

## **Summer Tanager (*Piranga rubra*)**

NMPIF level: Biodiversity Conservation Concern, Level 2 (BC2)

NMPIF assessment score: 12

NM stewardship responsibility: Low

National PIF status: No special status

New Mexico BCRs: 16, 18, 34, 35

Primary breeding habitat(s): Middle-elevation Riparian, Southwest Riparian

### **Summary of Concern**

Although not considered threatened in New Mexico, the Summer Tanager is a relatively uncommon neotropical migrant associated with riparian habitat, particularly in the southern half of the state. Little information is available on population trends in New Mexico, although within U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Region 2, the population appears to be stable.

### **Associated Species**

Cooper's Hawk, Common Black-Hawk (BC1), Lewis's Woodpecker (SC1), Bell's Vireo (SC1), Lucy's Warbler (SC1), Yellow Warbler, Blue Grosbeak, Bullock's Oriole (SC2), Lesser Goldfinch

### **Distribution**

Summer Tanager breeds across most of the central and eastern United States, primarily south of 40° N, extending west to portions of southeastern California and southwestern Arizona. The breeding range also extends south in Mexico to Sinaloa and Durango. This species winters from central Mexico south through Central America, to northern South America as far south as Bolivia and Brazil.

In New Mexico, Summer Tanager breeds in drainages and river valleys in most of the southern two-thirds of the state, but is most common in the south. Its range extends north to the San Francisco River valley in the west, and at least to Cochiti in the Middle Rio Grande valley. The species is probably also regular in small numbers in the Canadian River drainage south of Mills Canyon (Robinson 1996, Parmeter et al. 2002).

## Ecology and Habitat Requirements

In the southwest, Summer Tanagers generally occupy riparian woodlands dominated by cottonwood, sycamore and willow. It may also use riparian areas dominated by tall salt cedar (20 feet or more in height), up to approximately 5500 ft in elevation. Its range is generally lower than that of Hepatic Tanager, which occupies pinyon-juniper and pine-oak woodlands (Robinson 1996). Nests along the Gila River were placed in cottonwood, Goodding's willow and boxelder, at heights ranging from 14-98 ft. (Stoleson and Finch 1998). Areas with high vegetation density and volume are favored for nesting (Powell and Steidl 2002). Summer Tanagers begin arriving in southern New Mexico in mid-late April and remain through September. Clutches consist of 3-4 eggs, and a single clutch per season is raised. This species may be vulnerable to nest parasitism by Brown-headed Cowbirds, although nesting data are limited. Summer Tanager is a bee and wasp specialist, though it takes a variety of flying insects and also eats fruit. It tends to nest and forage fairly high in the tree canopy (Robinson 1996).

## Conservation Status

### Species Assessment

DISTRIBUTION	2
THREATS	3
GLOBAL POPULATION SIZE	3
LOCAL POPULATION TREND	3
IMPORTANCE OF NEW MEXICO TO BREEDING	1
<b>COMBINED SCORE</b>	<b>12</b>

Summer Tanager is a Biodiversity Conservation Concern, Level 2 species for New Mexico, with a combined vulnerability score of 12; it receives no vulnerability scores higher than 3.

### Population Size

PIF estimates a species population of 4.1 million, and that New Mexico contains less than 1% of the species population.

### Population Trend

Long-term trends in most parts of the species' range have been stable or increasing, though some regional declines have been linked to loss of riparian habitat (Robinson 1996). This species is not well sampled by BBS in New Mexico. BBS data for 1966-2004 are:

	Annual Trend (%)	P-value	Number of Routes
New Mexico	8.8	0.15	7
FWS Region 2	0.2	0.68	140
Western States	3.3	0.01	33

### **Threats**

This species is not considered to be highly threatened in New Mexico, but populations are relatively small and restricted to riparian habitat. Loss or decline of riparian gallery forests along the middle Rio Grande and elsewhere would have a negative impact on this species. Populations are declining rapidly in California and in the lower Colorado River Valley, where destruction of riparian forest is rampant (Robinson 1996).

### **Management Issues and Recommendations**

Summer Tanager will benefit from general efforts to maintain the health and integrity of remaining mid-elevation riparian habitat in New Mexico.

### **NMPIF Recommendations**

- Maintain mature riparian forests with cottonwood and willow associations, and an average tree height of 20 ft or greater.
- Enhance habitat to create conditions favorable to the reestablishment of populations in at least one site to the north of Cochiti Lake.

### **Species Conservation Objectives**

#### **NMPIF Objectives**

- Maintain a density of 6 pair per mile along the Gila watershed (Stoleson and Finch 1998).

- Carry out monitoring to better assess species population trends in New Mexico.

### **Sources of Information**

Parmeter, J., B. Neville, and D. Emkalns. 2002. New Mexico Bird Finding Guide. New Mexico Ornithological Society, Albuquerque, NM.

Powell, B. F., and R. J. Steidl. 2002. Habitat selection by riparian songbirds breeding in southern Arizona. *Journal of Wildlife Management* 66:1096-1103

Robinson, W. D. 1996. Summer Tanager (*Piranga rubra*). In *The Birds of North America*, No. 248 (A. Poole and F. Gill, eds.). The Academy of Natural Sciences, Philadelphia, PA, and The American Ornithologists' Union, Washington, D.C.

Stoleson, S., and Finch D. 1998. Breeding bird activity along the Gila River in the Gila-Cliff valley. Unpublished data. USFS- Rocky Mountain Research Station, Albuquerque, NM.