

# SCARLET Tanager (*Piranga olivacea*) GUIDANCE FOR CONSERVATION

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*The Scarlet Tanager is a common, but declining breeder and spring and fall migrant in the Hudson River Valley.*

## Conservation Status

The Scarlet Tanager is considered a Species of Greatest Conservation Need by New York State. Partners in Flight regards it as a species of Regional Concern in Bird Conservation Region (BCR) 30 and of Regional Stewardship in BCR 28. Breeding Bird Survey data indicate a declining population in the state since 1966. NYS Breeding Bird Atlas data reflect a decline in distribution in the Hudson River Valley.



## Identification

The adult breeding male is bright red with black wings and tail. This plumage changes in the late summer as it molts to a yellow-green winter plumage. The female has an olive green back and is yellowish below with blackish wings and tail. The immature male resembles the adult female. The song is a series of whistled phrases sometimes referred to as resembling “a robin with a sore throat,” and its call is a distinctive, soft, hoarse 'chip-burr'.

## Habitat

This tanager is a forest-interior species that breeds in a variety of mature deciduous and mixed forests, including pine-oak, eastern hemlock, and dry oak-hickory woodlands. It is most common in areas with a relatively closed canopy, a dense understory with a high diversity of shrubs, and minimal ground cover. The estimated minimum forest area needed to sustain a viable population is 25 acres. However, it is able to breed successfully in relatively small patches that are within 1/2 mile of larger contiguous forest.

## Food

The species forages primarily 18-50 feet off the ground on insects and other invertebrates, but sometimes feeds on the ground in wet or cold weather on earthworms, grasshoppers, and ground beetles. Its diet includes moths, bees, caterpillars, larvae of gall insects, beetles, crane flies, and most stages of gypsy moths, as well as fruit. Nestlings are fed insects and fruit.

## Nesting

This bird nests in deciduous trees, commonly oak. The nest is built by the female alone and is placed well out from the trunk on a horizontal limb, usually 20-35 feet above the ground with a clear view of the ground below and with open flyways from adjacent trees to the nest. It is a flimsy, shallow cup built of twigs, rootlets, grass, and weeds.

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## Threats

- Degradation and fragmentation of forests from development.
- Fragmentation of forests due to road construction and other development.
- Increase in parasitism in forest fragments by Brown-headed Cowbird.
- Increase in nest predation in forest fragments by skunks, raccoons, squirrels, chipmunks, as well as domestic and feral cats.

## Management Recommendations

Rosenberg et al. 1999 presents an excellent series of specific habitat area recommendations (see reference below).

- Prevent fragmentation of large forest tracts.
- Minimize the creation of edge habitats.
- Establish forested corridors to reduce isolation of small patches.
- Maintain structural and plant-species diversity within existing forests.
- Limit selective logging and other forest canopy disturbances to the non-breeding season.

**Adapted from MOWBRAY 1999, NatureServe 2008 and Rosenberg et al. 1999.**

## For additional information, see the following references:

Mowbray, Thomas B. 1999. Scarlet Tanager (*Piranga olivacea*), The Birds of North America Online (A. Poole, ed). Ithaca: Cornell Lab of Ornithology; Retrieved from the Birds of North America Online: <http://bna.birds.cornell.edu.bnaproxy.birds.cornell.edu/bna/species/479>

NatureServe. 2008. NatureServe Explorer: An online encyclopedia of life [web application]. Version 7.0. NatureServe, Arlington, VA. <http://www.natureserve.org/explorer>. (Accessed: May 2 2008).

Roberts, C., and C. J. Norment, 1999. Effects of plot size and habitat characteristics on breeding success of scarlet tanagers. *Auk* 116:73-82. <http://elibrary.unm.edu/sora/Auk/v116n01/p0073-p0082.pdf> (New York)

Rosenberg, K.V., R.W. Rohrbaugh, Jr., S.E. Barker, J.D. Lowe, R.S. Hames, and A.A. Dhondt. 1999. A Land Manager's Guide to Improving Habitat for Scarlet Tanagers and Other Forest-interior Birds. The Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, NY. <http://www.birds.cornell.edu/conservation/tanager/tanager.pdf>

Rosenberg, K. V., J. D. Lowe, A. A. Dhondt. 1999. Effects of forest fragmentation on breeding tanagers: a continental perspective. *Conservation Biology* 13:568–583.

Vega Rivera, J.H., McShea, W.J., Rappole, J.H. 2003. Comparison of breeding and postbreeding movements and habitat requirements for the Scarlet Tanager (*Piranga olivacea*) in Virginia. *Auk* 120:632–644.

