

***NOTE:** Around the time of the Ada County Costa's Hummingbird (late 2004) Shirley Sturts shared with me a report of another possible Costa's Hummingbird from Northern Idaho in 1996. I subsequently contacted the hummer's host (Dorrell) and got very interested in this report. Shortly thereafter I was asked by then IBRC Secretary Harry Krueger to review this record and compile my thoughts for review by the Committee. Below is a copy of the report I submitted to Harry.*

– Stacy Peterson
21 November 2006

5 December 2004

RE: Review / Opinion of 1996 Squaw Bay “Calypste” Hummingbird

Dear IBRC

On 28 October 2004, Shirley Sturts sent me some photos, rare bird reports, and email correspondence between the host and other observers regarding a “mystery” hummingbird from Squaw Bay, Idaho, seen between 7 and 30 May 1996.

This bird was apparently seen by a number of skilled observers, including at least Dan Svingen, Jim Acton, Kas Dumroese, Dale Goble, Susan Weller, Stephen Lindsay, and Sturts, yet the conclusions based on the reports submitted to the IBRC at that time (at least the ones available to me) showed widely divergent opinions on whether this bird was an Anna’s, or a hybrid between Anna’s and Costa’s. Interestingly, only email correspondence between the homeowner (Barbara Dorrell) and Lindsay provide any indication that the identification should actually be Costa’s, and I suspect that is the reason this record may be resubmitted to the Committee these years later (it is my understanding that the first round failed to accept the bird as Costa’s).

Materials I had to work with for this review:

Several photos (jpgs) taken by Dorrell and Weller. Most were of very poor quality, but a few (Weller’s) appeared to show significant enough detail on which conclusions could be drawn. The committee certainly has access to all these in original form, plus others, but for my evaluation, the best four images are:



Photo 1 (Susan Weller)



Photo 2 (Susan Weller)



Photo 3 (Barbara Dorrell)



Photo 4 (Barbara Dorrell)

Other materials in my possession:

- RARE BIRD REPORT – By Susan Weller
- LETTER FROM RICH STALLCUP – response by Stallcup based on Susan Weller’s photos (presumably the same ones copied above), solicited by Dan Svingen
- COMPOSITE RARE BIRD REPORT -- By Dan Svingen, Ila Svingen, & Kas Dumroese
- RARE BIRD REPORT (handwritten) – By Peder Svingen
- OBSERVATION NOTES; EMAIL PRINT OUT FROM “TWEETERS” AND SUBMITTED TO IBRC – By Dale Gobel
- EMAIL CORRESPONDENCE SUPPLIED BY STURTS – mostly between Barbara Dorrell and Stephen Lindsay. I don’t believe this material made it to the committee initially. Dorrell also forwarded me her copies of these email exchanges between her and Lindsay.

My initial opinion based on the photographs was that this bird could easily pass for an adult male Costa’s. I was excited and optimistic about the possibility of this bird being the first state record. I noted to Sturts that the body shape seemed somewhat sleeker and not as dumpy as I’d expect in Costa’s, but posture can be misleading in photographs.

The color of the gorget, in my opinion, really isn’t that problematic for a couple reasons. 1) The photos are scanned images of mediocre quality prints, and are apparently electronically adjusted post-scan, and 2) gorget color can be difficult to accurately capture on film, at least digital – I’ve taken dozens of digital pictures of Black-chinned gorgets and only a couple have accurately shown the purple iridescence.

Body shape and the relative size of various body parts (wing, tail, gorget “tails”, etc.) are perhaps more important in accurately determining the identity of this bird. To that end, my experience with Costa’s Hummingbird is limited. I’ve seen probably hundreds of Anna’s and Costa’s in the wild in California, but have not looked critically at the subtleties of identification in the field. As a licensed humbander, I’ve handled a handful of both species, mostly this past summer, but no adult male Costa’s. And in-hand examination relies on different characteristics for making an identification, compared to field observations or determining ID from photos.

