



EASTERN BRAZIL: BAHIA & ESPIRITO SANTO

30 September – 11 October 2023



Banded Cotinga

photo © Greg Jackson

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Introduction:

This tour of Eastern Brazil was the 4th private trip we've done with Greb and Debi, and as usual it ranked as one of my favourite trips of the year. The trip followed the same general guidelines as our previous three Brazil tours together – under two weeks in length, and crafted to combine comfortable accommodations, good food, a real diversity of habitats, and of course, terrific birding. Greg had two major targets he wanted to track down on

this trip, both Critically Endangered, endemic, and spectacular: the Banded Cotinga and the Cherry-throated Tanager. We worked on the route for awhile before finally settling on a trip covering Boa Nova, Itacaré, Camacan, and Porto Seguro in Bahia, then finishing with Linhares and Pedra Azul in Espírito Santo. In all, we recorded 347 bird species during the trip's 11 days, a decent number considering we had one day that was a dedicated travel day, and we also took a couple of afternoons off to enjoy the surroundings at the nicer lodges we visited during the trip. Not only did we manage to see both of the big targets in dramatic fashion, but we also made a clean sweep of Greg's list of Top 10 targets. We did so while also enjoying really lovely stays at Txai in Itacaré and Natureza Eco Lodge at Pedra Azul, having some memorable meals in Porto Seguro (and really tasty food everywhere), and also adding to Greg and Debi's collection of fine Brazilian *cachaça*.

Itinerary:

30 September – Arrival in Vitória da Conquista. Drive to Boa Nova.

Night at Pousada do Sande in Boa Nova.

1 October – Morning birding caatinga west of Boa Nova (Mata da Goiabeira) and humid forest south-east of Boa Nova (Mata do Charme). Afternoon birding *mata-de-cipó* and rocky outcrop habitats north of Boa Nova.

Night at Pousada do Sande in Boa Nova.

2 October – Morning at Mata do Charme. Afternoon drive to Itacaré on the coast, including a stop for Pink-legged Graveteiro in *cabruca* habitat (thinned Atlantic rainforest with cocoa planted in the understorey).

Night at Txai Resort in Itacaré.

3 October – Morning at Serra do Conduru State Park. Afternoon spent relaxing at our resort.

Night at Txai Resort in Itacaré.

4 October – Morning birding *restinga* forest at Txai. Afternoon drive to Camacan. Late afternoon visit to Fazenda Paris in the lowlands around Camacan.

Night at Pousada da Família in Camacan.

5 October – Morning birding at Fazenda Paris. Afternoon drive to Porto Seguro.

Night at Shalimar Praia Hotel in Porto Seguro.

6 October – Morning at Estação Veracel outside Porto Seguro. Mid-afternoon visit to mangroves in Porto Seguro. We took the rest of the afternoon off and visited the Passarela de Descobrimento in the evening for shopping and dinner.

Night at Shalimar Praia Hotel in Porto Seguro.

7 October – Travel from Porto Seguro to Linhares in Espírito Santo state.

Night at BHS Hotel in Linhares.

8 October – Full day spent birding in Vale Linhares reserve.

Night at BHS Hotel in Linhares.

9 October – Birding at the Augusto Ruschi Biological Reserve in Santa Tereza en route to Vargem Alta.

Night at Natureza Eco Lodge in Vargem Alta.

10 October – A full day birding in the Kaetés Reserve (Instituto Marcos Daniel) for Cherry-throated Tanager.

Night at Natureza Eco Lodge in Vargem Alta.

11 October – Birding at Reserva Águia Branca and near Vargem Alta in the morning. Free afternoon for packing and relaxing.

Night at Natureza Eco Lodge in Vargem Alta.

12 October – Morning transfer to Vitória to catch flights to São Paulo.

Tour Summary:

By starting our trip in Boa Nova, we were kicking the tour off in one of eastern Brazil's most diverse locations. The small town of Boa Nova sits in a contact zone between remnant areas of humid montane Atlantic Forests of the Serra da Ouricana to the east, extensive arid Caatinga scrub and woodland to the north and west, and in smaller enclaves within the dry Caatinga, patches of taller dry forest known as *mata-de-cipó* (vine forest), and notably, granite outcroppings on hilltops that are covered with a fascinating flora, dominated by cacti, terrestrial bromeliads, and orchids. We had just one full day and another morning at Boa Nova, but we made the best of it taking advantage of overcast weather on our first day that allowed us to bird almost without pause for most of the day. We started out on the outskirts of Boa Nova National Park, birding in dry farmland where we found a nice selection of Caatinga birds and Northeast Brazilian endemics including **Cactus Parakeet**, **Red-cowled Cardinal**, **Caatinga Cacholote** and **Pale Baywing** along with more widespread farmland birds such as **Picui Ground-Dove**, **Cobalt-rumped Parrotlet**, **White Monjita**, **Chalk-browed Mockingbird**, and **White-headed Marsh-Tyrant**. Along a quiet road through dense Caatinga scrub in the National Park we found more specialties starting with **Caatinga Antwren**, **Silvery-cheeked Antshrike**, **Black-bellied Antwren**, **Gray-eyed Greenlet**, and **Fulvous-crowned Scrub-Tyrant**. Soon enough one of Boa Nova's star birds fell into place when we called in a responsive male **Slender Antbird** that hopped around on the ground amidst a patch of terrestrial bromeliads near the roadside. This large, long-tailed antbird has a very restricted range in southern Bahia and the tiniest corner of northeastern Minas Gerais, where it is found in dry forest with understorey dominated by terrestrial bromeliads, mostly *Aechmea* and *Ananas* spp. We had lovely views of this great antbird as it bounced around in front of us, pounding its tail downward and intermittently throwing its head back to sing – fantastic. Walking gently downhill, we stopped to look at a pair of **Spot-backed (Caatinga) Puffbirds**, and shortly thereafter we heard the staccato calls of one of the best birds of the entire Caatinga biome. We were in luck, too, because after just one short blast of tape, an agitated **Great Xenops** rocketed in to the roadside, perching low down in full view while Greg rattled off a series of photos. What an absolute beast of a bird, and one that is always a highlight whenever we see it.

