

EASTERN TOWHEE:
BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES FOR HABITAT IN BIRD CONSERVATION
REGION 14

Introduction

The Eastern Towhee (*Pipilo erythrophthalmus*) is a large sparrow that forages in the leaf litter in disturbed forests and dry forest edges. Towhee populations are declining as forests mature and brushy edges revert to forest (figure 1). It is listed as a “Species of Greatest Conservation Need” (SGCN) in the Wildlife Action Plan of at least one State in BCR 14.

Habitat Needs

Preferred habitat is the seedling/sapling stages, preferably from 2 to 10 feet in height, of oak, oak-pine or pine communities. It will use larger diameter stands if the basal area of the larger trees is at or below 30 square feet. It will also use shrubby old fields with drier soils and ericaceous types (laurel etc.) also on drier sites and pitch pine/scrub oak stands.

Its territory size varies but is usually five acres or less.

Habitat Management Practices

The objective for the habitat management for this species is to maintain a sparse overstory with a dense understory of seedlings and saplings less than 10 feet tall in oak, oak/pine, pine and pitch pine/scrub oak stands. This condition needs to be made available across space and time so that at least 25 acres (five territories) is always in the appropriate habitat condition for every one hundred acres (50??) in the above types.

When assessing properties for habitat potential, look for soils that are excessively to moderately well drained, sandy to sandy/gravelly such as Adams, Boscawen, Caesar, Champlain, Colton, Croghan, Deerfield, Duane, Hinckley, Hoosic, Machias, Masardis, Merrimac, Quonset, Sheepscot, Stetson, Suncook, Sunday, Warwick, Windsor. There are others depending on where in BCR 14 you are working.

Recommended silvicultural treatments include:

In even-age stands with diameters at 10 to 12 inches – consider a heavy thinning to create a dense seed/sap understory.

In stands with larger diameters – consider either a shelterwood system or group selection with the groups limited to no more than 2 acres.

Stands on these soils can be operated in at any time of year. However, usually soil scarification helps with oak and pine regeneration so that operating on frozen ground may

not be as beneficial. The optimum time to work in these stands would be after nesting season since towhees nest on or near the ground.