I shared the photographs above (with permission) with the HUMBAND listserv – a private email group of licensed hummingbird banders. I also shared with them some of the basic (and conflicting) observations, such as apparent size of bird and gorget color, gleaned from the rare bird reports, not including names of the reporters.

I was mostly interested in hearing from banders in the southwest who have ample experience with this species. I did receive three responses from such folks, and a handful of responses from banders in the eastern USA with experience equal to or less than my own. Some of these responses should at best be considered opinions bantered about between “banding friends” and not something that should weigh heavily on the decision-making process of Bird Records Committee members. At the very least, pay close attention to the admitted lack of experience stated by many of these banders.

My preference is to leave out those contributions by banders who do not provide a substantive response, but at the request of Harry Krueger I include copies of ALL responses I received. Personally I only consider the responses by **Don Mitchell**, **Frank Baldrige**, and **Sheri Williamson** to be of any substantive value and therefore worthy of consideration. This is based on my personal experience with Mitchell and Williamson, and my understanding of the credentials and pertinent experience with Costa’s & Anna’s shared by all three. None of the other respondents really come close.

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BALDRIDGE is a long-time hummingbird researcher from California with considerable experience with hummingbirds of several species. Among his publications are:

Baldrige, F.A., Kiff, L.F., Baldrige, S.K., and Hansen, R.B. 1983. Hybridization of a Blue-throated Hummingbird in California. *Western Birds* 14: 17-30.

Baldrige, F.A. 1983. Plumage characteristics of juvenile Black-chinned Hummingbirds. *Condor* 85:102-105.

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MITCHELL has banded extensively in the Kern River Preserve in Kern County, California, where he worked largely with Costa’s and Anna’s, as well as Rufous and Allen’s Hummingbirds. Among other publications, he is the author of the Allen’s Hummingbird “Birds of North America” volume. I personally solicited his opinion, because I have banded hummingbirds with him in California and value his experience with Costa’s and Anna’s hummingbirds both in the field and in the hand.

Mitchell, D.E. 2000. Allen's Hummingbird (*Selasphorus sasin*). In *The Birds of North America*, No. 501 (A. Poole and F. Gill, eds.). Philadelphia: The Academy of Natural Sciences; Washington, D.C.: The American Ornithologists' Union.

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WILLIAMSON and her husband Tom Wood are the cofounders of the Southeastern Arizona Bird Observatory. She is a long-time hummingbird bander and is considered one of the leading experts dealing with southwestern hummingbird species. She is perhaps most well known as the author of Hummingbirds of North America in the Peterson Field Guides series. I personally solicited her opinion, as I believe she is the top expert in this field and very knowledgeable regarding hybridization in hummingbirds in particular.

Williamson, S.L. 2001. Hummingbirds of North America. Houghton Mifflin, Boston.

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As requested by Krueger, here is the entire HUMBAND communication (and personal responses) that resulted from my query, in the order responses were received.

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Hummingbird banding permit #22948

11/9/04

PRIVATE RESPONSE TO ME ONLY

If I were out in the field and saw what I saw in the photos, I would not hesitate to call it a COHU; everything seems consistent to me with that call. HOWEVER, this would be the first state record, and I'm not seeing a couple of absolute "clinchers" that I'd like to see for a first state record to rule out the very slim possibility of ANHU or hybrid. Are there any shots of at least a partially spread tail? That should be diagnostic. In one photo, I see another hummer in the background--any photos (or observer notes) noting relative size of the subject bird vs. a known species? COHU should be smaller than any other regular hummers up there, and ANHU larger (and a hybrid, I would guess, about the same size). Any observer notes on vocalizations or "tail-wagging" behavior? COHU sounds are so different from other hummers that I'd be suspicious if an experienced birder didn't note it, even if not familiar with COHU vocalizations.

