

SULLIVAN (W.R.) PAPERS

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# Houston Chronicle

Friday, September 4, 1936

## Humming Birds, 'Tamed' By Legion Hospital Patients, Starting South for Winter

By International News Service.

Kerrville, Texas, Sept. 3.—Five hundred or more practically tame humming birds which make their summer homes around the U. S. Veterans Hospital at Legion, near here, soon will leave for their winter habitat south of Mexico City. They already are starting their fall migration southward.

Many of the patients at the hospital have been cultivating the friendship of the little birds for several years, and have found them interesting companions.

W. H. Sullivan, most enthusiastic of the humming bird hobbyist, has induced the birds to light on his hands. So many of the bright plumed visitors are attracted to the hospital because feeders with sugar-sweetened water are placed about the grounds.

The patients get the birds close up by placing the feeders just outside their windows, or at times by leaving screens open and keeping a feeder inside the room. As many as 40 have come into a room at one time, humming like as many tiny electric fans. They perch on furnishings in the room briefly and then flash out again.

Although the birds frequently bicker among themselves over choice buds or feeder jars, they apparently are not afraid of their friends, the admiring patients. Indeed the patients are beginning to look upon them as annual guests who spend the winter "where summer nights are air conditioned by nature." The number of humming birds that comes here each summer is said to be increasing because of the growing number of feeders put out for them. Human hospitality toward the small, shy creatures has bridged here in a measure a gap of long standing between man and hummingbird.

Continually watching the small birds, Sullivan has made numerous interesting observations. He declares that some of the birds have a wingspread of 8 inches, but that the average is 2½ inches. The

birds are migratory and spend the winter below Mexico City, and in summer go as far north as Alaska. He observed that the humming birds' bill is divided, and not a tube, as many believe. It can thrust its tongue out of its bill for one inch.

### FOR EVERYBODY.

The Chronicle's Free Room Rental Bureau is particularly designed for strangers in Houston or people unfamiliar with the streets and their various locations, but the service is gladly rendered to anyone desiring it. Call at our front counter. Travis at Texas.

## Humming Birds Board Daily at Texas Hospital

Legion, Tex.—(AP)—Supervising the daily diet of approximately 500 humming birds is the odd hobby W. R. Sullivan has chosen.

Groups of the tiny birds dart into Sullivan's room at the Veterans Administration hospital, alight momentarily on light fixtures, zoom around the ceiling and are gone.

Twenty-five boxes for food have been placed throughout the hospital grounds. A container of sweetened water outside Sullivan's window attracts the greatest number. The birds start their visit the middle of March and remain until September.

Sullivan said some of them have a wingspread of eight inches, although the average is two and a half.

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## Annual Pilgrimage of Mexican Humming Birds Back to Texas Noted, Legion Veteran States

W. R. Sullivan, a patient hospitalized in the Veterans Facility, Legion, Texas, has an unusual and seasonal hobby. It consists of making and servicing humming-bird feeders for the many hundreds of tiny flyers when they arrive back in this section of Texas after their spring migration from Mexico. Sullivan is very enthusiastic over his small charges and believes that some of the birds are very old. They return unflinchingly each season.

The hummer most commonly found in this area is called the Black-Chin, no doubt from the black throat-patch of the males, which is a libelous misnomer in this case as may be verified by any person viewing the bird in bright sunlight. At such time his sooty front bib becomes a gorgeous burst of iridescent purple, and one thinks immediately of his jeweled brother, the Ruby-Throat. Females are dove-grey in color with green back and white-barred tail feathers. They are usually somewhat larger than the male bird. Black-Chin humming birds have an enormous range and are found as far north and west as Sitka, Alaska.

Incidentally, they are but one of almost 600 varieties of hummers. Seventeen different varieties migrate into the continental limits of the United States, but only one variety, the previously mentioned Ruby-Throat, goes east of the Mississippi. An occasional Ruby-Throat may be seen locally.

