

This rare plantcutter inhabits the coast of northern Peru, where it may require a specific habitat that is now threatened by the almost complete cultivation of the coastal river valleys.

DISTRIBUTION The Peruvian Plantcutter is known from very few coastal localities (at altitudes varying from sea-level to 550 m) in Tumbes, Piura, Lambayeque, La Libertad, Ancash and Lima departments, Peru (coordinates, unless otherwise stated, from Stephens and Traylor 1983) as follows:

Tumbes
80°28'W), whence specimen, from near 1883);

Piura
(4°33'S 81°08'W: label), east of Talara, BMNH) was collected 1933; near Talara³ where a bird (in ROM) March 1934; Quebrada 81°08'W: coordinates south-east of Talara, BMNH, ROM) were in January and October March 1937;

Lambayeque
79°50'W), where 20 August 1989 (B. M. Eten⁶ (6°54'S come six specimens (in 10-15 m in September río Saña⁷, c.5 km north-c.8 km south-west of being at 7°00'S specimen (in LSUMZ) September 1978 and seen in May 1987 (M.

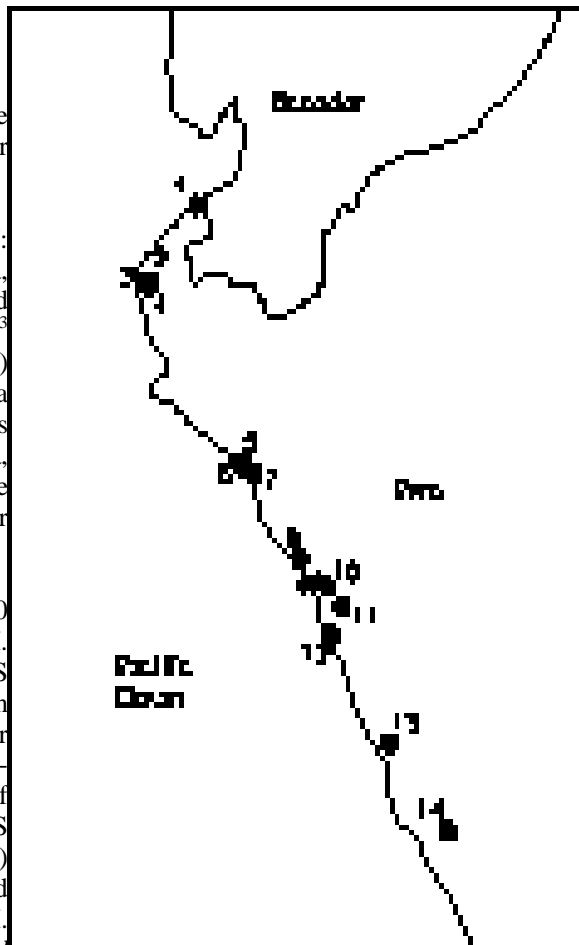
La Libertad
79°02'W), where at

in May 1885, four in May 1895, one in October 1912, and two in March 1953 (specimens in AMNH, BMNH, MNHN; also Hellmayr 1929b); Virú⁹ (8°25'S 78°45'W), where two specimens (in AMNH) were taken at 45 m in April 1919 (also Hellmayr 1929b); Hacienda Buenavista¹⁰ (c.8°29'S 78°38'W), at 300 m in the Chao valley, where a specimen (in FMNH) was collected in January 1975;

Ancash Suchimán¹¹ (8°43'S 78°26'W), at 200 m on the río Santa, where two specimens (in ANSP) were taken in March 1932 (also Bond 1956a); Chimbote¹² (9°05'S 78°36'W), where three specimens (in ANSP) were collected at 4 m in March 1932 (also Bond 1956a);

Lima Huaricanga¹³ (10°29'S 77°46'W), at 460 m in the Fortaleza valley above Paramonga, where two birds (in AMNH, MHNJP) were collected in August and September 1954 (Koeppke 1961); Chilcon¹⁴, untraced but probably río Chillón (c.11°30-40'S 76°55'-77°00'W), in the Canta valley, where a male and several females were sighted at 550 m in September 1982 (P. Scharf *in litt.* 1989).

