

# SERRA DOS CAIABIS, MT – BRAZIL

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**Introduction:** The Serra dos Caiabis is a range of hills in central-north Mato Grosso which separate the Arinos and Teles Pires drainages in the southern Brazilian Amazon. This geomorphological formation is an accessible area to explore the Mato Grosso tropical dry forest, an ecotone habitat between the *cerrado* of central Brazil and the Amazon moist forests to the north and west. The biodiversity here is similar to that of the better-known Serra do Cachimbo in southern Pará, perhaps somewhat poorer but with the advantage of being relatively accessible in a day-trip from Alta Floresta, the primary regional centre. The Serra dos Caiabis is still poorly-known ornithologically, having been the subject of just one survey in 2005-06 (Lees *et al.* 2008) and a follow-up visit we made in June 2008. All previous birding visits to the Serra dos Caiabis had been to the area south-west of Garimpo do Cabeça along the semi-abandoned MT-325 roughly 70-100 km from Alta Floresta.

**Summary:** While browsing in Google Earth recently, I noticed a set of photographs of the Salto do Apiacas, an impressive waterfall along the road to Juara. It was also obvious that the same road would provide straightforward access to the Serra dos Caiabis. I showed Jessica and we quickly resolved to undertake a mini-expedition to the site.

We left Alta Floresta at 1:30 AM, unsure of exactly how long it would take us to arrive to the site given uncertainty over conditions of the MT-160 south to Juara. We arrived near the site at roughly 5:00 AM where we stopped to listen to the dawn chorus. After some early birding in waterlogged secondary forest at 197m elevation (S 10deg 19'25.8" W 56deg 57'38.9") we continued to the entrance to the hydroelectric project where we met some workers in a truck who told us we could not enter the area. After they had driven off, we entered the hydroelectric project, passing the lifeless employee village and driving on toward the Rio Apiacas. We later learned that this village has been ready for workers since 1990, and in spite of the fact that most of the machinery and equipment have also been ready since then, work on the generating station has not proceeded. In the meanwhile we were nearly denied access to this breathtaking spectacle, just one of the many amazing waterfalls in the Brazilian Amazon slated for use in hydroelectric power schemes and which may never be seen in their full glory by future generations (see Cachoeiras de Curuá, PA and the Dardanelos complex at Aripuanã, MT).

We rushed our visit to the Salto Apiacas a little, concerned that someone could come at any moment to kick us out or worse (though in hindsight, so what?). Didn't really look at much other than the falls, but the habitat around here is in excellent shape and birding would probably be quite interesting. There were many Blue-headed Parrots flying around above the falls.



Continuing south on the road to Juara, we soon ascended the serra, stopping at a couple of spots to look around. Good stunted forest up here, and common species included White-fringed Antwren, Natterer's Slaty-Antshrike and Red-shouldered Tanager. Also Black-billed Thrush, Plush-crested Jay and Blue-tufted Starthroat near the summit where there is a steep embankment on the right hand

side of the road (S 10deg 20'57.2" W 56deg 56'50.6", elevation 350m). I also photographed a Bronzy Jacamar at the same spot. We played lots of tape for Caatinga Antwren, but predictably there was no response. A trio of *Gypopsitta* parrots called and blasted away through the open canopy, but I got nothing on them; the calls didn't sound like *aurantiocephala*, so I expect they were Orange-cheeked. In addition to the good quality stunted forest up here, there are also *campo rupestres*, open rocky areas with scattered clumps of scrubby vegetation and many terrestrial bromeliads. We didn't get into this habitat at all but will explore it at greater length in future visits.

Below the serra and to the south we reached the Rio Apiacas again, and birded both sides of the 123-m wooden bridge across the river. Mostly common riparian stuff here. Further along, in disturbed forest near the headquarters of Fazenda Hiroshima III, we had a number of frugivores including Fulvous-crested and Flame-crested Tanagers, 6 Pompadour Cotingas, Spangled Cotinga, Bare-necked Fruitcrow, Red-billed Pied-Tanagers, Purple Honeycreeper, Black-faced Dacnis and Blue-necked Tanager. A pair of Amazonian Pygmy-Owls responded to tape I was using to rile up these canopy birds, and soon enough we were able to enjoy one of the owls through the scope. Perhaps the most interesting sighting of the day were two Red-crested Finches found together with Rufous-collared Sparrows and a House Wren in a lifeless brush pile beside the road; this species has not been recorded from Alta Floresta. Unfortunately, we were about 500m into the municipality of Juara!



