



# Brazil: PANTANAL

September 1 - 10, 2024

Plus Jardim da Amazona, August 28 – September 1, 2024

## TRIP REPORT

Report & photos by Nick Bonomo

### 8/28 - Cuiaba arrival

For those who joined the pre-tour extension to the magnificent Jardim da Amazonia, our tour began this evening with a wonderful welcome dinner at a traditional churrascaria in the city of Cuiaba.

### 8/29 - Cuiaba to Jardim da Amazonia

After breakfast this morning we departed for Jardim da Amazonia. The excitement on board the bus was palpable, as each and every one of us was eager to begin birding. En route, we glimpsed our first Greater Rheas of the trip! Arriving midday, a refreshing homemade lemonade was waiting for us, followed by a delicious lunch highlighted by local fish and vegetables. Our chef, Sergio, took great pride in his work and proudly held court over his dining area, enthusiastically explaining the contents and flavors in each dish. While we ate, it was difficult to focus on food with Swallow-winged Puffbirds and Yellow-chevroned Parakeets careening across the gardens.

Immediately following lunch, a few gung-ho participants wandered the grounds of the lodge and were rewarded with tremendous views of a Mittermeier's Tapajos Saki (monkey) with a baby! This scarce and local primate is a specialty here at Jardim da Amazonia. The full group met a bit later for an afternoon's birding on foot from the lodge itself. Birds were both abundant and cooperative. As we slowly walked through the forest, a Blackish Nightjar flushed from the trail and landed in full view just a few yards away! Any glimpse of a nocturnal species during the light of day always feels really lucky. Several elegant Fork-tailed Palm Swifts floated in the sky above, and we enjoyed nice views of the well-named Short-tailed Swift also. Hummingbirds were well-represented with three species: White-chinned Sapphire, Black-throated Mango, and the real star, Dot-eared Coquette for those who were lucky enough to catch a glimpse during its brief appearance. At one point we had two species of Jacamar in view at once: Brown and Rufous-tailed.

We emerged from the forest into a more open area that was rife with new species. The highlight here was a trio of Black-girdled Barbets, the male of which began displaying from an open perch! These were really special views of a difficult bird. Not to be outdone, toucans put on quite a show. White-throated Toucan and THREE species of Aracari: Red-necked, Chestnut-eared, and Lettered. Yellow-tufted Woodpeckers are common here but are not to be overlooked, as they are one of the more striking woodpeckers in the region, and that's saying a lot. However, most of us seemed to enjoy the pair of Cream-colored Woodpeckers even more. Eduardo lived up to his nickname of "Mr. Antbird" by finding us a pair of Blackish Antbirds that were hanging in a nearby thicket. The hits kept on coming. One of the more bizarre-looking Amazonian species is the Bare-necked Fruitcrow, and we enjoyed killer scope views of one of these. Just before we had to pull ourselves away, a stunning male Black-faced Dacnis appeared out of nowhere into a fruiting tree that we had been watching attract birds for quite a while. It's always nice when the birds come to you 😊.

By the time we arrived back at the lodge, dusk had fallen, and a cooperative Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl was calling in the garden. We were able to locate the owl pretty quickly and enjoyed looks and even photos.

Sergio outdid himself with dinner tonight, capped off with our first caipirinhas of the trip.

### 8/30 - Jardim da Amazonia

We spent this morning on the river via small aluminum boats, but not before we enjoyed a ridiculously cooperative flock of Orange-cheeked Parrots that were feeding on a cashew tree by the dock.



(Orange-cheeked Parrot by Nick Bonomo)

Once we pulled ourselves away from the parrots, which was not easy to do, we boarded the boats. We motored to an oxbow where we enjoyed an encounter with a male Cone-billed Tanager, a highly sought after species that was only recently rediscovered! This remains one of the best places to see this bird. While we were searching for the tanager, we were visited by a curious Wattled Jacana. Several species of pigeon and dove shot across the sky, some perching cooperatively, such as a few of the attractive Scaled Pigeons.



One of the favorites of the morning was the pair of Point-tailed Palmcreepers that, as you might expect, clung to palm fronds not far from our boats. A White-naped Xenopsaris, a handsome flycatcher that is not often seen here, showed quite well. Our first pair of Lesser Kiskadees played and vocalized near the water's edge. In the same spot as the Cone-billed Tanager, a pair of stunning Blue-necked Tanagers reminded us who the better-looking tanager species really is. On our way out of the oxbow, a Striped Cuckoo made a cameo.

(Wattled Jacana by Nick Bonomo)

At a few strategic locations we beached the boats and made forays onto land to look for forest species. The style of birding in the forest was quite different from the river, but no less productive. Large woodpeckers were a highlight, and we enjoyed magnificent views of two species here: Red-necked and Ringed. Eduardo worked the thickets hard and showed us Rondonia Warbling-



Antbird and Golden-crowned Warbler. Elegant and Dusky-capped Woodcreepers were both heard and seen.

Along the banks of the river itself we enjoyed both Green and Buff-necked Ibises. A Pale-rumped Swift made a low pass at the water at about the same time a Swallow-tailed Kite dipped down to take a drink on-the-wing!! Swallow-winged Puffbirds were a staple of this habitat and were quite easy to see teed-up on snags as we ripped back up river.



We took a break during the midday heat. After lunch a few of us enjoyed a relaxing swim in the natural spring, an experience that is *highly* recommended to anyone who visits.

