

A wildlife, swimwear and hire car demolition tour of –

Brazil

27th June to 3rd August 2008

Barry-Sean Virtue and Steve Anyon-Smith



The Plan

Large, odd or rare mammals were on the main menu for our holiday to Brazil. Whilst the Atlantic forests of Rio de Janeiro and Minas Gerais states would provide a long list of endemic and other birds, the State of Mato Grosso with its Amazon forest and vast wetlands of the Pantanal would provide the chance to catch up with some large pussycats, along with unlikely looking things that eat termites.

We arranged to travel for five weeks in the dry winter period with the time spent roughly equally between a self-guiding hire car assisted visit to the “Mata Atlantica” and an “empty your wallets” tour in the Amazon and the Pantanal. Wedged between these marvellous wildlife habitats was a short visit to the geographically spectacular and culturally curious City of Rio de Janeiro and the frightening sights on Copacabana Beach.

Seven line summary

Brazil is one of those odd countries that are neither one thing nor the other. It is certainly not what is euphemistically termed a “developing country”, nor is it truly first world. For me it didn’t have the confronting and exciting in-your-face edge that poorer countries have, nor a first world fashion sense when it came to old ladies’ swimwear.

For wildlife, I got the feeling that the tide is turning in its favour. Brazil is an enormous country and there are many intact ecosystems, and Brazilian people are starting to take an interest. I felt positive about Brazil and its people.



Itinerary (as executed)

date	activity	stay at
26-Jun	fly Sydney to Buenos Aires	
27-Jun	fly Buenos Aires to Rio de Janeiro	
	drive to Serra dos Tucanos	Serra dos Tucanos
28-Jun	at Serra dos Tucanos	Serra dos Tucanos
29-Jun	at Serra dos Tucanos	Serra dos Tucanos
30-Jun	at Serra dos Tucanos	Serra dos Tucanos
1-Jul	at Serra dos Tucanos	Serra dos Tucanos
2-Jul	drive to Caratinga - Feliciano Miguel Abdala Reserve	Feliciano Miguel Abdala Reserve
3-Jul	at Feliciano Miguel Abdala Reserve	Feliciano Miguel Abdala Reserve
4-Jul	destroy a Fiat and redesign a hire car	Caratinga town
5-Jul	go to Belo Horizonte and get another car	Santuario do Caraca
6-Jul	at Caraca National Park	Santuario do Caraca
7-Jul	at Caraca National Park	Santuario do Caraca
8-Jul	at Caraca National Park	Santuario do Caraca
9-Jul	go to Cipo National Park	Pousada Lapa Grande, Cordeal Mota
10-Jul	at Cipo National Park	Pousada Lapa Grande, Cordeal Mota
11-Jul	at Cipo National Park	Pousada Lapa Grande, Cordeal Mota
12-Jul	go to Persopolis	"love hotel" somewhere
13-Jul	drive to Rio, return car	Ibiza Hotel, Copacabana Beach
14-Jul	visit the big statue on the hill, botanic gardens	Ibiza Hotel, Copacabana Beach
15-Jul	check the beach again, fly to Cuiaba	Mato Grosso Palace Hotel
16-Jul	at Cuiaba, bus to Alta Floresta at 1900	in bus watching trucks
17-Jul	to Cristalino Lodge, Amazonia	Cristalino Lodge
18-Jul	at Cristalino Lodge	Cristalino Lodge
19-Jul	at Cristalino Lodge	Cristalino Lodge
20-Jul	at Cristalino Lodge	Cristalino Lodge
21-Jul	at Cristalino Lodge	Cristalino Lodge
22-Jul	at Cristalino Lodge	Cristalino Lodge
23-Jul	return to Alta Floresta	Floresta Amazonica Hotel
24-Jul	fly to Cuiaba and transfer to Pantanal	Jaguar Ecolodge
25-Jul	at Jaguar Ecolodge	Jaguar Ecolodge
26-Jul	at Jaguar Ecolodge	Jaguar Ecolodge
27-Jul	at Jaguar Ecolodge	Jaguar Ecolodge
28-Jul	at Jaguar Ecolodge and Araras Ecolodge	Jaguar Ecolodge
29-Jul	at Jaguar Ecolodge	Jaguar Ecolodge
30-Jul	go to Araras Ecolodge	Araras Ecolodge
31-Jul	return to Cuiaba	Mato Grosso Palace Hotel
1-Aug	fly Cuiaba to Brasilia, Rio and Buenos Aires	planes, airports
2-Aug	lost on date line	
3-Aug	arrive home at the mercy of Aerolineas Argentinas	





Brazilian people

We didn't visit any areas where comparatively poor people live. So my observations are biased towards just a few areas in a vast country. Brazilians were found to be exceptionally helpful and obliging. Nobody behaved like a nuisance trying to sell us anything and at no time were we over-serviced by someone expecting tips. Given our almost total lack of understanding of the Portuguese language we found that we could function effectively on a combination of goodwill, sign language and cash. Tourists appear to be neither a curiosity nor significant economic contributors, so normal behaviour is easy.

Although much is said and written of personal security in Brazil we didn't feel unsafe in the areas we visited.



The Lonely Planet Guide and going broke in Brazil

This deserves a mention. Much of what is printed in the Lonely Planet Guide is outdated (which can't be helped) or utter bullshit. The guidebook says that using Visa cards to get money from ATMs or banks is easy. Let me be unequivocal on this point – you will not get a Visa card to find you any money anywhere outside of VERY large airports or cities.

Wildlife (see also lists and notes at the end of this report)

We identified 550 different birds and 43 mammals. The bird list far exceeded expectations. Mammal lists are always going to be disappointing if you follow in the footsteps of Jon Hall, who manages to see more things in less than half the time. This is what happens I guess when you ignore birds.....

I really only wanted to be sure of three mammals – jaguar, giant anteater and maned wolf and we saw all these easily.

We had a copy of *All the Birds of Brazil* (Deodato Souza) and for mammals we relied on local knowledge, Jon Hall's notes, pictures off the internet and the *Field Guide to Neotropical Rainforest Mammals* (Emmons).

We had the usual difficulties with Souza. However this book is a field guide in the sense that you do not need two Nepalese porters to carry it in the field. After a while you learn the conversion code from art to life and back again, or else you give up. The range maps are very useful and mostly accurate. The descriptions of the calls suggest that Mr Souza and associates were sometimes working late into the night and probably drinking what now powers many of the smaller vehicles in Brazil. Certainly the guide is valuable in the sense that at least it has all the birds of Brazil in it (at the time of publication).

Mammal taxonomy, particularly for primates, has seen many changes in recent years, so often we had little idea of what we were looking at. My thanks go to Jon Hall for sorting this out in this report.



Birds

My one target – harpy eagle was missed (by one day). That's okay – I may yet return to South America and I need something to look for! Of the 550 birds identified 290 were lifers. This far exceeded expectations.

We guided ourselves around the Atlantic forests during the first part of the trip and missed few birds of any consequence, although I am certain that a professional guide would have

winkled out a few rarities here and there. By walking alone we could get further along trails and to sites where many mixed groups of equipment-laden retirees would have ground to a halt. We made the decision to spend more time in the field with the money we saved on guides, so our list grew by visiting more sites. Pete, the resident guide at Serra dos Tucanos was invaluable with site notes and directions to find the local specialities during our stay there.

Our Amazon site – the awesome Cristalino Lodge – provided guides as part of the package. A local guide, Jorge, was excellent on birds but our full-time birding guide – “Reasonable” Brad Davis, a Canadian ex-pat married to a local lady (who was sensibly hidden from us) found us over 200 birds. I doubt we would have identified half of these on our own, assuming we knew where to look in the first place. We were rapt. We missed heaps but that’s the gig in rainforest anywhere. Cristalino Lodge is listed as one of the top birding destinations in the world and deservedly so.

In the Pantanal we had the guiding services of Eduardo Falcao (owner of Jaguar Eco-Lodge). Eduardo is famed for his ability to find jaguars (being part-jaguar himself) but also knows all of the local birds and where to search for them. We would have seen more birds with him if mammals and other tourists hadn’t competed for his attention. We weren’t displeased with our bird sightings in the Pantanal, a place where volume overwhelms diversity. Hyacinth macaw was the standout bird here.

I reckon that 600-650 birds could have been seen with our itinerary if mammals were largely ignored and local birding guides were used at all sites.

Mammals

Jaguar is at the top of everyone’s wish list for mammals for Brazil. We had two sightings, both on the Cuiaba River at Porto Jofre in the Pantanal. Our first was an attractive wet pussy sighting as a jaguar cub swam in front of our boat to reach its mum on the riverbank. We almost ran over it.

Giant anteater has long fascinated me and we feared that we would miss it when we culled Canastra National Park from our original trip plan. Happily the area around Araras Eco-Lodge in the Pantanal was awash with them, with three sightings on three different days. Maned wolf completes my world wolf list (I think). Maned wolves are something of a circus animal and virtually guaranteed at Caraca National Park at the nightly feeding at the Santuario do Caraca (the monastery).

Most mammals in South America are either difficult to see or mythical. We were happy to see a range of marmosets and other monkeys and scam a few eccentric bits and pieces along the way. The Pantanal was the best area for mammals, followed by the Amazon with the Atlantic forests being very slow. Spotlighting was rewarding in the Pantanal but frustrating elsewhere, disappointingly so along the Cristalino River.

Jorge is a standout mammal guide at Cristalino Lodge.



male coati



black tufted capuchin

Reptiles

Winter is never too good for reptiles anywhere, and Brazil is no exception. Various caimans form the bulk of the reptile biomass and these are relatively boring creatures unless they are being eaten by a jaguar or physically attached to you. We had good views of anacondas, one other unidentified snake (sufficiently small enough to make a tidy meal for a mid-sized spider), a few iguanas and skinks and that was about it.

Insects (annoying), visible or otherwise

July is the wrong time of year to see Brazil's more attractive insects. All is not lost because it is a good time to get up close to chiggers, "no-see-ums", ticks and the occasional mosquito. I have tough skin but at the time of writing only the sole of one foot and a small patch on my lower left ribcage does not have a bite on it. That leaves plenty of interesting places that do. I have cancelled all my lingerie modelling assignments for the foreseeable future as my ankles, waistline and legs are currently unusually unattractive. Some of my bite marks have been re-bitten more than once. I considered leaving some of the larger ticks attached as a deterrence to others. My records are incomplete but any day with less than ten ticks was considered a good day. Insect removal competed with drinking as an end-of-day activity.

"The Day of the Chigger" (at Cipo National Park – don't go there) will live long in my memory.

Mercifully, mosquitoes were uncommon or absent.

In summary, Brazil's insects were pretty lame and caused no real issues that fingernails couldn't worsen. Wearing a wetsuit at all times would have been uncomfortable and may not have been a sufficient deterrent.

Insects (not annoying)

A few butterflies.



Vegetation

Reasonably easy to find at most locations. I got the feeling that it will be around for a while longer despite all the coverage to the contrary in the media. I understand that deforestation rates are slowing in the Amazon and in some of the rural areas we visited people had moved to the cities. Here farms and houses were abandoned and native vegetation was on the increase. Some Brazilians told me that my optimistic view was unfounded whilst some others supported it. So I don't really know. I know one thing for certain – Brazil has a much better environmental record than Australia.

Legends and reality

The differences between expectation and delivery were so great in some areas, they deserve special comment -

Legend has it that – Brazil is an especially dangerous country in which to travel, particularly so in Rio and surrounds.

Aside from the possibility of being suffocated to death between two or more gargantuan matrons in G-strings walking their jewel-encrusted dogs (with their little booties) along the promenade at Copacabana Beach, we found no evidence of any danger. Everyone was extra-helpful and friendly and dodgy-looking types were rare. No doubt these chaps could be located at night in big cities if you were inclined to stagger out of strip-clubs drunk and wearing nothing except a Rolex and your favourite gold dog chain. We preferred to undertake these activities in daylight hours.

We heard of no problems from other tourists, and felt safe at all times.

Legend has it that – Brazilian police are unfriendly, corrupt, mean, ugly and hunt in packs extorting money from anyone who can pay.

We had some interaction with the variously plumaged varieties of police, and in one case, all of them simultaneously. They were interesting folk, just doing their jobs with their nice uniforms. They appeared to understand the law, or if not, they had access to thick law books just in case. They smiled a lot. They have a particular interest in large military-style weapons.

There will be further insights into the lot of the Brazilian police scattered throughout this report.

Significantly they did not ask us for any money. At least not in any language I could understand. And they weren't all ugly. I suppose they did hunt in packs.

Legend has it that – If Dengue Fever doesn't claim you then Malaria certainly will. A host of other potentially fatal tropical diseases are said to hide behind every leaf and in every pond.

We asked about dangerous biting insects at each place we visited and everyone said the same things – “not here” or “not now”. Insects that were not too dangerous could be found. See “insects” in the “wildlife” section.

Legend has it that – All Brazilian drivers believe that they are already five laps behind when they get into a vehicle.

The somewhat useless Lonely Planet Guide goes on to say that Brazilians are overfond of using their horns. Clearly the writer(s) have never been to Brazil. Let me be quite clear on this point – Brazilian drivers rarely use car horns and drive relatively safely in comparison with other Latin American countries. They are courteous, even when confronted with extreme situations, for example, if their car has been totalled by a hire car driven by me.

Legend has it that – All Brazilian women are beautiful. Well, you know what I mean.

Now I must confess some personal bias. I prefer women that are easier to walk around than over. I have no issues with exceedingly large older women enjoying the seaside airs. Doing so in a skimpy bikini whilst drinking beer on Copacabana Beach is not a good look.

Barry-Sean and I concluded that Brazilian women are either exceedingly attractive or they are not. There wasn't much middle ground.



Legend has it that – Rio de Janeiro’s location is stunningly beautiful.

Yeah, I’ll concede that.



Alcohol and food

Beer is widely available. It is of an average standard and relatively inexpensive. A cold can or stubbie cost us between two and 4.5 reals (\$A1.30 to \$A3) depending on location.

We sampled a Brazilian red wine. We didn't do this again.

Breakfasts are universally provided as part of hotel or lodge room tariffs. They were very good. Our accommodation often included other meals on a full board basis. These were always buffet style, varied, tasty and able to stay within the body for the requisite period. Generally they were of better quality than *a la carte* meals we bought at restaurants. Steaks were unremarkable by South American standards. Spicy food was hard to find and not very good.

The civilised world knows that beer, gin and tonic and single malt whisky aid the digestive process and we credit this diet with our lack of stomach-and-food interface issues.

Driving in Brazil

Brazilian roads are quite amazing. Whilst some areas have roads with consistently good surfaces, others, like the highway between Belo Horizonte and Rio, keep drivers, navigators and any other passengers fully alert, scared and often in pain. The traffic plays only a small part in all of this. It is the size of what we call "potholes" in Australia that is important. In Brazil they may as well be called "black holes" because many of them only receive matter; nothing is ever returned. Most of these could be dodged but some were strategically located such that avoidance was impossible. I wedged various pieces of wood in parts of the hire car's undercarriage to stop unusual squeaks, rattles and grunting. It is hard to get a car to grunt, but there you are.

Brazilian traffic engineers (if there are any) might have been responsible for the installation of speed humps. These are ubiquitous, even on major highways. They are occasionally signposted and manifest themselves in a bewildering array of shapes, sizes, materials and states of disrepair. They are often located under trees or on corners so that they cannot be seen. Some are so formidable that whole communities have grown up around them. Tradespersons in such places offer a range of mechanical and intimate personal services. Barry-Sean thinks that I am exaggerating here. He said that the availability of mechanical services is often somewhat scant.

Speed cameras are everywhere. At this point in time I am blissfully unaware of the number of speeding fines I have inherited.

Brazilian drivers are always in a hurry but they are not generally aggressive by deed or gesture. I would say they are courteous, skilled and crazy.

Traffic signs are a bit of a tease. In many places there aren't any and you soon learn to deal with this (by getting lost). In other areas you get lulled into a false belief that there will be more signs down the road. You will inevitably be disappointed. Signs would display

desirable destinations at several consecutive intersections only to be ignored thereafter or replaced by a totally different set of town names or whatever. This would then repeat itself endlessly. If you think I am joking, I was asked to participate in an “exit survey” at Rio Airport by a government tourism survey team. They specifically asked questions on road surface conditions and signposting.



We had two driving days when we didn't get lost. These were the two days when our car stayed parked at Caraca. On other days we would get lost so often that an eventual arrival, sometimes on the same day as departure, would be so joyous that we felt like we could have chewed the fat with the likes of Christopher Columbus, Sir Edmond Hilary or anyone arriving on-time from an Aerolineas Argentinas flight. I am told that Brazilians also get lost on their roads on a routine basis.

Whilst no small furry animals died on the roads whilst I was driving, a small Fiat certainly did. See the diary entry for the 4th of July.

Our hire car was a small locally-manufactured Chevrolet Cheap. It ran on sugar cane. Cane alcohol is relatively inexpensive in Brazil and averaged about \$A1 / litre. At least this meant that the car and its occupants could all have a drink each day.