Humming birds are insectivorous and their diet consists largely of small midges, mosquitoes and tiny bugs infesting shrubs and trees. They are notorious, of course, as sweetened-water tipplers and Mr. Sullivan declares that outside his window at the hospital they are drinking a quart of this solution each day. Usually they feed long after sunset, and as the days lengthen they will remain at the feeding stations until the last light has gone from the sky. Invariably pugnacious and quarrelsome, they become quiet as night falls and for the last few minutes of feeding time one hears only the subdued humming of their wings. The day time give-and-take, chatterings and pipings, is markedly absent.

Our first birds arrive around the 10th of March each year; males preceding females, and by the beginning of April their nesting cycle opens. Nests are cunningly camouflaged and hidden on low projecting limbs of the scrub-oak trees eight or ten feet above ground.

The mother birds make their nests in many cases of thistle down, but will readily use cotton instead if it is placed conveniently near their feeder. Each nest is criss-crossed with spider web on the outside, and upon this delicate foundation grey-green lichen is plated to blend with the rough limbs of the oak. Two white eggs, three-eighths inch in diameter by nine-sixteenths inch long are incubated for a period of 15 days and the newly hatched birds resemble nothing more than a badly singed grasshopper and give no indication of the long bills that soon will make their appearance. The mother feeds them by regurgitation, and in a brief space of time the young are forced to lie atop the nest since it is no longer large enough to contain them. Flying begins straight from the nest—there is no preliminary training—and the young birds are always easily identified, apart from their

immature markings, by their clumsiness around the feeding places. Sullivan constructs a special type of humming bird feeder that keeps all other birds away, and insects, too, from the fluid and he reports that many persons in Kerrville and vicinity are using them with gratifying success. Fellow patients at the hospital also take care of a number of birds each season and it is common belief that several thousand humming birds make their summer home near Kerrville.

Return migrations begin late in August—a somewhat gradual process, by the way—the birds slipping away one by one and following the spring pattern, males preceding. Some ornithologists say the young birds are first to depart for southern territory, but in the present instance this has not been verified. All we can say is that they are greatly missed during the winter months and are eagerly awaited as true harbingers of spring in these parts.

# Hummingbirds Eat Out of Hand At Sanctuary in New Hampshire

Nature Camp Pupils Study Them at Estate of Laurence J. Websters, Where Speed of Wings Recently Was Recorded as 90 Moves a Second in Flight

By Aria Cutting Roberts

TWO of the most talked-of nature study sanctuaries in the northern section of New Hampshire are in Lost River in North Woodstock, at the foot of the White Mountains, and at Bolderness, the Squam Lake estate owned by Mr. and Mrs. Laurence J. Webster. The Nature Camp at Lost River, started six years ago, is now in its second session of the season, with almost a capacity enrollment representing seven states and including several students from New York. Among the students at the first session was Mrs. Walter C. Teagle, of Port Chester, N. Y. Others at the Nature Camp from New York State include Attie Carr, of Mount Kisco; Mrs. Florence Thayer, of Richmond Hill, Queens, and Dorothy C. Martin, of St. James, L. I.

Faculty members include Dr. Charles M. Pomeroy, Clark University, teaching animal biology; Mr. Jarvis B. Hadley, Harvard University, geology and astronomy; Dr. Joseph S. Tidd, Dartmouth College, botany; Miss Violet L. Findlay, Wilmington, Del., teaching methods, and Mr. W. J. Sawyer, of Cornell University, ornithology.

The Nature Camp was established and is still supervised by Mrs. Webster, with the co-operation of the Society for Protection of New Hampshire Forests. It is in one of the most picturesque spots in the White Mountain region. The latitudinal location and the variations in altitude offer an excellent transition from the lower valleys, where plant and animal life are characteristically southern New England, to the region of Mount Washington, where an alpine condition is found. The effects of glaciation, so characteristic of the northeastern part of the country, are everywhere in evidence.

## Field Trips Made

Lectures and field work at Lost River are supplemented by field trips to the Pemigewasset Valley, to the valley of the Wild Ammonoosuc River, to Mt. Washington, Franconia Notch and Mt. Moosilauke, furnishing ample opportunity for study of a wide range of natural phenomena.

