

## **Brazil: Atlantic Rainforest and Pantanal Sept 6<sup>th</sup> – Oct 12<sup>th</sup> 2009**

**Rosemary and Peter Royle**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This 5 week trip was intended primarily for birdwatching but we were also keen to see mammals. It was a relaxed itinerary – we spent longer at most locations than many people do and this turned out to be very handy when we had bad weather (see below). We saw many excellent birds and mammals and also ate some truly excellent food and experienced great hospitality.

We stayed at 5 main locations. These were:

**Southern Pantanal** – we stayed at Fazenda Barranco Alto for 5 nights

**Rio de Janeiro** - 2 nights to see the sights

**Atlantic Rainforest** – Serra dos Tucanos for 10 nights

**Atlantic Rainforest** – REGUA for 6 nights

**Northern Pantanal and Chapada dos Guimaraes** – a 7 day tour with Boute Expeditions

This itinerary turned out very well and in retrospect we would not change anything. All our connections and pick-ups worked well - things in Brazil seem to be quite organised and punctual.

We saw 494 species of birds, of which 293 were lifers. We were very pleased with these results which included a number of charismatic birds we particularly wanted to see such as Saffron and Spot Billed Toucanets, Blond Crested, Pale Crested and Cream Coloured Woodpeckers, Hyacinth Macaw, Red Legged Seriema, Southern Screamer and the set of target Cotingas. We also did very well on the Atlantic Rainforest endemics. In addition we saw 24 species of mammal including Puma, Ocelot, Giant Otter and Giant Anteater.

A few key birding dips were Black Billed Scythebill, Collared Crescentchest and Harpy Eagle. We also did not do too well on night birds – the weather played a part here – and for some reason missed a few of the very small tyrant flycatchers. But we saw 19 species of parrot, all the cotingas, 8 manakins, 8 toucans, 35 furnarids, 37 “ant things” and 39 tanagers!

(Note that the above bird totals excludes “heard only” – our most tantalising “heard only” bird was Zigzag Heron!)

For a field guide we used the newly published “Guia de Campo – Birds of Eastern Brazil” by Sigrist, assuming this would be better than the much derided “All the Birds of Brazil” by Souza. This was not necessarily true – the illustrations may appear to be more life-like but they were very variable in accuracy according to the artist. The “ant things” were good but the tyrant flycatchers were particularly bad – the jizz was often completely wrong. And there are errors – Lesser Seedfinch is missing altogether and the Mantled Hawk is shown in flight with a black tail band which it does not have. But the biggest disadvantage was the lack of any information on habitat, calls or behaviour which is a big drawback. We also used “Birds of Serra dos Tucanos” – a slim (but expensive) volume by Ber van Perlo, which is strangely not available at the lodge. This was very useful indeed – good illustrations and useful text, but we unfortunately lost our copy on the second outing at Tucanos! I understand that van Perlo has just published a book “A field guide to the birds of Brazil” – this would probably be the one to get in the future.

For calls and songs we downloaded a huge number of mp3 tracks from Xeno Canto [www.xeno-canto.org](http://www.xeno-canto.org). This is very time consuming – there are usually many recordings for each species and it is necessary to find the best combination of quality and recording location

near to where you are expecting to see the bird. Luckily there are many recordings by Nick Athanas (from Tropical Birding) and Leonardo Pimentel (from REGUA) which are reliable in quality. We did not, however, download calls for the flycatchers as we did not know they were important – this was very wrong as some flycatchers can only be reliably identified by call. I tried to learn some songs before we went but found it very hard to do. In fact we did not use the mp3 player all that much – it was useful for confirming calls we had heard and we did use it on about 6 occasions when we were birding on our own to either confirm birds we were seeing (they usually reacted quite nicely) or to bring out species we could hear calling. But mostly the guides had all the necessary calls and songs available.

For research we used a number of trip reports from Birdtours <http://www.birdtours.co.uk/> and Travelling Birder <http://www.travellingbirder.com/>. There are many reports available for Serra dos Tucanos and an excellent one by Lee Ringan based at REGUA. There is not a lot of information for the Pantanal however.

