



## Brazil: The Amazon, Pantanal, and Atlantic Forest

*A Tropical Birding Custom Birding Tour*

**June 12 – July 2, 2024**

**TOUR LEADER: Nick Athanas**

*Report and photos by Nick Athanas*



*Jaguars are always a major highlight on this itinerary, and we were thrilled to see five of them including a mother (above) and her cub*

Brazil is one of my favorite countries to visit – its amazing biodiversity, fascinating habitats, friendly people, and great food all make me look forward to my next trip. This three-week custom tour visited some of the very best areas of Brazil for birding and wildlife viewing, including the superb Cristalino Jungle Lodge in the Amazon, the northern Pantanal with its astounding abundance of wildlife and amazing Jaguars, and the Ubatuba and Itatiaia areas of Southeast Brazil, where verdant forest teems with amazingly colorful tanagers and hummingbirds.



*The outrageous Toco Toucan is always a fan favorite!*

The tour began in Cuiabá, a city of about a million people in the lowlands of central Brazil. It is located between the Amazon and the Pantanal, which makes it a convenient starting point to visit both regions. Before heading off to Cristalino, we spent two nights atop a scenic escarpment northeast of Cuiabá called Chapada dos Guimarães. The area has excellent *cerrado*, a type of scrubby savanna with some neat birds not possible to see elsewhere on the itinerary, as well as some patches of taller forest in the wetter valleys that are great to bird later in the morning when the intense sun sends you looking for shade. A few of the special birds we saw here included **Collared Crescentchest**, **White-banded** and **White-rumped Tanagers**, **Curl-crested Jay**, **Chapada Flycatcher**, **Rufous-winged Antshrike**, **White-eared Puffbird**, **Black-throated Saltator**, and **Crested Black-Tyrant**. When birding was slow in the heat of the day we also spent some time looking at the butterflies, many of which sat still so that we could photograph them and then later identify them, including beauties like **Starry Night Cracker** and **Red-barred Amarynthis** ([click here](#) for the full list of butterflies we saw in this area). The next few pages have some of my favorite photos from this segment of the tour.



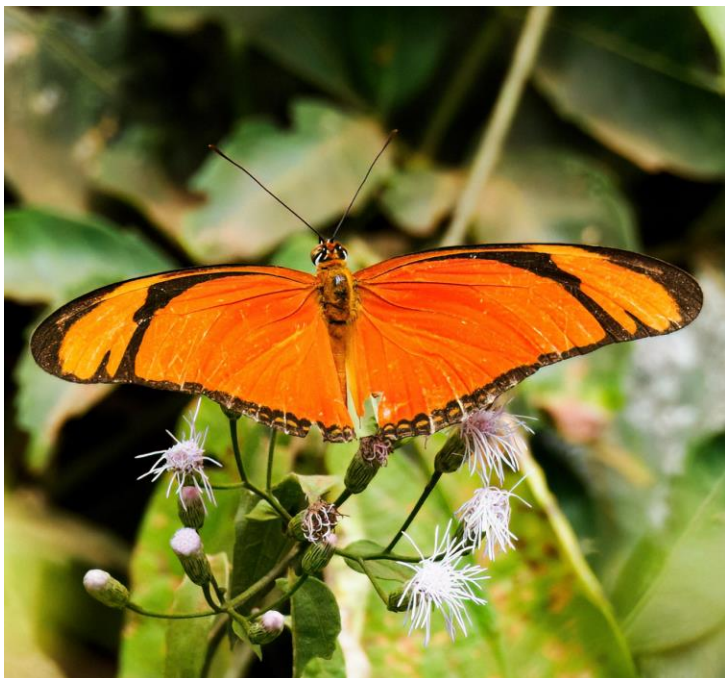
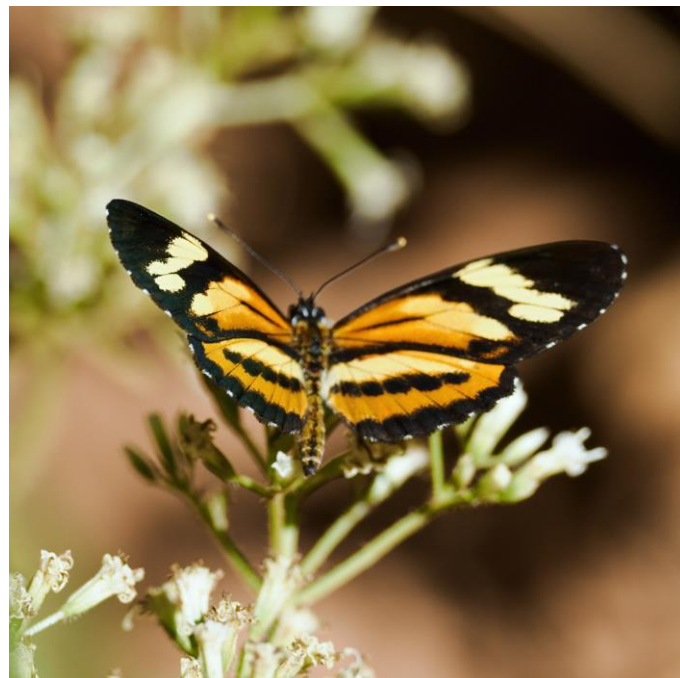
*Rufous-winged Antwren (above) and Black-throated Saltator (below), cerrado specialists.*





