

*This small rock-haunting insectivore is known to inhabit as yet only a tiny area within the Serra do Cipó, Minas Gerais, Brazil, where it faces possible threats from cattle-grazing, fires and brood-parasitism.*

**DISTRIBUTION** The Cipó Canastero is known only from a restricted area in the Serra do Cipó (part of the Serra do Espinhaço), 1,100-1,500 m, north-east of Jaboticatubas, Minas Gerais, south-east Brazil, where two specimens (including the type) were collected in December 1985 and December 1988 (Vielliard 1990b) and other records obtained in July 1988 (B. C. Forrester *in litt.* 1988), August 1988 and July 1989 (Pearman 1990). The species has not been found outside the Serra do Espinhaço, although it was looked for at Caraça, 19°58'S 43°29'W, 75 km south of Serra do Cipó, in August 1989, in suitable habitat between 1,250 and 1,550 m (Pearman 1990; see Remarks 1); it is likely, however, to be found at other localities in the Serra do Espinhaço to the north of its present range (M. Pearman *in litt.* 1992).

**POPULATION** The species was considered “not uncommon” in an estimated 10 km<sup>2</sup> area of suitable habitat, where a maximum of seven birds was found on 28 July 1989, using tape playback as a lure (Pearman 1990). In December 1988 twenty birds (nine pairs) were found (Vielliard 1990b; see Ecology), seemingly in the same area.

**ECOLOGY** Habitat is described as isolated rocky outcrops in grassfields on tablelands (Pearman 1990, Vielliard 1990b). Vegetation on these crags included flowering shrubs (*Vernonia* sp., *Agave* sp., *Yucca* sp.) and various cacti; lichen was present on the rocks (Pearman 1990; see Remarks 2). Birds are mainly terrestrial, often keeping hidden amongst rocks or taking short flights (Pearman 1990, Vielliard 1990b), and preferring the steepest slopes with the most vegetation and crevices; males in full song were strongly territorial, climbing to the tops of bushes (c.1.5 m above the ground) or the most exposed rocks to sing, and responded well to tape playback in late July; non-singing birds were initially lured into the open by playback, but often vanished into crevices (Pearman 1990). Territory size was approximately 10-20 ha (see Remarks 3) and, of the nine territories found in December 1988, four were grouped 200-300 m from each other, three were grouped approximately 1 km from these four, and two were 7 km from these three (Vielliard 1990b). Food is recorded as insects, taken from rocks and crevices (Vielliard 1990b). In early December 1988, two pairs each had a still dependent young, while two other pairs were each feeding a young Shiny Cowbird *Molothrus bonariensis* (Vielliard 1990b). Pairs holding territories were recorded also in July 1988 (B. C. Forrester *in litt.* 1988) and August 1988 (Pearman 1990).

**THREATS** The species was considered “not to be in immediate danger” as its particular habitat is reasonably extensive and not under any threats (Vielliard 1990b), although it has been noticed that the area is used for cattle-grazing, and grasslands are periodically burnt, large fires having been seen in July 1989, which may represent a threat unless the fires are long-standing features and the bird populations have adapted to cope with them (Pearman 1990); degradation from grazing and fires was also noted as a risk to the habitat in July 1990 (Gardner and Gardner 1990b). Parasitism by the Shiny Cowbird, a recent invader of the rocky fields in the region, is a cause of concern, and there is the potential for over-collecting to affect so highly restricted a population (Vielliard 1990b).

**MEASURES TAKEN** None is known. The area where the species has been found lies close to the Serra do Cipó National Park (33,800 ha: IBAMA 1989), but it has not yet been recorded from within the park limits (Pearman 1990, Vielliard 1990b).

**MEASURES PROPOSED** An extension of the Serra do Cipó National Park boundary to enclose an area no more than 20 km<sup>2</sup> is suggested, on the basis of current knowledge of the species's range, to enhance the chances for its survival (M. Pearman *in litt.* 1989). Surveys are needed better to delimit the species's range, possibly using tape playback, and to monitor its status, including further study on the impact of Shiny Cowbird parasitism and fires; given the known, devastating impact of brood-parasitism on isolated populations (see, e.g., accounts of Yellow-shouldered Blackbird *Agelaius xanthomus*, Kirtland's Warbler *Dendroica kirtlandii* and Black-capped Vireo *Vireo atricapillus*), this particular problem requires the most urgent investigation. Collection of further specimens should not be countenanced. Three near-threatened species endemic to the same area deserve to be considered in any conservation initiatives targeted on the

*Threatened birds of the Americas*

Serra do Cipó and/or Serra do Espinhaço (see Remarks 4).

**REMARKS** (1) The Cipó Canastero is separated from its geographically closest relative, the Short-billed Canastero *Asthenes baeri*, by at least 1,450 km to the south-west (Pearman 1990). If populations are indeed found to the north of its current range, the name “Cipó Canastero” may need to be reconsidered (M. Pearman *in litt.* 1992). (2) It is possible that the plants described for the habitat are primarily species of *Vellozia*, which look like *Agave* and *Yucca* but represent an interesting family (Velloziaceae) endemic to the Brazilian and Guyanan Shields (TAP). (3) An estimate of territory size varying from 15 to 30 m<sup>2</sup> (Pearman 1990) was a typographical error for 150-300 m<sup>2</sup> (M. Pearman *in litt.* 1992). (4) Two other birds are endemic and one nearly endemic to the Serra do Espinhaço, namely Hyacinth Visorbearer *Augastes scutatus*, Grey-backed Tachuri *Polystictus superciliaris* (also now known from Serra da Canastra National Park: M. Pearman *in litt.* 1992) and Pale-throated Pampa-finch *Embernagra longicauda*: all are considered sufficiently numerous and in such little disturbed habitat as to be considered at far less risk than the Cipó Canastero, but all certainly merit continued monitoring, especially the pampa-finch (which presumably is also liable to suffer brood-parasitism by cowbirds).