

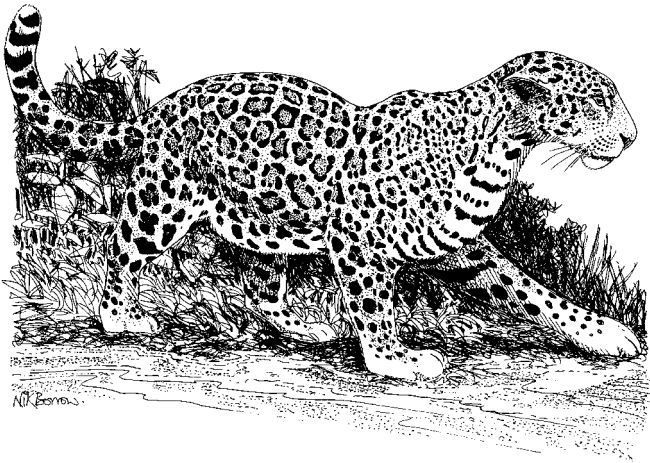
## JAGUARS & BIRDS OF BRAZIL

*Sunday 5th August – Saturday 18th August 2012 (14 days)*

*Leader: Derek Scott*

*Group Size Limit: 9*

*Tour Category: Easy for the most part, occasionally Moderate*



*Jaguar (Nik Borrow)*

Jaguar! Its evocative name conjures up images of an almost never seen, cold-eyed, powerful, spotted cat inhabiting large stretches of virgin and impenetrable rainforest. Birders visiting places like Chan Chich in Belize or Manu National Park in Peru are sometimes lucky enough to see this most appealing of Neotropical mammals, but to really have a good chance of observing this fabulous creature, it is necessary to spend plenty of time and to visit the very best places. The Brazilian Pantanal is now probably the finest area in the Americas to see this near-mythical cat and is recognized by wildlife enthusiasts and naturalists as the place where one can sometimes experience close encounters. Boat trips will offer us excellent opportunities and we have a good chance of being able to stare into the golden, telltale eyes of this fabled predator.

The Pantanal also holds a splendid selection of other mammals and we hope to encounter Brazilian Tapir,

Giant Otter, Crab-eating Fox and Marsh Deer here (and perhaps even Ocelot).

Designed as the perfect two-week sampling tour of the southern part of Brazil, but with an especial emphasis on seeing Jaguar, during our travels we will explore three different areas, the wonderful Pantanal, the Atlantic Forest zone at Intervalles State Park and the cerrado and campo habitats of Serra da Canastra.

Every birdwatcher has heard about the remarkable Pantanal, one of the largest wetlands in the Americas and a place that harbours one of the greatest wildlife concentrations in the New World. Called 'Terra de Ninguem' (No Man's Land) by the Brazilians, this vast alluvial plain, half the size of France, is situated at only about 330ft (100m) above sea level and is inhabited by just a few thousand people. In this immense and seasonally watery world, which has been the subject of some awe-inspiring wildlife films, the number of waterbirds defies the imagination. The

Pantanal is home to untold thousands of herons, egrets, storks, ibises, spoonbills and other waterbirds, but it should be borne in mind that they are spread over an immense landscape, with local concentrations here and there. We shall be visiting the area during the long dry season, when throngs of these piscivores compete with fierce-looking jacarés (caimans) for wriggling fish in the drying pools.

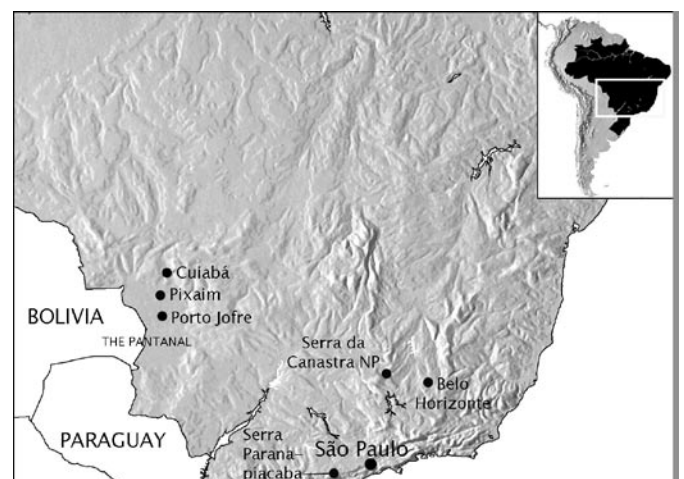
However, the bird that epitomizes the Pantanal more than any other is not a waterbird at all but the unique and gorgeous Hyacinth Macaw, the largest and easily the most impressive parrot in the world. Small numbers of this resplendent violet-blue marvel of the avian world live in the semi-deciduous woodlands and nut-rich palm groves of the Pantanal, and seeing a pair flap lazily across an azure sky will unquestionably be one of the highlights of our stay.