## **LOCATIONS**

**Fazenda Barranco Alto** <http://www.fazendabarrancoalto.com.br/>

This is a large working ranch on the banks of the Rio Negro which also operates as an eco-lodge for a small number of guests. Lucas and Marina, the owners, have retained the natural forest on much of their property, which also has numerous fresh and saline lakes. This results in an excellent mixture of habitats and consequently many birds and mammals. The food and hospitality was first class – always a chilled jug of fruit juice waiting when you returned from an expedition and free (and very generous) caipirinhas in the evening. Meals were eaten around one large table and at Sunday lunch, which is a big family occasion, Lucas's family joined us for a big joint of roast feral pig.

Each day there were organised excursions in the morning and afternoon, usually a combination of driving in 4WD vehicles with high seats and walking. There were two vehicles and typically we travelled in one of these with any other birdwatchers and the other vehicle held people with more general interests. Each time we went out we went to a different area and habitat so that we were still seeing new birds on the last day. Apart from the organised excursions you are free to wander around the farm and lodge area and around the ox-bow lake nearby – we chose to do this on several occasions in order to find our own birds and do some photography. A boat ride is usually offered as your first excursion – very good close views of kingfishers and otters – and an early morning canoe trip is also available – this turned out to be an excellent way of seeing Giant Otters up close. You can also ride or fish.

Lucas is a keen birdwatcher and this meant that he was happy to take us out on our own as it gave him a chance to birdwatch as well. We spent very long hours in the field, always driving back after dark to maximise nocturnal sightings.

We saw a total of 175 bird species here including close up views of 4 species of large macaw - Hyacinth Macaws nest only 100 yards from the lodge buildings. Birds we saw here and nowhere else included White Faced Ibis, Ringed Teal, Coscoroba Swan, Pied Lapwing, Collared Plover, Yellow Billed Tern, Golden Collared Macaw, Blue and Yellow Macaw, Nanday Parakeet, Spot Backed Puffbird, Cream Backed Woodpecker, White Lored Spinetail, Great Rufous Woodcreeper, Pied Water Tyrant, Fawn Breasted Wren, Yellowish Pipit, Plush Crested Jay and Lesser Seedfinch.

There were also very good numbers of mammals - we saw several types of monkey and deer and also Giant Otters, Giant Anteater, a Puma with a cub and two sightings of Ocelot – though strangely not Tapir though they are usually quite easy to see. Caimans and Capybaras are numerous on the river and Peccaries and Coatis are common.

You can travel either by plane or 4WD to the lodge from Campo Grande – the latter is cheaper but takes 6 hours with 28 gates to open and close! We travelled both ways by 4WD.

Our stay here was definitely the highlight of the trip.

**Serra dos Tucanos** <http://www.serradostucanos.com.br/>

Much has been written in trip reports about Serra dos Tucanos so I will not repeat it all here. However, we were not prepared for the fact that the lodge is actually just off a main road, and that the traffic noise could sometimes be obtrusive. The plus side of this is that there is easy access to the main road when going out on excursions.

We had an excellent room with a balcony overlooking the lawn and the feeders, though note that there is only one room that has this facility. The birds in the garden – both on the feeders and on the fruiting trees by the swimming pool – were quite exceptional both in number of species and in dazzling colourfulness! We saw 85 species in the Tucanos grounds and some of these – Channel Billed Toucan, Rufous Capped Antthrush, male Black Cheeked Gnateater and Saffron Toucanet – we saw nowhere else. There were many others which we saw well in the grounds and only poorly elsewhere. There are trails leading up the hill behind the lodge, but we found birding on these trails could be very slow - however when you did see something it tended to be good, especially in the evening. It is well worth dedicating time to birding in the grounds – afternoons (after a morning excursion) or when the weather is poor are good times. We actually spent 4½ days just in the grounds – much of this was in wet weather which was the only time we saw the Saffron Toucanets. On both occasions they just quietly appeared – once when we were just going in for lunch. The Spot Billed Toucanet and Blond Crested Woodpecker also slipped in very quietly and could easily have been missed. None of these birds stayed for very long. We only saw the Crescent Chested Puffbird on the last day, perched in an obvious place where it certainly had not been perched before!

During our stay at Tucanos there was party of 8 Japanese with their American guide; they were being looked after by Pete, the full time guide and were using the minibus. As well as ourselves there was also a Dutch couple and so Andy Foster, who runs the lodge, and does not usually do much guiding these days, took us out on excursions in his rather small car. A bit of a squeeze but it did have some benefits. Andy did a very good job of finding a large number of endemics for us – he used the MP3 player extensively and most of the birds responded well as the breeding season was starting.