The car was so basic it lacked a heater, internal door locks and many other simple things we take for granted. We hired the car through AutoEurope. The Brazilian company Unidas supplied the car. I would vigorously suggest you hire a car from someone else, no matter whether Unidas offer to give you the hire for free. The diary section of this report will progressively explain why this is so. The only good thing about Unidas is one of their front desk staff at Rio. (Hi Maria!).

In summary, ambitious driving itineraries in hire cars should be avoided. Unfortunately the places we visited are not public transport friendly and I cannot imagine how else you would get to them, without incurring much expense.

Notes on sites and accommodation

Serra dos Tucanos, Tres Picos State Park

This park is located an hour or so (depending on how many times you get lost) north-east of Rio on the way to Nova Friburgo. Serra dos Tucanos is a birders' lodge remotely located in a narrow forested valley near the town of Cachoeiras de Macacu.

The Good News

Our room, with private facilities, was large, comfortable and clean. Our stay was on a full-board basis with excellent food and happy and obliging staff. The grounds and adjoining trails are both beautiful and bird-filled. Bird feeders attracted a large range of colourful and desirable Atlantic forest endemics that ranged from hummers to toucanets. The lodge's website rather understates the birding within the grounds of the lodge. Many of the birds seen at the lodge were not seen elsewhere.

The highly regarded owners of Serra dos Tucanos were in England for the time of our visit, however we were more than capably looked after by Pete Forrest, the resident guide. Whilst we didn't use the ever-smiling Pete's guiding services he happily gave us details of all the local trail locations, which were found with a minimum of stress.



The Other News

It did not detract from our visit, but the security arrangements were truly phenomenal. How long were we going to live in Brazil, we pondered? We noted the large dogs, barbed wire, security cameras, multiple locked gates, doors and windows, along with a nightly curfew. The only other irritation was the nearby traffic noise. I was happy with my supply of earplugs.

Serra dos Tucanos is highly recommended and is very reasonably priced.

Website – www.serradostucanos.com.br

Email - serradostucanos@hotmail.com

Caratinga - Feliciano Miguel Abdala Reserve

This privately owned forest remnant is located between Caratinga and Ipanema in Minas Gerais State. It contains half the remaining population of the northern miquiqui, the largest primate of the Americas. We stayed in quarters normally used by researchers.

The Good News

You will see northern miquiquis in the first hour if, as we did, if you arrive in the afternoon. There are other mammals literally hanging around at the research station and plenty of easily seen and desirable birds. The food didn't make us sick. The researchers "in residence" were charming, attractive and, ah, attractive. It is very quiet and peaceful by day and night. You also get the feeling that the forest is well loved and that the research being conducted is worthwhile. The researchers certainly are, but I may be labouring this point.... Spotlighting was allowed and was reasonably productive.

The Other News

The price charged us for staying at the research station is ridiculous at \$A135 / person / night full board. The "owner" told me that this was good value. We knew this to be the price and we wanted to see the monkey so this is what we had to pay. The beds were pretty ordinary but they were clean. The room's door had no lock but we weren't raped anyway.

If your pockets are full of money and you are really interested in seeing the northern miquiqui at a peaceful, safe location in some high quality forest then the Feliciano Miguel Abdala Reserve will deliver nicely. An alternative would be to stay in the decidedly boring town of Caratinga and go to the reserve on a day trip, but you would miss the early morning bird gig and the spotlighting.

Caratinga Reserve is worth a night or two.

Email - Abdalla Passos - abdallapassos@hotmail.com

Caraca National Park

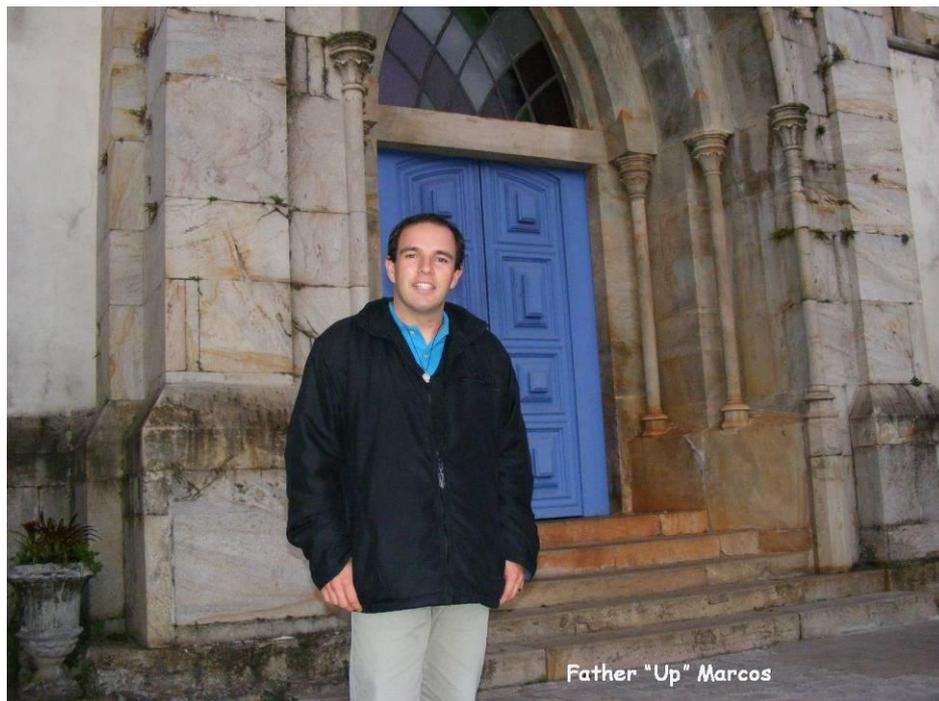
Depending on your ability to guess where you are, Caraca National Park is a couple of hours or so from Belo Horizonte in Minas Gerais State. There is only one place to stay in Caraca – the Santuario do Caraca (which, roughly translated means “the monastery” and not “sanatorium” or “large toilet”). The santuario is smack bang in the middle of the park.

The Good News

I don't think I have ever stayed in a place as atmospheric as the Santuario do Caraca. The rambling complex houses bits and pieces of buildings dating (I think) from the 17th century. The newest bits are old. The architecture, gardens, museums and all the churchy stuff where praying and stained glass happens, are impressive, beautifully preserved and accessible to visitors.

The accommodation is within the monastery. The rooms are large, self-contained and comfortable. An enormous restaurant offers delicious buffet meals. For breakfast you can fry eggs and crusty bread rolls on a large eucalyptus-fuelled fire. The breakfasts at Caraca are an enduring memory of my holiday!

Father “Up” Marcos personally makes all visitors welcome. He appears to be safe to have around small children.



The scenery from the monastery is world class. This can be enjoyed with a cheap, cold and cleansing ale from the tuck shop or restaurant. A high stone wall adjacent to the formal gardens and looking over some quality forest allowed superb views particularly as the sun sets. Many tame birds could be seen here.

The trail network at Caraca radiates from the monastery. The hire car got little use here. The trails are very birdy and the forest supports good numbers of easily seen primates. At least one maned wolf appeared nightly for the feeding from Father Up at the front of the church.

The Santuario do Caraca is extremely good value at \$A50 full board per person. This includes park entry fees.

The Other News

There is none. I could live at Santuario do Caraca.

The santuario has no website or email address!

Cipo National Park

This park is a couple of hours to the north east of Belo Horizonte. We managed to get lost finding it but there are other ways of getting there. The nearby small town of Cardeal Mota consists almost entirely of pousadas (B&Bs) serving the weekend rush out of Belo. Ours, the Lapa Grande was modern and pleasant but the room was small and the hot water supply has been the subject of four independent papers, all of which have been published in reputable scientific journals.

The Good News

The walks within the park are pleasant with few, if any, people to share them with.

The Other News

I wouldn't recommend that anyone should bother going to Cipo. It has the least number of birds I have seen anywhere in the world. The numbers of ticks and chiggers are mind-blowing. Go somewhere else or stay longer at Caraca.



Copacabana Beach

We booked the conveniently located 3-star Ibiza Copacabana Hotel over the internet from Sydney. It cost a little over half the walk-in rate, costing us \$A100 twin share. The hotel was fine with first class breakfasts, CNN, and a front desk that always had someone on hand that could speak English. These guys were invaluable for bus route numbers and for providing good advice on attractions. I presume they knew all sorts of things about local nocturnal street wildlife but we didn't ask. We were allowed a late checkout.

Recommended.

Alta Floresta and Cristalino Rainforest Lodge

Alta Floresta is a large town in Mato Grosso State that used to be lowland forest a generation or so ago. It is now an Amazon forest frontier town close to the geographic centre of South America. We stayed at the Amazonica Hotel on the town's outskirts. This is located next to a fair chunk of good forest. The locals call it a forest remnant but it is big enough for most people to get lost in.

Cristalino Rainforest Lodge is within the Cristalino State Park located some distance along, you guessed it, the Cristalino River!

The Good News

Both the Amazonica Hotel and Cristalino Rainforest Lodge are associated with each other and may be co-owned for all I know. The business is managed by the charming and competent Priscilla Eilert. Priscilla speaks and writes conversational English and was more than happy to assist us with all our travel arrangements to and from Alta Floresta and beyond. This included pre-paying for our bus transport and hotel in Cuiaba.

The Amazonica Hotel is good, clean and well serviced. The OceanAir flight crews stay here so it must be the best place around. Lots of good birds and a few mammals can be found in the hotel grounds and in the adjoining forest.

Cristalino Rainforest Lodge is located on a riverbank in pristine lowland rainforest. There has been little or no hunting around the area for a very long time and then probably only by indigenes. Birds are prolific and the opportunities for seeing them include many trails through subtly different habitats, a 50 metre high viewing tower which soars above the forest, boats for the river and a nearby salt lick. Mammals listed for the area are mouth-watering but of course many are hard to find. There are a range of see-able monkeys, otters and a few eccentric bits and pieces. We were happy with our mammal sightings and very happy with the birds.



The food at Cristalino is excellent, the staff are first class and the guides we were assigned – Jorge and “Reasonable” Brad Davis are as good as any I have been with anywhere in the world. We met with no resistance with suggested itinerary changes. Jorge, who once worked in the rainforest as a gold miner, knew where things might be and would seek us out if he found something when we had wandered off elsewhere. “Reasonable” Brad embarrassed me by having all the guiding skills I lack. He was assigned to us and just one other, an English birder - Andrew “Shadow” Whitehead. “Shadow” was so named because he would crash into “Reasonable” Brad if he stopped suddenly.

We stayed in a two-bed dorm that was okay. The beds were comfortable and the bathroom facilities were good. Just one other person shared the bathroom at the time of our visit.

The Other News

Bring earplugs if staying in the dorm. A very noisy generator doesn't shut down until 2230.

Cristalino offers very good value for money and should not be missed.

Their website can be found at – www.cristalinolodge.com.br

Their email address is - info@cristalinolodge.com.br

“Reasonable” Brad Davis can be contacted at - sclateria@yahoo.ca - for birding tours anywhere within Mato Grosso State.

The Pantanal

This, the world's largest wetland, is a couple of hours drive south from Cuiaba, in Mato Grosso State.

We stayed primarily in Jaguar Eco-Lodge with Eduardo Falcao, its owner. We also spent part of a day at Araras Eco-Lodge, and stayed there for a night on the way back to Cuiaba.

Jaguar Eco-Lodge

The Good News

Eduardo is probably the best person anywhere to find you a jaguar. They were seen on four of the six days we stayed with him and heard on one other. If Eduardo's hit-rate for jaguars was to fail, so would his business.

The food at the lodge was first class.

Eduardo had cut a couple of good trails into the forest near the lodge and quite a few birds and some mammals could be seen on these. A few trails into other micro-habitats would have been handy. Eduardo is very obliging with his time – day or night. If you want to go spotlighting somewhere in the middle of the night he will take you.



The Other News

The rooms at the lodge have a few rough edges – there has been little attention to detail and the maintenance is on a termites-holding-hands basis. Doors might not close (or open). The hot water may take up to ten minutes to appear and by this time the septic tank has overflowed. There are dozens of cattle to share the area around the lodge with – unless the gate is left open.... Dogs and a cat enjoy the “eco” nature of the lodge, by hunting around it. This is hardly what you would expect but I don’t think Eduardo has ever thought about it this way.

We were asked not to discuss what we were paying with anyone. I thought this meant that we were getting a good deal but now I am not so sure.

If you want to see a jaguar – go to Jaguar Eco-Lodge.

Eduardo and his charming wife can be contacted on - rejaguar@bol.com.br

There is also an informative website – www.jaguarreserve.com

Araras Eco-Lodge

Araras is located near the northern edge of the Pantanal. The property contains a wide variety of habitats and some mammals and birds are much easier to see here than further down the road at Jaguar Eco-Lodge and Porto Jofre. Jaguar is not one of these and is only seen occasionally. Four puma were seen here however, just a couple of weeks before our visit.

The Good News

The accommodation, grounds and trails around Araras are first class. The management runs a very slick and professional operation and understand the world of tourism. Araras has wide appeal to a range of tourists, with nature being the focus. There are long boardwalks, a lookout tower, horses for trail riding, a good spotlighting truck, boats, a swimming pool and the tamest capybaras in the world.

The tariff for staying at Araras was less than half the published rate in Lonely Planet which makes us wonder where they get their information from. We paid \$US115 per person full board including all activities. This is good value for Brazil.

The Other News

It is no fault of the lodge but after 1000 you can give up on the walks and get into the pool or the bar. It is just too hot.

Araras should not be missed. Two nights should round up most of the readily see-able birds and mammals. A longer stay would not disappoint.

Araras has a website – www.araraslodge.com.br

Email - contact@araraslodge.com.br



Weather

Our travel coincided with what is euphemistically called winter in Brazil. This is a dry time for most of Amazonia and the Pantanal and a drier time for the south-east around Rio. We had one fateful downpour on our 4th of July celebration (see diary), which lasted for 15 minutes. Clouds were a rare sight.

Rio de Janeiro and Minas Gerais states had wonderful mild to warm days with cool to cold nights. Caraca had light frosts on some mornings. Surprisingly even the Amazon and Pantanal were quite cold during evening spotlighting sessions and required jumpers and jackets. Daytime temperatures in the Amazon and Pantanal would climb into the high twenties or low thirties but with fairly low humidity. I didn't find the conditions oppressive at any time.



Diary

Wednesday 25th June 2008

The day before departure. A couple of months earlier I was quite stressed about this trip and would happily have cancelled it had I not already paid so much money. The cost of the trip was not the main issue but rather some of the imponderables - particularly driving the hire car, being pulled over by corrupt police and all sorts of travel connection issues. I couldn't ever remember being stressed before a holiday. It was too late now to worry about it. Never mind, my very good friend and travel companion Barry-Sean Virtue will sort everything out....

Day 0 – Thursday 26th June 2008

The ever-reliable Greg-roy (my ex-brother-in-law) took Barry-Sean and I to Sydney Airport. Upon arrival we scanned the departures screen and were slightly puzzled as to why our flight with Aerolineas Argentinas scheduled for a 0930 departure was not there. Still, no need for panic just yet. I wandered down to the arrivals area to see when or if the plane would arrive. It was going to arrive at 1700. I couldn't quite get my brain around this – thinking that 1700 wasn't in the morning at all.

None of this meant that the plane would actually leave. All we had was the vague threat that the plane might arrive sometime around sunset. I tracked down an Aerolineas employee, the long-suffering Monica, who, aside from dumping multi-layers of steaming hot shit on her employer and our travel agent for not telling us about the late departure, told me that the flight should leave at 1830. Monica was very charming and helpful (as I was, apparently) and we soon had our luggage stored in their upstairs office, procured \$50 worth of meal vouchers and the best economy class seats on the plane. We didn't realise it at the time but the meal vouchers were worth considerably more than the airline.....

I decided that Sydney Airport would be my new home for the rest of the day. Barry-Sean went to the city to buy T-shirts. I chatted to anyone who would chat back. The day drifted along as I worked on my new special subject “Sydney Airport infrastructure circa mid-2008.”

Eventually we were flying through all the airport barricades, or would have been had dodgy-looking Barry-Sean not been singled out for a drugs, weapons and paedophilia tendency search. They let him go on a two-thirds majority basis.

13 hours after our arrival we left Sydney on our very own A340-300. This was on account of us having more equity in the plane than the airline did. The short downhill flight to Auckland took two hours 20 minutes at a speed of 1120km/h.

The sector to Buenos Aires left a little late (which, for Aerolineas meant it left early), but they fed us and I managed some sleep. (Note to self – get row 31A,B,G or H in A340-300s in future). I remained in a familiar half-sleep zombie stupor the rest of the way to Buenos Aires. We arrived late and unlike other planes landing at night ours had no external lighting. Is this legal? This was not surprising and hardly mattered.

Day 1 – Friday 27th June 2008

After passing through immigration we were told that the voucher retrieval point for our increasingly valueless in-transit hotel, was after exiting customs. This was not the case. We were redirected back inside the terminal to the lost baggage desk. Of course, how stupid of us not to realise this was the place to be, unlike the Aerolineas office that had been constructed for just such a purpose. Many Aerolineas “frequent late flyers” clearly knew the ropes judging by the amorphous scrum of trolleys and smelly grumpy folk gathered at lost baggage.