We will visit the northern fringes of this huge area along the famous Transpantaneira, a well-maintained dirt road with 118 sometimes precarious-looking bridges, that allows access to the many different habitats of the region. Bare-faced Curassow, Chestnut-bellied Guan, Sunbittern, Toco Toucan and Mato Grosso Antbird are amongst the many other avian prizes that await us here.

On this exciting journey

we will also visit one of the best remaining stretches of Atlantic Forest, as it is in the southeast corner of Brazil that the richest concentration of localized, rare and little-known birds survives. Through a succession of ice ages and inter-glacial periods, the largest concentration of endemic birds to be found on the continent (over 170 species) evolved in the southeastern region of this huge country and immediately adjacent areas, isolated from the mainstream of Amazonian evolution by the dry cerrado and caatinga of central Brazil. Attacked for centuries by its new human colonists, the coastal forests that once covered vast areas have now shrunk to small remnants of what once was. Less than five percent of the original Atlantic Forest remains, but in the fine Parque Estadual Intervalles we have good opportunities to observe a splendid selection of the region's specialities, including the impressive Long-trained Nightjar, the lovely White-bearded Antshrike, retiring Ferruginous, Rufous-necked, Dusky-tailed and Squamate Antbirds, the adorable Swallow-tailed Manakin, the noisy Grey-hooded Attila, and colourful Brassy-breasted and Gilt-edged Tanagers.

Our final port of call is the celebrated Serra da Canastra National Park, which contains some of the finest cerrado and campo remaining



quality mammal and bird observations.

Birdquest has operated tours to the Pantanal and other regions of Brazil since 1989.

### Itinerary

**Day 1** The tour begins this morning at São Paulo airport, from where we will take a flight to Cuiabá, the capital of the state of Mato Grosso. From here we will drive deep into the Pantanal for a five nights stay (spending the first and the last nights at Pixaim near Poconé and the other nights at Porto Jofre). As we drive through this splendid area we will not be able to resist stopping as we come across one exciting new creature after another.

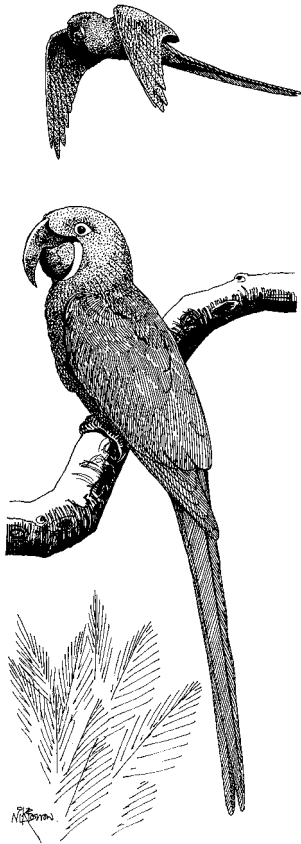
**Days 2-5** The Pantanal needs little introduction for it is undoubtedly one of the most famous wetlands in the Americas. This seasonally flooded grassland close to the Bolivian border is one of the largest marshes on the face of the globe and lies along the upper and middle course of the Paraná River. We will visit the northern fringe of this huge expanse of marsh, where numbers of waterfowl are impressive and where a varied avifauna definitely makes for a rich experience. The main attraction for the naturalist is the distinct possibility of meeting the most powerful cat in the New World, the mysterious and cagey Jaguar. Although this magnificent animal is still quite widespread in Central and South America, occurring from northern Mexico south to central Argentina, it is rarely seen almost everywhere. Jaguars are usually associated with large tracts of dense rain forest, but it is now known that they equally feel at home in more open habitat, with a very marked preference for the immediate vicinity of watercourses. The Pantanal probably holds the highest density of this enigmatic creature and is the world's foremost locale for viewing

