Full Detailed Itinerary - Brazil: Atlantic Forest Photo Tour

Day 1: Arrival in São Paulo-Guarulhos

The tour begins this evening in Guarulhos, a satellite city of São Paulo. We'll have one night in a good hotel that provides a free airport shuttle. No birding is planned for today.

Days 2 - 3: Trilha dos Tucanos

We start the tour by driving west across the busy São Paulo metropolis, heading towards Trilha dos Tucanos. This small lodge has become a must-visit spot for birders and bird photographers alike, and we spend two nights here. At their feeders, a main attraction is the incredible Saffron Toucanet which is a regular visitor, together with plenty of other great birds like Red-breasted Toucan, Blond-crested and Golden-fronted Woodpeckers, Maroon-bellied Parakeet, and various species of tanager. Some years, their moth trap attracts some incredible skulkers like Giant and Tufted Antshrikes, Crescent-chested Puffbird and even the very shy Brown Tinamou; we need some luck to get these beauties but chances are good. The forest surrounding the lodge is home to plenty of species that we won't have chances for during the rest of the trip, namely the local Black-fronted Piping-Guan, Atlantic Royal Flycatcher, Scalloped Woodcreeper, Ochre-collared Piculet, Mantled Hawk, and the tiny Oustalet's Tyrannulet. Apart from these specialties, plenty of other Atlantic Forest range-restricted species can be found here including Tawny-browed Owl, Star-throated Antwren, Squamate Antbird, and maybe even the difficult White-breasted Tapaculo.

Day 4: Trilha dos Tucanos to Ubatuba

We will have a couple more hours in the early morning to visit the moth trap and feeders or to target any species along the trails before departing towards the coastal city of Ubatuba. This means we have a long drive, but we can have some birding stops once pass through São Paulo. We will stay three nights in Ubatuba.

Days 5 - 6: Ubatuba Area

Once of the main attractions in the entire region is Folha Seca with its amazing feeders. Swarms of hummers are always present with the gaudy Festive Coquette often being the favorite. Others that visit include Saw-billed Hermit, Violet-capped Woodnymph, Brazilian Ruby, Sombre Hummingbird, Versicolored Emerald, and White-chinned Sapphire. The fruit feeders are less predictable, as sometimes they are very busy and other times rather quiet, but we should see at least a few neat birds such as Green-headed, Ruby-crowned, Brazilian, and Azure-shouldered Tanagers, and Violaceous Euphonia. Forested-covered mountains that come down to the sea make this part of the Atlantic coast truly beautiful. Various private reserves and quiet side roads at the base of the mountains offer easy birding with some of the best species the Atlantic Forest has to offer. Numerous antbirds are possible, many of which are truly handsome and often surprisingly easy to see compared to other parts of the Neotropics – a few in particular that we will be looking for are Scaled and Ferruginous Antbirds, Spot-breasted Antvireo, Tufted and Spot-backed Antshrikes, and Star-throated Antwren. Two of the strangest (and coolest!) tapaculos in the world also inhabit the forest here, the strikingly-patterned Spotted Bamboowren and the perky Slaty Bristlefront with its unforgettable song. This is the best place in the world to see the diminutive Buff-throated Purpletuft, an

endangered species, and we stand a great chance of finding Black-cheeked Gnateater, one of the most distinctive members of this small family. Other possibilities here include Robust, Yellow-fronted, and Yellow-throated Woodpeckers, Swallow-tailed, White-bearded, and Pin-tailed Manakins, Bare-throated Bellbird, White-necked Hawk, Maroon-bellied and Plain Parakeets, Black-capped, White-eyed, and Ochre-breasted Foliage-gleaners, Crescent-chested and Buff-bellied Puffbirds, and Red-necked Tanager.

Day 7: Ubatuba to Serra da Mantiqueira

Departing early from our hotel, we will do some birding near Serra do Mar State Park where we can hopefully pick up Hooded Berryeater or Bare-throated Bellbird. Later we move on to a small birding guesthouse where the local owner has managed to attract a few nice birds to his garden. He puts out food for the difficult Red-and-white Crake, which is not guaranteed, but it is our best chance for this hard species. After lunch, we head to the foothills of the Serra da Mantiqueira, where we spend two nights.

Day 8: Algulhas Negras Road, Itatiaia NP

After an early breakfast, we'll drive about 30 minutes to a rough road that enters the higher parts of Itatiaia National Park. The stunted forest and scrub here hosts a very different set of birds, and the eerie calls of Black-and-gold Cotingas ring out through the mist. Hearing them is easy, but seeing them often takes a lot of persistence and patience. We'll target several species along the lower parts of the road like Rufous-tailed Antbird, Large-tailed Antshrike (two more amazing antbirds!), Serra do Mar Tyrannulet, and Black-capped Piprites. Forest patches can be quiet until a mixed species flock comes whirling through, and then we can be inundated with birds like Diademed and Brassy-breasted Tanagers, Buff-throated and Bay-chested Warbling-Finches, Pallid Spinetail, Rufous-backed Antvireo, Sharp-billed Treehunter, and White-browed Woodpecker. We'll check a regular lekking site for Green-crowned Plovercrest, where several males of this superb-looking hummingbird usually perch and chirp incessantly. Farther up in stunted forest and scrub, we'll try various spots for the endemic Itatiaia Spinetail, and be sure to look for Araucaria Tit-Spinetail in its eponymous grove of trees. In the afternoon, we can bird a side road lower down the valley that passes through pastures and light woodland. The birding here is easy and offers very different birds like the rare and local Giant Snipe, comical Toco Toucans, screeching Curl-crested Jays, handsome White-eared Puffbirds, dancing Streamer-tailed Tyrants, and the aptly named Firewood-gatherer.

