



## THE PANTANAL

The Brazilian Pantanal is undoubtedly South America's greatest destination for wildlife watching and nature photography. Shared with Bolivia and Paraguay but mostly located in the Brazilian states of Mato Grosso and Mato Grosso do Sul, the Pantanal is the world's largest freshwater wetland ecosystem. Unlike the vast rainforests of the tropics, the Pantanal is a mostly open environment where wildlife is visible and abundant. Many wading birds such as herons, storks, and ibises take advantage of seasonally available resources as the flood waters recede each year during the dry season, and the variety and concentrations of birds and mammals here is unrivalled in South America. Evocative tropical birds such as Hyacinth Macaw, Toco Toucan, Jabiru, Greater Rhea, Red-legged Seriema, Agami Heron, Sunbittern and Sungrebe are all expected on this tour.

Add to that a very real chance to see Jaguar, South America's top predator and a truly magnificent big cat, and you have the elements of memorable natural history experience. We visit the best birding lodges along the Transpantaneira, the dead-end dirt road which runs through 150 kilometres of this amazing area. The birding here is both easy and extremely productive, and we should record more than 100 species of birds on several days during this tour. We will be up early every morning and will offer optional night drives on several evenings. There will be several exciting boat rides, including during two full days dedicated to the best areas for Jaguars and Giant Otters. We have excellent chances to see and photograph both of these impressive predators.

On most days we will take a break after lunch during the hottest part of the day, and participants can take a siesta, process photos, or explore the grounds of our lodges, all of which are very birdy places. Of course, if you prefer to keep on birding, there's nothing we'd rather do. This is your trip, and nothing is too much to ask to make it a truly memorable experience in South America's showcase environment.

## ITINERARY

### **Day 1: Arrival in Cuiabá.**

Arrival in Cuiabá (IATA: CGB), capital of Mato Grosso state in central-west Brazil. Overnight at a comfortable city hotel.

*Night in Cuiabá.*

### **Day 2: Travel to the Pantanal.**

After an early breakfast we depart for the Pantanal (110 kilometres, 1.5 hours travel time). Once we reach the famous Pantanal highway, the *Transpantaneira*, the fun begins as we drive slowly toward our first lodge. As we bump along the dusty road, we'll begin to notice egrets, herons, and raptors alongside the road attending water-filled ditches and drying-out watering holes. Our lodge, Pousada Piuval, is certainly one of the finest birding lodges anywhere in the Pantanal, and it makes for a perfect first stop along the *Transpantaneira*. After lunch and getting settled into the rooms, we'll get right to the birding, exploring the marshes, forest patches, and intervening drier open areas on the expansive lodge property. Piuval is home to several pairs of the endangered Hyacinth Macaw, and getting great views of this emblematic species will be our number one priority this afternoon.

*Overnight at Pousada Piuval.*

### **Day 3: Grasslands and gallery forests of northern Transpantaneira.**

Pousada Piuval hosts a variety of habitats on its vast property, and there will be plenty to keep us busy during our two nights at this location. The open dry areas along the lodge entrance road tend to be good for Guira Cuckoo, White-rumped Monjita, White Woodpecker and Blue-crowned Parakeet. Areas of gallery forest and dry forest host a number of species we may not find elsewhere during the trip, and we will be on the lookout for White-eyed Attila, Amazonian Motmot, Mato Grosso Antbird, White-lored Spinetail, and Saffron-billed Sparrow in the morning. Rarer but also possible here are Black-bellied Antwren and Chaco Puffbird. Piuval is a particularly good area for several species of cracids, and we hope to find Bare-faced Curassow and Chestnut-bellied Guan. Open areas between natural forest patches are good for Red-legged Seriema, which only occurs in drier parts of the Pantanal, along with the elegant Whistling Heron, Greater Rhea, and Nacunda Nighthawk. The forests themselves could yield Red-billed Scythebill or its massive cousin, the Great Rufous Woodcreeper. In the afternoon we can take a boat trip on the Baía Piuval, a wide shallow lake with vast rafts of floating vegetation where we'll search for Least Bittern, Purple Gallinule, and Yellow-breasted Crake. After dinner there will be an optional night safari to search for night birds and mammals, including perhaps the enigmatic Giant Anteater.