We arrived at lunchtime and spent the rest of the day in the grounds on our own. We then spent the next day also around the lodge, doing a walk with Andy in the afternoon. We then went on most of the usual excursions as follows:

**Pico de Caledonia (High Altitude), both Lower and Higher sections** We had beautiful weather on this day – the dry conditions combined with using Andy's car meant that we were able to drive much higher up the mountain than is usual. As soon as we got out of the car the first birds we heard calling were Grey Winged Cotingas! It took a little while longer until we got decent perched views though. All the other high altitude species obligingly appeared – the Diademed Tanagers were particularly smart. We then made the decision not to spend time walking to the top and looking for the Itatiaia Thistletail but to make the best use of the good weather by going down the hill and doing the lower section. On our way back down we had stunning close views of an unperturbable Black-and-Gold Cotinga singing his heart out close to the road. Swallow Tailed Cotingas were also located fairly easily. We did very well on the lower section even having close views of Red Legged Seriema and finished the day with 73 species, many of them of very high quality. Back at the lodge the weather had been poor all day.

**Portao Azul and Macae de Cima** Heavy rain overnight and the forecast was poor so we decided to concentrate on the inland side of the mountains. We had good weather again for the very pleasant walk up the hill at Portao Azul where we found most of the target species except the White Breasted Tapaculo which would not play ball. In the afternoon at Macae de Cima it was cool with wispy cloud and some rain but Bellbirds were calling all around and we had good but distant scope views. By laying in wait at a flowering bush we also had splendid views of a male Plovercrest. The soundscape here was amazing – the “donk” of Bellbirds“, the indescribable sound of Black-and Gold Cotingas, the minor descent of White Rimmed Warblers, the mournful coo of the Grey Fronted Dove and the deep hooting of Variegated

Antpitta (never seen!) was very other-wordly – it reminded me of old forest in New Zealand. Another good day. It rained all evening and most of the night.

**Three Toed Jacamar** A bad forecast again and indeed it did rain on and off all day even on the dry side of the mountains which is where this excursion is located. We managed a total of 92 species which is not terribly good - the weather was definitely a factor. We saw the key species however, with the exception of White Eared Puffbird (though we saw this later in the northern Pantanal). Thunder and heavy rain in the evening meant lots of happy frogs in the pond (except the one eaten by a snake as we watched) – at least 5 different kinds of croak.

**A rainy day at the lodge:** A wet morning – Joss and Wilma went on the Theodoro Trail but we stayed at the lodge watching the feeders and waited for some new birds to turn up – they did – the Blond Crested Woodpecker put in an appearance as also did a Pileated Finch. The fruiting trees near the swimming pool also yielded good birds such as Pin-Tailed and White bearded Manakin. In the afternoon we walked the trails and saw Spot Billed Toucanet and had good views of Rufous Capped Antthrush – like a little moorhen with a red cap and a trilling call.

**Serra dos Orgaos** An extremely windy day but little rain although it threatened all the time. We quickly saw good birds in the lower park but left here quickly for the upper park as it looked like rain. We stopped at the roadside café to look at the feeders but you could hardly stand up in the wind – needless to say there were no birds. The high level trail was amazingly quiet – the only bird which was calling, luckily, was the Sharpbill and we had reasonable views. No Hooded Berryeaters calling at all. We didn't go to the top as there seemed little point. We returned back down and then explored a raised walkway – again quiet (except for a tree we heard crashing down in the forest!) apart from a few foliage gleaners, but as we started to get a bit silly due to the lack of birds, and bang on the railings and pretend they were steel drums Peter said "What's that – oh just another foliage gleaner". But it wasn't – it was a Brown Tanager munching on bamboo seeds – not a striking bird but apparently rarely seen – Andy got quite excited. Peter managed some photos – the only ones he took all day!

**Bamboo Trail** A bad forecast and no escape to the dry side any more – the wet side has to be tackled! Peter, Joss and Wilma tackled the Bamboo trail in quite heavy rain. They saw very little but did get the main target bird – Hooded Berryeater. Rosemary watched the feeders and had good views of Spot Billed Toucanet but feeding on the palm berries not the feeders. After the others had arrived back soaking wet and cold, and we were having a warming-up coffee, Saffron Toucanets arrived on the big tree in the garden and we almost missed them! It rained all afternoon and we gave up on the birdwatching, retiring to our room to read and listen to music.

