

ONE GOOD REASON TO GO TO ALASKA WITH BIRD BONANZAS

The scene: Remote St. Lawrence Island, Alaska, in the Bering Sea, 30 miles from Siberia. An unusual pipit has been spotted by a participant of another birding tour. Their leaders look the bird over, but it is still a mystery. "Where are the BIRD BONANZAS tour leaders?" someone asks. Ben King is summoned. Ben is the author of "A Field Guide to the Birds of Southeast Asia," he is currently working on guides for northeast Asia and India, and he has more than 10 years field experience in Asia. There is no Asian bird with which he is unfamiliar. He observes the bird through the scope for several seconds. "It's a Pechora Pipit," he states confidently, and describes its field characters. Participants of both tours line up to observe it in the telescope and add it to their lifelists.

This is not an isolated instance. Over and over again Ben identifies the difficult Asian species that are a puzzle to the other "experts."

If you go on another tour to Alaska, you may be lucky to find that Ben King is in the same place at the same time. If you go on a BIRD BONANZAS tour, you won't have to trust to luck.

49 MORE GOOD REASONS TO GO (All have been seen on BIRD BONANZAS tours to Alaska):

Laysan Albatross	Eurasian House Martin
Flesh-footed Shearwater	Gray-headed Chickadee
Scaled Petrel	Eye-browed Thrush
Red-faced Cormorant	Dusky Thrush
Smew	Stonechat
White-tailed Eagle	Wheatear
Ringed Plover	Bluethroat
Dotterel	Siberian Rubythroat
Rufous-necked Stint	Dusky Warbler
Temminck's Stint	Arctic Warbler
Long-toed Stint	Red-throated Flycatcher
Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	White Wagtail
Great Knot	Gray Wagtail
Wood Sandpiper	Yellow Wagtail
Gray-tailed Tattler	Pechora Pipit
Terek Sandpiper	Red-throated Pipit
Common Sandpiper	Indian Tree Pipit
Black-tailed Godwit	Brown Shrike
Bar-tailed Godwit	Brambling
Slaty-backed Gull	Hawfinch
Red-legged Kittiwake	Eurasian Bullfinch
Kittlitz's Murrelet	Common Rose Finch
Whiskered Auklet	McKay's Bunting
Common Skylark	Rustic Bunting
White-throated Needletail	

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Letters to the Editor

To the Editor:

The article on the Eared Trogon in the March 1978 issue of *American Birds*, raises a number of points that should be commented upon.

The lack of records for the northern Sierras of Sonora and Chihuahua may tell us more about the distribution of observers than of trogons, for if the mountains of southwestern New Mexico are rarely visited then those south of the border are hardly looked at.

While working with Richard Crossin when he was doing his study of the Tufted Jay (*Cyanocorax dickeyi*) in the barrancas near the Sinaloa-Durango border, I saw both Eared (*Euptilotis neoxenus*) and Mountain Trogons (*Trogon mexicanus*) on numerous occasions. The sympatric relationship is more an artifact of language than a usage of the same habitat. In the canyons they are rarely found together. The Eared is a bird of the heavier, broad-

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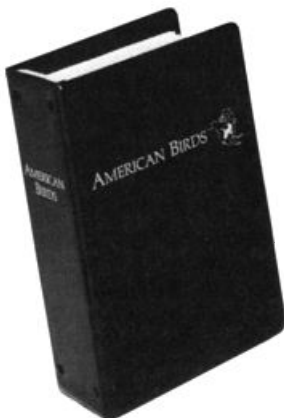
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leaved cover that occurs along the bottom and lower slopes, while the Mountain is a bird of the drier, open, upper canyon slopes and ridges. The upper areas have most of the madrone trees (*Arbutus*), although a number of the fruiting trees and shrubs occur mainly in the part utilized by the Eared Trogons. An inverted A would best visualize the areas of the canyon utilized by the two species, with the Eared found below the crossbar and the Mountain on the two legs above.

I feel from observation that a number of changes in the Sierra Madre of Mexico may be influencing the occurrence of certain species in the United States. Logging, overgrazing and firewood cutting have probably increased the abundance of rank, odored-leaved forbs, including various *Salvias*, and as *Arbutus* is rarely logged or cut for firewood because it is almost impossible to split, it has probably increased.

We must remember that the Coppery-tailed Trogon (*T. elegans*) in the United States occupies a niche that is not typical of its main range in Mexico, where it is found mainly in thorn forests and included riparian vegetation. Generally the Mountain Trogon in Mexico is found in types of canyons occupied in the United States by the Coppery-tailed.

It is also apparent that many people are

forgetting that at the periphery of ranges numbers of individuals are often drastically reduced by natural causes, hence statements about numbers and establishment, which are based on little data must be viewed with extreme caution. At present we do not know whether or not the Coppery-tailed Trogon or the Five-striped Sparrow populations are self-sustaining, or whether they depend on a constant inflow from the main range areas of these species. Only studies, including banding, will provide this information.

— Peter Hubbell, 6200 N. Via Rancho
Tucson, Ariz. 85704

Dale Zimmerman replies:

If, as Peter Hubbell's observations indicate, the Eared Trogon prefers mesic lower slopes, and the Mountain Trogon is more of a pine-oak zone bird, then we have at least a partial explanation for the sympatry exhibited by these two species. Yet certainly the Eared often lives among pines. The photograph of its habitat on page 25 of Joe Marshall's pine-oak woodland study shows open, dry, pine-oak growth. That author listed the preferred habitat as "pine forest," and mentioned territories in pine-oak woods including adjacent ponderosa and white pine stands.

Eared Trogons in Durango reportedly range

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into dry pine-oak areas, thus entering the Mountain Trogon's realm. One observer has seen Eareds at a Durangan site where I have found only the Mountain. As Hubbell says, the two rarely are found together, but they do frequent the same habitat to some degree — perhaps at different times. Southern Eared Trogons may enjoy a greater altitudinal range than those in northern Sonora, as Marshall noted for the Elegant Trogon. That author's study clearly reveals the Eared as a pine-oak woodland bird, but elsewhere it may prove to be ecologically less restricted. Perhaps, as northern outliers of a species that ranges into Michoacan, the Sonoran population is somewhat atypical.

Certainly one northward movement does not constitute a permanent range expansion. Natural forces frequently decimate peripheral populations. These latter thus tend to be unstable, with greatly fluctuating numbers. Nevertheless, range extensions *are* preceded by initial wanderers. I think we may assume the Elegant Trogon to be reasonably well established in Arizona where it now has nested

for nearly 40 years. In the Chiricahuas we know the same sites to be occupied in successive years, most likely by the same birds, although there probably is continued recruitment from Mexico at intervals. The contemplated banding of Chiricahuan trogons and the current study of Arizona's Five-striped Sparrows may shed light on the composition and stability of these northern populations.

Since publishing my paper in *American Birds*, a note entitled "Observations of the Eared Trogon and the Aztec Thrush in the Sierra Madre Occidental" by Rose Ann Rowlett (*Mex. Birds Newsletter* II, No. 2: 11-13, 1977) has come to my attention. The author and her companions found Eared Trogons in "moist pine-oak" vegetation in Durango, and noted that the birds perched "mostly in pines, occasionally in oaks or dead snags." They found the Mountain Trogon "... fairly numerous in the immediate area" and noted both species feeding on madrone fruits.

— Dale A. Zimmerman, Department of Biological Science, Western New Mexico Univ., Silver City, N.M. 88061

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