and photographing Jaguars. The most reliable way of seeing this inscrutable cat is to take boat trips on the rivers, as they like to loaf at the edge of a river or on the sandbanks. As we patrol the waterways we will be keeping a constant lookout for this spotted beauty, which is regularly active by day here, in contrast to its more crepuscular and nocturnal habits elsewhere on the continent. The largest individuals of 'El Tigre', as it is commonly referred to in most of Latin America, live here in the southern Mato Grosso, where average adults usually weigh twice as much as their colleagues in Central America. We stand a good chance of encountering this golden-eyed, exquisite marvel on one or more of our outings and with a bit of luck, one will be cooperative enough to allow our cameras to click away furiously.

Although Jaguars dominate the scene in the Pantanal, they would not be there for a healthy population of prey animals. Capybaras, the world's largest rodents, are by far the favourite prey of the big cat and occur all over the Pantanal, leading a semi-aquatic life. Collared Peccaries also feature high on the Jaguar's menu and small, snorting groups are sometimes encountered. Other mammals that we have a fairly good chance of seeing include Crab-eating Fox, South American Coati, Black-striped Tufted Capuchin, Black Howler Monkey, the curious-looking Brazilian Tapir, and Marsh Deer. With luck we will come across a Jaguarundi or even the striking Ocelot. We should also see the awesome Giant Otter. Several family parties inhabit the narrower stretches of the rivers and sometimes inquisitive individuals come to inspect the boat and can then be admired at minimal range. One evening we will make an extended night drive, armed with a powerful spotlight, with the aim of trying to observe

one or two of the more difficult nocturnal mammals.

We will spend some of our time along the famous Transpantaneira, a dirt road with more than a hundred, often rather dilapidated bridges, that runs through a variety of habitats including pastures, palm groves, gallery woodland, scrubby growth, meandering rivers, ponds and extensive flooded marshes. One of the lodges we will be based at overlooks a silt-laden, tree-lined river, where caimans abound. The rough pasture behind the lodge holds dainty Long-tailed Ground-Doves and a roost of impressive Nacunda Nighthawks. After dusk, Common Pauras emit their distinctive voices whilst hawking over the plains. We will drive within metres of the gigantic nests of the huge and grotesque Jabiru, which seem to balance precariously on the crowns of the scattered trees. The weird haunting cries of Southern Screammers are a common early morning sound, as numerous herons, egrets and ibises fly in to throng the marshes. Pairs of reclusive Plumbeous Ibises feed in the shallows, away from the more boisterous species. Raptors are very well represented and may include Black, Turkey and Lesser Yellow-headed Vultures, Grey-headed and Snail Kites, Crane, Savanna, Black-collared, Roadside and Short-tailed Hawks, Southern Caracara (or Southern Crested-Caracara), Yellow-headed Caracara, American Kestrel and Laughing and Aplomado Falcons. Away from the water, birdlife abounds in the scattered patches of gallery forest and in the distinctive savanna habitat, called cerrado, which is so characteristic of this part of Brazil. These palm-rich forests are the stronghold of the world's largest parrot, the spectacular Hyacinth Macaw. We will watch these huge birds flapping lazily towards their roosting trees, their rich purplish-blue feathers



Hyacinth Macaws (Nik Borrow)

in central Brazil. It provides an aspect of rolling grasslands with scattered trees and patches of gallery forest quite unlike other parts of tropical South America and is more reminiscent of the plains of East Africa. Mammalian and avian delights include the amazing long-snouted Giant Anteater, the long-legged Maned Wolf, the huge and stately Greater Rhea and the bizarre little Cock-tailed Tyrant, but our main quarry here, the much dreamed-of Brazilian Merganser, inhabits the wild rivers that originate in these hills. Serra da Canastra is without doubt the very best place to find this extremely localized and highly-threatened species. Our visit to these three very different Brazilian wildlife paradises will definitely produce an amazing collection of high