**Around the lodge:** Another wet start and good views of Saffron Toucanets at around 9:00 am. The rain stopped and Peter spent some time taking photos. We then took a taxi into the town for an Internet session – taxi about £25, Internet 50p! After lunch we walked the Tucanos trails.

**Cedae Trail:** Awoke to a sunny morning and took a taxi to the Cedae Trail, which is just up the road. We did this trail on our own which was a challenge but we enjoyed it – the scenery and the forest was excellent. We saw some good birds such as Mantled Hawk, Oustalet's Tyrannulet, White Thighed Swallow and Spot Backed Antshrike. In the afternoon we birded and photographed around the lodge finding new birds – such as Crescent Chested Puffbird – in the unaccustomed sunshine! (Taxi fare about £20)

**Theodoro Trail:** Again we birded this on our own, not quite so successfully as the previous day. Again hot and sunny. In the afternoon we transferred by taxi to REGUA in very hot weather. (Taxi fare about £20 to the Theodoro trail)

Note that we did not do the REGUA excursion as we were going there later.

In total we saw 247 species at Serra dos Tucanos.

**REGUA (Reserva Ecologica de Guapiacu) <http://www.regua.co.uk/>**

REGUA is essentially a private farm, part of which has been turned into an large private reserve, supported by organisations such as the World Land Trust. Much important forest has been purchased covering a wide range of elevations, and much replanting has also been carried out. There is also a wetland area, though this is currently not very large and is being expanded. This has attracted a few caimans and capybaras which were somehow still living nearby, but the number of birds species is not large. The lodge has good rooms and excellent food. There are excellent local guides, or you can do the trails on your own. (Though most of the trails, apart from the wetland trails, require you to be dropped off from a vehicle as they are some way from the lodge). There are also excursions to many of the same places as Tucanos offers but we did not go on any of these.

We were just a little disappointed with REGUA., though our views are possibly coloured by the poor weather we had. There were communication problems between Nicholas (who owns and runs REGUA), his guides, the kitchen staff and the guests – not surprising really as there is no phone and we felt Nicholas just takes on too much. (He runs both the farm, the reserve and the lodge) Some of the rooms had no information about the trails, mealtimes were unpredictable, our promised night walk never materialised, and guests were unsure what was actually happening from day to day. We felt that a “guest manager” was sorely needed. Two other points – the hummingbird feeders at the various “casas” around the reserve were all empty and untended, and the hide at the wetlands has a long steep ladder which I was unable to contemplate climbing, so my anticipated long spells in the hide did not happen. Despite this we would still strongly recommend visiting REGUA as these are only minor quibbles

We arrived on a very hot afternoon and the birding around the lodge was very quiet. Peter explored the wetlands – he sat on a bank for an hour or so and regretted it – he was attacked by chiggers all around his waist.

**Waterfall Trail:** We decided to do this on our own – we really prefer to bird without a guide whenever possible. We had a lift to the start of the trail and arranged to be picked up at 4:00 pm. It took us 4 hours to walk very slowly to the waterfall which is actually very spectacular. We saw plenty of familiar birds and found a new foliage gleaner and a couple of new antwrens. (The information in the lodge was very helpful for giving you ideas about what to expect/look for on each trail). Peter then walked on up another 1km up the Elfin Trail on a quest for Shrike-Like Cotinga – I had been using the MP3 player to teach him the call. And he saw it – he even managed to whistle it in! We walked slowly back with large monitor lizards occasionally crashing through the undergrowth. The weather was still hot so we went for swim at the lodge.

**4x4 Trail:** We left the lodge after breakfast to find the sky looking extremely menacing. We drove by 4x4 up to the top of a trail and then basically walked back down with our guide. It started well with cracking views of Eastern Striped Manakin – a fabulous little bird – and then after much perseverance we eventually got views of a Rufous Crowned Motmot. But then the rain started and the birding was very slow though Adilei managed to find a decent few of the species on our “wanted list”!. But we reached the bottom of the trail a full 3 hours before the vehicle was coming to pick us up! With no form of communication we just had to start walking back in the, by now, heavy rain, wading a stream in the process. Luckily after two hours the vehicle came to find us. As this was a trail which has been walked many times, how could the timing have been so wrong? It rained all evening and night and .....

