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## *News, Notes, Comments*

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### **Two Surprisingly Exceptional Days: 720 Hummingbirds**

Friday, 31 July, and Monday, 7 September, 2020, were surprisingly exceptional days for catching and banding hummingbirds. When combined, the two-day results revealed 720 birds captured and processed and dozens more released unbanded. These birds were captured in five banding sessions, three on 31 July at two locations and two on 7 September at one location.

These two days were highly successful for multiple reasons. Both banding sites were in rural, extensively wooded settings that included open areas, a nearby creek and few flowers or nearby feeders on which the birds could feed. Both sites included many active feeders as the primary source of food. At one site at least four feeders were permanently placed inside dummy cages with open tops, bottoms and sides so the birds were accustomed to going freely in and out of cages. In addition, the capture, banding and processing operations were enhanced at both sites by utilizing experienced extractors, handlers, data recorders and trained volunteers who assisted in having the bands ready for banding and/or were responsible for reading the band numbers of previously banded birds. Since birds were being captured at a continuous and surprisingly rapid rate, two steps were taken to limit the number of birds held for processing. We released dozens of birds unbanded immediately after their capture and we returned several feeders to the feeding/trapping area for the birds to utilize without having to go inside a trap. These steps effectively “slowed” the capture rate; however, birds still entered the traps.

Friday, 31 July, was a cool day (for late July) and overcast with an occasional light morning mist. The day’s first session (session 1) took place at Ed & Karen Zwicker’s home southwest of Litchfield, IL (about 50 miles [80 km] south of Springfield) from shortly after 08:00 until 11:00. Banding had been initiated at this site by Mary Hedrick (a subpermittee under my permit) in 2015, who

banded 94 birds on her first visit. Mary expanded the banding operations at the Zwickers site to twice each summer through 2018 and then three times in 2019. After her initial visit she failed to band 100 or more birds only once. For clarification, though, each visit was split into morning and afternoon sessions of about three hours each. Since Mary “retired” from her banding forays at the end of 2019, I was permitted to continue her operations at the Zwickers

The afternoon session 2 was also at the Zwicker site began about 12:15 and lasted until exactly 14:30. Session 3 was held at Phil and Kay Stoecklin’s blueberry orchard south of Hillsboro, IL (about 30 miles [48 km] southeast of the Zwicker site) from shortly after 16:00 until shortly after 19:00.

Both sessions on 7 September were held at the Zwickers; the morning session (session 4) was from about 08:15 to 11:30 and the afternoon session (session 5) from 12:45 to 15:45. The weather for these latter two sessions was clear, calm and relatively cool with temperatures in the upper 60s to lower 70s [= about 20° C]. For sessions 1, 2, 4 and 5, four automatic traps were used and for session 3, two were used. In these “automatic” traps the birds could freely fly in and out. Some birds did fly out, but most did not, and once inside the traps the birds that did not fly out would usually fly to the top where they could be readily extracted.

Table 1 shows the number of AHY and HY birds banded at each site. Table 2 identifies the number of returns for each year since 2014 (and includes 2020 birds banded earlier in the year). Many individuals were captured two or more times the same day. For sessions 1 and 2 at the Zwicker site, 66 individuals were repeats; for session 3 at the Stoecklin site, 32 individuals were repeats; and for sessions 4 and 5 at the Zwicker site, 45 individuals were repeats. The number of newly banded adult males (81) at the Zwicker site for 31 July seemed “above normal” especially when compared to the much lower number at the Stoecklin and similar banding sites. What seems to me to be the most

**Table 1. Newly banded birds by location/session.**

Location/session	Date	AHY-M	AHY-F	HY-M	HY-F	Total
Zwicker (1 & 2)	31-Jul-2020	81	52	4	6	143
Stoecklin (3)	31-Jul-2020	9	54	5	0	68
Zwicker (4 & 5)	7-Sep-2020	13	50	104	35	202

**Table 2. Returns for each location/session**

Location/session	Date	Sex	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Total
Zwicker (1 & 2)	31-Jul-2020	Male				1	4	13	6	24
		Female	1		1	11	14	29	6	62
Stoecklin (3)	31-Jul-2020	Male				1	1		3	5
		Female			2	4	4	7	8	26
Zwicker (4 & 5)	7-Sep-2020	Male						3	2	5
		Female				9	4	16	12	41

impressive figure of the 31 July “exceptional” day is the number of returns (previously banded birds) that were captured. Of the 328 captured birds on 31 July, 117 (36%) had been previously banded and, of these, 94 (29%) were returns; the other 23 were repeats of birds banded earlier that year. A more traditional rate of return at sites where I have banded for three or more years is 15-25% (and that is primarily for adult birds banded early each season rather than young birds banded later in the season (which have a low survival rate their first year and neither hatched at nor is necessarily expected to return to the capture area).

In addition, on 7 September we also caught a foreign retrap, an HY M that had been banded only two weeks earlier (22 August) by Cynthia Routledge in Clarksville, TN.

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**The abundances of the four subspecies groups of Fox Sparrows (*Passerella iliaca*) at a southern California bird banding station.**

I have maintained a year-round constant effort bird banding station in the Santa Monica Mountains in southern California (34° 01' 54" N , 118° 48' 44" W ) since 1994. The station is located in Zuma Canyon and is about 1.5 km from the Pacific Ocean. Banding protocol has changed somewhat over the 25 years the station has been in operation, but in general banding occurred every two weeks utilizing 10-20 twelve-meter mist nets at permanent net locations.

I became curious about the four subspecies groups of Fox Sparrows (*Passerella iliaca*) described by Pyle (1997). Weckstein et al. (2020) stated all four taxonomic groups can be found in southern California during the winter months. Los Angeles County is considered one of the best places to see all four groups of Fox Sparrows (Allen et al. 2016), but little is know about their actual abundances (Garrett, per. comm.). The four subspecies groups of Fox Sparrows are fairly distinct, although there are some differences in naming them (see Table 1). So I thought it would be enlightening to look at the abundances of the Fox Sparrow groups through our banding efforts at Zuma Canyon in the Santa Monica Mountains. A more detailed description of the banding station can be found in Sakai (2016).