

Neotropical News



SOUTH AMERICA

COLOMBIA

Assisting bird conservation in Colombia: ProAves

Colombia has the distinct privilege of harbouring the greatest diversity of birds in the world. With this honour comes great responsibility for their survival, but unfortunately the state of the environment in Colombia is rapidly deteriorating, which is reflected in the increasing number of bird species being classified as threatened. With the principal interest of protecting birds and promoting conservation, young ornithologists and conservationists from across the country have together formed Fundación ProAves—Colombia. ProAves is a charitable NGO with the urgent charter of conducting research to formulate and, importantly, implement conservation action plans to protect the nation's threatened and endemic birds and their habitats. Presently, ProAves members are working across the country undertaking a diverse array of projects. These include, for example, a programme of environmental education focusing on birds, rediscovering and assessing the population of Azure-winged Parrot *Hapalopsittaca fuertesi*, protecting the last two known colonies of Yellow-eared Parrot *Ognorhynchus icterotis*, and managing protected areas, such as Pangan Nature Reserve in the Chocó region, where over 21 threatened and near-threatened species together with over 40 endemics occur. ProAves works with various partners, including other ornithological groups, national conservation NGOs, and the regional National Parks administrative body. ProAves invites you to join forces in

support of its mission. ProAves also seeks to support initiatives you may have for enacting research or conservation of birds in Colombia. Please visit their web page (www.proaves.org) where you can find further information and ways to lend your expertise and help.

- Paul Salaman *in litt.* 2002

ECUADOR

New fishing plan aims to save Galápagos wildlife

The Ecuadorian government is attempting to coax the island's 400 fishing boats into fishing near the fringe of the Galápagos marine reserve's 64-km perimeter, with promises of support to help them sell their catches to bigger tuna fleets. 'The best thing that could happen to Galápagos is to get fisherman out...as far as possible from the two-mile radius', Environment Minister Lourdes Luque told reporters. Fishing is an age-old source of controversy in the pristine Galápagos, as industrial tuna fisherman from the coastal port of Manta are seeking permits to fish within the reserve, 1,000 km west of mainland Ecuador, while every few weeks marine authorities catch illegal boats loaded with shark fins inside the park's limits. Environmental organisations oppose letting industrial fleets fish in the Galápagos, fearing rare birds and marine life will get caught in tuna nets. Tuna was Ecuador's fifth biggest export last year. Luque said the plan to entice local fishermen away from the coastline would aid conservation efforts and keep the peace with Manta's tuna industry.

- Reuters, 7 May 2002

New gnatcatcher in danger of disappearing before being described

A new species of gnatcatcher, known at present only from a small area of white-sand forest in the Allpahuayo-Mishana Reserve, close to the city of Iquitos in Peru's Amazon basin, is in danger of becoming extinct prior to it being formally described. Three other species of birds have recently been discovered and described from the same area: the Ancient Antwren *Herpsilochmus gentryi*, Mishana Tyrannulet *Zimmerius villarejoi* and Allpahuayo Antbird *Percnostola arenarum*, and the description of a new subspecies of an antbird of the genus *Myrmeciza* will appear soon. All of these species, together with many other rare plants and animals are threatened by a recent land invasion precipitated by a group of land speculators. The economic limitations of the Peruvian institutions responsible for the protection of this reserve are preventing the enforcement of the law, and therefore the necessary expulsion of the invaders.

The Allpahuayo-Mishana reserve was created in March 1999 by the Peruvian government. It encompasses 57,600 ha, approximately 25 km south of Iquitos in the Amazon basin. The rainforests near Iquitos are famous for their habitat heterogeneity. A combination of historical and geological events has given the area a mosaic of diverse soil types—ranging from pure white quartz sands to red clays. In addition, the reserve harbours swamp forests as well as seasonally inundated forests. Each of these distinct formations supports a unique community of plants and animals, the result being that Allpahuayo-Mishana contains one of the highest biodiversities known in the Amazon basin.

Allpahuayo-Mishana is the only *terra firme* primary forest that is easily accessible from Iquitos. The nearest national park, Pacaya-Samiria is a three-day journey by boat from the city. In contrast, Allpahuayo-Mishana can be reached in half an hour by car. There is a field station available for biology students and tourists in the reserve, and many Peruvian and international investigators, have conducted research there, adding to its fame as Peru's hotspot of biodiversity. Indeed, the species counts from Allpahuayo-Mishana rank among the world's highest. For example, 143 species of reptiles have been recorded around Iquitos—the most ever registered at one locality. In addition, 71 species of amphibians, 460 species of birds, and close to 2,000 species of plants have been recorded in this small reserve. Many of these are white-sand specialists and are therefore exceedingly rare, due to the scarcity of white-sand forests in Peru. For example, about a dozen bird species have been found to be associated with white-sand forests in this area, and for several of them, these forests near Iquitos are their only known distribution in Peru. At least four new species of birds have been discovered within the last five years in Allpahuayo-Mishana (see above). Three species of endangered primates are found within the reserve, and for two of them, Yellow-handed Titi Monkey *Callicebus torquatus* and Equatorial Saki Monkey *Pithecia aequatorialis*. Allpahuayo-Mishana is the only place where these monkeys' habitat has been officially protected in Peru. However, biologists have only scratched the surface in their efforts to describe the flora and fauna of Allpahuayo-Mishana. It is probable that many of the white-sand endemics could disappear before being discovered, as thousands of hectares of forest have already been destroyed. The Allpahuayo-Mishana reserve is the only white-sand forest that has legal protection in Peru and protects the largest concentration

of this type of forest in the country. But, today this vital reserve is in grave danger of being effectively wiped off the face of the map. (For more details about the Allpahuayo-Mishana reserve, visit http://www.peruecologico.com.pe/areas_alpahuayomishana.htm or alternatively go to <http://www.nwf.org/internationalwildlife/2001/alvarez.html>).