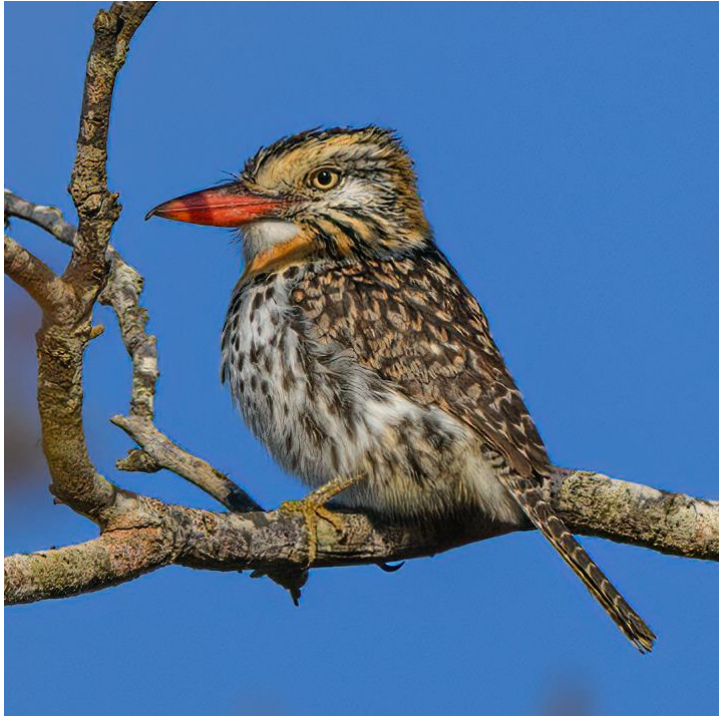
We picked up and moved on to a different spot, and birded the viny edges of the low Caatinga woodland adjacent to a small homestead. Here we added **Gray-headed Spinetail**, **Green-barred Woodpecker**, **White-throated Seedeater**, **White-naped Xenopsaris**, **Pileated Finch** and **Sooty-fronted Spinetail**, while unfortunately I was the only one to see a Broad-tipped Hermit that zipped in to check us out on two occasions. Heading back to the main road, we stopped for better views of **Caatinga Cacholote**. It was mid-morning and still mostly overcast, but things were heating up nicely so we headed on to the famed “Boa Nova wet forest”, or the Mata do Charme as it is known locally.

We spent the balance of the morning birding along a quiet track through the Mata do Charme in humid Atlantic rainforest on the east-facing slopes of the Serra da Ouricana mountain range. The forest here is always remarkably birdy, and even though it was nearly 10 am when we arrived, there was plenty of activity during the two and half hours we birded here. Antbirds were in attendance alongside the track, and we saw a male **Tufted Antshrike**, **Spot-breasted Antwren**, **White-shouldered Fire-eye**, **Streak-capped Antwren** and a showy **Scaled Antbird** in the understorey. The vine-festooned forest at the spot I affectionately refer to as “Softtail Corner” had the usual **Striated Softtail**, a global rarity that is typically easy to find here. Other ovenbirds in the mix included a responsive **White-collared Foliage-gleaner**, a nattering **White-eyed Foliage-gleaner**, **Buff-fronted Foliage-gleaner** with a mixed flock, **Pallid Spinetail** and a couple of skulking **Bahia Spinetails**.

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Slender Antbird



Spot-backed (Caatinga) Puffbird



Great Xenops

photos © Greg Jackson

After a little while a spritely pair of **Fork-tailed Pygmy-Tyrants** chattered back at us in reply to tape, and we had nice views of them as they flitted amongst the curtains of vine. There were a few *Inga* trees with flowers in the canopy that were attracting **Black Jacobin** and **Violet-capped Woodnymph**. In the understory we added a **Reddish Hermit**. A big mixed flock in the canopy had a few of the aforementioned species along with **Rufous-headed Tanager**, **Green Honeycreeper**, **Yellow-throated Woodpecker**, **Yellow-olive Flatbill**, **Gray-headed Tody-Flycatcher**, a surprising **Bahia Tyrannulet** at an unusually low elevation, **Blue Dacnis**, **Rufous-browed Peppershrike**, and in the middle and lower stories, **Grayish Mourner** and **Golden-crowned Warbler**.