*Sharpbill (Nik Borrow)*

glowing in the last rays of the setting sun. The world population of this fantastic creature, which surely epitomizes the wildness and uniqueness of the Pantanal, is now sadly reduced to just a few thousand birds, due to trapping for the cagebird trade. Here we should also find two splendid cracids: the rare Chestnut-bellied Guan and the gorgeous and not uncommon Bare-faced Curassow. That largest of toucans, the incomparable Toco Toucan, shows off its banana-shaped bill and glorious blue eyes here. Amongst the many other bird species we may well see during our visit are Undulated Tinamou, Neotropic Cormorant, Anhinga, Black-bellied Whistling-Duck, Muscovy Duck, Brazilian Teal, Whistling, Little Blue, Capped, Cocoli and Striated Herons, Snowy, Great and Western Cattle Egrets, Rufescent Tiger-Heron, Black-crowned Night-Heron, the bizarre Boat-billed Heron, Bare-faced, Green and Buff-necked Ibises, the unlikely-looking Roseate Spoonbill, Wood and Maguari Storks, Chaco Chachalaca, the smart Blue-throated Piping-Guan, Gray-necked Wood-Rail, Purple Gallinule, Limpkin,

the superb Sunbittern, Wattled Jacana, Collared Plover, Southern and Pied Lapwings, Solitary Sandpiper, Large-billed and Yellow-billed Terns, Black Skimmer, Picazuro Pigeon, Scaled and White-tipped Doves, Picui, Ruddy and Blue Ground-Doves, Yellow-collared (or Golden-collared) Macaw, Nanday (or Black-hooded), Monk and Peach-fronted Parakeets, Yellow-chevroned Parakeet (split from Canary-winged), Blue-fronted (or Turquoise-fronted) Parrot, Little and Striped Cuckoos, the punk-styled Guira Cuckoo, Smooth-billed Ani, Great Horned Owl, Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl, Band-tailed Nighthawk, Great Potoo, Buff-bellied Hermit, Glittering-throated Emerald, Blue-crowned Trogon, Ringed, Amazon, Green, Green-and-rufous and American Pygmy Kingfishers, Rufous-tailed Jacamar, White, Golden-green, Little and Pale-crested Woodpeckers, Straight-billed and Narrow-billed Woodcreepers, Red-billed Scythebill, Pale-legged Hornero, the ubiquitous Rufous Hornero, Chotoy, White-lored, Cinereous-breasted, Rusty-backed and Yellow-chinned Spinetails, Rufous-fronted (or Common)

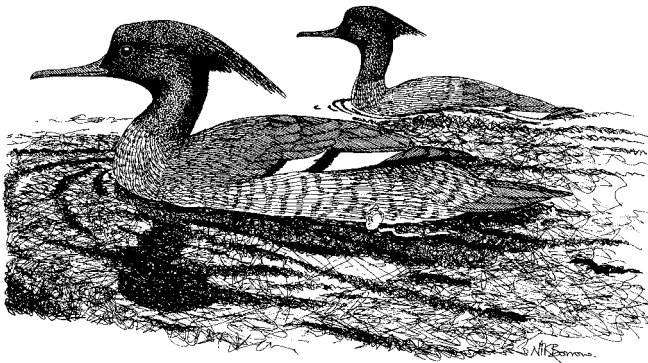
and Greater Thornbirds, the jay-like Rufous (or Grey-crested) Cacholote, Barred Antshrike, Rusty-backed Antwren, Mato Grosso Antbird, the superb Helmeted Manakin, Common and Rusty-fronted Tody-Flycatchers, Tawny-crowned Pygmy-Tyrant, Stripe-necked and Pearly-vented Tody-Tyrants, Fuscous, Vermilion, Fork-tailed, Boat-billed and Social Flycatchers, White-rumped Monjita, Black-backed Water-Tyrant, White-headed Marsh-Tyrant, Cattle Tyrant, Green-backed Becard, Tropical Kingbird, Lesser and Greater Kiskadees, Purplish Jay, Ashy-headed Greenlet, Creamy-bellied Thrush, Chalk-browed Mockingbird, Black-capped Donacobius, Thrush-like, Buff-breasted, Fawn-breasted and Moustached Wrens, Masked Gnatcatcher, White-winged and Southern Rough-winged Swallows, Grey-breasted and Brown-chested Martins, Yellowish Pipit, Chestnut-vented Conebill, Sayaca, Palm and Grey-headed Tanagers, Red-crested and Yellow-billed Cardinals, Saffron and Red-crested Finches, Blue-black Grassquit, Rusty-collared and White-bellied Seedeaters, Greyish Saltator, Yellow-rumped Cacique, Crested Oropendola, the attractive Orange-backed Troupial, Unicoloured, White-browed and Chopi Blackbirds, the exquisite Scarlet-headed Blackbird and Bay-winged, Shiny and Giant Cowbirds.

