

South-east Brazil

May 31st – June 14th 2005

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From the wooded basin long narrow strips of forest ran out in various directions like the arms of an octopus, one pair embracing the slopes of Ytaioa, another much broader belt extending along a valley which cut through the ridge of hills on the south side at right angles, and was lost to sight beyond: far away in the west and south and north distant mountains appeared, not in regular ranges, but in groups or singly, or looking like blue banked-up clouds on the horizon.

W.H.Hudson, Green Mansions.

Tour Diary

May 31st Our trip began eventfully, not least of all in the case, literally, of Robert Clark. Robert had taken the trouble to be born in Australia in order to avoid ever meeting us, but as he sipped a doubtless very pleasant cup of coffee, his luggage was appropriated by yours truly and taken to be checked in for Rio, quite probably not what he had in mind. Fortunately it was realised that a lonely-looking trolley that remained at check-in as we were leaving should not, after all, have been removed from its position outside the coffee shop upstairs. Having got ourselves on the correct flight, despite Air France's efforts to send us off an hour later than booked, we left Heathrow and a relieved and remarkably philosophical Robert and departed for Paris, settling down just 40 minutes later. It was past midnight as we climbed into the night sky once again, with Paris glittering below, and after a 10½ flight we landed soon after dawn and stepped out into a bright early Rio morning, where we piled into a waiting van with some relief. It had been a good flight, including a pleasant vegetable risotto, a passable Syrah and some Camembert, and most of us (including those who never sleep on planes, ever) slept pretty well. All this helped to quell the disappointment of being unable to avail ourselves of the 'curried currency', advertised on the immigration form.

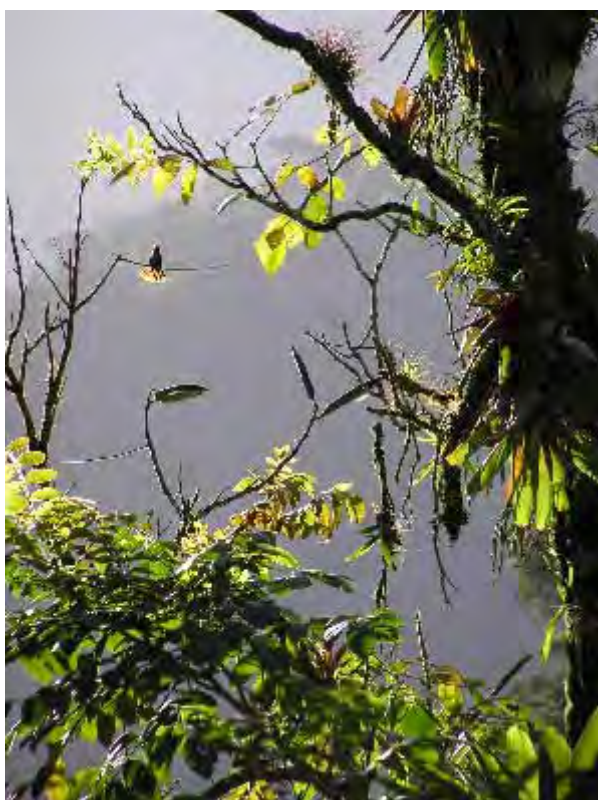
Heading north from the airport along roads and flyovers intertwined like spaghetti, it was obvious that this was no Third World country. Patches of open grass with Southern Lapwings and Cattle Tyrants helped to relieve the urban harshness, somehow made a good deal worse by the faces grinning impossibly from roadside hoardings. Crossing Rio harbour along the long arm of its spectacular road bridge brought flocks of frigatebirds and herons, a Snowy-crowned Tern and two South American Terns, but the bright, open view reverted to a jumbled, rusting corrugated shoreline of shipyards, a naval base and a fishing harbour, with great tankers lying inert offshore, followed by half-finished, shambolic suburbs, with little concession to style or grace. Although trees now dotted the open spaces in between the dwellings it was some time before the graffiti-clad buildings began to mix and soften with any permanence into the gentler countryside beyond, where patient horses ambled through patches of tall grass and sugar cane in carelessly erected enclosures.

The countryside took on a totally different feel as we turned away from the coast and headed inland. Here was open farmland, well-appointed ranching country; serious farming with none of the opportunistic impermanent feel of the coastal strip. The land steadily became hillier as we passed through patches of early morning mist and the rugged outline of Tres Picos NP came into view beyond Cachoeiras de Macacu, the last settlement before our destination, with a more than slight Pyrenean feel to its broad streets in the bright morning light. We came upon the lodge suddenly, passing through its wrought-iron gates, down a slope and across a river bridge to the façade that was familiar to us from our pre-trip drooling over the Serra dos Tucanos website.

After a warm greeting from Andy and Cristina, our hosts for the next two weeks, we set up 'scopes to watch the comings and goings of tanagers and hummingbirds at the bananas and hanging feeders across the lawn from our vantage point on the patio, with the occasional feeding flock passing through the trees above the lodge creating an interesting and sometimes confusing diversion. For some of us, this was a first visit to South America, but even for those who had been before, the birds we were dealing with were clearly different to those we had met before, though at least the families were better known. Some birds became quickly familiar: Masked Water-tyrant, dashing for insects over the lawn, Bananaquit, ever-present at the feeders, and Yellow-lored Tody-flycatcher, a clean-cut yellow and black flycatcher that greeted us every morning of our stay. Amid coffee, a lunch that should have warned us of the enthusiasm of the lodge's

catering staff, and much chatter, the afternoon passed all too quickly and dusk crept over us, with fireflies dancing in the darkness, not long after 5.30.

