



## eastern towhee

*Pipilo erythrophthalmus*

Kingdom: Animalia  
Division/Phylum: Chordata  
Class: Aves  
Order: Passeriformes  
Family: Emberizidae

### FEATURES

The eastern towhee averages seven to eight and one-half inches in length. The rusty color along each lower side of the body is an obvious feature. The male has a black head, throat, wings, back and tail, a white belly, white corners on the tail and red eyes. The female has basically the same coloration except she is brown where the male is black.

Young birds have streaks on the belly.

### BEHAVIORS

The eastern towhee is a common migrant and summer resident statewide as well as being a fairly common winter resident in Illinois. Spring migrants begin arriving in Illinois in February. Nesting takes place from May through August. The cup-shaped nest is placed either on the ground or a few feet off the ground in brushy areas along the forest edge. It is composed of leaves, bark, sticks and grasses and lined with grasses, bark, pine needles and sometimes hair. The female builds the nest over a five-day period. Three or four white or gray eggs with red-brown speckles are deposited in the nest. The female alone incubates for the 12- to 13-day incubation period. Two broods per year are raised. Nests are often parasitized by the brown-headed cowbird, which deposits an egg that the towhee will hatch

and raise, taking food and care away from its own young. Fall migration begins in September. The towhee lives in forest edges, thickets and open woods. Its song is "drink-your-tea" while the call note is "chewink." This bird scratches in leaf litter to find food. It eats seeds, insects and small fruits.

### HABITATS

- bottomland forests
- coniferous forest
- southern Illinois lowlands
- upland deciduous forest

### ILLINOIS STATUS

- common
- endangered
- threatened
- native
- exotic

### ILLINOIS RANGE

Permanent resident:

Summer resident: statewide

Migrant: statewide

Winter resident: statewide

### BIBLIOGRAPHY

Illinois Department of Natural Resources. 1999.

Biodiversity of Illinois, Volume 2: Woodland Habitats CD-ROM.