*Rufous-tailed Jacamar, a widespread but beautiful species (above) and an inquisitive Black-striped Capuchin (below)*



*Julia Heliconian**Tiger Crescent**Starry Night Cracker**Widespread Eighty-eight*

After our two nights in the Chapada, we drove back to Cuiabá and took a short commercial flight north to Alta Floresta in the Amazon basin. From there we drove to the edge of the Teles Pires River, where Sandro our boat driver was waiting to take us up the Cristalino River to Cristalino Jungle Lodge. The lodge is in the middle of a magical 28,000 acre private reserve blanketed in some of the most beautiful and accessible Amazonian forest on the planet. It is also a hugely important buffer zone against the rampant deforestation that has taken place in the state of Mato Grosso.



*Dawn from one of the canopy towers at Cristalino.*

We had five nights at this special lodge, giving us plenty of time to sample all the best areas. We spent a morning on each of the two sturdy metal canopy towers, looking out over a seemingly endless ocean of trees and spotting awesome birds like **Black-girdled Barbet**, **Pompadour Cotinga**, **White-browed Hawk**, **Ringed Woodpecker**, **Tooth-billed Wren**, **toucans**, **parrots**, **macaws**, and plenty more. Once it got too hot on the towers, we spent time along the shady trails, and also had a few dedicated trail-walking sessions. The birding was much harder but very rewarding with some special birds like **Banded Antbird**, **Alta Floresta Antpitta**, **Blue-cheeked Jacamar**, and **Red-necked Woodpecker**. However, in the dry season, the often-slow trail birding is offset by being able to visit the bathing pools, or *poçinhas*. Late afternoon, hot and thirsty birds come in to drink and bathe, giving unparalleled views of otherwise hard to find antbirds, manakins and more. We had great activity at both of the *poçinhas* we visited, seeing **Bare-eyed Antbird**, **Black-spotted Bare-eye**, **Spix's Warbling-Antbird**, **Snow-capped**, **Band-tailed**, and **White-crowned Manakins**, and **White-winged Shrike-Vireo**, just to name some. Every day we spent some time cruising the Cristalino River, which this time of year is also a butterfly superhighway, with thousands upon thousands streaming along the banks of the river in a swirl of color. Speaking of butterflies, it truly one of the top places in the universe to see them, and we were able to ID quite a few of them during our stay – check out the list at iNaturalist by [clicking here](#). Some of the animals we saw along the edge of the river included our first **South American Tapir** and **Giant Otter**, **White-cheeked Spider Monkey**, **Razor-billed Curassow**, **Black-collared Swallow**, **Amazonian Umbrellabird**, **Red-throated Piping-Guan**, **Capped Heron**, **Sunbittern**, and **Long-billed Woodcreeper**. I'm including some of my favorite photos from our time at Cristalino on the next few pages.