In the afternoon we had planned to visit a reserve near the town of Boa Nova, but unfortunately we found the gate was locked and nobody was around even though we had made arrangements. No problem, there are plenty of great birding spots around Boa Nova! A **White-bellied Nothura** ambling alongside the road was a nice little surprise, and we drove a short distance to an area of vine forest, seeing **White Monjita**, **Campo Flicker** and **White-faced Whistling-Ducks** in the bone-dry agricultural areas along the way. The forest was very quiet, but after some searching we finally succeeded in finding the hoped-for **Narrow-billed Antwren**, an odd endemic with a restricted range in dry forests in southern Bahia and northern Minas Gerais states. We also saw a couple of **Tropical Gnatcatchers** and heard another Slender Antbird.

We then headed a bit further out of town, stopping at a couple of spots as we drove through dry *caatinga* scrub to check out a small flock of **Golden-capped Parakeets** that flew overhead, pick up our first **Bahia Wagtail-Tyrant**, and a nice **Stripe-backed Antbird** that played hard to get for a while before finally showing pretty well. Our destination was a *lajedo*, a rocky hilltop area dominated by cacti, particularly *Melocactus*, and a diversity of terrestrial bromeliads. The views up here were stunning, and we had to tear ourselves away from the vista in order to track down the specialties we were looking for. Hummingbirds were in attendance, with **Ruby-topaz Hummingbird**, both **Glittering-bellied** and **Sapphire-spangled Emeralds**, and a few impressive **Swallow-tailed Hummingbirds**. A **Black-chested Buzzard-Eagle** soared overhead. After a bit of careful searching, I eventually found what we were looking for, a dapper pair of remarkably well camouflaged **Pygmy Nightjars** roosting in the open on the ground, looking exactly like the rocky surface they sat upon. This was one of Greg's top 10 targets for the trip, so definitely a major find! Thrilled with that success, we allowed ourselves to now enjoy the sunset and the shadows lengthening over the valleys below us, reflecting on the amazing places that birds and birding take us that we might not otherwise visit were it not for this wonderful pasttime.

The next morning we returned to the Mata do Charme, this time arriving more or less at the same time as another tour group of birders. Since we had already done well on a range of targets the previous morning, we let the others walk ahead of us and birded a bit near the beginning of the road to kick things off, seeing quite a few **Cactus Parakeets** and enjoying scope views of another flock of **Golden-capped Parakeets**. We also added **Wing-banded Hornero** and **Yellow-headed Caracara** before entering the forest proper. Other additions this morning included **Black-eared Fairy**, **Frilled Coquette** and **Black-throated Mango** attending flowering *Inga* trees, with **Versicolored** and **Glittering-throated Emeralds** and **White-chinned Sapphire** adding to the diversity of hummingbirds. A responsive **Black-billed Scythebill** might have the star of the morning's birding, but male **Swallow-tailed Manakin**, a **Green-backed Becard**, **Black-throated** and **Yellow-green Grosbeaks**, and more than 25 **Gilt-edged Tanagers** were all nice additions. Back by the car we found **Chestnut-backed Antshrike** and **Black-capped Donacobius**.

We left Boa Nova and headed east down through the cocoa-growing region of southern Bahia, heading in the direction of the coast. A short distance outside of Boa Nova we had a brief but close-range view of a **Jaguarundi** that thought about crossing the road but opted in favour of safety. Most of the afternoon was spent driving, but a random roadside stop in the heat of the day produced a pair of **Spotted Piculets**, **Blue-winged Macaw**, **Pale-legged Hornero**, **Ochre-ored Flatbill**, **Red-cowled Cardinal**, a soaring **Hook-billed Kite** and a handful of other species. A scheduled stop later on produced the **Pink-legged Graveteiro**, a unique canopy-

dwelling furnariid that is found almost exclusively in *cabruca* habitat (old cocoa plantations planted in tall forest that has been thinned) in southern Bahia state. We spent the last part of the afternoon driving to Itacaré, arriving to our accommodations at the upscale Txai Resort just before dusk. Duly impressed with the installations at Txai, we settled into our cabins before enjoying a delicious dinner. Over dinner we discussed the plan for the following morning: Debi opted out of the birding in favour of a later breakfast and a morning spent enjoying the paradisiacal setting at Txai, while Greg and I would spend the morning at the nearby Serra do Conduru State Park.



Pink-legged Graveteiro

Greg and I loaded our packed breakfasts into the car and headed south from Txai, turning inland at the village of Serra Grande and taking a bumpy dirt road to the Serra do Conduru State Park. After checking in with the park staff, we had a look around the headquarters area, hoping to find a fruiting tree that might attract White-winged Cotingas. We didn't have much luck on that front, seeing just a **Black-necked Aracari** in the only fruiting tree we could find. A flowering *Calliandra* bush beside the park office was attracting a nice selection of hummingbird, including a couple of **Black Jacobins**, **Violet-capped Woodnymph**, **Swallow-tailed Hummingbird**, **Sombre Hummingbird**, and **Versicolored Emerald**. No sign of the Racket-tipped Thorntail that one of our custom tours had seen here earlier in the year, though. We headed for the forest, taking a level trail into young second-growth forest. The trail eventually reaches taller, more mature forest, but we spent our time along the first kilometre or so where we found most of the birds we were looking for. Things started out well with a **Kinglet Manakin** that put in a brief appearance; we found the bird again later on for much more satisfying, prolonged views. A mixed flock had **Cinereous Antshrike**, **Plain Xenops**, **White-flanked Antwrens**, **Olivaceous Woodcreeper**, **Buff-throated Woodcreeper**, and best of the bunch, a pair of **Band-tailed Antwrens**, a range-restricted endemic. A **Scaled Antbird** was in the undergrowth nearby, and a

