

A forest reserve for this species in its native Bahia, Brazil, is urgently needed as the habitat within its small range is very rapidly being cleared, and already only small woodlots remain.

DISTRIBUTION The Slender Antbird (see Remarks 1) is restricted to south-central Bahia, Brazil, where it has been recorded from near Ipaoté (13°10'S 40°00'W), Irajubá (13°14'S 40°04'W), Ituaçu (13°49'S 41°27'W; see Remarks 2), Jequié (13°51'S 40°06'W) and Boa Nova (14°32'S 40°23'W) (King 1978-1979, Sick 1985, Teixeira 1987c). The species was described from a male collected somewhere in eastern Brazil in the early nineteenth century, and rediscovered in 1928, when another male and a female were collected at Ituaçu, 900 m, and Boa Nova, 800 m (Naumburg 1934; see Remarks 2). Most of the recent records of the species are from this latter locality, where it was studied in December 1974 on Fazenda Alvorada (Willis and Oniki 1981b), with six specimens collected there in October 1977, December 1978 and October 1983 (Teixeira 1987c), and February 1989 (J. F. Pacheco verbally 1992); a single bird was at Fazenda Santa Cecilia, north of Boa Nova and probably close to Fazenda Alvorada, in August 1989 (B. C. Forrester *in litt.* 1992). The species was also recorded from the municipality of Irajubá, 900 m, in 1977 (Sick and Teixeira 1979), near Jequié, 900 m, in October 1977 (H. Sick verbally 1988) and in the 1980s (TAP), and from 4 km north of Jequié, January 1988 (B. M. Whitney *in litt.* 1988). It has been speculated that it may also occur to the south of Boa Nova toward Vitória da Conquista and further inland from Ituaçu (King 1978-1979).

POPULATION Numbers are unknown. The species was known until 1974 from only three specimens (Willis and Oniki 1981b), and has consequently been on many lists of threatened birds (Sick 1969, 1972, King 1978-1974, Sick and Teixeira 1979, Willis and Oniki 1981b). In 1974 and 1977 it was found "without difficulty" in its range (King 1978-1979), when "a good, if scattered population" existed in patches of suitable habitat left near Boa Nova (Willis and Oniki 1981b). In a 200 ha woodlot north of Jequié, the species was "fairly common" (eight birds recorded) in January 1988 (B. M. Whitney *in litt.* 1988), but, notwithstanding reports that this bird could be "seen all over inland woodlots, e.g. along the main highway north to Salvador" (R. S. Ridgely verbally 1987), or that it is common where found (Ribeiro 1990a), it should be kept in mind that it is very rare indeed, and its restricted habitat is rapidly being cleared (B. M. Whitney *in litt.* 1988; see Threats).

ECOLOGY The Slender Antbird inhabits dry forest (mesophytic deciduous forest, 800-1,000 mm annual rainfall) with many "cipós" or lianas, such habitat being known as "mata-de-cipó", with a fairly open understorey, blocked here and there by lianas and by patches of huge terrestrial bromeliads *Aechmea* (Willis and Oniki 1981b, Ribeiro 1990a). This vegetation type extends south-west to northern Minas Gerais and typically occurs on deep soils (Rizzini 1979, Eiten 1983); the region of Boa Nova lies on a broad plateau which forms a border between wet coastal forests and the caatinga of the interior, and Slender Antbirds have been observed around terrestrial bromeliads and surrounding undergrowth near the borders between dry forest and caatinga or between dry forest and pastures (Willis and Oniki 1981b; see Remarks 3). In these places – occasionally in tall scrub nearby – the birds hop on the ground, low vines and the tops of bromeliads, tossing the dead leaves trapped in the bromeliads or on the ground (Willis and Oniki 1981b, M. Pearman *in litt.* 1989). However, at one site south-west of Jequié, the species was found on a scrub-covered hillside with (as always) extensive stands of large terrestrial bromeliads, but dominated by short *Acacia*-like trees only about 3 m tall and growing in patches separated by lower growth of bushes and weeds, i.e. certainly not "mata-de-cipó" (TAP). Members of a pair wander separately or together; each pair seems to have a very limited home range, barely 50 m across, usually separated by 100 m or more from the home ranges of other pairs, because patches of bromeliads are seldom close together; maximum densities observed at a study area near Boa Nova were in a rather scrubby second-growth woodlot, where pairs were 100-200 m apart (Willis and Oniki 1981b). In a 200 ha woodlot near Jequié two males were once singing only 30 m apart (B. M. Whitney *in litt.* 1988). A pair observed at Boa Nova seemed to be using an area of roughly 0.84 ha (Teixeira 1987c).