*Capped Heron (above) and Giant Otter (below)*





*Bare-eyed Antbird (above) and Snow-capped Manakin (below)*

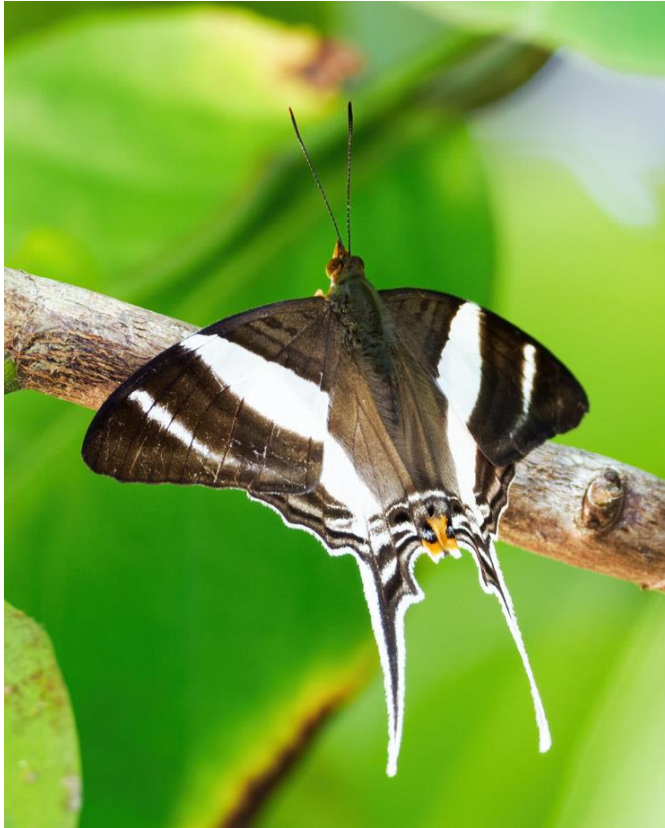






*Black-spotted Bare-eye (adult with a juvenile, above) and Sunbittern (below)*

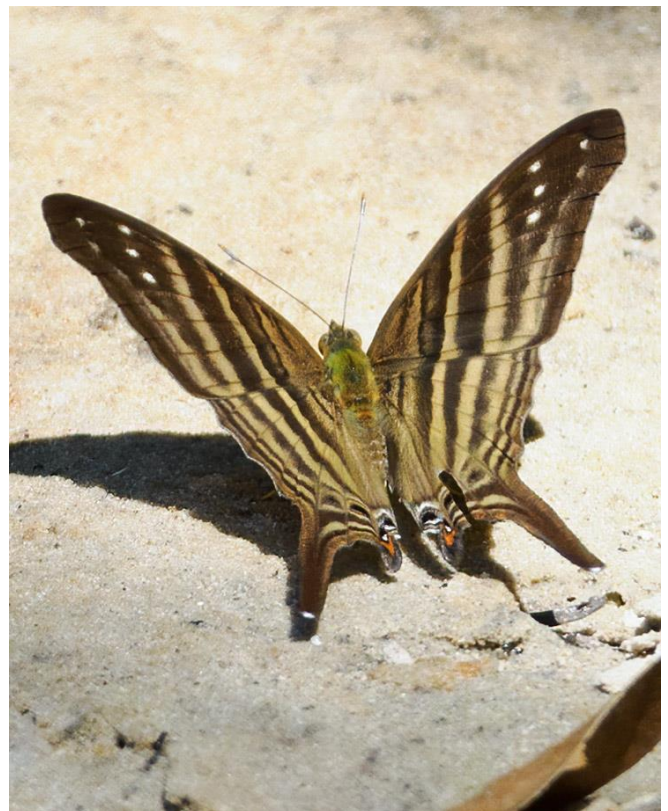
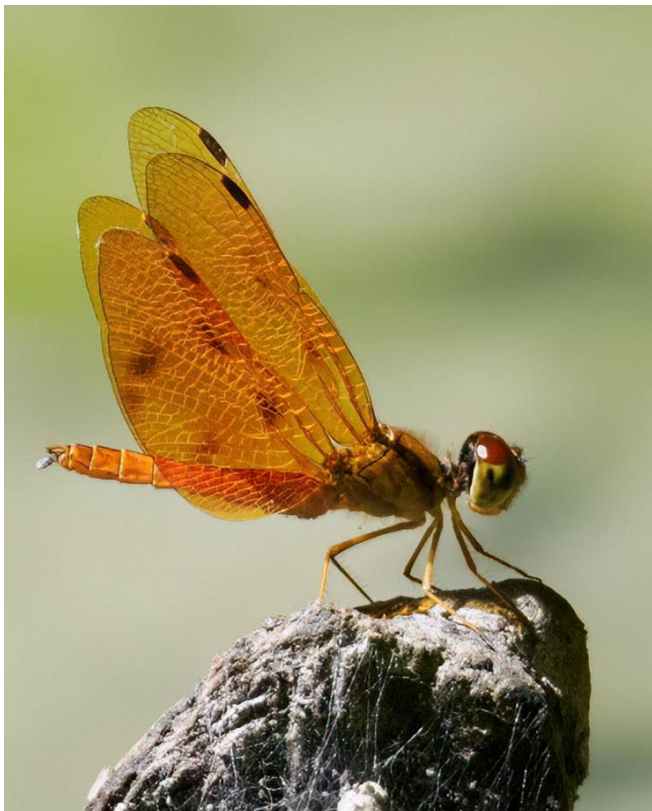




