

The last hope for this small insectivore appears to be an unprotected and rapidly diminishing tract of upland forest, only 1,500 ha in extent, near the type-locality in Alagoas state, Brazil.

DISTRIBUTION The Alagoas Foliage-gleaner (see Remarks 1) is known only from (Fazenda) Pedra Branca (“Serra Branca”: see Remarks 2), near Murici (9°19’S 35°57’W), on the south-eastern escarpment of the Borborema plateau in Alagoas, north-eastern Brazil (Teixeira and Gonzaga 1983b, D. M. Teixeira *in litt.* 1987), although it appears now to be present only in the remaining (adjacent) part of this area known as Fazenda Bananeira (see Threats, Measures Proposed). It was described from two adult males mist-netted in February 1979 (Teixeira and Gonzaga 1983b), while four additional specimens, including three females, were obtained at the same locality in November 1983, May 1984 and January 1986, all between 500 and 550 m (Teixeira *et al.* 1987; specimens in MNRJ); there were sight records in 1991 and April 1992 (D. Willis *in litt.* 1991, M. Pearman *in litt.* 1992). The species has not been found in the coastal lowland forests of the region, which have been well explored by ornithologists, although it is not difficult to locate owing to its loud vocalizations (Teixeira and Gonzaga 1983b; also M. Pearman *in litt.* 1992).

POPULATION Numbers are not known. Although described as a relatively conspicuous bird and easy to locate at the time of its discovery (Teixeira and Gonzaga 1983b), very few specimens have been collected since (see Distribution), and efforts made to find the species again in early 1987 and 1988 have failed (D. M. Teixeira verbally 1988), so that it “may be very threatened” (D. M. Teixeira *in litt.* 1987), or at least it seems to be rare.

ECOLOGY The Alagoas Foliage-gleaner has been observed in the forest interior, from the undergrowth to the canopy of the mid-storey trees, also frequenting areas of secondary growth such as selectively logged and old secondary forests (Teixeira and Gonzaga 1983b). Birds are found in pairs or small groups, and also join mixed-species flocks in which Lesser Woodcreepers *Lepidocolaptes fuscus* are particularly frequent (Teixeira and Gonzaga 1983b; for a description of the composition of these flocks, see Teixeira and Gonzaga 1985); all records in April 1992 were of single birds in mixed-species flocks (M. Pearman *in litt.* 1992). Food is obtained on the surface of leaves, branches and trunks, under bark, and amongst the debris jammed in branches, and consists of insects (including larvae taken from dead wood); the stomachs of two specimens contained beetles (perhaps Carabidae), grasshoppers, and ants (Teixeira and Gonzaga 1983b). There is no information on breeding of the species; specimens collected in early February had fairly enlarged testes and were moulting (Teixeira and Gonzaga 1983b), which might indicate a post-breeding condition: an immature female was collected in late January (specimen in MNRJ).

THREATS Destruction of forest in the vicinity of Fazenda Pedra Branca is the single most serious threat to this and all other upland forest species in Alagoas. Sugarcane plantations have replaced all the lower forested areas in Alagoas (see Threats under Alagoas Curassow *Mitu mitu*), and the remaining forests on the higher parts of the ranges, although not under threat from the sugarcane industry, are affected by other pressures such as selective logging, firewood removal and small-scale cultivation (e.g. of bananas), steadily eradicating the remaining forest on steep mountain slopes (Teixeira and Gonzaga 1983b, Teixeira 1986). The critical site for the Alagoas Foliage-gleaner at Pedra Branca, once some 7,000 ha in extent, has largely disappeared in the course of some 15 years of inertia over its protection, such that in 1990 the entire fazenda was found to have been cleared (D. Willis *in litt.* 1991, J. F. Pacheco verbally 1992); the remaining 1,500 ha, called “Bananeira”, is protected by law from further felling, but indiscriminate small-scale logging was evidently still occurring in April 1992 (M. Pearman *in litt.* 1992; see Measures Proposed).