If there aren't any additional "clinchers," though, I'd hesitate to consider the 1996 bird as a first state record.

I'll try to get back to you soon with additional thoughts after a more thorough look at the picks.

FOLLOW-UP on 11/10/04

I suspect many humband folks will have a strong opinion about ID of the bird, but keep in mind that the hurdle to clear for a first state record is and should be high. I think it was probably a Costa's, but I would likely vote it down as a first state record, especially since there is no good clinching tail shot, no record of vocalizations, tail pumping was absent, and size seems ambiguous--if it was a Costa's, especially a male, I think the observers would have been unanimous about it being small. Although the gorget color looks acceptably Costa-ish to me, I don't put too much stock in the color of the gorget, since there may be

individual color variation on top of variation due to angle of lighting, on top of variation due to optics / reproduction / scanning / etc. From what I remember of the photos, (I'll take another look when I have a chance) I would have liked the gorget tails to be a bit more elongated and I would have liked the tail to be a bit shorter relative to the wings to reduce the possibility it may be a hybrid ANHU X COHU.

You may want to pass along the additional evidence (observations of size, lack of tail-pumping and lack of vocalizations) to the humband folks in a second e-mail--this may temper some opinions.

FOLLOW-UP on 11/20/04

My thoughts haven't changed any--it was in all likelihood a COHU, but I think there was insufficient evidence to clinch it for a first state record.

DAVE PATTON

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Hummingbird banding permit #23105

11/10/04

PUBLIC RESPONSE TO HUMBAND NETWORK

I have almost no experience with Costa's and little with Anna's, but one thing I notice is the photo showing gorget color was taken on a bright day with glare involved. I have often seen the red of a feeder give the throat of a hummingbird a false red appearance. The size and shape look right for Costa's to me.

RUSTY TRUMP

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Hummingbird banding permit #22237-N

11/11/04

PUBLIC RESPONSE TO HUMBAND NETWORK

I have some field birding experience with both species, more so Anna's, and no banding experience with either. I agree with Dave, this looks like a Costa's to me too. I would not rely too heavily on colors in photos, or visually depending on lighting.

I too have seen red feeders play havoc on the color of hummers. Was there anything else noted about this bird that would indicate an Anna's besides the color of the gorget?

My vote would be for Costa's based on the photos. Have you had any response from the humbanders out west that see these birds more on a daily basis?

ALLEN CHARTIER

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Hummingbird banding permit #23156

11/11/04

PUBLIC RESPONSE TO HUMBAND NETWORK

I can wade in only as deep as Rusty and Dave, where I have field experience with both (more with Anna's) and no banding experience with either.

The bird looks like a Costa's to me, based on the shape of the "horns" on the gorget. They just seem too elongated and pointy for Anna's.

Hopefully you'll get some responses from those who have banded these species.

FRANK A. BALDRIDGE

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Hummingbird banding permit #21020

11/11/04

PRIVATE RESPONSE TO ME ONLY

Please excuse my delay in writing something coherent in regards to the "Idaho Mystery Hummer." I wanted to unearth some slides of both *C. costa* and *C. anna* in the hand (rather than consult a guide), and refer to some mensural characteristics mentioned in our BT hybrid article (but they are not useful here).

I would also like to preface my remarks by noting you apparently have already received some conflicting opinions from banders, and that the field identification of hummers is sometimes tricky for even experienced birders (in support of which I refer you to the misidentified *costa* on page 93 of the 1975 edition of Arnold Small's *Birds of California*).

F. Gary Stiles wrote a good article on that subject that appeared in *California Birds* (1971, #2, 41-54). On several occasions I almost convinced myself I was looking at a *costa* in the field, but had to admit it was just another *anna* (sometimes we see what we want to see). In Tulare County, where I did most of my banding, as of 1983, there were only 3 county records of *costa*. One was a wintering adult male that I banded and photographed. It probably would not have been accepted as a record without the mensural and photographic documentation.

