

FEATURED PHOTO

A JANUARY SCARLET TANAGER SPECIMEN FROM NEW MEXICO

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On 4 January 2002, a female-plumaged tanager (*Piranga* sp.) appeared in the yard of the Draper family in Rio Rancho, Sandoval Co., New Mexico. The bird was seen frequently in the Drapers' yard, which is heavily planted to be attractive for birds, for five days. It was observed feeding on the berries of *Photinia* cf. *fraseri*, and on a suet mixture containing mixed bird seed, peanut butter, and Crisco. It regularly used a bird bath and sunflower-seed feeder in a neighbor's yard. Draper tentatively identified it as a Scarlet Tanager (*Piranga olivacea*), but an experienced birdwatcher considered it to be a Summer Tanager (*P. rubra*). Photographs were taken and shown to an ornithologist who agreed that it was probably a Summer Tanager.

On 9 January the bird flew into a window at the Draper residence. It was immediately recovered and frozen. When it reached the Museum of Southwestern Biology, Dickerman immediately recognized it as a Scarlet Tanager. He prepared it as a study skin (MSB 32102), with one wing spread to show the white underwing coverts. It was a female with the ovary measuring 3 x 5 mm and the skull fully ossified. It weighed 27.1 grams, with heavy fat, and it was not in molt. The photos featured on this issue's back cover show the January specimen with two other Scarlet Tanagers in fresh fall plumage.

When compared with three other specimens in similar plumage, the Rio Rancho bird is distinctly paler above, the dorsum being near Grayish Olive (color 43) as opposed to Olive-Green (auxiliary) (color 48) of Smithe (1974, 1975, 1981). The bird is also paler ventrally, with the belly nearer Straw Yellow (color 56) than the Sulphur Yellow (color 55) of the other birds. In addition, it lacks the somewhat richer and deeper coloration of the breast. This generally paler coloration makes the specimen even more distinct from fall- and winter-plumaged female Summer Tanagers, especially from the eastern subspecies *P. r. rubra*, the only form yet collected during winter in New Mexico.

McNair and Escobar (1993) reviewed U. S. late fall and winter (22 November to 8 March) records of the Scarlet Tanager, finding 16 from seven states in the Southeast. Only two of these were reported with supporting evidence such as photographs. Those authors strongly suspected that some of the other records they listed represented misidentified female Summer Tanagers. Ironically, the Rio Rancho bird would have been misidentified as that species had it not flown into the window. This specimen is the fourth from New Mexico, where the Scarlet Tanager is otherwise known as a rare spring and fall migrant (Hubbard 1978). As far as we are aware, this is the first January specimen of the Scarlet Tanager from the U.S.

LITERATURE CITED

Hubbard, J. P. 1979. Revised check-list of the birds of New Mexico. N.M. Ornithol. Soc. Publ. 6:1-110.

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