The afternoon was spent walking a different trail from the lodge grounds. We encountered a few nice mixed flocks that included such gems as Bar-breasted Piculet, Fulvous-crowned Scrub-Tyrant, and Yellow-backed Tanager. As the light started to fall, Eduardo picked up on a few White-browed Purpletufts. The birding, however, really kicked into gear after sunset. First, a Bat Falcon appeared in the western sky, passing right beneath a bright Venus! A pair of Laughing Falcons duetted in the distance. Short-tailed Nighthawks crossed overhead, as if oversized bats. A Blackish Nightjar began hunting insects right around us. A Common Pauraque landed on the trail itself. And last but certainly not least, we enjoyed ridiculous views of a singing Oscillated Poorwill on a horizontal branch at high-level!! There is something special about nocturnal birding, and this session was particularly magical as all of this happened along one short stretch of trail over 15 minutes' time. Wow.

### **8/31 - Jardim da Amazonia**

This morning, we took another boat ride to two different forest trailheads that were again active with birdlife. Antbirds were a major focus this morning and did not disappoint. Several Rusty-winged Antwrens were quite actively foraging for us. Chestnut-tailed, Black-throated, and Spot-backed Antbirds were all seen quite well and repeatedly! Natterer's Slaty-Antshrike played hard to get for a bit but eventually cooperated as well. Our woodpecker luck continued with another biggun, the Chestnut

Woodpecker. While we were watching this woodpecker, a female Green-backed Trogon flew into view and was kind enough to perch to allow us all to see it. The star of the morning would have to be the Gould's Toucanet, which we were also fortunate enough to hear calling. And yet another Black-girdled Barbet was seen! Eduardo's persistence paid off when he finally spotted a Blue-cheeked Jacamar, a species we had been trying to find for two days now. Well, it was worth the wait, and this bird really performed, even seemingly following us as we continued to walk the trail. The mixed flocks also produced such gems as Rufous-tailed Flatbill, Bright-rumped Attila, Chivi Vireo, Rufous-bellied Euphonia, Purple Honeycreeper, and a stonking Bay-headed Tanager! And let's not forget the manakins, which were also well-represented with Fiery-capped, Snow-capped, and Flame-crowned. Yeah, it was a solid morning! On the boat ride back to camp the sun was getting high and so were the raptors. Seen from the boat were Short-tailed Hawk and Plumbeous Kite. White-banded Swallows coursed along the river, hawking insects all the way.



(Blue-cheeked Jacamar by Nick Bonomo)

This afternoon we took a brief walk around the lodge grounds. Getting into the shady forest really helps take the temperature down a few notches. We managed to add a few species for the tour with highlights being Southern White-fringed Antwren and Band-tailed Antbird.

This evening, we drove to a nearby marshy lake where dozens of macaws came to roost. This spectacle is one to be seen (and heard!). Blue-and-yellow Macaws were present in the dozens, as were Red-bellied Macaws. A few Blue-headed Parrots also joined the fray. A pair of kingbirds in the marshy veg were not the expected Tropical but proved to be White-throated Kingbirds. Several White-



headed Marsh-Tyrants put on a show flycatching along the lake's edge. As Milson, our driver, unloaded a cooler full of cold beverages for us, we watched the light fall and the sun set. A few massive Nacunda Nighthawks hawked insects over the lake as the last bits of light faded.

On our short drive back to Jardim da Amazonia I think the group assumed our wildlife experience was done for the day, but that was far from the case. A Barn Owl flew through the bus's headlights - we disembarked quickly enough to see the owl make one more, close pass. Then, a few hundred meters down the road, Eduardo yelled out "Tapir!" and we watched as this rather chunky ungulate casually meandered down the road in front of us. After several seconds of viewing, it wandered into the forest and out of sight. What a way to cap the day!

### **9/1 - Jardim da Amazonia to Cuiaba**

This would be our final day at Jardim da Amazonia and we wanted to make the most of it. We got back into the boats and returned to the oxbow lake where we had our first encounter with Cone-billed Tanager two days prior. Not far from the dock, our boatman spotted a Sungrebe swimming in the shadows! This bird eventually appeared in the open for all to see and then flew downriver. Today we succeeded again in finding the Cone-billed Tanager, enjoying more prolonged and open views of a singing male, all while being "serenaded" by a very annoyed group of Southern Lapwings. So subtle, they are. Once again, the tanager was far from the only bird to see at this spot. We had a flurry of hummingbirds including a young male Dot-eared Coquette and White-necked Jacobin. They were joined by the more common Fork-tailed Woodnymphs and Black-throated Mangos.



(Cone-billed Tanager by Nick Bonomo)

Following more satisfying tanager views, we headed back into the forest, which seemed a bit quieter today. Still, we tallied an impressive list for just a few hours and kept adding new species! A Red-throated Piping-Guan was a new bird for many in the group, and it allowed fine canopy views. Eduardo was again doing his antbird thing and turned up Natterer's Slaty-Antshrike, Amazonian Antshrike, Amazonian Streaked-Antwren, Southern White-fringed Antwren, Rondonia Warbling-Antbird, and

