

Status and Occurrence of Magnificent Hummingbird (*Eugenes fulgens*) in British Columbia.

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Introduction and Distribution

The Magnificent Hummingbird (*Eugenes fulgens*) is a fairly common to uncommon and local summer resident species found in montane Pine-Oak and Pine-evergreen forest, edge clearings with flowers in Southeastern Arizona, Southwestern New Mexico and West Texas from March to October (Howell 2003, Powers 2013). There are a few birds that overwinter in these states, but most head south for the winter (Howell 2003, Powers 2013). This species has bred in northern Colorado where it occurs as a rare to casual vagrant, mostly from May to September (Howell 2003, Powers 2013). The Magnificent Hummingbird is casual north of its normal range mainly from July to August, but has occurred as early as mid-April (Howell 2003, Powers 2013). Vagrants have been found in this spring and summer period from Nevada, Utah (Behle *et al.* 1985), Wyoming, South Dakota, Minnesota, Kansas (Thompson and Ely 1989), south-central Texas (Oberholser 1974), and Minnesota (Hamilton *et al.* 2007). In the east, it has occurred as a vagrant, more in the late fall and winter months from south Texas on the Gulf Coast, Arkansas, Georgia, Florida, and Virginia (Hamilton *et al.* 2007).

In Mexico, the breeding status of the Magnificent Hummingbird is largely assumed based on summer residence and the breeding condition of collected specimens (Powers 2013). This species is believed to occur in the highlands of most mainland states from the United States border, south to Chiapas (Edwards 1973, Howell and Webb 2010). The Magnificent Hummingbirds that occur in the northern part of their breeding range move to more southerly areas during the months of October to March (Howell and Webb 2010).

The range of the Magnificent Hummingbird extends further south into Central America, the highlands of Guatemala (Land 1970), El Salvador (Dickey and van Rossem 1938), and Honduras (Monroe 1968).

There is a unique population of Magnificent Hummingbirds that are much larger than the nominate subspecies and are found in Costa Rica, in the Cordillera Central and Cordillera Talamanca (Stiles and Skutch 1989), and in western Panama, in the Chiriquí, and around the Volcán Barú (Ridgely and Gwynne 1989). Slud (1964) states that the species “is not known from the northwestern divide,” creating a significant gap between the Costa Rican and Nicaraguan populations and Panama. These birds are a distinct subspecies, sometimes referred to as its own species called Admirable Hummingbird (*E. f. spectabilis*) (Howell and Webb 2010).

Along the West Coast of North America, the Magnificent Hummingbird is an accidental vagrant.

In California, the Magnificent Hummingbird is an accidental species with only two accepted records by the California Bird Records Committee (Hamilton *et al.* 2007, Tietz and McCaskie 2014). There are no accepted records for Oregon (OFO 2012) and Washington State (Wahl *et al.* 2005, WRBC 2014). In British Columbia, there are a couple of very recent records, which is most extraordinary (See Table 1). There are no records of the Magnificent Hummingbird for Alaska (Gibson *et al.* 2013), Alberta (Hudon *et al.* 2014) and Idaho (IRBC 2014).

Identification and Similar Species

The identification of the Magnificent Hummingbird is covered in all standard North American field guides. This species often favours relatively open areas within woodland, and perches prominently, at times making prolonged flycatching sallies (Howell 2003). The Magnificent Hummingbird starts its moult from June to August with adults starting earlier than immatures (Howell 2003). This moult ends from November to March (Howell 2003). This is a large looking hummingbird measuring 13 cm in length with a wingspan of 19 cm, and weighing 7 grams (Sibley 2000). This makes this species larger than the commonly found Anna's Hummingbird (*Calypte anna*) which measures 10 cm with a wingspan of 13 cm, and weighs 4.3 grams (Sibley 2000). There are no commonly occurring hummingbird species in British Columbia that look similar to the Magnificent Hummingbird; however, female and immature birds can be confused with the Blue-throated Hummingbird so individuals should be carefully scrutinized when trying to distinguish between the two species (Howell 2003). For a more careful study of the Magnificent Hummingbird and similar species it is recommended that keen observers read Howell (2003).

Adult males often look all dark with a white post-ocular spot (Howell 2003). The crown is iridescent violet with a small, dull bronzy forehead (or bill sheath); the gorget is iridescent turquoise-green to emerald-green; and the auriculars are dark with a white post-ocular spot (Howell 2003). The underparts are mostly iridescent dark bronzy green often looking black, becoming glittering bronzy-green on the sides and flanks, and smoky gray on the lower belly (Howell 2003). The white vent band is usually inconspicuous, and the undertail-coverts are dusky green with whitish edges (Dunn and Alderfer 2011). The upperparts are golden green to bronzy green, often with a pale gray patch on the neck sides (Howell 2003). The tail is all bronzy green and strongly forked (Sibley 2000). The bill and legs are black (Dunn and Alderfer 2011).

Adult females have a white post-ocular spot or short streak that contrasts with the dusky green crown and dark auriculars (Howell 2003). The throat is a dirty whitish colour with lines of dusky spots blending into dusky pale gray underparts that typically appear faintly mottled bronzy green spotting on the sides and flanks, often covered by the wings at rest (Howell 2003). The white vent band is often inconspicuous, and the undertail-coverts are edged with white (Howell

2003). The upperparts are golden-green to bronzy green (Howell 2003). The tail is golden-green to bronzy green with R2-R5 with fairly broadly blackish subterminal band; and whitish tips broadest on R4 and R5 reduced to a pale fringe on R2 (Howell 2003).