HIGHLIGHTS; Magnificent Frigatebird, Cocoli Heron, Black Hawk-eagle, Southern Lapwing, South American Tern, Snowy-crowned Tern, Ruddy Ground-dove, Plain Parakeet, Scaly-headed Parrot, Guira Cuckoo, Lesser Swallow-tailed Swift, Saw-billed Hermit, Sombre Hummingbird, Swallow-tailed Hummingbird, Violet-capped Woodnymph, Brazilian Ruby, White-barred Piculet, Rufous-capped Spinetail, Olivaceous Woodcreeper, Streak-capped Antwren, Sepia-capped Flycatcher, Grey-capped Tyrannulet, Yellow-lored Tody-flycatcher, Masked Water-tyrant, Cattle Tyrant, Great Kiskadee, Rusty-margined Flycatcher, Social Flycatcher, Tropical kingbird, Chestnut-crowned Becard, Grey-breasted Martin, Blue-and-White Swallow, Southern rough-winged Swallow, Chalk-browed Mockingbird, Rufous-bellied Thrush, Masked Yellowthroat, Bananaquit, Yellow-backed Tanager, Flame-crested Tanager, Ruby-crowned Tanager, Brazilian Tanager, Sayaca Tanager, Golden-chevrons Tanager, Palm Tanager, Violaceous Euphonia, Orange-bellied Euphonia, Green-headed Tanager, Red-necked Tanager, Burnished-buff Tanager, Blue Dacnis, Green Honeycreeper, Buff-throated Saltator, Crested Oropendola.



June 1st Andy had not recovered from a mystery affliction that had left him exhausted, so we faced the prospect of a day on the trails around the lodge, armed only with his recently-published field guide and the usual impressive reserves of enthusiasm. Undaunted, like school kids let loose in a sweetshop, but with no restriction on the number allowed into the shop at any one time, we set off up the hill, adding Bat Falcon, Southern Caracara and a huge swarm of swifts overhead before we were swallowed up by the forest.

The useful thing about *The Hitch-hiker's Guide to the Galaxy* is that it has the words **DON'T PANIC!** printed in large friendly letters on the cover. It occurred to us that all field guides to South America might benefit from such a simple attribute, as we agonised over foliage-gleaners, antwrens that looked nothing like the depictions in the book, woodcreepers that all looked brown and streaky, grovelling ground-dwelling things that refused to show at all and patches of vegetation that failed to look anything like the directions (if we were lucky) that were being pointed out by whoever had found a 'what's this thing?' that sounded hugely interesting if only we could see it.

However, in the nature of these things, we gradually settled into the required mental state to cope with this sort of birding - partly meditative, partly philosophical and wholly engrossed in the merest movement. By the end of the day we had amassed an impressive list that included a superb female Giant Antshrike that hove into view in the scrub opposite as we sat on the patio, several species of furnarid, some confusing flycatchers, a couple of marmosets for the lucky few and a growing familiarity with the birds we were likely to encounter. All by ourselves!

Although the sun shone through a few times, today was largely cloudy, though it rained only very late in the afternoon, and then only briefly. The lodge is situated at 400m, and is thus cooler than the coast, warm and humid by day after a cool night, necessitating a sheet and blanket for sleeping.

Not for the first time on the trip, we retired, with the emphasis on the tired, after a hearty evening meal (and a hearty lunch and a not-exactly minimal breakfast) well pleased with our efforts.

HIGHLIGHTS: Crested (Southern) Caracara, Bat Falcon, Maroon-bellied Parakeet, Squirrel Cuckoo, Spot-billed Toucanet, Sharp-billed Treehunter, Buff-fronted Foliage-gleaner, Black-capped Foliage-gleaner, Scaled Woodcreeper, Lesser Woodcreeper, Giant Antshrike, Spot-breasted Antwren, Plain Antwren, Star-throated Antwren, White-shouldered Fire-eye, Black-cheeked Gnateater, Tropical Pewee, Pale-breasted Thrush, Rufous-browed Peppershrike, Chestnut-bellied Euphonia

June 2nd Up at 6am for morning exercise, fags, coffee and another excellent breakfast, depending upon individual preference, a still ailing Andy drove us a short way up the hill to the start of the CEDAE Trail, a broad access track created by the local water company that starts at 600m altitude. A chilly wind blew up the valley and we willed the sun to come up as we walked along in the shadow of the high forest-clad hills above us. Activity gained pace very soon after it did so and in welcome warmth we added Surucua Trogon, Black-goggled Tanager and White-eyed Foliage-gleaner as we followed the river down the slope. Feeding flocks were frequently seen moving up or down the trail, but the most spectacular of all swarmed above us where the river crosses the trail near the house where the dog and cat live. You know the one. This single flock consisted mostly of Olive-green Tanagers, but also contained Black-tailed Tityra, Sharpbill and Flame-crested and Rufous-headed Tanagers, with Red-crowned Ant-tanagers in the forest below. Undoubtedly, though, the most impressive bird of the morning was a White-throated Woodcreeper that was thrashing a substantial bromeliad half to bits in a successful attempt to extract a centipede for its breakfast, no doubt amongst other things, but that's probably enough woodcreepery culinary detail to be going on with.

Returning to the lodge for another Bacchanalian lunch, we headed out on the loop trail over the hillside opposite, and the dead-end trail to the west. Initially very quiet, with only a spadebill for some of the party, we eventually added Spot-backed Antshrike, devouring a large beetle on the forest floor and a female Black-cheeked Gnatcatcher before heading back to the lodge, where we found Andy had returned from hospital having been placed on a drip for a couple of hours, still clearly finding things hard going but hoping to be fit for the following day. We whiled away the time either side of our evening meal looking at Jupiter and its moons, looking forward to spreading our wings.

HIGHLIGHTS: Black Jacobin, Surucua Trogon, Blonde-crested Woodpecker, Buff-browed Foliage-gleaner, White-eyed Foliage-gleaner, White-throated Woodcreeper, Spot-backed Antshrike, Blue Manakin, Oustalet's Tyrannulet, Whiskered Flycatcher, Cliff Flycatcher, Grey-hooded Attila, Boat-billed Flycatcher, Black-tailed Tityra, Sharpbill, Yellow-legged Thrush, Creamy-bellied Thrush, Rufous-crowned Greenlet, Golden-crowned Warbler, Rufous-headed Tanager, Olive-green Tanager, Black-goggled Tanager, Red-crowned Ant-tanager

June 3rd The morning saw Andy fit enough to take us on the lengthy drive beyond Nova Friburgo, settled by German and Swiss immigrants 380 years ago, and northward to a site for the very rare and local endemic Three-toed Jacamar. Passing the roadside Cliff Flycatchers and the entrance to the CEDAE Trail once again, we continued up the forested hill and past several eye catching advertising hoardings, the significance of which became clearer as we dropped down into the metropolis of Nova Friburgo, the outskirts of which featured a plethora of lingerie shops, apparently famous the world over. Well, famous enough to warrant generous comment every time we passed them, anyway.