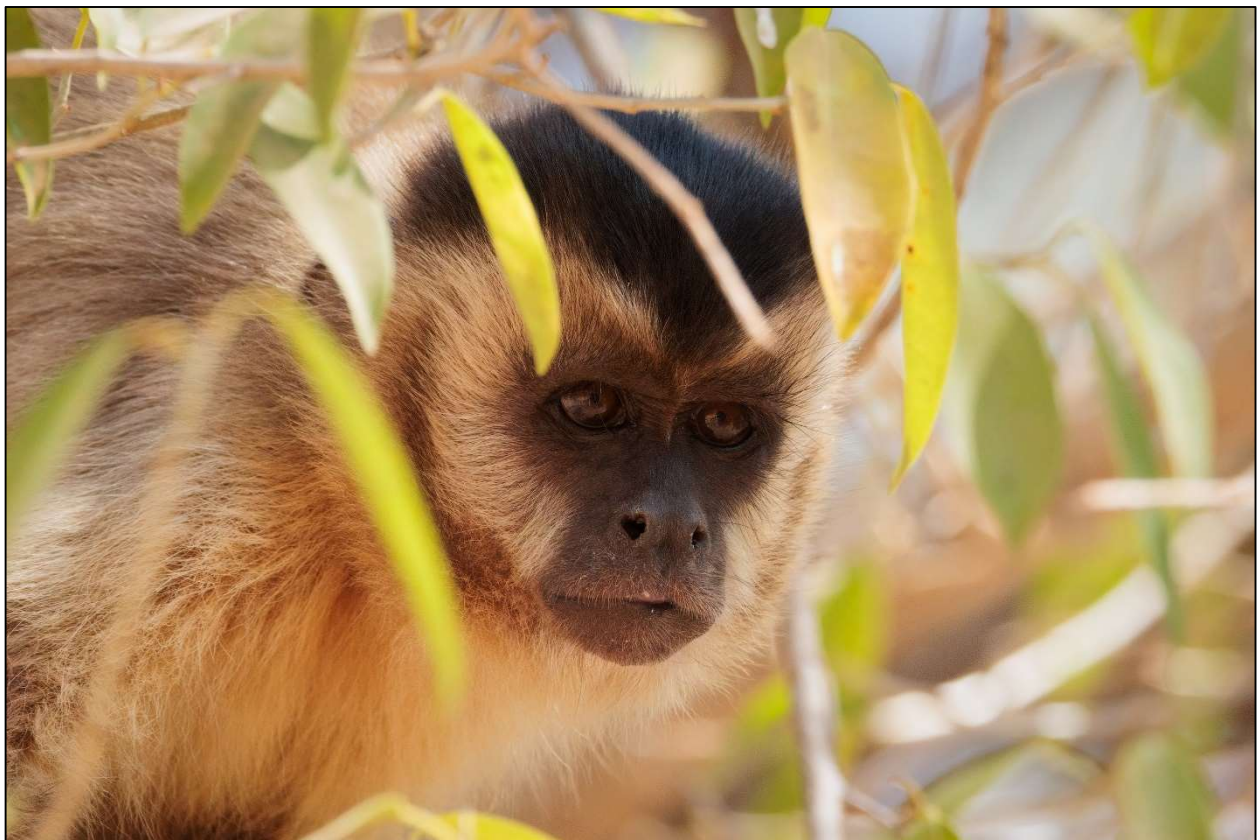
Black-throated Antbird. Manakins played a bit hard to get today, but we still managed views of White-bearded and Flamed-crowned. We finally broke a heard-only curse when views of Chattering Gnatwren were finally obtained by all! We had heard several of these up to this point without a clear look at one, so it was nice to lay eyes on that one.

The boat ride back again had us on raptor watch, which turned up a soaring Double-toothed Kite and another Short-tailed Hawk.

We returned to the lodge for our final meal, a hardy lunch prepared by Chef Sergio. We felt privileged to sample his culinary treats three times a day. The afternoon was spent driving back to Cuiaba, where we met up with the rest of the group for dinner to officially begin the main tour!

### **9/2 - Cuiaba to Pousada Rio Claro**

After breakfast, we began our much-anticipated journey into the Pantanal! Of course, we stopped at the famous unofficial entrance sign to the Pantanal, or so we thought! To our amazement, the sign was missing. Apparently, it had come down a couple weeks prior, for unknown reasons, and had not yet been repaired. Still, we were distracted from this surprise by the birdlife that was focused around feeders here. A pair of Chestnut-bellied Guans, a true Brazilian endemic species, greeted us. Life birds came fast and furious. Purplish Jays, Thrush-like Wrens, Grayish Baywings, and the first of many Silver-beaked Tanager were seen. One male White-lined Tanager was a nice surprise at this stop, as was a single Red-crested Cardinal amongst several dozen Yellow-billed Cardinals. Raptors were in evidence, as a couple each of Savanna Hawks and Roadside Hawks made several low passes. Brown Capuchins (monkeys) stole the show at times with their social antics. The highlight of the morning, however, was clearly a trio of very vocal Red-legged Seriemas, one of the iconic birds of the Pantanal.



(Brown Capuchin by Nick Bonomo)

A few miles past the entrance gate we stopped at a roadside watering hole that was absolutely stacked with Yacare Caiman, which must have been an intimidating sight to the dozens of birds that were also

drawn to this wet oasis. We spent a half hour here, constantly ticking new birds fast and furious. Water-loving species stole the show, particularly the herons. Wattled Jacanas were scattered along the muddy edges, where they crossed paths with Solitary Sandpipers, White-rumped Sandpipers, and Lesser Yellowlegs. A few Large-billed Terns, in the running for best looking tern in the world, hunted at eye level around the bridge. The long-legged waders (AKA heron-like birds) were the most diverse group, best represented by Rufescent Tiger-Heron, Capped Heron, and no less than FOUR ibis species: Green, Bare-faced, Buff-necked, and Plumbeous. You know the competition is fierce when Roseate Spoonbills don't get the attention they deserve. Though the focus was on the water, a few landbirds were seen in the roadside scrub. Greater Thornbird, Yellow-chinned Spinetail and our first of many Black-backed Water-Tyrants were seen well. A few Capybaras also dared to drink here. At this point in the dry season, water is at a premium in the Pantanal, especially this year due to a wet season that did not fully live up to its name. As a result, the wildlife is concentrated around wet spots such as this one.

We eventually pulled ourselves away from the action and proceeded to our first lodge, Pousada Rio Claro. The grounds themselves here are quite birdy, and we walked them before and after lunch, soaking up many more new species for the trip. The highlight here is Nanday Parakeet, a species that is difficult to see elsewhere in the Pantanal. Our first Chaco Chachalacas, "the voice of the Pantanal" per Eduardo, were obvious but uncharacteristically quiet. Bare-faced Curassows strutted around. Other garden highlights included Glittering-throated Emerald, Campo Flicker, Yellow-chevroned Parakeets, Scaly-headed Parrot, Rufous-bellied Thrush, Crested Oropendola, Solitary Black Cacique, Yellow-rumped Cacique, Giant Cowbirds, and throngs of Saffron Finches.

