

# eastern towhee

## *Pipilo erythrophthalmus*

Kingdom: Animalia  
Phylum: Chordata  
Class: Aves  
Order: Passeriformes  
Family: Passerellidae

### **ILLINOIS STATUS**

common, native

### **FEATURES**

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

### **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 incubates for the 12- to 13-day incubation period. Two broods per year are raised. Nests are often parasitized by the brown-headed cowbird that 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.

# ILLINOIS RANGE



© Mary Kay Rubey



adult male

## **Aquatic Habitats**

bottomland forests

## **Woodland Habitats**

bottomland forests; coniferous forests; southern Illinois lowlands;  
upland deciduous forests

## **Prairie and Edge Habitats**

none