**Day 6** This morning we leave the Pantanal behind and return to Cuiabá, from where we will take a flight to São Paulo. After our arrival in this huge metropolis with its 20 million souls we will drive west into the Serra Paranapiacaba for a three nights stay.

**Days 7-8** Large parts of the Serra de Paranapiacaba and of the Serra do Mar in western São Paulo state are still cloaked in pristine Atlantic rainforest and

form the Mata Atlantica Biosphere Reserve, which was declared an International Biosphere Reserve in 1991 and a World Heritage Site in 1999. We shall be spending our time in Parque Estadual Intervales, a 121,000-acre (49,000-hectare) state park that is part of a complex of four adjacent reserves that protect a total area of around 460 square miles (1200 square kilometres) at altitudes varying between 60-3600ft (20-1100m). Parts of the park consist of undulating limestone hills where deep caves add to the attraction. Sparkling streams tumble through these virtually untouched forests where excellent patches of bamboo are another major draw for visiting birders. A splendid set of wide and well-laid-out trails allows easy access to the forest, while nearby are lakes, areas of dense and impenetrable secondary growth, and even some more open terrain. The Atlantic Forest boasts such an unusually rich avifauna that even experienced birdwatchers tend to be confused by the many different sounds coming from the canopy, understorey and forest floor. Rainforest, more so than any other habitat, provides birders with their greatest challenge, but with patience and perseverance it can prove to be the most exciting and rewarding habitat of all, whether we are tracking down the plaintive whistles of tinamous, checking fruiting trees for cotingas, tanagers, parrots and toucans, or listening for the distant churring of an antbird flock following a swarm of army ants.

As the light level increases in the forest the loud, repetitive song of the Grey-hooded Attila can regularly be heard, as can the far-carrying 'cracked-bell' notes of the splendid Bare-throated Bellbird (indeed the latter's Brazilian name translates as 'broken bell').



*Brazilian Mergansers (Nik Borrows)*

We will be trying to lure the amazing Giant Antshrike and striking Large-tailed Antshrikes into view in the forest edge undergrowth, and we will check out fruiting trees for colourful flocks of Rufous-headed, Ruby-crowned, Black-goggled, Azure-shouldered, Golden-chevroned, Diademed, Brassy-breasted, Gilt-edged and Fawn-breasted Tanagers. The strange stout-billed White-bearded Antshrike, the sole member of its genus, favours dense patches of tall bamboo and can usually be persuaded to show itself, as can the Ferruginous, Rufous-necked, Dusky-tailed and Squamate Antbirds. Nightbirding is exciting here as delicate Long-trained Nightjars show off their very unusual silhouette at dusk as they hawk insects from the tracks, and later the rare Rusty-barred Owl may lure us into the forest with its hoarse grunts.

Other species we may well see here include Brown Tinamou, Rufous-thighed Hawk, Dusky-legged Guan, Slaty-breasted Wood-Rail, Pale-vented and Plumbeous Pigeons, Grey-fronted Dove, Ruddy Quail-Dove, Maroon-bellied (or Reddish-bellied) Parakeet, Red-capped and Scaly-headed Parrots, Tropical

