



BIRDING

MATO GROSSO

Customized birding and natural history tours throughout Brazil.

REMOTE SOUTHERN AMAZON MEGAS: RONDONIA BUSHBIRD EXPEDITION

There is no doubt that the Amazon rainforest is the most likely area on the planet to hold new discoveries for science, proof of which came in 2013 when no fewer than 15 new bird species were described in a special edition of the Handbook of the Birds of the World. A number of those discoveries came from the extremely poorly known region of the Aripuanã river of the Southern Amazon in Brazil lying between the Madeira and Tapajós rivers. Further research in this region indicates that more discoveries are yet to be made, and bird surveys in key areas have revealed a shocking biodiversity. So naturally we decided to start offering tours to the region! Our initial tour to the region was headlined by the Rondonia Bushbird, a species so rare only a handful of birders have ever seen it since it was first described to science in 1986 -- a mega in every sense of the word. We also found more than a half dozen other newly described species to science in addition to a strong supporting cast of regional endemics and near-endemics. This trip to the remote reaches of the southern Amazon in the vicinity of the Campos Amazônicos National Park offers an opportunity to see some of the least known birds of the Amazon. It is an antbird enthusiast's dream trip, with chances for Rondonia Bushbird, Pale-faced Bare-eye, White-breasted Antbird, Ferruginous-backed Antbird, Alta Floresta Antpitta, Banded Antbird and five newly described antbirds. Add in Campina Jay, Chico's Tyrannulet, White-browed Hawk, Cryptic Forest-Falcon, Buff-cheeked Tody-Flycatcher, Snow-capped Manakin, and Red-and-black Grosbeak, and one has the makings of some of the most exciting forest birding on the planet.

Suggested Itinerary:

Day 1: Arrival in Porto Velho.

Arrival in Porto Velho. You will be met at the airport for the transfer to a hotel with all modern conveniences in Porto Velho, the capital of the state of Rondônia. Depending on arrival schedules, there may be time for a bit of birding in the afternoon near Porto Velho.

Night in Porto Velho.

Day 2: Birding on west bank of the Madeira river.

Today we bird tall forests and sandy belt campinarana on the west bank of the Madeira river. The Madeira is a major barrier to speciation of Amazonian forest birds, and our principal focus today will be on west bank birds. First and foremost among these are a quartet of recently described species: Campina Jay, Western Striolated Puffbird, Inambari Woodcreeper, and Predicted Antwren. Other interesting birds found at this site include Brown-mandibled Aracari, Peruvian Warbling-Antbird, Humaitá Antbird, Citron-bellied Attila, and an as-yet-undescribed species of *Hemitriccus* tody-tyrant.

Night in Porto Velho.

Day 3: Drive to Tabajara.

From Porto Velho it will take us approximately five hours to drive to Tabajara in north-central Rondônia, possibly more if the roads are in poor condition. We should arrive in Tabajara with time for

some late afternoon birding at a nearby site.

Night in Tabajara.

Days 4 – 6: Birding Tabajara area.

We have three full days to work the extremely diverse Tabajara area. Avian surveys undertaken in this region have produced a bird list in excess of 500 species, including 51 species of typical antbirds! The highlights are numerous, and there is an excellent variety of trails and habitats in the immediate vicinity of the small village of Tabajara, easily enough to keep us busy during our stay here. We will bird open sandy campinas near the village to look for the recently described Chico's Tyrannulet and other white sand specialists such as Rufous-crowned Elaenia, Pale-bellied Mourner, Green-tailed Goldenthrout, and Campina Thrush. In the taller campinarana forest nearby, a long trail takes us into great habitat for such rare specialties as Buff-cheeked Tody-Flycatcher, Black Manakin, Zimmer's Tody-Tyrant, and the recently described Aripuanã Antwren. Other more widespread, but equally compelling birds here include Spotted Puffbird, Bronzy Jacamar, Snow-capped Manakin, and Rondonia Warbling-Antbird. Crossing the Rio Machado downstream from the *2 de Novembro* rapids, we visit a long trail into varzea (Greater Schiffornis) and excellent terra firme forest. In the tall forest we'll be after Roosevelt Stipple-throated Antwren, Manicoré Warbling-Antbird, Alta Floresta Antpitta, Banded Antbird, Pearly Antshrike, Blue-cheeked Jacamar, Red-and-black Grosbeak, and much more. We'll be on the alert for any sign of an active army ant swarm, as two of the biggest targets of the tour are a duo of fancy, endemic antbirds: the White-breasted Antbird, and the Pale-faced Bare-eye, both of which are obligate army ant followers.