This tour was chock full of exciting boat trips, and this afternoon's few hours on the Rio Claro was in the running for best of the best. The entire boat ride was ridiculously productive from start to finish. Birds were constantly in sight. Just after pushing off from dock, a Sunbittern was spotted creeping along the water's edge. A Black-collared Hawk kept watch over the river, seemingly alert and ready to catch a fish if presented with the opportunity. The fact that there was even less water than usual in the Pantanal at this time of year was reflected in some of the sightings we had this afternoon. For instance, Scarlet-headed Blackbird is not usually associated with the river proper, but were present in double-digit numbers today. Not long into the trip, the highlight for some was a Brazilian Tapir along the riverbank. This mammal is highly sought-after, but it would not be our last for the tour! Back to the birds, kingfishers are a major part of the birdlife on the Rio Claro. We pretty quickly had Ringed and Amazon, not long followed by the diminutive American Pygmy Kingfisher. Almost immediately after we had the Pygmy, our boatman spotted a Green-and-rufous Kingfisher, known to be the most difficult species to find. We felt very lucky to have encountered one. A bit later in the trip we found a Green Kingfisher, completing the five species South American kingfisher sweep in one boat ride! Around this time, we enjoyed treetop views of our first Black-and-gold Howler Monkeys of the trip, and Toco Toucans dropped to the riverbank for a drink.





(Sunbittern by Nick Bonomo)



(American Pygmy Kingfisher by Nick Bonomo)



As we proceeded further down river, a pair of Jabiru storks inquisitively checked out our boat. We spotted a Yellow-headed Caracara hitching a ride on the back of a Capybara - not something you see every day, while a South American Coati foraged on a mudflat. Herons and ibises of several species dotted the riverbank. A Laughing Falcon was spotted perched atop a dead snag in the middle of a marshy area. While everyone was gawking at the waterbirds and raptors, Eduardo kept eyes and ears open for landbirds that can be found in the riverside vegetation. His diligence got us views of Band-tailed Antbird and Rusty-backed Spinetail. As dusk fell, all of a sudden we were inundated with Band-tailed Nighthawks, which treated us on our ride back to dock. Lesser Bulldog Bats joined the nighthawks in the riverine insect feast. One lucky boat had brief views of a Boat-billed Heron, and a couple participants even had silhouette views of a Scissor-tailed Nightjar!



(Band-tailed Antbird by Nick Bonomo)

There's something special about observing nature from the water. It provides a very different perspective on the environment, and as an added bonus, birds seem to be less wary of boats than human beings on foot. This boat ride capped an action-packed magical first day in the Pantanal.

### **9/3 - Pousada Rio Claro to Porto Jofre**

This morning's supposedly "quick" pre-breakfast walk turned into over an hour of productive birding in the woodland adjacent to the lodge. The end of the trail, which dead ends at the Rio Claro, was especially productive with a large mixed flock moving through. Orange-headed Tanager topped a list of species that included White-throated Piping-Guan, Squirrel Cuckoo, Cinnamon-throated Hermit, White-wedged Piculet, White Woodpecker, Cream-colored Woodpecker, Turquoise-fronted Parrot, Barred Antshrike, Great Rufous Woodcreeper, Straight-billed Woodcreeper, Rufous Cacholote, Helmeted Manakin, Stripe-necked Tody-Tyrant, Southern Beardless-Tyrannulet, Rufous Casiornis, Masked Gnatcatcher, Buff-bellied Wren, Tropical Parula, and Flavescent Warbler. No wonder we were late for breakfast.

After breakfast we went back on the water and enjoyed more close encounters with many species, the highlight of which was undoubtedly an Agami Heron hunting the shadowy riverbank. Even when this rarely-seen species is encountered, views are often dark and obstructed - not the case this morning! The group enjoyed prolonged open viewing of this subtly gorgeous species. This would go down as one of the birds of the trip without a doubt.



(Agami Heron by Nick Bonomo)

Once back to dock, our rabid group opted to take a short walk in the woods rather than cooling off before lunch. That decision was rewarded with point blank views of a Red-billed Scythebill, a target bird for many on the tour.

After lunch, we checked out of the pousada and made the trek all the way to the end of the Transpantaneira, at Port Jofre. En route, of course, there was birding. We enjoyed our first glimpses of Hyacinth Macaws, the largest parrot in the world. Southern Screamers dotted the wet areas alongside the road. An Orange-backed Troupial crossed the road in front of the vehicle. One pool contained a half-dozen of the striking Capped Heron. We had nearly driven past a wet, dense culvert for the sake of time but ultimately decided to stop because it just looked too birdy to pass up. Good thing we did, as we added many new species here, and enjoyed fantastic eye level or below views of nearly all of them! A Little Cuckoo flopped into the reeds and eventually showed itself. A White-tailed Goldenthrout fed on flowers before disappearing. Snail Kites hunted the wetland here for, you guessed it, snails. We were thrilled to find an American Pygmy Kingfisher perched right next to the wooden bridge. Spinetails were represented by Cinereous-breasted and Yellow-chinned. A striking White-headed Marsh-Tyrant teed up in absolutely perfect light for the photographers in the group. And we had our first looks at seedeaters, specifically Rusty-collared and White-bellied.