Forenoons are devoted to classes in natural history, afternoons are spent in the field and the evenings are given over to illustrated lectures on popular subjects. The students are taught something of animal life and are particularly interested in the nature of life that exists in brooks, streams and ponds. The nature garden at the camp has 400 different species of plants.

Simple but comfortable camp life is provided for the students. The assembly room is in a building with a large fireplace and rustic furniture. This is headquarters for study, lectures, library, conferences and indoor recreation. A new structure is the museum, where a large relief map assists the students.

The pilgrimage to Mrs. Webster's home in Holderness, with its hummingbird sanctuary, is one of the outstanding features of the session. Mrs. Webster, herself an authority on nature study and chairman of the Nature Camp committee of the State Federation of Women's Clubs,

serves as hostess to the visiting students. Her gardens are now in the height of their beauty, and the activity of the birds delight the group. A study in flower arrangement is made under the direction of Miss Findlay, and members of the Nature Camp faculty later serve as judges of the exhibit.

## Constant Humming at Estate

It is the hummingbird at the Webster home which attracts the greatest attention, however. There is a constant humming and soft twittering everywhere as the little birds seek the many small tubes of sweetened water taped to the branches of trees, shrubbery and vines close to the house. Just outside the living room windows they hover, pausing in their flight to dip their long bills into the tubes for the refreshment they know Mrs. Webster has provided for them. They likewise flutter among the vines outside the upper windows—for the tubes are everywhere, and then they are off to see their nests or playmates.

It has meant great patience and diplomacy—if such a word may be used—to win the hummingbird, and in recent years Mrs. Webster has won many of these little birds to her windows and doors. She actually tamed them to the extent that they will feed from the tubes held in her hands and even between her lips. The males, with their ruby throats,

are beautiful in their hovering flight. Nature lovers and others always have marveled at the quick flight of the hummingbird, many wondering whether the tiny wings are ever still and at what rate of speed they move.

Because Mrs. Webster has been able to tame the little fellows enough to retain them near her windows some length of time, it has been possible to study the birds and record the speed of their wings. Several scientists heard of Mrs. Webster's activities at the Nature Camp in Lost River, and then came the recent hummingbird study.

## Wings "Stopped" for Picture

Professor Harold E. Edgerton, of the department of electrical engineering at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, visited the Webster residence and made high-speed photographs of the birds, revealing that their wings move sixty times a second while they are hovering and ninety times while in flight. Professor Edgerton was able to do this through a device known as the stroboscope, by which machinery in motion could be "stopped" for photographic examination.

As the tiny birds hummed about the veranda a portable backboard was built, a camera was set in a window with the light beside it and a tube of sweetened water placed about two feet from the camera in front of the gray backboard. As the birds gathered about the tube the light was turned on and pictures were taken at a speed of 1-100,000th of a second. The process used was similar to that of taking ordinary "flash" pictures.

Motion pictures of the birds also were taken, at the rate of 1-6,000th of a second. It was with these that Professor Edgerton was able to note that the hummingbird's wings move in nearly a swimming motion, as used in the "crawl."



A remarkable stop-motion photograph of four female ruby-throated hummingbirds hovering about a vial of sweetened liquid. Professor Harold E. Edgerton, Kenneth J. Germeshausen and Herbert E. Grier of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where this high-speed method of photography was developed, found that in hovering the wings move at the amazing speed of nearly sixty beats a second. Although perches are provided, the birds prefer to hover while feeding. This photograph, taken in an exposure of 1-100,000 of a second, is probably the first of its kind showing the wing action of a hummingbird.

## HUMMING GOOD JOB



S. A. ZOO NOW HAS SPECIAL CAGE OF BIRDS  
Eight humming birds raised by Fred Stark.

## THINGS HUM AT BIRD EXHIBIT

San Antonians who have found humming birds too fleet for study now will have a chance to watch the tiny creatures for hours.