A successful mission for us getting back to the lost baggage desk required going past large men with guns whose only task was to prevent just such a manoeuvre taking place.

Two hours later and we were the proud owners of a room voucher for the El Presidente Hotel in downtown Buenos Aires. As we had to be back at the airport in three hours the voucher was of limited use. We had time for a shower, a beer and a feed with some prostitutes at the 24-hour diner across the road, and then we were back to the airport.



I had earlier made a joke with Barry-Sean about the likelihood of the flight to Rio not leaving on time on account of what looked to me like fog. Large slabs of it were to be seen everywhere.

Confusion reigned at the airport. This related not so much to how late our flight would be (on account of the fog), but whether the airport could fulfil its design function at all. Constant gate changes kept us on the move. Additionally there were vouchers to redeem and vouchers to acquire. People we had never met were getting very angry at each other.

At 1000 we left Argentina. This felt very nice. The flight on a 737 had very few passengers. I think many had decided it was quicker to walk to Brazil. We pondered whether the stale bread roll we were served as food could shatter a plane window if thrown.....

Rio de Janeiro International Airport was in stark contrast to the disappointing facility in Buenos Aires. We located the Unidas Car Rental folk. The paperwork was quickly completed and we were soon the proud custodians of a Chevrolet Celtra, Centro or Can or something. The car was rather basic, lacking a heater, internal door locks and many of the moving parts normally associated with cars. It wasn't the "VW Gol or similar" quoted over the internet at all. But it ran well, or at least it did until the 4th of July. It was fuelled with fermented sugar cane juice.

I was nervous at taking on the Rio traffic but the other drivers were unusually polite and not the reckless idiots I had expected. We took a few wrong turns before finding ourselves marvelling at the 11km long bridge that took us out of Rio and across the harbour.

About an hour before the light died we arrived at Serra dos Tucanos in Tres Picos State Park, a couple of hours north east of Rio. The lodge is truly wonderful. We were given a large well-appointed room. The trees within the grounds were loaded with epiphytes and the bird feeders and vegetation were alive with exotic Atlantic forest endemic birds. I managed eight "lifers" before sunset. We showered, had dinner and drinks and chatted with Pete Forrest, the resident guide. I washed down a sleeping pill with a tot of Highland Park 12yo. All was well with the world. I woke at 1100 and couldn't believe that it wasn't time to get up...

Day 2 – Saturday 28th June 2008

We struggled to get our stupid sugar-cane-fired car started, but after waking everyone up at the lodge it eventually spluttered into life. The scent of partially burned sugar cane hung in the early morning air.

Our first trail was the Bamboo Trail, which began after a short drive up the road from the lodge. The birds were regular and continuous throughout the day with over 50 different ones seen. The best forest is at the far end of the trail, which suited my habit of walking fairly quickly at times when there was nothing much to be seen.

Poor views of common (or tufted-ear) marmoset provided the first mammal for the trip. The only other mammals of real interest were the "rotties" patrolling a fenced property. We were one roddy-sized hole in the fence from death....

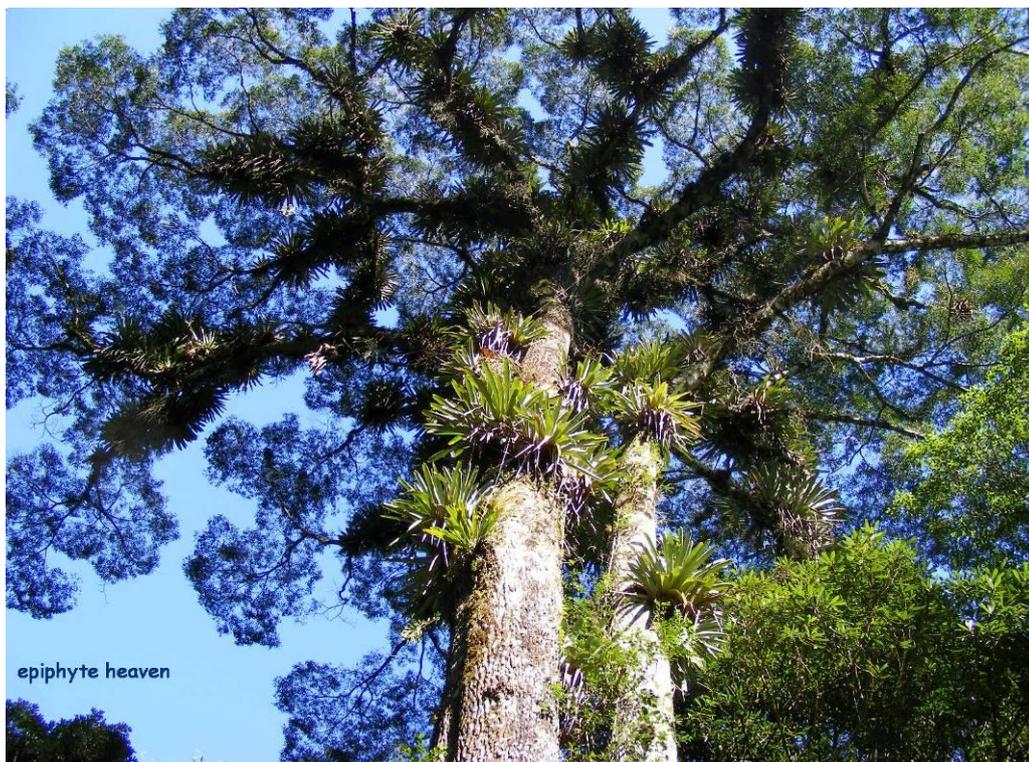
Aside from incredibly attractive forest, the viewing conditions were perfect – equable temperatures, no insects and virtually no other people.

A late afternoon exploration of the trails behind the lodge added a few birds. 23 lifers, many of them Atlantic forest endemics, were added for the day.



Day 3 – Sunday 29th June 2008

The Cedae Trail entertained us in the morning. The trail starts from a fairly non-descript point along the main road and although it passes through tall epiphyte-laden forest, the birding was slow at times. Undergrowth things would happily scream at us but fail to show themselves. When we returned to our car someone had put a sticker on the door handle with a phone number in case we had broken down. On reflection this translation could be inaccurate as my understanding of written Portuguese is poor. The sticker may have said - “For a good time call Silvia – roadside assistance okay”.



Once more the trails behind the lodge produced a few birds and kept us entertained.

The lodge's driver fixed our car-start problem by doing what the hire car company should have done in the first place – by putting a litre of petrol in a small “cold start” tank that lives under the bonnet.

Beer complemented watching the hummingbird feeders - an agreeable end to the day.

Pete drew us a map of how to get to the “High Altitude Trail – Low Section” for the following day. Given the complexity of the directions, he feared we might never be seen again.

Day 4 – Monday 30th June 2008

Serra dos Tucanos makes brilliant packed lunches. We took these and our easily started car along the cold and foggy road to Nova Friburgo and beyond. Our journey ended at the entrance to a large farm gate (San Bernardo) after travelling along a narrow, winding and rapidly ascending cobblestone road. It was something of a miracle that we found the wildlife reserve and the property without once getting lost.



The views around the reserve are first class. Granite domes covered in bromeliads are interspersed with patches of rainforest and farmland. Edge habitats abound. For the first hour or so there were birds everywhere but activity died off rather quickly. The highlights included a few red-legged seriemas sitting quietly in a tree next to the path.



Day 5 – Tuesday 1st July 2008

Breakfast was at 0615. We then started on our journey to Serra dos Orgaos National Park, a couple of hours drive away. I hadn't realised the landscapes around Rio de Janeiro State would be so spectacular. I had seen Rio on the TV but didn't appreciate

that this type of landscape was even more dramatic further inland. Serra dos Tucanos and surrounds did not disappoint in terms of scenery.

The park entrance saw us sign various documents of unknown purpose. It was all in Portuguese and the nation's obsession with collecting information reached a pinnacle here. Phone numbers figured prominently. They wouldn't let me through without having my mobile number. I gave them my home number instead. It didn't make much difference because my mobile was also at home. But the young man at the gate was so happy to get this vital and uncertain detail he let us through with a flourish!

We walked the Pedro do Cima (?) Trail, which ascends through rainforest and forms the start of a three-day walk to somewhere that didn't matter to us. The path was reminiscent of the ascent of Mt Kinabalu on Borneo except there were hardly any people to share it with. But there were many birds. The best were spot-winged wood-quail, black and gold cotinga, hooded berryeater, diademed tanager and swallow-tailed cotinga. The cotingas were seen high on the trail just before the forest becomes stunted. Swallow-tailed cotinga is said to be very difficult to find in Atlantic forests in winter.



Barry-Sean descended a little earlier and had good views of a South American coati.

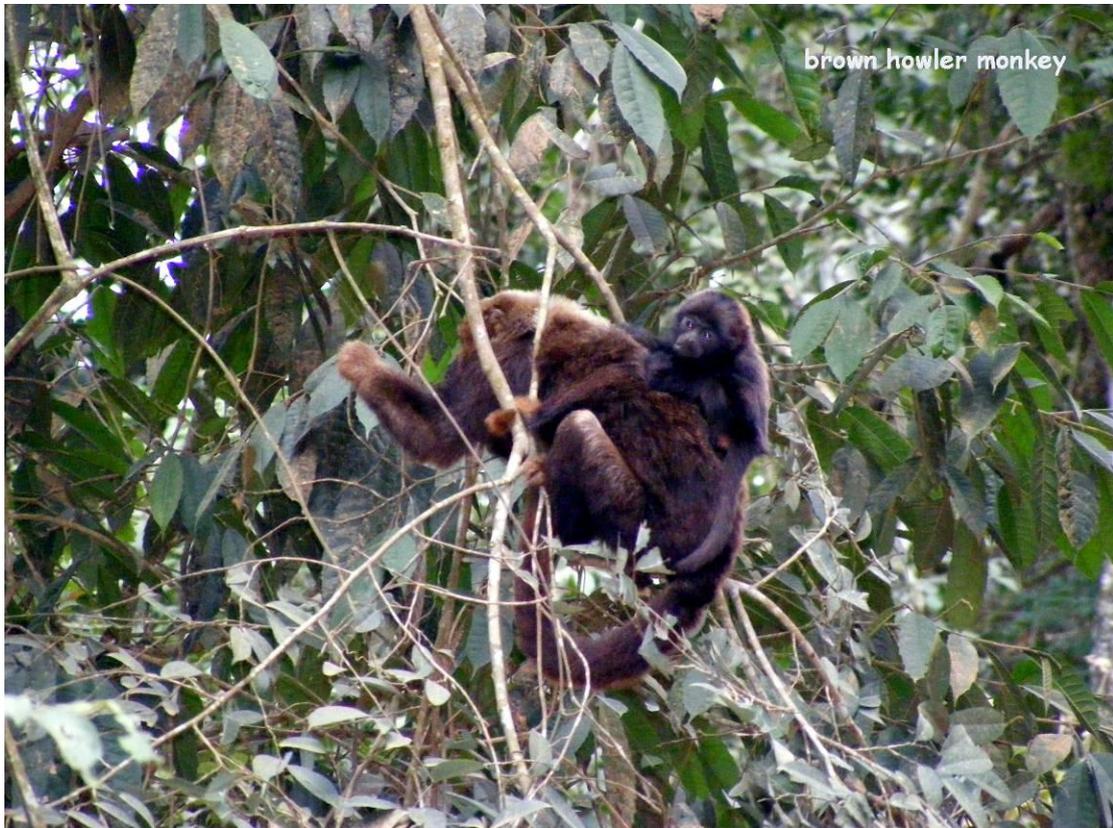
We passed Pete and his guests from the lodge but I think given our ability to move faster, further and earlier gave us the best of the birds seen.

Gin and tonic and a few new hummers at the lodge completed a wonderful day.

Day 6 – Wednesday 2nd July 2008

We left Serra dos Tucanos for the Feliciano Miguel Abdala (or “Caratinga”) Reserve near the town of Caratinga. We expected the day to be a long one and we soon found out why. It wasn’t long before we were lost. A critical turn-off wasn’t signposted although if I had listened to Barry-Sean we may have found our way initially to a point where we would have still, no doubt, got lost. To say there were few road signs is an understatement; often there were none. Never mind, we took the next parallel route and hoped for the best. This road was fun. It started off as a sealed road with all the trappings that go with such things, like signs, lines and fences. Things slowly deteriorated until we found ourselves on a washed out winding dirt goat track. The goats nailed it.

By 1400 we had found the reserve after stopping briefly along the way to snap a few obliging brown howler monkeys hanging above the road.



We were assigned a guide, Antonio, who was pleasant, knowledgeable and obliging. In no time we were face to face with northern muriquis (perhaps 40 of them), black-tufted capuchins, pretty research students and brown howlers. We had seen four of the reserve’s five primates in the first hour. Birds were also pretty common and we saw many here that were not to be seen again, including a very lost but unmistakable bicoloured conebill. Thinking about it, no bird is truly lost if it is still capable of moving around.



A basic but nutritious dinner was followed by a spotlighting wander along the road inside the reserve. A black agouti and a spectacled owl were the only participants at the other end of the spotlight.

Day 7 – Thursday 3rd July 2008

We hit the trails with Antonio on a mild windless and overcast day. We failed to find the buffy-headed marmosets that live in the reserve and along the nearby river's edge but managed quite a long list of attractive birds in some very good quality forest and edge habitat. A number of birds seen were at the extreme edge of their range according to Souza.

One of the research students (whose name could not be pronounced, let alone remembered) had a nasty habit of dressing down for dinner and drinks. She did this by wearing skin-tight black leotards. I was told by other observers that these suited her, but I forgot to look at this aspect. Thinking about it, I might have, once.....



Post-dinner spotlighting produced a few nightjars and crap views of what was probably a jaguarundi but I will never know for sure. Maybe the image of black leotards had affected my sight....The researchers said that jaguarundis were the most common of the local cats, although just about everything on the “cat page” has been seen in the reserve from time to time.

Day 8 – Friday 4th July 2008

An interesting day for sure.

We birded for a few hours before driving to Caratinga town. We had a mission – to get some local money somehow. The traffic was atrocious as I dodged and weaved trying to find a bank and / or a legal parking spot. One way streets, absurd numbers of pedestrians and a street layout that at no time gave any indication of where the middle of town was located contributed to our fun. Eventually I parked the car and soon found the Banco do Brasil. They did not have a Visa ATM and did not want any USD. They told me to go to the Banco do Mercantil, where they redirected me to the Banco do Brasil. This caused me to plunge into a spiral of reciprocal perspectives, or maybe it was a spiral spiral? But I was failing in my quest, that’s for certain.

In frustration I began waving my Visa card around rather randomly in the hope that I would get some good advice, get robbed or be redirected to anywhere other than a bank. Later in the day I would think that getting robbed would have been a kindness, but the day was early. An attractive Portuguese-speaking lady with a nice uniform pointed me to a sign that read “Visa”. This was an attempt to get rid of me from the front of the Banco do Mercantil rather than anything in the way of worthwhile advice because the “Visa” sign was on the front of a Suzuki motorcycle dealership.

Perhaps buying a motorcycle with my credit card might also have been a good idea at this time but I didn't have the prescience to know this. Lacking any worthwhile plan of my own, I gave the cycle shop a try. A young lass, no doubt trying to sell a sprocket or used bike seat or something, reacted with bemusement when I showed her a crisply minted US dollar note. I was saved from possible arrest (probably by the very same members of the local police that we were to meet later in the day) by the arrival of a middle-aged chap who directed me to follow him to a very small room upstairs. We both looked furtively about as he opened a safe and produced a chunk of local currency which he was happy to exchange at an attractive rate for both of us.

Rain started falling as we left Caratinga for Caraca National Park, or at least that was the plan anyway. We managed to get as far as the small town of Santa Barbara do Leste, about 25km away. It was here that two cars tried to occupy the same time and space. One of them was our hire car.

An old man with a hat on (never a good sign) drove his Fiat sedan onto the highway from a minor side street rather unexpectedly. This wouldn't have been so bad had he kept going, but he chose to stop in front of us by using the time-honoured "stalled engine" method. My options were limited to ramming him in the classic t-bone fashion.



I removed the hire car from the highway. I was impressed that "our" car could still be driven when the other chap's vehicle was terminally rooted and was eventually pushed out of further harm's way. I calmly wandered about in the rain wondering when something new would happen, although I was not in any position to initiate anything.

My first thoughts centred on my total lack of knowledge of the local road rules. If I had been a clearer thinker I would have been more worried about the lynching party being formed in the local favela. Very happily for us, Otavio, an English-speaking employee of the local mayor's office was a witness to the fun. He said to me that the walloppers were on the way and that the "old man" had stuffed up big time. "It wasn't my fault then?" Never. Good.

Our newest best friend, Otavio, rang the hire car company, the police and anybody else he thought deserving of coming over to the highway to watch the increasingly large crowd gather around the gringos.

Nobody was hurt in the accident although how the old guy got out of his new boomerang I will never know. He was a fine old chap who shook hands and amused himself by looking at my photos of Ethiopia, Uganda and beyond.

