

The Quetzal of the pines: *Euptilotis neoxenus*

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Abstract: *The authors make a review of the mysterious Eared Quetzal (Euptilotis neoxenus), and describe new information of this elusive species, whose habits remain unknown.*

When we think of Trogonidae family (trogon and quetzals) we just imagine birds of gorgeous plumage, sitting quietly on a branch in the tropical jungle, among bromeliads, orchids and vines.

Now try to imagine a trogon or quetzal perched on a pine branch, his head covered with snow and back. Hard to imagine, right?

For there is a kind of quetzal inhabiting the temperate forests of North America: the Eared Quetzal (*Euptilotis neoxenus*). The name comes from the fact that this species has down as "ears" on the side of the head, one of the characteristics that make it unique among the family members.

This amazing species is endemic to the Sierra Madre Occidental, from Mexico to the south of USA (state of Arizona). In addition to that it is the only quetzal that can live in cold climates.

Another notable feature of this species is that making long-distance migration. When inclement winter approaches, the Eared Quetzal flaps its wings to less cold areas. It is not known where populations of Eared Quetzal spend the winter, because they simply disappear during the cold months!

Unlike other family members, the Eared Quetzal does not allow the approach of man, screaming and flying into the woods as we approached. How has a flashy bright red abdomen (see photo), when noting our presence the Eared Quetzal always turns his back to the viewer in an attempt to "hide her beauty," going unnoticed.

As if not enough all these attributes that make it the "black sheep" of the family of trogon, the Eared Quetzal does not have the same kind of calls of his relatives (the long, slow sequence: Kuo, Kuo, Kuo, Kuo ...). His calls are extremely high-pitched screams: "chiiiiiii-to ... chiiiiiiiiito ...". In fact, one of its common names is "Chito" due to their callings.

This species has ever lived with a legend: the Imperial Woodpecker (*Campephilus imperialis*), also endemic to temperate forests of the Sierra Madre Occidental. It was the largest woodpecker in the world, and was extinguished by hunting and destruction of forests. What remains of this giant today are their nests in hollow trees, which are used by the Eared Quetzal, among other species.

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Two other members of the Trogonidae family cohabiting the pine woods with Eared Quetzal: the Mexican Trogon (*Trogon mexicanus*) and the Elegant Trogon (*Trogon elegans*).

Deforestation is affecting both the members of this family, like other species that use of hollow trees to make their nests.

Let's hope that more studies are developed on the habits of this mysterious species, in order to have the necessary tools to ensure their long term survival. So we are preventing that the Eared Quetzal also becomes a legend ...

References:

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Williamson, S. L. (1992). The Eared Trogon in Arizona: Behavior, ecology, and management of the "Northern Quetzal." pp. 98–101 in Proceedings of the Chiricahua Mountains Research Symposium, 15–16 March 1992. Southwest Parks and Monuments Association, Tucson, Arizona.



One of the few photos available of this rare species: the Eared Quetzal (*Euptilotis neoxenus*) (photo: Karina Avila).