

# **Broad-billed Hummingbird, *Cyananthus latirostris*: First South Carolina Banding and Photographic Record**

**Bill Hilton Jr.**

*Hilton Pond Center for Piedmont Natural History, 1432 DeVinney Road,  
York, South Carolina 29745-2119, USA  
research@hiltonpond.org*

On 4 January 2008 Donald Proctor spotted a hummingbird with a blue throat at his home near Rockville, SC on Wadlamaw Island, about 25 miles southwest of Charleston. Donald's wife Annabeth confirmed the sighting later that day and described the bird's vocalizations as "like a Ruby-throated Hummingbird with a frog in its throat."

The Proctors quickly contacted me via e-mail, so early on the morning of 6 January I drove to their Low Country residence and erected a radio-controlled portable wire trap in which I hung a sugar water feeder. At 7:05 a.m. in pre-dawn light I observed what was obviously a very dark hummingbird swoop past the trap. The bird made several more passes-by before entering the device and being captured at 7:21 a.m.

Even in dim light the bird's fully iridescent body glistened blue and green, and its red and black bill almost glowed (Fig. 1)—sure signs this was a male Broad-billed Hummingbird, *Cyananthus latirostris*. (Females are drab and except for a reddish lower mandible resemble female Ruby-throats.) The only species with which my in-hand bird might be confused is its congener, the adult male White-eared Hummingbird, *C. leucotis* (Johnsgard 1997). The latter has a similarly colored body and bill but typically sports a prominent diagonal white stripe behind its eye; in addition, the White-eared male's head is purplish. Both species have bright white undertail coverts; in a White-eared the white usually extends as a central line up the abdomen. The species further differ in their rectrices. When the Proctor's Broad-billed first approached the feeder, even in silhouette I could see his tail was heavily forked; the tail in White-eareds is square. In the hand, the top of the Broad-billed's tail was dull green while the undersides of the rectrices were metallic gun metal blue. The tail's ventral surface—which would show when a courting male is facing a female—is more colorful than the dorsal side.

After removing the Proctors' bird from the trap I placed his bill into the port on a sugar water feeder. The hummer drank readily and I fed him several times during the banding, measuring, and photographic process. I applied band #Y14597 to the Broad-billed Hummingbird's left leg and released him unharmed.

South Carolina's only other known Broad-billed occurred on 30 July 1985, as observed and reported by David and Julia Wise in the extreme northwest mountain province of the state. LeGrand (1986) summarized the

sighting in *American Birds* thus: “Although it could not be documented by photograph or by expert birders, an adult male Broad-billed Hummingbird at a Seneca, SC feeder 30 July 1985 was impeccably described and compared with noticeably smaller Ruby-throateds to rule out all other species . . . a first for the Southern Atlantic Coast Region if not for the entire Atlantic Coast.”



Figure 1. Broad-billed Hummingbird. Photo by Bill Hilton Jr.

Broad-billed Hummingbirds are indeed rare in the U.S.—especially as far east as the Carolinas. North Carolina’s first one appeared near New Bern on 7 Oct 2001 (LeGrand 2007), with another at Kill Devil Hills (Dare County) in mid-summer 2005 (*ibid*). The species breeds in extreme southeastern Arizona and throughout northern and central Mexico. The Arizona population migrates south, but it is believed Mexican Broad-billeds are primarily year-round residents not expected to show up at northerly locations. Nonetheless, there are now Broad-billed Hummingbird records for at least 19 states as far away as Oregon and Idaho or Michigan and Wisconsin (*fide* state birding checklists). There are even reports of Broad-billeds from Ontario and New Brunswick—a significant distance for a “non-migratory” hummingbird. What causes these birds to stray from “traditional” breeding and wintering grounds is anyone’s guess.

Based on careful examination, I suspected the Wadmalaw Broad-billed was a second-year male hatched sometime in 2007—especially because of

the extent of black on his bill, brown edging on much of the body plumage, and the pale gray tips on central tail feathers. However, because of my unfamiliarity with handling mid-winter Broad-billeds I took a more conservative approach and simply aged him as “after-hatch-year.”

Annabeth Proctor later informed me that “About three hours following his banding and release, the little Broad-billed Hummingbird re-established his territory and returned to normal behavior. It is amazing how quickly the other hummingbirds tried to take over his feeders.” The Proctors welcomed Carolinas birders to visit and observe their Broad-billed Hummingbird throughout the month until he disappeared, apparently sometime in late January or early February 2008.

Measurements and other attributes of Broad-billed Hummingbird #Y14597 included: date of capture: 06 Jan 2008; age/sex: After hatch year male (probable second year); weight: 3.37g; wing chord: 50.99mm; tail length: 35.0mm; tail fork: 9.0mm; culmen (upper bill ridge): 21.0mm; bill corrugations: none; molt: none noticeable.

An unexpected follow-up on the Proctor’s bird came in early August 2008 when a Broad-billed Hummingbird first appeared at a feeder at the New Bern home of Patti Holland in coastal North Carolina (Craven County), on the Neuse River about 300 miles directly northeast of Rockville, SC. This bird was recaptured on 9 November by Susan Campbell (LeGrand et al. 2009) and confirmed to be the individual I banded at the Proctors’ ten months previously. This was the third state record for the species in North Carolina and the second for the New Bern area. The bird was present at least until early February 2009 (Southern 2009). Color photographs taken by others at New Bern show a hummingbird with much brighter plumage—further evidence he was a second-year immature when banded at Rockville. One can only speculate whether this Broad-billed Hummingbird spent summer months in the Carolinas or whether he returned to his typical breeding grounds in Mexico and then made another trip to the Southeast.



Figure 2. Broad-billed Hummingbird. Photo by Bill Hilton Jr.

### **Acknowledgements**

I thank Annabeth Proctor for her initiative in reporting to me the Broad-billed Hummingbird, and I further appreciate her and her husband graciously hosting me as I banded and confirmed the bird’s identification. Thanks also

to fellow hummingbird bander Susan Campbell for letting me know about her recapture of the Rockville bird in New Bern. My hummingbird banding in the U.S. is supported in part by donations from individual members of the Carolina Bird Club.

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