The Military Police (the civil police in Brazil) were the first on the scene. Whilst they had no jurisdiction they enjoyed meeting new people and comparing weapons. Handshakes all round. The sarge' loved a photo of me taken in Ethiopia toting an AK47. He looked in the direction of my crutch, his crutch, that of his constable, as well as Barry-Sean's and various others before nodding his approval. I clearly outgunned him and he knew it! Things were going well at this point.



The Highway Police (the equivalent of Australia's Highway Patrol) were next to visit us. Gun pictures had some impact but not quite as much. These guys were more interested in the problem at hand – me. A series of questions were asked relating to where my parents met, whether kangaroos are good to eat, but more importantly, how were they ever going to

feed their children considering the global financial meltdown and the parlous state of Brazilian police salaries. Otavio indicated that I should go to the blind side of the vehicle and see what could be agreed.

What we agreed on was this – I had no right to be driving a car in Brazil. The police determined this after consulting my Australian and International driver's licenses and examining them for any sign that they were written in Portuguese. This took some time but many potential languages suggested by me turned out to be Italian, French, Urdu, Amharic and English. We had reached an impasse.

Brazilian law books were produced – every police car should have them – and it came to pass that I was issued a ticket. I still don't know what it said but it was clear that my driving days were over for some time because I was informed that it was neatly stated that I had no legal right to drive in Brazil. Some time limit was suggested for dealing with the pointy end of the ticket. It might yet mean that I will never again travel to Brazil because I donated the ticket to someone who cared less than I did.

Otavio was now our nominated local legal driver. I questioned the senior police officer on this point, meekly introducing the idea that we were on a holiday, Otavio wasn't, and we were quite interested in getting the hell out of Santa Barbara before our visas expired and the lynch mob arrived. The nice police officer calmly pointed out that he was only doing his job and that he didn't give a rat's arse whether I drove or not. I found this advice welcoming but also confusing. Was I being set up?

The assembled crowd suggested that despite the apparent goodwill from all our new friends, we should get the hell out of Santa Barbara post haste.

I drove our crippled motor past the police at a roadside snack stop on the way back to Caratinga. They waved enthusiastically. They later passed us with a ceremonial blast on the sirens and a nice light show. We all waved to each other – we were having such a super time.

We stayed at the ABC Hotel. I made multiple phone calls to Unidas, the hire car company, who told us that we should catch a taxi to Belo Horizonte and pick up a replacement car from the airport there. We would be reimbursed the taxi fare. The whole time and motion thing collapsed from this point. Things that were said to happen didn't and vice versa. The hire car was towed – and we drank our first and last bottle of Brazilian red wine. So ended the 4th of July celebrations.



Day 9 – Saturday 5th July 2008

We caught what was to prove a very expensive taxi to Belo Horizonte Airport. For some unfathomable reason I expected someone at the car hire counter to have some information on us. This person would then smile spontaneously at seeing me and then peacefully hand over money (for the taxi fare) and car keys. The reality was that we had a fairly well groomed young lady who was a bit flustered by having anything to do with us. She made me fill in a variety of apparently unrelated forms and took great delight at taking multiple swipes of my credit card. Then, with a royal wave, I was dismissed.

Our new car was identical in every respect to the one that was so recently broken, excepting the modifications.

We searched for Caraca National Park and the Santuario do Caraca in the wrong part of Brazil. Whilst this gave us something to do, it wasn't entirely what we had hoped to be doing with our time. We traveled through some interesting countryside and eventually arrived 30 minutes before the national park's gate was locked shut. Happily the santuario's reception had our reservation, although the name on the booking was fanciful in the extreme. "Smith" had become "Snitch". In hindsight I think we represented the only people that hadn't already turned up for their booking and that was good enough reason for them to let us in.



We were ecstatic with a number of things. Chief among these was that we were no longer in a car. The rooms at the monastery were great and the deal at Caraca was the best in the country - \$A50 per day full board. We sampled some alcohol and waited for the nightly circus of the maned wolf feeding.

A large group of school kids were also staying at Caraca and most of these wanted to practice their English with us. We couldn't get rid of them. I felt like the Pied Piper. They even wanted photos with the Australians. Or maybe they had been told that we would be gentle with them..... Don't they have pedophiles in Brazil?

150 people watched a large wolf crunching chicken bones a few feet in front of us. What the wolf was thinking about all of this is anyone's guess.



It was at about this time that I realized that the hire car company had failed to give me the new car's registration papers.

Day 10 – Sunday 6th July 2008

We decided to ditch the plan to drive to Canastra National Park on account of the long distance and the certain knowledge that we would get lost finding the place.

Breakfast in the self-serve kitchen was a holiday highlight. We cracked some eggs onto a giant barbecue plate. It was difficult trying to decide what not to eat and drink. Smiling kitchen staff came and went as the eucalyptus-fueled fire did its thing.



Outside the kitchen the day started languidly with a light frost and a reluctant sunrise. The trails were birdy with the highlight being a shrike-like cotinga feeding with some thrushes in a fruiting fig. A red-ruffed fruitcrow put in an appearance but was never seen again. Masked titi monkeys were the only mammals seen.

I called Maria at the Rio hire car desk. She confirmed that having no registration documents for the car was mighty bad news indeed. Maria promised to get them to us. We must have spoken to just about every employee of Unidas during our time in Brazil and Maria was the only person I trusted. The paperwork arrived by courier the next day.

After lunch I walked the trail that ventures past the Hall of Virgins and into the Grotto of Turds. I should suggest at this point two very important things:

1. I don't think there were any virgins in the hall or else I wouldn't have passed it, and
2. I played no part in the naming of any place or the design or production of any maps.

I failed to get to the Grotto of Turds as it required a serious waste of energy, although no doubt I would have been disappointed. I'm not entirely sure what I expected to find there and I'll never know whether donations were welcomed.

Maria called and said that the cost of the taxi from Caratinga was a big problem for her. I think she meant that it was a big problem for us. It appeared that the company was now not going to pay us. Maria said that she could pay me off from her meager salary and was almost in tears. (*I discovered later when we met in Rio, that Maria was also a dancer in a Brazilian circus.....*). Payment from Maria was never an option (sigh!).

The maned wolf had only a dozen admirers, and most of the others were sober. The monastery skunk also put in an appearance.



Day 11 - Monday 7th July 2008

We forgot to bring a trail map with us and walked one that gradually degenerated to a point where only wolves, cats and lost people had gone before. Then we got stuck in a swamp that wolves and cats were smart enough to avoid. With newly soaked shoes we split up.

I was rapt to see black-tufted marmosets. Masked titi monkeys were also seen on both sides of the Tanque Grande Trail. Birds were obliging.

Post-lunch and the Campo de Fora Trail produced more black-tufted marmosets and some really nice birds including white-bibbed antwren.

The late afternoon was spent at the edge of the monastery gardens looking over a stone wall at prodigious numbers of birds and the setting sun. We enjoyed the company of some cool drinks.

Spotlighting from the car produced a couple of Brazilian rabbits and a rufous nightjar.

Day 12 – Tuesday 8th July 2008

We chased a common grey four-eyed opossum up the stairs and into the kitchen. We hit the trails after some breakfast of devon and egg rolls. Animals were slow all day. We contemplated whether Father Up had put a curse on us. The day drifted with a familiar pattern emerging – drinks, maned wolf, disappointing spotlighting and more drinks.



a few essentials at the Siemsing wall

Day 13 – Wednesday 9th July 2008

We left the lovely Caraca a little after 0800 and spent five and a half hours completing the three hour drive to Cipo National Park. If we had only made ten wrong turns it would have been a good driving effort.

We stayed at the first place we saw that looked quiet and decent. This was the Fazenda / Pousada Lapa Grande. It will never be known exactly what the room rate was, but we thought it to be 200 reais when we checked in. The owner was an older lady who spoke apparently flawlessly in a language we did not understand. We explained that we didn't understand her slowly and patiently in a language she did not understand. This goes to prove that we were sillier than she was. It went downhill from there. She had two large dull-looking sons, whose names no doubt were Seth and Karl. The boys, who had very low pulse rates and breathed funny, could be rented out by the hour to stand around and make others look talented. They had clearly never had to do much in the way of work.

The national park is four kilometers from the pousada along a dirt road. The entrance to the park is rather grand and here they extracted a \$2 entry fee from me. Barry-Sean did not have to pay on account of his advanced years. In the limited time we had available to us before the park closed we poked about in the cerrado, picking up a few birds along the way.

The nearby town of Cordeal Mota provided some food for the next day's lunch along with some beer and a tough steak, chips, rice and salad.

Day 14 – Thursday 10th July 2008

A rather attractive young lady of African heritage rode her bicycle to the pousada to prepare our breakfast. The preparation took forever given that none of it was cooked.

We made a 16 kilometre round trip walk to a waterfall. The actual falls were boring as batshit as they so often are. We found ocelot, probable puma and a smaller cat spoor on the trails, left over from the previous evening, but failed to see any. The whole park looked to be perfect habitat for just about everything but it was amazingly quiet. Whole kilometers could be walked without seeing so much as a single bird.

The only spot that gave us any number of sightings was Chigger Billabong. Disappointingly we didn't know that this was its name when we sat beside it. If you don't know what a chigger is, look it up, or I can send you a picture of my ankles and you can work it out by deduction.

Dinner was pasta and beer, followed by, for the second night running, a whole hour of the Woody Woodpecker Show (in Portuguese) on the television. Brazil is addicted to this 1950's (I think) cartoon. It is okay when watched with a single malt or three.

Day 15 – Friday 11th July 2008

An amazing day and one I will never forget. We searched for one of the higher altitude trails in the park with little success. Although we had a map the trailheads were impossible to find. We relocated.

It was almost 1000 when we started walking along a promising trail where flowers and fruits were found in abundance and edge habitats were the norm, and yet it was the singularly most boring and unproductive place for finding birds or mammals that I have ever found anywhere.

Woody Woodpecker was still on TV so all was not lost.



Day 16 – Saturday 12th July 2008

Barry-Sean managed to see black-tufted marmosets before breakfast in the trees across the road from the pousada.

We left Lapa Grande in a rush. I had proffered the amount of money we understood we had to pay to a guy I had never seen before but who looked like he may have lived at the place. He gave half of it back to me. I smiled, grabbed Barry-Sean midway through cleaning his teeth and hurled him and his belongings into the car before anyone had a chance to check with the old lady of the manor.

The drive to Persopolis, near Rio, was lost-free. Unfortunately Saturday afternoon is never a good time to find accommodation in Persopolis in the very unlikely event you find yourself needing some. Hotels in Brazil barely advertise their existence at their property boundary. You have to check under the rock near the letterbox for the “clue of the day” and then take it five blocks away where you might be able to park your car. I soon got jack of driving on the narrow speed-radar-filled and car-choked streets. Two hours later and I was offered a chance to sleep with Barry-Sean in the only double bed left in Persopolis. Tempting as this offer was.....

We bailed back towards the highway where we had spied a fairly modern “love hotel” earlier in the afternoon. We checked in, taking note of the sign above the reception that explained how old children had to be before you could comfort them.

An adjacent facility sold beer, wonderful food (the blackboard special was all they had – pork and beans), good company and best of all - we didn’t have to drive anywhere.

Day 17 – Sunday 13th July 2008

The run to Rio Airport took just on an hour. I got nowhere with the Unidas people who had obviously lacked the courage to tell me that I would get no money back for the taxi. They admitted that it wasn’t my fault but there you go.

A fancy air-conditioned bus connects the airport with various places in the city and by late morning we settled into our room at the Ibiza Copacabana Hotel. The famous beach was a couple of hundred metres away and deserved a visit. The beach was clean, attractive, three or four kilometers long and well maintained. Large numbers of magnificent frigatebirds and brown boobies (*this really is the name of a seabird*) were in constant attendance.

Barry-Sean went right and I went left after agreeing on a time and place to compare notes. It was 27 degrees, sunny and windless. The women seen, were on average the fattest, least attractive and most disappointing bush-pig farm rejects I have ever seen. Barry-Sean told me I was being too kind. The few pretty ones were very pretty indeed.



Some of the guys were starting to look good. I am advised by someone that takes more interest in these matters that most of these men are nice to each other in a most un-manly way. *(Thanks for the insight Mandy).*

I sat and chatted for a while with an “African-Brazilian” lass, if there is such a person. She worked in a bar – that figures. She had an older Swedish “boyfriend” who joined us after a while. I didn’t speak so he assumed I couldn’t understand him and his lover talking in English. The Swedish Adonis was making dismissive noises about me whilst his girlfriend and I winked at each other. The joke ended up being on him as I departed with a few well-chosen words.

We ate at a roadside restaurant. Some young ladies joined our table and started chatting. When Barry-Sean went to the toilet one of them dropped her bra to show me a red heart tattooed on her left tit. They explained that they had no boyfriends but were happy to have some temporary ones. Presumably that wouldn’t be the end of it. We went back to the hotel and watched Woody Woodpecker.

Day 18 – Monday 14th July 2008

Rio is very well served by public buses. After we had our standard enormous breakfast and hopped on a fast and cheap bus to the Christ the Redeemer cog train station. The cog train is an electric train that ascends the steep hill to the famous statue by way of a cogged rail. The journey traverses some awesome forest and past themed plantings, religious and other statues and phenomenal views.

As we caught the first train of the day, the summit had few people and we could move around easily. This changed very quickly. The day was crisp and clear and the panorama was just like the postcards. Any holiday to Brazil would not be complete without a visit.





"Christ the Redeemer"



looking north



east to Copacabana



southwards

Good as the view is, there is only so much time that can usefully be spent looking at it so we found ourselves on another bus bound for the “Jardim Botânico” – the Rio Botanic Gardens. The gardens are simply wonderful – large, well interpreted, safe and user-friendly. They are contiguous with Tijuca National Park, which means there is lots of leakage of mammals and birds. The gardens are also very old with palms and trees of monstrous proportions, all covered in limb-breaking masses of epiphytes.

Within 15 minutes of our arrival we had a family of tufted-ear (or common) marmosets just a few metres away. They pretty much ignored us but I reckon the production of a banana would have changed things. The same applied for some black-tufted capuchins and channel-billed toucans. Tanagers were common with flame-crested the best of them. Antbirds, antshrikes, guans, woodcreepers, woodrails and flycatchers were all present in numbers.



Rio Botanic Gardens



Yet another bus took us back to Copacabana. We walked the last kilometre or so to the hotel because the bus conductor was keen to please us by dumping us out of the bus in the middle of nowhere. I think the side-street's name started with the same letter as the one containing our hotel. This "journey by leg" confirmed our earlier findings regarding the local women.

Our drinking site was typical of those in Rio – a narrow shop with seating for about three people.

Day 19 – Tuesday 15th July 2008

This was the day you have when you have already seen all what you wanted to see one day too soon. We hopped on a bus for Flamengo Park, a long narrow recreation area that contained quite a few birds including various parrots chewing on palm or fig fruits.

Back to Copa and the weekday bikini girls were displaying the same attributes as their weekend colleagues, but mercifully there were not so many of them.

We felt very safe around Copa. There were law enforcement types everywhere although happily they were not in our faces. The city is clean and has a happy vibe. Pedestrians are a crazy mix of tourists (mostly Brazilian), local residents of all ages, sizes and nationalities and the type of person that has evolved all over the world to walk up and down city streets or stand in your way on street corners.

After a spell in an internet café we returned to the beach for a beer and to watch the freak show. We marveled at a black transvestite itinerant hairdresser as it gaily plaited any hair it could get its hands on. While this was happening, rather too close for mine, a five-piece improvised calypso band invaded our small beachside table for the dual purpose of making all conversation impossible and extracting money. They had partial success. One of the band members had the popular percussion instrument known as the "three old steel springs stretched across a piece of hollow aluminium being strummed with a screwdriver".



itinerant
trans-sexual
hairdresser

Over time the size of the women decreased, although Barry-Sean reckoned we may have been getting acclimatized.

Off to the airport where a visit to the Unidas counter was as fruitless as ever. Maria Silva was the only positive thing about Unidas. She was honest, contrite on behalf of her employer and clearly upset that we would carry a negative image of her country. There are a few other comments I would like to make about Maria but I appear to have mislaid my notes



Maria Silva

A TAM Airlines A320 took us to Cuiaba via Brasilia, arriving in the middle of the night. We shared a taxi to the Mato Grosso Palace Hotel with some other Australians. They were in Cuiaba for an international wetlands conference. The hotel was good.

Day 20 – Wednesday 16th July 2008

Our schedule had us stuck in Cuiaba for the day. Our bus to Alta Floresta didn't leave until 1900. The city has been described in rather unflattering terms by anyone I met who didn't actually live there. One visitor said that the only difference between Hell and Cuiaba was that there were no mosquitoes in Hell. We didn't find it to be so bad at all.

Barry-Sean chose to go shopping. With the advice of the hotel reception I went to Parque Mae Bonifacia. The shopping trip was largely fruitless but the park was wonderful. It sits in the city's outskirts and consists of a very large fenced area containing native vegetation crisscrossed with trails. Black-tailed (or Pantanal) marmosets were very common and tame. Also seen were Azara's and red-rumped agoutis and a few capybara. Birds were abundant and varied with some that were not seen elsewhere on our holiday.



