

*This bird of scrub and dense undergrowth is confined to a very small area in the Andes of west-central Peru (the Pacific slope of Cordillera Negra in Ancash department), where it is threatened by habitat destruction by cattle-grazing and farm expansion.*

**DISTRIBUTION** The Russet-bellied Spinetail (see Remarks 1) is restricted to the Pacific slope of Cordillera Negra, Ancash department, west-central Peru (coordinates unless otherwise stated from Stephens and Traylor 1983), where the five known localities are as follows: ridge of Cerro Quitacruz and down the east side of Quebrada de río Seco (9°30'S 77°47'W), above Chacchan on the right bank of the Casma valley, Huaráz province (27 km west of Huaráz), where birds were seen (and tape-recorded) at 2,830-2900 m in August 1983 (NK; coordinates read from IGM 1971); near Colcabamba (c.9°35'S 77°49'W), on the left bank of the Casma valley, Huaráz province (c.20 km west of Huaráz), where the type and paratype (in MHNJP) were collected at 2,800-2,900 m in August 1956 (Koepcke 1957); Bosque San Damián, above San Damián (c.9°51'S 77°47'W), on the right bank of the Huarmey valley, Aija province, where three specimens (in AMNH, MNHJP) were collected in September 1956, with four birds (in LSUMZ) taken in April 1980 and sightings in October 1985, all at 1,830-2,300 m (Koepcke 1957, M. Kessler *in litt.* 1988); Bosque de Noquo near Pararin (c.10°02'S 77°39'W: IGM 1971), Recuay province, where six specimens (in MHNJP) were collected at 2,840 m in May 1988; above Cochabamba (untraced, but still within the Cordillera Negra), where a specimen (in MHNJP) was collected at 2,840 m in June 1985; Huiña Pajatun, below San Juan (untraced, but also in the Cordillera Negra), where two specimens (in MHNJP) were collected at 2,640 m in November 1985.

**POPULATION** The species was found to be fairly common above Chacchan in August 1983, when seven birds were encountered in 1 ha of habitat (NK). At Bosque San Damián it was found to be uncommon in April 1980 when only four birds were collected during two days of survey (Parker *et al.* 1982; specimens in LSUMZ) and in October 1985, when only two birds were seen at 2,100 m during two days at 2,100-2,600 m (M. Kessler *in litt.* 1988). The six specimens taken in Bosque de Noquo in three days suggest that the species is fairly common there (NK).

**ECOLOGY** The Russet-bellied Spinetail inhabits 1.5-3 m tall densely tangled, thorny *Croton* scrub, with scattered small trees (some evergreen), on the upper slopes and mountain-tops at 1,800-2,900 m, but is also found in low dry shrubby forest (*Barnadesia*, *Myrsinanthes*), and in the thick undergrowth (mainly *Croton* scrub) within small patches of taller (c.15 m) trees around springs: its habitat is only accessible along the many cattle- and mule-trails traversing it (Koepcke 1957, Fjeldså and Krabbe 1990; also M. Kessler *in litt.* 1988, J. W. Eley *in litt.* 1989, and label data on specimens in AMNH, LSUMZ and MHNJP). Alone or (usually) in pairs, this species forages for insects by hopping along small branches and vines and by probing dry clumps of moss (J. W. Eley *in litt.* 1989, Fjeldså and Krabbe 1990). Stomach contents in five specimens were insects, and in one also seeds (MHNJP label data). A rapid chase followed by a fight was observed in August, and appeared to be a territorial dispute (NK). The only breeding information is of two juveniles taken in May, adults from May, June, August and November all having undeveloped gonads (specimens in MHNJP). In April 1980 local inhabitants above San Damián reported that the slopes are normally green in February but that hardly any rain had fallen for two years (J. W. Eley *in litt.* 1989).

**THREATS** The dense habitat favoured by this species is being continuously opened and degraded by roaming cattle (M. Kessler *in litt.* 1988, J. W. Eley *in litt.* 1989, NK), a problem facing all the species inhabiting undergrowth on the Pacific slope of south-western Ecuador and north-western and west-central Peru (see Threats under Henna-hooded Foliage-gleaner *Hylocryptus erythrocephalus*, Blackish-headed Spinetail *Synallaxis tithys* and Grey-headed Antbird *Myrmeciza griseiceps*). A further threat to the Russet-bellied Spinetail is the encroachment of cultivated fields on this extremely restricted habitat (NK: see Remarks 2).

**MEASURES TAKEN** None is known.

**MEASURES PROPOSED** Detailed mapping of the Russet-bellied Spinetail's remaining habitat should be carried out (see Remarks 2), and measures taken to ensure that enough is protected to sustain viable

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populations of the bird.

**REMARKS** (1) On the basis of coloration Vaurie (1980) grouped the Russet-bellied Spinetail with Ruddy *S. rutilans*, Chestnut-throated *S. cherriei*, Rufous *S. unirufa*, Black-throated *S. castanea* and Rusty-headed Spinetails *S. fusciorufa*. Vocally and distributionally, however, it more closely resembles the Necklaced Spinetail *S. stictothorax* (NK). (2) On the IGM (1971) map, symbols denoting “matorral” are used at the known sites for the species: these symbols cover some nine patches totalling c.150 km<sup>2</sup> between 9°30’ and 10°00’S on the Pacific slope of Cordillera Negra. It is not certain whether the lack of these symbols on adjacent maps to the north and south denotes absence of this habitat there, or whether (as seems to be the case) they were left out for other reasons.