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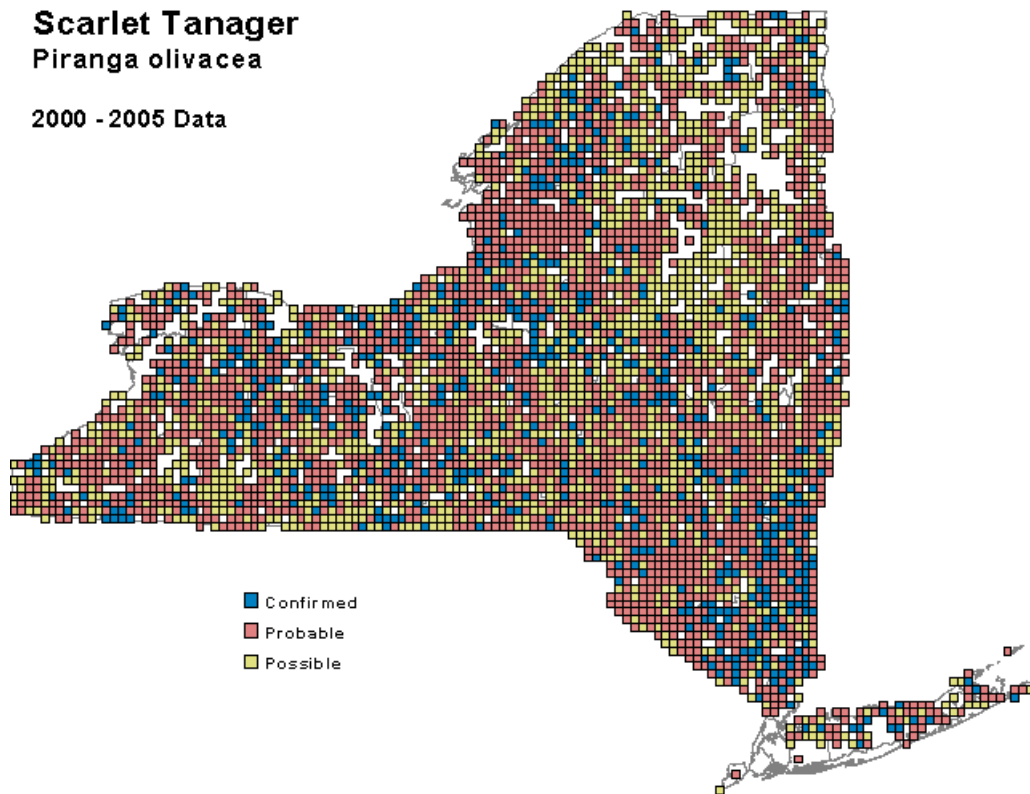
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## NYS BREEDING BIRD ATLAS COMPARATIVE DATA

### Scarlet Tanager

*Piranga olivacea*

2000 - 2005 Data

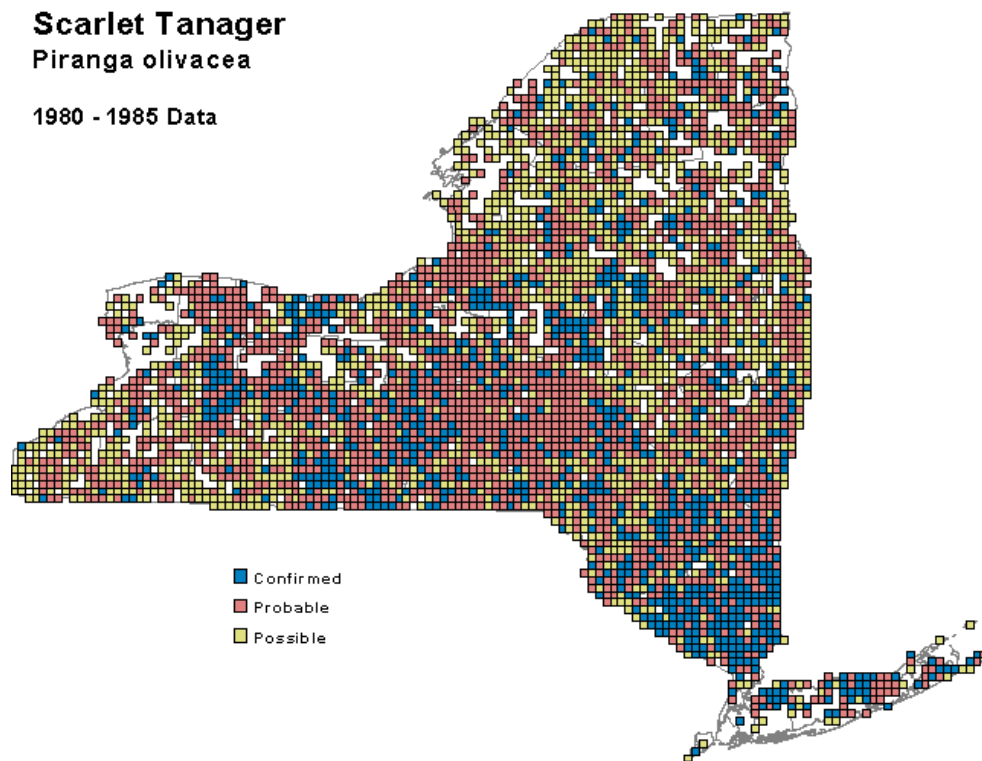


- Confirmed
- Probable
- Possible

### Scarlet Tanager

*Piranga olivacea*

1980 - 1985 Data



- Confirmed
- Probable
- Possible

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