*Orsilochus Daggerwing (above), Fine-banded Amberwing (below)*



*Statira Sulphur (above), Many-banded Daggerwing (below)*



After leaving Cristalino, we flew back to Cuiabá and then drove two hours south into the Pantanal to begin the next segment of our trip. The wide-open spaces and wetlands jam-packed with waterbirds were a huge contrast to the Amazon, and the birding was far easier. While the biodiversity was lower, the sheer number of individuals was mind-blowing, and that's one of the most amazing things about birding in the Pantanal – everywhere you look almost any time of the day you can see something. We split our time between three lodges, Pousada Piuval, Hotel Pantanal Mato Grosso, and Hotel Santa Rosa at far southern end of the Transpantanal Highway. Each one offered a different experience. Piuval was the best for birding by far, and during one full day there we recorded 111 species of birds ([list here](#)) including iconic birds like **Hyacinth Macaw** and **Jabiru**, localized species such as **Pale-crested Woodpecker**, **Great-Rufous Woodcreeper**, **Chestnut-bellied Guan**, and **White-lored Spinetail**, and crazy numbers of **ibis**, **herons**, and other **waterbirds**. The PMG Hotel at Pixaim is located along a lazy river with fun afternoon boat rides where we saw another **South American Tapir** and even our first **Jaguar**, (very unexpected) along with **Bare-faced Curassow**, **Undulated Tinamou**, **Yellow-collared Macaw**, **kingfishers**, **Black-collared Hawk** and others. The hotel grounds were full of birds like **Yellow-chevroned**, **Blue-crowned**, and even the scarce **Nanday Parakeets**, **Yellow-billed** and **Red-crested Cardinals**, and **Solitary Black Cacique**. Their forest trail hadn't been maintained for a while which made things difficult, but a few of the group braved it with me to find some different birds including **Mato Grosso Antbird**, **Flavescent Warbler**, and **Large-billed Antwren**. The Santa Rosa Hotel is in Porto Jofre along the Cuiabá River, and the main reason to go all the way down there is to see **Jaguars**. Nowhere else in the world can you go out on any given day and expect to see multiple cats. We had two nights in Porto Jofre, giving us one afternoon and one full day to watch Jaguars, and during that time we saw five different individuals. The best by far was a mother with a cub that we spent hours watching. She spent much of the time sleeping in a tree, occasionally coming down to join her kitten that was partly hidden by the tree trunk, but once climbed up the tree towards her – but she wouldn't let him join her. A few photos of that encounter are on the following pages.



