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Kale, H. W., II, B. Pranty, B. M. Stith, and C. W. Biggs. 1992. The atlas of the breeding birds of Florida. Final Report. Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission, Tallahassee, Florida.

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Ruby-throated Hummingbird

Archilochus colubris

English settlers named hummingbirds for the sound of their buzzing flight. The Ruby-throated Hummingbird is the only breeding hummingbird in eastern North America. It breeds from the lower Canadian provinces south to Texas and central Florida and winters from south Texas to Panama.

Habitat. In Florida, Ruby-throated Hummingbirds are found in a variety of habitats, including hammocks, mixed pine and hardwood forests, hardwood forests, stream floodplains, and agricultural and suburban areas.

They feed on small insects and nectar, showing a preference for red, orange, or yellow flowers. A wide variety of native and exotic flowers are available for Ruby-throated Hummingbirds in Florida (for example, see Austin 1975).

After a courtship display flight, copulation takes place on the ground, and the promiscuous male departs. On a small branch, the female builds a tiny nest of plant material held together with spider webs and disguised with lichen. It is usually 3 to 6 m (10 to 20 ft) up in a tree and is often placed near water.

Sometimes an old nest is refurbished. In it, the female lays 2 white eggs, 1.3 cm (1/2 in) long. The incubation period is 11 to 14 days, and the nestlings fledge after 14 to 28 days in New England. In the hot weather of the south, the young may develop more quickly, because the female can brood the young less and feed them more (Tyler in Bent 1940).

Seasonal Occurrence. Ruby-throated Hummingbirds begin to return to Florida as early as late February, and breeding begins in May.

Status. Evidence of breeding has been found in every county in the state, but there are few records from south Florida. Sprunt (1954) reported that Ruby-throated Hummingbirds seldom breed in south Florida and included only 1 confirmed record. He (1963) later recorded 2 nests in Corkscrew Swamp in 1961. This location has had successful nesting in 3 out of 4 recent years (Paul 1989). The first nesting record for Sarasota County was established in Oscar Scherer State Park in 1987 (Paul 1987).

The small lichen-camouflaged nests of Ruby-throated Hummingbirds are difficult to find, which may account for the large number of "possible" and "probable" breeding records on the Atlas map.

Summering birds are most often observed visiting sugar-water feeders and garden flowers, and most confirmed breeding records were obtained by observing family groups of the female and her young.

This species has been on the Audubon Blue List since 1978 because its population is said to be declining (Tate 1986), but there is little evidence of a decline in Florida (Stevenson and Anderson 1994).

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