**Around the wetlands:** ...was still raining in the morning. It eased off mid-morning so we walked around the wetlands and easily found Masked Ducks just floating around – also various grebes, ducks and gallinules. It started to rain again and we tried some of the tracks around the back of the small hill by the wetlands – we got a bit lost despite my copied drawings of the maps (It would be useful if copies of the maps were available at the lodge to take around with you rather than being fixed inside the guest book). We got rather wet and did not see much. After lunch we decided to try another outing – this time in full waterproofs –

and we managed to find an Ash Throated Crane and Capped Herons and watched the Cattle Egrets come in to roost.

**Wetlands with Adilei:** We awoke to low cloud but no rain and went back to the wetlands with Adilei to find some species which we knew we had missed. The rain held off and we saw good birds including Moustached Wren and a Common Potoo with a chick roosting under the breast feathers. After lunch we went back to the wetlands for photography but most of the waterbirds seemed to have disappeared. After dinner Nicholas gave us an interesting presentation on the history and development of REGUA.

**Trail the other side of Matumbo village:** After an early breakfast we set off for the Matumbo Trail to try and pick up some key species which we were still missing. The trail went past small farms and through forest with clearings and the weather was at last sunny. We quickly saw a Yellow Fronted Woodpecker (stunning) and then a manic displaying Frilled Coquette and later also a manic displaying Scale Throated Hermit and a miniscule Reddish Hermit. The area was very birdy indeed and we added many species to our REGUA list. After lunch it was very hot and we lazed around the lodge and took photos of the butterflies which came to the bananas on the feeders. Then we took a last walk down to the wetlands via the tree nursery where my attempt to call up Moustached Wren resulted in good views of a Long Billed Wren! Again the waterbirds seem to have disappeared – we had fallen in love with Capped Herons and we wanted some photos but they were just not there. Dinner was very late - Nick Athanas had arrived with two clients and they went looking for owls and Giant Snipe after dark – dinner had been delayed for them but nobody else knew this. (We had asked for night walk but it never materialised so we felt a bit sore about this – the only comfort was that they did not see the Giant Snipe!)

The next day we left before dawn for our flight from Rio via Brasilia to Cuiaba.

In total we saw 170 species at REGUA.

### **Boute Expeditions <http://www.boute-expeditions.com/> 7 day tour of the Pantanal and Chapada dos Guimaraes**

We knew very little about Boute Expeditions apart from the information on the website when we booked this tour so were a little apprehensive when we arrived in Cuiaba – but it turned out very well. There were three of us in the group – ourselves (who had been in Brazil for nearly 4 weeks) and Harold from the USA who had never set foot in Brazil before. However, he was a very nice chap and we had an excellent guide – Guiliano Bernardon – who coped well with our different levels of experience. Guiliano was very personable, spoke first class English and really knew his birds and where to find them.

Our itinerary was as follows:

**Trans-Pantaneira:** We were picked up early from our hotel in Cuiaba by Guiliano in his Renault Megane Scenic which proved very capable on dirt roads and tracks. We spent the morning driving along the Trans-Pantaneira with frequent stops for birds in very hot weather. Good views of Red Winged Tinamous, Chestnut Bellied Guans, Maguari Stork and at last, photographable Capped Herons. We arrived for a late lunch at

**Fazenda Santa Theresa (also known as the Pantanal Wildlife Centre)** This was an excellent lodge with terrific food and beautiful appliqué embroideries for sale, made by local women. We went out on a good boat trip in the afternoon, seeing many waterbirds including Sunbittern, and including a short walk where we saw more birds and an amazing Great Potoo trying to be a tree snag. A juvenile Great Horned Owl in the garden enlivened the evening and a night walk located a Spot Tailed Nightjar.

The next day we were out early and birded the riverside scrub and forest. The mozzies were bad but the birds were good. An obliging Red Billed Scythebill on the fencepost by the lodge gave great views. In the afternoon Peter climbed up the viewing tower to photograph the Jabiru nest – one of the well grown youngsters was exercising his wings and just lifting off in

the strong wind. Later we went on another boat ride – this time accompanied by a Great Black Hawk and a Black Collared Hawk who would both dive down and pick up fish scraps thrown by the boatman. We failed to find a Sungrebe and as it got dark we could hear a Zigzag Heron calling but we failed to tempt it any closer with the MP3 player. We did see Giant Otter though.

