

HUMMINGBIRD GALLERY

We received the first e-mail from Uwe Roemers with a request for help in identifying a species of hummingbird. Just returned from a trip to Bolivia, he had photographed a hummer who had fed repeatedly at an interesting and unusual plant. The bird had been very cooperative, offering Roemers many opportunities to be captured by his Canon EOS 10D digital camera.

Roemers already had a variety of galleries on his web site, and these hummingbird images helped him create a new one. But identification was elusive. Often the females of most hummingbird species look like this one, lacking iridescent coloration on throat and head that make the task easier; this one had none. We were asked to help, but weren't able to, even with the excellent photos.

I posted a request for help on a listserv for neotropical ornithologists, and I was not disappointed: three



Here the hummingbird feeds from below while hovering. The plant corolla was most definitely not of the common red-to-orange coloration typical of many hummingbird flowers, although the stamens clearly were.

scientists* were sure the bird was a White-bellied Hummingbird, *Amazilia chionogaster* (or *Leucippus chionogaster*, according to the Handbook of the Birds of the World, Vol. 5).

As to gender, that was more difficult, because males and females of this species do not display the dramatic sexual dimorphism that is common among hummingbirds. Residents of the U.S. need only look at any species with which they are familiar, from the Ruby-throated to the Anna's, to experience how the sexes of a species have different forms. In the species *A. chionogaster*, the male is larger (5.5 grams vs. 4.5 grams for the female), but coloration differences are mostly subtle. We decided that gender could not be determined from the photos.

The three individuals who were able to identify the species were unfamiliar with the plant pictured, and so we let go of our goal of identifying it as well.

But one scientist, Stefan Kreft, pursued the question further. He learned from Dr. Pierre Ibisch (Professor for Nature Conservation, Faculty of Forestry, University of Applied Sciences, Eberswalde, Germany) that the plant appears to be of the *Puya* genus, and closely related to *Puya lokischmidtiae*, a Bolivian species described only a few weeks earlier!

Ross Hawkins

* Stefan Kreft, Germany; Sebastian K. Herzog, Bolivia; Adrian Azpiroz, USA



Many hummingbirds will conserve energy by perching to feed, if possible. In this photo, our subject bird has opted to perch and not to hover.



Note the heavy deposits of pollen on the beak; hummingbirds are valuable pollinators of many plants throughout the New World.

About the Photographer

UWE ROEMERS of Munich, Germany, has been an amateur nature photographer for just three of his twenty-eight years, pursuing it with a passion that is increasingly directed towards birds. Currently working on an advanced degree, Roemers clearly is on an equally serious track with his photographic pursuits. His web site is found at www.purewildlife.com. All images on this page are © Uwe Roemers and are used with permission.