This trip was about the waterfall and scouting, and thus it was never intended to be an all-out birding assault on the area. Ominous clouds and a sprinkling of rain were enough to convince me that we should get back up over the serra just in case the rains worsened. We have confidence in our Fiat Uno, but also know her limits (that said, see here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RmmAhUxDArA>). We stopped a bit later for a nap, and again later on for a late lunch en route to Alta Floresta. Back in town by 15:30 or so, we made a short detour before heading home and were rewarded with a female Masked Duck on the reservoir at Estancia Copecas just east of town.

**Access:** From Alta Floresta take the MT-208 west towards Nova Bandeirantes. 12 km from Alta Floresta bear left at an obvious fork in the road where the pavement ends. It begins again 100m on, and at present the road is surfaced as far as the Rio Santa Helena. At 89 km from Alta Floresta, you will see the Fazenda Apiacas on your right and an obvious dirt road heading off to the left with a large sign for Fazenda Bacaeri. Take this road (the MT-160) 55 km south and you will reach a fork signed to Juara on the left and the hydroelectric project at Salto Apiacas on the right. Taking the left fork the road soon begins to ascend the Serra dos Caiabis. There is good habitat atop the serra and on the slopes as far as the Rio Apiacas and a little beyond. We didn't continue past the headquarters of Fazenda Hiroshima where the forest has been cut over, but this road ostensibly leads to Juara. In May 2009 the road was in good condition from the MT-208 as far as the hydroelectric project, but appeared to deteriorate pretty quickly after Fazenda Hiroshima. That said, we encountered two pick-up trucks coming from Juara so it was probably passable at least in a 4-WD.

### References:

Lees, A.C., Davis, B.J.W., Oliveira, A.V.G., and Peres, C.A. 2008. Avifauna of a structurally heterogeneous forest landscape in the Serra dos Caiabis, Mato Grosso, Brazil: a preliminary assessment. *Cotinga* 29: 147-157.



### Bird List for 20 May 2009:

1. **Great Tinamou**
2. **Tataupa Tinamou**
3. **Brazilian Teal**
4. **Masked Duck** – a female seen in the afternoon in Alta Floresta, on the reservoir at Estancia Copecas on the MT-208 just east of town
5. **Spix's Guan** – 1 seen in tall forest at the Juara-Salto Apiacas junction of the MT-160

6. Red-throated Piping-Guan
7. Bare-faced Curassow
8. Neotropical Cormorant
9. Rufescent Tiger-Heron
10. Cattle Egret
11. Capped Heron
12. Turkey Vulture
13. Greater Yellow-headed Vulture
14. Black Vulture
15. Hook-billed Kite
16. Pearl Kite
17. Snail Kite
18. Gray Hawk
19. Roadside Hawk
20. Southern Caracara
21. Collared Forest-Falcon – several heard, 1 seen at dawn NE of the hydroelectric project
22. American Kestrel
23. Limpkin
24. Ash-throated Crake
25. Southern Lapwing
26. Wattled Jacana
27. Ruddy Ground-Dove
28. Blue Ground-Dove – several heard early morning atop the Serra dos Caiabis
29. Eared Dove – common atop the Serra dos Caiabis
30. Scaled Pigeon
31. Plumbeous Pigeon
32. Gray-fronted Dove
33. Blue-and-yellow Macaw – fairly common north of the Serra dos Caiabis
34. Scarlet Macaw – common south of the Serra dos Caiabis
35. Chestnut-fronted Macaw
36. Blue-winged Macaw – flock of 8 tape-recorded in flight just north of the Serra dos Caiabis
37. Crimson-bellied Parakeet – heard only, north of the Serra
38. *Brotogeris* sp.
39. Scarlet-shouldered Parrotlet – heard atop the Serra dos Caiabis
40. *Gypopsitta* sp.
41. Blue-headed Parrot
42. Smooth-billed Ani
43. Guira Cuckoo
44. Striped Cuckoo
45. Tawny-bellied Screech-Owl
46. Amazonian Pygmy-Owl – 1 seen, another heard in the disturbed forest beyond the Rio Apiacas before the Fazenda Hiroshima headquarters
47. Burrowing Owl
48. Blackish Nightjar
49. Gray-rumped Swifts
50. Fork-tailed Palm-Swift
51. Reddish Hermit
52. Black-throated Mango

- 53. **Black-eared Fairy**
- 54. **Long-billed Starthroat**
- 55. **Blue-tufted Starthroat** – a male photographed perching high in a leafless tree in the stunted forest atop the Serra dos Caiabis; several probable females also seen



