

THE CHOCOLATE TOWHEE.—On October 25, 1910, after three weeks of fruitless effort I secured a bird in unique plumage, which I called the Chocolate Towhee.

Extremely shy and skulking in his ways, dodging in and out of the tops of the felled trees where the withered leaves clung thick, now in the brush-heaps or through the wood-side bramble-patches, he had led me a merry and discouraging race full off; nor ventured to drop a single note that would lead to his identity. Nor was it my fortune to get one satisfying view of him through the glasses. So I began to fear that he might flit for the south some fine night, and leave me a sadder but no wiser man.

He was almost always alone, as though considered the black sheep of the family by his species, who did not appear to take kindly to his wild, furtive ways.

Nature was evidently in sportive mood when she made him, but as is often the case with freaks, he was no improvement on the beautiful colors or elegant color pattern of the towhee, as every bird-lover knows him in thicket and forest.

And the camera failed to give a definite conception of the odd mixing of dark brown and black in his plumage.

The idea seemed to have been to make an out and out chocolate bird of him, but the black persisted. Evidently a male bird, his measurements tallied so closely with those of other males of his species as to require no comment.

His only white feather was a single one on his throat just below the bill. Otherwise the white was replaced by dark brown or chestnut—a shade or two deeper than normally—so that the entire throat, breast and belly, including the vent and under-tail coverts, were all of one color without shading. This dark brown replaced the ordinary black on rump and tail-coverts, which, however, were marked or tipped with black. And the black of the back was irregularly splashed with brown. The crown and nape partook of the brown of the lower parts, extending around and uniting with it on the throat, but enclosing the black auriculars, lores, and line over the eye. The spot at the base of the primaries with the outer tail feathers, usually white, presented the palest brown in the plumage, being quite light. And there was brown where the primaries are normally edged with white, and likewise on the tertials. The greater coverts were also carefully edged with brown. The bill was dark horn instead of black as the male chewink.

Thus in this bird we have the untire underparts captured by the brown, likewise the head, nape and rump, with the black reduced to a square black on the back, on his wings and upper tail-feathers and the cheek spots.

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