

COLORADO FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS - SIGHT RECORD FORM

NEW STATE RECORD _____

UNUSUAL RECORD X

ACCEPT 70

Species: Eastern Towhee (*Pipilo erythrophthalmus*)

Rcd 1/18/00 wpl

Date: 19 Dec. 1999 & 9 Jan. 2000**Number seen:** 1**Sex:** Male**Plumage:** Def. Basic**Locality:** 518 A St., Penrose**Elevation:** about 5330'**Nearest town:** Penrose**County:** Fremont**Time observed:** about 06:50 - 07:10 MST (19th); early afternoon (9th)**Duration of observation:** about 8 minutes, off and on (19th); about 30 seconds, off and on (9th)

Description: The compilers of the Penrose CBC had had an Eastern Towhee coming to their feeder for at least eight days. I and others participating on the count were at the house before dawn to wait for the bird to show. Shortly after first light, it did. It fed on seed spread on the ground and patio. On the ground, it often did the typical double-foot scratch to reveal seeds under the litter.

It was obviously a "Rufous-sided" Towhee (black head, chest, and upperparts, rufous sides, white belly). It was larger than the White-crowned Sparrows and smaller than the Curve-billed Thrasher that were also present on the ground beneath the feeder. The eyes were reddish, the beak was dark, and the legs were pinkish-gray. The wings were black, including the remiges. The outer half or so of the primaries had white bases forming a small, white patch. Additionally, many of the outer primaries had thin, white leading edges forming parallel white lines. There was no trace of white spotting on the scapulars or wing coverts they were unrelievedly black. The tail was black with extensive white on the distal corners, however I was unable to discern the precise pattern. The sides were strongly rufous and seemed brighter orange than what I'm used to seeing in Spotted Towhee (though there were no Spotted for comparison).

Similar species eliminated: The only confusion species is Spotted Towhee, which is eliminated easily due to the lack of white spotting on the scapulars and wing coverts and the pattern of white in the outer primaries. Eastern x Spotted hybrids are much more difficult to rule out. Hybrids can be very similar to Eastern Towhee (pers. obs.), though most probably are intermediate in plumage, thus should have at least some hint of white spotting. Hybrids should also be the result of a pairing of Eastern with the *arcticus* race of Spotted (the one on the plains). Since that race of Spotted has a brown cast to the plumage, I would suggest that hybrids could have such (as did the Eastern-like towhee singing a Spotted song at Tamarack SWA that I saw in May 1998). However, to be absolutely positive, or at least as positive as possible without the genetic code of the bird, one would have to hear vocalizations from the bird - I did not. Unlike some, I do not believe that Eastern Towhee is a distinct possibility as a breeder in CO. I believe that if it occurs, it is much more likely to do so in late fall and winter as vagrants from further east.

Describe the bird's song and call, if given, including method of delivery (i.e. from perch, in flight, duration): none heard either day

What is your prior experience with this and similarly-appearing species? I have seen hundreds of both Eastern and Spotted towhees.

Light conditions: sun very low off to my left (19th); various juxtapositions (9th)

Optical equipment used: Zeiss 7x42

Distance, and how estimated: estimated at about 4-5 meters (19th); 5-10 meters (9th)

Other observers who saw the bird with you: Sue Bonfield, Doug Faulkner, Brandon Percival, Bill Maynard, Peter Gaede, Lisa Marchet, Jim & Rosie Watts, and many others (19th); Mark Janos, Doug Faulkner, Brandon Percival, and Chris Wood (9th)

Other observers who saw the bird independently: quite a few

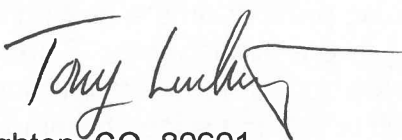
If photographed, type of equipment and film: I did not photograph.

List books, illustrations, recordings, other birders, etc. consulted and how this influenced your identification:

a) at time of observation: none

b) after observation: none

Reporting observer: Tony Leukering

Signature: 

Address: Colorado Bird Observatory, 13401 Picadilly Road, Brighton, CO 80601

Date report was written: I wrote this on 28 December 1999 and 12 January 2000 from memory.