Attracting little interest from its quarter of a million inhabitants as we drove through Nova Friburgo's urban sprawl, we raised our profile somewhat by stopping briefly at a road bridge in the intriguingly named township of Conselheiro Paulino for a party of three Blue-winged Macaws, with Long-tailed Tyrant, Saffron Finch and Southern Beardless Tyrannulet also in view by the road. Although the open ranching country to the north hardly looked very promising, bare grass with a small pond and some scattered trees produced a host of new birds, including Yellow-browed Tyrant, Yellow-chinned Spinetail, White-tailed Hawk, White-rumped Monjita, Shiny Cowbird, Yellow-headed Caracara, Brown-chested Martin, Campo Flicker, Streamer-tailed Tyrant and Rufous and Tail-banded Horneros.

Not very much further on, having found Savannah Hawk, Yellow-eared Woodpecker and Magpie Tanager along more wooded portions of the same road, we stopped where it wound through wet, rank grassy fields with a lightly forested hillside above us and a huge granite buttress that loomed over the opposite side of the valley. This interlude, initially to look at a party of scruffy-headed Guira Cuckoos, produced another rush of new species in the line of trees close to us – Hepatic, Turquoise, Burnished-buff and Hooded Tanagers, Chestnut-vented Conebill, Yellow-browed Woodpecker, Narrow-billed Woodcreeper and Chivvi Vireo – and it was some relief to pile into a bar in the neat little town of Duas Barras for a strong coffee, to catch our breath if nothing else.

The rolling hillsides and rough agriculture beyond Duas Barras continued to produce new birds whenever we stopped, with Common Thornbird, Orange-headed Tanager, Double-collared Seedeater, Blue-winged Parrotlet and White Woodpecker at an innocuous-looking patch of trees adjacent to a small allotment, a small party of White-rumped Swallows and then a Red-legged Seriema as we screeched to a halt to watch this bizarre bird strutting about on the grassy slope above, doing its best to emulate the elegant Secretarybird of similar situations in Africa.

After a party of Black-capped Donacobius at a wet valley floor, our luck continued as we stopped to take a break for lunch. Each of our stops thus far had immediately produced a rush of new birds and this was no

different, as a large flock of Gilt-edged Tanagers flowed through the trees above us, accompanied by Bran-coloured Flycatcher, Scaled Woodcreeper, Green-winged Saltator, Planalto Tyrannulet and a Green-backed Becard, with a White-necked Hawk overhead and a Sharp-tailed Streamcreeper calling noisily from a tiny overgrown stream trickling from the forest edge into a field of rank grass by the roadside.

Beyond Sumidouro, with not a Japanese wrestler in sight, we stopped at a series of roadside allotments with pools and a river running through a broad valley floor, where Brazilian Teal, White-headed Marsh-tyrant, Giant Cowbird, White-eyed Parakeet and Planalto Hermit were all new, and a couple of superb Whistling Herons stood in a wet field a little further on.

We turned on to a subsidiary road through stands of tall vegetation that narrowed the road almost to single file dimensions as we wound our way uphill, eventually coming to a halt on a bend around a steep gully beneath high trees that recalled the Manu Road from Cusco over the Peruvian Andes. Though our quarry failed to show immediately, we did manage to identify Biscutate Swift (even if we had no idea what it means) and Black-chested Buzzard-eagle as we waited until, in response to Andy's tape, one called from the ridge above us.



The Three-toed Jacamar is not the most beautiful bird in the world, and it isn't even the most attractive of the jacamars, but it is undoubtedly one of the world's rarest, and for that reason alone it was good to watch it perform, even though the appreciation of a bunch of committed birdwatchers was unlikely to have been of much consequence to its immediate, uncertain future. Perhaps it was the melancholy nature of this thought that encouraged us to sleep through most of the journey back to the lodge, even those who never sleep on planes, ever. Those who remained awake had the pleasure of seeing the Brazilian version of the game much loved by continentals – The First To Turn His Lights On Is Chicken!

Again, it had been a really good day, during which we had seen 101 species. Andy had proved his worth as a very good guide (if he needed to) and we took this as a reasonable reason to celebrate with a passable level of alcoholic intake that ensured a very good night's sleep.

HIGHLIGHTS: Whistling Heron, Brazilian Teal, White-necked Hawk, Savannah Hawk, Black-chested Buzzard-eagle, White-tailed Hawk, Yellow-headed Caracara, American Kestrel, Red-legged Seriema, Picazuro Pigeon, Blue-winged Macaw, White-eyed Parakeet, Blue-winged Parrotlet, Biscutate Swift, Planalto Hermit, Sapphire-spangled Emerald, Three-toed Jacamar, White Woodpecker, Yellow-browed Woodpecker, Campo Flicker, Tail-banded Hornero, Rufous Hornero, Yellow-chinned Spinetail, Common Thornbird, Streaked Xenops, Sharp-tailed Streamcreeper, Narrow-billed Woodcreeper, Southern Beardless Tyrannulet, Planalto Tyrannulet, Bran-coloured Flycatcher, White-rumped Monjita, White-headed Marsh-tyrant, Streamer-tailed Tyrant, long-tailed Tyrant, Green-backed Becard, Brown-chested Martin, White-rumped Swallow, Black-capped Donacobius, Chivvi (Red-eyed) Vireo, Chestnut-vented Conebill, Magpie Tanager, Orange-headed Tanager, Hood Tanager, Hepatic Tanager, Turquoise Tanager, Gilt-edge Tanager, Saffron Finch, Green-winged Saltator, Shiny Cowbird, Giant Cowbird

June 4th Intent upon a day at high altitude, we drove to pine and eucalyptus-clad hillsides at around 1400m near Olaria, negotiating steep block-paved roads that had become slippery in the early morning drizzle, a factor that brought us to a stop by a roadside garden at the edge of the forest. The red flowers of its tomato tree, some hanging red bell-shaped flowers and an avocado tree made the garden a magnet for birds and we spent some time watching the comings and goings of a series of thrushes and tanagers that included Chestnut-headed, Brassy-breasted and Cinnamon Tanagers, together with Olivaceous Elaenia.

