



# BLACK-CHINNED HUMMINGBIRD

## SCIENTIFIC NAME:

*Archilochus alexandri*.

Genus from the Greek *archi* meaning chief or first in importance, and *lochos* for a body of people. The specific epithet honors M. M. Alexandre, a medical doctor of the 1800s who also collected birds in Mexico.

**DESCRIPTION:** About 3.5 inches long. Males average 3.1 grams; females average 3.4 grams. Adult males bright metallic green on back, with black chin and upper throat. Small iridescent violet band on lower throat contrasts with white upper breast and dusky green sides. Adult females have dull green backs and dirty white underparts. Both sexes have small white spot behind eyes. Immatures look like adult females.

**DISTRIBUTION:** The black-chinned hummingbird's breeding range extends from southwestern British Columbia, Washington, and northwestern Montana, south through central Idaho, eastern Colorado, eastern New Mexico, and central Texas into northwestern Chihuahua and northern Sonora, Mexico; also west to northern Baja and southern California. This Neotropical migrant winters from northern Mexico and southern Texas to southern Baja California, and occasionally east as far as southern Louisiana and northwestern Florida.

In Arizona, black-chinned hummingbirds primarily breed below 7,000 feet elevation and are common summer residents along the Colorado River and in lower mountain canyons and cities. They migrate across the Mogollon Plateau during the autumn and through southwestern deserts in spring.

ART BY NATHAN REDWOOD



**HABITAT:** Prefers low- to mid-elevation riparian habitats; urban areas with shade trees, parks, and orchards; and evergreen oak and pinyon-juniper woodlands. Native nesting substrates include hackberry, cottonwood, sycamore, alder, pinyon, juniper, oak, arrow weed, and willow. An introduced riparian invader, tamarisk or salt cedar, has recently been found to be a popular nesting substrate for this species.

**BIOLOGY:** Black-chinned hummingbirds arrive in Arizona between late February and early March and depart primarily by mid-September, with some lingering at feeders into late October. The breeding male performs courtship displays, exhibiting a swinging figure-8 pattern 15 feet over the female's head, pausing at the top to flap his wings before plummeting toward the ground, giving off a buzzing or whizzing noise. After a mate is secured, the female

spends three to seven days building a tiny cup nest, usually 1.5 inches across and 1 inch high. Nests are built on the fork of a small limb or vine, typically 4 to 8 feet off the ground but as high as 30 feet. The nests are built with plant down and coated on the outside with spider's silk. Nesting occurs between April and June, but peaks from early May through mid-June. Black-chins have two to three broods per year, each containing two white eggs. Incubation lasts 16 days and is performed solely by the female. Young fledge the nest 21 days after hatching.

Black-chins drink nectar from flowers and eat pollen, insects, and spiders. Like many flycatchers, they often sally out quickly from a perch to catch small flying insects.

**STATUS:** Black-chinned hummingbirds are common rangewide and populations are probably stable. They are not on the Arizona Game and Fish Department's list of *Wildlife of Special Concern in Arizona* (AGFD in prep.) and are not listed or proposed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as threatened or endangered.

**MANAGEMENT NEEDS:** The black-chinned hummingbird's ability to use a variety of habitats may be one of the key reasons it has remained successful in times when most native habitats are at risk of decline due to human population growth. However, its tendency to nest in riparian habitats may present problems in the future, if loss of riparian habitat continues. Parks and gardens are also used by black-chins, and may become extremely important to this hummingbird if native riparian areas continue to be lost. 🦋