*Watching a Jaguar along one of the tributaries of the Cuiabá River*



*Mom resting on her favorite tree trunk*



*The cub waiting on the ground below her*



*"Junior" trying to climb tree to get to mom...*

While Jaguars were the main focus during these days, we had time to look at other things too. We saw more **Giant Otters**, a troop of **Black Howler Monkeys**, **Black Skimmer**, **Yellow-billed** and **Large-billed Terns**, **Toco Toucan**, hundreds of **Snail Kites**, a rare **White-naped Xenopsaris**, the usual cadre of water-loving birds, and many others. Here are more photos from our time in the Pantanal



*Yacare Caiman are abundant in the Pantanal*



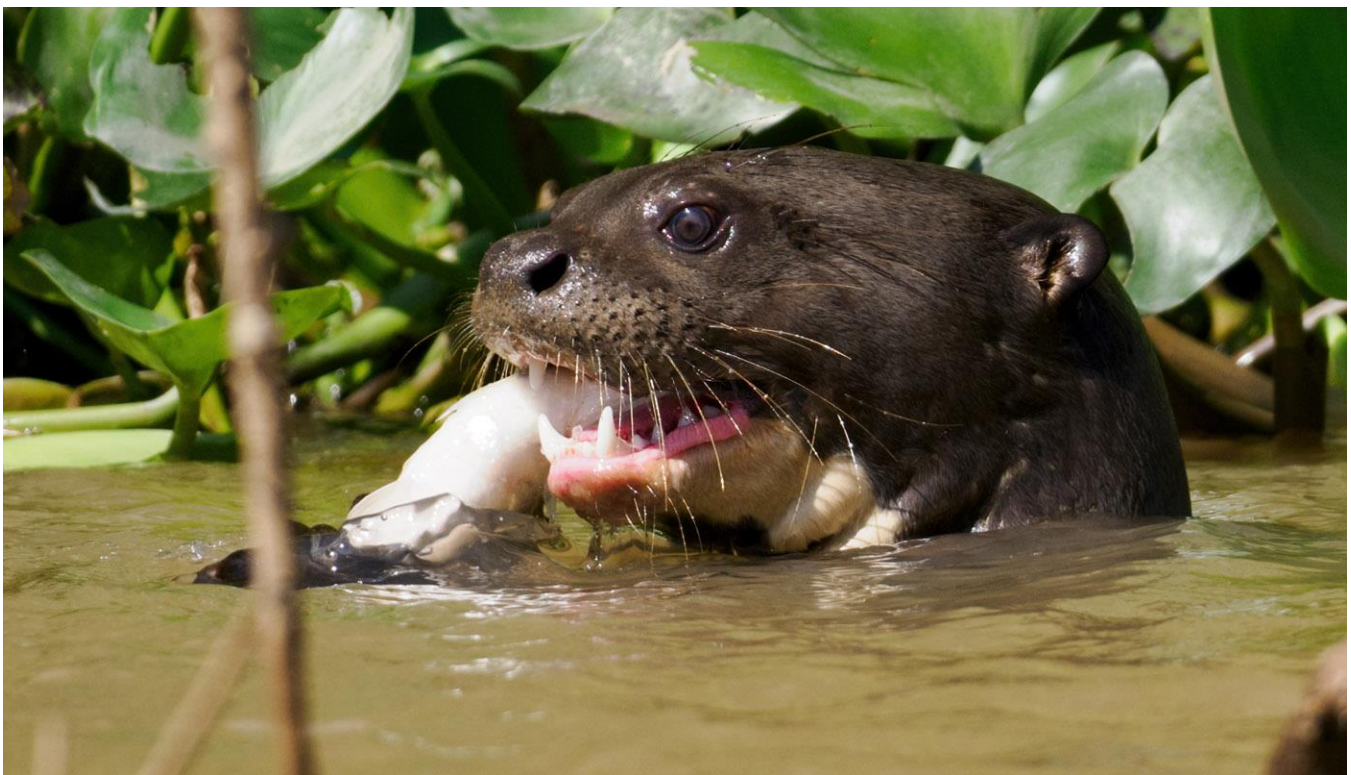
*We flushed up some Nacunda Nighthawks that were roosting on the ground near Pousada Piuval*



*A South American Tapir along the Pixaim River*



*A Black-collared Hawk cruising along the Pixaim River*



*A Giant Otter enjoying a sashimi lunch*



*One of the other Jaguars we saw during the boat rides at Porto Jofre*



*A Yellow-chevoned Parakeet feeding on flowers behind Hotel Pantanal Mato Grosso*





