

*This rare formicariid is confined to patches of bamboo and dense undergrowth in semi-deciduous moist forest and cloud-forest in the Pacific slope foothills of the Andes in south-west Ecuador and north-west Peru, where it is threatened by habitat destruction.*

**DISTRIBUTION** The Grey-headed Antbird (see Remarks 1) is confined to the Pacific slope of the Andes in El Oro and Loja provinces, south-west Ecuador, and Tumbes and Piura departments, north-west Peru, where it is found at elevations ranging from 600 to 2,900 m. The bird is known from few specimens, and is generally distributed in five areas, where localities (coordinates from Paynter and Traylor 1977 and Stephens and Traylor 1983) are as follows:

**Ecuador** (*El Oro*) La Chonta, 610 m (Chapman 1926, Zimmer 1932), at 3°35'S 79°53'W (see Remarks 2); San Pablo, 1,200 m, at 3°41'S 79°33'W, near Zaruma, where a bird (possibly this species) was heard calling in 1991 (Williams and Tobias 1991); (*Loja*) above Vicentino, 1,250-1,450 m, at c.3°56'S 79°55'W (five males singing in February 1991: Best 1992); Alamor, 1,400 m (Chapman 1926) at 4°02'S 80°02'W; Celica, 2,100 m (Zimmer 1932) at 4°07'S 79°59'W; 8 km west of Celica, 1,900 m (one specimen collected and others seen in August 1989: R. S. Ridgely *in litt.* 1989); near San José de Pozul along the road to Pindal, 1,600 m, at 4°07'S 80°03'W (sightings in April–May 1989: P. Coopmans verbally 1991); Utuana, 2,500 m, at 4°21'S 79°43'W (one male singing in February 1991: Best 1992); Quebrada Hueco Hondo, 1,000 m, Tambo Negro, south-west of Sabiango, at 4°23'S 79°51'W (two birds sighted in February 1991: Best 1992);

**Peru** (*Tumbes*) Campo Verde, 750 m (Wiedenfeld *et al.* 1985), at c.3°51'S 80°12'W; (*Piura*) Cerro Chacas, 2,625 m, at 4°36'S 79°44'W (several heard and one seen: Best and Clarke 1991); Palambra, 1,200-2,000 m, a few kilometres from Canchaque on the Canchaque–Huancabamba road (Chapman 1923; specimens in AMNH, ANSP, CM and MCZ) at c.5°23'S 79°37'W; c.15 km by road from Canchaque on the Canchaque–Huancabamba road, 1,500-2,900 m (Parker *et al.* 1985; specimens in LSUMZ); 2.8 km by road south-west of Abra de Porculla, 2,000 m (specimen in LSUMZ, also one seen in August 1989: Schulenberg and Parker 1981, B. M. Whitney *in litt.* 1991) at 5°51'S 79°31'W. It may occur east-south-east of Sapillica, at 4°45-50'S 79°50-57'W in Piura department, where isolated patches of habitat apparently exist (read from IGM 1982 and LANDSAT 1986).

**POPULATION** No estimate has been made, and recent records have added little information on the species's status. In 1974, 1975 and 1980 this antbird was found to be rare, occurring in very small numbers and seen or heard on only one out of six or more days of observation on the Pacific slope in Piura department (Parker *et al.* 1985), presumably owing to the scarcity of its preferred bamboo habitat (NK: see below). In Ecuador it has been found in very low numbers in patchy habitat within a very restricted area (see Distribution), and the overall population must be very small.

**ECOLOGY** The Grey-headed Antbird inhabits patches of *Chusquea* bamboo and densely tangled undergrowth in humid and semi-humid forest, occasionally being found in deciduous forest (e.g. at Tambo Negro), at elevations ranging from 600 to 2,900 m (Chapman 1926, Parker *et al.* 1985, Wiedenfeld *et al.* 1985, Best and Clarke 1991, Best 1992). In the general region where it occurs in Piura, there is mixed evergreen forest (including *Clusia*, *Oreopanax*, *Podocarpus* and *Polylepis*) between 2,150 and 3,050 m, whilst below 2,150 m, where human pressure is extensive and increasing, only scattered patches of forest exist: arboreal bromeliads are conspicuous, but tree ferns are absent (or very scarce), *Chusquea* bamboo is uncommon, and foggy, cloudy weather conditions occur regularly (Parker *et al.* 1985). At Campo Verde (750 m), Tumbes department, there is mainly a moist evergreen forest, with abundant vine tangles and scattered patches of bamboo (an unidentified genus) (TAP; Wiedenfeld *et al.* 1985). In Ecuador, this antbird has been found in evergreen forest undergrowth, especially bamboo, as well as in dense but low second growth and, rarely, in evergreen patches in otherwise deciduous forest (Best 1992).