We achieved a late checkout at the hotel and a discounted room rate for when we returned later in the trip. A slothful afternoon was spent mostly in the cool of the hotel foyer. We went on occasional missions to buy bits and pieces and noted that the locals were a good deal more attractive than their coastal cousins.

Priscilla, the operations manager at Cristalino Rainforest Lodge had booked us the best seats in the overnight bus to Alta Floresta. These were the ones at the front of the bus upstairs with the windscreen in front and nobody behind. The 12 hour journey was very

comfortable and aside from the number of loading and unloading stops was quite fun. The most remarkable feature of the trip was the number of trucks on the road. Streams of semi-trailers 15 or 20 strong were not unusual. There were few safe overtaking opportunities. Many trucks were overtaken nevertheless.

Day 21 – Thursday 17th July 2008

We arrived at Alta Floresta around 0730. The Amazonica Lodge driver was there to take us the short distance to the hotel, where we would spend the better part of the day. The hotel sits within a large area of lowland rainforest which contains a few birds and mammals that are absent or less easily seen in the primary forest at Cristalino Lodge.

We were received at the hotel by the competent and ever-smiling Priscilla. I gave her a couple of small gifts for being so helpful before we left Australia.

The trails were quiet and we failed to see anything of great note.

Lunch was at a wonderful buffet barbecue restaurant in town.



Cristalino Lodge lies within Cristalino State Park on the Cristalino River and is an hour's drive and an hour's boat trip from Alta Floresta. The Cristalino River is quite pristine with no development upriver. It is a "black water" river and filled with fish as fishing is banned along its length. The river journey to the lodge was pleasant but we saw nothing of great interest, although there were plenty of birds considering the time of day.

On arrival we were given our do's and don'ts spray and met our guide, "Reasonable" Brad Davis, a Canadian ex-pat living in Alta Floresta. Brad knows all the birds by sight and call and all the trails. He is personable and competent. He got the "Reasonable" tag through no

fault of his own. An English birder had asked him what the afternoon's program looked like. Brad replied – "We start off getting all the Hanging Gardens of Babylon endemics, before relocating to Atlantis to see the newly discovered Atlantean albatross. Then we ascend the Lost World of Roirama where the local Indians have staked out the Roiraman giant quail-pitta display lek. On the way back we do some serious birding and hope to see about three hundred species." "Seems reasonable", was the reply.

We had a good dinner and lulled ourselves to sleep to the sound of a noisy generator.

Day 22 – Friday 18th July 2008

Up at 0500, breakfast at 0520 and up river before sunrise. Our group of three was joined by the Englishman, Andrew "Shadow" Whitehead, a very competent and enthusiastic birder who was certainly never going to get lost. He always shadowed the guide. We watched a Brazilian tapir swim across the river on our way to a walk along "Dr Haffa's Trail".



The walk was very good with red-headed manakin and many antbirds and their kin being seen. Great jacamar, pompadour cotinga and swallow-wing puffbirds added to the mix.

After lunch I went searching for silvery marmosets. I saw marmosets but they had banded tails, which didn't seem to fit anything that was said to live about the place.

Our elite group left the lodge at 1430 for a walk and evening spotlight at the salt lick. It was clear that the lick is very popular with tapir, peccaries (both types) and deer. We managed to call in a tawny-bellied screech-owl, but didn't really have our hearts in staying up too late.

Exhausted, we had a quick beer, whisky and bed.

Day 23 – Saturday 19th July 2008

The Cristalino Lodge folk try to avoid having more than one group of visitors on any given trail each day. This was our day to climb the lookout tower. The tower is 503 metres high and its summit is well above the highest of the Amazon trees. There are three platforms with the highest allowing 360 degree views and the chance to look down on macaws, toucans and just about everything else. I never expect to see a wide variety of birds in rainforests at any given place or time, but as soon as we arrived it was clear that there were birds in every direction. The quality was high with spangled cotinga, white-necked puffbirds, paradise jacamar and myriad parrots, honeycreepers, flycatchers, hummers, motmots, guans, bare-necked fruitcrows and aracarís. None of us could believe it! There were also millions of flying ants.....

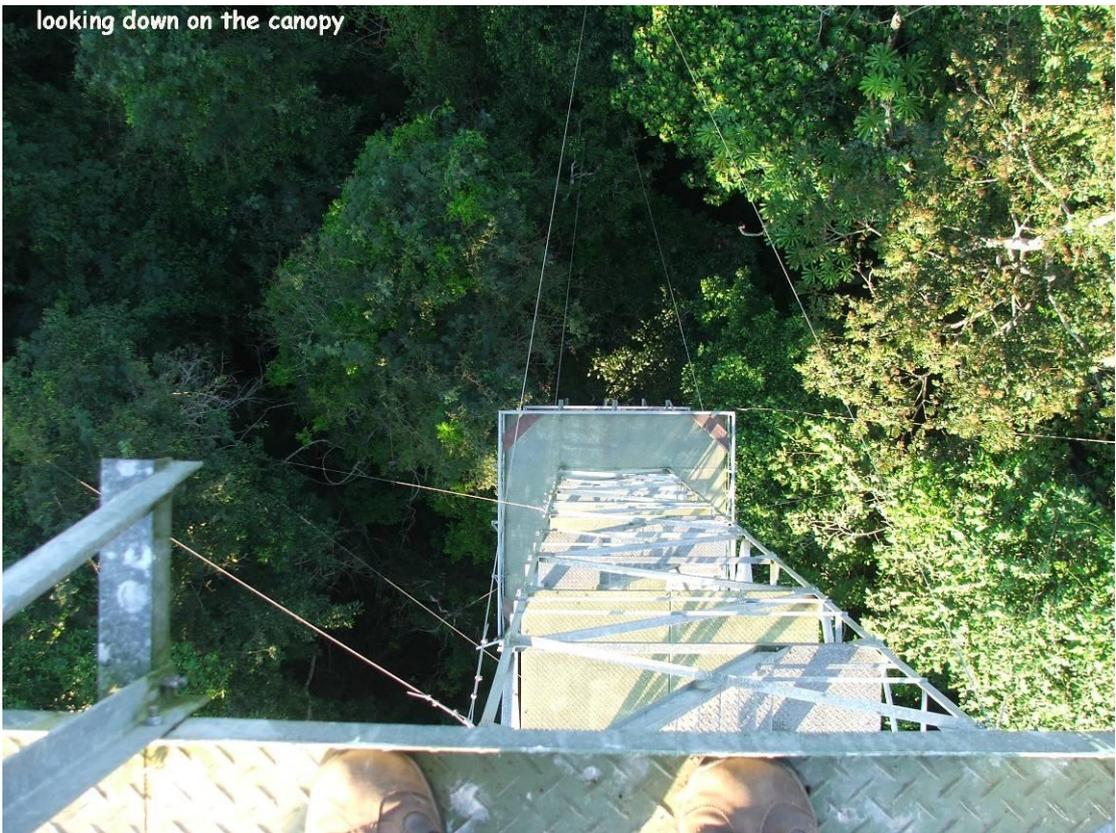


sunrise view from the top of the 50m lookout tower

a little bit up



looking down on the canopy



By 0930 it was getting hot so we climbed down to the relative cool of the forest floor. We revisited the salt lick area where crimson-bellied parakeets and an enormous mixed feeding flock of other birds kept us occupied. White-whiskered spider monkeys rounded out a wonderful morning in the field.

The afternoon was a tad lazy but we managed to keep the lists ticking over as we ventured out on the river and tried a trail said to be good for white-nosed bearded saki monkeys. We heard them but failed to see any. We spotlit along the river on the way back to the lodge but it was very disappointing with nothing seen aside from a few nightjars.

Dinner consisted of a large fish that had no name that I could understand. The evening's main focus was a gin and tonic drinking exhibition put on by Barry-Sean and I. This was interrupted by cries of "night monkey!" We rushed outside but after initially failing to see anything we spotted a kinkajou resting on a cecropia branch just outside the lodge. Whilst I would have preferred to see a night monkey I had never seen a kinkajou so I was happy. A later howl of "night monkey!" also turned into a kinkajou sighting by the time we got our torch onto it.

Day 24 – Sunday 20th July 2008

We were joined by Jorge, a local guide and ex-gold miner, and started the day by traveling upstream to a trail that began in lowland forest and ended on top of a very rocky granite (or gneiss?) hill. En route we were enchanted by the occupants of a band-tailed manakin display lek. The rocky hill was fascinating as the thinner dryer soils supported deciduous trees, many philodendrons and orchids and different birds. These included white-crested purpletuft and turquoise tanager.





Gneiss bluff inside the rainforest



black-throated mango chick (~50mm long)

Lunch was followed by a stroll along the Bamboo Trail where I tracked down a few red-bellied titi monkeys.

The official afternoon excursion was again upriver, this time to the Brazil Nut Trail. While waiting at the boat for Shadow to arrive we watched a feeding neotropical river otter. On the trail there was one good mixed flock but the highlight was a single Amazonian umbrellabird.

We took the precaution of taking an ice-filled esky with a few coldies. So we drifted down the river in twilight with no thought of dehydration. However the spotlighting was again abysmal. We all blamed the unseasonably high level of water in the river and a residual curse from Father Up.

Barry-Sean, aside from forcing me to drink a beer at lunchtime each day, had now got me drinking gin and tonic habitually.

Day 25 – Monday 21st July 2008

Jorge, Barry-Sean and I went in search of white-nosed bearded saki monkeys while Reasonable Brad went hunting a few leftover birds for Shadow before taking him back to Alta Floresta. Jorge found us the monkeys, marvelous beasties indeed, on a rocky hill on the Tales Pires Trail. They are far more attractive and interesting than the pictures in the mammal book suggest. Bird highlights were snow-capped manakin, musician wren and royal flycatcher.

We spent some of the afternoon chatting with Brad and Judy, the Wings Tours guide. We birded around the lodge before suffering through a film about the history of it. We escaped to go spotlighting upriver but the result was the same.

Day 26 – Tuesday 22nd July 2008

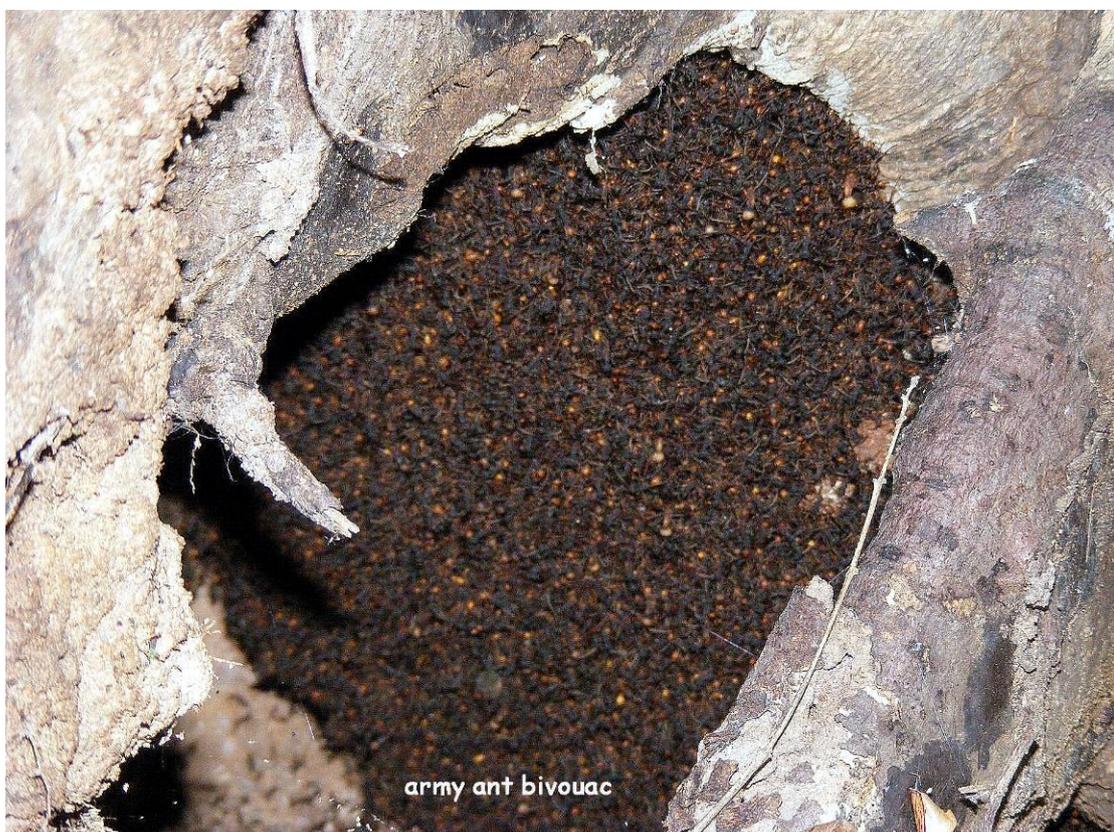
We asked if we could go back to the tower. This was organized without fuss. Just before sunrise we were ready for what the wildlife world would throw at us, but the experience was quite different to our first visit. There were virtually no small passerines, probably because of the lack of swarming ants that were a bit of a nuisance the first time. With regard to monkeys it was very different. There were spider monkeys and capuchins everywhere. We failed to see a single monkey just a few days before and now they were in every second tree. It never ceases to amaze me the amount of wildlife that can hide from view when it wants to.

At around 0700 Jorge appeared at the bottom of the tower to tell us that a red-handed howler monkey and its young had turned up at the lodge. I had no choice but to descend the tower and do the quickstep along the trails. I was soon watching the howlers as they climbed about in a cecropia tree next to the accommodation. Thanks Jorge, now back to the tower.

Birding had slowed and we soon found ourselves on the forest floor trying to catch up with some elusive blue-backed manakins. This was not the first time we had tried to see these birds while they were calling all around us, but the result was the same – no manakins. A spotted juvenile red brocket deer added to the mammal list.

300 metres shy of the lodge we came upon an army ant swarm. This was just what we had been looking to see. Ant swarm specialist birds were in attendance. These included bare-

eyed antbird, black-spotted bare-eye and ornate antwren. The ants were audibly storming across the forest floor and up trees, logs, me and anything else in their path. Monster spiders, scorpions and all manner of insects succumbed either to the ants or the antbirds. I tracked the returning ants to their bivouac beneath the base of a dead tree. This monstrous mass of ant material was receiving a steady stream of deconstructed dead stuff, including a fair number of hapless other ants.



After lunch I returned to the swarm to see silvery marmosets eating insects that were escaping the ants while climbing up the bamboo stems and tree trunks.

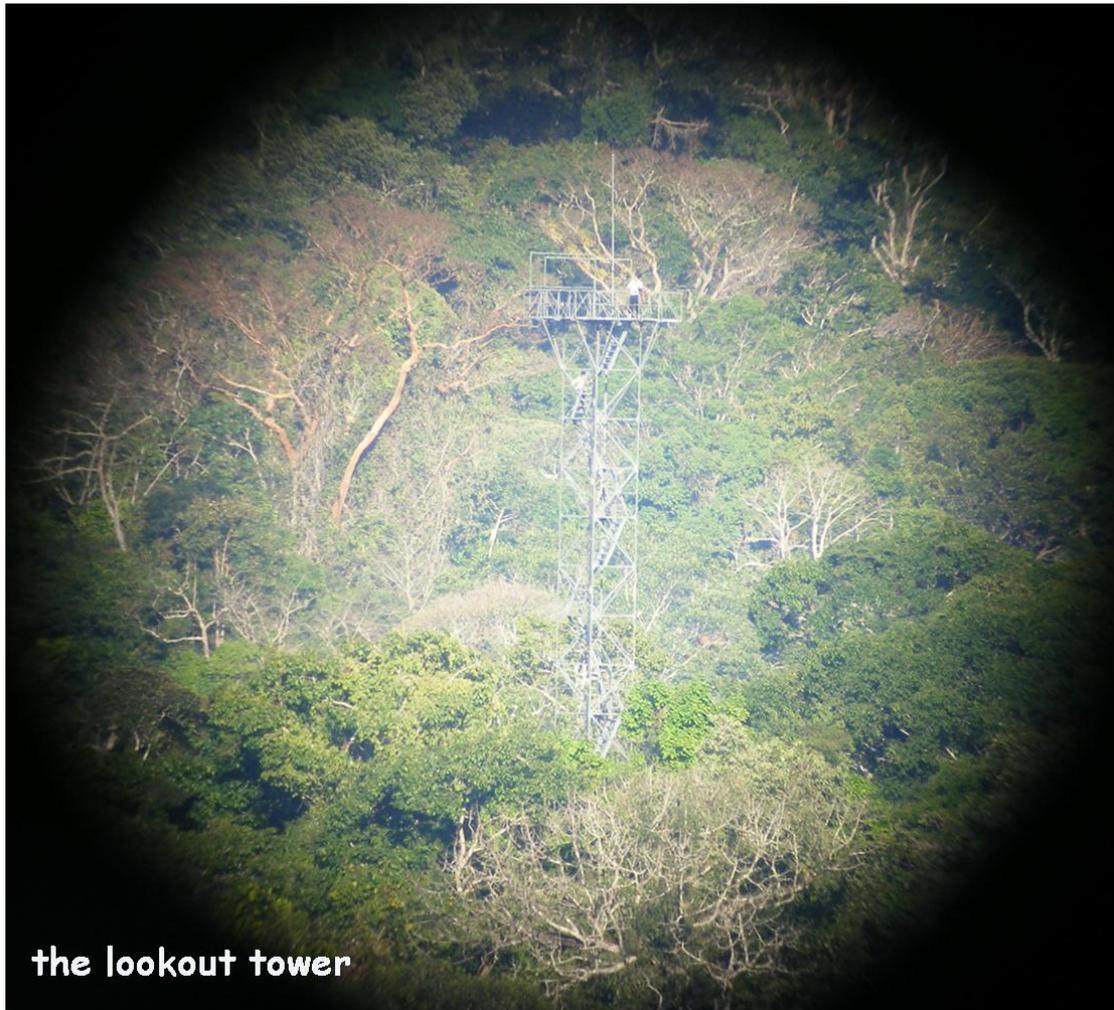
We walked the Bamboo Trail where yet more ant swarms were found. Similar birds were seen and Reasonable Brad became somewhat animated when he heard a rufous-vented ground-cuckoo calling in the distance.

