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The Scarlet Tanager, a real dazzler

WARREN NELSON

It is early May and there is still a nip in the air. You look out your window and you stop in your tracks.

O n

was one of those springs when the birds arrived just as a cold snap hit and there weren't any insects for them to

are usually found in dense woods and sing from up in the higher limbs of the canopy. Normally, you are more likely to hear them than to see them.

While the male is a bright red color, the female is a dull green above and yellowish below, with dark wings and tail. She is a beautiful bird in her own right.

They usually nest in dense woods fairly high up. The female makes the nest of small twigs, roots and grasses. She lays four bluish eggs and incubates them for two weeks, when they hatch out. The young develop at an incredible rate. They can fly in only ten days. If humans grew as fast as birds, they would graduate from high school at age two.

They hang around well

your feeder is a bird like you have never seen before. It must be some type of exotic escapee or some gorgeous migrant from South America. The color alone is like no other bird around here. There on your feeder is a vivid red bird about seven inches long with solid black wings and tail. You could watch it for hours as it eats a few seeds and gorges on the grape jelly you have put out to try to attract orioles. You are one of the lucky ones to have a male Scarlet Tanager at your feeders. This is a scenario that plays out to some extent each spring in our area, but the spring of 2004 was a once-in-a-lifetime surprise. They showed up at feeders by the dozens – I even had seven of them at my feeders. People called me from all over the area asking 'what on earth is happening.' It

feed on. The main food source – your feeders. There is some truth to the belief that the bird is some gorgeous South American specie. For six to seven

your

feeders. There is some truth to the belief that the bird is some gorgeous South American specie. For six to seven months of the year, it is a resident of South America and we only have it here for about four months, which probably makes it more of a South American specie than a North American one. That aside, they are more common than most people think. They aren't seen very often because they

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into September before heading for their wintering grounds.

Spring is on us again and the orioles are starting to show up, so the tanagers aren't too far behind. Get the grape jelly, oranges and sugar water out. Maybe you will be one of the lucky ones to have a Scarlet Tanager or two show up at your feeders.



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