Sooretama Slaty-Antshrike showed himself higher up in some vine tangles above the trail. Another smaller flock had a few larger birds in it, including **Grayish Mourner** and a female **Green-backed Trogon**, while a **Golden-spangled Piculet** seemed to be doing its own thing aloof from the others. Before long we heard the high-pitched calls of another big target here, the **Great-billed (Margaretta's) Hermit** at its lek. Greg and I eased our way into the forest to get a bit closer to the birds, and with the use of my handy phone-mounted thermal camera we were able to quickly spot a male on a song post and get him in the scope without having to get too close and potentially disturb him. There were a couple of males around, and we were able to watch them as they zipped between favoured perches, stopping to sing loudly (or as loudly as a hermit can) while continually pumping their long tails. Pleased with that, we returned to the trail and birded until we reached a rather muddy patch. By now the forest had gone quiet, so we walked back toward the headquarters, seeing **Eared Pygmy-Tyrant**, **White-crowned Manakin**, **Green-backed Becard** and **Piratic Flycatcher**. A fast-moving troop of **Wied's Marmosets**, an endemic primate, dashed through vine tangles over the trail, showing pretty well but only for a few instants. We would improve on those views the following day. Back around the park office we saw a few **Peach-fronted Parakeets**, and as we were leaving a stop by the park gate produced a nice flock of tanagers with our first **Opal-rumped (Silvery-breasted) Tanagers**, **Hooded Tanager**, a couple of flashy **Brazilian Tanagers**, **Blue Dacnis**, **Saffron Finch**, and **Buff-throated Saltator**, with a pair of diminutive **Cobalt-rumped Parrotlets** also showing up nearby.

The plan for the afternoon was to relax and enjoy the deserted beach and the well-appointed facilities at the Txai Resort, so I left Greg and Debi to do their thing and went into town to run a few errands and check out a couple of nearby birding areas. I was pleased to make it back to the hotel in time for a late afternoon stroll down the deserted beach – not bad! We re-convened in the evening for another sumptuous meal and a *caipirinha*... maybe two.

Debi couldn't be convinced that breakfast before dawn and a hike into the muggy forest could be better than a relaxing morning spent enjoying the comforts our hotel had to offer, so Greg and I came up with a compromise of sorts, deciding to bird the hotel property, followed by a late breakfast before we hit the road for our next destination. Debi demurred nonetheless, so it was just the two of us walking the loop road through patches of secondary scrub interspersed with taller *restinga* forest and a couple of areas with rather stunted white sand forest called *mussumunga*. In the *restinga* we found **Sooretama Slaty-Antshrike**, a pair of **Bahia Antwrens** that took a long time to find, a female **Blue-backed Manakin**, and the first of what seemed to be dozens of **Chivi Vireos** and **Bananaquits**. Pygmy-owl imitations attracted several **Red-legged** and **Green Honeycreepers**, along with a fair few **Brazilian Tanagers**, **Hooded Tanager**, **Flame-crested Tanager**, **Burnished-buff Tanager**, and in one spot, an actual **Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl**. One particularly rich spot also produced **Golden-spangled Piculet** (split by the Brazilian ornithological committee as Bahia Piculet), a female **Black-bellied Thorntail**, **Rufous-throated Sapphire** and a couple of **Blue-chinned Sapphires**, along with an active flock comprised of some of the species named above. Nearby we encountered a delightful troop of more than a dozen **Wied's Marmosets** feeding in jackfruit trees near the road, and these rather habituated primates put on a great show for us. Back near the hotel we found our first **Scaled Dove**, saw a few **Tropical Mockingbirds** and a handful of **Gray-rumped Swifts** overhead before zipping over the restaurant for a late bite of breakfast, after which we packed up and checked out, heading back inland via Ilhéus to the town of Camacan.

Our visit to Camacan was unusual in that we had come to the lowlands of the Serra Bonita area, but that we would not be driving up the fairly rough road to the famed Serra Bonita Lodge in the hills above Camacan. Instead, we would spend our morning in the lowlands at an old cocoa plantation, the Fazenda Paris, in search of one of the rarest and most spectacular birds of Eastern Brazil. We took a packed breakfast and managed to arrive fairly early in the morning. Fazenda Paris is renowned as one of the best spots in the world to see the fabulous Banded Cotinga. This species, along with Cherry-throated Tanager, was one of the two most important

