ASH-THROATED ANTWREN *Herpsilochmus parkeri* **E**[2]

This recently discovered antwren was fairly common in humid montane forest on a low isolated mountain ridge in San Martín department, northern Peru. Its minute geographic range coupled with rampant deforestation of the adjacent lowlands in the río Huallaga drainage renders it highly vulnerable.

DISTRIBUTION The Ash-throated Antwren (see Remarks 1) is currently known with certainty only from the type-locality, c.15 km by trail north-east of Jirillo to Balsapuerto, 6°03'S 76°44'W, at 1,350 m on the left bank of the río Huallaga, San Martín department, northern Peru, where it was discovered in 1983 (Davis and O'Neill 1986). It was again recorded in June 1987, when a male and female were seen together 3 km north-east of "Jesús del Monte" (untraced), north of Vencedores and Herio (also untraced: see Remarks 2) (M. Pearman *in litt.* 1991). It apparently does not occur immediately to the west, across the Moyobamba valley, and it was found only at 1,350 m even though elevations down to 750 m were studied intensively in the same range of foothills (Davis and O'Neill 1986).

POPULATION This antwren was reported to be fairly common to common at the type-locality, and in October–November 1983 when it was discovered, birds were usually seen in pairs: eight specimens (four of each sex) were taken at this time (Davis and O'Neill 1986, T. S. Schulenberg verbally 1989).

ECOLOGY The habitat at the type-locality is very heterogeneous: the Moyobamba valley directly to the west of the mountain ridge is moderately xeric, owing to a partial rain-shadow effect, and the species was taken at what appeared to be the upper elevational limit of the savanna-like habitat that characterizes much of that valley, which, however, was distributed only in scattered patches at 1,350 m (Davis and O'Neill 1986). There was another distinct habitat, located mostly on ridges in this area, that resulted from the outcropping of poor-quality, sandy soils where vegetation was usually short (c.4 m), extremely dense, and of low floristic diversity: a semi-stunted (canopy height c.12 m), but more diverse forest was also present and seemed to form a transition between the savanna-like vegetation and the tall cloud-forest (averaging 30-35 m in height) present in areas with good soil (Davis and O'Neill 1986): more information on the locality and its avifauna is given by Davis (1986).

The Ash-throated Antwren was noted most commonly in the canopy and mid-levels of the tallest forest, which had a mostly closed canopy, many epiphytes and a moderately open undergrowth, but was only slightly less common in the semi-stunted forest, where it was also found from mid-levels to the canopy, this latter forest having an extremely dense undergrowth and only a slightly closed canopy in which epiphytes were extremely abundant; the species was once netted in some low bushes in the savanna-like habitat at the very abrupt (presumably fire-maintained) border between the savanna and the semi-stunted forest (Davis and O'Neill 1986), an apparently similar situation to where birds were seen in June 1987 (M. Pearman *in litt.* 1991).

Birds usually travel in pairs, often within mixed-species flocks comprising a combination of Slaty Antwren *Myrmotherula schisticolor*, Buff-throated Foliage-gleaner *Automolus ochrolaemus*, Ocellated Woodcreeper *Xiphorhynchus ocellatus*, Streaked Xenops *Xenops rutilans* and Buff-throated Tody-tyrant *Hemitriccus rufigularis*. The stomachs of five individuals contained a variety of insects, primarily Coleoptera (including Curculionidae and Coccinellidae, one of which was tentatively identified as a *Brachiacantha* sp.), Hemiptera (both of which were present in all five stomachs), and Hymenoptera (present in four stomachs); in lower frequencies were Homoptera (including at least one Fulgoroidea), Formicidae, Orthoptera, Dermaptera and one spider of the Araneae (probably Salticidae) (Davis and O'Neill 1986). All known specimens were collected from the end of October to late November (1983): none had active gonads, two had only slightly (5 and 10%) ossified skulls, most had worn plumage and only two were in light to moderate body moult, all suggesting that most breeding takes place during the drier parts of the year, from about May to September or October (Davis and O'Neill 1986).

THREATS Widespread clearance of the foothill tropical, upper tropical and lower subtropical forest, throughout the Amazonian slopes of the Andes, for the cultivation of both coca and coffee, poses a serious threat to the many species of birds restricted to this zone. Lowland areas in the Huallaga valley to the west of the ridge where this species occurs are almost entirely deforested, and forest clearings are gradually extending further and further up into the surrounding mountains (T. S. Schulenberg verbally 1989). There is no reason to assume that any habitat for the bird will survive for long if steps are not taken to protect

some portion of it. The unstable and dangerous political climate that pervades the upper Huallaga valley at the present time probably precludes any conservation action in the next few years, but this area should be placed high on the list of biologically important places to receive attention when the present crisis passes (TAP).

MEASURES TAKEN None is known.

MEASURES PROPOSED A reserve in the low, isolated mountain range east of Moyobamba would also hold several other species that are rare or have very limited distributions, e.g. the threatened Spot-winged Parrotlet *Touit stictoptera* and Royal Sunangel *Heliangelus regalis*, as well as the Napo Sabrewing *Campylopterus villaviscensio* and Bar-winged Wood-wren *Henicorhina leucoptera* (Davis 1986), and should be created as a priority (but see Threats). A study to disclose the distributional status and population of this species should be undertaken.

REMARKS (1) The Ash-throated Antwren is closely related to the Black-capped Antwren *Herpsilochmus pileatus*, which has been treated as three subspecies: *motacilloides*, *atricapillus* and *pileatus*, found from Peru to eastern Brazil; Davis and O'Neill (1986) suggested treating all four taxa as different species, at least until it is known whether any intermediate populations exist between *parkeri* and *motacilloides*, and until the ranges of *pileatus* and *atricapillus* are better known. (2) Jesús del Monte was described as north of Herio village (on the road between Tarapoto and Moyabamba, somewhere between Abra Tangorama and Moyabamba), and thence north of Vencedores: as these localities are untraced, the proximity to the type-locality is unknown.