Director Fred Stark has put on

← exhibit, in front of the Brackenridge zoo commissary, eight of the humming birds he has raised on a mixture of canned milk, honey, and beef extract.

A large new, glass fronted cage has been donated by Richard Friedrich, San Antonio Zoological society president.

## Bird Sanctuary At Legion Starts National Policy

Patients who have protected and fed the flock of 500 or more humming-birds that visit the Veterans' Administration Hospital at Legion each summer are believed to be responsible for the forming of a National policy that will establish wildlife sanctuaries at every veterans' facility throughout the United States.

In a press relations digest released by the Veterans' Administration, the humming-bird sanctuary at Legion is described and its importance in starting the wildlife conservation program is emphasized. General Frank T. Hines, Administrator of Veterans' Affairs, has instructed the manager of each veterans' hospital and home throughout the nation to study methods by which "the conservation of bird, fish and wild animal life on the reservations of the Veterans' Administration" can be affected.

According to the Administrator's advice to the hospital managers,  
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## BIRD SANCTUARY HERE STARTS NATIONAL POLICY

(Continued from page One)

noted the Associated Press, not only would such conservation be in line with National policy and practices, but study and development of the project will create interest on the part of the patients, especially those requiring prolonged treatment in institutions specializing in cases.

"Due to the necessity of economizing in operating expenses for the current fiscal year," said General Hines, "it is not proposed to undertake an expensive conservation program. For the present, work will be confined to the establishment of bird sanctuaries, which can be created from available material as an occupational therapy measure or by utilizing station labor." General Hines is convinced that many song birds can be attracted to the reservations by fabricating simple bird houses and raised platforms suitable for feeding in the winter season.

The plan further comprehends the preservation of fish and animal life by prohibiting fishing or shooting on the reservations, except as to destruction of such birds or animals as are predatory and the killing of which is permitted by Federal or State laws. The work is to be carried forward in co-operation with the Department of Agriculture, Bureau of Biological Survey.

The Veterans' Administration press relations bulletin which carried the outline of the plan, says, "Already at the Veterans' Administration hospital at Legion, near Kerrville, Texas, some 500 humming-birds regard the institution as a sanctuary. Although they are known to be exceedingly timid by nature, they have become quite tame and fly in and out of the hospital windows. They are fed by the patients and their favorite tippie is sugar-saturated water." The fact that Legion is a humming-bird sanctuary was first publicized in The Kerrville Times in its issue of July 23 of this year.

## Outdoors, Indoors: It's All the Same If One's Hungry



In and out the window they fly, these humming-birds at Legion Hospital. Sometimes as many as forty come into the window at one time, darting about the room, perching on light cords or a convenient tie rack. Photo shows W. R. Sullivan, a patient who has made a study of the birds; one can be seen by his hand as it feeds on sugar-saturated water. Inset shows close-up of a between-meals snack.

### Legion Hospital Is Humming-Bird Sanctuary Without Equal in State

Among summer visitors here are none so distinguished as the estimated group of 500 humming-birds who come to Veterans Administration Hospital at Legion each season. There are probably few, if any, other places in Texas where so many of the birds gather.

Patients there have placed 25 feeders about the grounds; everything is done to provide for the welfare of the birds. The little visitors come all the way from the south part of Mexico, below Mexico City. Males begin arriving about March 15 and the females tag along about three days later. Last stragglers have left for their home by the middle of September.

Lying in his bed in a second story room of Ward 2, W. R. Sullivan, a patient there, has been observing the birds for several seasons. He has a feeder, containing sugar-saturated water, outside his window, and at times opens the window, places the feeder inside, and tempts the birds to the interior.

They dart in, not shyly, but with an assurance that bespeaks ownership. Sometimes as many as 40 come into the room at one time. Wings whirring and humming, they make as much noise as 40 small electric fans. Perching for a moment on a light cord or tie rack, inspecting a curtain sash or zooming around the ceiling, they are everywhere at the same time.

