

When this hummingbird (p. 41, bottom) arrived at the feeder in February of 2009, I didn't know what it was. I could tell that it was different from our usual visitors: Anna's and Allen's hummingbirds. So I dusted off my wife's copy of *The Sibley Guide to Birds* and started shopping around for a lookalike.

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Soon enough, I got to p. 302, with a single color image depicting an "Anna's Hummingbird, juvenile male, dusted with pollen." Bingo. According to Sibley, when hummingbirds feed on flower nectar, they often become stained with pollen, which "creates a yellow to orange patch that can be quite conspicuous but should not cause identification problems (beyond momentary surprise) as no hummingbird species is normally yellow on the head."

But I *did* have a problem. After a while, I realized there was something strange about this bird. It wasn't stained yellow. It *was* yellow.

I placed a call to a friend, David Solis, a wildlife biologist and photographer, who is now based in New Mexico. In turn, David passed me along to Dr. Stan Harris, a retired wildlife professor back on my home turf, at Humboldt State University. Dr. Harris was able to confirm that the bird was something truly unusual: a first-generation **Magnificent × Anna's Hummingbird** hybrid.

It's easy enough to figure out where one of the bird's parents came from, as Anna's Hummingbirds are common in northern California, where I live. But what about the other parent? The Magnificent Hummingbird is accidental to California, with only two accepted records for the state at that time. But guess what? One of them, a female, was from right in our own neighborhood (my wife and I live in the Pigeon Point Ridge neighborhood of Eureka), back in 2004, and we believe that that bird is the hybrid's mother.

It's been more than three years since I became aware of this hybrid, and the bird is still at our place! And check this out: I have since learned that presumably the same bird had been previously detected in the neighborhood—apparently, as long ago as 2004, the same year the female Magnificent showed up. The hybrid's first appearances were at the nearby Violet-green Winery. Both the female Magnificent and her apparent offspring made their first appearances at the winery. Soon thereafter, the vintners named both a 2005 *Cuvée Maggie Claret* and a 2007 *La Croix* (The Cross) in honor of their amazing guests.

It is extraordinary to have had the chance to study this bird in such detail over the course of several years, and I hope that this photo salon conveys some sense of the wonder and delight this remarkable bird has brought to our lives.

Acknowledgments

Thanks to David Fix, Tom Leskiw, and Don Wattenbarger for providing some background about the arrival in Humboldt County of the Magnificent × Anna's Hummingbird.

Magnificent × Anna's





*San Diego County, California;
May 2009. Photo by © Joe Fuhrman.*



*Cochise County, Arizona;
August 2004. Photo by © Bob Steele.*



*Humboldt County, California;
July 2012. Photo by © Jerry Mahlberg.*

What happens when you mix rosy-red with green, purple, and black? Why, as any kid with finger paints will tell you: a mess! But not so with hummingbirds. In this photo salon, innkeeper Jerry Mahlberg shows us what happened when an Anna's Hummingbird (males are brilliant rosy-red on the head) mated with a Magnificent Hummingbird (males are dark purple, green, and black on the head). The surprising result: a beautiful **yellow** hybrid!

Top left: Adult male Anna's Hummingbird.
Top right: Adult male Magnificent Hummingbird.
Left: Adult male Magnificent x Anna's Hummingbird.

This series of images shows how the Magnificent x Anna's Hummingbird differs from the two expected hummingbirds in the region: Allen's and Anna's. In each pairing, note that the images have been obtained from the same distance and angle.



Top: Allen's Hummingbird; 10 April 2009, 6:44 p.m.

Bottom: Magnificent x Anna's Hummingbird;
10 April 2009, 6:48 p.m.

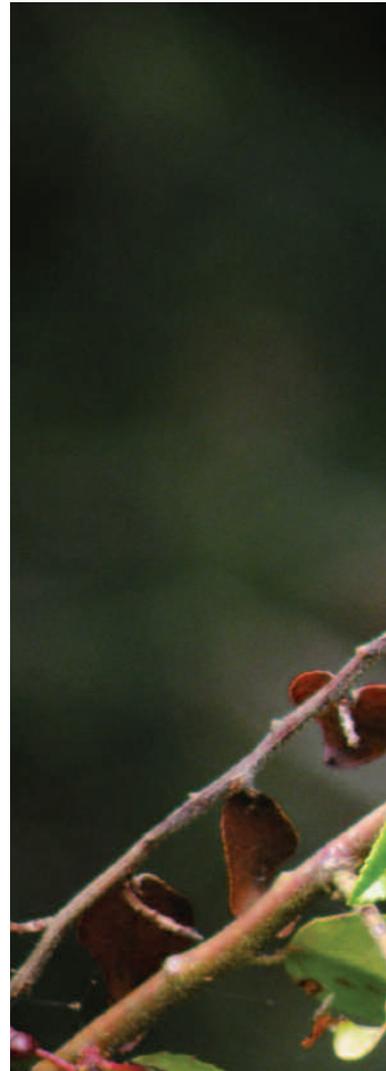




Top: Anna's Hummingbird; 21 April 2009, 7:32 p.m.

Bottom: Magnificent x Anna's Hummingbird;
21 April 2009, 7:36 p.m.





As many birders know, iridescent feathers are subject to rapid and dramatic color changes. But this is ridiculous! (Yes, the three images above are all of the same Magnificent x Anna's Hummingbird.) *All images: Humboldt County, California; July 2009. Photos by © Jerry Mahlberg.*



This female Magnificent Hummingbird was California's second. It is likely the mother of the Magnificent x Anna's Hummingbird that is the subject of this article. *Humboldt County, California; April 2004. Photo by © Kerry Ross.*



Humboldt County, California; March 2007. Photo by © Don Wattenbarger.



In this era of digital photography, it has become possible for birders to photo-document, during the course of many months or even years, how an individual bird changes through time. (See *Birding*, May 2012, pp. 36–41.) Note that the two images shown here were obtained more than five years apart.

Humboldt County, California; July 2012. Photo by © Jerry Mahlberg.