targets on the trip, so we settled in for a vigil from the plantation headquarters, setting up our chairs facing some nearby *açaí* palms in hopes the cotingas might come in for some breakfast of their own. There was plenty of activity around the buildings, and we quickly racked up some real stunners including **Green-backed Trogon**, flocks of **Golden-capped Parakeets** and our first **Maroon-faced Parakeets** and **Ochre-marked (Blue-throated) Parakeets**, too. We hadn't been waiting for more than 20 minutes when suddenly we spied a female **Banded Cotinga** in a nearby tree! Greg was able to fire off a few quick shots before the bird dropped down into a fruiting Surinam Cherry tree right below us, disappearing into the foliage. A great start, but nobody travels to another continent for a female Banded Cotinga... a few more birds popped up in the same general area, including **Blond-crested Woodpecker** and **Opal-rumped Tanager**. Another 20 minutes or so passed as we watched these and others, and then suddenly... there it was! A spectacular male **BANDED COTINGA**! We ooh'ed and aah'ed at this shocking bird, cloaked in an almost electric cobalt blue, with violet purple throat, upper chest, and breast. It sat for a minute or two on a *Cecropia* branch, long enough for us to get the scope on it and for the cameras to get a bit of work in, before it too dropped down into the nearby Surinam Cherry bush. Thrilled with our good fortune, and frankly a bit stunned it had been so easy, the rest of the morning was quite jovial (**Lineated Woodpecker**, **Cliff Flycatcher**, **Sayaca**, **Palm** and **Green-headed Tanagers**, **Yellow-fronted Woodpecker**, etc.). The female Banded Cotinga zipped in and out of the Surinam Cherry bush a couple of times, but the male did not re-appear. Still, we had seen it in style and one of the trip's top two targets was in the bag. Would the Cherry-throated Tanager collaborate in the same fashion?

We departed Camacan by late morning, stopping for a late lunch in Eunápolis before we turned east toward the coast again, heading for the large resort town of Porto Seguro.



White-winged Cotinga

The next morning, I met Greg early in the lobby of the Shalimar Praia Hotel, and we picked up our packed breakfasts and grabbed a quick cup of coffee before piling into the 4-wheel drive vehicle I had rented the evening prior, temporarily ditching our comfortable SUV for a morning of birding at the Estação Veracel private reserve outside Porto Seguro. Since we had connected on the Banded Cotinga in spectacular fashion at Fazenda Paris, a lot of the pressure was off and we were able to enjoy a good morning in the sandy soil *tabuleiro* forest of the flat coastal plain. Before we reached the reserve headquarters, we made an early stop to call in a **Ringed Woodpecker** that we heard through the rolled-down windows. This same stop produced **Channel-billed Toucan**, **Grayish Mourner**, a singing White-flanked Antwren, and a nice **Least Pygmy-Owl**. We met up with our local guide Jailson at the park HQ and quickly checked in with the staff there. A short session on foot nearby produced **White-bellied Tanagers**, **Red-legged Honeycreepers**, and both **White-chinned** and **Rufous-throated Sapphires**. Soon we heard the calls of one of our main targets here, and after some searching we had our first views of the endemic **Red-browed Amazon** – a good start. After carefully navigating the muddiest, rutted stretches of the track through the reserve, we arrived at a clearing where we stopped and walked the road slowly, seeing a flock of a dozen **Ochre-marked Parakeets**, more **Red-browed Amazons**, **Scaled Pigeon**, **Sooretama Slaty-Antshrike**, **Green-backed Trogon**, a flock with **Blue Dacnis**, **Red-legged Honeycreeper**, **White-bellied Tanager**, **Opal-rumped Tanager**, **Orange-bellied Euphonia**, and **Dusky-capped Flycatcher**. Jailson pointed out a day-roosting **Common Potoo**. A short walk down a side trail produced the much-desired **Hook-billed Hermit** (it took some work, though!), a couple of **Red-headed Manakins**, and a sharp male

Black-headed Berryeater. We worked the clearing edges and finally spotted our first **White-winged Cotinga**, a distant female, then a distant male, a couple of closer males, and by the time we were finished we had found seven individuals in the area. A **Banded Cotinga** made the briefest of appearances, and only Jailson and I glimpsed it. We had great views of **Golden-spangled Piculet**, and a nice pair of **Red-stained Woodpeckers** nearby. A patch of exotic *Grevillea* flowers was attracting some hummers, and we saw **Blue-chinned** and **White-chinned Sapphires**, along with **Violet-capped Woodnymph** and **Swallow-tailed Hummingbird**. A late morning visit to the very sandy, campina-like *mussununga* habitat was quiet, but we did find **White-fringed Antwren**, a couple of day-roosting **Scissor-tailed Nightjars**, and a very bold **Crab-eating Fox**.



Crab-eating Fox

We returned to Porto Seguro to pick up Debi and head into town for a late lunch at a nice per-kilo buffet restaurant. On the way back to the hotel we took a detour to a mangrove at the edge of town where, despite the searing early afternoon heat, we were able to call in a couple of **Little Wood-Rails**, yet another endemic. The mangrove also has **Plain-bellied Emerald**, **Little Blue Heron**, **Snowy Egret** and a flyover **Magnificent Frigatebird**. Given our successful morning in finding Greg's key remaining targets at Veracel in the morning, we elected to forego any night birding and instead take the afternoon off before heading down to the *Passarela do Descobrimento* in the early evening. This seafront promenade, with its colonial facades painted in pastel colours, comes alive in the evenings when its shops and restaurants are joined by many carts and stands selling

local crafts and souvenirs. We perused the shops, closely checking the *cachaça* offerings, and enjoyed the lively atmosphere as we made our way to our restaurant for a really enjoyable dinner.

The next day was dedicated to the drive south from Porto Seguro to the city of Linhares in the state of Espírito Santo. We opted for a later breakfast at our hotel, seeing our first **East Brazilian Chachalaca** at the hotel's feeders, along with a handful of other birds including **Burnished-buff Tanager**, **Rufous-bellied Thrush**, **Green-headed Tanager** and **Sayaca and Palm Tanagers**. We set off, passing through cattle country as we left the coast behind in southern Bahia to zip down the BR-101 highway, traversing vast areas of *Eucalyptus* plantations for pulp and paper, and also passing coffee plantations impressive in size. The drive was smooth and uneventful, if a bit boring.

