

*This small insectivore of forest thickets in north-east Brazil is confined by habitat destruction to just a few very small reserves, although a new race may prove to exist in Maranhão.*

**DISTRIBUTION** The Plain Spinetail (see Remarks 1) is endemic to north-eastern Brazil in the states of Pernambuco and Alagoas. However, five specimens (in LSUMZ) from Maranhão require further evaluation (see Remarks 2).

*Pernambuco* Although specimens were collected at Palmares in March 1927 (two in AMNH) and at Engenho Pirajá, Ipojuca, in January 1944 (in MNRJ), birds were recognized as distinct (see Remarks 1) only later on the basis of two specimens obtained in September 1950 at Usina Nossa Senhora do Carmo, Vitória de Santo Antão (Pinto 1950b). Other localities where birds have been recorded are: Lagoa do Zumbi, Cabo, April 1961 (specimen in MNRJ); UFPE Ecological Station at Serra (or Brejo) dos Cavalos, Caruaru, 1974-1979; and Saltinho Biological Reserve, Rio Formoso, July 1980 (specimens in MNRJ and UFPE; A. G. M. Coelho *in litt.* 1986).

*Alagoas* Records are from São Miguel (north bank of the rio São Miguel, opposite Roteiro), where a bird was collected in October 1951; Fazenda Canoas on the rio Prata, c.12 km north of Maceió, municipality of Rio Largo, where another specimen was taken in October 1951 (Pinto 1954a); Engenho Riachão, Quebrangulo, where two specimens (in MZUSP and LACM) were taken in April 1957 and birds were seen in the 1980s (Studer 1985, B. C. Forrester *in litt.* 1992); and Pedra ("Serra") Branca, Murici, 500 m, where a bird was collected in January 1986 (specimen in MNRJ) and others were seen in October 1990 (also at Usina Utinga Leão, 5 km from Murici) (J. F. Pacheco *in litt.* 1991) and in April 1992 (also near the junction of BR101 and BR104) (M. Pearman *in litt.* 1992).

**POPULATION** This species has been considered locally common, or at least not rare (A. G. M. Coelho *in litt.* 1986, D. M. Teixeira *in litt.* 1987, J. Vielliard *in litt.* 1986), but owing to the small size of most of the reserves where it survives overall numbers are likely to be low.

**ECOLOGY** Very little is known about this species. Birds have been found in patches of Atlantic Forest suffering various degrees of disturbance (Pinto 1950b, 1954a, A. G. M. Coelho *in litt.* 1986, D. M. Teixeira *in litt.* 1987); observations in April 1992 were in second growth in a recently burnt area at forest edge (Murici), and in a coffee plantation mixed with second growth near a remnant forest patch (BR101/104 junction) (M. Pearman *in litt.* 1992). Singles or solitary pairs forage very near the ground in dense tangles and thickets at the edge of forest and in secondary growth, probing in clusters of dead leaves and perch-gleaning from vegetation; the species does not appear to be associated with bamboo (B. M. Whitney *in litt.* 1991).

**THREATS** Although not rare, the Plain Spinetail is very local and forest-dependent (J. Vielliard *in litt.* 1987, J. F. Pacheco verbally 1991), and even if apparently not immediately threatened, it requires monitoring (D. M. Teixeira *in litt.* 1987). The deforestation throughout its range has been massive (e.g. Teixeira 1986), so that the species is now restricted to a few forest reserves (see Distribution), and even these are not totally secure (A. G. M. Coelho *in litt.* 1986).

**MEASURES TAKEN** The species is protected under Brazilian law (Bernardes *et al.* 1990). Efforts for the preservation of the forests in the Serra das Guaribas at Quebrangulo (Studer 1985) resulted in the creation in December 1989 of the 4,500 ha Pedra Talhada Biological Reserve (LPG). The occurrence of the species in the 450 ha UFPE Ecological Station and the 500 ha Saltinho Biological Reserve may give it some additional protection.

**MEASURES PROPOSED** Surveys of the species in the field are needed to assess its conservation status more accurately. The conservation of the Pedra Branca forests at Murici is a self-evident imperative, this being apparently the largest remaining continuous forest area in extreme north-east Brazil (Teixeira 1987) and holding several other threatened birds (see Remarks under Alagoas Foliage-gleaner *Philydor novaesi*).

**REMARKS** (1) The Plain Spinetail was originally described as a subspecies of the Rufous-capped Spinetail *Synallaxis ruficapilla*, and has been so treated by some subsequent authors (Pinto 1950b, 1954a,

1978, Meyer de Schauensee 1982, Sick 1985), but the view that “they are quite distinct species” on the basis of morphological features (Vaurie 1980) is certainly supported also by their striking differences in voice and their disjunct ranges (LPG; also B. M. Whitney *in litt.* 1991). (2) Five specimens of a *Synallaxis* (in LSMZ) were collected at Coroatá, Fazenda do Caximbo, Maranhão, in September 1972; with some points of difference (probably subspecific) they match Vaurie's (1980) description of *infuscata* reasonably well (J. V. Remsen *per* B. M. Whitney *in litt.* 1991), and hence may represent a range extension of *infuscata* well to the west. It is worth noting that Fazenda do Caximbo is also a site for Pectoral Antwren *Herpsilochmus pectoralis* (see relevant account).