Tearing ourselves away from the garden, which was clearly also a magnet for birdwatchers, we added Pallid Spinetail in the tangled understorey beneath the eucalyptus and Grey-headed Kite above us, before entering more open countryside along the side of a hill that alternated with patches of scrub and forest. Swallow-tailed Cotingas and Shear-tailed Grey Tyrants perched on the tops of trees on the hillside opposite and we added Mottled Tyrannulet, Green-barred Woodpecker, Tropical Parula, Hooded Siskin, Velvety Black-Tyrant and White-throated Hummingbird in roadside vegetation as we continued steadily upward.

The next landmark was a lovely pink-flowered cherry that was crammed with hummingbirds and, initially, some Bay-chested Warbling-Finches. We lingered in this spot for two hours, with Plovercrest, White-throated Hummingbird, Brazilian Ruby and Glittering-bellied Emeralds speeding about amid the flowers and Rufous-crowned Greenlet, Dusky-tailed Antbird, Variable Antshrike, Rufous-capped Spinetail and a lovely Ochre-faced Tody-flycatcher in the low bracken-fringed scrub by the red-dusty trail, which also held a skulking Red-eyed Thornbird that responded furtively to Andy's tape. After finding a Fawn-breasted Tanager in the forest above the road, we moved on as the trail wound beneath one of the great, dark granite outcrops speckled with huge bromeliads, the afternoon becoming steadily warmer and more sultry. Here the forest came closer and we took fairly good views of three Black and Gold Cotingas calling from the trees across the valley and Blue-billed Black-Tyrant, White-rimmed Warbler and White-winged Becard as we passed from open views into an archway of forest.

We had made good but slow progress, seeing so much that was new, and now we headed back, with grey clouds promising rain that came in steady but fairly brief bursts. A flock of swifts, too distant to identify, circled the dark granite outcrop like a swirl of insects, but we had one more grand surprise – at the top of the welcome descent through the more open part of trail, two Diademed Tanagers performed superbly for us in a couple of isolated trees by a small enclosure.

Satisfied with our good fortune, we scuttled on through the diminishing rain and arrived back at the lodge in time for a quick shower and a well-deserved evening meal, which we ravaged with the intensity of White-throated Woodcreepers, having been confined to a mere packed lunch in the middle of the day!

HIGHLIGHTS: Grey-headed Kite, Plovercrest, Glittering-bellied Emerald, White-throated Hummingbird, Pallid Spinetail, Green-barred Woodpecker, Red-eyed Thornbird, Variable Antshrike, Dusky-tailed Antbird, Swallow-tailed Cotinga, Black-and-Gold Cotinga, Olivaceous Elaenia, Mottle-cheeked Tyrannulet, Ochre-faced Tody-flycatcher, Blue-billed Black-Tyrant, Velvety Black-Tyrant, Shear-tailed Grey Tyrant, White-winged Becard, Hooded Siskin, Tropical Parula, White-rimmed Warbler, Cinnamon Tanager, Chestnut-headed Tanager, Diademed Tanager, Fawn-breasted Tanager, Brassy-breasted Tanager, Bay-chested Warbling-Finch

June 5th Funchal is about 45 minutes from the lodge, beyond Cachoeiras de Macacu to the south, and we turned off the main road here, stopping in bright sunshine at a pool in open farmland that produced our first Wattled Jacanas, with Yellowish Pipit, Campo Flicker and a couple of Burrowing Owls on the hillside above. After Least Grebe at another set of pools and an obliging Chestnut-backed Antshrike in a thin band of trees that lined the road beside some allotments and ploughed enclosures, we moved on to our intended destination: a wetland reserve adjacent to a remnant patch of lowland forest, a habitat that has been decimated in the past.

A couple of Crane Hawks drifted over above the trees and a Red-rumped Cacique squawked into view as we approached, then we rather guiltily disturbed a few Capped Herons and Black-crowned Night-Herons from the large weed-fringed pool that nestles beneath a circling amphitheatre of forest. Its outlying fingers of scrub produced excellent views of a tail-wagging Sooretama Antshrike, though we were not to discover its evident identity until returning to the lodge and getting out *The Big Book*, as volumes of HBW came to be known. Despite the wetland, it is the forest that holds most interest, and we were soon swallowed up by its narrow, puddled trails, along which we found White-bearded Manakin and Plain Xenops, had fabulous views of a beautiful Long-billed Wren and good views of the rather less striking Unicoloured Antwren. We voraciously devoured our first experiences of White-flanked Antwren, Eye-ringed Tody-Tyrant and Rufous-tailed Jacamar before returning to the lodge to give the same treatment to another fulsome lunch, interrupting the return journey for our first Lesser Yellow-headed Vulture and a swirling flock of White-collared and Biscutate Swifts, low enough over the road to compare tail shapes.

Following lunch, which was disturbed by a feeding flock of furnarids that passed through the trees above the roof, including a Southern Bristle-Tyrant, subsequent patio birding turned up our only Swallow-Tanagers of the trip. A walk along the lodge trails produced Black-throated Grosbeak, Tawny-throated Leaf-tosser and fabulous views of a Scaled Antbird, all of which took our total for the trip thus far to 214 species.

HIGHLIGHTS: Least Grebe, Capped Heron, Black-crowned Night-Heron, Lesser Yellow-headed Vulture, Crane Hawk, Wattled Jacana, Burrowing Owl, White-collared Swift, Amazon Kingfisher, Rufous-tailed Jacamar, Plain Xenops, Tawny-throated Leaf-tosser, Thrush-like Woodcreeper, Chestnut-backed Antshrike, Sooretama Slaty Antshrike, White-flanked Antwren, Unicoloured Antwren, Scaled Antbird, White-bearded Manakin, Southern Bristle-Tyrant, Eye-ringed Tody-Tyrant, Black-tailed Flycatcher, Yellowish Pipit, Long-billed Wren, Swallow-Tanager, Black-throated Grosbeak, Red-rumped Cacique

June 6th Up the hill again, we turned back on ourselves at the top behind a police checkpoint and on to the Theodoro Trail. Originally the route of the Nova Friburgo - Cachoeiras de Macacu railway it next became a road that followed the same course, but both attempts at traversing the intervening terrain would have had to negotiate forested hillsides that featured a couple of huge landslides, not the best recommendation for safe travel by either means. Today the road is visible in only a few places and evidence of the old railway is even scarcer, with the forest having crept inexorably closer on both sides.