Screech-Owl, Common (or Grey) Potoo, White-collared Swift, Scale-throated Hermit, Violet-capped Woodnymph, Black-throated Mango, Black-throated and Surucua Trogons, the splendid Rufous-capped Motmot, the superb Red-breasted Toucan, Ochre-collared Piculet, Yellow-fronted, White-spotted, Green-barred and Lineated Woodpeckers, Campo Flicker, Plain-winged, Olivaceous, White-throated, Scalloped (split from Scaled) and Lesser Woodcreepers, Black-billed Scythebill, Rufous-capped and Grey-bellied Spinetails, the localized Red-eyed Thornbird, White-browed, Buff-fronted, Black-capped and White-eyed Foliage-gleaners, the retiring Rufous-breasted Leaf-tosser, the truly amazing Giant Antshrike, Large-tailed and Variable Antshrikes, Plain Antvireo, Such's Antthrush, Rufous Gnatcatcher, the handsome Hooded Berryeater, the unique Sharpbill, the gorgeous Red-ruffed Fruitcrow, Black-crowned Tityra, the adorable Swallow-tailed Manakin, Serra do Mar Tyrant-Manakin, Ochre-faced Tody-Flycatcher, Planalto and Yellow Tyrannulets, Yellow-bellied, Olivaceous and Highland Elaenias, Mottled-cheeked and Bay-ringed Tyrannulets, the diminutive

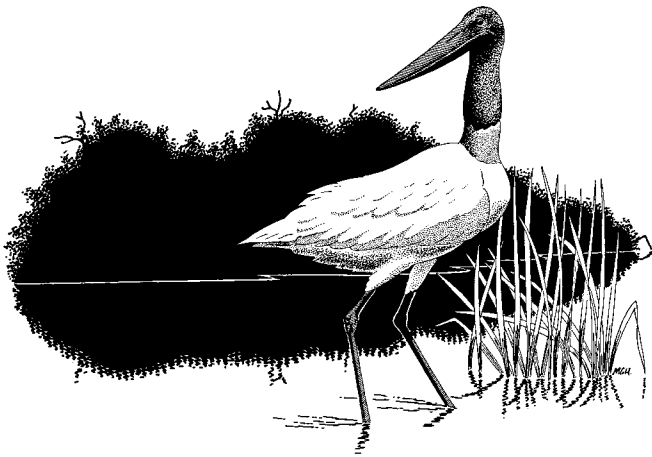
Eared Pygmy-Tyrant, Large-headed Flatbill, White-throated Spadebill, Cliff (or Swallow) Flycatcher, Shear-tailed Grey Tyrant, the noisy Three-striped Flycatcher, Greenish Schiffornis, Chestnut-crowned Becard, Yellow-legged Thrush, Golden-crowned Warbler, Red-crowned Ant-Tanager and Black-throated Grosbeak. With a bit of luck we will come across several of the more uncommon birds of the area (or species which are silent and unobtrusive at this season), which include Mantled Hawk, Black-fronted Piping-Guan, Pavonine Cuckoo, Buff-bellied Puffbird, Unicoloured Antwren, Short-tailed Antthrush, the secretive Variegated Antpitta, Eye-ringed and Hangnest Tody-Tyrants, Riverbank (or Neotropical River) Warbler, Olive-green Tanager, Uniform Finch and Buffy-fronted and Temminck's Seedeaters (the last three are bamboo-dependent species that occur when the local bamboos are in flower). Mammals are not very obvious at Intervalles, but we do have a fair chance of encountering the largest New World monkey, the Southern Muriqui or Southern Woolly Spider Monkey.

**Day 9** After some final birding in the Serra Paranapiacaba we will head northeastwards for an overnight stay at an historic ranch at the small town of Mococa.

**Day 10** This morning we will continue our journey to the remote Serra da Canastra in Minas Gerais state for a four nights stay. In the afternoon we will begin our exploration of this fine area.

**Days 11-13** Serra da Canastra National Park covers an area of about 177,000 acres (71,500 hectares) in the southwest of Minas Gerais. It harbours the headwaters of the Rio São Francisco, the longest river lying totally within Brazil, which flows