Slender Antbirds were not found to follow either army ants (Willis and Oniki 1981b) or mixed-species flocks (Teixeira 1987c), but such associations certainly occur to some extent, birds being found on one occasion foraging near Ochre-cheeked Spinetail *Synallaxis scutata* and Narrow-billed Antwren *Formicivora iheringi* (see relevant account), and on another with the spintail, Stripe-backed Antbird

Myrmorchilus strigilatus, Rufous Gnateater *Conopophaga lineata* and Black-billed Scythebill *Campylorhamphus falcularius* (M. Pearman *in litt.* 1989). The diet includes small grasshoppers and other insects (Willis and Oniki 1981b). Crickets, cockroaches, and small spiders were found in stomach contents, and winged termites *Eutermes* can also be taken at the forest edge (Teixeira 1987c).

Breeding activity seems to start by October, declining from December on; a recently built nest, apparently of this species, was found on 4 October 1983 near the ground among bromeliads; a pair of Slender Antbirds was observed around this nest (Teixeira 1987c). A female in AMNH, collected on 5 June 1928, had undeveloped ovaries.

THREATS In central-southern Bahia primary dry forest is rapidly being cleared for cattle pastures (Willis and Oniki 1981b), being reduced to scattered fragments of 10-15 km², which totalled about 965 km² in the early 1970s (Teixeira 1987c). Although the initial stages of this clearing, creating many zones of forest edge, probably benefit this bird, patches of forest are decreasing in size and length of edge; cleared slopes can be seen all around Boa Nova, so the survival of the species there is certainly in doubt (Willis and Oniki 1981b). Indeed, three out of four tiny woodlots still standing in July 1989 were highly disturbed by livestock and appeared to face imminent clearance (M. Pearman *in litt.* 1989; also B. C. Forrester *in litt.* 1992) and, overall in this part of Bahia, in 1990 only 5-20% (and nearer 5%) of forest remained (D. Willis *in litt.* 1991; see Remarks 3).

MEASURES TAKEN The Slender Antbird is protected under Brazilian law (Bernardes *et al.* 1990).

MEASURES PROPOSED The creation of a forest reserve of mata-de-cipó is desirable (Willis and Oniki 1981b, Teixeira 1987c) and now urgently needed (Ribeiro 1990a), and could be done in conjunction with an experimental agricultural station, which is needed on the southern Bahian plateau because of its distinctive climate and soils (Willis and Oniki 1981b). Such a reserve would also help to preserve other threatened bird species which occur in the same region (see Remarks 4). Clearly much more work on the biology of this species would be most valuable in determining the principles for its long-term management, and such studies might be combined with any on Narrow-billed Antwren.

REMARKS (1) The Slender Antbird is the only species in its genus. (2) It seems improbable that Naumburg (1934, 1935) would be mistaken over the locality being Ituaçu, yet the specimen in AMNH on which this record is based is labelled "Itirussú", and an Itiruçu is mapped by TAW (1986) just north of Jequié and listed by Paynter and Traylor (1991) on the basis of its mention by Zimmer (1933), who was reviewing *Thamnophilus punctatus pelzelni*; although not stated, it seems very probable that Zimmer's material was provided by the same collector, E. Kaempfer. In terms of its position at 13°31'S 40°09'W, Itiruçu is a slightly more likely locality for the Slender Antbird than Ituaçu. (3) The character of forest in this transition zone can alter within short distances (thus not all the 5-20% of what remains is appropriate for the Slender Antbird): only 11 km east of Boa Nova and at the same altitude a woodlot exists which holds no Slender Antbirds but an entirely different group of birds, including the near-threatened Rio de Janeiro Antbird *Cercomacra brasiliiana* (D. Willis *in litt.* 1991). (4) One other threatened and one near-threatened species, Narrow-billed Antwren and Rio de Janeiro Antbird respectively, are known from dry forests of southern Bahia (see relevant accounts); moreover, these forests are the source of a curious specimen of White-winged Potoo *Nyctibius leucopterus*, a species now known to be widespread in Amazonian forests (R. O. Bierregaard *in litt.* 1989), but the type-locality near Vitória da Conquista (Wied 1820-1821, Greenway 1958) remains the only site for Bahia, and it cannot be assumed that the form in Bahia is identical to that from the Amazon.