

Scarlet Tanager

Piranga olivacea

If the Neotropics had a flagship bird it would surely be the Scarlet Tanager. The male's luminescent red and black plumage arrests even the casual observer. Similarly striking, but far less common, are individuals with bright orange feathers rather than the typically red ones (Beadle and Rising 2006); only one of these orange males was noted during the second Vermont atlas.

The Scarlet Tanager breeds throughout the deciduous forest biome of eastern North America. Thompson (1853) reported the species in Vermont, though he implied that it was uncommon during that time of greatly reduced forest cover. Perkins and Howe (1901) considered it a "not very common summer resident." The species became more abundant in the twentieth century with the regeneration and maturation of the state's deciduous forests. Scarlet Tanagers winter in South America as far south as Bolivia (Mowbray 1999b). When birds return to New England in late spring, harsh weather may result in a shortage of their insect food sources. Notable mortality has been recorded during years with very cold spring weather in New Hampshire and Vermont (Zumeta and Holmes 1978) and in Connecticut (Clark 1984). Zumeta and Holmes suggested that relatively large insectivorous songbirds like the Scarlet Tanager may be especially vulnerable because of their greater need for the larger insects that are particularly sparse in cold, wet conditions.

The Scarlet Tanager usually nests in the interior of large tracts of mature deciduous forest, with nest heights of 4.6 to 18 meters (15 to 60 feet; Baicich and Harrison 1997). During the second atlas, nest building was noted from 24 May to 14 July (N = 7). Only one nest was found with eggs, on 13 June. Two nests with nestlings were discovered, on 20 June and 24 June; fledglings were observed from 21 June to 18 August (N = 33). Although females and nests high in the canopy are difficult to detect, the male's loud, distinctive song and calls often reveal its presence. As confirmation can be difficult, breeding was confirmed in only 26 percent of blocks, a value substantially lower than that for a number of other passerine species.

