

This very rare species is endemic to the Central Andes of Colombia, where it is known from four specimens taken in 1911 and 1942, a bird mist-netted in 1967, and a population discovered in 1989. Clearance of most of the natural vegetation within its limited range seems likely to have caused a population decline.

DISTRIBUTION The Yellow-headed Brush-finch has been recorded from three localities along the upper Magdalena valley in Tolima and Huila departments, on the eastern slope of the Central Andes, where localities (coordinates from Paynter and Traylor 1981) include: (*Tolima*) río Toche (4°26'N 75°22'W; east of Quindío on the Quindío trail), where the type-series (a male and juvenile female in AMNH) was taken at 2,075 m in October 1911 (Chapman 1912); Toche (4°32'N 75°25'W), where a male and female (in ANSP) were collected at 2,255 m in May 1942; between Toche and km 27 (east of Tapias, on the road from Ibagué), where a population was found at c.2,000 m in 1989 (P. Kaestner *in litt.* 1992); and (*Huila*) La Plata Vieja (= La Plata, at 2°23'N 75°53'W; in the middle of the río La Plata Vieja valley), where a single bird was mist-netted and photographed on 18 December 1967 at c.1,300 m (Dunning 1982, Hilty and Brown 1986, H. W. Dunning *in litt.* 1991).

POPULATION Until 1989, the Yellow-headed Brush-finch was only known from two specimens taken in 1911, two more taken near the type-locality in 1942, and a bird trapped in 1967 (see above): however, the species was found to be common (although hard to see) along a 30 km stretch of road between (south-east of) Toche and km 27, with birds seen (usually commonly) in small flocks on all of six visits to the area between March 1989 and June 1990 (P. Kaestner *in litt.* 1992). Despite its apparent abundance at this site, the size of the population remains unknown (P. Kaestner *in litt.* 1992).

ECOLOGY The specimens of this bird were taken at 2,075 and 2,255 m, with the mist-netted birds apparently trapped at c.1,300 m (Hilty and Brown 1986), and recent observations from c.2,000 m (see Distribution). The type-series was collected upriver on the río Toche, which was generally “heavily forested, humid and luxuriant”, although the two specimens were taken from the “brush covering the cleared mountainsides of the open valley” (Chapman 1917a). The ANSP specimens were apparently taken in “forest” (Ridgely and Tudor 1989), but Hilty and Brown (1986) suggested that the habitat of this species is apparently similar to that of the Dusky-headed Brush-finch *A. fuscolivaceus*, i.e. second growth, shrubby forest borders, and bushy overgrown pastures. This suggestion appears to have been confirmed by recent observations near Toche, where birds were seen on highly disturbed hillsides with thick secondary vegetation, especially where there were vines and some remnant forest trees still standing (P. Kaestner *in litt.* 1992). Small flocks of the brush-finch (rarely in mixed bird flocks) foraged in the vines and bushes, calling only infrequently (P. Kaestner *in litt.* 1992). Birds seen in March were all deemed to be adults (with yellow heads), whereas in November many presumably young birds (with olive heads: see Remarks) were present (P. Kaestner *in litt.* 1992), suggesting a breeding season during the middle of the year.

THREATS It is likely that habitat disturbance and, mainly, forest clearance along the foothills of the eastern slope of the Central Andes has been the main, if not the only cause of decline of this upper Magdalena valley endemic (LGN; also Ridgely and Tudor 1989).

MEASURES TAKEN None is known.

MEASURES PROPOSED Surveys should be undertaken to determine the current range and ecological requirements of this species. In particular, studies are needed on populations that appear to exist in secondary habitats (e.g. near Toche) in order to determine whether they are viable, and consequently to assess the true extent and nature of the threats that the species faces. Patches of remaining primary habitat in the foothill areas on the eastern slope of the Central Andes, in both Tolima and Huila, need protected area status to ensure that this and other bird species (see below) are conserved. Obviously, any fieldwork or conservation initiatives should take into account proposals for the Tolima Dove *Leptotila conoveri* (see relevant account), which is sympatric with the Yellow-headed Brush-finch between Toche and Ibagué, and has also been observed in secondary habitats. Other sympatric species and conservation initiatives

Threatened birds of the Americas

relevant to this area are mentioned in the equivalent section under Tolima Dove.

REMARKS The type-specimen in AMNH has an olive-yellow head, but the other bird there is mostly olive (it has a scattering of yellow feathers with yellow lores and eye-ring): the bird photographed in December 1967 is like the latter but with less yellow, and the specimens in ANSP show equal variation with the female having a yellower head than the (second) male (Ridgely and Tudor 1989). Recent observations (see Ecology) suggest that the usual head coloration (i.e. mature adult) is yellow, with immature birds showing varying degrees of olive, apparently confirming that the type-series is representative, and that the English name should be Yellow-headed rather than Olive-headed Brush-finch (see Hilty and Brown 1986, Ridgely and Tudor 1989).