

Yellow-eyed Junco (*Junco phaeonotus*)

NMPIF level: Biodiversity Conservation Concern, Level 1 (BC1)

NMPIF assessment score: 14

NM stewardship responsibility: Low

National PIF status: No special status

New Mexico BCRs: 34

Primary breeding habitat(s): Mixed Conifer Forest

Other habitats used: Ponderosa Pine Forest

Summary of Concern

Yellow-eyed Junco is a Mexican species that reaches fairly high densities in the extreme northern portion of its breeding range in southern Arizona and New Mexico. Breeding habitat for this species in New Mexico occurs only at upper elevations in the Animas Mountains in Hidalgo County and the Big Burro Mountains in Grant County.

Associated Species

Whip-poor-will (BC2), Broad-tailed Hummingbird (SC2), Cordilleran Flycatcher (SC2), Violet-green Swallow, Mexican Chickadee (BC2), Olive Warbler (BC2), Red-faced Warbler (SC1)

Distribution

Yellow-eyed Junco occupies mountain regions of Mexico, extending south along the Sierra Madre Occidental and the Sierra Madre Oriental to the central volcanic belt, and highland areas of Oaxaca, Chiapas, and Guatemala. In the north, its range includes a number of locations in southeast Arizona.

In New Mexico, this species occurs in high-elevation forests in the Animas Mountains, in Hidalgo County, and in the Big Burro Mountains, Grant County. Records also exist for the Big Hatchet and Pinos Altos Mountains. In winter, it sometimes occurs in the Peloncillo Mountains (Hubbard 1978, Sullivan 1999, Parmeter et al. 2002).

Ecology and Habitat Requirements

In the southwestern United States, Yellow-eyed Juncos occupy mixed-coniferous forest and ponderosa pine forest. They are generally found at higher elevations, but may be found at mid-elevations where conifer forest is present in canyons. A somewhat wider array of habitats is used across the range in Mexico, including pine-oak associations. This species is a year-round resident throughout its range. In winter, Yellow-eyed Juncos often move to lower elevations, flocking with Dark-eyed Juncos in foothill woodlands and scrub habitats. Pairs form by mid-April and remain together throughout the breeding season, during which up to three broods may be raised. Nests consist of a scraped hollow in the ground, typically concealed by a rock, log or grass tuft and lined with grass and pine needles. Juncos experience a fairly high rate of nest failure due to predation and weather-related factors. Diet consists primarily of insects in summer and seeds in winter. Yellow-eyed Juncos forage on both the ground and in trees, always staying close to cover (Phillips et al. 1964, Moore 1972, Sullivan 1999).

Conservation Status

Species Assessment

DISTRIBUTION	4
THREATS	4
GLOBAL POPULATION SIZE	2
LOCAL POPULATION TREND	3
IMPORTANCE OF NEW MEXICO TO BREEDING	1
COMBINED SCORE	14

Yellow-eyed Junco is a Biodiversity Conservation Concern, Level 1 species for New Mexico, with a total assessment score of 14. At the continental level, it receives PIF vulnerability scores of 4 for its limited breeding and non-breeding distribution. From NMPIF, it receives a score of 4 for threats to breeding in the state. Yellow-eyed Junco is listed as threatened in the state of New Mexico.

Population Size

PIF estimates a species population of 20 million. Size of the New Mexico population is unknown. In 2005, DeLong (2005a, 2005b) reported a minimum of 6 territories in the Big Burro Mountains and found the species in nine locations in the Animas Mountains.

Population Trend

No BBS data are available. NMPIF assigns a score of 3 for local population trend, indicating uncertainty.

Threats

Yellow-eyed Juncos in New Mexico are threatened by loss or degradation of breeding habitat. High-elevation conifer forest in the Animas and Big Burro mountains is limited in extent, and may be vulnerable to catastrophic fire. Habitat in the Animas Mountains occurs only on private lands, so management options are limited, whereas Yellow-eyed Junco habitats in the Big Burro Mountains are managed by the U.S. Forest Service.

Management Issues and Recommendations

Management options for this species are limited.

NMPIF Recommendations

- Seek to maintain healthy mixed-conifer habitat in the Animas Mountains.

Species Conservation Objectives

NMPIF Objectives

- Maintain or increase the existing population.

Sources of Information

DeLong, J. P. 2005a. Yellow-eyed Junco surveys in the Big Burro Mountains of Southwestern New Mexico. Report submitted to New Mexico Department of Game and Fish. Eagle Environmental, Inc., Santa Fe, New Mexico.

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Phillips, A. R., J. Marshall, and G. Monson. 1964. Birds of Arizona. Univ. of Arizona Press, Tucson, AZ.

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