Moving on, I think the records from BC [British Columbia in spring], statements regarding hybrids, and the "computer modeling" [of size of bird on feeder based on photographs] can, or should, be discounted out of hand, each for different reasons (in regards to hybrids the lack of any information as to measurements and feather shapes).

We have varying first-hand testimony as to gorget coloration. We primarily have some extremely poor photographs of a hummer taken in May, when we would expect to see a bird in either adult or juvenile plumage.

We can begin by tossing photograph number two (P2), though the gorget does not appear elongated, as in *costa*. P1 & P3 overall also suggest *anna*, though the bill is perhaps a bit short, the gorget appears possibly longer than normal, and the gorget color appears abnormal. Note the dusky-green below the gorget in P1 and at the side of the breast in P3, typical of *anna*. My slides of *costa* show more white in the throat and the sides more grayish.

[To interject – I am not 100% positive exactly which of the 4 photos he's referring to; I wish he'd made more identifying remarks in that regard. Saying "P1 & P3" isn't terribly helpful! -- Stacy]

P4 has problems with light/exposure and focus, which may make throat and sides of the breast appear lighter, as they do in this photograph. The color of the gorget is suggestive of *costa*, and the apparently radically elongated feathers at the end of the gorget are typical of *costa*. But note the glare on the feeder and its atypical color. While individual feathers can not be discerned, the length of the gorget suggests *costa*. But that photograph also suffers from glare and is of poor quality.

Sitting here in scientific obscurity, I see indications of *costa*, but I am uncomfortable in making a definite pronouncement. If I was on the state list committee, I would definitely take a pass, considering it would be a first state record. For a first state record, I would want to see better photographs of the bird (hopefully including in-the-hand shots of the head, remiges, and rectrices), and mensural data, preferably in conjunction with mensural data on *anna* taken by the same individual with the same equipment - or I would want the little mother (father) in my hand, along with comparative material.

FOLLOW-UP by Baldrige on 11/12/04

After reflection, I feel I should rephrase my comments. The strongest indication of *costa* is the elongated feather shown in the gorget of P4, and one might id on that basis alone. However, some of the other photos (both in quality and what they portray) raise questions and the possibility of a hybrid cannot be ruled out (but from the data given identifying its parentage would be voodoo science). We know these things stray, and it might be best to mention the observation in the list, noting that it was questionable.

BOB SARGENT

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Hummingbird banding permit #22237

11/12/04

PUBLIC RESPONSE TO HUMBAND NETWORK

Standing in ignorance up to my chin, I can only say that I am enjoying the discussion of Costa's. I have never banded this species. From what I have read and seen I would have suspected Costa's.

CHARLIE BROWER

PO Box 96

West Columbia, TX 77486

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Hummingbird banding permit #22280-J

11/12/04

PUBLIC RESPONSE TO HUMBAND NETWORK

My vote goes for Costa's. That is not from banding experience, as I have banded one of each.

FRANK BALDRIDGE

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Hummingbird banding permit #21020

11/12/04

PUBLIC RESPONSE TO HUMBAND NETWORK

Thanks Charlie, but is this like an election (where the votes of two idiots weight more than a moron - nothing personal). What is the rational behind your vote? Just curious. Peace.

CHARLIE BROWER

PO Box 96

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Hummingbird banding permit #22280-J

11/12/04

PUBLIC RESPONSE TO HUMBAND NETWORK

Frank and all,

The Costa's that I banded, I originally found on a CBC. It was a HYM [Hatch-Year Male]. I spent several

hours determining if it was an Anna's or Costa's. I had binocular views from about 15 feet, but no gorget color. I made the call then on size, bill length and shape, and I felt the birds proportions best matched Costa's. I went back the next day, trapped it, and banded it. Got my measurements, which confirmed Costa's. On this bird, I looked at the photos, my photos of both species, a couple of books, and went and got one of my feeders that is the same model that is shown in the photos, and measured it.

