

This rare and very poorly known bird of elfin forest is confined to Amazonas and La Libertad departments, north-central Peru. It is threatened by deforestation for agriculture, but may exist within a national park.

DISTRIBUTION The Russet-mantled Softtail (see Remarks) is known from some 15-20 specimens taken at five localities south of the río Marañón from central Amazonas department south to eastern La Libertad department, north-central Peru: the bird has not been found in similar habitat further south in Huánuco department (Parker and O'Neill 1976, Schulenberg and Williams 1982). The five known localities (coordinates from Stephens and T aylor 1983) are as follows:

Amazonas south-east of La Peca Nueva (c.5°34'S 78°17'W) in the Cordillera de Colán, where at 2,530 m birds (in LSUMZ) were collected in August or September 1978; Leimebamba (6°41'S 77°47'W), the type-locality, at 3,050 m (Hellmayr 1905); Atué n (c.6°45'S 77°52'W), where six specimens (in ANSP, MCZ) were taken at 3,350 m in July 1932 (also Bond 1945); Lluy (6°45'S 77°49'W), where six specimens (in ANSP, MCZ) were taken at 3,050 m in September 1933 (also Bond 1945);

La Libertad Mashua (c.8°12'S 77°14'W), east of Tayabamba on the trail to Ongón, where a specimen (in LSUMZ) was collected and observations were made at 3,350 m in September 1979 (TAP).

POPULATION The species was considered rare by Parker *et al.* (1982), but the fact that 12 specimens were collected in just seven days in 1932 and 1933 at two localities (specimens in ANSP and MCZ) implies that it was not rare then. In 1979, during more than 20 days of fieldwork in upper montane forest at Mashua, the species was observed only twice, and mist-netted once (TAP), although a sizeable population undoubtedly occurs both to the north and south of Atué n (NK), e.g. in Río Abiseo National Park, situated in south-western San Martín department, and adjacent to the central part of eastern La Libertad department (Leo *et al.* 1988).

ECOLOGY The species inhabits humid elfin forest (Parker *et al.* 1982) at elevations ranging from 2,530 to 3,350 m (see Distribution). The presence of elfin forest as low as 2,500 m (Cordillera de Colán) may be explained by a cool local climate owing to frequent rainfall (NK). At Mashua in La Libertad, this species was observed in the tangled upper parts of *Chusquea* bamboo thickets inside stunted forest near treeline, dominant small trees in this habitat including species of *Clethra*, *Hesperomeles*, *Gynoxys*, and *Weinmannia*, with mosses and bromeliads thickly covering the larger branches of trees; pairs and small groups probed curled, dead leaves trapped amidst branches at 2-3 m, and followed small mixed flocks comprised of Citrine Warbler *Basileuterus luteoviridis*, Black-capped Hemispingus *Hemispingus atropileus* and Plush-capped Finch *Catamblyrhynchus diadema* (TAP). An immature was collected in July, a juvenile and three immatures in September, and an adult with slightly enlarged gonads in September (Bond 1945; specimens in ANSP and LSUMZ), suggesting that breeding takes place at the end of the rainy season and during the "dry" season (June–September).

THREATS In the Chuquibamba district (where Atué n is situated) all land in the quichua and lower jalca (páramo) zones (1,800-3,200 m) is currently cultivated or used by roaming cattle (Schjellerup 1989). It is not known to what degree this is the case in the rest of the species's range, but as elfin forests are generally fairly easily approached from the páramo or puna, they remain very vulnerable (NK). Habitat degradation caused by grazing cattle seriously affects some understorey birds (see accounts of Russet-bellied Spinetail *Synallaxis zimmeri* and Grey-headed Antbird *Myrmeciza griseiceps*), but too little is known about the habitat requirements of this species to estimate the impact of such disturbance. The habitat at Mashua appeared to be relatively undisturbed in 1979, although adjacent páramo grassland was being grazed by a small number of cattle and was burnt almost annually (TAP). Extensive areas of treeline forest and páramo vegetation in the Cordillera de Colán were still pristine in 1978 (T. S. Schulenberg verbally 1990).

MEASURES TAKEN The species probably inhabits Río Abiseo National Park (274,500 ha: IUCN 1992), as it has been found both to the north and the south.

MEASURES PROPOSED Surveys are urgently required to determine the precise nature of this species's status and distribution. Such work should concentrate on searching for and assessing any population within the Río Abiseo National Park, currently the only protected area in this region, although it is

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recommended that a second reserve ranging from the páramo to the upper tropical zone be established within the range of this species, in order to ensure the integrity of habitat for at least two viable populations of this and other species endemic to the region (see Measures Proposed and Remarks under Yellow-browed Toucanet *Aulacorhynchus huallagae*).

REMARKS Vaurie (1971, 1980) removed *Thripophaga berlepschi* to the thornbirds *Phacellodomus*, despite the somewhat pointed central tail-feathers and the absence of lanceolate chestnut feathers in the forehead of *berlepschi*. His simultaneous merging (Vaurie 1971, 1980) of the canasteros *Asthenes*, including Berlepsch's Canastero *Asthenes berlepschi*, with *Thripophaga* has caused some confusion of names. Vaurie's classification of the furnariids (1971, 1980) has proved wrong or directly misleading in several cases (see, e.g., Remarks under Royal Cinclodes *Cinclodes aricomae*, White-browed Tit-spinetail *Leptasthenura xenothorax* and Pale-tailed Canastero *Asthenes huancavelicae*), and we do not follow it here. The Russet-mantled Softtail appears to be behaviourally and ecologically similar to most members of the genus *Cranioleuca* (TAP).