

PREVENTING EXTINCTIONS

**Black-breasted Puffleg**  
*Eriocnemis nigrivestis*



**Male Black-breasted Puffleg (© Francisco Enriquez)**

**Background**

Black-breasted Puffleg is found seasonally on the northern and north-western ridge-crests of Volcán Pichincha, Pichincha, and in the Cordillera de Toisán above the Intág valley, Esmeraldas and Imbabura, north-west Ecuador. On Volcán Pichincha, the area of suitable habitat where the species is known to occur has been dramatically reduced to c.34 km<sup>2</sup>, and supports an estimated 160 individuals. However, it may also occur on the unstudied western slope of the volcano where additional habitat remains. In 2006, a small population was rediscovered in the Cordillera de Toisán above the Intág valley. It may still occur on Volcán Atacazo, but the only confirmed evidence concerns three specimens from 1898, with a possible sighting in 1983.

The global population has been estimated at 250-999 individuals, with a known Extent of Occurrence of just 68 km<sup>2</sup>. Available records suggest that it is an altitudinal migrant, but its movements remain poorly understood and appear to have changed since it was first collected. The large number of museum specimens (over 100) suggests it was formerly more common, but the only confirmed record between 1950 and 1993 was of three individuals in 1980. It has clearly declined and is now rare within a very limited range. The main threat is the felling of forest for timber and charcoal, facilitating the introduction of cattle and the eventual spread of the agricultural frontier for ranching and to a lesser extent production of crops.

**Actions being implemented**

- 1. High level advocacy** for Black-breasted Puffleg conservation is a primary aim of the project. The Species Action Plan has been translated from English to Spanish and updated according to recent changes in legislation. The action plan has been made available on Aves y Conservación's website, and submitted to the Ministry of Environment and to other authorities, both in Pichincha and Imbabura province.
- 2. Towards a land securement** strategy, a stakeholder workshop will be conducted in Imbabura Province in late 2010 to create awareness of the Species Action Plan and gather further information on the species' habitat in the area. Field expeditions are also planned in search of unknown and remnant populations of Black-breasted Puffleg.

**3. The protection of strategic habitat** is being pursued through several different actions. There are aims to develop a management plan for the Alaspungo community forest, and to promote the declaration of Alaspungo's forest as a 'community protected area' within the Municipality of Quito. Several meetings have been conducted with officials from the municipality, gaining recognition for the importance of the Alaspungo forest area both for biodiversity and as a watershed. As a result, political and financial support has been provided for the area's recognition under the municipal subsystem of protected areas as well as for the preparation of the management plan.

There are also plans to explore the possibility to include Alaspungo in the government Socio Bosque initiative. Forthcoming changes in the National Protected Area System may include regional protected area categories within the national system, which would include the Alaspungo forest. Members of the Alaspungo community have been trained for guiding and provisioning for tourists, and have received their first visitors, approximately 2,500 school students from Quito. It is hoped that income from such ecotourism will help promote the protection of remaining habitat.

**4. Education** on the conservation status of the species is aided by its status as Quito municipality's emblematic bird. Various events are planned to further improve awareness, including the organisation of excursions for school children to give them a first-hand experience of the beauty of Black-breasted Puffleg's high-Andean forest habitat, and to carry out environmental education talks in Quito's schools, focusing on the conservation status of the Black-breasted Puffleg, climate change and biodiversity conservation.

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