The species forages in the undergrowth, usually 1-4 m above ground, often in bamboo, in pairs or family groups, and regularly follows mixed-species flocks (Parker *et al.* 1985, R. S. Ridgely *in litt.* 1989, B. M. Whitney *in litt.* 1991); at Celica it has been seen in flocks with Line-cheeked Spinetail *Craniolauca antisiensis*, Grey-breasted Wood-wren *Henicorhina leucophrys*, Three-banded Warbler *Basileuterus*

*trifasciatus* and others (R. S. Ridgely *in litt.* 1989). There are no records of its diet, but it presumably feeds on arthropods like other members of the family, and its exceptionally long, slender bill may be specialized for probing internodes and leaf clusters of *Chusquea* bamboo and debris trapped in vine tangles (NK).

Eighteen specimens collected from September to December had inactive gonads (in AMNH, ANSP, LSUMZ and MCZ). Two juveniles were taken in June (ANSP and MCZ). Breeding in this region probably occurs in the wet season (Marchant 1958), which is from January to May (Brown 1941), as is also suggested by several singing males in February 1991 (Best 1992).

**THREATS** Habitat destruction is a serious threat: in addition to rampant deforestation throughout its range, considerable trampling of the undergrowth by cattle and clearance of bamboo by local people for pack-animal food pose a threat to this and other undergrowth inhabitants such as the threatened Blackish-headed Spinetail *Synallaxis tithys*, Henna-hooded Foliage-gleaner *Hylocryptus erythrocephalus* and Rufous-necked Foliage-gleaner *Syndactyla ruficollis*, all of which have restricted ranges in densely settled regions of south-west Ecuador and north-west Peru (Parker *et al.* 1985, Best and Clarke 1991: see relevant accounts).

**MEASURES TAKEN** The species is known to occur in only one forest reserve, namely Tumbes National Forest in Peru (75,100 ha: IUCN 1992) (Wiedenfeld *et al.* 1985): however, this park lies at the lower elevational range of the species (see Distribution).

**MEASURES PROPOSED** Immediate action to protect several large patches of evergreen forest at 1,500-3,000 m on the western slopes of the Andes in south-west Ecuador and north-west Peru should be taken: such forests have been located near Celica, where most recent records of this antbird have been obtained (Best and Clarke 1991). The region south-east of Sapillica, and surviving high-elevation forests between Ayabaca and the Porculla Pass area, should be surveyed to establish the presence of additional populations. Additional comments on the conservation status of the south-west Ecuador and north-west Peru forests, the other threatened species for which they are critically important, and initiatives proposed for their preservation are given in the equivalent section and Remarks under Grey-backed Hawk *Leucopternis occidentalis*.

**REMARKS** (1) The systematic position of *griseiceps* remains an enigma. Although believed to be closely related to Black-throated Antbird *Myrmeciza atrothorax* by Chapman (1923, 1926) and Cory and Hellmayr (1924), Todd (1927) suggested placing it in *Formicivora*, a view opposed by Zimmer (1932), who pointed out that the widely exposed position of the nostrils, the pattern of wing and tail, and the morphology of the tail closely resembles various species of *Cercomacra*, from which *griseiceps* differs mainly by its more slender bill, a character most closely approached by *Myrmochanes*. Its allocation to *Myrmeciza* was opposed by R. S. Ridgely (*in litt.* 1989), who, on the basis of its behaviour and bamboo association (but still lacking vocal and biochemical data), suspected that it might be better placed in

*Myrmeciza griseiceps*

*Drymophila*. Recently its song was recorded at Utuana, and it seems to differ substantially from all other antbird genera (NK). (2) When read on IGM (1982) these coordinates show an elevation of 300 m; according to this map, the nearest site at 600 m on the Santa Rosa–Zaruma road is at 3°41'S 79°45'W.