(White-headed Marsh-Tyrant by Nick Bonomo)

As we inched closer to Porto Jofre, AKA the end of the road, we stopped again at a large semi-wet pasture that was unsurprisingly loaded with birds. One of the first birds we saw upon getting out of the bus was a flock of southbound American Golden-Plovers. It is always fascinating to see birds in active migration, especially individuals that would have left the Arctic tundra only a month or two prior. A series of brown blobs scattered through the pasture were not, in fact, cow dung...rather, they were day-roosting *Nacunda* Nighthawks! Closer to the road itself, a pair of Great Antshrikes chased each other around while a Southern Yellowthroat sang from the scrub. Other landbirds included Bluish-gray Saltator and Black-capped Donacobius. A singing Yellowish Pipit showed itself nicely to the group. The “best” bird of this spot, however, was a pair of Subtropical Doraditos, which is a bright and spritely little flycatcher not often seen on this tour.



We eventually peeled ourselves away from the action and arrived at our lodge for the next two nights. Some tour participants took a bit of time before dinner to walk the grounds and have an unforgettably close encounter with several Hyacinth Macaws.

#### **9/4 - Cuiaba River**

Today was our day to search for Jaguar. We had two boat trips scheduled, and boy did they deliver. We had eyes on our first Jaguar, a patrolling female, before the clock struck 7am, which even shocked

Eduardo. After our quick success and prolonged views, we continued further down the Cuiaba River and its tributaries. We ended up seeing FOUR (!) separate Jaguars on the morning run, including a hunting female and a large male relaxing on the riverbank. We also had a close encounter with a pair of vocal fishing Giant River Otters. We quietly watched and listened as these two animals interacted with one another and even pulled up a fish.



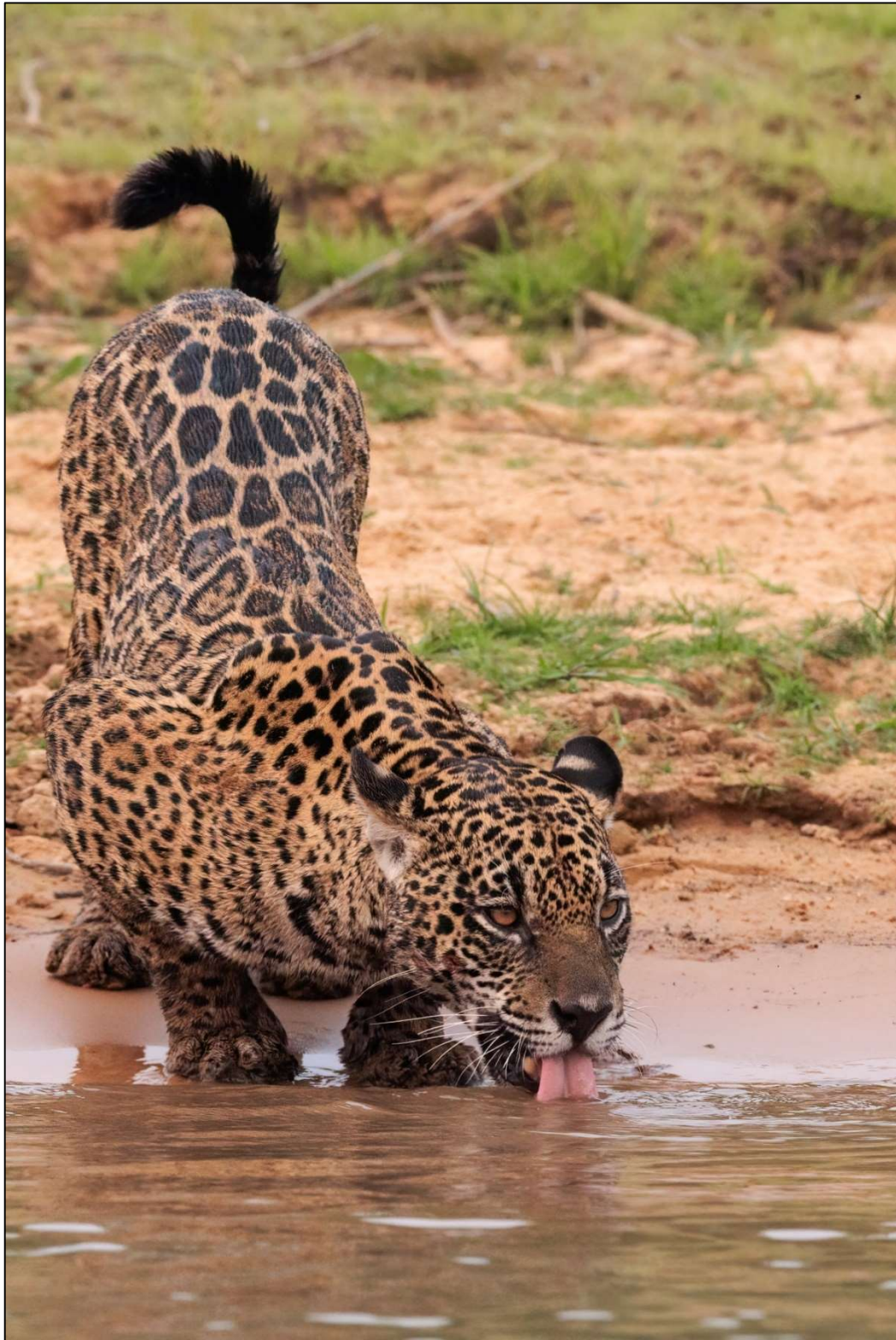
(Giant River Otter by Nick Bonomo)

After lunch and a siesta, and a dip in the refreshing pool for a few of us, we were back on the river for the last few hours of the day. It would have been difficult to match the excitement of the morning, but we ended up doing just that. We found two more of these powerful cats, including one female that delivered quite a show. We first saw her slowly walking along the riverbank, seemingly “on the prowl” at first. Eventually she came to a stop and seemed to relax for a bit, sitting right at the edge of the river.