The most memorable birding involved a huge wave of 60-70 Brassy-breasted Tanagers, admixed with Variable Antshrikes, Eared Pygmy-Tyrant, Rufous-crowned Greenlet, Streaked Xenops and Buff-browed, Buff-fronted and White-browed Foliage-gleaners. Grey-capped Tyrannulet, a male Surucua Trogon, brief views, for most of us, of Azure-shouldered Tanager and Plumbeous Pigeon followed as we attempted to tape in a Variegated Antpitta, and although one was calling close by and somehow circling us, we never glimpsed the little horror. Getting the message that we could probably wait all night, we turned back, finding a Solitary Tinamou (for those at the front only), Green-winged Saltator, Grey-hooded Flycatcher and Grey-rumped Swifts as we returned to the van, while Chris, bringing up the rear, found our only White-necked Thrush of the trip, news of which was greeted happily, no joyously, by us all, accompanied by clashing cymbals and happy thrush-finding songs. Actually, the truth was that we tried to convince him that it only occurs below 50m in altitude and was likely to have been a thrush whose name was concocted from a roadside hoarding advertising gin, or something. Not very edifying, but fun, and we did get better, admitting our jolly ruse at the evening log, to the further amusement of all.

We took a different road through Nova Friburgo, up the hill towards Macae de Cima, along which some expensive-looking and decidedly Germanic properties had been built. Stopping at a stand of bamboo, we found a female Bertoni's Antbird, then a White-bearded Antshrike, a bird that Andy had seen only once before in six years, while two Bare-throated Bellbirds called nearby with a rather truncated version of the metallic, echoing 'ongg' of their Costa Rican counterparts.



The recent rain made parts of the rest of the road difficult to negotiate and it was hardly surprising that we eventually failed to cope with the slick glue-like mud on an uphill bend through the forest that had claimed a turf lorry that lay forlornly by the road, so we decided to cut our losses, park the van and take lunch before wandering on. In truth, the post lunch session was rather quiet, although we did find a few Scale-throated Hermits, had good views of Rufous Gnatcatcher, a much appreciated Zone-tailed Hawk and a star find; a Tiny Hawk circling over the forest before diving back in to resume its secretive existence.

Returning to the Theodoro Trail at 3.30 we found it to be very quiet, but were rewarded, if that is the right word, by a solution to the antpitta mystery as the little sod flew over our heads across the path and into the gloom of the forest, apparently having launched itself off the bank above us, no doubt after watching us, unseen, for a suitable length of time. However, the walk back did produce fantastic views of a pair of Black-faced Trogons, our best looks at a Sharp-tailed Streamcreeper and a Yellow-eared Woodpecker.

HIGHLIGHTS: Solitary Tinamou, Tiny Hawk, Zone-tailed Hawk, Plumbeous Pigeon, Pileated Parrot, Grey-rumped Swift, Scale-throated Hermit, Black-throated Trogon, Yellow-eared Woodpecker, White-browed Foliage-gleaner, White-bearded Antshrike, Bertoni's Antbird, Rufous Gnatcatcher, Bare-throated Bellbird, Grey-hooded Flycatcher, Eared Pygmy-Tyrant, Yellow-olive Flycatcher, White-necked Thrush, Azure-shouldered Tanager

June 7th We spent our morning along the CEDAE Trail, in calmer conditions than five days ago, though it was chilly before the sun rose over the valley sides. Our first birds included a party of five parrots that were mainly green with yellow faces with a dark streak through the eye and yellow-washed flanks, which deliberations over the parrot books at our disposal back at the lodge revealed to be Yellow-faced Amazons, which have been heard in the area but never previously been pinned down successfully.

So, a pretty good start, that continued with at least one, possibly two Channel-billed Toucans flying across the valley and back again, a female Pin-tailed Manakin and a Rufous-capped Motmot that flew into the trees above the broad trail but almost immediately off again and into the forest. Andy then successfully taped in a male Rufous-capped Antthrush, scuttling about, tail cocked, on the forest floor, with a Mantled Hawk circling high above the forest. As on our previous visit, the trees near the house where the dog and cat live attracted a large feeding flock that comprised Flame-crested, Yellow-backed, Rufous-headed, Red-necked and Green-headed Tanagers, 6-7 Sharpbills, Streaked Xenops, Buff-fronted Foliage-gleaners and Chestnut-capped Becards, joined by a bunch of Olive-green Tanagers towing along a Grey-capped Tyrannulet or two. A Black Hawk-Eagle later and we headed back to the lodge for lunch.

Not everyone chose to wander the trails above the lodge after lunch, and this seemed to have been a pretty good idea on a quiet afternoon. However, those who had done so found a roosting Ferruginous Pygmy Owl, its whereabouts betrayed by a host of enraged tanagers, and which stayed in situ for everyone to have excellent views. Although today had been a fairly quiet day, we had now seen 238 species on the trip so far, with the promise of a lot more on the coast next day.

HIGHLIGHTS: Mantled Hawk, Yellow-faced Amazon, Ferruginous Pygmy Owl, Rufous-capped Motmot, Channel-billed Toucan, Rufous-capped Antthrush, Pin-tailed Manakin

June 8th Our day on the coast NE of Rio began with Ringed and Green Kingfishers and three Swallow-tailed Hummingbirds en route to a patch of lowland forest in the grounds of a plush-looking hotel along the road to Saquarema that Andy obtained permission for us to visit from a rather bemused owner. The forest, that is, not the hotel, which we would probably have found more difficult to persuade ourselves into, given the state of some of us! Having noted the name of the hotel as Hotel Fazenda, we realised after several more Hotel Fazendas that this must denote a sort of hotel and indeed it does – a farm or country hotel, more or less. The hotel was actually called Serra Castelhana.