*Overnight at Pousada Piuval.*

### **Day 4: Transpantaneira to Pixaim river.**

We have more time to bird the dry forests at Piuval this morning before we pack up and make the mid-morning drive south along the Transpantaneira to our next stop, the Pixaim river, located about 55 kilometres south of Piuval. We should arrive in time for lunch. In the afternoon we may go for a walk on an excellent trail into gallery forest, or perhaps we will take a lazy boat ride on the Pixaim river, one of the Pantanal's best rivers for bird photography.

*Overnight at Hotel Mato Grosso or Southwild Pantanal.*

**Day 5: Pixaim area.**

We have a full day to bird the rich Pixaim area, with its excellent gallery forests and open, scrubby savannas flanking the lovely river. A walk on the gallery forest trails will target Helmeted Manakin, Undulated Tinamou, Flavescent Warbler, Stripe-necked Tody-Tyrant and more. In the drier, scrubby areas away from the river we can search for White-naped Xenopsaris, Green-backed Becard, Chotoy Spinetail and Golden-collared Macaw. The river trips here are always a highlight, and we will spend either a morning or an afternoon on the river, where we may be fortunate enough to track down the shy and reclusive Agami Heron. The area is also good for mammals, with real chances for Giant Otter, Marsh Deer, and possibly even Jaguar!

*Overnight at Hotel Mato Grosso or Southwild Pantanal.*

**Day 6: Transpantaneira south to Porto Jofre.**

We spend the morning driving from the Pixaim river to the end of the *Transpantaneira*. We will have time to make a number of stops for birds and mammals along the way. We shall give special attention to the Campos do Jofre area, a wide expanse of open, flooded savannas where dozens of Southern Screamers, hundreds of Capybara, and thousands of Yacare Caiman are easily found. Careful searching of this area might reveal Maguari Stork, the rare Caiman Lizard, or if we are fortunate, a Yellow Anaconda. We should arrive to our hotel at Porto Jofre at the terminus of the *Transpantaneira* in time for a late lunch. After check-in at the hotel, we head out for our first boat trip in search of the Pantanal's top predator, the Jaguar.

*Night at Porto Jofre or aboard a comfortable floating hotel.*

**Days 7 & 8: Jaguars!**

We have two full days to dedicate to our search for the largest cat in the Americas, the powerful Jaguar. This elusive apex predator is nearly impossible to find across much of its range, but the area surrounding the Encontro das Aguas State Park, centered along the lower reaches of the Three Brothers river in the northern Pantanal has become famous over the past fifteen years as the most reliable place in the world to see Jaguars. While these solitary predators are secretive and elusive, we have excellent chances to observe and photograph them during our two full days on the Cuiabá, Piquiri and Three Brothers rivers. Each day will consist of a full morning and an afternoon river safari using comfortable motorized launches with powerful 4-stroke engines that allow us to reach all the best locations quickly and quietly. We'll be looking for Jaguars as they rest in the shade, drink at the water's edge, or stalk the river banks in search of their favoured prey – Capybaras and caiman. Additionally, we expect to encounter multiple family groups of Giant Otters, and many birds including all five South American kingfishers, Black Skimmers, Yellow-billed and Large-billed Terns, Pied Lapwings, Blue-throated Piping-Guan, Jabiru, Roseate Spoonbill, Black-collared Hawk, Blue-crowned Trogon, Little Cuckoo, Cinereous-breasted and Rusty-backed Spinetails, Orange-backed Troupial and much more.

*Nights at Porto Jofre or aboard a comfortable floating hotel.*

**Day 9: Birding north on Transpantaneira.**

Bird our way north along the Transpantaneira, spending the best part of the morning in the Campos do Jofre area, a vast flooded wetland full of screamers, jacanas, caiman, and storks. Arrive in the afternoon to our lodge (one of Pousada Rio Claro, Pouso Alegre, Aymara Lodge, or Pousada Piuval -- depending on flight schedules on Day 9).

**Day 10: Return to Cuiabá in time to catch outbound flights.**