Nights in Tabajara.

Day 7: Transfer to Bushbird camp.

After some early birding around Tabajara, we will spend the rest of the day traveling to our campsite on the Rio Machado. What it lacks in sophistication, our campsite makes up for with its tranquil setting along an uninhabited stretch of river in the buffer zone of the Campos Amazônicos National Park.

Night in camp.

Days 8 – 9: Birding Bushbird Trail.

We have two full days allotted to our quest for the Rondonia Bushbird. The first morning we will likely head directly for the best bushbird territories, a walk of at least one kilometre if water levels allow us to reach the trailhead nearest to the bushbirds by boat, or possibly up to three or four kilometres if low water levels mean we can only reach the more distant trailhead. The Rondonia Bushbird is a shy, low density species even in its ideal micro-habitat, and finding the birds can require quite a lot of patience and perseverance. The trail here is excellent birding even without bushbirds, and we will be looking for goodies such as Pavonine Quetzal, Hoffmanns' Woodcreeper, Aripuanã Antwren, Yellow-browed Antbird, Buff-cheeked Tody-Flycatcher and more. The Rio Machado itself also offers good birding, particularly in the dry season when low water levels reveal the river's muddy banks, where Orange-cheeked, Blue-headed, and Kawall's Parrots congregate to ingest clay and minerals in the mornings. River islands and exposed sandbars are home to Sand-coloured Nighthawk, Ladder-tailed Nightjar, Pied Lapwing, and nesting Black Skimmers and Large-billed Terns.

Nights in camp.

Day 10: Morning birding. Transfer to Porto Velho.

We have a final partial morning available for birding, during which time our team will be breaking camp for our departure for Porto Velho. The balance of the day will be spent on the long drive back to the capital, where we stay the night in a comfortable city hotel.

Night in Porto Velho.

Day 11: Birding on west bank of the Madeira river.

An early start this morning will take us back to the west bank of the Rio Madeira, as we head for the open campinas near the town of Humaitá, where we will search for the elusive Ocellated Crane and other specialties of the Amazonian savannas found here. In the late afternoon we return to Porto Velho for a farewell dinner to celebrate our successes.

Night in Porto Velho.

Day 12: Outbound flights.**PRICE:**

Please inquire by e-mail (bradley@birdingmatogrosso.com or birdingmatogrosso@gmail.com) for an up to date quote for this itinerary. When you write, please indicate your ideal travel period and the number of participants in your party.

ACCOMMODATION:

Porto Velho (Day 1, 2, 10, 11) – Porto Velho is the capital of the state of Rondônia and a wide range of hotels are available. We will stay at a comfortable business hotel with en suite facilities and air-conditioning.

Tabajara (Day 3 – 6) – Tabajara is a very small village with just a single basic *pousada*. Facilities here are shared, but the rooms do have air-conditioning.

Bushbird camp (Day 7 – 9) – Our campsite is located on a small homestead overlooking the Rio Machado at a location known as *Alto do Bode* (Goat's Bluff). There is no electricity or running water here. We will provide tents, mattresses, and sheets to participants.

CLIMATE:

Expect hot and humid conditions throughout the trip. Rain is possible at any time, even during dry season months (June to October), although it is less likely during that period. During the southern winter, cold fronts do push into the southern Amazon from time to time, causing overcast weather with lower temperatures (especially in early mornings) for periods of up to three or four days.