Due to its proximity to the city of Iquitos, the continued conservation of the reserve is a challenging problem. Although the formal creation of the reserve gives the area legal protection for perpetuity, this does not guarantee actual preservation for the land, due to the enormous demographic pressures on the area, combined with the limited availability of resources in Peru for park maintenance and protection. The participation of the private sector and international organisations is urgently needed, now more than ever. In December 2001, a group of land speculators encouraged 200 persons to enter the reserve and begin to carve out homesteads. While this action is illegal, the authorities in Iquitos have a limited budget to enforce existing laws, and recently many illegal roads have been created, trees felled, and animals hunted by the colonists. White-sand forests are extremely fragile and are in no way suitable for agriculture. Once the trees are felled, available nutrients quickly leach away through the sand, and the ground becomes a degraded wasteland. Recovery times for cleared white-sand forests are estimated to be well over 1,000 years! Although unsuitable for agriculture, the land value has increased in recent years due to its proximity to the city of Iquitos and the recent construction of a paved highway. Indeed, open lands are available which are much more fertile and therefore more suitable for agriculture, but further away from the city. There are already six traditional communities within the borders of the reserve. These support the reserve and are protesting against the invasion. The new colonists are threatening

their traditional way of life and disrupting the delicate balance of sustainable use and long-term preservation of the forest that these local communities are trying to implement.

Fortunately a leading group of Peruvian and North American ornithologists and conservationists are now working with the Rainforest Conservation Fund in the USA, BirdLife International in Europe, and Amigos de Allpahuayo-Mishana in Iquitos, to ensure the continued preservation of Allpahuayo-Mishana, but requires help. Immediate needs are funds for protective services (personnel, vehicles for park guards, fences and signs). Longer term requirements are funds for research, promotion of ecotourism, environmental education, and help with sustainable economic alternatives for the local communities to continue to live inside the reserve, especially use of non-timber forest products and community-based ecotourism. Any economic help is welcome, as well as suggestions for cooperative projects or research for the short- and long-term health of the reserve. Please send your tax-deductible donations to: Rainforest Conservation Fund, 2038 North Clark Street, Suite 233, Chicago, Illinois 60614-4713, USA. Please write 'Allpahuayo-Mishana Fund' on your cheque.

- José Alvarez Alonso *in litt.* to NEO-ORN, 8 March 2002

BRAZIL

Mayor of Itaituba caught logging Amazônia National Park

In April 2001, IBAMA was notified of logging activity within the limits of the Amazônia National Park. In May, a small team of IBAMA inspectors visited the region and discovered an illegal clear-cut of 706 ha and further preparation of 3,000 ha for clear-cutting within the park. According to the inspectors, the men working in the park confessed to be working for the mayor of the local town of Itaituba, Wirland Freire, who had recently purchased a farm near the park, and was

preparing the park to be burned in order to expand his cattle-ranching operation. Norberto Neves de Souza, the IBAMA agent in charge of the operation, informed Greenpeace that at least 70 chainsaws were operating within the park, and during the inspection, IBAMA confiscated 14 chains for chainsaws, two axes, 234 sharpening files, 89 scythes and four tents. A team of Greenpeace activists accompanied a second IBAMA inspection of Amazônia National Park and of the mayor's farm later in May. During the inspection a chainsaw, two shotguns and various chainsaw belts were confiscated. Mayor Freire has subsequently received two fines, totalling US\$20,000.

- http://www.greenpeace.org/~forests/forests_new/html/content/reports/Amazon_Park.PDF

CHILE

Fires ravage native forests in southern Chile

Fires raging uncontrolled in early 2002 had, by late February, destroyed at least 53,000 ha of land, one-third of which had native tree species found only in Chile, about 800 km south of the capital, Santiago. 'Frankly, it's an environmental tragedy because there are many separate fires. They had been stabilised but unfortunately the meteorological conditions...made them spread beyond the barriers that we had set up initially', said government

spokesman Heraldito Munoz. The fires, which started in late January, reached state-protected nature reserves, destroying forests of *Araucaria* and other species. Some small farms and commercial tree plantations were also destroyed, the state forestry agency admitted, but populated areas were not affected. 'Fortunately, the fires are not affecting important urban centres. However, some farmers have lost houses and resources', Munoz said, while pledging government support to the victims. It was predicted likely to take fire fighters one month in order to bring the blazes under control.

- Reuters, 27 February 2002