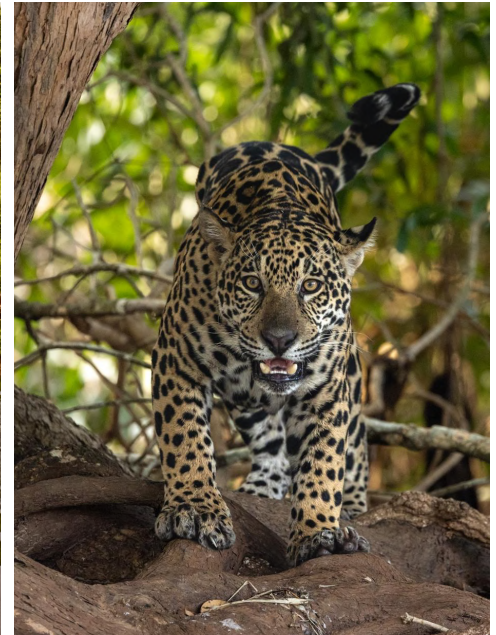


Brazil's Pantanal: Jaguars and More | October 11-24, 2025 | Trip Report by Greg Butcher



Compiled by guide Greg Butcher along with local guide extraordinaire Xavier Munoz. Our clients included Becky, Bill, Emily, Janet, Kathy, Lynn, Nancy, Ray, and Sue.

The Pantanal has many elements for “The Trip of a Lifetime”. For starters, it is the world’s largest wetland, at



75,000 square miles. Like most natural wetlands, it hosts an incredible variety of wildlife. We had great views of five big mammal species: 11 jaguars (!), Giant Otters (including a couple munching on big fish), Giant Anteaters (including one with a baby on her back), Tapirs on four different days, and Capybaras (the world’s largest rodent) almost every day. For crocodilians, we had caimans daily; the highlight was when a very large caiman attacked a very large anaconda and held on for a very big meal. In addition, we saw dozens of the largest parrot in the world (Hyacinth Macaw, on nine different days) among a total of six macaw species. The Pantanal is host to a number of big, showy birds such as Greater Rhea, Southern Screamer, Bare-faced Curassow, and Chaco



Eagle. For the extension, we went to the edge of the Amazon for a new suite of birds, including 24 species of beautiful tanagers (not all with tanager in their name) such as Paradise, Swallow, Turquoise, and Yellow-backed, and three Dacnises (small tanagers): Blue, Black-faced, and Yellow-bellied. Despite two impressive rainstorms, we experienced the Pantanal at the end of the dry season and enjoyed a wonderful experience.

Saturday, October 11 Early Arrivals / Three City Parks

We all flew into Campo Grande, the capital of Mato Grosso do Sul, entrée to the southern portion of the Pantanal, and close to the Paraguayan and Bolivian borders. All but one of us arrived on the 10th, so we got up at what we thought was an early hour to visit a Campo Grande city park, Parque Estadual do Prosa, arriving at 7. We hadn't yet realized that sunrise had occurred at 5:11 a.m. and that we had much earlier mornings to come. We saw our first Bare-faced Curassows, Toco Toucans, Blue-and-yellow Macaws, agoutis, and Capybaras (both rodents), never dreaming that we would see these species almost every day for the next 10 days. On the other hand, today was our only day for Blue-crowned Trogon, Red-shouldered Macaw, White-wedged Piculet, Large-billed Antwren, and Helmeted Manakin. After a couple of hours, we headed to BioParque Pantanal, which Xavier refers to as "the aquarium" because it seemed like most of the displays featured fish. It provided a great overview of the Pantanal and a good orientation for the days to come. Xavier and local guide Edson showed off their Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl calls, and – not for the last time – it attracted an owl for close-up views. The goal of the call was actually to attract songbirds to mob a pretend owl, and we got good looks at several birds that would stay with us for most of the trip: Rufous Hornero, Great Kiskadee, Streaked Flycatcher, Thrush-like Wren, Rufous-bellied Thrush (looking a lot like an American Robin!), and Sayaca and Palm Tanagers. For lunch, we enjoyed a typical Brazilian meat-eaters' extravaganza at a local churrascaria restaurant, where the servers roamed the restaurant with freshly cooked cuts of meat, mostly beef. We were pleasantly surprised to find that the salad bar was good enough to feed our vegetarians well. While some of us laid low in the afternoon, our Oregon contingent – Becky, Emily, Janet, and Lynn – headed out to a park near the hotel, Parque das Nações Indígenas, and found 18 species. We met officially at dinner at our Hotel Deville that night to enjoy our first caipirinhas (the Brazilian national drink) and to lay out the plans for the rest of the trip.