I am not saying that I am positive, but what I think it is.

KEVIN GILLOOLY

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Hummingbird banding permit #22902-M

11/22/04

PRIVATE RESPONSE TO ME ONLY

I've been away for the past 8 or 9 days and just checked in on my yahoo groups. I think you have a AHY male Costa's there. The descending gorget is obvious, but beyond that the roundness of the head makes me think a Costa's for sure. My experience also is that Anna's typically have "flatter" forecrowns. I've banded (72) Anna's and only (2) Costa's per my records in BandMgr.

I have both birds rather regularly here at my home in Tucson and have watched both for many hours over the last couple of years. Gorget color sometimes can appear variable on both birds due to lighting etc as you know.

As for hybrids, I haven't a clue. Of the nearly 1000 birds I've banded in the last (2) years, I've never had a bird that I thought fit that situation. I've had variations within a species but nothing rising to the degree where I thought I had a hybrid.

SHERI L. WILLIAMSON

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Hummingbird banding permit # 21101

11/30/04

PRIVATE RESPONSE TO ME ONLY

Hi, Stacy! Sorry to take so long to respond, but I just got back from a month of birding and "naturalizing" in Belize (grueling work, but someone has to do it.)

The whitish breast, apparent whitish midline, and gorget shape and color (though I never entirely trust

iridescence, especially in photos) all indicate that this bird is *not* a pure ANHU, but the extension of the tail well past the wing tips and the straight, stout bill argue strongly against a pure COHU. The gorget shape is more problematical, but the "tails" seem too wide at the base for a pure COHU. The forehead and lower gorget ("Adam's apple") are flattish in this bird, not rounded as they are in COHU.

I certainly wouldn't call it an "intergrade," which suggests the blending of two subspecies, but I'd definitely call it a hybrid.

Sorry it's not the answer you were hoping for, but half a Costa's is better than none, eh? It's too bad that this bird was originally written up as an ANHU (it's on the ANHU map in the Field Guide, but I've corrected my database). Maybe the fact that this issue was raised again is a hopeful sign that more birders are taking hummingbird ID seriously.

Since I wasn't able to go into much detail on hybrids in the field guide, I'd refer those looking for more in-depth information to the definitive paper on the subject:

Wells, S., R.A. Bradley, L.F. Baptista. 1978. Hybridization in *Calypte* hummingbirds. *Auk* 95(3): 537-549.

The map showing breeding range overlap between the two species is outdated, of course, but interesting from a historical perspective.

MY THOUGHTS: The above conclusions were based largely on photographs. I had the privilege of reading some, if not all, of the Rare Bird Reports submitted as well as email correspondence between Dorrell and Lindsay and others. It's clear that Dorrell and Lindsay were convinced it's a Costa's, and Oregon humbander Mike Patterson in email correspondence with them a few years ago agreed.

I have no experience with Dorrell or Lindsay, and my overall positive experience with Patterson does include a time when he publicly jump the gun on a *Selasphorus* hummingbird photo-identification from the northeast a couple years ago -- an identification that turned out to be clearly inaccurate as better photos became available. We all do that from time to time (indeed I initially thought this bird to be a likely good Costa's based on the photographs alone), but I can't help but ponder whether or not he's doing the same thing with this "Costa's" identification.

Email correspondence sent third or fourth hand might be problematic, and I hesitate to even give much credence to the emails between Lindsay, Dorrell, and Patterson. I sincerely doubt they would hold much value in the ornithological record years down the road. I trust that if the Committee finds it important, they'll either solicit a full report from those persons or decide to accept the emails on face value.

But just considering the official Committee material submitted by observers to the Committee and forwarded to me by Sturts, I am struck by several things:

1) The size of the bird varies by observer and even among groups of observers who wrote "composite" rare bird reports. But in virtually all cases, the bird is described in such a way that its size exceeds that expected for Costa's. And these conclusions come from birders that I respect as careful observers (Dumroese, Svingen, Goble, etc....)