After Plain-breasted Ground-Doves near the hotel entrance the approach to the forest along a narrow corridor of cultivation was excellent, with Yellow-bellied Elaenia, Rufous-tailed Jacamar, Sapphire-spangled Emerald, Lemon-chested Greenlet, Short-crested Flycatcher, Plain Becard and Sooretama Antshrike all vying for our attention at the forest edge more or less at once. The forest itself produced Minute Hermit at a banana flower, eventual views of Rufous-winged Antwren, two female White-bearded Manakins and Hooded Tanager and good numbers of Unicoloured and White-flanked Antwrens.

Nearing the coast, we made several stops at a series of saltpans which, by and large, were notable for their lack of birds, although we did find a Solitary Sandpiper living up to its name on one of them and Least Tern, Cayenne Tern, Yellowish Pipit and Little Blue Heron at another. A brief seawatch really brought things to life, producing several Brown Boobies, a procession of Cayenne and South American Terns, with one Sandwich following the same line along the coast, and brief views of a cetacean some way offshore.

At this point we were close to some sandy dunes covered with low, berry-bearing shrubs and tall cactus that stretched along the shore and we walked into our first experience of *Restinga*, a habitat that is disappearing quickly as developers have their way. However, the bit we entered was marked as a reserve, a fact that was soon forgotten when we began to be marked by some voracious mosquitoes that had their evil way with us more or less without interruption as we looked at two very close Restinga Antwrens in the buckthorn-like vegetation. The open areas beyond the scrub were at least free of these pestilential little critters and, as an added bonus, held some birds, with Roseate Spoonbill, White-cheeked Pintail, Collared Plover and Striated Heron at some undisturbed pools and a singing White-browed Blackbird – an *Icterid* in the way of these things, not a thrush – and Grassland Sparrow as we left to return through mosquito-ville to the bus, and back to the lodge, now 2½ hours and a good sleep away, even for those who never sleep on planes, ever.

Today had been hot and sunny, prompting comment that the coast must be more or less unbearable in the full heat of summer.

HIGHLIGHTS: Brown Booby, Striated Heron, Little Blue Heron, Roseate Spoonbill, White-cheeked Pintail, Collared Plover, Greater Yellowlegs, Solitary Sandpiper, Sandwich (including 'Cayenne') Tern, Least Tern, South American Tern, Plain-breasted Ground-dove, Minute Hermit, Ringed Kingfisher, Green Kingfisher, Rufous-winged Antwren, Restinga Antwren, Yellow-bellied Elaenia, Short-crested Flycatcher, Plain Becard, Lemon-chested Greenlet, Grassland Sparrow, White-browed Blackbird

June 9th Our first stop on a bright morning was at a series of fishponds near Maraporã, with low mist over lush cobweb-spun fields of rushes and early dew creating a magical feel to the world as we pored over our first Limpkins of the trip. Then, we took the road into Parque Nacional Serra dos Orgaos, stopping

near the park HQ before moving on down a broad road at about 500m altitude and then taking to two other trails at around 1000m and 1100m, the second of which contained a significant amount of bamboo.

Beneath spectacular dark peaks, arranged like loaves of bread on a shelf above the forest, we located Yellow-throated Woodpecker, Lesser Woodcreeper and Mantled Hawk before making it beyond the car park. The walk downhill along the reserve access road added Yellow-legged Thrush, Rufous-capped Motmot and Red-crowned Ant-tanager, both of which gave views to more or less everyone, though birding was relatively slow and it was not until we had climbed back up the hill and were close to the car park that we found several purple-throated Euphonias in a loose flock in the trees above, our first of the trip.

The first trail, a narrow, undulating affair, was initially also quite slow, though we did bump into a small party of Brown Howler Monkeys and a Tufted-ear Marmoset on our way up the slope, with not much else of great significance to show for our efforts until Andy taped in a superb, chunky Hooded Berryeater, which circled us repeatedly, giving everyone marvellous views. Moving on, he next located the call of a White-bibbed Antbird, very close to the track, though views for just about all of us involved little more than a tantalising dose of grovelling, mostly by the bird, as it moved parallel to us just below the trail. However, as we moved away, Cristina called us quietly back to see the bird jumping about in full view at the edge of the path. No matter how much time you put into places like this, such good views of these enigmatic birds are hard to come by, and this one, a superb mixture of black, white and brown arranged in just the right patterns and quantities would have delighted all but the most jaded observer. For most of us, it proved to be the bird of the trip and, speaking personally, if I had realised when leaving school in 1969 that one day I would be looking down on Teresopolis in SE Brazil, eating crisps dipped in mayonnaise and luxuriating in just having seen such a lovely bird, I think I would have quite looked forward to it.



We drove a little higher to another trail, where we found a Scale-throated Hermit and had wonderful views of a Mantled Hawk, perched on a bush against the dark crags above us, before moving off into the forest again on Sheila's rocket-powered heels, to find a pair of Bertoni's Antbirds, our third Black-throated Trogon of the day and a Brazilian Antthrush that responded far more generously to the tape than its Rufous-capped cousin had done. That was almost it, though a Sharp-tailed Streamcreeper was found amid water cascading down an open culvert near the van, apparently oblivious to our presence as it nibbled away at insects in the moss-clad gully.

Traffic was held up at some traffic lights at road works down the hill and the reaction of the drivers when they turned green was astonishing, the take-off resembling the start of a Grand Prix, with cars vying for position in three or four lines of traffic that converged at speed on the open side of the road. What was almost as amazing was that once everyone had passed this brief obstruction, everything returned to its normal state of relatively patient, horn-free progress down the hill.

