



Field Guides Tour Report

Safari Brazil: The Pantanal & More 2015: Brazilian Merganser Extension

Oct 24, 2015 to Oct 28, 2016

Marcelo Padua

For our tour description, itinerary, past triplists, dates, fees, and more, please [VISIT OUR TOUR PAGE](#).



An Ochre-breasted Pipit, one of a variety of grassland species we observed on our extension to Canastra and the Rio Sao Francisco. Photo by guide Marcelo Padua.

With well over 1800 species of birds Brazil has many remarkable places to go birding, but Canastra National Park certainly occupies a high position in the rank of birding destinations within the country. Its diversity of habitats such as the grasslands of the upper reaches of the mountain range with breathtaking vistas holds an enormous diversity of endemic plants, many of which were in bloom during our visit.

These in turn support a wide variety of highly specialized birds such as the wonderful Cock-tailed Tyrants that fly around like tiny helicopters patrolling the fields, or the tiny Sharp-tailed Tyrants that cling to long shoots from the Arrow Grass that dominates the landscape.

Small streams with crystal clear waters support a denser vegetation where Brasilia Tapaculos and Helmeted Manakins find shelter, and as these streams join forces they gradually give body to the Sao Francisco river, which leaps from the mountain in an amazing waterfall where thousands of Great-dusky and White-collared swifts nest and seek shelter every day.

Down below, the Sao Francisco finds a much more lush forest that harbors a great variety of Atlantic Forest endemics such as the colorful Gilt-edged Tanager and the minute Pin-tailed Manakin. These clean and undisturbed waters near the headwaters of the Sao Francisco are one of the last remaining strongholds of the world's rarest merganser, the Brazilian Merganser, a bird which once occupied many streams of Brazil and Argentina.

Due to its incredible sensitivity to changes in its habitat, however, this species has disappeared from most of its range and is now confined to small areas where the water is pure and clear. These birds have large territories and occupy large stretches of the river, driving away others of their species and thus keeping their numbers quite low. This makes the effort of finding them quite difficult, as we need to be able to search long stretches of water in hope of locating the birds.

Our efforts paid off handsomely after much work as we found a pair of birds resting on a rock in the river, and we watched as they walked into the water and drifted away with the current of the Sao Francisco.

The search for these rare birds was thrilling and the privilege of seeing them inspiring. We hope these birds will continue to breed, and that the few places still suitable for their existence will remain protected, allowing us to see them again for many years to come.

Thank you for joining me on this wonderful adventure.

--Marcelo

KEYS FOR THIS LIST

One of the following keys may be shown in brackets for individual species as appropriate: * = heard only, I = introduced, E = endemic, N = nesting, a = austral migrant, b = boreal migrant

BIRDS

Rheidae (Rheas)

GREATER RHEA (*Rhea americana*) – Always fascinating to watch this emblematic giant roam through the fields of the Cerrado.

Tinamidae (Tinamous)

RED-WINGED TINAMOU (*Rhynchotus rufescens*)

SPOTTED NOTHURA (*Nothura maculosa*) – One individual seen well on the road.

Anatidae (Ducks, Geese, and Waterfowl)

MUSCOVY DUCK (*Cairina moschata*) – Fairly common along the river in the lower section of the national park making it even harder to locate Brazilian Mergansers.

BRAZILIAN MERGANSER (*Mergus octosetaceus*) – It is hard to describe the thrill of finding a pair of this ultra-endangered species. The odds are always against us as there are so few of these birds left in the wild, and they have very large territories so we had to scan several miles of the river. It was an effort that was greatly rewarded by great looks at a pair of birds. [E]

Cracidae (Guans, Chachalacas, and Curassows)

DUSKY-LEGGED GUAN (*Penelope obscura*)

Ardeidae (Herons, Egrets, and Bitterns)

CATTLE EGRET (*Bubulcus ibis*)

WHISTLING HERON (*Syrigma sibilatrix*) [*]

Threskiornithidae (Ibises and Spoonbills)

BUFF-NECKED IBIS (*Theristicus caudatus*)

Cathartidae (New World Vultures)

BLACK VULTURE (*Coragyps atratus*)

TURKEY VULTURE (*Cathartes aura*) – The birds seen in Brazil are quite different from North American individuals and feature a light band on the back side of their neck. (ssp. *ruficollis*)

Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)

WHITE-TAILED KITE (*Elanus leucurus*) – This elegant species is quite widespread, making its way as far north as the US. The South American representative is the nominate subspecies and occurs all the way into Chile to the west of where we saw it.