2) Color of the gorget varies by observer. As stated earlier, gorget color can be tricky for a number of reasons, but IF this bird were a hybrid, we might be given the option of accepting the colors at face value as shown on the photographs and described in the reports. I'm concerned, however, by emailed admissions (*fide* Dorrell) that at least some of the photos were electronically altered. Indeed, many of the photos are incredibly dark and virtually useless unless altered somehow, but I would still like to see the negatives before making a judgment on color renditions for this particular record. But again, color is not as important as structure and/or shape in my opinion.

3) No one mentioned seeing the bird exhibit the typical Costa's "tail-wagging" – indeed, a few observers noted that this feature was NOT seen. Given the bird's presence for nearly a month and the quality of observers who saw the bird and filled out reports, I would expect this feature to have been observed if it were present. Costa's does "wag" its tail to a significant degree. The fact that this was apparently watched for and not observed raises doubts to me.

4) Only Dorrell reports hearing the bird vocalize (and she only heard it once and described it as a rapid ticking, according to an emailed response I solicited from her in November 2004. I do not know if this was based on memory or notes, so I can't put much stock in the response. Costa's vocalizations are very distinctive – their chip-notes remind me of a Bushtit. This feature would be a nice one to add in the "Costa's" column, and the lack of anyone but Dorrell hearing vocalizations raises concerns.

The idea of a hybrid among Costa's and Anna's is not something that should be taken lightly. As Williamson suggested, the 1978 article in *Auk* by Wells, et.al., contains a wealth of information. They document eleven (11) hybrids between Costa's and Anna's in California within a few years, including several studied in-hand. Many of the birds exhibited characters either intermediate between the two species, or showing bias for one species or the other depending on the character in question. One interesting tidbit I found in that article was the observation that vocalizations can vary in hybrids. Indeed at least one presumed hybrid was heard vocalizing very similarly to a typical Costa's. With that in mind, I would use caution in basing the identity of the Squaw Bay bird as a Costa's based on the recollection of a single observer (Dorrell) who admittedly has zero experience with the species and therefore couldn't be expected to recognize a slightly atypical hybrid vocalization, given the evidence that may support a potential hybrid in this case (see Williamson's response above in particular).

Basic shape comparisons (wing to tail length, body posture, head shape, etc.) are probably more useful without regard to gorget color, and here Williamson's expertise weighs heavily on my mind. Williamson has indeed expressed concern with the length of the tail relatively to the wings as part of her conclusion that the bird was not a pure Costa's. I didn't notice that at first, but upon review of a number of adult male Costa's photos available on the web and other published resources, Williamson's point is well taken. This is a feature I'll be more conscious of in the future. Also, the forehead shape is flatter on this bird, as would be expected in an Anna's, as Williamson states. I find it interesting that Gillooly states the opposite from his perspective, but his limited experience may play a role in distinguishing these subtleties.

In conclusion, I cannot provide definitive support that the 1996 Squaw Bay bird is a Costa's Hummingbird. At best I'd say "Calypse" hummingbird, identification uncertain. This has been a very educational venture for me, and I trust that the Committee will benefit from this experience as well. Please don't hesitate to contact me with any additional questions or comments.

(signed)

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ADDENDUM:

Upon reviewing more photos later submitted by Dorrell it becomes even more clear to me that this bird is simply too large and robust for a pure Costa's. Especially in comparison to the other hummingbirds in the vicinity of the feeder -- even the one (unidentified) hummer feeding at the adjacent port (photos 6 & 7) -- the "mystery hummer" dwarfs this bird! Even if we granted that this visitor's silhouette was that of a Calliope, the "mystery hummer" still is far too large. Male Costa's are small...

--Stacy Peterson
11/21/2006