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Jane and Earl Youngstrom
1603 First Avenue North
Clear Lake, IA 50428

Dear Youngstroms,

Ron Andrews sent me the photo that you took of the strange hummingbird. I am virtually positive that the bird is a Rufous Hummingbird, a species that normally is found in western United States but that has the habit of sometimes wandering east in late summer and fall. In recent years, there have been a number of records from other midwestern states as well as several from Iowa. I have turned the photo over to the Records Committee of the Iowa Ornithologists' Union, a statewide group of birders. They will look at the photo and should be able to come to some agreement as to what the bird is.

The first record we had of this species in Iowa was in late September 1984 when one showed up at Chester (on the Minnesota border east of you). That bird almost certainly was a Rufous Hummingbird but because of the unusual plumage it showed, it couldn't be identified with certainty. In July 1986, a male was seen and photographed at St. Olaf in northeastern Iowa and another bird returned to that same yard again this past summer. This past weekend I learned that another was seen in Cedar Rapids earlier this fall. Thus the bird you saw is only of only about 5 such records for Iowa and certainly is a valuable record for the state.

I would guess that a few of the birds wander into Iowa almost every year but until people started putting out hummingbird feeders, they were never seen. I think the increasing interest in bird feeding and sugarwater feeders will mean we will get more records of this bird. The fact that one was seen in the same yard two years in a row suggests they might come back. It would probably be worth watching your feeder next year to see if your bird returns.

I certainly appreciate your help in bringing this record to my attention and for providing the photo. Such records help us considerably in better understanding the birds of Iowa.

Sincerely,

James J. Dinsmore
Professor, Animal Ecology
President, Iowa Ornithologists' Union