LUGGAGE

We suggest you pack lightly for this trip, as space may be at a premium in our vehicles due to the expeditionary nature of the trip. We will provide most of the camping kit, with the exception of sleeping bags. A lightweight sleeping bag would be appropriate for our time spent camping, and even possibly in the basic *pousada* at Tabajara where sheets are provided, but blankets are not.

Please note that there are weight limits on both checked and carry-on baggage on internal flights in Brazil:

Checked baggage: 2 bags, 22 kg total

Carry-on: 1 bag + 1 purse or camera bag, 5 kg* total

Overweight baggage fees in Brazil vary from airline to airline, but expect to pay something on the order of R\$20 – R\$25 per kilogram overweight. Airlines will accept payment by credit card for overweight fees, but sometimes you will be required to leave the queue to pay these fees to a difference airline employee.

VISAS AND ENTRY REQUIREMENTS

A valid passport is required for entry into Brazil. It must be valid for at least six months past the time of your scheduled return. U.S., Canadian, and Australian citizens must obtain a visa in advance before traveling to Brazil; if you do not have a visa, you will not be allowed to board the airplane. **British and South African citizens do not need a visa.** Other nationalities should check with the Brazilian consulate or embassy in their home country.

You will be given an entry card at immigration upon arrival; keep it with your passport for the entire trip in case the authorities ask to inspect it. By law you are required to carry your passport with you at all times. It is a good idea to make a photocopy of your passport photo pages and visa page, and to keep the copy in a different place from the passport during the tour.

TIME ZONES

The state of Rondônia is UTC-04:00, one hour behind Brasília time (the time zone which covers the national capital and eastern Brazil).

CURRENCY

Brazil's national currency is the Real (pronounced *hay-OW*, and pluralized as *reais*). The colourful banknotes each have a creature from the Brazilian fauna and come in denominations of: R\$1, R\$2, R\$5, R\$10, R\$20, R\$50 and R\$100. As of mid-April 2016, the exchange rate against the U.S. Dollar was USD:BRL = 3.5:1.

The Real is the only widely accepted currency in Brazil, although U.S. dollars may be accepted in more upscale tourist hotels and travel agencies (but expect any change to be given in local currency). The easiest way to obtain local currency is to use a debit or credit card at an automated bank machine linked to the Cirrus/Mastercard or Visa/Plus networks; most banks charge a nominal fee for these transactions. Otherwise you may want to change money at a foreign exchange kiosk in the airport where you arrive to Brazil.

Credit cards are fairly widely accepted in hotels, restaurants, and shops. Visa and Mastercard are the most popular cards. Traveler's cheques are nearly impossible to use these days in Brazil.

In Tabajara credit cards are not accepted, and expect to have difficulties paying for any items if you only have larger denomination bank notes.

HEALTH

A current Yellow Fever vaccination is useful, as occasional outbreaks in remote areas of the country happen from time to time, but is no longer a requirement for travelers to Brazil unless you arriving directly from another country where Yellow Fever is endemic. The shot is good for ten years, and your clinic or travel doctor should give you a stamped and dated yellow card that serves as proof of vaccination. Always keep your basic shots such as tetanus, polio, and diphtheria up to date. **Always consult a travel doctor in your home country well before the start of your trip for qualified professional advice on vaccination requirements.**

There is a minimal malaria risk in the area of the Amazon we will visit, please consult a travel doctor regarding the appropriate anti-malarial regime.

Bring all prescription and over-the-counter medicines with you in sufficient quantities to last the entire

trip, as well as a copy of your prescriptions with generic drug names.

All participants are urged to ensure they are covered with comprehensive travel insurance for the duration of the tour. We ask that you provide your policy number and insurer's contact information together with the participant details form sent to each member of the group separately. There are parallel health providers in Brazil, with a public option and a private option. The public option is woefully underfunded and overcrowded, and any treatment or procedures required during the tour will be sought at private hospitals with all costs covered by the client.