

Eastern Towhee (*Pipilo erythrophthalmus*)

Description: Towhees are typically found on the ground or near the ground. They have a dark hood and rufous sides with a white belly. Upperparts are mostly black (male) or chocolate-brown (female). Tail has noticeable white corners in flight. Smaller than an American Robin. Eyes are usually red and their call is a sound like “towhee.”

Trend: Declining - Conservation Tipping Point Orange Alert

Habitat: Towhees typically are found on the ground or near the ground. Towhees can often be seen in backyards in urban areas. They prefer bushy areas like shrubbery and overgrown fields and hedgerows, forest edges or open woods with dense undergrowth.

Ways You can help with Conservation: Significant declines of Eastern Towhee populations over the last 50 years are probably due to habitat loss; declining insect (food) populations; predation by cats, raccoons, snakes, and other predators; and the removal of natural leaf litter.

Do not use pesticides or pest control services, especially mosquito-spraying.

Plant a native shrub layer and leave the leaves in your yard to provide nesting and foraging habitat. Local deer populations often heavily browse or eliminate the shrub layer. Protect young shrubs with fencing (temporary or permanent) or deer deterrent spray. Where the shrub layer is present, it is often dominated by non-native or invasive species. Replace invasive shrubs with native shrubs to provide larval host plants for caterpillars (aka baby bird food). Eastern towhees forage for insects in or under leaves on the ground. Leave your leaves where they fall to support this critical ecosystem.



Male Eastern Towhee photo by Jesse Gordon



Female Eastern Towhee photo by Maxine Okazaki

Keep cats indoors and take precautions to make your windows visible to all birds. The Eastern Towhee’s ground-nesting habit and willingness to visit backyard feeders makes it particularly vulnerable to predation by outdoor cats, especially in suburban areas. Proximity to human-altered landscapes means that this species is often killed by collisions with communications towers and glass windows.