As we were watching her, Eduardo whisper-shouted “Tapir!!” and pointed up the bank, where we watched a fully grown Tapir unknowingly walking directly towards a hungry jaguar. The cat soon noticed the massive ungulate and crouched behind a riverside shrub. We all watched in anticipation, wondering whether or not the Jag would even think about taking down such a large beast. Some of us were clearly rooting for this to happen, while others were dreading any such interaction. The cat remained crouched and watched the Tapir pass by as if wondering “is this really happening?!” The Tapir, still clueless at this point, passed by the cat and came to a stop several meters beyond it. With the Jaguar still intently watching, and the Tapir still within striking distance, the Tapir must have gotten a whiff of the cat, because at the snap of a finger the Tapir went from a standstill to abruptly dashing into the forest. The Jaguar remained, looking in the direction of the departed Tapir, possibly wondering if she passed up a chance for a massive meal? We’ll never know what was going through that cat’s head, but either way this interaction between the two animals was amazing to watch play out. Eduardo was equally stunned and admitted he had never seen a Tapir and a Jaguar in the same frame before.



As if that wasn't enough excitement, this moment seemed to push our female Jaguar back into hunt mode. She resumed both walking and swimming along the riverbank into an area where thick vegetation spilled into the river. It was here that she leapt into the vegetation and pulled out a rather large Iguana. Happy with her catch, she proceeded to lie down on the bank and consume her snack.



(Jaguar by Nick Bonomo)

Though the day was focused on mammals, we did add a few new birds, such as Pied Plover and Yellow-billed Tern. Laughing and Bat Falcons were each seen well perched atop dead snags. Sharp-eyed Eduardo spotted a pair of perched Yellow-collared Macaws. And while we were watching the active female Jaguar late in the day, Peach-fronted Parakeets drank nearby while a pair of Harris's Hawks showed well, the latter a very scarce species here.

Thrilled with our luck, we headed back to the lodge where we arrived around sunset, which gave us enough time for happy hour before another delicious dinner.

### **9/5 - Porto Jofre to Pouso Alegre**

Before leaving the Porto Jofre area, we made a few strategic stops for a handful of species that are best found along this southern stretch of the Transpantaneira. Fawn-breasted Wren topped the list of targets, but was joined by White-lored and Chotoy Spinetails, Variable Oriole and Yellow-browed Tyrant. The wet areas continued to produce, highlighted by great scope views of a Pantanal Snipe plus more Southern Screamers and Muscovy Ducks. It is difficult to complete long drives on this bridge-laden dirt "highway" without stopping several times. For instance, we were distracted by a superb adult King Vulture and more Hyacinth Macaws.

We took lunch along the Pixaim River on our way back northward. A midday walk around the grounds was productive despite the time of day. Pigeons and doves were abundant here and included Picazuro Pigeons and Scaled Doves, two of the sharper looking Columbidae in the region. The punk-like Guira Cuckoo is always a crowd pleaser, and we enjoyed fine views of that species today. The related Smooth-billed Anis were rather abundant here. When birders hear the word "rail," they generally think of very secretive birds. That, however, is not how anyone would describe Gray-cowled Wood-Rail, which are actually quite showy. We saw about a half-dozen during our pre-lunch stroll, along with another Sunbittern (never tire of those!). Here we also enjoyed prolonged views of Mato Grosso Antbird, one of the region's most-desired antbirds. A flashy Orange-backed Troupial fed in a flowering tree by the parking lot, which was a nice send-off for lunch!

We continued to our next lodge, arriving early afternoon, and enjoyed some birding along the road that led to the property. Long-tailed Ground-Doves were exactly where Eduardo thought they might be. A flock of our first Chestnut-vented Conebills moved through. And glued to tree trunks were Lineated Woodpecker and Great Rufous Woodcreeper.

Later on, we spent a long evening vigil at a nearby watering hole called "The Wait," because, well, you wait for animals to come to the water. And so, we waited. And the birds and mammals came. The only freshwater available for quite a ways, the spot is regularly visited by wildlife. There was *always* something drinking at the pond edge. We knew it was a special place when we spotted our first Undulated Tinamou drinking right in the open. The tinamous kept coming, reaching maximum count of about 10 individuals! A pair of Sunbitterns constantly patrolled the edge. The highlight here, however, was the mammal show. Every 15 minutes or so a new mammal would arrive to drink. The list was impressive and highlighted by a Tayra, a large mustelid, that pranced to the water's edge for a drink. Its bouncy gait was adorable. A raucous group of Collared Peccaries rolled in the mud, causing a bit of a scene. A handful of Coatis also made a ruckus. Add Black-tailed Marmoset, Red Brocket Deer, and Azara's Agouti to the list and it was quite a show. We ended with a pass from a Band-tailed Nighthawk over the pond.

The night's mammal show was not yet finished! After dinner we headed out for a night drive. It started off with a bang with killer views of a Brazilian Tapir casually crossing the road and stopping at a roadside pool for a prolonged drink in full view. She eventually wandered off, not caring one bit about our presence. While everyone was still on a high from that experience, the Tapir was outdone by a Giant Anteater that was leisurely strolling and feeding along the dirt track. At one point it curiously approached the vehicle, sniffed the front tire, and kept on its way. We watched this animal do its thing for a good 10 minutes or more, at point blank range. We could've turned back at that point and called



the drive a great success, but of course we continued and found more classic Pantanal mammals, including Crab-eating Fox and Crab-eating Raccoon. A Barn Owl screeched in the distance. We watch a Parauque in the spotlight. At the end of the drive, we remarked that the combined mammal list from these past two days would make anyone in the world jealous. Needless to say, the whole group was thrilled. It is not supposed to be this easy!



