

OBSERVATIONS OF AN ANNA'S HUMMINGBIRD NESTING ON A WIND CHIME IN VICTORIA, BRITISH COLUMBIA

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Abstract

From 19 January to 9 June 2008 I watched the daily nesting behaviour of an Anna's Hummingbird (*Calypte anna*) at my home in Royal Oak near Victoria, British Columbia. The nest site, on a wind chime, is apparently the first reported for the species. The time required to build a nest, the kind of nest materials, and the length of the incubation period were consistent with other studies; the fledging period of 30 days, however, was four days longer than the maximum previously reported.

Introduction

Since its arrival in Victoria, British Columbia in 1944, Anna's Hummingbird (*Calypte anna*) has become a familiar year-round resident on southeastern Vancouver Island and the south mainland coast. It has also expanded its range into the southern interior of the province where it is now a rare resident (Campbell et al. 1990).

Fifteen years after its arrival on southern Vancouver Island the province's first nest was discovered along the Cowichan River on 6 July 1958 (Guiguet 1978). Since then many nests have been reported and all have been located on branches in trees. These include native species such as Douglas-fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*), grand fir (*Abies grandis*), Sitka spruce (*Picea sitchensis*), western redcedar (*Thuja plicata*), western hemlock (*Tsuga heterophylla*), bigleaf maple (*Acer macrophyllum*), black cottonwood (*Populus balsamifera* ssp. *trichocarpa*), Garry oak (*Quercus garryana*), red alder (*Alnus rubra*), and western flowering dogwood (*Cornus nuttallii*), and introduced species including flowering plum (*Prunus triloba*) and sequoia (*Sequoia* sp.) (Campbell et al. 1990, Barnard and Campbell 2007, R.W. Campbell pers. comm.).

In other parts of its range in North America, the

Anna's Hummingbird is primarily a tree-nester but there is a single occurrence of a female building a nest on an insulated telephone wire (Russell 1996).

The purpose of this article is to report the nesting of Anna's Hummingbird on a wind chime in a residential region of Royal Oak, BC, and provide insight into the successful fledging of young during the 2008 nesting season.

Breeding Chronology

Although the nest was observed almost daily from my living room window (Figure 1), the following notes, in chronological order, are the most noteworthy:

19 January: First sighting of a nest being built outside our living room window on a dragonfly window chime under the eaves trough. The nest was being built on the horizontal glass wing of the dragonfly (Figure 2). The wing is only about an inch and a half wide! The nest was very small at this point – only about 1/3 of its final height. The female used



Figure 1. Lance and Angela Bull admiring the location of an Anna's Hummingbird nest on a wind chime outside their front room window in Royal Oak, BC. 21 February 2008 (R. Wayne Campbell).

tiny twigs, mosses from an ornamental tree in our yard, and paint chips from the exterior wall of our house. This was the exact day I found out I was also expecting a baby!! The Anna's Hummingbird made incredible progress over the following three to four days.



Figure 2. The female Anna's Hummingbird built her tiny nest on one of the glass wings of a dragonfly that was part of a wind chime. Royal Oak, BC. 19 January 2008 (Lance Bull). BC Photo 3631a.

1 February: The female laid an egg and remained on the nest 24 hours-a-day only leaving briefly to feed at a nearby hummingbird feeder. We put out two feeders as soon as we spotted the nest – one with the store bought mix and the other with plain sugar and water. The female did not like the pre-made mix that we bought at all but drank constantly from the feeder with sugar and water. So we discontinued the store-bought mix.

10 February: The female seems to have stopped building the nest now and it was at its full height. She still remains on the egg constantly when not fixing the nest or feeding. She is never gone more than 10-20 seconds from the nest.

14 February: The egg hatched on Valentine's Day! The female fed the nestling constantly! It seemed like an awful lot of feedings for such a tiny bird.

24 February: The nestling is finally big enough that the tip of its beak can be seen over the top of the nest when the female is feeding it (Figure 3). The

female is no longer sitting on the nest brooding the nestling but now only comes to feed it. When not feeding the nestling she remains very close to the nest. The feeding mother looks like a jack hammer when feeding its baby. It is done with such force it is amazing the youngster survives each feeding!