*One of several Ferruginous Pygmy-Owls that we saw in the Pantanal*



*The beautiful Flavescent Warbler we saw while navigating that "fun" forest trail at Pixaim*



*A boisterous pair of Black-capped Donacobius along the Transpantanal Highway*



*The unusually low water levels of the Pixaim River made it much easier to see the shy Undulated Tinamou*

After a night in Cuiabá and feast at a local *churrascaria* (Brazilian steakhouse), it was time to move on the final segment of the tour in the Atlantic Rainforest in Southeast Brazil. We divided our time about equally between the lowlands and the mountains, being based in only two places, the coastal resort town of Ubatuba and the beautiful Hotel do Ypê in Itatiaia National Park. After our nonstop flight to São Paulo, we drove several hours down to the coast where lush rainforest drapes over the impressively steep coastal range and reaches all the way the sea. We spent our time in the Ubatuba area mainly at two sites, a private reserve called Fazenda Angelim, and a forested road called Folha Seca. Angelim has nice, wide trails and clearings, making it a great place for groups to see some of the superb birds of the Atlantic Forest lowlands. A few of them that we especially enjoyed were **White-necked Hawk**, **Yellow-fronted** and **Blond-crested Woodpeckers**, **Spot-backed Antshrike**, **Ferruginous** and **Scaled Antbirds**, **Black-cheeked Gnatcatcher**, **Orange-eyed Thornbird**, **Eye-ringed Tody-Tyrant**, and **Red-necked Tanager**. Folha Seca is home to some of the best hummingbird feeders in Brazil. A retired gentleman named Jonas moved there over 20 years ago and fell in love with the birds; he maintains the feeders faithfully every day and generously welcomes visitors to his yard. We saw eight hummer species at the feeder: **Black Jacobin**, **Saw-billed Hermit**, **Festive Coquette**, **Brazilian Ruby**, **Violet-capped Woodnymph**, **Sombre Hummingbird**, **Versicolored Emerald**, **Glittering-throated Emerald**, and **White-chinned Sapphire**. The banana feeders were great too attracting the likes of **Green-headed** and **Brazilian Tanagers**, **Chestnut-bellied Euphonia**, and others. Away from his feeders in the forest, the birding was more challenging but arguably even more rewarding as we managed to locate lots of nice birds like **Buff-bellied Puffbird**, **Spot-breasted Antwreio**, **Unicolored** and **Rufous-margined Antwrens**, **Rufous-capped Antthrush**, **South American Leaf-tosser**, **Plain-winged Woodcreeper**, **Black-capped** and **White-eyed Foliage-gleaners**, and **Swallow-tailed Manakin**. Here are some shots from our time in the Ubatuba area.



*The scarce and local Buff-throated Purplethroat, which took an extra effort to find after missing it at Angelim*



*The retina-searing Brazilian Tanager is a regular at Jonas's banana feeders*



*Festive Coquette is my favorite of the hummers that come to Jonas's feeders. Here, two males had an extended argument*



*Two shy forest interior birds of the lowland forest – White-eyed Foliage-gleaner (above) and Rufous-capped Antthrush (below)*





*A Red-necked Tanager feasts in a fruiting tree at Fazenda Angelim*



*Our group with Jonas, in the plain blue shirt. Not my photo, not sure who took this one*

