

First Record of Summer Tanager (*Piranga rubra*) for Alberta

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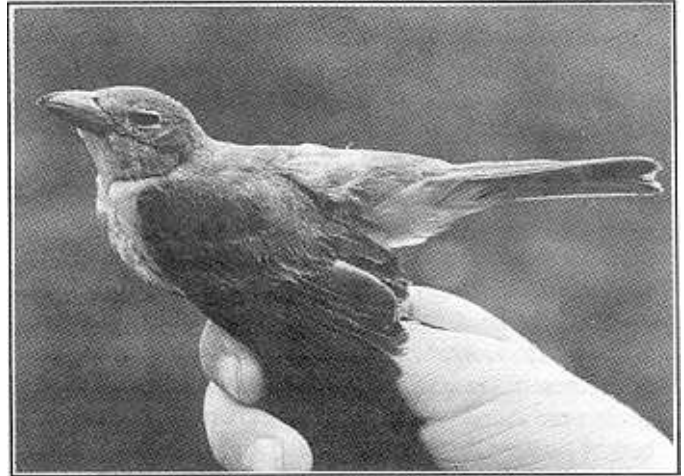
On the evening of 4 July 1995, H. Norris glimpsed an unusual yellow-bellied bird at his home near St. Paul, Alberta. A half-hour search until dusk unfortunately failed to locate the bird. Then, the morning of 5 July 1995, a Summer Tanager (*Piranga rubra*) was found dead beneath an east-facing window at the home (53° 57' 30" N and 111° 04' 36" W). The bird was brought to the Provincial Museum of Alberta, where it was examined and has been prepared as a skin (Z95.13.1).

Several of the tanager's features were inconsistent with it being a Western (*P. ludoviciana*) or a Scarlet Tanager (*P. olivacea*). The tanager had a distinctly large bill (exposed culmen, 18.5 mm, compared to the 16.0 mm extreme for the Western Tanager in Godfrey [1986]) and lacked a pronounced tooth on the upper mandible. The bird also lacked wing bars, a conspicuous feature of Western tanagers, and had red feathers in the wing (a greater covert on the right wing) and the tail (most rectrices on the left side and one rectrix on the right side), not the black feathers of adult male Western and Scarlet tanagers. The bird's plumage was distinctly variegated, featuring numerous red feathers on the predominantly olive upperparts and yellow underparts: the upper back, forehead and cheeks of the bird were primarily red; red feathers also covered the throat, breast, rump and under tail areas of the bird. This complex patterning indicate that this was an immature male in the process of acquiring the red coloration of adult males (the Hepatic Tanager, *P. flava*, does not show such a progressive transformation [Isler and Isler 1987]). Based on the length of its tail (72.5 mm), it would appear that the bird belongs to the eastern subspecies of the Summer Tanager, *Piranga rubra rubra* (Ridgway 1902).

The Summer Tanager breeds from the central and southern United States to northern Mexico and is an occasional visitant to eastern Canada. Records from western Canada are limited to several reports from Manitoba and one from Saskatchewan (Godfrey 1986; Purdy 1986). The species can now be added to the list of Alberta birds.

The bird had enlarged testes (left testis, 10 mm x 7 mm), which suggests that it was reproductively mature. The bird also had significant deposits of subcutaneous fat. Hence, the bird was in no immediate danger of starving and probably suffered an untimely death. The discovery of

this bird in a small farmyard at the edge of a pasture field and woods of 10-15 m trembling aspen is surprising, considering the predilection of this species for oak-pine woods or riparian woodlands in its normal breeding range (Isler and Isler 1987).



Summer Tanager

Photo: Hugh Norris

Literature Cited:

- Godfrey, W.E. 1986. *The birds of Canada*. Rev. ed. National Museum of Natural Sciences (Canada), Ottawa. 595 pp.
- Isler, M.L., and P.R. Isler. 1987. *The tanagers: natural history, distribution, and identification*. Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington, D.C. 404 pp.
- Purdy, J. 1986. A Summer Tanager in Manitoba. *Blue Jay* 44:184-186.
- Ridgway, R. 1902. *The birds of North and Middle America*. Part 2. United States National Museum Bulletin 50, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. 834 pp.

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Dinosaur Provincial Park Publication

A new publication *The Ecology of Dinosaur Provincial Park*, by Maggie Romuld, illustrated by Rita Wildschut, is now available. This field guide was written from notes taken by the author while researching the park for her Master's Degree. The book is available at the bookstore at Dinosaur Provincial Park (which helps support the Dinosaur Natural History Association) and at several locations in Brooks and the surrounding area.