northward for over 1550 miles (2500km) before entering the Atlantic just south of Recife. The imposing Canastra range overlooks the surrounding countryside and sheer cliffs border the upper parts of the park, where several spectacular waterfalls can be admired. Different kinds of bushy and grassy savanna, known as cerrado and campo, cover most of the undulating terrain and these endless, largely treeless expanses are dotted with innumerable termite mounds. Here, imposing Greater Rheas and bizarre Giant Anteaters roam. The latter are quite common and one can usually get very close to these peculiar-looking, wacky creatures, with their long snouts and large bushy tails. A healthy population of the bizarre Maned Wolf lives in the park and with a modicum of luck we should be able to observe this unique carnivore. It is the largest canid in South America and with its long, thick, buff-red pelage and amazingly long legs it offers a remarkable sight. Males of the remarkable Cock-tailed Tyrant perch near the top of tall swaying grass stems and proclaim their territorial rights by regularly launching themselves into the air with fluttery wing beats, holding their uniquely-shaped tails cocked over their backs. Rocky rivers flow in the valley bottoms and these are the exclusive habitat of the exceedingly rare Brazilian Merganser. With its tiny world population (of around 250 individuals) and mysterious appeal, this enigmatic sawbill is one of the most highly prized Neotropical avian treasures. Persistent scanning of the many wild rivers of the Serra da Canastra will be our priority and should eventually yield views of this enigmatic waterbird. Sharp-tailed Streamcreepers inhabit the quieter streams and are sometimes more obvious here than in most of their wide range. In some areas, patches of shrub and bushes



*Jabiru (Michael Hodgson)*

prevail and here we will try to locate the secretive Brasilia Tapaculo. This distinctive and very localized endemic was first described as a subspecies of the more widespread White-breasted Tapaculo, but its different voice resulted in new studies that led to a change of status. Lush gallery forest lines the wider stretches of the rivers and holds an avifauna with distinctly Atlantic Forest affinities.

Amongst the many additional

species we may well encounter in this splendid national park are Spotted Nothura, Red-winged Tinamou, White-faced Whistling-Duck, White-tailed Kite, Black-chested Buzzard-Eagle, White-tailed Hawk, Eared Dove, Golden-capped and White-eyed Parakeets, Blue-winged Parrotlet, Squirrel Cuckoo, Planalto Hermit, the huge Swallow-tailed Hummingbird, Glittering-bellied Emerald, White-vented Violetear, the rare Stripe-breasted

Starthroat (which often visits the feeders at our hotel), Amethyst Woodstar, White-barred Piculet, Blond-crested Woodpecker, Planalto Woodcreeper, the unusual and rarely-observed Campo Miner, Spix's, Sooty-fronted and Pale-breasted Spinetails, Firewood-gatherer, Streaked Xenops, Rufous-winged Antshrike, White-shouldered Fire-eye, the adorable Collared Crescentchest, Plain-crested Elaenia, Sooty, White-crested and Southern Beardless Tyrannulets, Grey-hooded, Sepia-capped, Bran-coloured and Euler's Flycatchers, Grey-headed (or Yellow-lored) Tody-Flycatcher, Grey Monjita, Masked Water-Tyrant, the marvellous Streamer-tailed Tyrant, Yellow-browed Tyrant, the dainty Sharp-tailed Tyrant, Rufous Casiornis, Crested and Velvety Black-Tyrants, White-winged Becard, Tawny-headed, White-rumped and Blue-and-white Swallows, Curl-crested Jay, Sedge (or Grass) Wren, the rare Ochre-breasted Pipit, Yellow-rumped Marshbird, White-bellied Warbler, Cinnamon and Burnished-buff, Tanagers, Lowland Hepatic-Tanager, Rufous-collared Sparrow, Grassland Sparrow, Great

Pampa-Finch, the striking Blue Finch, Grassland Yellow-Finch, Wedge-tailed Grass-Finch, Yellow-bellied, Double-collared and Capped Seedeaters, Pileated-Finch, Black-masked Finch, Green-winged and Black-throated Saltators, and Hooded Siskin.

**Day 14** There we will be a chance for some early morning birding at Serra da Canastra before we head back to São Paulo airport where the tour ends in the early evening.

**Accommodation & Road**

**Transport:** The hotels are of normal Birdquest standard throughout. Road transport is by minibus and roads are mostly good.

**Walking:** The walking effort is mostly easy, but there are some moderate walks.

**Climate:** Generally warm or hot, dry and sunny at lower altitudes, but cool (even quite cold in the early morning) in upland areas. Overcast weather is quite regular and there may well be some rain. It will be rather humid in places.

**Bird/Mammal Photography:** Opportunities are quite good.