HIGHLIGHTS: Limpkin, Yellow-throated Woodpecker, White-bibbed Antbird, Brazilian Antthrush, Hooded Berryeater, Purple-throated Euphonia

June 10th It would not be unreasonable to say that much of our walk down the Theodoro Trail – the old railway line from Nova Friburgo that we visited four days ago – was cold and not very productive. Apart from a substantial flock of White-eyed Foliage-gleaners with several Streaked Xenops, another Brazilian Antthrush, a party of Azure-shouldered Tanagers and a Green-barred Woodpecker, it was not until we reached an arm of the valley with two or three calling Bare-throated Bellbirds that we were able to stand in some sunshine, basking thankfully in its heat like lizards on a rock. A White-throated Spadebill showed well for most of the group for the first time on the trip and a Brown Tinamou dashed from the path as a special treat for the lucky couple at the front. Otherwise, the Variegated Antpitta performed its trickery, flying across the trail like a dumpy rugby ball as most backs were turned, and it remained largely quiet except for a large, straggling flock of Brassy-breasted Tanagers that poured through the trees, accompanied by White-browed

and Buff-fronted Foliage-gleaners, Streaked Xenops, Plain Antvireo and Streak-capped Antwrens, with at least one White-throated Woodcreeper making a horrifying racket in its attempt to hack a tree or something to bits.

We all needed a rest, it seemed, so we spent the remainder of the day chilling out by the pool or along the lodge trails, which proved to be very quiet. Perhaps this reflected the mood of the day, during which we had added only one species to our list, to bring our total thus far to 269, but it was more likely that we could see the likely outcome of our planned visit to a German pub with Andy and Cristina later in the evening. Indeed, we piled back into the lodge at about half past midnight, well fed and watered after a thoroughly enjoyable meal in Mury, on the outskirts of Nova Friburgo. We certainly did not hold back, and the cost of \$40 each was very good value.

HIGHLIGHTS: Brown Tinamou, White-throated Spadebill

June 11th Clive started our day splendidly, finding two Blue-naped Chlorophonias at the bananas, and we left the lodge, heading for the high altitude trail again, in bright sunshine. However, as we climbed the hill towards Nova Friburgo, low cloud shrouded the top of the ridge overhead and it was plain that we would have to change our plans and trust that the following day would be better up there.

So, beyond Nova Friburgo, we headed for Sumidouro along the longest block-paved road away from the Great Wall of China, stopping after an hour in some wooded hills with bamboo and bracken-clad slopes. We saw very few birds here in intermittent light drizzle, and although our next stop, at some roadside scrub with a few trees, produced a Ferruginous Antbird, it grovelled unhelpfully for most of us. It was not until our third stop, at a series of greenhouses built for flower growing, that the pace began to speed up appreciably, with Blue-black Grassquit and Creamy-bellied Thrushes, Swallow-tailed Hummingbird and Short crested Flycatcher in a sparse garden by the road. A brief stop at the moist valley where we took lunch on our previous visit produced excellent views of Spix's Spinetail and a Dusky-legged Guan, cavorting in the trees on the forest edge opposite.

By now it was late morning and in brightening conditions we headed out into open country, continuing beyond Sumidouro to the jacamar site. After Crested Black-Tyrant at a farm entrance we stopped at a series of pools by the roadside, where Andy showed us a Firewood-gatherer at its disorderly nest, a collection of sticks shoved into a sort of nest shape that presumably does what it is supposed to, and a Blackish Rail was spotted as it made a dash for the less exposed shelter of a nearby hedge, not that we could see it where it had been anyway. The jacamar site itself produced a rather unexpected Barn Owl, roosting in a tangle of roots beneath the top of the bank overhanging the road, Small-billed Elaenia and Thrush-like Woodcreeper.

Turning back towards Sumidouro we set out along on a little-used road that passed through a really beautiful valley with stands of bamboo, wet reedy flushes and open fields with occasional patches of woodland, overlooked by more imposing dark granite outcrops. An Aplomado Falcon, several Yellow-headed Caracaras, Streamer-tailed Tyrants and Cattle Tyrants decorated the dry open grassland at the start of the valley, but Burnished-buff and Magpie Tanagers, Chestnut-vented Conebill and Long-tailed Tyrant were more reflective of the wooded section that we passed through next, with excellent views of a White Woodpecker perched close to us in the trees above. The wet, rank grassy patches beneath the longest granite outcrop we had seen so far then produced several White-eared Puffbirds, our only Yellow-rumped Marshbird of the trip, some Wedge-tailed Grass-Finches, several more Streamer-tailed Tyrants and Yellow-chinned Spinetail then, finally, a party of Curl-crested Jays, slipping with oropendolas through scattered trees bathed in lovely warm afternoon light that recalled English parkland, with cattle quietly grazing beneath.

HIGHLIGHTS: Aplomado Falcon, Dusk-legged Guan, Blackish Rail, Barn Owl, White-eared Puffbird, Spix's Spinetail, Firewood-gatherer, Ferruginous Antbird, Small-billed Elaenia, Crested Black-Tyrant, Curl-crested Jay, Blue-naped Chlorophonia, Blue-black Grassquit, Wedge-tailed Grass-Finch, Yellow-rumped Marshbird

June 12th Prior to the start of the trip we had anticipated seeing upwards of 250 species, but with the group list on 293 at the start of our last full day we knew that a total of 300 was probably achievable. At any rate, it had exceeded our expectations already, and we set out in good spirits for another go at higher altitude, but first detouring down the road to see a pair of Tropical Screech-Owls in a line of pines edging some gardens – a good start to proceedings.

Weather at high altitude was very much better than it was yesterday and a good deal drier than on our first visit. We managed to negotiate the steep cobbled road to around 1500m, where we soon connected with White-crested Tyrannulet, though the morning progressed rather more gradually than we had hoped, with

none of the large bird flocks that were a feature of our first attempt at this altitude. Nevertheless, we made very good progress in terms of distance, reaching the cherry tree at 0900 instead of lunchtime, finding fewer hummers in the cooler conditions of earlier morning. A couple of antshrike species failed to respond to the tape as we stopped at intervals along the winding path, but at a bracken-clad section of the hillside Andy heard a Large-tailed Antshrike. It began to react as he played the tape of its call, coming closer by the minute and eventually gave stunning views at the edge of the track, hidden from standing view by the fronds of its green world but visible low down at knee-height among the bracken stems, fanning its paddle-shaped tail, just a couple of yards away from the edge of the path.

