

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.

Bare-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 provinces¹⁻⁵. 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 eyes²⁻⁴. 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.

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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); 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)



