



Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program

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Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife

Scarlet Tanager *Piranga olivacea*

State Status: **None**
Federal Status: **None**

SPECIES DESCRIPTION: Male Scarlet Tanagers are bright red with black wings and tail when in breeding plumage. Females, immatures, and males during the fall and winter are dull green above, yellow below, with greenish-gray (female) or black (male) wings. The Scarlet Tanager is monogamous and highly territorial. During the nesting period they are primarily insectivorous, gleaning for insects on the wing, but they also forage on fruit during much of the year.

DISTRIBUTION AND ABUNDANCE: The Scarlet Tanager is a Neotropical migrant songbird with a breeding range throughout much of eastern North America extending from southern Canada to the southern United States and west to the Great Plains. Their wintering range extends from Panama and along northwestern South America to Bolivia. The global population is considered to be relatively stable, but the population in Massachusetts is undergoing a significant decline (Sauer et al. 2014). Scarlet Tanagers can be found in suitable habitat throughout Massachusetts but are least common in the southeast and are absent on Nantucket as a breeding bird.

HABITAT DESCRIPTION: Scarlet Tanagers inhabit a variety of forest types in Massachusetts. However, they are considered to be area-sensitive and generally require large tracts of deciduous or mixed mature forest for nesting. Following breeding, they may seek out patches of early successional forest habitat for increased foraging opportunities (fruits, arthropods) and decreased risk of predation (dense cover).

THREATS: This species is sensitive to forest fragmentation throughout its breeding range as areas with extensive fragmentation may result in reduced reproductive success due to high nest predation and brood parasitism. Other threats include loss of wintering habitat and collisions with anthropogenic structures,



Photo by Andy Reago and Chrissy McClarren

especially during their nocturnal migrations (e.g., buildings, towers).

REFERENCES:

- Mowbray, T.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/bna/species/479>.
- Rosenberg, K.V., J.D. Lowe, and A.A. Dhondt. 1999. Effects of forest fragmentation on breeding tanagers: a continental perspective. *Conserv. Biol.* 13:568-583.
- Sauer, J.R., J.E. Hines, J.E. Fallon, K.L. Pardieck, D.J. Ziolkowski, Jr., and W.A. Link. 2014. The North American Breeding Bird Survey, Results and Analysis 1966 – 2013. Laurel, MD.
- Walsh, J., and W.R. Petersen. 2013. *Massachusetts Breeding Bird Atlas 2*. Massachusetts Audubon Society and Scott & Nix, Inc.

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A Species of Greatest Conservation Need in the Massachusetts State Wildlife Action Plan

Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife

1 Rabbit Hill Rd., Westborough, MA; tel: 508-389-6300; fax: 508-389-7890; www.mass.gov/dfw

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