MEASURES TAKEN The Alagoas Foliage-gleaner is protected under Brazilian law (Bernardes *et al.* 1990). It was the discovery of and proposal to protect a forested area near Murici (Special Environmental Agency 1977) that led to its investigation in 1979 and hence to the discovery of four new species from this site, the Alagoas Foliage-gleaner itself, Alagoas Antwren *Myrmotherula snowi*, Orange-bellied Antwren *Terenura sicki* and Long-tailed Tyrannulet *Phylloscartes ceciliae* (LPG; see relevant accounts).

MEASURES PROPOSED Although the proposal to protect a forested area of some 5,000 ha near

Murici as an ecological station, important to preserve the vegetation in order to sustain several streams rising there (Special Environmental Agency 1977), pre-existed the discovery there of four new birds for science, this discovery apparently made no difference to the urgency (or lack of it) with which the proposal was addressed, and concrete action was only possible (through FBCN) in mid-1992 to establish this as a major protected area in the region. The delay is all the more regrettable, not only because “Pedra Branca” is now known to hold at least 12 threatened bird species (see Remarks 2), but also because in the intervening years the main site in question has been “totally deforested” (J. F. Pacheco verbally 1992), and further because, as of 1987 (when its preservation as apparently the largest remaining continuous forested area in north-east Brazil was described as imperative: Teixeira 1987b), US\$200,000 was available to WWF-US through the MacArthur Foundation for the conservation of the area, yet only recently have conditions been suitable to initiate action (M. G. Kelsey verbally 1992). According to one report, all that apparently now remains is an elongated tract of forest, believed to be about 1,500 ha in extent, covering several ridge-tops and belonging to Fazenda Bananeira, which is known to hold this and at least some of the other species listed in Remarks (Alagoas Antwren, Buff-throated Purpletuft *Iodopleura pipra*), and which must now be the subject of urgent action (see Threats) if it, too, is not to disappear (D. Willis *in litt.* 1991); however, FBCN is informed that another 1,400 ha still exists at Usina Bititinga, and the intention is to include both tracts of forest in the park once further surveys have been carried out to demarcate boundaries, etc. (R. B. Pineschi *in litt.* 1992). It is clearly vital that FBCN is successful in this initiative (see Remarks 2), and the strongest international support should attend its efforts and ensure their rapid conclusion.

REMARKS (1) The Alagoas Foliage-gleaner is closely related to the Black-capped Foliage-gleaner *Philydor atricapillus* from south-eastern Brazil, Paraguay and north-eastern Argentina, with which it seems to form a superspecies (Teixeira and Gonzaga 1983b): the English name Greater Black-capped Foliage-gleaner, used for this species in Teixeira *et al.* (1987), indicates this relationship. (2) Although the name of the type-locality of this bird has been given as “Serra Branca” (Teixeira and Gonzaga 1983b, Teixeira *et al.* 1987), this mountain is actually known by local people as Pedra Branca, after the farm that once encompassed a major part of it (P. T. Z. Antas verbally 1988, LPG). One other threatened bird species, the Alagoas Antwren, is known solely from this small area, and another 11, the Golden-tailed Parrotlet *Touit surda*, Plain Spinetail *Synallaxis infuscata*, Orange-bellied Antwren, Scalloped Antbird *Myrmeciza ruficauda*, Black-headed Berryeater *Carpornis melanocephalus*, Buff-throated Purpletuft, White-winged Cotinga *Xipholena atropurpurea*, Long-tailed Tyrannulet (only one other locality known), Forbes's Blackbird *Curaeus forbesi* (recorded in adjacent fields), Seven-coloured Tanager *Tangara fastuosa* and Yellow-faced Siskin *Carduelis yarrellii* (see relevant accounts), have been recorded there, along with the highly threatened subspecies *pernambucensis* of the near-threatened Solitary Tinamou *Tinamus solitarius* (King 1978-1979, LPG), making this one of the most remarkable and important of sites in the Neotropics for threatened species, and one of the most urgent cases to which to attend in Brazilian conservation (see Measures Proposed).