We had a day and a half scheduled to bird the excellent reserve administered by Vale, the giant Brazilian mining conglomerate, situated just north of the small town of Sooretama. We were to be accompanied by Gabriel Bonfá, a skilled young biologist and birder who lives in Linhares and knows the area like the back of his hand. We met Gabriel early on the morning of October 8th and headed for the Vale reserve. Upon our arrival, along the entrance road even before reaching the main gate, we found a wonderful group of **White-headed Marmosets**, a charming endemic primate that was high on our list of mammals to look for. We started with some birding around the headquarters area hoping to find parrots, but it was fairly quiet early on – we did see **Crested Becard**, **Ochre-lored Flycatcher**, several **Cattle Tyrants**, and **Scaly-headed** and **Orange-winged Parrots**. The main reason for coming to Linhares was the Endangered and endemic Red-billed Curassow, and Gabriel suggested we head for the tracks into the forest reserve to begin our search. Remarkably, we had almost instant success when Gabriel heard the calls of the curassows from the moving vehicle. We quickly stopped and jumped out, and after a bit of anxious searching we were soon watching a fantastic female **Red-billed Curassow** as she looked down at us, a bit nervously, from a perch just inside the forest edge. What a tremendous start. We had a great morning, seeing **Robust Capuchin** and **Amazonian Brown Brocket Deer** along the central track, and hearing Masked Titi Monkey, continuing a good mammal day that would last until after dusk. At a large clearing we had our best views of **Maroon-faced Parakeet** and **Channel-billed Toucan**, and we saw **Green-backed Trogon** and a nice little flock being led by **Sibilant Sirystes**, accompanied by **Streaked Xenops**, **White-barred Piculet**, **Chivi Vireo**, **White-bellied Tanager** and **Brown-crested Flycatcher**. Further stops produced great views of **Black-cheeked Gnateater** and **Rufous-capped Anthrush**, **Grayish Mourner**, and **Sepia-capped Flycatcher**.



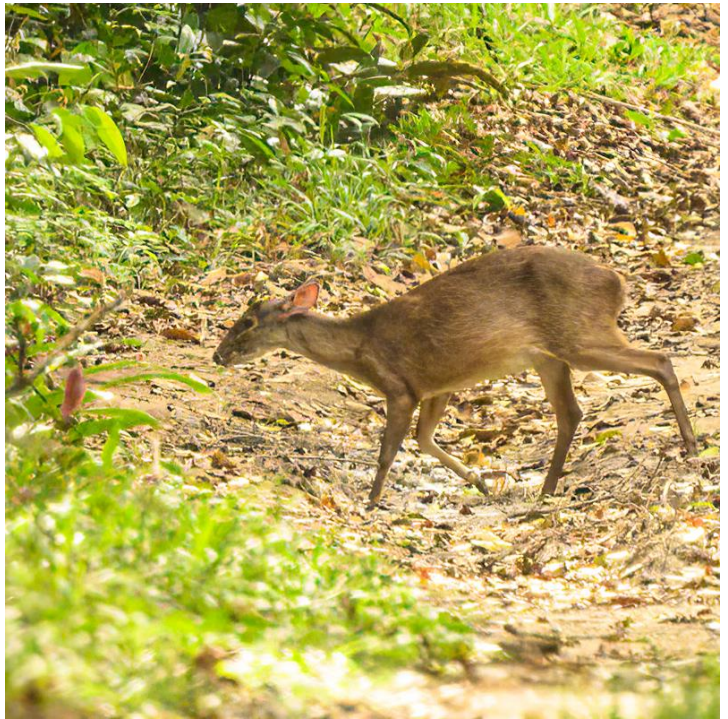
Red-billed Curassow



Black-cheeked Gnatcatcher



Rufous-capped Antthrush



Amazonian Brown Brocket Deer

Gabriel took us to a reliable lek for the endemic **Minute Hermit**, a tiny hummingbird with a small range in eastern Brazil. Even though we could hear the hermits all around us, it took a little while before we managed good views, but in the end we had walkaway views of a singing male just a couple of metres in front of us. After a snack and a cup of hot coffee, we tried to explore deeper into the reserve, but a combination of recent winds and an understaffed maintenance crew meant that we were unable to proceed much beyond the hermit lek. We worked our way back along the central track, where it was mostly quiet in the mid-day heat until suddenly everything seemed to happen at once when a **Red-rumped Agouti** bounded off to the side of the road, a **White-necked Hawk** flushed up from a low perch, a small troop of **Robust Capuchins** protested our

presence, and a little mixed flock with **White-flanked Antwren**, **Eared Pygmy-Tyrant** and a couple of others showed up shortly thereafter. This little run of activity took us up to noon, and we had a quick discussion on our options.



