

Naturewise
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There are two tanager species of birds in Pickett County, the Scarlet Tanager and the Summer Tanager. The male of the Scarlet has a brilliant red body with black wings and tail, the female is greenish yellow with olive wings and tail. The summer male is solid red with darker red tail and wings and the female is yellowish below and olive above.

During the second year the Scarlet attains its full color but can be puzzling to identify in the late summer when he shows splotches of red and green as he molts to a yellow-green winter plumage. The male of the summer stays red the year round. Neither is related to Cardinal [known as the redbird] which is also red but has black markings on the face.

Both tanager species are insect eaters but will occasionally come to feeders as witnessed by Dr. Ralph Phillips recently. We have had Summer Tanagers to visit a feeder containing a mixture of peanut butter, lard, meal etc. [I will give the recipe in a later column.] The summer, sometimes called "Bee-eater", has been seen tearing into paper wasp nests and eating the larva.

Songs of the two tanagers are similar to the Robin's song. The Scarlet has a quick raspy sound-- the summer more melodic. The summer prefers to nest in the forest edge while the Scarlet goes deeper into the woods. Both are spectacular and once you have had the privilege to watch one you're hooked and want to know more about these beautiful summer visitors.

We received a nice note from Helene and Howard Woods complimenting this column and describing their birds and wildlife at their homes in Nashville and Byrdstown. She tells of seeing Tree Swallows in the Monroe area. Maybe we have more than we are aware of.

Robbie Hassler
1455 Hassler Rd.
Byrdstown, TN 38549