

SCISSOR-TAILED HUMMINGBIRD *Hylonympha macrocerca* V/R¹⁰

This hummingbird is endemic to the cloud-forests of the Paria Peninsula, north-eastern Venezuela, a restricted habitat that is under threat from agricultural encroachment.

DISTRIBUTION The Scissor-tailed Hummingbird (see Remarks) is endemic to the mountains of the Paria Peninsula, Sucre state, north-eastern Venezuela, an area which it shares with four other threatened species (see Threats under White-tailed Sabrewing *Campylopterus curvipennis*). Described in 1873 from trade-skins, the origin of this species was not known until 1947, when birds were collected on the Paria Peninsula (Phelps and Phelps 1948).

Records come from two main areas on the peninsula, in the centre and at the easternmost end, the localities involved (coordinates from Paynter 1982) being as follows: Cerro Humo (c.10°40'N 62°30'W), whence come the majority of recent records, specifically from the villages of Manacal and Las Melenas (G. Medina-Cuervo *in litt.* 1986, B. Swift *in litt.* 1986, Goodwin 1990, M. Pearman *in litt.* 1991); Terrón de Azúcar (untraced, but seemingly close to Cerro Humo: Phelps and Phelps 1958, Paynter 1982), a locality mentioned by Phelps and Phelps (1958); Cerro Patao (c.10 km west of Cerro Azul: Bond *et al.* 1989), a locality mentioned by G. Medina-Cuervo (*in litt.* 1986); Cerro "El Olvido" (c.2.5 km west of Cerro Azul, on the ridge between Cerro Patao and Azul: Bond *et al.* 1989), where the species was studied during July to September 1988 (Bond *et al.* 1989); Cerro Azul (c.10°40'N 61°56'W), where five males and nine females were taken during September 1947 (Phelps and Phelps 1948).

POPULATION The shipments of trade-skins to London (the second of which comprised 62 birds of this species) in 1873, and the subsequent series taken on Cerro Azul, led Phelps and Phelps (1948) to consider the Scissor-tailed Hummingbird common. The series of 72 skins in COP includes many taken on the same day, and there are recent observations of 2-7 individuals per day on Cerro Humo, where the bird apparently outnumbers the White-tailed Sabrewing (in March 1984 and July 1990: B. Swift *in litt.* 1986, M. Pearman *in litt.* 1991). On Cerro El Olvido between July and September 1988, Bond *et al.* (1989) recorded this species as "abundant" (absolute numbers estimated at three males and four females) in upper montane forest above 840 m, and rare below this elevation (just three individuals seen between 685 and 785 m): however, the bird was also found to be "abundant" (two males and two females) in mature secondary forest at c.530 m. The density of birds was calculated at between four and eight individuals per hectare, and this was extrapolated to give a population estimate (for the area from Cerro Patao eastwards, above 500 m) of 300 individuals along the ridge, with 700 below this and in secondary growth (Bond *et al.* 1989). The population on Cerro Humo can be assumed to be quite high owing to the numbers recently observed, but there appear to be no recent records of birds from anywhere other than this site and Cerro El Olvido. Further observation is needed in other areas between Cerros Patao and Azul before the estimates outlined above can be used with any confidence.

ECOLOGY The Scissor-tailed Hummingbird has been found between 800 and 1,200 m on Cerro Humo (Meyer de Schauensee and Phelps 1978, G. Medina-Cuervo *in litt.* 1986), whereas further east (where the mountains are no higher than 920 m) birds have mainly been recorded from 685 to 920 m, but the species is known from as low as 530 m on Cerro El Olvido (Phelps and Phelps 1948, Bond *et al.* 1989). It inhabits lower and upper montane rainforest (cloud-forest), and mature and secondary forest (Bond *et al.* 1989). Meyer de Schauensee and Phelps (1978) noted the species as one of forest-edge and small clearings, an assessment reinforced by M. Pearman (*in litt.* 1991), who observed that the bird appears to be one of forest edge rather than the interior. However, the Scissor-tailed Hummingbird was found to be common on the summit of Cerro Azul (in primary cloud-forest) in 1947, and on adjacent Cerro El Olvido the species was much commoner inside the forest of the upper montane zone than in other habitats (Phelps and Phelps 1948, Bond *et al.* 1989), this also being the case on Cerro Humo (C. Sharpe *in litt.* 1992). Within primary cloud-forest (characterized by a lower, more open canopy, luxuriant epiphytic growth, and the presence of small palms in the undergrowth), birds feed mainly at bromeliad flowers and on their insect inhabitants, whereas in secondary forest feeding was associated with the shrubs *Heliconia aurea* and *Costus* sp. (Bond *et al.* 1989). Birds hawk for insects from exposed perches or opportunistically whilst perched (Bond *et al.*

1989). A female that occupied a feeding territory for at least the month of August (this was post-breeding, and no sexual interactions were noted) spent 80-85% of her time perching 3-5 m up (B. Swift *in litt.* 1986 noted perching typically between 10 and 25 m up), and 13% feeding (Bond *et al.* 1989).

THREATS The Scissor-tailed Hummingbird has had its entire range “protected” since 1978 within the Paria Peninsula National Park, but despite this the available habitat is now very restricted, and threatened by agricultural encroachment: Cerro Humo may have no more than 1,500 ha of suitable habitat remaining, this area being very accessible by road, and subjected to much human disturbance (G. Medina-Cuervo *in litt.* 1986). Further details of habitat destruction and threats within the Paria Peninsula National Park are given in the equivalent section under White-tailed Sabrewing.

MEASURES TAKEN This species has only been recorded from areas now within the Paria Peninsula National Park (37,500 ha), which covers all montane areas between Cerro Humo and Cerro Azul (Bond *et al.* 1989: see corresponding section under White-tailed Sabrewing).

MEASURES PROPOSED For the Scissor-tailed Hummingbird the priority has to be the guaranteed protection of the forests on Cerro Humo and those further east, around Cerros Patao and Azul (see Population). The population appears to be healthy (see above), but the status of this species is essentially unknown away from Cerro Humo and Cerro El Olvido. More could be discovered about the bird's ecological requirements, especially with reference to the way it utilizes second-growth forest and forest edge, therefore a study concentrating on these points would be valuable. All studies and initiatives should integrate with work on all five threatened species in this area (see Threats under White-tailed Sabrewing).

REMARKS The Scissor-tailed Hummingbird is the only member of its genus.