The next morning we went out before breakfast and birded the entrance road – plenty of good birds including Greater Thornbirds nest-building and Rusty Backed Antwren out in the open! A late breakfast then off back up the Trans-Pantaneira to

**Piuval Lodge** seeing big flocks of migrating Mississippi Kites on the way. A more commercial lodge but there were still plenty of birds including Hyacinth Macaws. We spent the afternoon walking a track through fairly open forest – for once the birds – such as Saffron Billed Sparrow - were easy to see.

The next morning was very overcast and it soon started to rain. We eventually called off the birding, had breakfast and drove out slowly looking for a few key species which we managed to find. Then a long drive back to Cuiaba and then north west to

**Serra dos Araras** where we immediately found new parrots in the fruiting trees of the lodge and had a truly excellent lunch. Out again in the afternoon - raining again - for the great Harpy Eagle hunt, hoping to find the juvenile bird who was regularly returning to the nest tree to roost. Suffice to say, it didn't, though we did find some night birds on the walk back and the evening insect chorus was phenomenal.

We were out very early the next morning to see if we could locate the Harpy Eagle. We went up to a viewing platform on the top of a rocky outcrop where we did not see the HE but did see plenty of other good birds. Then back to the lodge for a late breakfast before driving to

**Chapada dos Guimaraes.** This was a very scenic sandstone habitat with cerrado scrub, cliffs and waterfalls and a completely different set of birds. We stayed in a big tourist lodge with a stunning view which had good birds in the patches of forest in the grounds (e.g. Helmeted Manakin). We ate our meals in a buffet restaurant in town which gave a good insight into the excellent local cuisine. (Sagu Vinho – sago in wine – was a revelation.)

Over the next afternoon, full day and final morning we birded a number of locations in the area, often from quiet roads, so it was relatively easy – the hot dry weather here helped as well. At a waterfall viewing point Peter even managed to take a picture of a definitive Biscutate Swift! There were many new species to be seen - we saw no less than 3 new species of manakin, caught up with Southern Antpipit at last, and we also had stunning views of ornate Hawk Eagle at the nest. (Note that the "Birds of Eastern Brazil" does not cover all the birds here).

We then drove back to Cuiaba where the trip finished. This was altogether a very good package and was very reasonably priced. We saw 266 species.

#### **Rio de Janeiro** Hotel Orla de Copacabana

We spent one day in Rio in order to go up Sugarloaf Mountain and to the Christ Statue at Corcovado, and to have a look at the famous beaches. The latter were disappointingly deserted in the cool overcast weather. (No dental floss bikinis to be seen!) We went on a coach tour on a pretty basic multi-lingual trip but it did achieve our objectives even if Christ was swathed in mist! We were able to watch Frigate Birds soaring below us from Sugarloaf Mountain. The rest of Rio is disappointing – there are few attractive old buildings unlike many South American cities.

## **OTHER INFORMATION**

**International Flights** We flew BA direct from Heathrow to Sao Paulo. The fare was very competitive at the time of booking and the whole journey including check-in at Terminal 5 was very smooth and relaxing. Excellent food too.

**Internal flights** We flew with TAM who were efficient and on time. There are many other operators in Brazil but TAM has an English website which helps with planning. However we did not book directly over the web as the prices (even special deals) seemed a bit high – we rang Journey Latin America <http://www.journeylatinamerica.co.uk> to see if they could do any better and they could – much better. So we booked the internal flights (and also our Rio hotel and tour, and last-night hotel at Sao Paulo airport) through them. (Interestingly they could not get such a good price for the International Flights as we could)

**Airports** There are two airports in Rio and two in Sao Paulo. Internal flights go from all of them so you need to check carefully when organising transfers, pick ups etc. The small city airport in Rio (Santos Dumont) is very close to the centre with a very short runway surrounded by sea, but fantastic views when coming in to land!

**Airport check-in etc** We found out quite by chance that if you enquire where to check-in in English you are often whisked to the Priority counter where everything is done for you and there are no queues! The automatic check-in machines are to be avoided if possible – they are in Portuguese only and we could not work out how to check in two people together. Most TAM announcements are in both Portuguese and English. Note the gate numbers on the displays carefully – they often change.