Figure 3. Female Anna's Hummingbird ready to feed a large nestling whose bill is just visible over the top of the nest. Royal Oak, BC. 21 February 2008 (R. Wayne Campbell). BC Photo 3631b.

28 February: The nestling is starting to stretch its wings periodically throughout the day. It lifts its rear end and tail feathers out of the nest to defecate away from the nest. I am continually amazed at how far the excrement is expelled. It hits the living room window that is 60-90 cm from the nest. The head of the nestling can now frequently be seen above the top of the nest.

4-6 March: During this period the female often leaves the yard, probably on foraging forays, but usually frequents a large ornamental 4.6 m from the nest. She always perches on the same branch even though the tree is large. The growing nestling is fed less frequently.

13 March: The nestling has grown so big that it seems too big for the nest. It almost looks like the female incubating except that the beak is smaller and has no color (brown/grey only). At times the nestling appeared to be panting heavily with labored breathing. I was very concerned and the female had

not been seen all day. I thought that it was dying of thirst and hunger, or very sick, and that it had been abandoned.

14 March: The near fledgling perched on the edge of the nest (Figure 4) most of the day and cleaned itself regularly. It stretched and flapped its wings several times and looked like it was on the verge of flight. The female was spotted several times today feeding the nestling which alleviated my fear that it had been abandoned.



Figure 4. The large nestling Anna's Hummingbird perched on the rim of its nest for most of the day on 14 March 2008. Royal Oak, BC. (Lance Bull). BC Photo 3631c.

15 March: From 0800-1000 hrs, I watched the nestling practicing as it was ready to take its inaugural flight. It was also actively preening. The female still carries on feeding. The nestling made several brief attempts to hover about an inch above the nest sometimes hanging on to the nest with its feet.

At 1300 hrs the nestling flew from the nest and landed in a shrub about 1.8 m away. It remained in the exact same spot for hours. The female flew from the feeder to the nest and found the young had fledged. Amazingly she then flew directly to the fledgling in the shrub and fed it just as regularly as she did when it was in the nest. Perhaps by habit, but every time the female went to feed the juvenile she first visited the feeder, then flew to the empty nest, and finally

to the shrub! It seemed so poignant that the young hummingbird flew for the first time on my birthday.

In the afternoon we saw another Anna's Hummingbird land on a branch directly in front of the juvenile. At first I thought it was the attending female but then when it turned around it suddenly jumped on top of the juvenile's back and started violently pecking at it. I ran outside screaming and clapping to scare the attacker away. It worked but the juvenile was found on its back clinging to the branch, looking completely dead. The body looked misshapen with the wings slightly bent but outspread. My husband examined it as I was too upset to see it injured. As he approached the bird it had managed to hold on to the branch and was able to pull itself upright. Once upright, the hummingbird flew and landed on a fence. Since I was concerned that the hummingbird would leave our yard and not be protected my husband flushed it back in to the yard. It flew directly to the same bush where he had been sitting for hours since leaving the nest. The mother did not seem to be anywhere in sight during the attack but about 15 minutes later she returned and began feeding it. Obvious she was oblivious to the attack.

Around dinner time, the juvenile hummingbird flew out of our yard and for about 10 minutes remained out of sight. The female returned to the usual bush for feeding and quickly departed in the same direction the juvenile had flown. Within 10 minutes the fledged bird returned to the same shrub it was attacked and remained in it for the rest of the day and night.

16 March: In the morning I noticed that the juvenile was still in the same bush and perched on the same branch. It practices flying within a 0.6 m circle, then returns to the same branch. A few hours later it flew to various low branches on shrubs in the yard. Once it flew up into the ornamental tree and perched on the same branch where its mother sat during the first few weeks after hatching. About dinner time the juvenile fed at the feeder for the first time and flew back to its favourite bush where it continued to either sit very still or practice flying. Soon the female came to feed it and then disappeared for an hour. For the first time I noticed that when the young hummingbird moves around the yard it "chirps" to let its mother know where the next feeding should

be! Not surprisingly, she instantly follows the sound and commences feeding.