Back in the shade of the forest, in a stand of bamboo at the side of the trail, we were next treated to cracking views of a White-collared Foliage-gleaner, with a bill that would not shame a White-billed Diver, and after two of the best birds of the trip in close succession we took lunch with our total on 297. Several Variable Antshrikes, a female Dusky-tailed Antbird, Diademed Tanager, Pallid Spinetail and Bay-chested Warbling-Finch all appeared as we nibbled, and a couple of Thick-billed Saltators showed rather indifferently in the scrubby hillside. Moving back along the trail, we connected with the first feeding flock of the day, mostly Brassy-breasted Tanagers, with some interesting furnarids that included Scaled and Olivaceous Woodcreepers, Streaked Xenops and, from large trees within the forest, the ringing call of a Black-billed Scythebill. It continued to call as we searched for the most likely spot in anticipation of its appearance, but it surprised just about everyone by appearing low down on a thick trunk further up the track, remaining in view for a frustratingly brief few moments before diving back into the forest.

It would have been appropriate if the scythebill, a woodcreeper with a bill like a curlew, had been our 300th species, but that privilege fell to an antwren-like bird that Chris and Keith found a little while later in some stunted trees at the edge of the track that proved to be our first Rufous-backed Antwreio. A Mouse-coloured Tapaculo proved enormously elusive, our cumulative views amid a low tangle of bracken and twisted branches amounting to a tail and, perhaps, an undertail covert feather! However, even though we returned to the lodge earlier than anticipated, the day still had one trick up its sleeve as we did some late afternoon birding from the patio. All of us knew that a series of loud, resounding calls from beyond the bananas was being produced by something interesting, but it took a remarkable bit of what may have been skill or luck, but was undoubtedly the reward for perseverance beyond the call of duty by Paul to reveal a Slaty-breasted Wood-Rail, calling from a horizontal branch no less than 20 feet above where anyone in their right mind would have expected such a bird to be. Indeed, HBW suggests that this species is shy and infrequently seen, listing just one known example of its nest, situated 2m above ground in a thick bush. Anyway, we were grateful for its temporary identity crisis, at least those of us fortunate enough to connect with it as it perched unobtrusively amid the greenery.

So, we finished our final full day on 302 species, a result that was well beyond our expectations and a great credit to Andy's bird-finding skills and, it should be said, our own enthusiasm and birding skills.

HIGHLIGHTS: Slaty-breasted Wood-Rail, Tropical Screech-Owl, White-collared Foliage-gleaner, Black-billed Scythebill, Large-tailed Antshrike, Rufous-backed Antwreio, Mouse-coloured Tapaculo, White-crested Tyrannulet, Thick-billed Saltator

June 13th The last day of an excellent trip arrived like something out of the depths that you know is there but hope you don't have to see it, rather like a tax bill. The plan was to have coffee and take a walk into the forest, then have a late morning brunch prior to our departure for the airport. However, our departure for the leafy seclusion of the forest was delayed by a flock of mainly Biscutate Swifts, swirling high above the lodge like gnats, with more continually arriving until the flock, split into two or three discrete gatherings, amounted to 2,500-3,000 birds. Eventually, most of us trooped into the hills above the lodge one last time, singing jolly 'going on an aircraft for 16 hours' songs as we did so. Not surprisingly, since we were quite early, things took a while to get going, though early birds included a superb male Pin-tailed Manakin, perched close to the trail and a White-eyed Foliage-gleaner. A mixed flock of Flame-crested, Black-goggled, Sayaca, Burnished-buff, Yellow-backed and Green-headed Tanagers turned up and activity quickened almost right away. A brief view of Blond-crested Woodpecker turned into excellent views for some of us as it perched in full view on a stump above the treetops, a Channel-billed Toucan slipped unobtrusively through the canopy and a Black-throated Grosbeak (the whole bird is black!) preceded the appearance, at long last, of a Saffron Toucanet. Although it gave superb views, responding most unusually to the tape, it did not turn out to be our last new bird of the trip, as a Black-eared Fairy turned up at the feeders to take our total for the trip to 304 species.

HIGHLIGHTS: Saffron Toucanet, Black-eared Fairy

So, it was off to the airport, John B leaving on a different flight that got him back in the UK ahead of us, not to the Falklands in the Brazilian Air Force transport plane that followed us down the tarmac as some of had predicted. We left Rio at 17.15 and arrived back in the UK the following morning, with less of a jetlag than would be the case on returning from just about anywhere else on this fabulous continent.

So to the **Bird of the Trip** contest, a bit of fun perhaps, but revealing nonetheless. A total of 56 species was included in the 12 lists, with 30 appearing more than once. Channel-billed Toucan, Saffron Toucanet and Spot-billed Toucanet shared the distinction of appearing in first place on three lists but on no others! The list included ten ant-things, eight tanagers, five raptors and two hummingbirds.

Each of us chose ten species, with ten points for our favourite, down to one for number ten. In reverse order, 10th place was shared between Black-cheeked Gnateater, Blue-naped Chlorophonia and Plovercrest (15 points), Magnificent Frigatebird was 9th (17 points), Bare-throated Bellbird 8th (18 points), with Guira Cuckoo (20 points) and White-bearded Antshrike (26 points) in 7th and 6th, respectively, Brazilian Tanager 5th (31 points) and White Woodpecker 4th (35 points). The top three were **Mantled Hawk**, with 38 points from five lists, **Large-tailed Antshrike**, which scored 42 points from six lists, and by some distance in first place **White-bibbed Antbird**, which appeared on all but two lists with a total of 63 points.

Serra dos Tucanos is a superb introduction to birding in South America. There is not the intensity of the Peruvian Andes, where a trip including the Amazon will involve more than 500 species and a week in intensive care, or the diversity of Costa Rica, where our trip in July 2004 netted more than 360 species. Still, it provides an excellent base for exploring a pretty specialised and threatened type of South American forest and includes examples of a wide range of bird families that may be encountered across the entire continent. Particularly well-represented groups were furnarids, of which we saw 27 species (including seven woodcreepers and six foliage-gleaners) and tanagers, of which we encountered 34 species.

If the foregoing doesn't get the message across adequately, let me say just once more that the birding, the welcome and the accommodation are all well worth getting on board an aircraft and seeing for yourself. It was a memorable two weeks in a place that we were fortunate to be able to visit in such comfort, at a very reasonable cost, and I'm sure I speak for everyone in thoroughly recommending the experience.

Ian Hodgson, July 2005