The humming-birds are not as afraid of human beings as they are of each other. They will alight on Sullivan's hand but are continually quarreling among themselves.

Sullivan, watching the humming-birds hours on end, has made many interesting observations: some of the birds have a wingspread of eight inches, although the average spread is two and one-half inches; the transients winter below Mexico City and travel as far north as Alaska; contrary to the general idea, the birds' bill is divided instead of being a tube; the bird can run its tongue an inch out of its bill.

# Odd Specimen of Insect World Is Sinister - Appearing Mantis

BY J. FRANK DOBIE

Strict scientists call him mantis; many educated people refer to him as the praying mantis; another name is soothsayer, and I like that; but folks in my part of the country know him only as the devil's horse. The dictionary term "rear horse", I never heard.

He is as odd a specimen of the insect world as ever crossed his legs, and when he does rear up, whether his legs are crossed or not, his posture is grotesquely prayerful. His resemblance to a horse is of the same character as that of a clothes horse, or some of these modern sculpturings that in the name of art are labelled as horse.

He has a sinister reputation, entirely due to his figure; in reality he is as innocent as a sucking dove, a horned frog, a ratsnake, or a cricket.

So far as is known, he does not eat cloth like the cheerful and aimable cricket, and he does eat other insects — insects that are bothersome and that may stand a chance of conquering the world sooner than Hitler.

Nobody knows how the old belief got started that a devil's horse is eager to spit in your eye and put it out.

The Mexicans call him campomocha. One time, with a few Mexican vaqueros (cowboys), I was driving a small herd of cows in Live Oak county. We were moving very slowly, probably not over a mile an hour, in order not to overheat the cows. We had stopped to graze them on an open sand hill and were resuming speed, when suddenly one of them, a wholesome-looking, apparently healthy, strong, middle-aged, dry cow, in good flesh, stopped at the tail end of the herd, took three or four steps when urged on, and fell over as dead as Hector's pup.

There had been nothing visibly wrong with her three minutes before she died. I could not tell that anything was wrong with her after she died, except that she wasn't breathing. Cows don't take heart-failure and drop dead like old men or young men. The Mexicans all agreed that she had eaten a campomocha — unintentionally of course — while grazing.

## Fatal as Bullet

Not being actuated in those days by the scientific spirit, I did not bother to perform an autopsy. I certainly could not swear that the cow had not swallowed a campomocha. Many times I have heard Mexican ranch hands tell how this insect, if lapped in by a hungry beast and swallowed, is as fatal to the swallower as a bullet in heart or brain.

The next time I am around some old lump-jawed worthless cow and a devil's horse at the same time, I mean to experiment. I wish some agricultural experiment station would take up the matter.



But a human being is not any more likely to swallow a devil's horse, accidentally, while grazing—even on lettuce or celery—than he is to allow a rusty lizard to run down his throat and salivate him while drinking water. And, most certainly and emphatically, if he does not swallow the insect, it will never harm him.

Yet the creature may be lethal to creatures other than the smaller insects on which he constantly preys. To hummingbirds!

When one considers that the hummingbird is the most bellicose and fiery creature for its size and weight that wears feathers and then thinks of the match-headed, toothpick-limbed devil's horse killing him, one is filled with amazement. But here is testimony not to be doubted from Miss Ruth Dodson, of Mathis, Texas, one of the soundest observers and recorders of the life around her that I know.

"One day I went out into the yard and was surprised to see a hummingbird in the air before a hollyhock blossom with its spread wings motionless. I knew at once that the bird was dead and thought that it must have become entangled in a spider web and could not get out. I couldn't think of anything else that could have happened to it that would hold it in that position. When I looked closely, I saw, directly under the blossom, a large devil's horse perched on a bend of the stalk of the plant. It was holding the bird under each wing and was eating greedily into its breast; it reminded me of a voracious dog.

## Tears at Bird

"While I watched, it raised its head a time or two, looked at me in that disconcerting way the creatures have, and then went back to tearing at the bird. But it must have been well along with the meal when I discovered it, for in a little while, it cocked its head at me and let the hummingbird drop to the ground.

