

BIRD EXPLORER

Rufous Hummingbird

BY HEATHER PALADINI

The most common hummingbird in Oregon is the Rufous Hummingbird, *Selasphorus Rufus*. We begin seeing them in the Applegate Valley in spring, as they return from their overwintering grounds in Mexico to spend the warmer months here.

The Rufous Hummingbird is known for being one of the feistiest hummingbirds. It is incredibly territorial and defensive and can scare away birds many times its size with its dive-bombing attack. Rufous Hummingbirds, which measure about three inches in length, exhibit sexual dimorphism, which means there are noticeable differences between adult males and females. Adult males are almost entirely a rusty, or rufous, orange, with a bright white chest and a fiery red and iridescent throat, which they use to attract mates and deter predators and intruders. Some adult males have iridescent green on their backs, while their female counterparts are mostly green with rusty flanks and patches of rust on their green tails, with a bright white chest.

In the spring, Rufous Hummingbirds live along the West Coast in northern California, Oregon, Washington, Alaska, and parts of Idaho and Montana. They overwinter to the south in Mexico. The Rufous Hummingbird has the longest

migratory journey of all birds, relative to its body size, traveling over 3,000 miles one-way from as far north as Alaska to Mexico.

Rufous Hummingbirds depend on nectar and insects as their primary food source. Therefore, they migrate to warmer climates in the fall and winter as nectar and insects become scarce in their northern range.

Their springtime northward migration aligns with the blooming of our native manzanita shrubs, *Arctostaphylos*, a family of plants in the Ericaceae, or heather, family. Rufous Hummingbirds and manzanita have a strong mutualistic relationship. Manzanita's early-blooming flower is a favorite food of the Rufous Hummingbird. The small, bell-shaped flowers with their tubular structure are the perfect shape for their long, slender bills, and the flowers provide the nectar that hummingbirds need to sustain them on their journey and to prepare for the breeding season. In return, hummingbirds help pollinate the manzanita. Thus, each ensures the other's survival in perpetuity.



Rufous Hummingbird. Photo: Anne Goff.

Rufous Hummingbirds begin nesting between April and July, depending on the climate of their locality. Their nests are tiny, only about 1.5 inches across, and are made of bark, moss, and lichen, filled with soft downy fluff like that of thistle, and glued together with spiderwebs. Their little white eggs are the size of jellybeans and are laid in clutches of two or three.

The Rufous Hummingbird's enhanced spatial memory helps it remember the locations of specific flowers and feeders from one year to the next, making it a rather efficient collector of nectar. Like all hummingbirds, the Rufous is an important pollinator, playing a role in the reproduction of many flowering plants. It is a food source for many predatory birds, including hawks and owls.

Unfortunately, the population of the Rufous Hummingbird has declined 67 percent since 1970, due to a variety of mostly human-induced conditions: habitat loss, climate change, invasive species, and pesticide use.

Attract hummingbirds to your garden

If you want to attract more Rufous Hummingbirds to your garden, remember that, as with any pollinator, they need sources of food, shelter, shade, and water.

Hummingbirds are attracted to bright red, pink, and orange colors. This is why most hummingbird feeders are bright red. Please note that nectar from flowers is not red, even when the flower is red; it is the bright red flower that attracts the hummingbird to the nectar, so the "nectar" in the feeder need not be red. In fact, red dye can be harmful to hummingbirds. You can easily make your own nectar by mixing one part sugar with four parts water, stirring until the sugar is dissolved.

Even better, you can create a more ideal hummingbird habitat by adding nectar-rich, tubular-shaped flowers that are orange, pink, and red to your garden and green spaces. Some varieties to consider are honeysuckle, bee balm, columbine, hummingbird sage, red flowering currant, Oregon grape—and don't forget the manzanita.

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Summer update from Star Ranger Station

Happy summer to the Applegate community and our valued partners!

Over the past several months, Forest Service (FS) staff have undergone quite a few transitions. While it's always bittersweet to say goodbye to colleagues, we're excited for them as they move on to new adventures. One change that will directly impact the Siskiyou Mountains Ranger District (SMRD) is the upcoming retirement of District Ranger Jen Sanborn, effective June 1. Jen has dedicated 36 years to federal service, primarily here in southern Oregon. Her career has been split between the Bureau of Land Management's Medford District and the U.S. Forest Service on the Fremont-Winema and Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forests.