SHARP-SHINNED HAWK (RUFIOUS-THIGHED) (*Accipiter striatus erythronemius*) – A brief look at this species, which is far less common than its North American counterpart.

SAVANNA HAWK (*Buteogallus meridionalis*) – This elegant raptor is common in the open areas of Central Brazil but becomes less common in the Atlantic forest.

ROADSIDE HAWK (*Rupornis magnirostris*)

WHITE-TAILED HAWK (*Geranoaetus albicaudatus*) – A common sight in the open areas of the Cerrado, often perching on the cross bars of power lines.

Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots)

GRAY-NECKED WOOD-RAIL (*Aramides cajaneus*) [*]

Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)

SOUTHERN LAPWING (*Vanellus chilensis*) – Seen daily on the tour.

Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)

ROCK PIGEON (*Columba livia*)

PALE-VENTED PIGEON (*Patagioenas cayennensis*)

PICAZURO PIGEON (*Patagioenas picazuro*) – Although common, this species is quite beautiful and always merits a good look in order to observe the intricate pattern on the back of its neck and the nuances of the wing pattern.

RUDDY GROUND-DOVE (*Columbina talpacoti*) – Especially common in town.

SCALED DOVE (*Columbina squammata*) – A close relative of the Inca Dove.

PICUI GROUND-DOVE (*Columbina picui*) – One of the most widespread species of columbids in South America.

EARED DOVE (*Zenaida auriculata*)

Cuculidae (Cuckoos)

SQUIRREL CUCKOO (*Piaya cayana*) – These large cuckoos always draw attention to themselves thanks to their acrobatic behavior as they jump between branches looking for food.

GUIRA CUCKOO (*Guira guira*) – Common in urban areas.

SMOOTH-BILLED ANI (*Crotophaga ani*) – The most common species of cuckoo in Brazil, being easily found in pastures and open areas.

Strigidae (Owls)

BURROWING OWL (*Athene cucularia*)

Apodidae (Swifts)

GREAT DUSKY SWIFT (*Cypseloides senex*) – We saw thousands of these roosting behind the Casca D'anta waterfall along with White-collared

Swifts.

WHITE-COLLARED SWIFT (*Streptoprocne zonaris*)

Trochilidae (Hummingbirds)

PLANALTO HERMIT (*Phaethornis pretrei*) – A particularly good look at one feeding in the gardens of our hotel on the last morning of the extension as we had breakfast.

WHITE-VENTED VIOLETEAR (*Colibri serrirostris*)

STRIPE-BREASTED STARTHROAT (*Heliomaster squamosus*) – A Brazilian endemic with a very limited range. Canastra is undoubtedly the best place to see this species.

GLITTERING-BELLIED EMERALD (*Chlorostilbon lucidus*)

SWALLOW-TAILED HUMMINGBIRD (*Eupetomena macroura*) – Common even in urban areas.

VIOLET-CAPPED WOODNYMPH (*Thalurania glaucopis*) – Endemic to the Atlantic Forest.

SAPPHIRE-SPANGLED EMERALD (*Amazilia lactea*)

Trogonidae (Trogons)

SURUCUA TROGON (*Trogon surrucura*) – This species has two well-marked populations in which the color of the belly is either red, like the ones we saw, or yellow, found on birds in the northern part of the range.

Momotidae (Motmots)

RUFOUS-CAPPED MOTMOT (*Baryphthengus ruficapillus*) – An Atlantic Forest endemic that we saw behind our rooms in the lower part of the park.

Alcedinidae (Kingfishers)

AMAZON KINGFISHER (*Chloroceryle amazona*)

Bucconidae (Puffbirds)

WHITE-EARED PUFFBIRD (*Nystalus chacuru*)

Galbulidae (Jacamars)

RUFOUS-TAILED JACAMAR (*Galbula ruficauda*)

Ramphastidae (Toucans)

TOCO TOUCAN (*Ramphastos toco*)

RED-BREASTED TOUCAN (*Ramphastos dicolorus*) – Great scope views at the spot where we saw the mergansers.