It was then that I noticed that the body of the devil's horse was distended to the roundness of a pecan, showing that it had had a full meal. I killed the devil's horse, of course.

"Then one day a year or so later I was sitting by a window with some sewing in my hands. I heard a shrill noise in the sage bush under the window. The noise was insistent and unfamiliar to me (and I have never been able to decide how it was made). I looked out and saw a hummingbird fluttering among the leaves of the sage bush.

I ran out with my scissors in my hand. When I looked closely enough to see what kind of trouble the frantic bird was in, I thought I detected the 'hands' of a devil's horse on its back. I was going to have a witness this time; so I called a neighbor. She came at once and with her better eyesight could see the devil's horse among the leaves.

It was holding the bird securely by the back, one 'hand' near the tail and one near the head and was eating into the pack of the bird. At the noise of our excited voices, the devil's horse drew its bloody head out of the bird's feathers and looked around, then went back to eating.

"I handed the scissors to my neighbor and told her that the next time the head appeared to clip it off. She did this, leaving the long, bloody neck. I then cut off the branch that held the devil's horse and rushed into the house with it—the bird still fluttering and the devil's horse still holding on, both to the branch and to the bird.

I emptied a box of stationery and put the whole thing into it. Then I phoned the science teacher at the high school, who sent a boy for it at once.

"Later the teacher phoned to tell me that the hummingbird died at the first whiff of chloroform, but the devil's horse was harder to kill; and not until it was dead did it let go of the hummingbird. I don't believe that I made the teacher understand that the devil's horse had already been beheaded—they are hard to kill."

## Devil's Horse

I can understand all of this except the impulse to kill the devil's horse. I like hummingbirds also, but no hummingbird has ever pleased me more than a devil's horse that comes up and assumes a prayerful attitude in front of me while gazing

with his philosophic look. I would not any more kill a devil's horse for killing a hummingbird than I'd kill a boy for killing a rabbit or kill a man for killing a beef or a buck. As a matter of fact, I have known a good many men that I had rather kill than any devil's horse. It never has been convenient to kill one of them, however.

This last summer I came through Kerrville to see my mother and sister Martha in a lodge they have out from town. In a small tree in front of the house they had a can-like contrivance—made by patients in the hospital at Legion, near Kerrville—for feeding nectar to hummingbirds. I have seen eight or 10 hummingbirds at a time sipping sweetened water out of one of these contrivances.

On the early summer-morning I am speaking of I noticed two hummingbirds darting around the contrivance in an excited way but not sticking their bills into the holes for drawing the sweetened water out of. Then I noticed a large devil's horse on the bottom of the can for the creature can stand upside down. He was just waiting there.

I watched for a good while, hoping that a hummingbird would come near enough to be pounced on, but they disappeared. I had to come away. I enjoined my sister Martha to watch carefully. Before long I

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"Later the teacher phoned to tell me that the hummingbird died at the first whiff of chloroform, but the devil's horse was harder to kill: and not until it was dead did it let go of the hummingbird. I don't believe that I made the teacher understand that the devil's horse had already been beheaded—they are hard to kill."

### Devil's Horse

I can understand all of this except the impulse to kill the devil's horse. I like hummingbirds also, but no hummingbird has ever pleased me more than a devil's horse that comes up and assumes a prayerful attitude in front of me while gazing with his philosophic look. I would not any more kill a devil's horse for killing a hummingbird than I'd kill a boy for killing a rabbit or kill a man for killing a beef or a buck. As a matter of fact, I have known a good many men that I had rather kill than any devil's horse. It never has been convenient to kill one of them, however.

This last summer I came through Kerrville to see my mother and sister Martha in a lodge they have out from town. In a small tree in front of the house they had a can-like contrivance—made by patients in the hospital at Legion, near Kerrville—for feeding nectar to hummingbirds. I have seen eight or 10 hummingbirds at a time sipping sweetened water out of one of these



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TO LIGHT.