



Spotted Towhee

Coloring instructions:

Red - the eye

Rufous (rusty red) - the sides and undertail coverts

Black - the head, bill, throat, back, wings (except for the white spots on the wing bars), and tail (except for the white tip)

White - the tip of the tail, the white spots on the wing bars, the belly, and the thighs

Spotted Towhee

Length: 7 $\frac{1}{4}$ "

Habitat: Resident in brush and oak woodlands

Field marks: Rufous (rusty red) sides, black head, and white belly

Field notes: Often heard scratching loudly in dry leaves in the underbrush.

Seeing this bird is a challenge. First you must go to the proper habitat. You have the best chance of seeing this bird if you go to a brushy area. Once there, listen for the sound of something scratching in the fallen leaves underneath the bushes. You will hear the sound of several scratches then a pause, several scratches and then a pause. You might have to get down on your hands and knees and you might only see something moving farther away in the tangled stems of the miniature jungle beneath the bushes. But you might see a bird.

Watch it scratch again. If it is a towhee, it will kick backwards through the leaves with both feet simultaneously as it gives a slight

hop. Several such "double scratches" and then the towhee pauses and examines the area it has just cleared for any uncovered insects.

By this behavior in this habitat, you will know it is a towhee even if you can't see it clearly. As you become more familiar with the towhee, you will come to know its markings and its descending screechy call.

Even though the towhee has bold markings, it is hard to see because of **countershading**. The towhee has a whitish belly and dark back. Many animals have this pattern of light below and dark above. If an animal was one uniform color, the underside would always be in the shadow and would appear darker. But with countershading, the lighter belly, being in the shadow, appears darker while the darker upper side, being in the light, appears lighter. The result is that the animal blends into its surroundings in an uncanny way.

In the springtime, however, the male wants females to see him so he makes himself more visible. He perches on exposed branches and sings. He also spreads his tail and wings so that the white patches on the tail and the white spots on the wings are easily seen.

Spotted Towhee Challenges

Put a check mark in the box when you have completed the challenge.

- Identify a male Spotted Towhee. It has a black head, back, wings and tail.
- Identify a female Spotted Towhee. It has a dark brown head, back, wings and tail.
- Identify a juvenile Spotted Towhee. It looks like an oversized, streaked brown sparrow. However, it has the white patches of the towhee on the corners of its tail.
- Observe how countershading helps this boldly colored bird blend in.
- See a towhee do its double scratch.
- See what unusual red eyes these birds have.
- See a male singing and spreading its tail and wings.