We didn't bother going spotlighting in favour of extra drinking and sleeping time.

Day 27 – Wednesday 23rd July 2008

This was our last day at Cristalino and it started with a short boat trip upstream to the Cacao (or Serra) Trail. This trail ascends a rocky hill festooned with flowering orchids, philodendrons, ferns and bromeliads. We had fair views of a rather incongruous-looking tapir and flushed a couple of other furry things without identifying them. There were a good number of new birds.





There was post-lunch confusion regarding our return bus trip to Cuiaba. Priscilla called us to explain that the bus tickets had not been booked and that there were no seats left. She was very apologetic and explained that we could go on the early morning flight from Alta Floresta arriving in Cuiaba at the same time as the bus. We would get an extra night at the Amazonica Hotel, dinner, breakfast and the air ticket for the cost of the bus fare. This was great news for us because we were bound to get some decent sleep at the hotel, aside from anything else!

We arrived at the hotel with nobody understanding what was going on. This appears to be a very Brazilian thing.

I stormed about the forest behind the hotel but failed to find anything of great interest. Drinking beer seemed to lie more within my skills set. Estimates on when Priscilla would return ranged from "dinner time" to "two weeks". We didn't see her.

The fairly rowdy, drunk and barely clad poolside revelers at the hotel turned out to be the pilot and cabin crew for our OceanAir flight to Cuiaba the next day.

Day 28 – Thursday 24th July 2008

The geographic center of South America is somewhere on the road between Alta Floresta and Cuiaba. Alta Floresta was entirely lowland rainforest a generation or so ago. So I was

surprised to see a 100-seat twin jet aircraft waiting for us. The rather hung-over crew trudged into the Fokker MK28. Meanwhile we had to have an airport security body scan whilst our hand carry – with bombs and AK47 intact – was entirely ignored. They may have a little fine tuning to do here.

The flight landed a few minutes early (*note to Aerolineas, it isn't all that difficult, is it?*) and Juscineide, the wife of Jaguar Eco-Lodge's Eduardo picked us up at the airport as planned. She explained that our driver was a couple of hours away, so we asked to go to Parque Mae Bonifacia so that we could look for critters and get a new set of ticks. The ticks were to last the rest of the holiday and beyond. I was still picking off ticks after I returned home to Australia on account of them living in my clothing. I am sure they had dispersed within my pack, where, for all I know, they still persist.

We caught up with the large pack of resident marmosets and ticked off a few more birds.

Our new driver, Paulo, took us to Jaguar Eco-Lodge in an 11-seater Mercedes bus. The road south toward Pocone was fairly uninteresting but it soon changed. It wasn't long before we started seeing truly mind-blowing numbers of egrets, ibis, storks, cormorants, terns and caimans. Pools were rapidly drying out as the dry season got into stride. Fish were concentrating ridiculously. Anything that wanted to eat fish only had to open and close its mouth in a random fashion. And yet many fish were dying through lack of oxygen and being ignored by the predators. The only danger for the assembled throng lay in crashing into one another.



the start of the Pantanal



one of 83 timber bridges before Jaguar Eco-Lodge

Jaguar Eco-Lodge is okay. It is fairly rustic but clean and comfortable. We had a late lunch and keenly anticipated the late afternoon / evening's activities. Eduardo arrived and pressed the flesh and explained that we would be going on a jaguar search along the road well after dinner. So we slept for a bit before Paulo spotted a jaguar on the road outside the lodge. So off we went.



Jaguar Eco-Lodge

As soon as we turned on the truck's headlights we saw a crab-eating fox on the road. Some distance toward Porto Jofre we stopped near a patch of forest. Eduardo made his best grunting and growling impression (this wasn't too hard because he is part jaguar anyway), and soon elicited a response from two cats a short distance into the forest. Apparently they were mating and this recreation for jaguars was sufficient for them to ignore us. I would have too.

Day 29 – Friday 25th July 2008

The day started relatively cool and overcast. We walked along a trail running through terra firme forest. We ticked off helmeted manakin and soon afterwards, at an abandoned research station, a great potoo.

The interesting thing about the research station, which consisted of a number of buildings in good repair, was that although it had not been used for many years there was not a hint of theft or vandalism. You could simply open doors, look around inside and close them again. Some rooms still had equipment or specimen jars with contents intact. I said to Eduardo that the whole area, had it been in Australia, would have been vandalized, covered in graffiti and torched. It would have ended up with the government being sued because a local youth (or twelve) would hurt himself while trying to blow up the last of the brickwork with hand grenades stolen from an army warehouse. Eduardo explained that it would be rare in the Pantanal for this to occur, principally because there were no young people. Hmm, a better world methinks. How to get rid of young people?



A post-lunch walk behind the lodge found black-striped tufted capuchins but little else of note.

At 1530 we set off for Porto Jofre, driving slowly along the road, seeing a surprising number of new birds and marveling at the general abundance of other wildlife. We returned during the twilight to see a couple of crab-eating foxes, a red brocket deer, but still no cats.



Eduardo's truck

Day 30 – Saturday 26th July 2008

Eduardo had the idea that getting up at 0400 and spotlighting the road in the truck would be productive. We managed to spot each other, getting very cold in the process. We then went back to bed.

Having a head cold did not enhance my walk along the trail directly behind the lodge. The slow plod strategy employed by most guides was also wearing me down. The realization that we would most likely miss seeing both jaguar and giant anteater was much on my mind. I couldn't work out whether this was important or not, but I knew one thing – I wasn't all that thrilled about it.

New arrivals at the lodge meant that we were joined after lunch by some of the delegates to the international wetlands conference in Cuiaba. These guys, friendly folk from the USA, were primarily interested in water plants. I figured that they would have a great time. But instead they were to join us for a boat trip on the Cuiaba River looking for jaguars. My crystal ball said to me – “These are just the sort of people that you are likely to hear in a bar somewhere loudly rabbiting on about how they saw a (*substitute name of desirable animal here*) during their first outing, while you have just spent nine weeks sitting in an ice cave during a blizzard waiting for the (*same animal*) to return to its den / lair / 16 room villa overlooking Nice.” These guys wanted to see water plants!

Whilst challenging all the rules of safe boating (one of the wetland ecologists had a similar displacement to a reasonable sized wetland), we slowly motored upstream. We entered a narrow blind anabranch of the river and after turning around started back to the main channel. One of the Americans calmly said “jaguar”. A jaguar cub was swimming across in front of us to join its mother on the bank. Had we cared to, we could have run over it. I resisted the temptation to photograph the spectacularly beautiful cat so that I could enjoy the experience. So the first good views of a pussy for the trip and it was

The next day the wetland ecologists could be heard rabbiting on about their big cat diary and my prediction surrounding the circumstances of it, in a bar at Porto Jofre. What made it worse for the unwilling listeners was that *they* had yet to see a jaguar.

We spotlit back to the lodge picking up an ocelot in the process. Eduardo took the truck out again after dinner for good views of tapir, but Barry-Sean and I sensibly used this time to replace fluids and go to sleep.

Day 31 – Sunday 27th July 2008

It was cold, and I still had one, so I sat inside the truck for an early morning drive to Porto Jofre. We were meant to spend the better part of the day on the river, but it was cut short due to the large number of Eduardo’s visitors, which changed a number of time and motion things. The boat trip was relatively boring in any event. The idea was to track down giant river otters but this failed. A large colony of black skimmers and a sole black howler monkey were the most interesting things seen.

Back near the wharf was a nesting pair of hyacinth macaws. These deserved to be photographed. But a large fairly animated frizzy-haired gentlemen appeared and ranted about me having to pay him to take photos of the birds. My head cold, collection of itchy-bites and general belligerence welcomed the chance for a little distraction by way of violence. If he wanted money he could come and take it. Disappointingly the whole matter was defused when others of our party bought beer from him.



The day had the tone of one of those “days after the day before” experiences and never really got back into gear. We had seen a jaguar and now we had to get our shit together. Barry-Sean and I did this by trying to count the number of snail kites flying to their nightly roost. We got into an argument somewhere in the area of 65,820. We decided that drinking gin was more in keeping with our abilities.

Day 32 – Monday 28th July 2008

We were on the road at 0400 for a spotlight trip on the back of the truck to the Araras Eco-Lodge, about two hours drive toward Cuiaba. Eduardo had to transfer Tony, an American living in Australia, so we took the opportunity to do some spotlighting as well as spending the better part of the day at Araras. Spotlighting was a tad slow but we did see an ocelot from a couple of metres away on the edge of the road, a sole crab-eating fox and about a hundred nightjars.

We had breakfast at Araras before hitting the trails. Mikhail, a Russian crane (*the feathered type*) researcher, told of a giant anteater seen in good habitat across the road the day before so off I went. As this was now the least likely place to find the thing, I duly failed to find it. Coatis abounded along with red brocket deer and Azara’s agoutis, and all were ridiculously tame so I figured that there had been no hunting at Araras (which is an enormous property) for a very long time.

We had all been frozen during the spotlighting on the truck despite wearing every piece of clothing we owned, but within an hour of sunrise we were roasting.





I ventured to the much-touted lookout tower at Araras. This is connected to the lodge by an 800m long boardwalk, with almost all of it inside gallery forest. It was quite birdy despite the heat outside. I passed various monkeys including an adult Barry-Sean going the other way. I scaled the tower and more or less collapsed.

A Brazilian tourist puffed his way to the top of the tower. We said hello. After scanning the swamp, he gestured and asked me “Do you know what this animal is?” I figured that I could identify a capybara, or in an extreme case, a marsh deer, as good as the next man. He pointed directly below the tower into a large muddy puddle. Here, in the open and wallowing like a pig, despite their alleged hatred of water, was as perfect an example of a giant anteater that you’d ever hope to come across. I thanked the gentleman effusively as I set the local record for tower descending. And so I had bagged the last of my “wish list” mammals.



Barry-Sean asked the management of Araras for the lodge's room rate as we had one spare day to kill on the way back to Cuiaba. I made sure he asked three times because the rate quoted was less than half the price indicated on their website and much less than half the price quoted in Lonely Planet. This was mysterious.

Wellington, Eduardo's driver, took us back to Jaguar Eco-Lodge after lunch at Araras. Upon arrival I abandoned the slow walk strategy around the trails. I tried an entirely new approach to seeing the same possible wildlife. I decided that I would sit in one place and see how much alcohol I could drink whilst all the animals would come to me. This worked in my favour, with an obliging nine-banded armadillo on the grass behind the lodge at 1630.



The evening's spotlighting (which we again failed to join) saw a tapir.

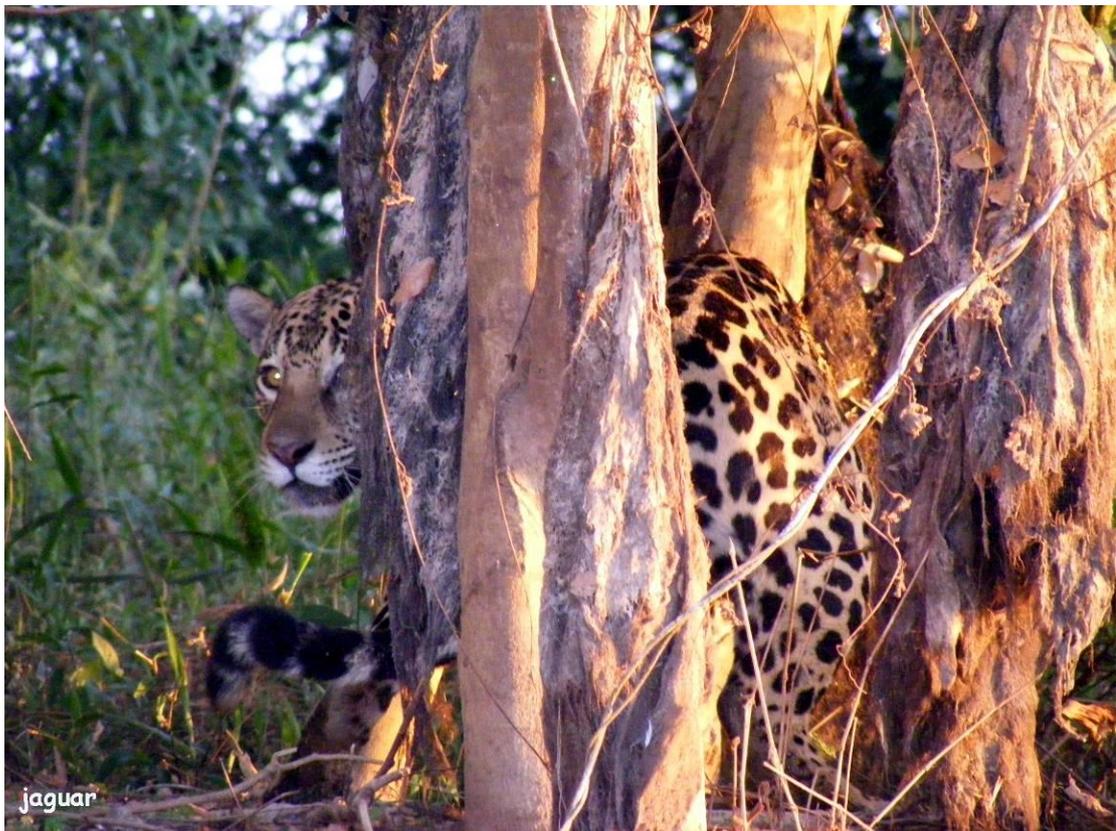
Day 33 – Tuesday 29th July 2008

The morning was a bit of a waste of time. Eduardo was so busy trying to cover all the bases for everyone that we (having seen what we had set out to) were relegated to yesterday's news.



After an early lunch and an extended gasbag with other tourists, we took our last long slow drive to Porto Jofre for a final late afternoon boat trip on the Cuiaba River. A Spanish couple and their guide joined us. The Spanish lady was incapable of communicating with anyone at any level – even eye contact didn't work. The couple clearly felt as though they had gone to the wrong country. Their guide was a bit of a goose but the full extent of his lack of ability was to be realized later.

Once on the water the Spanish chap spotted an adult female jaguar on the riverbank ahead of us. It quickly moved into the forest. We waited for a while and eventually it came back, either to catch the afternoon sun, add a Spanish person to its life list or drink from the river. Our skilled boatman took us in a very long quiet slow loop, at first downriver, then across it and finally upstream, where he cut the motor and went with the current. We had the jaguar in view at all times and when we drifted past it resting on the bank, it flicked its tail and largely ignored us. We passed within four metres. The boatman paddled us up level and we took some pictures. We had to encourage it to move or else it was happy to just sit there. After a while it sauntered off, only to reappear a little further downstream. It clearly had no fear of people in boats. A truly indelible wildlife experience!



During our time at Jaguar Eco-Lodge, jaguars were seen on four nights out of six and heard on one other.

Our return from the river was frustrating. Eduardo gave the spotlight to the Spanish tourists' guide. He had clearly never used a spotlight before but that wasn't going to stop him. With his sunnies on and the spotlight waving around at chest height he pointed the thing in every place where there was no chance of seeing anything and at no place where there was! We saw nothing of course, excepting a probable ocelot in the gloomy area where the spotlight wasn't.

Day 34 – Wednesday 30th July 2008

Eduardo transferred us and the very odd Spanish couple and their guiding-skills challenged guide to the Araras Eco-Lodge. The lodge is closer to the start of the Transpantaneira. Araras gets fewer jaguar sightings but other critters are abundant, tame and often absent from the area around Jaguar Eco-Lodge. Capybaras cruise about your feet in the drinking lounge, caimans abound, as do coatis, black howlers and black-striped tufted capuchins. Pantanal marmosets are quite easy to see and the area seems to be anteater heaven. We saw both southern and giant anteater (three times) despite staying only one night.

