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## Eastern Towhee     *Pipilo erythrophthalmus*

The Eastern Towhee is a common bird of open woodlands and roadside edges throughout most of Florida. It is sometimes called the Ground Robin because its russet flanks remind one of the *American Robin* and from its foraging habit of shuffling leaves on the ground. Its call notes and song seem to come from everywhere during the breeding season. One of its southern names, the Joree, is derived from its call. It breeds from southern British Columbia and southwestern Quebec south through the United States to Florida, northern Texas, and Guatemala (AOU 1983).

**Habitat.** Eastern Towhees inhabit a variety of habitats and require only that dense thickets are present. They are most commonly found in pine flatwoods, overgrown fields, woodland edges, and residential areas with suitable groundcover. They forage on the ground and consume a variety of plant and animal matter.

The Eastern Towhee nests on or near the ground. The nest is a simple cup built of grasses, leaves, twigs, and strips of bark. Two to 5 eggs are laid, which are gray to cream-colored and spotted with reddish-brown. The eggs are incubated by the female for 12 to 13 days. The young fledge in only 10 to 12 days.

**Seasonal Occurrence.** Two to 3 broods are commonly raised each year, between April and August. Eastern Towhees breed and winter in Florida. Individuals that breed farther north are seen February through April and during fall migration, October through December.

**Status.** Three breeding subspecies of the Eastern Towhee occur in Florida: *P. e. alleni* in the peninsula, west along the coast to Bay County; *P. e. rileyi* in the central Panhandle, east along the northern tier of counties to Nassau County; and *P. e. canaster* in the western Panhandle (Stevenson and Anderson 1994). The 3 races all differ in iris color: red in *canaster*, yellow in *rileyi*, and pale yellow (usually termed "white") in *alleni*. Towhees are a common breeding species throughout the mainland, but they are absent from the Keys. In Howell's time (1932) they did not breed in the Everglades, but Atlas data show that Eastern Towhees now occur southwest to Cape Sable. Habitat changes caused by the drainage of wetlands, road and canal construction, and an extended drought since the 1960s may have allowed them to extend their range into this area.



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