

This rare montane hummingbird is confined to a tiny area of montane shrubbery at just over 3,000 m in the upper Marañón drainage of western Peru, where it is poorly known and in need of investigation.

DISTRIBUTION The Purple-backed Sunbeam (see Remarks 1) is known from a few recent sightings and specimens, and from two older collections, all within 20 km of each other in the upper río Marañón valley, La Libertad department, western Peru, where localities (coordinates from Stephens and Traylor 1983) are as follows: above Succha (Succha was a hacienda at this time, at 7°54'S 77°41'W: see Remarks 2), on the left bank of the río Marañón, Huamachuco province, where the type-series (21 specimens in AMNH, BMNH, FMNH, MCZ, MNHN, USNM and WFVZ) was collected at 3,050-3,200 m in February and March 1895 (Salvin 1896); above Soquián (7°51'S 77°41'W), a hacienda at 2,000 m, just a few kilometres from Succha, where seven specimens (in ANSP and WFVZ) were collected (by M. A. Carriker) in June 1932 (see Remarks 3). Some 20 km north-west of the type-locality at Molino (c.7°45'S 77°46'W: c.10 km north-west of and above Aricapampa, on the road from Trujillo to río Marañón), a few birds were seen and some collected at 3,000 m in October and November 1979 (T. S. Schulenberg *in litt.* 1989).

POPULATION In 1895, 21 specimens were collected in eight days, with seven taken in two days in 1932 (see above), suggesting that the species must then have been at least fairly common (NK). The continued presence of the species near to the type-locality was confirmed in 1979 (see above) although the modern status of the population remains unknown.

ECOLOGY The Purple-backed Sunbeam inhabits shrubbery with alders *Alnus* and other trees at 3,050-3,200 m, and has been observed feeding from an orange-red flowered mistletoe (probably the loranthacean *Tristerix longebrachteatum*: NK) that parasitize these trees in abundance, and from a white-flowered leguminaceous bush with oleander-like leaves, which grows above 2,450 m in Ecuador and Peru (Baron 1897). Other species of the genus *Aglaeactis* have adapted well to human presence, being able to feed from *Eucalyptus*, and regularly feeding from the shrubs that often border fields and villages: this may prove the case with *aliciae* (T. S. Schulenberg *in litt.* 1989). Two males collected in June had slightly enlarged testes, juveniles and immatures being taken in February, March and June (specimens in AMNH, ANSP, FMNH and USNM).

THREATS With its extremely restricted range, the Purple-backed Sunbeam would appear very vulnerable to habitat destruction. However, the status of its habitat remains unknown, and it seems possible that it can tolerate some degree of habitat alteration (T. S. Schulenberg *in litt.* 1989).

MEASURES TAKEN None is known.

MEASURES PROPOSED The status of this species and its habitat should be investigated, and the extent to which it can thrive in secondary habitats needs to be assessed.

REMARKS (1) It has been suggested that the Purple-backed Sunbeam is a well-marked subspecies of the Shining Sunbeam *Aglaeactis cupripennis* (Zimmer 1951, Schuchmann 1985). However, *A. c. cajabambae* occurs at Cajabamba, only some 55 km north-west of Succha (and presumably also at Huamachuco some 45 km west of Succha); *A. c. caumatonotus* occurs at Cochabamba, only 24 km west of Succha and 16 km west-south-west of Molino, and also at Yánac further south, in Ancash department; and *A. c. ruficauda* at Patás on the right bank of the Marañón, only some 16 km from Succha (Zimmer 1951). Thus *aliciae* is surrounded by three forms of *cupripennis* that are more similar to each other than any is to *aliciae*, and as there are no specimens showing any signs of hybridization (Zimmer 1951) and the two may eventually be found to be sympatric, it appears best to retain *aliciae* as a distinct species. (2) Succha was erroneously placed in Ancash department by Peters (1951) and Meyer de Schauensee (1970), and erroneously cited as Huamachuco (see Zimmer 1951). (3) No altitude was given on Carriker's specimens, and although he did

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collect some species at Soquián between 2,440 m and 2,745 m (Carriker 1933, Bond 1947, 1951a), he may well have collected this sunbeam higher up, perhaps even at the type-locality.