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Summer Tanager *Piranga rubra*

The Summer Tanager is a fairly common summer resident of Florida's open woodlands. This tanager has a wide breeding distribution in North America, from California east to New Jersey and south to Texas and the Gulf coast. It winters from south Baja to the Amazon Basin and also in most of the West Indies. A few winter in southern Florida.

Habitat. The Summer Tanager prefers open woodlands for breeding, typically a mixture of oak and pine.

According to Howell (1932), bees and wasps compose the greatest portion of the Summer Tanager's diet. Other insects, spiders, and berries are taken in lesser amounts.

The nest of the Summer Tanager is placed 3 to 10 m (10 to 35 ft) above the ground on a horizontal limb of an oak or pine. It is built of grass, stems, and Spanish Moss and is lined with fine grass. The female lays 3 or 4 bluish-green eggs, spotted with reddish-brown (Sprunt 1954), that hatch in 12 days. The amount of time required for fledging is not known (Ehrlich et al. 1988).



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Seasonal Occurrence. Breeding in Florida occurs from April (Howell 1932) through mid-July (Taylor and Laird 1981).

Summer Tanagers are single-brooded (Isler and Isler 1987), but McNair (1996) reported a possible instance of double brood in Florida, apparently in 1995, after finding a nest that remained active until at least 19 July. This is the latest nesting report for the species anywhere in its range.

Status. This attractive songbird occurs throughout the northern half of the state, but is uncommon and sparse distributed in the lower peninsula. It is rare south of Lake Okeechobee, but breeding was confirmed in southern Hendry County during the Atlas project. Howell (1932) and Sprunt (1954) mention suspected breeding records far south as central Dade County.

The male's robin-like song is usually the first indication of its presence. Despite their bright colors (red in the male and yellow in the female), Summer Tanagers are frequently difficult to locate in the tree canopy. Although most Atlas records are of singing or territorial males or observations of pairs, breeding is fairly easy to confirm watching the adults carry food or by finding recently fledged young. Finding a nest is difficult; however, fewer than 5% of the quadrangle records represent nests.

Bill Pranty

Sponsored by Janet C. Balding

Summer Tanager