**Language** We tried to learn some Portuguese before we left without much success, but it was well worth buying the CD just to hear Portuguese pronunciation which no book can truly prepare you for. We found it very helpful to have learnt some basics in this before the trip - r and rr are pronounced as a soft h, de and te are pronounced gee or chee, emphasis is on the second last syllable unless there is an accent - as follows:

Rio de Janeiro	is pronounced	Hio de Janeiro
Campo Grande		Campo Grangee
Serra dos Tucanos		Seha dos Tucanos
Cerrado		Sehado
Restaurante		Hastorunche
Real		Hayow
Reis (plural of Real)		Hayice

(But note that if a Brazilian is talking to you in English they will use the English pronunciation of the currency e.g. Rayahl)

With a background of school French and Latin we found we could understand most signs. Be aware that hardly any older people speak any English – even taxi drivers. One hotel reception had a useful translation system on their PC.

**First names** Very curious this one – Brazilians often use first names to identify people – e.g. we were Mr Peter and Mrs Rosemary. So if the hotel reception or a tour guide can't find your booking check under your first name rather than your surname.

**Food** The food was much more interesting and varied than we were expecting. A typical meal would be the ubiquitous rice and beans (the latter cooked with onion and garlic and very tasty) plus a meat dish, perhaps a vegetable dish, always some salad and usually a very gooey sweet (often based heavily on condensed milk or its caramelised version Doce de Leite) But this was often the minimum and there were frequently two meat dishes. On the last



day at Cuiaba with Guiliano we had a meal in a Churrascaria – all the types of barbecued meat you could ever imagine delivered to your table in endless supply plus casseroles and salads and sweets. All for a fixed price and definitely recommended. Breakfasts were also very good – always cake and yoghurt, pao de queijo (cheese bread), tropical fruit and often pastries as well as the usual breakfast fodder.

**Souvenirs** If you are on a birding trip it is often difficult to find time to buy any gifts or souvenirs but we found that roadside cafés (e.g at Serra dos Orgaos) sold lots of goodies in the food line intended as gifts – Doce de Leite, Jellies, honey etc. We bought a few of these home and they were well received! There are very few shops selling souvenirs at Sao Paulo airport – we found only one small shop where we managed to get some Cachaça and some coffee. (They also sold Brazilian football shirts)

**Caipirinha** (Kaipireenya) This is a fabulous cocktail made from Cachaça (cane spirit), limes, sugar and ice. They can be very strong and they are delicious. They are often offered free, or a complimentary one is offered when you check-in to a hotel. They were free at Barranco Alto and REGUA though the ladies who made them at REGUA were teetotal and never sampled them so they often needed more sugar! At Tucanos Andy offers free Cachaça in various forms.

**The Pantanal** We spent only three nights in the northern Pantanal – two at Fazenda Santa Theresa and one at Piuval Lodge. Although we saw most of the main Pantanal bird species, the Boute itinerary, which only goes half way down the Trans-Pantaneira, does not really give you any feel for the Pantanal itself, especially in the dry season – you just see fields with a few wet areas and wet drains by the road. You do not see many mammals – a few capybaras and caimans but not the hundreds we had seen in the south, so we were glad we had included the south Pantanal in our itinerary.

**Weather** We were not expecting wall to wall sunshine especially in the Atlantic Rainforest but we did in fact have very poor weather except for the last few days at Chapada dos Guimaraes. It was often very cool, cloudy and windy due to a sequence of Antarctic cold fronts marching up the continent. (It was often warmer in the UK at the time during the Indian summer) The cool weather in the Pantanal was probably a blessing as otherwise it would have been extremely hot – we were able to stay out in the field for long periods. But it was very poor light for photography. In the rainforest the combination of dark forest and dark sky meant that photographing – and even seeing – birds was very hard. We had 27 continuous hours of rain at Tucanos, plus plenty of other showers, and another 2 days of rain at REGUA. Then more rain at Piuval Lodge and when searching for the Harpy Eagle. The trip to Serra dos Orgaos was almost birdless due to the very strong winds. On the other hand, our excursion to Pico de Caledonia was in beautiful sunny weather which enabled us to see all the target birds very easily. So I guess you win some, you lose some, but it is worth factoring in extra days to allow for rain.

**Bird list** I have attached the bird list as a separate file. For each species I have indicated where we saw it, under the headings as follows:

Pan S	–	Pantanal South
Pan N	–	Pantanal North
Gui	–	Chapada does Guimaraes including Serra dos Araras
Tuc G	–	Tucanos grounds
Tuc A	–	All Tucanos, including excursions, grounds and journey from Rio
Reg	–	Regua

**Rosemary Royle**  
Pembrokeshire, Wales, UK