- 56. **White-tailed Trogon**
- 57. **Blue-crowned Trogon**
- 58. **Ringed Kingfisher**
- 59. **Amazon Kingfisher**
- 60. **Green Kingfisher**
- 61. **Green-and-rufous Kingfisher**
- 62. **Blue-crowned Motmot**
- 63. **Bronzy Jacamar** – photographed in the stunted forest atop the Serra dos Caiabis
- 64. **Black-fronted Nunbird**
- 65. **Swallow-winged Puffbird**
- 66. **White-throated Toucan**
- 67. **Yellow-tufted Woodpecker**
- 68. **Red-stained Woodpecker**
- 69. **Lineated Woodpecker**
- 70. **Red-necked Woodpecker**
- 71. **Plain-crowned Spinetail**
- 72. **Straight-billed Woodcreeper**
- 73. **Lafresnaye's Woodcreeper**
- 74. **Lineated Woodcreeper**
- 75. **Fasciated Antshrike**
- 76. **Barred Antshrike**
- 77. **Natterer's Slaty-Antshrike** – common by voice in the stunted forest atop the Serra
- 78. **Spot-winged Antshrike**
- 79. **Pygmy Antwren**
- 80. **Amazonian Streaked-Antwren**
- 81. **White-fringed Antwren** – common by voice in the stunted forest atop the Serra
- 82. **Gray Antbird**

83. Blackish Antbird
84. Black-faced Antbird
85. Black-throated Antbird
86. Forest Elaenia
87. Southern Beardless-Tyrannulet
88. Short-tailed Pygmy-Tyrant
89. Sneathlodge's Tody-Tyrant
90. Spotted Tody-Flycatcher
91. Yellow-margined Flycatcher (**nominate ssp.**) – a very vocal pair in disturbed forest near Fazenda Hiroshima, and like birds we recorded during 2006 surveys, the vocalizations appear to match the nominate race rather than *paraensis* which is found in tall forests around Alta Floresta
92. Yellow-breasted Flycatcher
93. Fuscous Flycatcher
94. Drab Water-Tyrant
95. Rusty-margined Flycatcher
96. Great Kiskadee
97. Boat-billed Flycatcher
98. Crowned Slaty-Flycatcher
99. White-throated Kingbird
100. Tropical Kingbird
101. Brown-crested Flycatcher
102. Bright-rumped Attila
103. Spangled Cotinga – a male seen at fruiting trees near the Rio Apiacas
104. Screaming Piha
105. Pompadour Cotinga – at least six birds, including 3 males, seen between the Rio Apiacas and Fazenda Hiroshima III
106. Bare-necked Fruitcrow
107. Dwarf Tyrant-Manakin
108. Fiery-capped Manakin
109. Red-headed Manakin
110. Masked Tityra
111. Thrush-like Schiffornis
112. White-browed Purpletuft – a single bird seen atop the Serra dos Caiabis
113. Wing-barred Piprites
114. Rufous-browed Peppershrike
115. Red-eyed Vireo
116. Gray-chested Greenlet
117. White-winged Swallow
118. Gray-breasted Martin
119. White-banded Swallow
120. Southern Rough-winged Swallow
121. House Wren
122. Thrush-like Wren
123. Moustached Wren
124. Long-billed Gnatwren
125. Black-capped Donacobius
126. Plush-crested Jay – heard, and a pair glimpsed atop the Serra dos Caiabis

127. **Black-billed Thrush** – very common at the summit of the Serra  
128. **Red-capped Cardinal**



129. **Red-billed Pied-Tanager**  
130. **Flame-crested Tanager**  
131. **Fulvous-crested Tanager** – a male seen near Fazenda Hiroshima III just beyond the ‘city limits’ in Juara; still unrecorded in the municipality of Alta Floresta  
132. **Red-shouldered Tanager** – quite common atop the summit of the Serra  
133. **Silver-beaked Tanager**  
134. **Blue-gray Tanager**  
135. **Palm Tanager**  
136. **Paradise Tanager**  
137. **Blue-necked Tanager**  
138. **Swallow Tanager**  
139. **Black-faced Dacnis**  
140. **Blue Dacnis**  
141. **Purple Honeycreeper**  
142. **Yellow-backed Tanager**  
143. **Bananaquit**  
144. **Rufous-collared Sparrow**  
145. **Grassland Sparrow**  
146. **Blue-black Grassquit**  
147. **Red-crested Finch** – a breeding male and duller plumaged male seen together with two *Zonotrichia capensis* and *Troglodytes aedon* along the road in disturbed forest near edge immediately before the headquarters of Fazenda Hiroshima. Photographed.  
  
148. **Slate-coloured Grosbeak**  
149. **Buff-throated Saltator**

- 150. Golden-crowned Warbler
- 151. Rose-breasted Chat
- 152. Olive Oropendola
- 153. Purple-throated Euphonia
- 154. Rufous-bellied Euphonia