

## ARIZONA JUNCO

BY ROGER TORY PETERSON

**D**URING May 1947, while in the Chiricahua Mountains of southeastern Arizona, I was the guest of Herbert Brandt, who was making an intensive study of that area for his forthcoming book, "Arizona Bird Life." At an altitude of eight thousand feet the little rusty-backed, yellow-eyed Arizona Juncos (*Junco phaeonotus palliatus*) were our constant companions, and I could not resist painting a portrait of one for *The Wilson Bulletin* (Frontispiece).

This junco is restricted to the mountains of southeastern Arizona, southwestern New Mexico, and the adjacent area of Mexico. It is apparently completely sedentary, not making even altitudinal migrations.

There has been much discussion by systematists on the relationships among the various juncos. Some contend that there is no biological basis for specific separation of the *oreganus* and *hyemalis* groups and that it has been demonstrated that the gap between the two is bridged by the Cassiar Junco—*cismontanus*. They suggest also that most of the other juncos could probably be lumped with this one plastic group, but they are hesitant about including the Arizona Junco—and understandably so.

In addition to the bright yellow eye and pale yellow lower mandible that distinguish these little juncos of the desert mountains from all the other juncos of the United States—even from the neighboring Red-backed Junco, *dorsalis*, the Arizona Junco has characteristic and unmistakable traits of behavior. Whereas the Oregon Junco, *J. oreganus*, and the Slate-colored Junco, *J. hyemalis*, sing songs that to my ears are nearly identical, a single trill on one pitch, similar to the Chipping Sparrow's song, though less rapid and more musical, the Arizona Junco has a more complicated finch-like song, which involves two and sometimes three pitches—for example: *chip chip chip, wheedle wheedle wheedle, che che che che che*.

Furthermore, the Arizona Junco *creeps* along in strange mouse-like fashion. I have never seen it hop, whereas other juncos habitually hop. Alexander Wetmore tells me that he once saw a Carolina Junco (*Junco hyemalis carolinensis*) creep in this manner, but in my experience it is not characteristic behavior either for the Carolina or for any other of our juncos except the Arizona bird.

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