Picidae (Woodpeckers)

WHITE-BARRED PICULET (*Picumnus cirratus cirratus*) [*]

CAMPO FLICKER (*Colaptes campestris*)

Cariamidae (Seriemas)

RED-LEGGED SERIEMA (*Cariama cristata*) – A few birds seen nicely from the car in the upper reaches of the park.

Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)

SOUTHERN CARACARA (*Caracara plancus*)

YELLOW-HEADED CARACARA (*Milvago chimachima*)

AMERICAN KESTREL (*Falco sparverius*)

Psittacidae (New World and African Parrots)

BLUE-WINGED PARROTLET (*Forpus xanthopterygius*) – Seen on our last morning right at the parking lot of our hotel.

MAROON-BELLIED PARAKEET (*Pyrrhura frontalis*) – Another Atlantic forest endemic that was seen right from our hotel.

PEACH-FRONTED PARAKEET (*Eupsittula aurea*)

GOLDEN-CAPPED PARAKEET (*Aratinga auricapillus*) – This Brazilian endemic is only possible on this extension to the main tour.

WHITE-EYED PARAKEET (*Psittacara leucophthalmus*)

Thamnophilidae (Typical Antbirds)

VARIABLE ANTSHRIKE (*Thamnophilus caerulescens*)

PLAIN ANTVIREO (*Dysithamnus mentalis*)

LARGE-BILLED ANTWREN (*Herpsilochmus longirostris*) – Great looks at this canopy antwren in the lower section of the National Park.

WHITE-SHOULDERED FIRE-EYE (*Pyriglena leucoptera*) [*]

Melanopareiidae (Crescentchests)

COLLARED CRESCENTCHEST (*Melanopareia torquata*) [*]

Rhinocryptidae (Tapaculos)

BRASILIA TAPACULO (*Scytalopus novacapitalis*) – This was definitely one of the highlights of the extension for me. Seeing a tapaculo so well is always a treat.

Furnariidae (Ovenbirds and Woodcreepers)

SCALED WOODCREEPER (*Lepidocolaptes squamatus*)

STREAKED XENOPS (*Xenops rutilans*) – Showed up in response to the pygmy-owl tooting in the lower section of the park.

RUFOUS HORNERO (*Furnarius rufus*)

SHARP-TAILED STREAMCREEPER (*Lochmias nematura*) – Seen really well at that lodge we stopped at on our way to our hotel in the high area of the park.

BUFF-FRONTED FOLIAGE-GLLEANER (*Philydor rufum*) – Seen right in the gardens of Recanto da Canastra.
FIREWOOD-GATHERER (*Anumbius annumbi*) – It was fascinating to watch the bird building its massive stick nest.
PALE-BREASTED SPINETAIL (*Synallaxis albescens*) [*]

Tyrannidae (Tyrant Flycatchers)

