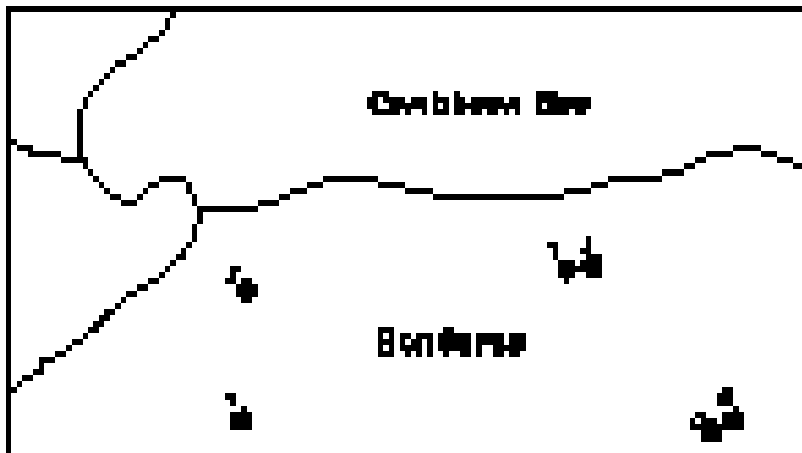


Although this hummingbird is common in its preferred arid thorn-forest, this habitat has a restricted range within Honduras: unfortunately, these same areas are under severe pressure from agricultural development.

DISTRIBUTION The Honduran Emerald is endemic to Honduras, where its restricted range is explained by an association with the arid interior valleys (Monroe 1968, Howell and Webb 1989a; see Ecology). At present only seven localities have been traced (coordinates from Monroe 1968) and from west to east these are: Santa Bárbara¹ (14°53'N 88°10'W, at c.270-300 m), where a male (in MCZ) was collected in May 1935 (see Threats); Cofradía² (15°24'N 88°09'W, c.170 m), where a male (in MCZ) was collected in March 1933 (see Threats); then (further east, along the upper río Aguán valley, in Yoro department) Coyoles³ (15°29'N 86°41'W, c.75 m), where four males (in AMNH, CM) were taken in June 1948 and 1950; 6 km west-north-west of Coyoles, where the bird was common in June 1988 (Howell and Webb 1989a); 4-4.5 km west of Olanchito⁴ (16 km east of Coyoles), where the bird was again common in June 1988 (Howell and Webb 1989a), and in March 1991 (Howell and Webb 1992); then (about 100 km south-east from the Coyoles area) El Boquerón⁵ (14°50'N 86°01'W, c.10 km south-west of Catacamas in Olancho department), where two birds (in MCZ) were taken at c.1,220 m in September 1937; and Catacamas⁶ (14°53'N 85°55'W, at c.410 m), where a female (in MLZ) was collected in August 1937 (see Moore 1938b). Two other specimens exist: a male (in LSUMZ) was taken at “Las Jabens” (or possibly Las Jabeus; both untraced) in September 1937, Monroe (1968) suggesting that (from the date and collector involved) this is within the Catacamas region; and the type (in AMNH) from “Honduras” (see Lawrence 1867).



POPULATION Until recently, all that could be said about the population of this poorly known species was that 11 specimens have been collected and it was “possibly common locally” due to the fact that four specimens each have been taken in the Coyoles and Catacamas regions (Monroe 1968). In early June 1988, however, the bird was found to be a

common inhabitant of the arid vegetation in the upper río Aguán valley: six birds were found in one hour, just 6 km west-north-west of Coyoles; 12-15 birds were found (easily) in an area of 200 m² (one bird holding a territory of 10 m²), 4 km west of Olanchito (Howell and Webb 1989a); and (4.5 km west of Olanchito) between 22 and 28 birds were counted in 500 x 50 m of thorn-forest (part of a larger tract) on 16 March 1991 (Howell and Webb 1992). One bird was noted “apparently” singing near Olanchito in 1988 (Howell and Webb 1989a), suggesting that this may be a breeding locality. Nothing is known of any other extant population, apart from the fact that almost all suitable habitat has now been cleared at Santa Bárbara and Cofradía (Howell and Webb 1989a; see Threats).

ECOLOGY The preferred habitat of the Honduran Emerald was unknown until recently, Monroe (1968) presuming it to be a forest inhabitant and AOU (1983) suggesting that the distribution lies generally in the humid lowlands. However, plotting the known localities on the habitat map in Monroe (1968) reveals that they lie close to or within “arid and mixed scrub, and thorn-forest” (Howell and Webb 1989a). In June 1988 it was indeed found that the bird was generally associated with the arid interior valleys where (at two localities: see Distribution) it was found to be a common inhabitant of arid thorn-forest and scrub (Howell

and Webb 1989a). Near Coyoles, the thorn-forest was c.6-10 m high and dominated by Mimosaceae, Cactaceae and Euphorbiaceae, the species still being found there despite heavy grazing of the understorey and the apparent lack of flowers (Howell and Webb 1989a). Around Olanchito, birds were seen in similar but more cut-over and heavily grazed thorn-forest and scrub (see Threats), where feeding was noted at several flowering plants, namely *Pithecellobium lentiscifolium*, *Aechmea* cf. *bracteata*, *Pedilanthus* cf. *tithymaloides* and a conspicuous organpipe cactus (probably *Lemaireocereus* or *Cephalocereus*) (Howell and Webb 1989a). The birds fed at heights of 0.5-10 m (insect-catching was also noted) and, earlier, individuals were seen perching at 1.5-8 m in bare trees and bushes (Howell and Webb 1989a). The Honduran Emerald appears to occur at quite high densities in suitable habitat at certain times of the year (i.e. June: see Population), although it is unknown if this situation changes seasonally. "Breeding" records are represented by a bird heard apparently singing on 8 June (Howell and Webb 1989a), and a male with enlarged testes (in AMNH) collected on 13 June (1950).

THREATS The relatively small area of preferred habitat (within the arid interior valleys: see Monroe 1968) explains both the restricted range of this bird and its threatened status, because this habitat is under pressure for conversion to agricultural land (Howell and Webb 1989a). At Santa Bárbara and Cofradía, arid conditions similar to those in the upper río Aguán valley were recorded (in 1988) but most of the thorn-forest had been cleared for grazing, and what little remained was extremely dry with few birds of any species apparent (Howell and Webb 1989a). Despite this, the Honduran Emerald can seemingly tolerate substantial habitat modification, with birds being recorded at Coyoles in understorey heavily grazed by cattle, and at Olanchito where the forest was relatively more cut-over and also heavily grazed (Howell and Webb 1989a). A major threat to the upper río Aguán valley in 1991 appears to be a newly paved road that had opened up the area: much of this valley has been and is continuing to be converted into pineapple plantations (Howell and Webb 1992).

MEASURES TAKEN None is known.

MEASURES PROPOSED Immediate protection needs to be given to a number of tracts of the preferred thorn-forest and scrub habitat where this bird occurs. Its continued survival would probably be ensured in even relatively small areas owing to its seemingly high population density, but an ecological study is necessary in order to confirm this, to identify the bird's year-round needs, to help with the selection of suitable localities, and to suggest an optimum area for the conservation of a viable population. Once areas have been identified, measures need to be taken to prevent (further) degradation. Suitable remaining areas around Coyoles and Olanchito appear to be the current priority for immediate protection, owing to the proven existence of (possibly breeding) populations there and to the urgency caused by agricultural encroachment (see Threats). A search needs to be undertaken to find other populations, for example around Catacamas.