20 March: Until today, only the female (Figure 5) and juvenile hummingbird had visited the feeder but now there is suddenly a non-stop stream of other hummingbirds. My "family" may have been scared away.



Figure 5. Female Anna's Hummingbird at feeder that was utilized daily during the nesting period. Royal Oak, BC. 20 March 2008 (Lance Bull).

21-22 March: There is still a constant stream of Anna's Hummingbirds, and now Rufous Hummingbirds (*Selasphorus rufus*), at the feeder, but still no sign of my "family".

26 March: The juvenile was spotted at the feeder twice in 45 minutes in the late afternoon. Moments after it finished feeding, two other hummingbirds began feeding, neither being the mother. The juvenile was later spotted at the feeder for several minutes looking around between drinks. It seems more comfortable with flying, and when perched looks very pudgy, fluffy, and grey.

27 March: The juvenile was at the feeder throughout the evening for long periods. I noticed another Anna's Hummingbird come to feed beside the juvenile. It was the mother! A rufous came shortly after and the "family" left immediately.

31 March: The female and juvenile were present at the feeder for long periods of time. The juvenile is now acquiring some green colour on its back. They are not disturbed by the presence of humans and will continue to eat from the feeder while my husband

is still filling it! They also tolerate a barking dog, showing little change in behaviour.

A new Anna's Hummingbird, a juvenile that appeared pudgy with more red and black in its plumage, was also seen at the feeder.

April: During this month the juvenile has become aggressive and is frequently seen chasing other hummingbirds as if establishing a feeding territory. The mother avoids the squabbles and immediately flies out of the yard when other hummingbirds are present. Sometimes I have had to scare off the more aggressive hummingbirds by yelling or clapping, when they appear to be attacking the juvenile.

It is interesting to note that when I am in the yard gardening, the female and juvenile continue feeding while the other hummingbirds wait until I am inside the house before they visit the feeders.

10 May: Perhaps some of the aggressive behaviour in my yard may be attributed to a new nest discovered in the neighbour's yard. It was on a tree branch and contained two large nestlings that barely fit into the nest.

12 May: The nestlings in the neighbour's yard fledged and almost immediately began using my feeder. The juvenile, who had been the aggressor earlier with other hummingbirds using the feeder, seemed to tolerate the recent fledglings.

19 May: My husband checked the nest on the wind chime and discovered an infertile egg still intact. Clearly two eggs were laid but only one hatched and fledged a young.

25 May: By the end of May the number of hummingbirds at the feeder decreased substantially. The juvenile was still present but was becoming more difficult to identify as it moulted into more adult-like plumage.

9 June: We are contemplating discontinuing the feeder for the summer months as hummingbirds are probably relying more on natural nectars than sugar-water in the feeder.

Summary

The nest built on the wind chime is apparently the first recorded for the species (Russell 1996). I discovered part way through the 2008 nesting season that in 2007 an Anna's Hummingbird had actually built a nest, and laid eggs, on a wind chime next door.

The nest (Figure 6) was unsuccessful. It is likely that the same bird used my wind chime, 10 m away, as its nest site in 2008.

The use of paint chips in the construction of the nest has been previously recorded in Arizona (Maender et al. 1996). The nest construction process and incubation period fall within the times reported as seven days (Stiles 1973) and 14-19 days (Pitelka 1951, Stiles 1973) respectively. The departure from the Victoria nest at 30 days (e.g., 14 February to 15 March) is four days longer than the maximum of 26 days previously reported (Kelly 1955, Smith et al. 1974, Maender et al. 1996).



Figure 6. An Anna's Hummingbird built its nest between ornaments on the top of a wind chime in Royal Oak, BC in February 2007 but the attempt was abandoned even though eggs were laid. 21 February 2008 (R. Wayne Campbell). BC Photo 3629.

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About the Author

Angela works as a mortgage underwriter for a Credit Union in Victoria, BC. She and her husband Lance spend much of their free time exploring forests and beaches on southern Vancouver Island with their 14 year old spaniel lab *Buddy*. They also enjoy spotting wildlife, especially owls, and have learned a lot from their "adopted" hummingbird family.

Lance and Angela will be "parents" again as they are expecting their first baby in early September 2008.