Day 9: Algulhas Negras to Canastra NP

We might need to head back up the amazing Algulhas Negras road if we missed any big targets, but we can only spend a short time before beginning a long drive into the interior of the country. We leave behind the humid Atlantic Forest and head into the Cerrado biome. This is mostly a travel day, but we may have a bit of time for some birding stops along the way before reaching the town of São Roque de Minas, where we spend three nights. We usually arrive early enough for some afternoon birding in dry forest not far from town but it will depend on our timing.

Days 10-11: Serra da Canastra NP

This park is simply magnificent. The Canastra plateau, with its scenic escarpments and waterfalls, dominates the area, and there is a mosaic of habitats including gallery forest, rivers, wooded farmland, scrubby Cerrado, and tall, undisturbed grasslands. The area is one of the last strongholds for the Brazilian Merganser, one of the world's rarest ducks; while we have seen it on many of our tours, in recent years sightings have become less frequent (though we do tend to find them on more than half our visits). Even if we aren't fortunate enough to see one, there are plenty of other birds and animals to fill our days here.

During one full day, we'll bird areas at the base of the escarpment. There are numerous lookouts to scan for "ducks", but there are plenty of other birds to see while we do so such as Whistling Heron, Buff-necked Ibis, Yellow-chevroned and Golden-capped Parakeets, White-eared Puffbird, Narrow-billed Woodcreeper, Rufous-fronted Thornbird, Pale-breasted Spinetail, Black-capped Antwren, Plain-crested Elaenia, Yellow-browed Tyrant, Plush-crested Jay, Yellowish Pipit, Blue Finch, Plumbeous and Dubois's Seedeaters, Black-throated Saltator, and Chopi Blackbird. We'll walk along a trail to the base of the impressive Casca D'Anta Waterfall, where Great Dusky Swifts can usually be seen clinging to the cliffs. The trail can also be productive for some tough birds like Flavescent Warbler and Chestnut-headed Tanager, and we can usually track down a singing male Helmeted Manakin. On the other day, we'll bird the windswept grasslands on top of the escarpment, which is a world apart from anything else on this tour. Cock-tailed Tyrants zip back and forth over the grass, Ochre-breasted Pipits perform cool display flights, and cute grassland specialists like Sharp-tailed Tyrant and Black-masked Finch can usually be found with a bit of searching. It's not unusual to see Giant Anteaters, and Maned Wolf is a possibility as well. We'll reach the top of the waterfall we visited the previous day, which is another spot to look for Brazilian Merganser. If the water level is low enough, we may be able to cross the river and try to flush up some Sickle-winged Nightjars. Other birds we have a chance for today include Collared Crescentchest, Gray-backed Tachuri, Rufous-winged Antshrike, and Tawny-headed Swallow.

Day 12: Onward to Caraça

One last long drive today, about 6.5 hours total, but we'll stop occasionally for breaks and eventually some birding; some years a local park in the middle of Belo Horizonte has the local and rare endemic Three-toed Jacamar which we may try to see based on the latest info about it. We typically arrive in Caraça by mid-afternoon; it is a private nature reserve protected by the Catholic Church set in impressive mountain scenery. The reserve protects close to 28,000 hectares of land, providing a pristine and safe home for some of the most beautiful animals of the region. The most famous of the species here is the bizarre, rare, and gorgeous Maned Wolf. It's a canid unlike any other in the world with long legs that evolved to be able to see above the tall grass of the Cerrado plains of central Brazil. This wolf is rare and difficult to see in the wild but... in 1980, the head priest of the Caraça Monastery got very interested in one individual of this wolf that would come during the night to steal food leftovers from the church's trash cans. The priest decided that such a beauty deserved better and started feeding it meat every night and little by little the wolf started approaching closer and closer to him. However, it kept faithful to its wild nature and never turned into a pet; it only snatched the food away and then shyly ran away into the forest. This ritual was happily continued to this day. Hundreds of visitors come to this beautiful corner of Brazil to experience the feeding ceremony of this amazing beast. It takes place directly in front of the church every night. Visitors gather around the patio, eagerly waiting for the wolf to make its appearance from the shadows along the main stairway of the church. The wolf does not show up every night, and sometimes it comes very late after most people have gone to bed, but usually at least two out of three nights it will come. We will have two nights in this unique place, so we have a very good chance. Some nights even a Brazilian Tapir comes in to eat fruit and vegetables that the caretaker puts out.

Day 13: Caraça Sanctuary

We have a full day to bird this reserve surrounded by stunning scenery, and we have several targets to try for. The best bird here for some might be the local country endemic Hyacinth Visorbearer, the males of which are stunningly beautiful. Other targets here include Serra Antwren, White-breasted and Rock Tapaculos, Gray-eyed Greenlet, Black-capped Antwren, the mighty Large-tailed Antshrike, the tiny endemic Hangnest Tody-Tyrant, and the vocal Pale-throated Pampa-Finch. Occasionally the stunning Swallow-tailed Cotinga can be seen – let's hope for some luck!

Day 14: Caraça to Belo Horizonte, Confins Airport

We will have a few more hours of birding, trying to improve photos or targeting any species we still need. Later in the morning, we will have enough time for showering and repacking before departing towards the International Airport of Confins located north of Belo Horizonte where the tour ends.

Toll free from the USA & Canada: (800) 348-5941

International number: +1-409-515-9110

Toll free from the UK: +0800-046-5654

Email: info@tropicalbirding.com