(Giant Anteater by Nick Bonomo)

9/6 - Pouso Alegre to Pousada Piuval

We spent the morning taking two walks and a drive, all around lodge property. We enjoyed new species for the trip plus better looks at some we had seen already. The undoubted highlight of the morning was finding a day roost of two Great Potoos! Every time I see this species I am surprised at just how large they are. We marvelled at their camouflage as we viewed them from all angles. The morning's list was another impressive one and included Savanna and Roadside Hawks, Rufous-tailed Jacamar, Chestnut-eared Aracari, Toco Toucan, Pale-crested Woodpecker, Golden-green Woodpecker, Hyacinth Macaw, Turquoise-fronted Parrot, Red-billed Scythebill, Rufous-fronted Thornbird, Helmeted Manakin, Pearly-vented Tody-Tyrant, Bran-colored Flycatcher, Rufous Casiornis, Short-crested Flycatcher, Masked Gnatcatcher, Chalk-browed Mockingbird, Creamy-bellied Thrush, the magnificent Crested Oropendola, Blue-black Grassquit and Red-crested Finch.





(Pale-crested Woodpecker by Nick Bonomo)



After lunch it was off to our final Pantanal lodge for two nights. En route we secured excellent views of Greater Rhea, a species which we would see many of over the next couple days. Eduardo spotted two Whistling Herons roadside, a species that we had seen a few times already but not quite this well!

Our arrival at Pousada Piuval was mid-afternoon and we already noted some goodies around the main grounds. Campo Flickers and Green-barred Woodpecker showed really well for anyone who wanted to get a photo. Red-legged Seriema were actually strutting around the lawns outside our rooms! Chopi Blackbirds are abundant here and seemed to be always within sight/sound.



(Red-legged Seriema by Nick Bonomo)

This evening, we drove to The Bay for what would be the waterbird spectacular of the tour. Literally hundreds of birds were in view as we watched from the edge of the water. The sounds of White-faced and Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks were almost deafening at times. A few Southern Screamers dotted the marshy landscape. One area of the wetland was so thick with egrets that it looked covered in a foot of snow. The waterfowl-lovers in the group were very pleased to see Brazilian Teal and Muscovy Duck so well. One group member's sharp eyes spotted our only Purple Gallinule of the trip, a fine adult. Shorebirds (AKA waders) were well-represented here too. Black-necked Stilts were perhaps the most visually striking species present. Migrants from the north included American Golden-Plover, Lesser Yellowlegs, White-rumped Sandpiper, and Pectoral Sandpiper. Dashing between those feeding shorebirds were a handful of Wilson's Phalaropes whose distinctive active behavior was fun to watch. Terns were represented by Black Skimmer and Large-billed Tern. Eduardo picked out our first of several Maguari Storks here; we later saw a few more including in flight - impressive! Jabirus and Wood Storks by the dozen vied for our attention. In addition to the aforementioned carpet of egrets, we saw Rufescent Tiger-Heron, Whistling Heron, Capped Heron, Black-crowned Night-Heron, Little Blue Heron, Striated Heron and Cocoi Heron. The diversity was impressive! With the setting sun at our backs, this was a fun way to end the day.



(Maguari Stork by Nick Bonomo)

### **9/7 - Pousada Piuval**

We began the day with a pre-breakfast walk to a woodland that is known to hold White-fronted Woodpecker, a species that has become very scarce in the Pantanal. We succeeded in finding this local specialty enjoying views that were prolonged. A trio of roosting Great Horned Owls was an unexpected bonus. After coffee & food we explored nearby palm-heavy woodlands in search for more antbirds. "Mr. Antbird" Eduardo struck again by finding us Planalto Slaty-Antshrike, Black-bellied Antwren, and Rusty-backed Antwren! We then returned to the bay, which was once again impressive. Before turning in for a midday siesta, one final stop at a bayside picnic area was home to an active Jabiru nest that had a colony of Monk Parakeets nesting in the underside of the nest itself, all while Black-and-gold Howler Monkeys jumped between the treetops above us. At this spot we also secured possibly our best views of Variable Oriole and Variegated Flycatcher.

After our midday break from the heat, we spent the evening in a different section of nearby woods. They were a bit quiet but we managed an active mixed flock that included Large-billed Antwren, Red-billed Scythebill, Southern Beardless-Tyrannulet, Forest Elaenia, Plain Tyrannulet and Gray-headed Tanager. As dusk fell, Undulated Tinamous and Chaco Chachalacas began calling, White-throated Piping-Guans perched in dead snags, and a pair of Crimson-crested Woodpeckers showed incredibly well.





(Steve with Greater Rheas by Nick Bonomo)

After dinner we took a night drive in an open-air truck to see what might be lurking in the dark. The birds stole the show this evening, in contrast to the mammal-heavy event from two nights prior. We had no fewer than four (!) encounters with Great Potoos. We couldn't get enough of this bizarre nocturnal bird. A Black-banded Owl cooperated for the group by perching in a low palm tree right next to the truck! You could not ask for much better views. The night was capped by a pair of Brazilian Tapirs rumbling through the forest floor. By this point we had nearly lost count of how many Tapirs we had seen on this tour.



(Great Potoo by Nick Bonomo)



## 9/8 - Pousada Piuval to Chapada dos Guimarães

Before departing this phenomenal pousada, a brief pre-breakfast bird walk took quite a turn when we spotted a female jaguar sauntering through the field!! As if that was not shocking enough, a Giant Anteater was foraging in the same area, though the two animals did not interact, probably a good thing for the anteater. Normally, by itself, a Giant Anteater would have been the overwhelming highlight of the morning. However, we could not resist one last spectacular view of a jaguar before leaving their territory. Using our bus as a blind, we approached the animal without disturbing it. As great as it is seeing jaguars from a boat on the Cuiaba River, stumbling across one in an unexpected location is even more thrilling if you can believe it. We considered ourselves very lucky. The rarity of the moment could be realized by the expression on Eduardo's face, which was one of exhilaration.