The lodge has swampy lakes behind it and a lookout tower from which birds and mammals and their attendant scenery can be seen.

We arrived at Araras after 0900 and by the time we dealt with the paperwork and various other bits and pieces it was already quite hot. Luckily as soon as we started walking we saw a giant anteater, a larger one than we saw two days earlier.



Lunch, a delicious cooked dead fish that until recently lived in the Cuiaba River, was at a roadside diner associated with the lodge. Three longnecks helped our digestion.

The afternoon reached no great heights because we were concerned at having to somehow dispose of our remaining gin and single malt whisky stockpile.

Our last spotlighting event was short but wonderful. We piled into the lodge's truck and within a couple of minutes had great views of southern anteater, a Brazilian rabbit and three crab-eating raccoons. Guess what the raccoons were doing?

Day 35 – Thursday 31st July 2008

We were joined by the manager of Araras, Antonio, as we walked to the lookout tower and beyond. Best sightings were Mato Grosso antbird, undulated tinamou, coatis, Pantanal marmosets, black-striped tufted capuchins, black howlers and a large very sleepy giant anteater. This was a fine last excursion in Brazil, adding a few birds to our list and leaving a very positive impression.

After lunch we were transferred to Cuiaba and the Mato Grosso Palace Hotel. The timing was perfect to search out a bar and something to eat. Distressingly, like many countries, Brazil has the habit of having cities that contain every kind of shop that you don't need, but we were resourceful enough on this occasion.

The last of the single malt was consumed in front of the Woody Woodpecker Show.

Day 36 – Friday 1st August 2008

Checking out at 0415 we made our way to the airport for our TAM Airways flight to Rio de Janeiro via Brasilia. TAM is everything that Aerolineas Argentinas is not. The plane left and arrived on time. At Rio we asked the Aerolineas Argentinas desk if we could check our luggage for the flight to Buenos Aires in the evening. We were given the option of an earlier flight. Given the airline's track record we had no choice but to take it. We left the stunning views of Rio in our wake and pondered the day ahead in Argentina.

Our plane was a 737 prototype and was falling to pieces inside. Bits of seat, armrest and seat pocket fell on the floor as the masking tape gave way. I am not joking. A decade's worth of desiccated food samples collected around my feet when the seat pocket crapped itself. The plane landed safely so nothing else mattered.

Our long wait at Rio was thus transferred to Buenos Aires.

Buenos Aires International Airport is small, narrow and boring. One redeeming feature is the price of the duty free alcohol, except that we were not allowed to take any on account of New Zealand's airport security rules! Bottles of one litre Highland Park were \$US34. We could have bought one and drank it while we were waiting for the plane, for the equivalent price of five beers in the airport "restaurant".

We had no idea why our flight was so late given that the aircraft had been parked for hours at the terminal. There were lots of things we were to learn about our Argentine carrier. We discovered later that the reason the plane was late was because they couldn't convince a cabin crew to come to work. The airline had gone belly up while we were in Brazil and the government had to buy it to keep it running. Half the fleet was grounded because the planes had not been maintained. This is so sad because I love Argentina.

Day 37 – Saturday 2nd August 2008

Lost on the date line.

Day 38 – Sunday 3rd August 2008

I managed almost eight hours sleep on the plane. This was more worthwhile than it might seem. There was simply nothing else to do. The plane had no alcohol or fruit juice, ran out of water and toilet paper, and had no video or cabin lights. Presumably there was no money to pay for the food or drink so they didn't load it. Whilst in transit in New Zealand, a charming and beautiful young Brazilian girl, now studying in Australia, started chatting to me (!!). She told me the recent history of the airline, including rioting passengers in Argentina, cancelled flights and corruption within the airline at all levels. The plane's cabin crew all willingly confirmed this to me later!

The last leg of our return-to-base plane saga was enriched by access to the Kiwi-language Saturday Herald. The stories were mostly about violence and sex (or both), shitty weather and the All Blacks win (front page). Page three had the ripping yarn about an escaped sheep that had been recaptured after four years on the run. It had pictures of the sheep, its new friends, and the animal's "owner-occupier". A long story of the sheep's feral life followed, along with a description of its fleece, including a dag count. The story had a happy ending – although the sheep was worthless, it would live out its life in leisure in a nice paddock. Utter bullshit.

Steve Anyon-Smith
67 Wattle Road
Jannali 2226
NSW Australia
steveas@tpg.com.au
16th August 2008
all enquiries welcome



BIRD LIST

Number in first column refers to plate number in Souza (or the closest plate where the bird has since been split). The number in the other columns refers to the “day number” of the trip. Common (and boring) birds tend to be under-recorded.

T – Serra dos Tucanos and surrounds. Day 17 was in Rio Botanic Gardens. Day 18 was in Flamengo Park, Rio.

C- Caratinga Reserve

R – Caraca National Park

I – Cipo National Park

A – Alta Floresta and Cristalino Lodge

P – Pantanal. Day 20 was in Cuiaba.

*seen by Barry-Sean and not by me.....

	BIRD	T	C	R	I	A	P
14	Solitary Tinamou		7				
16	Undulated Tinamou						32
18	Least Grebe				13		
26	Brown Booby	17					
26	Neotropic Cormorant						28
26	Anhinga					21	28
28	Magnificent Frigatebird	1					
28	Little Blue Heron						28
28	Snowy Egret	5					28
28	Cocoi Heron						28
28	Great Egret	1			13		28
28	Striated Heron	18				22	28
30	Whistling Heron					21	28
30	Capped Heron					21	29
30	Cattle Egret	1				21	28
30	Black-crowned Night-Heron						28
30	Rufescent Tiger-Heron						28
32	Boat-billed Heron					23	30
32	Plumbeous Ibis						28
32	Buff-necked Ibis						28
32	Green Ibis					21	20
32	Wood Stork					22	28
32	Maguari Stork					21	29
32	Jabiru						28
34	Southern Screamer						28
34	Bare-faced Ibis						28
34	White-faced Ibis						28

	BIRD	T	C	R	I	A	P
34	Roseate Spoonbill						28
36	White-faced Whistling-Duck					21	
36	Black-bellied Whistling-Duck						30
36	White-cheeked Pintail				13		
38	Muscovy Duck					23	30
38	Brazilian Teal					21	
40	Black Vulture	1	6	10	13	21	20
40	Turkey Vulture	1	7	10	14	21	
40	Lesser Yellow-headed Vulture	1					28
40	Greater Yellow-headed Vulture					21	30
40	King Vulture					22	
42	Gray-headed Kite					23	
42	Swallow-tailed Kite	16				21	
42	Snail Kite						28
42	Plumbeous Kite					21	
44	Roadside Hawk	4	6		15		20
46	Black-collared Hawk						28
48	Great Black-Hawk					21	30
48	Savanna Hawk	4					28
48	Crowned Eagle		7				
48	Black Hawk-Eagle	4					
50	Laughing Falcon				14		30
52	Black Caracara					21	
52	Red-throated Caracara					24	
52	Southern (Crested) Caracara	1	6	10	13	21	28
52	Yellow-headed Caracara	4		11			34
52	Chimango Caracara			11	14		
52	Aplomado Falcon						32
52	Bat Falcon				14	21	29
54	Chaco Chachalaca						28
54	Spot-winged Wood-Quail	5					
56	Spix's Guan					22	
56	Dusky-legged Guan	5	7	10			
56	^E Chestnut-bellied Guan						29
56	Blue-throated Piping-Guan						29
56	Red-throated Piping-Guan					21	
56	Bare-faced Curassow					25	30
58	Razor-billed Curassow					24	
58	Limpkin						28
60	Gray-necked Wood-Rail	18		10			20
60	Slaty-breasted Wood-Rail			12			
62	Rufous-sided Crake						30*
64	Purple Gallinule						34
64	Sungrebe						30
64	Sunbittern					20	28
64	Red-legged Seriema	4	7				28
66	Wattled Jacana					21	28

	BIRD	T	C	R	I	A	P
66	Pied Lapwing					21	28
66	Southern Lapwing	1	6		13		28
68	Collared Plover						30
72	South American Snipe				13		
72	White-backed Stilt						28
74	Kelp Gull	17					
76	Cayenne Tern	19					
76	South American Tern	17					
76	Yellow-billed Tern						30
78	Large-billed Tern						28
78	Black Skimmer						30
78	Picazuro Pigeon			10	13	21	20
80	Pale-vented Pigeon						28
80	Plumbeous Pigeon	5				22	28
80	Eared Dove	4					29
80	Plain-breasted Ground-Dove	19					20
80	Ruddy Ground-Dove		7		14	21	30
80	Blue Ground-Dove					22	
82	Scaled Dove				13		29
82	Long-tailed Ground-Dove						29
82	White-tipped Dove		7	10	14		
82	Gray-fronted Dove			10		21	
82	Blue-and-yellow Macaw					21	
82	Scarlet Macaw					21	
82	Red-and-green Macaw					21	
84	Hyacinth Macaw						28
84	Chestnut-fronted Macaw					21	
84	Blue-winged Macaw		7			23	
84	Golden (Yellow)-collared Macaw						29
84	Red-shouldered Macaw	19					20
86	Blue-crowned Parakeet						34
86	White-eyed Parakeet					21	
86	Peach-fronted Parakeet				13		29
86	Monk Parakeet	19					31
88	E Blue-throated Parakeet		6				
88	Maroon-bellied Parakeet	2					
88	E Crimson-bellied Parakeet					23	
88	Painted Parakeet					27	
90	Blue-winged Parrotlet				14		
90	Dusky-billed Parrotlet					24	
90	E Plain Parakeet	2					
90	Yellow-chevroned Parakeet				14		20
90	Golden-winged Parakeet					21	
92	White-bellied Parrot					23	
94	Blue-headed Parrot					21	
94	Scaly-headed Parrot	3	7	10	13		29
94	Red-fan Parrot					21	

	BIRD	T	C	R	I	A	P
96	E Kawall's Parrot					26	
96	Blue-fronted Parrot						28
96	Yellow-crowned Parrot					27	
96	Orange-winged Parrot					23	32
98	Squirrel Cuckoo	3	7			21	20
98	Black-bellied Cuckoo					24	
98	Little Cuckoo						29
98	Greater Ani						28
98	Smooth-billed Ani	1	6		13	21	28
100	Guira Cuckoo					21	28
100	Striped Cuckoo						29
102	Tawny-bellied Screech-Owl					22	
102	Great Horned Owl						29
102	Spectacled Owl		6				29
104	Burrowing Owl	4	7			21	
106	Great Potoo						29
106	Short-tailed Nighthawk					23	
108	Nacunda Nighthawk						20
108	Pauraque		7				29
108	Ladder-tailed Nightjar					23	
108	Scissor-tailed Nightjar						32
110	Rufous Nightjar			11			
110	Spot-tailed Nightjar						29
110	Little Nightjar						30
110	Blackish Nightjar					23	
112	White-collared Swift	1					
112	Gray-rumped Swift					24	
112	Chapman's Swift					22	
112	Short-tailed Swift					22	
114	Lesser Swallow-tailed Swift	3					
114	E Saw-billed Hermit	1					
114	Gray-breasted Sabrewing					25	
116	Long-tailed Hermit					25	
116	White-bearded Hermit					21	
116	Black Jacobin	5					
116	White-vented Violet-ear				14		
118	Planalto Hermit	5		11			
118	Buff-bellied Hermit						28
118	Reddish Hermit		7				
118	E Tapajos Hermit					22	
118	Swallow-tailed Hummingbird	3		10	14		
118	White-necked Jacobin					27	
120	Black-throated Mango					24	
120	Plovercrest	2					
122	Glittering-bellied Emerald	4		11	14		29
122	Fork-tailed Woodnymph					23	29
122	Violet-capped Woodnymph	1	7	10			

	BIRD	T	C	R	I	A	P
122	Gilded Sapphire						29
124	White-throated Hummingbird	4		11			
124	E Sombre Hummingbird	1		11			
124	E Brazilian Ruby	1					
126	Versicolored Emerald					27	20
126	Glittering-throated Emerald	4					29
126	Sapphire-spangled Emerald		7				
128	Black-eared Fairy					23	
128	Long-billed Starthroat					24	
128	Amethyst Woodstar			12			
130	Black-tailed Trogon					21	
130	White-tailed Trogon					21	
130	Collared Trogon					23	
130	Black-throated Trogon					24	
130	Blue-crowned Trogon						20
130	Violaceous Trogon					23	
132	Ringed Kingfisher	16				21	28
132	Amazon Kingfisher				13	21	28
132	Green Kingfisher				16	21	
132	American Pygmy Kingfisher						29
132	Blue-crowned Motmot					23	30
134	Brown Jacamar					24	
134	Blue-cheeked Jacamar					23	
134	Rufous-tailed Jacamar		7		14		29
134	Bronzy Jacamar					23	
134	Paradise Jacamar					23	
134	Great Jacamar					22	
136	White-necked (Guianan) Puffbird					23	
136	Collared Puffbird					23	
136	White-eared Puffbird				15		
136	Striolated Puffbird					23	
136	Spot-backed Puffbird				15		
138	E Crescent-chested Puffbird		7				
138	Swallow-wing					22	
140	Black-fronted Nunbird					21	29
140	White-fronted Nunbird					23	
140	Black-girdled Barbet					23	
142	Lettered Aracari					23	
142	Red-necked Aracari					21	
142	Chestnut-eared Aracari						29
142	Black-necked Aracari		7				
142	Curl-crested Aracari					23	
144	Spot-billed Toucanet	2					
144	Channel-billed Toucan	18				22	
144	Red-breasted Toucan			11			
144	Red-billed (White-thr) Toucan					24	
144	Toco Toucan				14		29

	BIRD	T	C	R	I	A	P
146	Bar-breasted Piculet					23	
146	White-barred Piculet	3	6	10	14		20
146	White-wedged Piculet						20
148	Green-barred Woodpecker						24
148	Campo Flicker	4			14		
148	Pale-crested Woodpecker						30
148	Ringed Woodpecker					26	
150	White Woodpecker				14		
150	Yellow-tufted Woodpecker					21	
150	Yellow-throated Woodpecker		6				
150	Golden-green Woodpecker						29
150	Yellow (White)-browed Woodpecker	2					
152	Little Woodpecker						20
152	Red-stained Woodpecker					23	
152	E Yellow-eared Woodpecker	2					
152	Lineated Woodpecker	2		10	15	27	29
152	Crimson-crested Woodpecker						28
154	White-chinned Woodcreeper					26	
154	Long-tailed Woodcreeper					22	
154	Olivaceous Woodcreeper	3		10		23	29
154	Strong-billed Woodcreeper					25	
154	White-throated Woodcreeper	2					30
154	Great Rufous Woodcreeper						31
156	Wedge-billed Woodcreeper					23	
156	Cinnamon-throated Woodcreeper					21	
156	Amazon Barred-Woodcreeper					24	
156	Red-billed Scythebill						32
156	Black-billed Scythebill	2					
156	Curve-billed Scythebill					24	
158	Straight-billed Woodcreeper						29
158	Spix's Woodcreeper					22	
158	Narrow-billed Woodcreeper						32
158	Scaled Woodcreeper	2		11			
158	Lefresnaye's Woodcreeper					22	
158	Lesser Woodcreeper	3					
158	Lineated Woodcreeper					27	
160	E Tail (wing)-banded Hornero				14		
160	Pale-legged Hornero						35
160	Rufous Hornero	2		11	14		
162	Yellow(thr)-chinned Spinetail						29
164	Rufous-capped Spinetail	2		11	14		
164	Sooty-fronted Spinetail				14		
164	Gray-bellied Spinetail			10			
166	Cinereous-breasted Spinetail			10			
166	Rufous-fronted (Common) Thornbird		7		14		
166	Greater Thornbird						28
166	E Red-eyed Thornbird	4					

	BIRD	T	C	R	I	A	P
168	E Pallid Spinetail	2					
168	Rusty-backed Spinetail						29
168	Speckled Spinetail					25	
170	Caatinga (Rufous) Cacholote						32
170	E Pale-browed Treehunter	4					
170	Striped Woodhaunter					23	
172	Rufous-tailed Foliage-gleaner					23	
172	Russet-mantled Foliage-gleaner						35
172	Rufous-rumped Foliage-gleaner					22	
172	White-browed Foliage-gleaner	2					
172	Buff-fronted Foliage-gleaner	2		12			
174	Chestnut-winged Hookbill					22	
174	Buff-browed Foliage-gleaner	2					
174	E White-collared Foliage-gleaner	4					
174	Buff-throated Foliage-gleaner					24	
174	White-eyed Foliage-gleaner			12			
176	Sharp-tailed Streamcreeper	4		12			
176	Plain Xenops			11		22	
176	Streaked Xenops	2	7			27	
178	Fasciated Antshrike					22	
178	Spot-backed Antshrike	2					
178	Tufted Antshrike			10			
178	Great Antshrike						28
180	Glossy Antshrike					27	
180	Barred Antshrike						20
180	Chestnut-backed Antshrike	18	8			23	
182	Planalto Slaty-Antshrike(see slaty)		7				
182	Plain-winged Antshrike					22	
182	Amazonian Antshrike					22	
182	Variable Antshrike	4	7	11			29
184	Spot-breasted Antwreio	3					
184	Plain Antwreio	2					
184	E Rufous-backed Antwreio	5					
184	Saturnine Antshrike					24	
184	Cinereous Antshrike					22	
186	Dot-winged Antwren					22	
186	E Serra Antwren		7	11			
186	White-shouldered Fire-eye	1		11			
188	E Star-throated Antwren	3					
188	White-eyed Antwren					22	
188	White-flanked Antwren					22	
190	Pygmy Antwren					27	
190	Ornate Antwren					26	
190	Long-winged Antwren					27	
192	Plain-throated Antwren					25	
192	Bertoni's Antbird	2					
192	E Rufous-tailed Antbird	4					