Minute Hermit

Since we had seen the bulk of the usual targets for the site in Porto Seguro already, we decided to head for lunch and return to the hotel for a short break to escape the extreme heat. At least partly refreshed, we returned to the reserve in the late afternoon and headed for a loop trail near the headquarters. Gabriel soon produced the goods, finding a very skulky male **Plumbeous Antvireo**, another rare endemic. In the same area we also saw **Robust Woodpecker**. Heading back to the staff accommodation area, we set up a late afternoon vigil in hopes of connecting on the sometimes-split Reichenow's Blue-headed Parrot. We saw **Plain Parakeet**, more **Orange-winged Parrots**, a nice group of **Yellow-fronted Woodpeckers**, **Red-rumped Cacique**, **Green-headed Tanager**, **Chestnut-vented Conebill**, **Tropical Parula** and **Red-cowled Cardinal**. A few **South American Coatis** were comical crowd pleasers, as always. Since the Covid-19 pandemic the reserve has no longer been permitting night activities, so we slowly made our way out as dusk approached, taking a longer route through an extensive orchard in hopes we might find... a **Brazilian Tapir**! No, two **Brazilian Tapirs**! A fantastic end to our day.

Given our success with the curassow yesterday, and in consideration of the fact that the tracks leading deeper into the Vale reserve were blocked by fallen trees after recent wind storms, we were unanimous in deciding to forego our scheduled 2nd morning at Linhares and instead head south toward the land of the Cherry-throated

Tanager. This change in schedule allowed us to take a slightly later breakfast, eating at the remarkably civilized hour of 6:30am, and we also decided to take a detour up to the hill station town of Santa Teresa to try for a couple of specialties that weren't on our original itinerary.

We reached the Augusto Ruschi Biological Reserve in Santa Teresa by late morning, and after checking in with the reserve administration and signing their log book, we spent a productive couple of hours birding a couple of quiet roads through the reserve. First, at the reserve headquarters we had **Boat-billed**, **Social** and **Streaked Flycatchers**, a half dozen **Gilt-edged Tanagers**, a pair of **Golden-chevroned Tanagers**, **Green-winged Saltator**, both **Pale-breasted** and **Rufous-bellied Thrushes**, a lovely flock of **Maroon-bellied Parakeets** and some **Blue-and-white Swallows** that were nesting in the buildings. In the forest we saw **Dusky-legged Guan**, **Spot-breasted Antvireo**, **Streak-capped Antwren**, **Olivaceous** and **Plain-winged Woodcreepers**, **Lesser Woodcreeper**, **Black-capped** and **White-eyed Foliage-gleaners**, a bunch of **Swallow-tailed Manakins** lekking and visiting fruiting trees, a female **Pin-tailed Manakin**, **Sharpbill**, **Chestnut-crowned Becard**, **Whiskered Flycatcher**, **Gray-hooded Flycatcher**, **Tropical Pewee**, **Long-tailed Tyrant**, poor views of a couple of **Blue-naped Chlorophonias**, **Black-goggled Tanager**, **Flame-crested Tanager**, **Azure-shouldered Tanager**, **Red-necked Tanager** and **Rufous-headed Tanager**. We also had great views of the rare but somewhat unremarkable **Wied's Tyrant-Manakin**, and we finished off our impromptu session at Augusto Ruschi with a quality sighting of the wonderful **Crescent-chested Puffbird**.



Golden-chevroned Tanager



Black-horned Capuchin



Crescent-chested Puffbird

After a light lunch at a bakery in Santa Teresa, we drove for another couple of hours along winding roads through lovely hilly countryside. After a short stop in the village of Pedra Azul (to check out the gourmet coffee and see what *cachaça* was on offer at a local emporium), we proceeded to the beautiful Natureza Eco Lodge, arriving in the late afternoon.

We had two full days scheduled at our last birding site, the Kaetés Reserve in the hilly Pedra Azul region of central-southern Espírito Santo state. The forest remnants in this area, together with the Augusto Ruschi reserve in Santa Teresa, protect the last remaining individuals of the endemic Cherry-throated Tanager. At the time of our visit, researchers pegged the known world population at just 20 individuals, with 15 of those in the Kaetés Reserve and surrounding forest patches. Loaded up with packed breakfasts and lunches, we departed from our lodge under the cover of darkness early on the morning of October 30th, anxious and excited about the day ahead of us. We met with the two researchers who are tasked with tracking the tanagers and at the Kaetés entrance gate we loaded our things into the reserve's safari-style 4WD vehicle for the final steep uphill to the upper reaches of the reserve at ca. 1250 metres elevation. Our plan to see the tanagers was relatively simple: we would walk slowly along the ridgetops in the reserve, listening carefully for the tanagers and also for the mixed species flocks they often join. The use of playback for the tanagers is prohibited, so we would have to rely on fieldcraft, a healthy dose of good fortune, and the benevolence of the birding gods in order to find these special birds.

