

*Being known from a single 1937 skin from Amazonian lowlands in Ecuador or Peru, it is impossible to judge the status of this seemingly valid rainforest antbird.*

**DISTRIBUTION** The White-masked Antbird (see Remarks 1) is known from a single specimen (male) collected by the Olalla family at Andoas on the lower río Pastaza, originally (or at least marked by the collectors as) in Oriente province, Ecuador, but now (apparently through changes in the international border) in Loreto in western Peru, on 16 September 1937 (Berlioz 1938, specimen in MNHN; see Remarks 2).

**POPULATION** Nothing is known.

**ECOLOGY** The habitat is given as humid forest (Sibley and Monroe 1990). The altitude of Andoas is given as 200 or 250 m (Paynter and Traylor 1977, Stephens and Traylor 1983). Berlioz (1938) noted that “*P. castanea* seems to live side by side in the tropical zone of eastern Ecuador with *P. albifrons peruviana* Tacz., three specimens of which were sent from the same locality”.

**THREATS** The state of forest in this part of western Peru is unknown.

**MEASURES TAKEN** Understandably, no specific action has been taken other than searches to rediscover the species, e.g. by E. O. Willis (*in litt.* 1991), who visited Andoas (both Andoas Nuevo on the Ecuador frontier and “Andoas Viejo”, i.e. the Andoas of the type-locality) in 1979, but who failed to observe the species despite the presence of some large swarms of army ants; and by a team from ANSP, which investigated the region around Taisha, in Morona-Santiago province, Ecuador, about 150 km upriver from the type-locality, in July 1990, without success, although at 600 m this site may have been too high (NK).

**MEASURES PROPOSED** Further examination of the type-specimen, and the use of biochemical analysis of any DNA extractable from it, would be valuable in determining the taxonomic identity of this bird (see Remarks 1). However, until such work is done searches are still needed in the region of the type-locality and appropriate areas elsewhere in case the species is genuine; concomitant with this, vigilance is needed in case habitat destruction at the type-locality proceeds apace before a firm judgement can be reached on taxonomic status.

**REMARKS** (1) The only other member of the genus is the White-plumed Antbird *Pithys albifrons*, widespread in the Amazon basin but very little known (there is a useful referenced summary in Hilty and Brown 1986). Berlioz (1938) noted: “The two species are, however, quite different: *P. castanea* is obviously a larger bird than its ally, with uniform chestnut colour (without the grey back and wings of *P. albifrons*), a deep black cap, including the nasal feathers, and apparently (the specimen seems quite adult) nothing recalling the white elongated feathers characteristic of the other species”. Nevertheless, the validity of *castanea* as a good species remains in some doubt (see Sibley and Monroe 1990); E. O. Willis (*in litt.* 1991) reported hearing an opinion that it might represent a *Pithys* x *Rhegmatorhina* hybrid. (2) The precise site of the type-locality is unclear; Paynter and Traylor (1977) have a full discussion of the options, concluding that two towns called Andoas exist, a point confirmed by TAW (1986) and by E. O. Willis (*in litt.* 1991), namely one in Ecuador (Andoas Nuevo) on the frontier, and the other (now) in Peru (Andoas or “Andoas Viejo”). It is assumed here, perhaps mistakenly, that the type-locality is the Peruvian Andoas.