



The Bird Rescue Center of Sonoma County

Restoring wings to the wild

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The Trouble With Towhees

Over the years, we've come to realize that California Towhees are, well, they're "special." Every Baby Bird Season, we get lots of these ubiquitous, drab brown birds as well as a much smaller number of their more flamboyantly colorful cousin, the Spotted Towhee. We continually asked ourselves how such an unremarkable bird could be so very hard to care for.



Although the California Towhee may seem boringly common, they present a real challenge to all wildlife rehabilitators because they are wary, furtive birds that are easily stressed in captivity. Furthermore, a vast percentage of them come to us because they have been "catted," which is a poor prognosis for any bird. Trauma, pain, and the stress of captivity can be a deadly combination. But perhaps the biggest problem is that, unlike most baby birds that will readily gape and beg for food, Towhees are reluctant to gape and often outright refuse to eat. Some would literally starve themselves to death before they gape for you.



Team Towhee To The Rescue

We have had to develop a special protocol for treating Towhees and, with a lot of patience, we've seen a remarkable improvement in the number of birds that recover and are able to return to the wild. Here are just a few of the techniques we've developed:

- Towhees now get special brown paper liners in their housing (because white scares them)
- They get special trays of leaf litter and their own special (shallow) dishes to encourage them to practice the characteristic Towhee two-step (a foraging ritual that encourages eating)
- They are cared for only by specially trained volunteers (who have demonstrated the exceptional patience required and have learned the tricks that encourage them to gape)
- They get extra aviary space and more time than is usual to learn all the skills they will need to survive in the wild
- They get their own, special, soft-release cages
- And they have their very own, special group of volunteers, Team Towhee, who

host them and provide supplemental support during their transition to independence.



Here's a look at some of our Towhees responding to the newly developed protocols and techniques developed here at The Bird Rescue Center. Video footage courtesy of our Lead Towhee Whisperer, Dana Gleis.

Welcome Team Towhee

As a result of our efforts, and with the dedication of our army of Towhee Whisperers who patiently coax these difficult patients to eat, we have seen a vast improvement in our release rate, more than doubling in just one year!



The Bird Rescue Center has literally become Towhee Central - and instrumental in helping educate other rehabbers how to care for the Troublesome Towhees. We have contributed a chapter about caring for Towhees for the second edition of the textbook, *Hand Rearing Birds*, and created a Towhee Whisperer training video to share with other licensed rehabilitators.

Are You A Towhee Whisperer?

One of our Towhee volunteers, Pat Seddon, approached us with her design for a special Towhee Whisperer T-shirt. She explained: *I wanted to create a special Towhee shirt because, prior to volunteering, I had always considered Towhees to be rather unremarkable, Basic Brown Birds. I now understand that rehabilitating Towhees requires being a full-on Towhee Whisperer. While the average person buying one of these shirts still may not understand the full extent of what it is to be a Towhee Whisperer, I wanted them to appreciate these Basic Brown Birds that are so often overlooked.*



You can be an honorary Towhee Whisperer by purchasing one of her specially designed T-Shirts. **The sale of each shirt will cover the cost of 2,000 meal-worms** – Towhees favorite diet. To give you some perspective, **during Baby Bird Season, we go through about 10,000 meal-worms every day!**



Do You Use eScrip?

Want to help The Bird Rescue Center without spending extra cash? Sign up for eScrip and a portion of the money you spend with your regular shopping will be donated directly to us! **We recently received \$5,000 from Oliver's Markets** – all from shoppers using eScrip. There are so many local companies who participate in the eScrip program – it's the perfect way to make your regular shopping dollars go even farther.



[Sign up today](#) and designate The Bird Rescue Center as your favorite non-profit. After that, every dollar you spend at a participating merchant helps fund the work we do!



OPEN HOUSE

October 6th, 2018
from 10am - 1pm

3430 Chanate Road,
Santa Rosa, Ca, 95404

[More Information](#)

We are open from 9am to 5pm, 7 days a week.

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