The tracks atop the ridges in the reserve are flat and easy to walk, and we stuck to these areas, focusing most of our efforts on the areas where the birds had been recorded recently. We had quite a pleasant day's birding, although on the whole things seemed a bit slow, perhaps due to the rather dry conditions – it had been a fairly dry spring in the area thus far, and the forest was quiet overall as a result. Still, we managed to put together a nice list of birds seen while we worked slowly back and forth along the road: **Frisillated Coquette**, **Violet-capped Woodnymph**, **Swallow-tailed Kite**, three different **Surucua Trogons**, **Spot-billed Toucanet**, **Yellow-eared Woodpecker**, a heard-only **Brown-backed Parrotlet**, **Spot-breasted Antwren**, **White-bibbed Antbird**, **Rufous Gnateater**, **Olivaceous Woodcreeper**, **White-throated Woodcreeper**, **Lesser Woodcreeper**, **Black-billed Scythebill**, **Scaled Woodcreeper**, **Streaked Xenops**, **Buff-fronted Foliage-gleaner**, **Buff-browed Foliage-gleaner**, **Swallow-tailed Manakin**, several **Hooded Berryeaters**, an amazing 18 **Bare-throated Bellbirds** (but not a single adult male in pristine white plumage), **Cinnamon-vented Piha**, **Chestnut-crowned Becard**, **White-throated Spadebill**, **Whiskered Flycatcher**, **Sepia-capped Flycatcher**, **Mottled-cheeked Tyrannulet**, **Drab-breasted Pygmy-Tyrant**, **Tropical Pewee**, **Sibilant Sirystes**, **Rufous-crowned Greenlet**, two or three **Sharpbills**, **Yellow-legged Thrush**, **Chestnut-bellied Euphonia**, **Black-goggled Tanager**, **Gilt-edged Tanager**, **Rufous-headed Tanager**, and **Green-winged Saltator**. However, aside from a single distant vocalizing bird down in the valley below us in the morning, we hadn't made any progress with our principal target. Lunch time came and went, and our energy sapped a bit accordingly during the warmer afternoon hours. We were philosophical about it, keeping a positive spin on things. One, at least we had heard a tanager, so the birds were indeed around, and two, we had two full days scheduled so we'd be back tomorrow ready for round two.



Hooded Berryeater

By 4 pm it was just about time to head back down the hill and call it a day (visitors to the reserve are technically accompanying the researchers who monitor the birds, and we follow their schedule), so Greg, Debi and I continued to walk along the track near where we had heard the distant calls of a tanager earlier in the day, while Hartur and Athos headed in the other direction to pick up the vehicle. We were trodding along slowly, straining to hear anything to give us hope, when suddenly the reserve's truck came flying up the road in our direction. "Get in!" was the command, and we figured it could mean only one thing—tanagers! They wheeled the truck around and rocketed back in the other direction, explaining that the Cherry-throated Tanagers had passed over the road just as they had been turning the vehicle around to come pick us up. We hopped out at the spot, and listening anxiously for the telltale sharp calls... and there they were! A mixed flock was moving over the ridge and heading down into the valley below: **Sharpbill**, **Sibilant Sirystes**, **Streaked Xenops** and **Mottle-cheeked Tyrannulet** were amongst the first birds we saw as we sorted through the flock. The tanagers called again, this time seemingly farther off, and our collective blood pressure rose a notch or two. Would they slip away from us? Would we lose them down the steep valley? The guys weren't so sure, as these flocks can change direction on a dime, and that is exactly what happened. The flock changed directions, and suddenly the tanagers were here, calling, and calling LOUDLY. And then we saw one. And another. Two **Cherry-throated Tanagers** were in the midst of the flock, clambering along lichen-covered branches, peering underneath, occasionally pausing and sitting still. We were awestruck as we watched 10% of the world's population of this spectacular little bird, overcome by the sudden reversal of our fortune, as just minutes earlier we had been trudging along, resigned to return down the hill empty-handed. We followed the flock for maybe 10 minutes or so, losing the tanagers and then re-finding them. They were no longer calling, but they stayed with the rest of the flock as it moved along the ridgeline, and we kept up for a while before the flock practically vanished, the birds diving down into the valley below. High fives followed all around, as the shock wore off and a giddy glee set in. **Cherry-throated Tanagers!!!**



Cherry-throated Tanager

Dinner was a celebratory affair. We decided not to test fate by trying to see the tanagers again the next day, and opted instead for a morning birding walk on the forest trail behind our hotel, followed by an exploratory outing to look for Rio de Janeiro Antbird. The hotel grounds were birdy, with the likes of **Whistling Heron**, **Maroon-bellied Parakeet**, **Pallid Spinetail**, **Crested Becard**, **Gray-capped Tyrannulet**, **Campo Troupial** and **Brassy-**

breasted Tanagers, while the forest trail produced **Star-throated Antwren**, **Spot-breasted Antvireo**, **Ferruginous Antbird**, **Rufous-breasted Leaftosser**, and Greg's best views yet of **Cinnamon-vented Piha**. The late morning outing to try for the antbird was a misfire, as access to our site was closed and there was no one around to sweet-talk into letting us in. A little shopping trip into the town of Pedra Azul in the afternoon was good for a couple more bottles of *cachaça* and a package or two of the Jacu Bird coffee, the most expensive coffee in all of Brazil, the beans of which are "selected" by Dusky-legged Guans that feed on the coffee fruits and later leave little piles of the seeds behind for the coffee growers to harvest.

We had to return to Vitoria for outbound flights in the morning, but before breakfast Greg snuck out for a solo walk on the grounds, this time tracking down one of the **Swallow-tailed Cotingas** that nest on the grounds but had given us the slip the morning prior. Greg and Debi flew on to São Paulo to spend a couple of days before they returned to the U.S., and I started my trip home to Alta Floresta in northern Mato Grosso, where I arrived the following day.

For the full bird list from this tour, please see the trip list found in the eBird Trip Report at the following link: <https://ebird.org/tripreport/162940>