Immature males hold this plumage from June to September (Sibley 2000). These birds often look superficially “messy” or patchy, but birds in fresh plumage are very neatly scalloped (Howell 2003). The crown, nape, and upperparts are dull bronzy green with the crown darker and often with a few iridescent violet spots that are hard to see; scaly pale buff tips found on the fresh plumage soon abrade (Howell 2003). The face is dark with a whitish post-ocular streak and often a short whitish moustache streak (Howell 2003). The throat is a dirty pale gray with lines of dusky spots and a variable, typically large, iridescent green central patch (Howell 2003). The underparts are dusky gray to sooty gray with scaly pale tips of fresh plumage that soon abrade; the chest is mottled black, and the undertail-coverts are a dull bronzy green with whitish edgings (Howell 2003). The tail is bronzy green with R2-R5 variable and a relatively diffuse and narrow blackish subterminal band with pale gray to whitish tips to R3-R5; and light fringes to R1-R2 (Howell 2003). There is a black band and pale tips that are broadest on the outer rectrices (Howell 2003).

Immature females hold this plumage from June to September (Sibley 2000). These birds resemble the adult female, but the underparts are duskier with scaly pale edgings (Howell 2003). The tail is bronzy green with a dark subterminal tail band (Howell 2003).

The call is a sharp “*chip*” that varies from a high chip-like Anna’s Hummingbird to a low, solid chip or flat, squeaky “*tip*” (Sibley 2000). The chase call is variable with a rapid, laughing series of “*twik twik wik wik wiki k ik ikikikikik*” rising with a steady whining “*twee kwee kwee kwee kwee kwee*” and a crackling “*chip krr krr*” (Sibley 2000)

Occurrence and Documentation

The Magnificent Hummingbird is an accidental species in British Columbia with four very recent records. The first record was of an adult male found by Peter Hamel and Margo Hearne that was coming to a hummingbird feeder at 1-3207 Warf Street at the Purple Onion Deli in Queen Charlotte City on April 28, 2014 (P. Hamel Pers. Obs.). The bird didn’t allow for good photographs to be taken despite extensive efforts made by both observers (P. Hamel Pers. Obs.). It was briefly relocated in the same general area by both Peter Hamel and Margo Hearne April 30, 2014 before it disappeared (P. Hamel Pers. Obs.). This record constitutes the first sighting of this species in British Columbia and Canada. The only commonly occurring hummingbirds in this area are the much smaller Rufous Hummingbird (*Selasphorus rufus*) and the much more rare Anna’s Hummingbird (P. Hamel Pers. Comm.). The bird was clearly

observed and the plumage characteristics were carefully noted (P. Hamel Pers. Obs.). Incredibly, an adult male Magnificent Hummingbird sighting came to Peter Hamel's attention in the late fall of 2014 (P. Hamel Pers. Comm.). This bird was found by Arnold Hamilton as he worked on a job site in Prince Rupert on October 18, 2014 (P. Hamel Pers. Comm.). The bird was an adult male seen very close up and was well described to Peter Hamel (P. Hamel Pers. Comm.). Though it is only a sight record, it should not be ignored since an adult male had been seen in the region that Spring. This person described the large size of the bird and the loud sound the wings made which is what drew his attention to the bird (P. Hamel Pers. Comm.). He was able to note the plumage colouration and knew it was something out of place (P. Hamel Pers. Comm.). The third provincial record was an adult male photographed coming to a hummingbird feeder in Bridge Lake by Daryl Llewellyn on July 4, 2015 (R. Cannings Pers. Comm.). Clear identifiable photographs can be viewed at <http://bcbirdalert.blogspot.ca/2015/07/magnificent-hummingbird-north-of.html>. This bird constitutes the first photographic record for British Columbia and Canada for a Magnificent Hummingbird. Though the bird was well documented it only stayed one day. Incredibly, an adult male was found shortly after the Bridge Lake sighting and was photographed at a hummingbird feeder in Lillooet by Annessa Terry, July 10-11, 2015 (R. Cannings Pers. Comm.). It is not known if they were different birds or the same bird having moved south (R. Toochin Pers. Obs.). Unfortunately, both birds were made public well after they had left the private residences so further observations were not possible.

The Magnificent Hummingbird does tend to wander north of its normal breeding range in North America mainly between July and August, but has occurred as early as mid-April (Howell 2003). Though there are far too few vagrancy records to establish any type of pattern for British Columbia, the few records that exist do fall into the larger timing of when this species will move out of range. There have been extreme droughts in the Southwestern United States from 2010-2015 which may well have played a role in pushing these birds so far north (M. Meredith Pers. Comm.). Like other southern hummingbirds, Magnificent Hummingbird is a species that has been documented well out of range and, therefore, should be expected to do so again in the future (Sibley 2000). Observers that feed hummingbirds should be on the lookout for this large, beautiful species, and be ready to photograph future vagrant records. This species is possible anywhere in the province, and hopefully will be found again the future.



Figure 1: Record #4: Magnificent Hummingbird adult male in Lillooet on July 10, 2015.
Photo © Annessa Terry.

Table 1: Records of Magnificent Hummingbird for British Columbia:

- 1.(1) adult male April 28 and 30, 2014: Margo Hearne, Peter Hamel: 1-3207 Warf , Purple Onion Deli, Queen Charlotte City (P. Hamel Pers. Comm.)
- 2.(1) adult male October 18, 2014: Arnold Hamilton: Prince Rupert [possibly same bird as above] (P. Hamel Pers. Comm.)
- 3.(1) adult male July 4, 2015: Daryl Llewellyn (photo) 8636 Boulton, Bridge Lake (R. Cannings Pers. Comm.)
- 4.(1) adult male July 10-11, 2015: Annessa Terry (photo) 376 Moha, Lillooet (R. Cannings Pers. Comm.)

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