With all the changes, two questions commonly arise about recreation access and wildfire response this summer. We're happy to share that recreation and district crews have been working hard preparing for the season—clearing roads, prepping campsites, and removing hazardous trees near campgrounds, trailheads, and day-use areas. Most campgrounds opened by May 1. Some services, like bathroom cleaning and maintenance, may happen less frequently this summer.

On the wildfire front, we're in good shape. Our engines are fully staffed, and we're prepared for the season ahead.

Beginning mid-June, crews will shift to seven-day staffing schedules. Dutchman Lookout will also be staffed, depending on snow levels. When not engaged in fire suppression or critical training, fire crews will also support high-priority fuels-reduction projects across the district.

In May, we removed the gate on Forest Service Road 1050 (Elliott Creek Road), near the private inholding known as Joe Bar. The chain of locks and the privately sourced gate post will be available for pickup at the Star Ranger Station. Removing the gate has reopened access to several trailheads and around 45 square miles of public lands.

We will also be installing a new gate on Forest land along the 1060 Road to restrict motorized access to the Blue Ledge Mine Superfund Site.

Project Updates

Upper Applegate Watershed Restoration Project (UAWRP) Environmental Assessment. This spring, pile-burning activities were conducted as part of the UAWRP. While broader project work is temporarily on pause, we have completed the planning and groundwork needed for long-term restoration goals. For more information, including maps, visit fs.usda.gov/r06/rogue-siskiyou/projects/archive/52305.

Thompson (formerly Grayback) Shaded Fuel Break Categorical

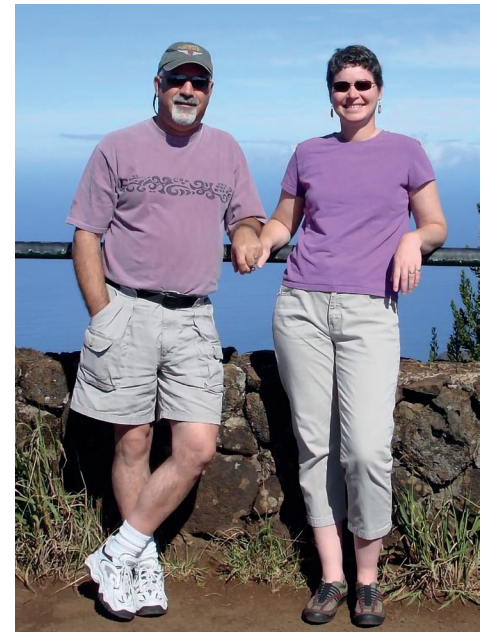
Exclusion. This important fuels-reduction project along FS Roads 1010 and 1020 proposes thinning, piling, pile burning, and under burning on approximately 1,000 acres. Community input has been vital to project development. Remaining environmental surveys are scheduled for completion this year. We hope to have a decision signed by winter 2025, with implementation potentially beginning next spring. For project details, visit fs.usda.gov/r06/rogue-siskiyou/projects/63141.

Yellowjacket Environmental Assessment (formerly Little Applegate EA). The Yellowjacket project aims to strengthen landscape resilience to wildfire while connecting fuels reduction work across the Upper Applegate Watershed and Ashland Forest Resiliency Project areas. It also supports local economies through timber production. The project is moving forward under an Emergency Action Determination, in alignment with Executive Order 14225, *Immediate Expansion of American Timber Production* (March 1, 2025).

So far, project teams have been refining the scope of work through field visits and site evaluations. Public involvement opportunities will be offered once a more detailed plan is finalized. Stay tuned!

Staying Informed

GovDelivery: Our primary communication tool for project updates and news. Customize your subscription at public.govdelivery.com/accounts/USDAFS/subscriber/new. Need help?



Jen Sanborn (right) with her husband Doug (left).

Contact Amanda Merz at amanda.merz@usda.gov.

Forest Webpage: Our website was recently updated. Our new homepage is: fs.usda.gov/r06/rogue-siskiyou. View current and recent projects at fs.usda.gov/r06/rogue-siskiyou/projects.

Rogue River Siskiyou National Forest (RRSNF) Facebook Page: Follow us for highlights, updates, and forest happenings at facebook.com/R6RRSNF.

We're looking forward to a safe and enjoyable summer and hope to see you out in the forest!

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