

# Bare-eyed Ground Dove *Metriopelia morenoi*: a rock-loving dove of dry areas

Juan I. Areta

The high Andes are inhabited by four small charming ground doves. Our focus in this photospot is one of the must-see Argentine endemics.

**B**are-eyed Ground Dove *Metriopelia morenoi*, or Moreno's Ground Dove as it is often known, is endemic to north-west Argentina, and can be encountered only in arid mountainous habitats from Jujuy to San Juan provinces<sup>1-5</sup>. Three other Andean-Patagonian doves currently placed in the genus *Metriopelia*—Black-winged Ground Dove *M. melanopectera*, Golden-spotted Ground Dove *M. aymara* and Bare-faced Ground Dove *M. ceciliae*—can also be found in north-west Argentina. Bare-eyed and Bare-faced Ground Doves were formerly grouped in the genus *Gymnopenia*, which alludes to their large patches of bare orange/red skin around the eyes<sup>2-4</sup>. Both doves are fairly similar, but they have yet to be found together. However, bear in mind that Bare-eyed Ground Dove has bold wing-coverts and an overall greyish colour, whilst Bare-faced Ground Dove has pale-tipped wing-coverts and warmer rusty tones throughout.

Perhaps due to their evolution in open and windy environments, Bare-eyed Ground Doves are mostly (but not completely!) silent, as they do utter several different vocalisations (unpubl. data). Their squeaky wingbeats betray their presence when fleeing or fighting for a nest hole in an earth bank. They regularly gather in foraging groups. If you hear a noisy wingbeat and see a dove flying away, scan the rocky surroundings as they frequently only fly short distances.

The surroundings of the town of Tañi del Valle in Tucumán is probably one of the easiest places to encounter this gorgeous dove. Explore the small, seasonally dry creeks above the town and as far as the 'El Infiernillo' pass for it. The near-

endemic Tucuman Mountain Finch *Compsospiza baeri*, the endemic White-browed Tapaculo *Scytalopus superciliaris* and a host of high-altitude ovenbirds like Slender-billed Miner *Geositta tenuirostris*, Puna Canastero *Asthenes sclateri*, Scribble-tailed Canastero *A. maculicauda*, Streak-fronted Thornbird *Phacellodomus striaticeps* and the taxonomically debated endemic Buff-breasted Earthcreeper *Upucerthia validirostris* also occur.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank Nick Athanas, James Lowen and Juan María Raggio for providing photos to illustrate the article. Thanks are also due to Alejandro Bodrati and Kristina Cockle for sharing a birding trip to north-west Argentina.

## REFERENCES

1. Fjeldså, J. & Krabbe, N. (1990) *Birds of the high Andes*. Svendborg: Zoological Museum, University of Copenhagen, and Apollo Books.
2. Goodwin, D. (1959) Taxonomic notes on the American ground doves. *Auk* 76: 510–516.
3. Goodwin, D. (1983) *Pigeons and doves of the world*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
4. Hellmayr, C.E. & Conover B. (1942) Catalogue of birds of the Americas and adjacent islands. *Field Mus. Nat. Hist. Publ.* 430, *Zool. Ser.* 13(1).
5. Sharpe, R. B. (1902) On a new species of *Gymnopenia*. *Bull. Brit. Orn. Club* 12: 54.

## JUAN IGNACIO ARETA

Grupo FALCO, Calle 117 Nro. 1725 e/67 y 68, Buenos Aires, La Plata, 1900, Argentina. E-mail: esporofila@yahoo.com.ar

Bare-eyed Ground Dove *Metriopelia morenoi*, El Infiernillo, Tucumán, Argentina (Juan I. Areta)

Right: Bare-eyed Ground Dove  
*Metriopelia morenoi*, El Infiernillo,  
Tucumán, Argentina (Juan M.  
Raggio)

Below: Bare-faced Ground Dove  
*Metriopelia ceciliae* (James C.  
Lowen/[www.pbase.com/james\\_lowen](http://www.pbase.com/james_lowen)); this closely related species  
is easily identified by its spotted  
wing-coverts

Opposite page top and bottom:  
Small groups of Bare-eyed Ground  
Dove *Metriopelia morenoi* gather  
frequently on top of sunlit rocks  
to rest quietly (Juan I. Areta),  
stretching their necks when  
nervous (Nick Athanas/Tropical  
Birding)



