

This rare hummingbird inhabits semi-arid country in north-central Peru, and remains one of the least known members of its family. Although possibly not immediately threatened, it is vulnerable owing to its limited distribution.

DISTRIBUTION The Grey-bellied Comet (see Remarks) is known from some 16 specimens taken at four localities in Peru, one on the Pacific slope in Cajamarca, and three in the río Marañón drainage, Cajamarca and Huánaco departments, as follows (coordinates from Stephens and Traylor 1983):

Cajamarca Paucal (c.7°00'S 79°10'W), on the Pacific slope, the type-locality (Taczanowski 1883, also Plenge 1979); and in the río Marañón drainage, Cajamarca (7°10'S 78°31'W), whence come a specimen (in MNHN) dated December 1893 and two (in AMNH) January 1894 (with one other in ANSP simply "1894"), all from c.2,900 m (also Salvin 1895, Baron 1897, Zimmer 1952, Bond 1954b); near Cajamarca, where four specimens (in AMNH, BMNH) were collected in May 1894 at 3,050 m (also Salvin 1895, Baron 1897, Zimmer 1952); Cajabamba (7°37'S 78°03'W, the town being at 2,655 m), where six specimens (in AMNH, BMNH, MNHN) were collected in January 1894, mostly above the town at 2,750 m, but with one specimen and sightings from below it (also Salvin 1895, Baron 1897, Zimmer 1952);

Huánaco Cullcui (c.9°23'S 76°42'W), on the right bank of the río Marañón at 3,170 m, where a specimen (in FMNH) was collected in December 1922 (also Zimmer 1930, 1952); and c.200 m above the río Marañón, at the point it is crossed by the Huánuco–La Unión road, where three or more were sighted in May 1975 (TAP).

The species presumably occurs along both slopes of the río Marañón in the intervening departments of La Libertad and Ancash, and its range may extend north to southern Amazonas department and west to other regions on the Pacific slope (NK).

POPULATION All but two of the known specimens were collected by O. T. Baron who, after obtaining only eight during a two-week stay at Cajamarca, concluded that it was one of the rarer species of hummingbird (Baron 1897). It was given the status "rare" by Parker *et al.* (1982).

ECOLOGY The Grey-bellied Comet has been found in open semi-arid country on the barren hills surrounding the town of Cajamarca: these hills were partly cultivated by Indians, whose huts were surrounded by fences of cacti and agave, both of which (and other amaryllidaceans) were in bloom in January when *Taphrolesbia* was seen amongst them (Baron 1897). At Cajabamba the hills were covered with small brushwood, only the canyons containing some small trees (Baron 1897). At Cullcui there are steep, dry hills with cacti, agaves and other desert plants that form impenetrable thickets along the streams and, although at 3,170 m, it has been described as being in the arid, subtropical zone (Zimmer 1930). The species lives singly amongst rocky, inaccessible places, and in deep canyons (Baron 1897). It is dominated by the Giant Hummingbird *Patagona gigas* in competition for certain flowers (Baron 1897). Three or more birds observed in the upper río Marañón valley were on a steep slope covered in shrubs, cacti and bromeliads, and were seen at or near the flowers of a *Puya* sp. (TAP). Nothing further is known of its habits.

THREATS None is known, but its apparent rarity and small range may render it vulnerable to any habitat alteration.

MEASURES TAKEN Exports of hummingbirds from Peru are officially controlled (Inskipp 1987), and most species, including *Taphrolesbia*, are on Appendix II of CITES (WTMU 1988).

MEASURES PROPOSED A study of the species is badly needed in order to establish both its distributional status and ecological niche, and therefore whether any management initiatives are required.

REMARKS The Grey-bellied Comet is the sole member of its genus. After receiving a report (from O. T. Baron) that *griseiventris* was not a *Cyanolesbia* (a name used for forms now referred to *Agelaiocercus*, *Lesbia* and *Sappho*), Hartert (1898b) placed this species in *Polyonymus* with *caroli* (a treatment already published by Simon 1897), which he thought it resembled more, by its long, straight, pointed, strong bill, very wide rectrices and style of coloration in both sexes; and indeed although the monotypic *Taphrolesbia* (Peters 1945, Zimmer 1952, Bond 1954b) or *Tephrolesbia* (Simon 1919, 1921, Zimmer 1930, Meyer de Schauensee 1966) has had wide currency, Zimmer (1930) maintained that it is in fact doubtfully separable from *Polyonymus*.