



Elegant Trogon

BY TERRY B. JOHNSON
NONGAME BRANCH CHIEF
ILLUSTRATION BY ZACHERY ZDINAK

SCIENTIFIC NAME: *Trogon elegans*, from the Greek *trogon*, meaning gnawing or fruit eating, and the Latin *elegans*, meaning fine or choice (the bird, not its food!).

DESCRIPTION: 12 inches long from tip of bill to tip of tail. Both sexes with white breast band and broad but short yellow bill. Male bright green above, on throat, and upper breast; bright red on belly. Female generally browner and duller where male is green and bright. In both sexes, tail finely barred black on white below, and metallic copper to olive green above (distinctly coppery in the female).

DISTRIBUTION: South through western Mexico to Costa Rica, generally at middle elevations (4,000 to 6,000 feet), and similar terrain in eastern Mexico. In Arizona, the southeastern "Sky Island" mountain ranges.

HABITAT: Southeastern Arizona's wooded canyons, especially those with perennial streams and tall trees such as sycamores. Also adjacent pine-oak woodland and conifer-clad hillsides, but mainly canyon bottoms.

BIOLOGY: True to its name, this species is a fruit eater, but it also feeds on insects and other arthro-

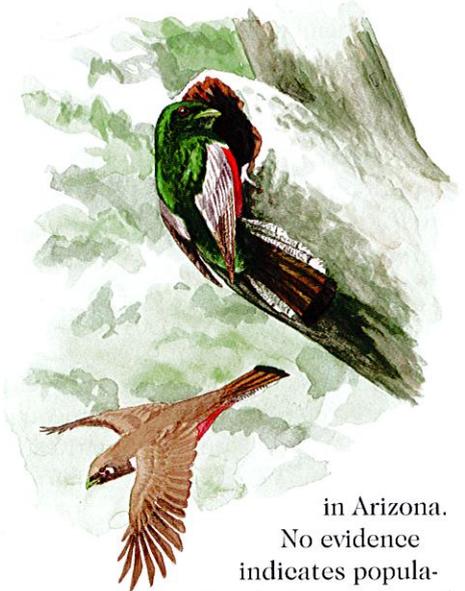
pods. It sallies (flies) from a branch to hover briefly at the outermost twigs of a tree or shrub, and pluck its "prey" on the wing.

Elegant trogons return to Arizona each spring to early summer, from mid-April through early June, and their distinctive call, a turkey-like *ko-a ko-ah*, again rings through the canyons. Autumn departure is as diffuse as spring arrival. Usually by October most have moved south, but in most years a few over-winter here.

A secondary cavity nester, the elegant trogon joins many other species in taking advantage of holes made by woodpeckers. Most nest trees are at the confluence of a main canyon and a major tributary. The elegant defends its nest from other birds, not just other trogons. A territory typically extends about one-quarter mile up and down the canyon bottom.

Due to staggered arrival of returning adults, egg-laying occurs from early May through June or July. Clutch size ranges from two to four. Both sexes incubate. Hatching occurs in 22 to 23 days, and fledging begins about 20 to 23 days later. Adult elegant trogons of all ages are subject to predation. Ringtails and squirrels may ravage the nest, and various avian predators may pick off an inexperienced bird, or a seasoned adult.

STATUS: Although considered by most birders not common enough, the elegant trogon is neither rare nor endangered, but also neither widespread nor anywhere abundant



in Arizona. No evidence indicates population declines in any of the core canyons occupied over the past few decades. The elegant trogon is thus not a candidate for federal listing as threatened or endangered, although it is an Arizona species of special concern. The latter status reflects the species' preference for habitats also used by humans.

MANAGEMENT NEEDS: The elegant trogon's needs are twofold: habitat protection, and management of people. Its foraging and nesting habitats must be protected, and in some cases restored. Water tables and hydrographs must be sufficient to maintain sycamores and other riparian trees. Human recreation must also be sensitive to possible impacts on trogons. Use of tape recorders and other call-back mechanisms to entice a trogon into better view, whether through binoculars or a camera, can affect nesting success. Sheer numbers of birders too close to an occupied nest tree can also be problematic. These and other aspects of "management" are well described in R.C. Taylor's book, *Trogons of the Arizona Borderlands*. 🦋