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## Juncos—Eldorado's Winter Friends

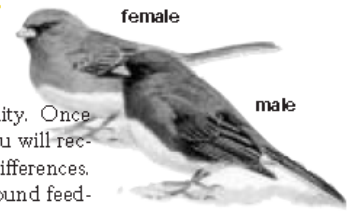
I saw the first Junco of our 2003-2004 winter season on October 10, beneath my bird feeder. I don't know if this was early or late, but the weather was still unseasonably warm. I think of Juncos as winter birds in Eldorado, and they are the most commonly seen birds during the Audubon Christmas Bird Count.

My first field guide to birds showed six distinct Junco species. In 1973, the American Ornithologists' Union combined these into two species—Dark-eyed Juncos and Yellow-eyed Juncos. The Dark-eyed Juncos have several races or populations that differ depending on the book consulted. Most of these can be found in New Mexico in winter. Oregon, Pink-sided, Slate-colored and Grey-headed are fairly common. The Red-backed and White-winged are less common. According to field guides, the Yellow-eyed Junco may be seen in SW New Mexico and SE Arizona.

But don't despair at this complexity. Once you recognize one of these Juncos, you will recognize the others, despite the color differences. They are small (5.75 in. to 6.25 in.), ground feeding birds with striking white outer tail feathers. They hop on the ground eating seeds, berries and insects, or glean seeds from low vegetation and grasses. They always seem to be perky and happy.

Winter flocks may contain 10 to 20 birds. Males seem to dominate over females in these flocks, making food less available to females. So females may winter farther south to assure their survival.

In breeding season, the birds are usually seen in pairs and are thought to be monogamous. They sometimes produce up to three broods of three to five eggs. I have never seen them in Eldorado in the summer, but I enjoy their company all winter long.



—Pam Herline