SOUTHERN BEARDLESS-TYRANNULET (*Camptostoma obsoletum*) – Abundant on the extension.
GRAY-BACKED TACHURI (*Polystictus superciliosus*) – This diminutive flycatcher is a Brazilian endemic and can often be a hard one to find.
Fortunately we had excellent looks at it both on the tour and on the extension.
YELLOW-BELLIED ELAENIA (*Elaenia flavogaster*) – The most common and widespread of the elaenias.
PLAIN-CRESTED ELAENIA (*Elaenia cristata*)
HIGHLAND ELAENIA (*Elaenia obscura*)
SOOTY TYRANNULET (*Serpophaga nigriceps*) – This tyrannulet is always close to water, and we saw them several times as we spent lots of time scanning the rivers in search of the mergansers.
GRAY-HOODED FLYCATCHER (*Mionectes rufiventris*) – The pygmy-owl tape brought this one in for close inspection along with other great birds.
SEPIA-CAPPED FLYCATCHER (*Leptopogon amaurocephalus*)
PLANALTO TYRANNULET (*Phyllomyias fasciatus*)
SHARP-TAILED TYRANT (*Culicivora caudacuta*) – Another very distinctive flycatcher seen both on the main tour and on the extension.
SOUTHERN ANTPIPIT (*Corythopsis delalandi*) [*]
GRAY-HEADED TODY-FLYCATCHER (*Todirostrum poliocephalum*)
COMMON TODY-FLYCATCHER (*Todirostrum cinereum*)
YELLOW-OLIVE FLYCATCHER (*Tolmomyias sulphureus*)
CLIFF FLYCATCHER (*Hirundinea ferruginea bellicosa*)
BRAN-COLORED FLYCATCHER (*Myiophobus fasciatus*)
EULER'S FLYCATCHER (*Lathrotriccus euleroi*)
CRESTED BLACK-TYRANT (*Knipolegus lophotes*) – The flycatchers of the genus *Knipolegus* are typically quiet and not responsive to playback, and therefore seeing them can be a challenge some times. Fortunately this species tends to be conspicuous, and we managed to spot them on the main tour and on the extension.
YELLOW-BROWED TYRANT (*Satrapa icterophrys*) – A bird sitting on a wire was seen from the breakfast area on the last day of the extension.
GRAY MONJITA (*Xolmis cinereus*)
WHITE-RUMPED MONJITA (*Xolmis velatus*)
MASKED WATER-TYRANT (*Fluvicola nengeta*)
COCK-TAILED TYRANT (*Alectrurus tricolor*) – This incredible flycatcher always figures in the list of most-wanted birds on the tour. They were present in lower numbers than usual at Emas National Park on the main tour this year, so it was particularly rewarding to see them even better at Canastra.
LONG-TAILED TYRANT (*Colonia colonus*)
CATTLE TYRANT (*Machetornis rixosa*)
SIBILANT SIRYSTES (*Sirystes sibilator*) – The *Sirystes* was recently split into three species. The birds present in most of Brazil are of the nominate group and retained the original scientific name, but if you have seen them in other areas you may want to check to know which taxa you've recorded before.
SWAINSON'S FLYCATCHER (*Myiarchus swainsoni*)
SHORT-CRESTED FLYCATCHER (*Myiarchus ferox*)
BROWN-CRESTED FLYCATCHER (*Myiarchus tyrannulus*)
GREAT KISKADEE (*Pitangus sulphuratus*)
SOCIAL FLYCATCHER (*Myiozetetes similis*)
TROPICAL KINGBIRD (*Tyrannus melancholicus*)
FORK-TAILED FLYCATCHER (*Tyrannus savana*)

Pipridae (Manakins)

HELMETED MANAKIN (*Antilophia galeata*) – Spectacular looks at this striking manakin in the national park on the day we walked to the Casca D'anta waterfall.
PIN-TAILED MANAKIN (*Ilicura militaris*) – We had seen a few juveniles and females on the main tour, but seeing an adult male on the extension was a real treat.

Vireonidae (Vireos, Shrike-Babblers, and Erpornis)

GRAY-EYED GREENLET (*Hylophilus amaurocephalus*)

Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies)

PLUSH-CRESTED JAY (*Cyanocorax chrysops*) – I never get tired of watching these spectacular jays even though they are common.

Hirundinidae (Swallows)

BLUE-AND-WHITE SWALLOW (*Pygochelidon cyanoleuca*)
TAWNY-HEADED SWALLOW (*Alopochelidon fucata*) – Present in good numbers this year on the high plateau of the National Park.
SOUTHERN ROUGH-WINGED SWALLOW (*Stelgidopteryx ruficollis*)
WHITE-RUMPED SWALLOW (*Tachycineta leucorrhoa*)
CLIFF SWALLOW (*Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*)

Troglodytidae (Wrens)

HOUSE WREN (*Troglodytes aedon*)

SEDGE WREN (*Cistothorus platensis*) – A paper published recently proposes splitting these into up to eleven different species, and although I do not think there will be that many splits it is certainly worth keeping your records straight. The bird we saw is currently treated as subspecies polyglottus.

Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)

PALE-BREASTED THRUSH (*Turdus leucomelas*)

RUFIOUS-BELLIED THRUSH (*Turdus rufiventris*) – The national bird of Brazil and a common one in most of the country.

CREAMY-BELLIED THRUSH (*Turdus amaurochalinus*)

Mimidae (Mockingbirds and Thrashers)

CHALK-BROWED MOCKINGBIRD (*Mimus saturninus*)

Motacillidae (Wagtails and Pipits)

OCHRE-BREASTED PIPIT (*Anthus nattereri*) – This one took a lot of work this year, but after much perseverance we managed to get good looks at it, even watching its display flight.