POPULATION Unlike the White-tipped Plantcutter *Phytotoma rutila* (see Fjeldså and Krabbe 1990) the present species has never been recorded in large flocks. Although given the status "locally fairly common" by Parker *et al.* (1982), it has been recorded at only five localities since 1933 (see Distribution),



Tumbes¹ (3°34'S comes the type-sea-level (Taczanowski

Quebrada Salada² coordinates given on where a specimen (in at 90 m in September (4°33'S 81°13'W), was taken at 275 m in Ancha⁴ (4°36'S given on label), east-where four birds (in taken at 170 m 1933, January 1936 and

Reque⁵ (6°52'S birds were seen in Whitney *in litt.* 1991); 79°52'W), whence BMNH) collected at and October 1899; near north-east of Rafan and Mocupé (the latter 79°38'W), where a was collected in where six birds were Pearman *in litt.* 1990); Trujillo⁸ (8°07'S 460 m four were taken

and only a few were seen near río Saña/Rafan in January and May 1987 (NK), with three males and three females recorded there (in an area estimated to be c.0.5 ha) by M. Pearman (*in litt.* 1990) in May 1987. In 1989 near Reque, 20 birds were found in a 50 ha patch of suitable habitat (B. M. Whitney *in litt.* 1991).

ECOLOGY The Peruvian Plantcutter inhabits desert scrub and riparian thickets (Parker *et al.* 1982), but must be somewhat specialized, as this habitat type is far more widespread than the bird is (NK). Near Reque, an area of barren coastal dunes, birds were found in an area of habitat consisting of *Prosopis*, *Acacia*, *Capparis* and a variety of unidentified lower shrubs (B. M. Whitney *in litt.* 1991).

Four specimens in ROM had green leaves in their stomachs. Near río Saña the species was frequently observed perching conspicuously in *Prosopis* or *Acacia* trees (especially early in the morning when birds were very vocal), but was only seen feeding (on five occasions) on the succulent leaves of a certain (unidentified) species of bush in 1987, and it was not found during intensive searches in the adjacent agricultural area in 1983 and 1987 (NK, M. Pearman *in litt.* 1990). Other species of plantcutters are known to feed on grass, fruits, buds and tender leaves, occasionally severely damaging crops (Fjeldså and Krabbe 1990).

Two males with active gonads and a laying female have been collected during March (in Ancash), a male with slightly enlarged testes in April (in La Libertad), and three specimens with inactive gonads in April (La Libertad), August (Lima), and September (Lambayeque) (specimens in AMNH and LSUMZ).

A male atop a bush with a twig in its bill flew over to a female before being lost from view, in August (B. M. Whitney *in litt.* 1991). The nest has never been described, but in other plantcutters it is an open cup placed in a bush or tree (Fjeldså and Krabbe 1990).

THREATS There may be some form of specialization within its habitat that renders the species particularly vulnerable; however, all the river valleys of western Peru are heavily cultivated (NK) and it may simply be that there is very little of any original habitat left within its range. The 50 ha patch discovered at Reque in 1989 had clearly had many trees removed in the recent past, and most of the larger trees still standing had had their lower limbs removed; this area was heavily grazed every day by cattle and goats, and the general assessment was that the site would soon be destroyed (B. M. Whitney *in litt.* 1991).

MEASURES TAKEN None is known.

MEASURES PROPOSED A study of the species, its habitat and the pressures upon it is urgently needed, and areas where good populations still remain must be conserved as a matter of the highest priority.

REMARKS Fjeldså and Krabbe (1990) noted that, whilst plantcutters Phytotomidae closely resemble cotingas of the genus *Ampelion*, DNA sequencing did not suggest a close relationship; yet Sibley and Monroe (1990) placed the genus *Phytotoma* next to *Ampelion* in the Cotingidae, while Lanyon and Lanyon (1989), also recognizing the similarity of the two genera, proposed moving *Ampelion* and its related genera into the family Phytotomidae (see Remarks under White-cheeked Cotinga *Zaratornis stresemanni*).