From Ubatuba, it was quite a long drive to Itatiaia, but we did some birding along the way to break it up. Itatiaia is Brazil's oldest national park, and one of only a few that has places to stay inside. Several of the hotels have closed but fortunately the best one is still going strong, the Hotel do Ypê with its quaint Swiss-style chalets and amazing views. Unfortunately we had some weather to deal with during our stay, so that magnificent view was often hidden by clouds and fog, and rainy weather took a chunk out of our birding time. But what a great place to hang out when it's wet outside! The feeders were bringing in the likes of **Brazilian Ruby**, **White-throated Hummingbird**, **Scale-throated Hermit**, **Olive-green**, **Black-goggled**, **Ruby-crowned**, **Green-headed**, and **Golden-chevrons Tanager**, **Blue Dacnis**, and **Chestnut-bellied Euphonia**, all of which were easy to photograph, along with a marauding troop of **Black-horned Capuchins** that would quickly steal all the bananas given the chance. Birding away from the feeders when it was dry got us other neat birds like **Blue-winged Macaw**, **Rufous-capped Spinetail**, **Velvety** and **Blue-billed Black-Tyrants**, **Red-breasted Toucan**, **Eared Pygmy-Tyrant**, **Pileated Parrot**, **Maroon-bellied Parakeet**, **Tufted Antshrike**, **Oche-rumped** and **White-bibbed Antbirds**, **Scaled Woodcreeper**, **White-browed Woodpecker**, and **Half-collared Sparrow**. On one of our full days there, we had a long excursion to the upper part of the park at Algulhas Negras, finding some fabulous birds like **Green-crowned Plovercrest**, **Atlantic Black-throated Trogon**, **Rufous-backed Antwreio**, **Rufous-tailed Antbird**, **Sharp-billed Treehunter**, **Black-capped Piprites**, and **Diademed Tanager** before the rain set in and we had to flee to lower elevations. A side trip down the mountain was well worth it to see the antics of four displaying **Streamer-tailed Tyrants**. Okay, more photos incoming from this last part of the trip!



*Gorgeous Green-headed Tanagers were delightful to watch as they swarmed the feeders at Hotel do Ypê*



*We were lucky to see this Green-crowned Plovercrest at a lek along the Algulhas Negras Road moment before it started pouring*



*This White-browed Warbler seemed oblivious to us while feeding in the road, allowing for some great shots!*





*Black-goggled Tanager (above) and White-throated Hummingbird (below)*





*Streamer-tailed Tyrants danced for us along a side road through farmland*



*We saw the scarce Half-collared Sparrow along the road below the hotel*

After three memorable weeks in Brazil, it was finally time to head back to São Paulo and fly back home – it passed in a flash! Thanks to everyone for helping make it a wonderful trip, I had tons of fun and hope to see you on another trip in the future!

## SPECIES LISTS

The **bird list** as well as photos of 111 species is on eBird at this link: <https://ebird.org/tripreport/255422>.

### Insects

Please see list at iNaturalist ([click here](#))

A few others not on iNaturalist:

*Dircenna* sp. Possibly *Dircenna diro* Diro Clearwing?

*Neptis* sp. (Sailor sp.)

*Dynamine* sp., Maybe *D. arene*?

*Pantherodes pardalaria*

### Mammals:

Giant Anteater *Myrmecophaga tridactyla*

Greater Bulldog Bat *Noctilio leporinus*

Pallas's Long-tongued Bat *Glossophaga soricine*

Long-nosed Bat *Rhynchonycteris naso*

Tufted Capuchin *Cebus apella*

Black-striped Capuchin *Cebus libidinosus*

Black-horned Capuchin *Cebus nigrinus*

Red-bellied Titi (heard) *Callicebus moloch*

Black Howler *Alouatta caraya*

White-cheeked Spider Monkey *Ateles marginatus*

Crab-eating Fox *Cerdocyon thous*

Jaguar *Panthera onca*

Tayra *Eira Barbara*

Giant Otter *Pteronura brasiliensis*

South American Coati *Nasua nasua*

Brazilian Tapir *Tapirus terrestris*

White-lipped Peccary *Tayassu pecari*

Marsh Deer *Blastocerus dichotomus*

Red Brocket *Mazama americana*

Brazilian Squirrel *Sciurus aestuans*

Capybara *Hydrochaeris hydrochaeris*

Azara's Agouti *Dasyprocta azarae*

Red-rumped Agouti *Dasyprocta leporine*

**Reptiles:**

Spectacled Caiman *Caiman crocodilus*

Yacare Caiman *Caiman yacare*

Schneider's Dwarf Caiman *Paleosuchus trigonatus*

Yellow-spotted River Turtle (Yellow-headed Sideneck) *Podocnemis unifilis*

Geoffroy's Side-necked Turtle *Phrynops geoffroanus*

Argentine Black-and-white Tegu *Salvator merianae*

Giant Ameiva *Ameiva ameiva*