entertained every morning by the near constant bickering of a half dozen hummers sorting out who gets first dibs on our two feeders. However, this is nothing compared to what's happening at Ralph and Vi Shepherd's house near Ponce golf course.

Ralph and Vi have been feeding a 100 or so hummers every day since mid-August. Having 23 feeders hanging on or near their back porch is one reason they have so many birds. Another reason is that their backyard is completely surrounded by a nice mix of thick shrubs and trees of various height. Migrating hummers are a top priority for the Shepherds, in fact, Vi said that she didn't mind if we referred to the hummers as “being like their grandkids.” While they are certainly providing a “hummer paradise”, what's most important is that their backyard has become a crucial stopover for birds who are about to embark on a 1000 mile journey, some non-stop across the Gulf of Mexico. That the hummers have become little gluttons is not that surprising when you consider the fact that hummers need to almost double their body weight if they are going to survive the perils of migration.

The Shepherd's hummer season begins modestly. Ralph hangs two feeders at the first hint of spring in early April. Those two feeders seem to keep the local hummers satisfied for most of the summer. Ralph noted that hummers are good at supplementing their diet with a variety of small insects. However, things change dramatically in August when the first of the migrating birds begin to pass through. At this point, the Shepherds hang all 23 feeders and begin the daily chores of mixing a gallon and a half of sugar water and cleaning feeders before they are refilled. Vi follows the recommended mix of 4 parts water to one part dissolved sugar. She sees no reason to add red food coloring. Over the years, Ralph has found ways to deal with the various backyard pests that can plague those of us who have bird feeders. For example, he learned that placing the feeders away from the porch posts and using commercial baffles and a little axle grease on the feeder posts in the yard greatly deters raccoons and squirrels. His approach to yellowjackets and wasps is to go on the offensive with bug spray early in the summer before the populations explode.

The Shepherds have noticed that the adult male Ruby-throats tend to migrate first. The males are very territorial which means that they are constantly diving at and threatening each other. Having many feeders spread out assures that a dominant male can't guard all of the food all of the time. Now, in September, the adult males have moved south and most of birds are females

and first-year birds. The number of hummers diminishes as the weather cools but the Shepherds typically have stragglers until Thanksgiving. (In fact, many of us leave a hummingbird feeder out as late as possible because hummingbird banders have found that there are more stragglers than you'd expect.).

When you're on Ralph and Vi's porch, sitting in a comfortable rocker, surrounded by a 100 hummers there's sense of magic. While there is no doubt that the hummingbirds benefit immensely from the Shepherd's effort, it just might be that Ralph and Vi benefit even more. The Shepherds are active members of HSV Audubon and would like to share their knowledge with anybody interested in providing their own "hummer paradise".

As always HSVBIRDS.ORG has a lot of information about everything you'd like to know about birds and some of Nature's other wonders. You will see on the website that HSV Audubon has available a Village birding checklist. It lists the over 200 species of birds that might be seen in the Village, when they might be seen and how common they are. It's a great way to keep track of the birds at your feeder.

HSV Audubon meets the 2nd Friday of each month, except July and August, at 10:00 at the Coronado Center. Guests are always welcome.

Photos by Vic Prislipsky