

The Methow Naturalist

The mind is not a vessel to be filled, it is a fire to be kindled. Plutarch 80 CE

Catching Fire



Fire on Bally Hill in the Methow during the Carlton Complex fire July 2014

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Fire Ecology
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Anna's Hummingbird on the Move

Anna's Hummingbird

By Arthur Campbell



A male Anna's

In the last decade, the Methow's coterie of hummingbirds has welcomed a new species: Anna's hummingbird. The distinctive adult male Anna's tops his gray and green body with crown and throat feathers that glow pinkish-red in sunlight. Female and young Anna's also are dressed in gray and green tones, but lack the adult male's spectacular head feathering, and so are hard to distinguish from females and young of other hummingbird species.

Ornithologists in the 19th and early 20th century found Anna's hummingbirds nesting only in California west of the Sierras from San Francisco Bay and the northern Central Valley south to northern Baja California. Observers found Anna's hummingbirds to be notably early breeders, with the nesting season extending from December through May, timing that coincided with the blooming of several of the birds' favorite nectar-producing plant species. In addition to noting this early nesting schedule, observers also found that every year some Anna's, after the nesting season, wandered to eastern California, Arizona, and northern Mexico. Despite this inclination to wander after the breeding season, most probably in search of food, many or most Anna's remained in their breeding range throughout the year, and ornithologists viewed the species as basically sedentary.

In the first half of the 20th century, observers in California noticed an increase in the numbers of Anna's hummingbirds, which ornithologists attributed to the widespread planting of eucalyptus trees in California in the late 19th century. Eucalyptus trees flower from late fall through early spring, and the planted eucalyptus were an additional source of nectar during the breeding season.

This population increase in California certainly resulted in Anna's hummingbirds dispersing more widely in the post-breeding season, and by the middle of the 20th century, observers began seeing Anna's hummingbirds in the Pacific Northwest. In 1944, observers recorded Anna's hummingbirds in Oregon and on Vancouver Island. In the 1960s and 1970s, observers recorded Anna's at many locations in the Pacific Northwest including Seattle in 1964, Yakima in 1972, the British Columbia Okanagan in 1974, and Tacoma in 1976.

The Methow had its first record of an Anna's in 1979 at Basecamp (currently the Bush School) two miles northwest of Mazama. Three decades went by before the next observation was recorded on the eBird database: two Anna's visited a feeder between Twisp and Winthrop in 2010. Observations in the Methow have increased since 2010, and Methowans have now recorded Anna's in the valley in all four seasons. In just the current year, Anna's have appeared in the Rendezvous, Pearygin Lake State Park, near Dead Horse Lake just northwest of Twisp, and between Twisp and Carlton. Near to the Methow, Anna's have also been seen this year at Alta Lake State Park, Indian Dan Canyon, Brewster, along Lake Chelan, and in the Okanogan Valley.

Why the range of Anna's hummingbird has expanded so rapidly is a fascinating example of how our human activities can influence birds, and birds, in turn, can influence our activities. Probably the key factor facilitating the species' northward expansion

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An Anna's hummingbird nest, made largely out of *Parmelia* lichen since the mid-20th century has been the increase in human populations in the western United States and the attendant increase in introduced plantings and hummingbird feeders. Introduced plantings and feeders can provide a consistent source of food throughout the year, something particularly important to an Anna's hummingbird with stay-at-home tendencies. Anecdotal evidence also suggests a feedback mechanism has been in play here: hummingbird feeders increase the numbers and visibility of hummingbirds leading people to put up more hummingbird feeders, which increase the number of hummingbirds, et cetera.

Climate change has also facilitated the northward expansion of Anna's hummingbird. With Anna's inclination to be resident rather than migratory, annual minimum temperatures that Anna's are able to tolerate provide a key constraint on the species' range. As temperatures warm, the geographic area with suitable minimum temperatures has been expanding northward. For example, higher latitude areas in the Northern Hemisphere, such as northern Canada and portions of Alaska, have been warming approximately twice as fast as the entire globe, and observers have now seen

Anna's as far north as south-central Alaska and southern Yukon Territory.

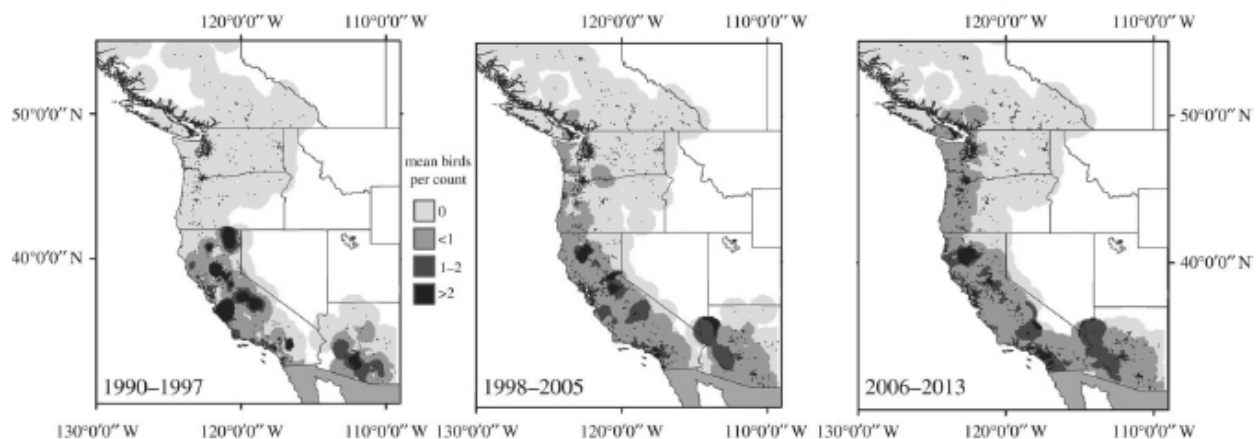
It seems likely that more and more Anna's will make their home in the Methow in the coming years. If you want to put up a hummingbird feeder to attract Anna's, and also attract other hummingbirds, make sure you first view the National Audubon Society website <https://www.audubon.org/news/hummingbird-feeding-faqs> –that provides information about the sugar solution to use and how often to clean the feeder. With a bit of luck, you may have a gem-like Anna's visit your home.

Acknowledgements

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An Anna's male toughing it out in winter; there must be a heated feeder nearby.



The distribution of Anna's hummingbirds in winter (January and February) at Project FeederWatch count sites over 24 years.