

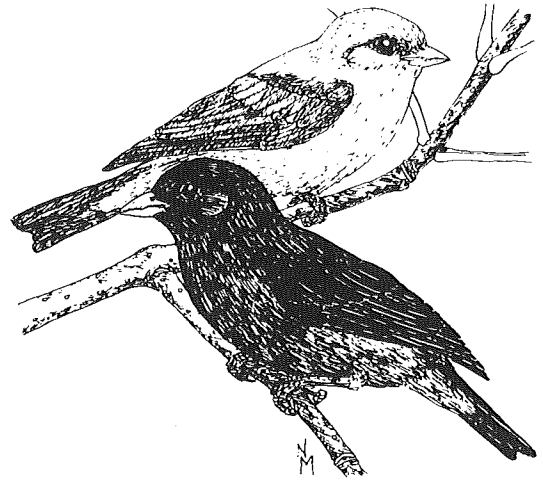
Scarlet Tanager

Piranga olivacea

The Scarlet Tanager inhabits deciduous and mixed woodlands, where it is often found in oaks and beeches, apparently finding the open arrangement of these trees' foliage well suited to its hover-glean method of foraging (Holmes and Robinson 1981). Galli et al. (1976) recorded that the species shows a marked dependency on woodlot size; they did not find tanagers consistently in woodlots of fewer than 10 ha (25 a). Tanagers prefer mature forests, as they build their nests quite high above the ground and forage in the upper forest canopy. Prescott (1965) found 68% of tanager nests studied in trees with a DBH greater than or equal to 23 cm (9 in).

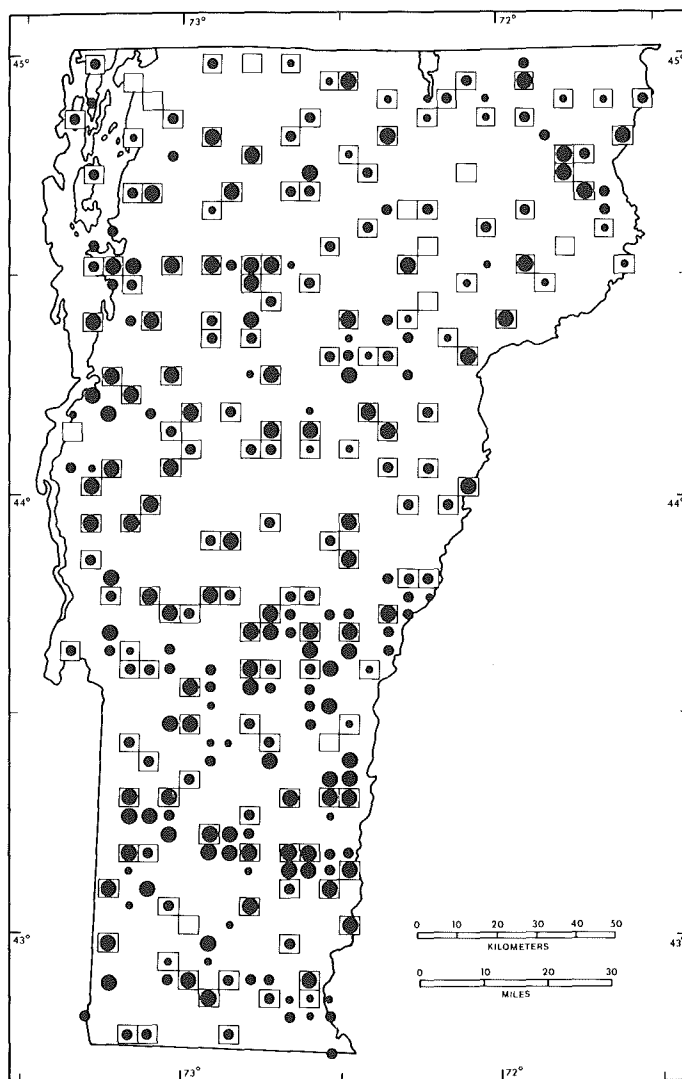
Despite the male's bright plumage, Scarlet Tanagers are notorious for being more often heard than seen. Their high-ranging habits and their tendency to inhabit trees with broad, leafy crowns make tanagers difficult to see. Once located, Scarlet Tanagers may be easily studied because of their method of foraging. The tanager's song provides a reliable method for finding its breeding territories. Similar in some respects to that of the vireos, the song consists of an indeterminate series of coupled phrases. Although the tone of the sound is not unlike that produced by an American Robin or Rose-breasted Grosbeak, it has a unique, rough, burry quality. When not singing, Scarlet Tanagers may be located by their distinctive alarm note or location call, which can be rendered as *quick-churr* or simply *quick*. Careful observation of the adults is the most effective way to gain confirmation of breeding. The most frequently used confirmation codes during the Atlas Project were those for parents with food (FY), 54%; recently fledged young (FL), 18%; and nest with eggs (NE), 14%.

Scarlet Tanagers return to Vermont by the second week (occasionally the first week) of May. Nest building is well under way by the fourth week of May. Eggs have been reported from May 25 to June 20 (12 records); nests with young have been reported



from June 10 to June 28 (5 records); and fledglings have been reported from June 20 to August 3 (5 records). The nest is a loosely constructed platform of twigs and rootlets, lined with grasses, stems, and fine strips of bark. It is usually placed away from the trunk of the support tree and is well shaded and accessible to the parents (Prescott 1965). Nest heights of 17 Vermont nests averaged 10 m (33 ft) above ground, within a range of 2–17 m (6.5–56 ft). Out of 15 Vermont nests, more than 50% were located in conifers, predominantly hemlock. Clutch size ranges from 3 to 5 eggs, usually 4. Tanagers depart from Vermont in August and September; their autumnal movement peaks in mid September. Some linger into October in mild years; an extreme date is October 27.

The Scarlet Tanager is thinly but widely distributed through the deciduous and mixed woodlands of Vermont. The species was located in 94% of the priority blocks, with the lowest occurrences in the intensively farmed Champlain Lowlands (87% of the priority blocks) and the North Central region (79% of the priority blocks); relatively low occurrence in the former may be a result of forest fragmentation, while factors affecting the distribution of the species in the North Central region include some forest fragmentation and decreases in the abundance of favored tree species, such as beeches and oaks. Tanagers may have increased in numbers in Vermont over the last 50 years.



No. of priority blocks in which recorded

TOTAL 168 (94%)

Possible breeding: 24 (14.5% of total)

Probable breeding: 71 (42.0% of total)

Confirmed breeding: 73 (43.5% of total)

Physiographic regions in which recorded

	no. of priority blocks	% of region's priority blocks	% of species' total priority blocks
Champlain Lowlands	27	87	16
Green Mountains	53	98	32
North Central	15	79	9
Northeast Highlands	15	94	9
East Central	19	100	11
Taconic Mountains	16	100	9
Eastern Foothills	23	96	14

Ross (1914) and Fortner et al. (1933) indicated that the Scarlet Tanager was "not common" and "uncommon to rare" during the early 1900s. Reforestation probably explains its population increase in southern Vermont.

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