(Jaguar by Nick Bonomo)

After breakfast, it was time to make our bittersweet departure from the Pantanal itself and head to our final biome of the trip, the cerrado! We were forced to take a detour due to construction which took us on a scenic, if not bumpy ride through the countryside. Along the way we encountered a few active wildfires, which served as a stark reminder of the rapid changes that our planet is undergoing.

Despite the detour, our arrival for lunch in Chapada dos Guimarães was not terribly late. Following lunch, we checked into our lovely lodge adjacent to the national park. The gardens here were buzzing with new species for us; we remarked it was like we had driven to a new country, just a couple hours' drive from the Pantanal. One particular flowering tree in the front garden was very attractive to hummingbirds. In just a little while, standing in one spot, we logged White-vented Violetear, Glittering-bellied Emerald, Fork-tailed Woodnymph, Glittering-throated Emerald, and the spectacular Swallow-tailed Hummingbird. Cobalt-rumped Parrotlets were showing well, and Rufous Horneros strutted around the lawns. A new thrush for us, Pale-breasted Thrush, was common at the water feature, which also attracted Black-faced Tanagers, White-lined Tanagers, Blue Dacnis and Buff-throated Saltator. The feeder in the back attracted several Saffron-billed Sparrows. Swallow Tanagers, hands down one of the most attractive tanagers in the region, were ever-present on the property.

After we enjoyed a refreshing welcome drink provided by the lodge staff, we hiked up a hill across the street to an observation tower that rose above the canopy; from here we could see for miles. Unfortunately, that included views of multiple active wildfires, reminding us that this was an unusually dry year locally! From the tower we managed to find Pale-vented Pigeon, Scaled Pigeon, Red-and-green Macaw, Olivaceous Woodcreeper and Golden-crowned Warbler. We walked back down the trail at dusk, encountering a singing Little Nightjar along the way, which we were able to locate and view on a bare branch for several minutes!

### **9/9 - Chapada dos Guimarães**

This would be our final full day of the tour and we were determined to make the most of it! An early morning visit to the cerrado would be a real highlight for the group. This habitat type put many interesting species in play for us, with little overlap with what we had seen in the Pantanal. The walk started with a couple of similar-looking flycatchers that were once considered conspecific but are now known to be in different genera! These would be the Chapada and Suiriri Flycatchers. We had the pleasure of studying these birds side by side, making for an educational experience for the group. Next up, a trio of very vocal and showy White-rumped Tanagers made an appearance. As we continued through the dry scrub, we encountered a roadside Burrowing Owl that seemed used to human presence. One of the big target species out here is Collared Crescentchest. We had been on the trail of a couple calling birds but were unable to lay eyes on those. But further down the track, one appeared out of nowhere and began calling from a snag, allowing everyone to enjoy this unique species and snap some photos! A bit further down, a Curl-crested Jay flew past us. Fork-tailed Flycatchers, Rufous-collared Sparrows, Cinnamon Tanagers and White-banded Tanagers were soon to follow. While all this was going on, an excited Eduardo called out “Coal-crested Finch!” and the group was able to view one female and eventually a crisply-plumaged male for prolonged views. The hits kept coming with White-eared Puffbirds, Aplomado Falcon, White-eyed Parakeet, Plain-crested Elaenia and Plumbeous Seedeater. The last new bird of the cerrado happened to be the “best” for most of us...Eduardo spotted a male Horned Sungem perched in the open. We got all scopes on this sleek hummingbird, a specialty here. With that in the bag, we departed the cerrado and headed for gallery forest.



(Collared Crescentchest by Nick Bonomo)

The forest in a nearby wet valley held yet more new species for us. We started with a bang getting a visual on an Amazonian Motmot while a second bird called in the distance. Southern Antpipit, Plain Antvireo and Euler's Flycatcher were part of one small flock, while another was attended by both Helmeted and Band-tailed Manakins, Little Woodpecker, Chivi Vireo, Purple-throated Euphonia, Thick-billed Euphonia, Blue Dacnis, Red-legged Honeycreeper and Sepia-capped Flycatcher. An adult King Vulture was spotted riding the thermals high overhead.

For our afternoon walk today, the group split into two. One half hung around the lodge grounds and enjoyed more fantastic views of birds using the water feature plus additions like White-throated Kingbird and Burnished-buff Tanager. The more adventurous folks walked down a ravine and recorded Tataupa Tinamou, Red-shouldered Macaw, Black-tailed Tityra, Boat-billed Flycatcher and Red-legged Honeycreeper.

We reconvened after sunset in search of night birds. Our nightjar luck continued in the form of wide-open views of Rufous Nightjar while Little Nightjar and Common Pauraque called around us.



(Rufous Nightjar by Nick Bonomo)

### **9/10 - Chapada dos Guimarães to Cuiaba**

Today would be primarily a travel day as the group shared a farewell breakfast and hit the road back towards Cuiaba for our departing flights. But not before a few gung-ho folks took part in an early morning walk before breakfast on this final day. Until the last second, we were adding new species, including Pale-bellied Tyrant-Manakin, Crested Becard, Piratic Flycatcher, Spot-backed Puffbird, Yellow-bellied Elaenia and Black-throated Saltator! We said our goodbyes to the beautiful grounds of our lodge and our gracious hosts, and headed off towards the airport. We arrived at the airport with plenty of time to spare before our journeys home. The combination of beautiful birds, spectacular mammals, enthusiastic group and passionate guides all made for an unforgettable trip!





# Brazil: PANTANAL

September 1 - 10, 2024

Plus Jardim da Amazona, August 28 – September 1, 2024

Report & photos by Nick Bonomo

For information on our next Pantanal tour, contact [gina@sunrisebirding.com](mailto:gina@sunrisebirding.com)