Parulidae (New World Warblers)

MASKED YELLOWTHROAT (*Geothlypis aequinoctialis*)

GOLDEN-CROWNED WARBLER (WHITE-BELLIED) (*Basileuterus culicivorus hypoleucus*)

FLAVESCENT WARBLER (*Myiothlypis flaveola*)

WHITE-BROWED WARBLER (*Myiothlypis leucoblephara*)

Thraupidae (Tanagers and Allies)

CINNAMON TANAGER (*Schistochlamys ruficapillus*) – This striking species favors semi-open areas and is quite distinctive from the typical tanagers.

MAGPIE TANAGER (*Cissopis leverianus*)

WHITE-RUMPED TANAGER (*Cypsnagra hirundinacea*)

RUBY-CROWNED TANAGER (*Tachyphonus coronatus*)

SAYACA TANAGER (*Thraupis sayaca*)

PALM TANAGER (*Thraupis palmarum*)

BURNISHED-BUFF TANAGER (*Tangara cayana*)

GILT-EDGED TANAGER (*Tangara cyaniventris*) – How wonderful it is to have such a wonderful bird as a regular visitor to your yard. Such was the case at our lodges at Canastra.

SWALLOW TANAGER (*Tersina viridis*)

BLUE DACNIS (*Dacnis cayana*)

SAFFRON FINCH (*Sicalis flaveola*) – The birds we saw in Minas Gerais belong to the subspecies *brasilensis*, while the ones that were seen in the pantanal are members of the *pelzeni* group.

WEDGE-TAILED GRASS-FINCH (*Emberizoides herbicola*)

BLUE-BLACK GRASSQUIT (*Volatinia jacarina*)

PEARLY-BELLIED SEEDEATER (*Sporophila pileata*) – A nice save on this species that we missed on the main tour. This one was one of the splits from Capped Seedeater a few years back.

RUFIOUS-RUMPED SEEDEATER (*Sporophila hypochroma*) – Another great save since the main tour was a bit slow on seedeaters this year.

YELLOW-BELLIED SEEDEATER (*Sporophila nigricollis*)

PLUMBEOUS SEEDEATER (*Sporophila plumbea*)

BLACK-MASKED FINCH (*Coryphaspiza melanotis*)

BANANAQUIT (*Coereba flaveola*)

GREEN-WINGED SALTATOR (*Saltator similis*)

Emberizidae (Buntings and New World Sparrows)

GRASSLAND SPARROW (*Ammodramus humeralis*) – This is a common species in the grasslands of the cerrado, but we had excellent looks at a singing male.

RUFIOUS-COLLARED SPARROW (*Zonotrichia capensis*)

Icteridae (Troupials and Allies)

WHITE-BROWED MEADOWLARK (*Sturnella superciliaris*) – Formerly known as White-browed Blackbird.

CHOPI BLACKBIRD (*Gnorimopsar chopi*)

YELLOW-RUMPED MARSHBIRD (*Pseudoleistes guirahuro*)

SHINY COWBIRD (*Molothrus bonariensis*)

GIANT COWBIRD (*Molothrus oryzivorus*)

EPAULET ORIOLE (*Icterus cayanensis*)

VARIABLE ORIOLE (CHESTNUT-SHOULDERED) (*Icterus pyrrhopterus valenciobuenoi*)

CRESTED OROPENDOLA (*Psarocolius decumanus*)

Fringillidae (Finches, Euphonias, and Allies)

PURPLE-THROATED EUPHONIA (*Euphonia chlorotica*)

HOODED SISKIN (*Spinus magellanicus*)

Passeridae (Old World Sparrows)

HOUSE SPARROW (*Passer domesticus*)

MAMMALS

TUFTED-EAR MARMOSET (*Callithrix jacchus*) – A regular visitor of the feeders at our lodge in Sao Roque de Minas.

MASKED TITI MONKEY (*Callicebus personatus*)

GIANT ANTEATER (*Myrmecophaga tridactyla*) – A female carrying a baby on its back was the mammalian highlight of the extension for me.

PAMPAS DEER (*Ozotoceros bezoarticus*)

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Totals for the tour: 155 bird taxa and 4 mammal taxa