

**First Recorded Nesting of Ruby-throated Hummingbird
(*Archilochus colubris*) in Central Park and
New York County – Spring 2014**

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In the Second Breeding Bird Atlas of New York State (McGowan and Corwin 2008), data are presented to suggest that Ruby-throated Hummingbird (*Archilochus colubris*) has been on the increase as a breeding species in most of New York State from 1965 to 2005. However, nesting records from New York City were scant during this same time frame. Here we present the first known breeding attempt by this species in Central Park, Manhattan which also represents the first published record for New York County. We also summarize what is known of the current breeding status of this hummingbird in other parts of New York City, and the historical record of this bird as a breeding species in the five boroughs.

In late spring 2014 in Central Park, on 27 May and then again on 29 May, our bird walk group saw a female Ruby-throated Hummingbird gathering nesting material from the flowers of a willow tree (*Salix* sp.) at the upper lobe of the Central Park lake. She also perched nearby on both mornings, and we could clearly see the nesting material in her beak. However, we could not locate the nest, but were certain it must be in that area. On the afternoon of 29 May, Peter Stoppard who had been on our morning bird walk, located the almost completed nest approximately five meters above ground level in a Sweetgum (*Liquidamber styraciflua*), about 20 meters from where we first saw the female collecting nesting material. The nest was on a small branch approximately two meters from the outside of the tree. The nest tree was at the edge of a small body of water

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and afforded easy access and exit to the female hummingbird. See Figure 1 below. No male hummingbird was ever seen in the area of the nest, nor in Central Park, during the late May to mid-June time frame.



Figure 1. Female Ruby-throated Hummingbird in at her nest in Central Park (New York County) on 1 June 2014. Photograph © Deborah Allen.

By 1 June before 09:00am, the female was spending approx. 60-70% of her time on her nest, and we assumed that eggs had been laid on or close to this date. During the course of the next several days, many birders observed the hummingbird on her nest with no sign of distress by the bird. On the morning of 14 June at 07:15am, RDC observed a female Baltimore Oriole (*Icterus galbula*) within 0.5 meters of the nest, and the female hummingbird flying at, and possibly striking, the head of the oriole. After

one minute, the oriole left the area. However at approx. 09:00am on the same morning, the female oriole returned, and two birders and one photographer witnessed the oriole consume one egg, despite nest defense by the hummingbird. Photographs by R. Brewka show that the egg eaten by the oriole contained an almost fully-developed embryo. The oriole then took the second hummingbird egg away, presumably to feed to her young. Both eggs most likely would have hatched in the next 1-3 days. Robinson *et al.* (1996) give 12-14 days as the incubation period, with eggs “hatching asynchronously by 1-3 days.” From 09:00-10:30am, the female hummingbird remained in the immediate area of the nest, even sitting on the empty nest for a short while. After 14 June 2014, she was sometimes seen in that area of Central Park again (eg., 6 July).

Accounts of predation on hummingbirds by new world orioles are very rare. Wright (1962) reported a Baltimore Oriole that killed one of four Ruby-throated Hummingbirds while the oriole and the hummingbird foraged on *Caragana* flowers in New Brunswick, Canada. Ashman (1977) tells of an adult female Bullock’s Oriole (*Icterus bullockii*) eating a *Selasphorus* hummingbird on South Farallon Island, California.

According to eBird (Cornell) reports on-line and other sources, Ruby-throated Hummingbirds have been seen during the nesting season (late May through late June) in 2012-14 in each of the four other boroughs of the City, and this suggests to us that this species nests every year somewhere within New York City:

Bronx County (Pelham Bay Park), confirmed nesting by B. Keogh and photographed by D. Allen (25 June 2013) – see Fig. 2 below.

Kings County (Prospect Park), confirmed nesting on 24 May by B. Manian as reported by R. Jett (2012):

<http://citybirder.blogspot.com/2012/06/brooklyn-hummingbirds.html>

Queens County (Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge), a single bird on 21 June submitted by T. Preston (2014):

<http://ebird.org/ebird/view/checklist?subID=S18851369> . An adult female was also observed by the authors in the same area on 7 June 2014.

Richmond County (Cemetery of the Resurrection), a single bird on 29 June submitted by A. Ciancimino (2014):

<http://ebird.org/ebird/view/checklist?subID=S18941305> .



Figure 2. Female Ruby-throated Hummingbird at her nest in Pelham Bay Park (Bronx County) on 24 June 2013. This nest was constructed with many more lichens than the Central Park nest. Photograph © Deborah Allen.

In the late 19th century, Ruby-throated Hummingbird was likely a widespread breeding species in New York City. E. P. Bicknell (see Griscom 1926) regarded it as a common summer resident in Bronx County. However, by the early 20th century, Griscom (1923) provided no evidence for breeding in New York City. Cruickshank (1942) wrote: “It becomes scarce or absent as a breeding bird near New York City and seldom nests within the limits of the metropolis.” He only mentions having seen a nest in Bronx Park (probably the one described by Williams 1924), but provides no date of this observation. Bull (1964) reported Ruby-throated Hummingbird as a local breeder in the area, but does not present any evidence for this species nesting in any of the five boroughs.

By comparison, in Richmond County, the historical record is more extensive. Siebenheller (1981) reports that A. Hollick made a journal entry on 3 July 1871 on the discovery of a hummingbird nest on Staten Island. Others including G. Hicks (1887) and W. T. Davis (16 June 1900) also recorded seeing hummingbird nests in that borough. Siebenheller (1981) writes, "As late as 1955 the species was included on the breeding bird list, but since that time there have been no breeding records, and hummingbirds now are seen only as migrants." Indeed, the 2000 Checklist of birds of Staten Island (Section of Natural History 2000) lists the Ruby-throated Hummingbird as a "former breeder." The Breeding Bird Atlas (McGowan and Corwin 2008) lists the species as a "probable" breeder in a single block on Staten Island for the 2000-2005 time frame. Since approx. spring 2007 (*fide* H. Fischer) Ruby-throated Hummingbird has nested in Clove Lakes Park; on 7 June 2011 (*fide* C. Barron), an active nest was observed here. Also (*fide* C. Barron) in different parts of Richmond County including Randall Manor (near Silver Lake Park and Allison Pond Park), Grant City, and (*fide* H. Fischer) Grymes Hill, hummingbirds have been seen in May-June 2014. Generally, southbound migrant Ruby-throated Hummingbirds arrive in mid-July throughout Richmond County, and remain for a few days to several weeks.

Comparing historical and recent records of breeding Ruby-throated Hummingbirds, we find that dates for nesting phenology are similar: females have been seen sitting on nests as early as 24 May 2012 (Kings County); 30 May 1924 (Bronx County); 1 June 2014 (New York County); and as late as 14 June 2011 (Richmond County). Young have left the nest from (approx.) 19-23 June 2012 (Kings County) and 30 June to 2 July 1924 (Bronx County). For 2014 in Central Park, we estimate (using a rough guide of 21 days in the nest), that young would have fledged in the 6-10 July time frame.

In summary, Ruby-throated Hummingbird seems to be increasing as a breeding species in New York City since at least 2010. It may also be that an increasing number of observers are out looking for birds locally, and the use of the internet (world wide web) for reporting the occurrence of this and other species is also being employed more often. Ruby-throated Hummingbird is one of three hummingbird species reported for New York County since 2000. The other two were Calliope Hummingbird (*Selasphorus calliope*), see Stewart 2001; and Rufous Hummingbird (*Selasphorus rufus*), see McGuinness 2012.

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