



## **A Hummingbird Lesson** by Robert Yancey

One of the more intriguing and heartbreaking things I learned while working offshore, is the migratory habits of hummingbirds. Several of the oil production platforms I worked on were in the path hummingbirds would travel when migrating south for the winter and returning for the spring.

The southern trip would be fairly uneventful, at least by my observation. Springtime arrived and the journey home began. For a couple of weeks every morning I would see birds on the platform. It is really unusual to see land birds offshore, especially deep in the High Island area. Over one hundred miles from the coast of Texas to the west and another one hundred miles north to Louisiana, birds other than seagulls, were a rarity. Most of the little animals would take flight early and continue their migration. The lesson I learned was taught by ones that lingered behind.

To the casual observer, the spectacle was whimsical and entertaining. Upon closer study, one realized the reason for the fluttering about the platform and increasing boldness toward humans as they would almost land in your hand. These hummingbirds that remained behind were starving and dying of thirst. For hours, these creatures would inspect every valve handle colored red, orange, yellow etc. probing fixtures again and again from several angles to be sure. Unable to feed from the steel flowers with brass stems, desperation would take hold. Any liquid available was tasted and tried for nutritional value. Rain water collected in the tops of barrels and flat spots of equipment were the first to be depleted. From there the oil catch-pans and saltwater were the only choices. The hummingbirds would drink antifreeze mixtures, engine oils,

cooking oils, hydraulic oil and production waste, all found in various catch pans of huge pieces of running equipment. The heartbreak to find these small animals dead, covered in a liquid they had no business being around, was enormous.

Upset at this unnecessary death, I analyzed the problem and searched for solutions. Feeders were needed as was a fresh water supply readily accessible for migratory birds. Valve handles should be painted colors not to mimic flowers in nature. Screening material should be used to fashion covers over the pans to allow entrance of liquid yet keep birds away from the poison. All of this and more crossed my mind on more than one occasion. Some of the guys on a couple of platforms DID have feeders. Paid for with their own money and maintained out of an abundance of kindness-still the deaths continued. Why? Why? Why! Whose fault is this? Who could I blame and demand to rectify?

The analytic nature in me began to systematically breakdown the sequence of events and search for the failure. This process of migration has been ongoing for thousands and perhaps millions of years. Nothing humans have done in the last 60 years, with the advent of the offshore industry, have started or stopped bird migrations. They fly by instinct to and fro across the waters only stopping because there is a place available to land. There lies the problem- stopping. The majority of the birds don't stop, they continue to their destination. While life was good in warmer locations, preparations were made for the trip. Only the ones too weak to continue stopped on the platform. If a spot wasn't provided, hummingbirds would have fallen out of the sky to the waters below and become something tasty for fish. So, that still leaves the two groups of birds I gave witness to on the structure. A group would leave as soon as it was light, the other stay. The root cause for this tragedy was the hummingbird's decision making. The prepared birds never stopped, the tired ones only stopped for short rest. Only the hummingbirds that failed to continue their journey home suffered this outcome. Instead they chose to allow themselves to be tempted by false promises and an entrapping oasis.

Our journey through life is not easy. At times, it will take everything in our power to stay above the waters. Occasionally we may even find a place to rest a moment. But it is only when we are distracted by things, waste energy chasing false hopes, and no longer have the stamina to continue, do we fall to the poisons of life.

Above all stay focused and keep moving. It is only when we stop, do we fail.