

# Foraging by a Summer Tanager during a reorientation flight

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**Spring reorientation flights** (see Burrell *et al.* 2015, *this issue*) of landbirds are a rarely studied phenomenon in North America. The region of Point Pelee National Park, near Leamington, Ontario, has regular reorientation flights involving dozens of species and thousands of individuals, predominantly in May (Lewis 1939, Gunn 1951, Burrell 2012, 2013). These flights have raised questions about the physiological demands placed on the individuals involved as the elevated energy requirements of migration on passerines is well documented (Richardson 1978, Van Doren *et al.* 2015). This note documents a Summer Tanager (*Piranga rubra*) interrupting its spring reorientation flight to forage. No other observations of birds doing this have been noted by the authors during previous surveys of spring reorientation in the Great Lakes region.

On 12 May 2014, Holden was observing a reorientation flight at the tip of Point Pelee National Park. During mid-morning, he recorded two observations of Summer Tanager; a first-alternate male at 0924 EDT and an alternate female at 1009 EDT (cf. Humphrey and Parkes 1959). While the male flew steadily

southwards over the waters of Lake Erie, the female interrupted her passage to forage, a behaviour not noted during previous observations of spring reorientation flights (K. Burrell pers.obs.). As she approached the tip of Point Pelee from the north at an estimated height of 50m, she made an erratic flight, followed by a rapid descent to the southernmost trees on Point Pelee. Holden observed that she had captured a wasp and she spent the following three minutes consuming the prey item. Upon consumption, she rapidly ascended from her perch and continued her flight southwards over the waters of Lake Erie. The sequence was captured with a Canon DSLR and 600mm lens (Figures 1, 2, and 3). An additional forty minutes of observation yielded no further observations of Summer Tanager foraging.

The Summer Tanager is one of the quintessential ‘reverse migrants’ in Ontario; observations of reorientation flights at Point Pelee and nearby Pelee Island have documented the species relatively frequently (Burrell 2013). With no confirmed nesting of Summer Tanager for the province (Reid 2007), observations



of the species most likely pertain to overshooting migrants beyond their traditional breeding grounds (Robinson 2012). The individual documented here was presumably migrating south, flying from Point Pelee National Park south over the waters of Lake Erie. While it would be difficult to fully understand the energy expenditure placed on a single individual during a spring reorientation flight, this observation would indicate that the phenomenon is not engrossing to the point of stopping basic foraging instincts. Given the amount of time undertaken by the authors documenting spring reorientation flights in the Pelee region, this observation was specifically noteworthy given the fact that no previous observations of this nature have been documented (i.e. individuals engaged in spring reorientation flights abruptly stopping their flight and consuming prey, before resuming flight southwards). As such, we hope this observation can provide but a small piece in helping to understand reorientation flights in the future and greater insight into the documentation and understanding of foraging behaviour and energetic needs of reorienting passerines.

Figure 1. The female Summer Tanager seconds after her capture of a wasp sp. at 1009 EDT on 12 May 2014.

Figure 2. Consumption of the wasp sp. on one of Canada's southernmost mainland trees at 1010 EDT on 12 May 2014. The consumption of bees and wasps by Summer Tanager is characteristic of the species (Robinson 2012).

Figure 3. Following the consumption of the wasp sp., the female Summer Tanager rapidly ascended and continued her reorientation flight at 1013 EDT on 12 May 2014.

*Photos: Brandon R. Holden*

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