	BIRD	T	C	R	I	A	P
192	E Ochre-rumped Antbird	2					
192	Striated Antbird					22	
192	E Scaled Antbird		6				
194	Black-capped Antwren			10			
194	Rufous-winged Antwren					22	
196	Streak-capped Antwren	3					
196	White-browed Antbird					23	
196	Black-faced Antbird					24	
196	Spix's B543Warbling Antbird					24	
198	Gray Antbird					22	
198	Manu Antbird					22	
198	Mato Grosso Antbird						34
198	Band-tailed Antbird					21	29
202	E Bare-eyed Antbird					26	
202	Spot-backed Antbird					24	
202	Scale-backed Antbird					26	
204	E White-bibbed Antbird			11			
206	Black-spotted Bare-eye					26	
208	Rufous Gnateater			11			
208	Chestnut-belted Gnateater					22	
208	E Black-cheeked Gnateater	3	7	10			
210	Mouse-colored Tapaculo	2					
212	Shrike-like Cotinga			10			
212	Swallow-tailed Cotinga	5					
212	E Black-and-gold Cotinga	5					
212	E Hooded Berryeater	2					
212	Spangled Cotinga					23	
214	White-browed Purpletuft					24	
214	Screaming Piha					21	
214	Pompadour Cotinga					22	
216	Green-backed Becard						35
216	Chestnut-crowned Becard	2	7				
216	White-winged Becard	3				23	
218	Bare-necked Fruitcrow					21	
218	Red-ruffed Fruitcrow			10			
218	Amazonian Umbrellabird					24	
218	Sharpbill	3					
218	Masked Tityra					21	
222	Band-tailed Manakin					24	
222	Red-headed Manakin					22	
222	Snow-capped Manakin					25	
224	Helmeted Manakin						29
224	Blue (Swallow-tailed) Manakin	2		11			
224	E Pin-tailed Manakin	2					
224	White-bearded Manakin		6				
224	Fiery-capped Manakin					22	
226	Thrush-like Schiffornis					22	

	BIRD	T	C	R	I	A	P
226	Greenish Schiffornis	2					
228	Dwarf Tyrant-Manakin					22	
228	White-rumped Monjita	4					
230	Vermilion Flycatcher						28
230	Black-backed Water-Tyrant						28
230	Masked Water-Tyrant				13		
230	White-headed Marsh-Tyrant						29
230	Streamer-tailed Tyrant		6		14		
230	Long-tailed Tyrant			10			
232	Drab Water-Tyrant					23	
232	Blue-billed Black-Tyrant	4		12			
232	E Velvety Black-Tyrant	4	7	10	14		
232	Crested Black-tyrant			13			
234	Cattle Tyrant	18					29
234	Tropical Kingbird	3					20
234	Crowned Slaty Flycatcher					22	
234	Dusky-chested Flycatcher					23	
236	Boat-billed Flycatcher						20
236	Rusty-margined Flycatcher					24	35
236	Social Flycatcher	3		11	14		
236	Lesser Kiskadee				13		
236	Great Kiskadee	1	6	10	13		20
238	Dull-capped Attila						30
238	Rufous Casiornis					24	29
238	Cinereous Mourner					24	
240	Royal Flycatcher					25	
240	Bran-colored Flycatcher						35
240	Whiskered (Sulphur-rumped) Fly	2				23	
240	Cliff Flycatcher		6	10	13		
240	Fuscous Flycatcher						20
240	Euler's Flycatcher					28	28
242	Tropical Pewee			11			
242	Dusky-capped Flycatcher					23	29
242	Short-crested Flycatcher		7				
242	Brown-crested Flycatcher				14	24	28
244	Yellow-olive Flycatcher	3		10	13		
244	White-throated Spadebill	2					
244	White-crested Spadebill					22	
246	Eared Pygmy-Tyrant	2					
246	Helmeted Pygmy-Tyrant					22	
246	Large-headed Flatbill					23	
246	Rufous-tailed Flatbill					26	
246	Olivaceous Flatbill					23	
248	Ochre-faced Tody-Flycatcher	4		11			
248	Rusty-fronted Tody-Flycatcher						34
248	Spotted Tody-Flycatcher					23	
248	E Yellow-lored Tody-Flycatcher	18		11			

	BIRD	T	C	R	I	A	P
248	Common Tody-Flycatcher						28
248	Yellow-browed Tody-Flycatcher					23	
250	E Eye-ringed Tody-Tyrant	2					
250	Pearly-vented Tody-Tyrant						28
252	Drab-breasted Bamboo-Tyrant	2					
254	Yellow Tyrannulet	5		10			
254	Sao Paulo Tyrannulet		7				
254	E Oustalet's Tyrannulet	3					
254	Mottle-cheeked Tyrannulet			10			
256	Sooty Tyrannulet				14		
256	White-crested Tyrannulet			11			35
258	Yellow-bellied Elaenia				14		35
258	Small-billed Elaenia					23	
258	Olivaceous Elaenia	4		11			
258	Lesser Elaenia			11			
258	Highland Elaenia			10			
260	Southern Scrub-Flycatcher						35
260	Amazonian Tyrannulet					23	
260	Forest Elaenia					23	
260	Gray Elaenia					23	
262	Rough-legged Tyrannulet	5					
262	Greenish Tyrannulet			11			
262	Southern Beardless-Tyrannulet	4		11	14	27	28
262	Mouse-colored Tyrannulet				15		
264	Ochre-bellied Flycatcher					23	
264	Gray-hooded Flycatcher	2		10			
264	Sepia-capped Flycatcher	3		11			
264	White-naped Xenopsaris					27	
266	White-winged Swallow					21	34
266	White-rumped Swallow						29
266	Brown-chested Martin		7				
266	Blue-and-white Swallow	4		11	13		
266	White-banded Swallow					21	
266	Tawny-headed Swallow						20
266	Southern Rough-winged Swallow			11	14	21	
268	Purplish Jay						29
270	Black-capped Donacobius						28
270	Thrush-like Wren					21	29
270	Tooth-billed Wren					23	
270	Buff-breasted Wren					23	20
270	Fawn-breasted Wren						29
272	House Wren	1	6	13	14		
272	Musician Wren					25	
274	Yellow-legged Thrush	5		10			
274	Chalk-browed Mockingbird		7		14		34
276	Rufous-bellied Thrush	2	6	10	14		20
276	Pale-breasted Thrush	2	7	10	14		

	BIRD	T	C	R	I	A	P
276	Creamy-bellied Thrush	4	7	10	14		29
278	Rufous-browed Peppershrike	3		10			28
278	Slaty-capped Shrike-Vireo					24	
278	Long-billed Gnatwren					26	
278	Masked Gnatcatcher						30
280	Chivi Vireo			11	15		
280	Rufous-crowned Greenlet	2		10			
280	Ashy-headed Greenlet						28
282	Dusky-capped Greenlet					23	
282	Tawny-crowned Greenlet					23	
282	Yellowish Pipit						28
282	Bay-winged Cowbird						28
282	Shiny Cowbird				15		20
284	Giant Cowbird					26	28
284	Crested Oropendola			10	13	26	29
284	Amazonian Oropendola					23	
286	Yellow-rumped Cacique					21	28
286	Red-rumped Cacique		7	11			
286	Solitary Cacique						34
286	Unicolored Blackbird						29
286	Scarlet-headed Blackbird						29
286	Chopi Blackbird						29
288	Epaulet Oriole					26	28
288	Troupial						32
288	Yellow-rumped Marshbird				14		
290	Tropical Parula						29
290	Masked Yellowthroat				14		
290	Golden-crowned Warbler	2					
290	Flavescent Warbler				14		30
292	White-rimmed(browed) Warbler	2					
292	Rose-breasted Chat					22	
294	Bananaquit	1	7	10	14		20
294	Bicoloured Conebill		8!!				
294	Chestnut-vented Conebill		8				
294	Purple Honeycreeper					23	
296	Diademed Tanager	5					
296	Fawn-breasted Tanager			11			
296	Black-faced Dacnis					27	
296	Yellow-bellied Dacnis					21	
296	Blue Dacnis	1	7	10	13	23	
296	Green Honeycreeper	1					
296	Swallow-Tanager			12	15	24	
298	Green-headed Tanager	1	8				
298	Red-necked Tanager	3					
298	E Brassy-breasted Tanager	2					
298	E Gilt-edged Tanager	3		10			
298	Green-and-gold Tanager					23	

	BIRD	T	C	R	I	A	P
300	Turquoise Tanager					24	
300	Bay-headed Tanager					23	
300	Burnished-buff Tanager	4	7	10	14		
302	Purple-throated Euphonia						28
302	Violaceous Euphonia	1					
302	Orange-bellied Euphonia	3					
302	Chestnut-bellied Euphonia	1					
302	Blue-naped Chlorophonia	1		12			
304	Sayaca Tanager	2		10	14		20
304	E Azure-shouldered Tanager	3					
304	E Golden-chevroned Tanager	1					
304	Palm Tanager	2		10	14	22	
304	White-lored(golden-bel) Euphonia					27	
304	Rufous-bellied Euphonia					23	
306	Red-crowned Ant-Tanager	5				25	
306	Hepatic Tanager	4					
306	Silver-beaked Tanager						20
306	Brazilian Tanager	2					
308	Gray-headed Tanager				14		20
308	White-winged Shrike-Tanager					24	
308	Flame-crested Tanager	18	7				
308	White-shouldered Tanager					24	
308	Ruby-crowned Tanager	2	7	10			
310	Chestnut-headed Tanager	4					
310	Orange-headed Tanager	4					
310	E Rufous-headed Tanager	3					
310	Yellow-backed Tanager	3				23	
310	Hooded Tanager						29
310	Black-goggled Tanager	3		10			
312	E Brown Tanager			10?			
312	White-banded Tanager						20
312	Red-billed Pied Tanager					27	
312	Magpie Tanager		7	10			
314	Buff-throated Saltator	1					20
314	Green-winged Saltator		7	10			
314	Thick-billed Saltator	4					
314	Black-throated Saltator				13		
318	Red-crested Cardinal	19					35
318	Red-capped Cardinal					24	
318	Yellow-billed Cardinal						28
318	Lesser (chest-bellied) Seed-Finch						29
320	Rusty-collared Seedeater						29
320	Yellow-bellied Seedeater			11	14		
320	Double-collared Seedeater		7	11	14		20
322	White-bellied Seedeater				14		29
324	Pileated Finch		7		14		
324	Red-crested Finch						20

	BIRD	T	C	R	I	A	P
324	Uniform Finch	5					
324	Saffron Finch	4	7				28
326	Rufous-collared Sparrow	2		10			
326	Grassland Sparrow				14		
326	Wedge-tailed Grass-Finch			12	14		
328	House Sparrow		6				



CRISTALINO JUNGLE LODGE

An Amazon Sanctuary



CRISTALINO AREA

Cristalino Jungle Lodge is a unique destination. It is located in a private forest reserve surrounded by the Cristalino State Park and other protected areas in the Southern Amazon. The region has astonishing biodiversity and many endemic species.



ACCOMMODATIONS

The accommodations were built in harmony with the environment using sustainable practices. There are three types of accommodations: private bungalows, standard rooms and dormitories.

Mammal List

	T	C	I	N	A	P
Gray Four-eyed Opossum			12			
Nine-banded Armadillo						32
Giant Anteater						32
Southern Anteater						34
Common Marmoset	2					
Black-tufted Marmoset			11	16		
Silvery Marmoset					22	
Black-tailed Marmoset						20
Black Tufted Capuchin	18	6				
Brown Tufted Capuchin					21	
Black-striped Tufted Capuchin						29
Red-bellied Titi					24	
Masked Titi			10			
White-nosed Bearded Saki					25	
Red-handed Howler					26	
Black Howler						31
Brown Howler		6				
Northern Muriqui		6				
White-whiskered Spider Monkey					23	
Crab-eating Fox						
Maned Wolf			9			
Jaguarundi		7?				
Ocelot						30
Jaguar						30
Neotropical River Otter					24	
Striped Hog-nosed Skunk			10			
South American Coati	5					32
Kinkajou					23	
Crab-eating Raccoon						34
Brazilian Tapir					22	
Marsh deer						28
Red Brocket					26	29
Guianan Squirrel	3	7	10	15	23	
Capybara				14	22	20
Azara's Agouti					21	32
Black Agouti		7				
Red-rumped Agouti						20
Brazilian Rabbit		8				34

	T	C	I	N	A	P
Long-nosed Proboscis Bat					21	
Lesser Fishing Bat						30
Greater Fishing Bat						30
Jamaican Fruit-eating Bat						34
Seba's Short-tailed Fruit Bat						29

Notes on some mammal sightings

Grey four-eyed opossum. One seen running up the stairs to the kitchen at 0700 inside Santuario do Caraca, Caraca NP.

Nine-banded armadillo. One seen in the grounds of Jaguar Eco-Lodge at 1630.

Giant anteater. Three seen on three different days at Araras Eco-Lodge. Also seen by others the day before our first sighting.

Southern tamandua (anteater). One seen on the evening spotlight tour from Araras.

Common (tufted ear) marmoset. Two seen on the Bamboo Trail at Serra dos Tucanos. A large family seen in the Rio de Janeiro Botanic Gardens.

Black-tufted marmoset. Many seen on the Tanque Grande Trail at Caraca NP on one day but not on others. Also seen on the Campo de Fora Trail near the start in the tall forest.

Black-tailed (Pantanal) marmoset. Very common in Parque Mae Bonifacia in Cuiaba. Fairly easy on the boardwalk at Araras and possible in the forest behind the Jaguar Eco-Lodge.

Black-tufted capuchin. Many at Caratinga and very common in Rio de Janeiro Botanic Gardens.

Brown-tufted capuchin. Common at Cristalino Lodge and at Amazonica Hotel in Alta Floresta.

Black-striped tufted capuchin. Common at the boardwalk at Araras and less so in the forest behind the Jaguar Eco-Lodge.

Red-bellied titi. One seen on the Bamboo Trail at Cristalino.

Masked titi. Common on the Tanque Grande Trail and elsewhere at Caraca.

White-nosed bearded saki. One large group seen on the Tales Pires Trail at Cristalino.

Red-handed howler. A mother and baby seen in the grounds at Cristalino.

Brown howler. Common at Caratinga and along the riverine forest near the entrance road.

Black howler. Common at Araras on the boardwalk and occasional elsewhere in the Pantanal.

Northern miqui. Common and easy to see at Caratinga.

White-whiskered spider monkey. Common at Cristalino, especially on the Figuera Trail.

Crab-eating fox. Reasonably common at night in the Pantanal, especially near Jaguar Eco-Lodge.

Maned wolf. Easy to see at Santuario do Caraca in the church courtyard.

Ocelot. Regular on spotlights from Jaguar Eco-Lodge. We saw three or four.

Jaguar. Apparently regular on the banks of the Cuiaba River late in the afternoon. They were seen four out of six nights during our stay at Jaguar Eco-Lodge. Also regular along the road from Porto Jofre to about halfway between Jaguar and Araras Lodges. One was seen near Araras during our stay at Jaguar, however they are uncommon there. Also possible at Cristalino but you wouldn't want to be waiting to see one before you could have another drink.

Jaguarundi. One probable at Caratinga, hiding in undergrowth at night.

Neotropical river otter. One seen from the lodge at Cristalino. Apparently there is a site for them upstream of Cristalino but we didn't need to go there. Also regular on the Cuiaba River – others saw them but we did not.

Giant river otter. We didn't search for them as we had seen them before. Sites as per neotropical, above. They were seen at both these sites by others during our stay.

Striped hog-nosed skunk. One seen in the evening where it lives under the steps at the maned wolf feeding area at Caraca. It eats what the maned wolf does not.

South American coati. Common at Araras. One seen at Serra dos Orgaos NP.

Kinkajou. One, possibly two, seen on the same night in the grounds of Cristalino Lodge.

Crab-eating raccoon. Apparently seen nightly on the spotlight tour at Araras. We saw three or four.

Brazilian tapir. Two seen at Cristalino where they are reasonably common. Also seen twice on spotlights at Jaguar Lodge – although they may have been the same animal.

Marsh deer. Seen daily in small numbers in the Pantanal.

Red brocket deer. One seen at Cristalino, although other suspicious noises in the undergrowth may have been this animal. Seen daily in the Pantanal by night and during the day at Araras.

Bats, rats and other rodents..... well, read Jon Hall's trip report. We saw most of them but....