

This middle-storey and lower canopy antbird is known from six lower cloud-forest localities in La Paz, Cochabamba and Santa Cruz, its small geographic and elevational range (c.500-1,650 m) placing it seriously at risk owing to the current high deforestation in the yungas of north-western Bolivia.

DISTRIBUTION The Ashy Antwren is known from few specimens, and even fewer sightings, from the yungas in the departments of La Paz, Cochabamba and Santa Cruz, Bolivia, where localities from north-west to south-east (coordinates, unless otherwise stated, from Paynter *et al.* 1975) are as follows:

La Paz Santa Ana, 15°50'S 67°36'W, at 670 m (and not found higher or lower) on the río Coroico, where the type-series (seven specimens in ANSP) was collected in July 1934 (Carriker 1935a); along the road to Bolinda, north of Caranavi (at 15°46'S 67°36'W), where three individuals were seen at 1,400 m in September 1979 (Remsen *et al.* 1982); Serranía Bellavista, 35 km by road north of Caranavi, where two males and a female (in LSUMZ) were mist-netted at 1,650 m in lower cloud-forest during June 1979 (Remsen *et al.* 1982); río Beni, c.20 km by river north of Puerto Linares (at c.15°28'S 67°27'W: IGM 1980), where a specimen (in LSUMZ) was collected at 600 m in July 1981;

Cochabamba Alto Palmar (untraced), specimen (in LSUMZ) collected at 1,100 m in 1960; Palmar, 17°06'S 65°29'W, female (in ANSP) collected at 800 m in July 1937 (D. F. Stotz *in litt.* 1989, R. S. Ridgely *in litt.* 1990);

Santa Cruz Santa Rita (untraced), male (in LSUMZ) collected at 500 m in 1961 (Remsen *et al.* 1982); Cerro Hosane, c.17°25'S 64°00'W, on the río Blanco, where two specimens (in CM) were collected at 1,200 m in August and September 1917 (pre-dating the type-series); along the upper río Saguayo (17°50'S 63°39'W), in Amboró National Park, where a few were recorded in March 1992 (Parker *et al.* 1992); and in the Serranía Raigones, 18°10'S 63°32'W, in the extreme south-eastern corner of Amboró National Park, where several individuals were seen at c.800 m (TAP).

POPULATION The paucity of museum specimens and sightings suggests that the species is uncommon, and the bird was certainly scarce at Serranía Bellavista, where only three specimens were mist-netted and none seen during more than 40 days of fieldwork in tall forest at 1,350-1,650 m: similarly, only one individual was collected during a prolonged field effort at 600 m along the río Beni below Puerto Linares (Remsen *et al.* 1982). The only locality where Ashy Antwrens have been found in numbers is the upper río Saguayo valley in Amboró National Park at c.650-1,000 m (Parker *et al.* 1992). In a small area covered daily (c.10 ha) there were two pairs associating with different middle-storey mixed-species flocks at 650-800 m, and a solitary male was seen at 1,000 m (TAP). This was the only *Myrmotherula* species observed at this locality (in contrast to the sites near Puerto Linares and Santa Ana where both White-flanked Antwrens *M. axillaris* and Grey Antwrens *M. menetriesii* were also noted); this suggests that the Ashy Antwren may be most numerous in a narrow elevational zone above the normal upper limits of its congeners (e.g. from 700 to 1,200 m).

ECOLOGY The Ashy Antwren inhabits tall humid forest at elevations ranging from 500 to 1,650 m (Remsen *et al.* 1982). At Serranía Bellavista it occurs at 1,650 m, but apparently not at a nearby lower (1,350 m) but wetter locality, where none was found in 24 days of intensive fieldwork in 1980 (Remsen *et al.* 1982). Remsen and Quintela (unpublished) treated it as a bird of "foothill tropical forest", which they defined as the forest at c.500-1,100 m that is somewhat drier than "true montane forest", the lower zone of which they called "upper tropical zone forest" with approximate elevational limits of 1,100-1,700 m. At all known localities this antwren occurs in the middle storey and lower canopy of tall, humid forest (TAP): four sightings were of birds foraging 3-5 m above ground (Remsen *et al.* 1982), while two specimens are labelled "light forest undergrowth" and "low in forest undergrowth" (specimens in LSUMZ: see below).

Carriker (1935a) noted that it was seen in mixed-species flocks, and indeed along the upper río Saguayo Ashy Antwrens were always noted in flocks that included Tawny-crowned Greenlets *Hylophilus ochraceiceps* and Red-crowned Ant-Tanagers *Habia rubica*, and were often with Golden-crowned Warblers *Basileuterus culicivorus* (TAP). Other regular flock associates, including the Bolivian Recurvebill *Simoxenops striatus*, are listed in Ecology under that species. Both Carriker (1935a) and Remsen *et al.* (1982) noted this antwren in flocks that also contained White-flanked Antwrens and Grey Antwrens; the latter authors also observed Bluish-slate Antshrikes *Thamnomanes schistogynus* with an Ashy Antwren. None of the the latter three associates were noted at the río Saguayo site, although they all

occur at lower elevations in Amboró National Park (TAP). The bird seen near Puerto Linares “stood out from other *Myrmotherula* species in its more acrobatic, rapid movements, spending only one-two seconds at isolated small leaf clusters at branch tips before flying to other clusters” (Remsen *et al.* 1982). Two pairs studied at length by Parker *et al.* (1992) “primarily searched clusters of dead leaves that hung from open, slender branches or were trapped in vine tangles, from c. 6-15 m (mainly at 12-14) above the ground; they also occasionally probed balls of moss on branches, and appeared to scan green leaves as well but were not seen to take any prey from them”. A pair observed in the Serranía Raigones also searched dead leaves trapped in dense lower canopy tangles at 9-12 m (TAP). All stomachs reported on contained insects (Remsen *et al.* 1982), and prey items at the two Amboró sites included small green orthopterans, small spiders, and a roach (TAP).

A pair behaving nervously, both with small green orthopterans in their bills, were observed on 17 August at río Saguayo, but no nest or fledglings could be found in the area (TAP). All recent Bolivian specimens (LSUMZ) from June–July had ossified skulls and enlarged or slightly enlarged gonads (Remsen *et al.* 1982), although this is not necessarily a sign of breeding (TAP).

THREATS The intensive and expanding cultivation of coca and coffee on the Andean slopes, at elevations inhabited by this species, poses a serious threat, and the species's only chance of survival may be on slopes too steep for cultivation, if such exist (TAP). Because the foothill tropical forest is drier than the upper tropical zone forest, it is easier to clear and burn, and thus is a favoured target for colonization projects; the amount of this forest that has been cleared in the yungas of La Paz and Cochabamba is certainly substantial, and of the 19 species apparently restricted to this type of forest, the Ashy Antwren and the Bolivian Recurvebill are of special concern because of their limited distributions (Remsen and Quintela unpublished, ICBP 1992, Crosby *et al.* in prep.: see relevant account, but also Threats under Yellow-rumped Antwren *Terenura sharpei*).

MEASURES TAKEN The Amboró National Park in Santa Cruz holds the species (see equivalent section under Bolivian Recurvebill).

MEASURES PROPOSED The Ashy Antwren is sympatric with a number of other threatened species, all of which are in urgent need of conservation initiatives to ensure their long-term survival: a strategy for the conservation of the montane forest and its threatened endemic bird in this region is presented in the equivalent section under Bolivian Recurvebill.