During the second atlas, the Scarlet Tanager was re-

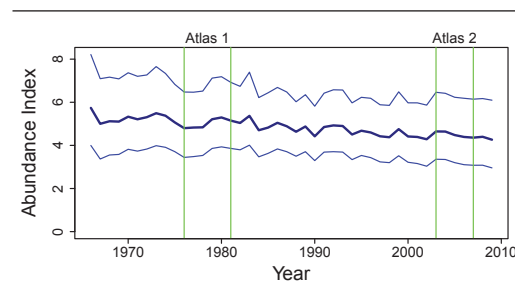


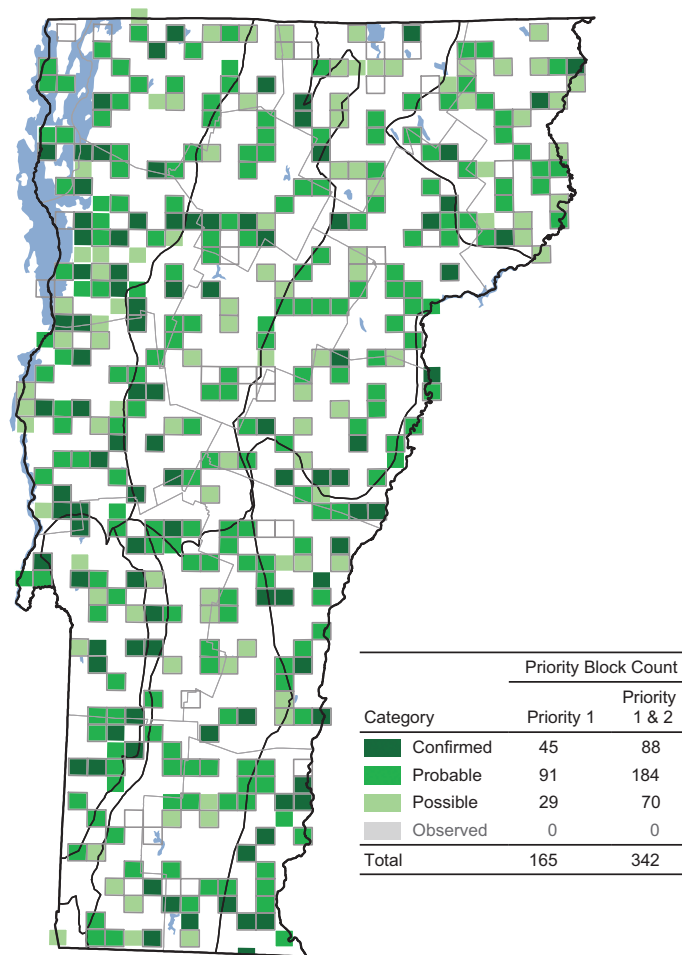
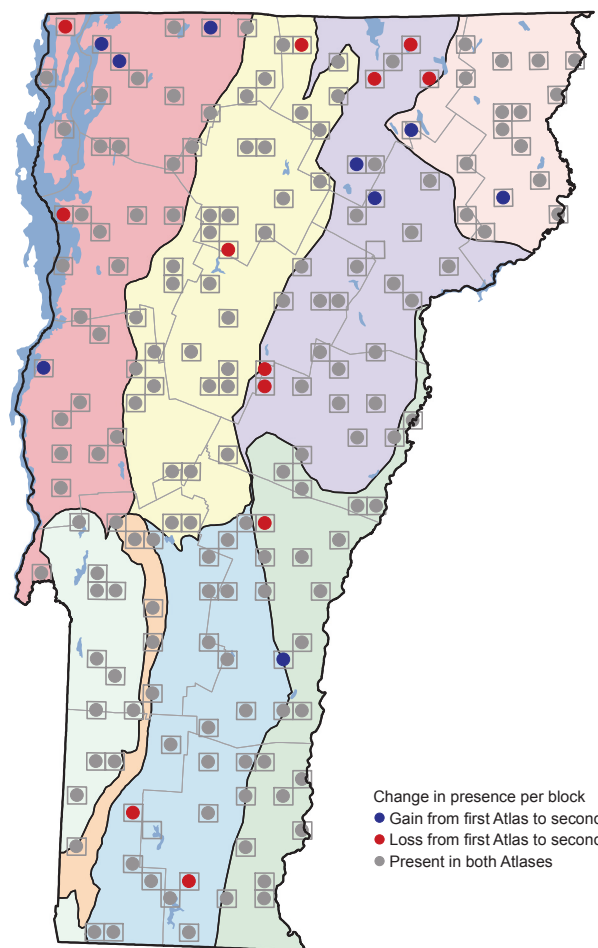
corded in all biophysical regions of the state. Occupancy rates were high (greater than 86 percent in all regions). Statewide, the species showed a 2 percent decrease in the number of occupied blocks. Within each region, changes in block occupancy were minimal, and likely due to differences in coverage or local fluctuations in land use and habitat availability.

From 1982 to 2007, Breeding Bird Survey data show no significant change in Vermont or Maine. In New Hampshire, Massachusetts, and New York, there were significant declines of 1.3, 1.4, and 1.4 percent per year, respectively. The Atlantic Northern Forest (Bird Conservation Region 14) showed a significant annual 1.3 percent decline (Sauer et al. 2011). The second Maryland atlas showed a small decrease in the number of occupied blocks (Ellison 2010), whereas the second Pennsylvania atlas indicated a slight increase (Wilson et al. 2012). There were no notable changes in block occupancy in the second New York atlas (McGowan and Corwin 2008) or in the second Ontario atlas (Cadman et al. 2007).

Studies of Scarlet Tanagers on their breeding grounds

RELATIVE ABUNDANCE OVER TIME





CHANGE IN DISTRIBUTION BETWEEN ATLASES

Biophysical Region	First Atlas	Second Atlas	Change	% Change
Champlain Valley	29	31	+ 2	+ 7
Northeastern Highlands	15	17	+ 2	+ 13
Northern Green Mountains	35	33	- 2	- 6
Northern Vermont Piedmont	27	24	- 3	- 11
Southern Green Mountains	26	24	- 2	- 8
Southern Vermont Piedmont	20	20	+ 0	+ 0
Taconic Mountains	11	11	+ 0	+ 0
Vermont Valley	5	5	+ 0	+ 0
Totals	168	165	- 3	- 2

DISTRIBUTION IN CURRENT ATLAS

Biophysical Region	% of region species occupies	% of all records for this species found in region
Champlain Valley	95	20
Northeastern Highlands	97	11
Northern Green Mountains	93	18
Northern Vermont Piedmont	87	17
Southern Green Mountains	92	15
Southern Vermont Piedmont	92	11
Taconic Mountains	100	6
Vermont Valley	100	2

indicate that minimizing fragmentation of existing forests is important for maintaining populations (Rosenberg et al. 1999). Loss of suitable habitat appears to be the most obvious threat over the long term. Efforts to preserve large tracts of mature forest should help to assure the continued presence of this spectacular species in Vermont.

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