Sunday, October 12 Explore the South Side of the Pantanal

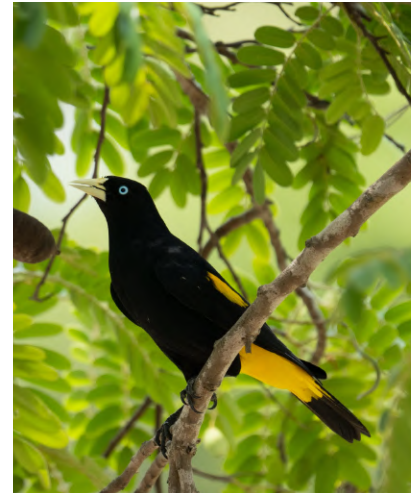
Our first official breakfast was in the hotel at 6 a.m. Then we were off in our van to drive to Pousada (Lodge) Aguape. We had 39 species before reaching the lodge, including our first Greater Rheas, whistling-ducks (White-faced and Black-bellied), Chaco Chachalacas, Guira Cuckoos, ibises (Buff-necked, Plumbeous, and Bare-faced),



Whistling Heron, Turquoise-fronted Amazon (parrot), and White-rumped Monjita. Even before lunch we found out, much to our surprise, that we were sharing the pousada with large flocks of Hyacinth and Blue-and-yellow Macaws, Nanday Parakeets, and Yellow-billed Cardinals. After packing our bags, we enjoyed a buffet lunch and a mid-day siesta, two events that we repeated throughout the rest of the tour. At 3:30, we climbed onto our safari vehicle for our first tour of the pousada grounds. The most common birds were the 100 Picazuro Pigeons and the 25 Guira Cuckoos. More interesting were the six White-throated Piping-Guans and the day-roosting potoos, both Common and Great. Luckily, the local driver knew where to find them since both potoos looked like perfect tree branches. We were pretty excited by our first Narrow-billed Woodcreeper, but it was outdone by both the Great Rufous Woodcreeper and the Red-billed Scythebill. We saw both Purplish and Plush-crested Jays. One of my favorite birds was the tall but scrawny Red-legged Seriema. And we had our first howler monkey and Pampas Deer for the tour. We finished the day with a buffet dinner and a review of the checklist.

Monday, October 13 Full Day Southern Pantanal Safari

It isn't a full day unless you start early, so we did. I started the checklist at 5:22 a.m., and we had 77 bird species before lunch. But this morning wasn't primarily about birds; the stars of the show were the Giant Anteaters, especially the mama with her baby on her back. She was acclimated to humans, so we had to retreat from her advance, while our photographers abandoned their long lenses for their smartphones. We also saw our only White-lipped Peccary and our first Capuchins (monkeys) this morning. When we could tear ourselves away from the mammals, there were a lot of birds to see, such as Red-crested Finch, Wedge-tailed Grass-Finch, Yellowish Pipit, and Chotoy Spinetail. And that was just the songbirds! We also saw our first Jabirus and Limpkins and our only Long-tailed Ground Dove. Throughout the trip we saw large nests of birds in the Ovenbird family *Furnariidae* (not related to the North American breeding Ovenbird, which is a warbler). We saw mud nests of the Rufous Hornero (and the bird itself) almost every day. We also saw large stick nests of the thornbirds on many days, but today was the only day we saw Rufous-fronted Thornbirds at their nest. In addition to our usual siesta, we enjoyed a presentation by a couple of the people who were reintroducing orphaned Giant Anteaters to the pousada grounds. Then we were back on the safari vehicle by 3:30. We had to pause a few times when we were interrupted by cattle drives; ecotourism isn't the only source of income in this area. We added a bunch of new birds, including our only Swallow-tailed Hummingbird of the tour. We saw a Scaly-headed Parrot, a pair of Red-and-green Macaws, and three different Aplomado Falcons. We found a White-browed Meadowlark and our first



White-headed Marsh Tyrants.

Tuesday, October 14 Aguape to Campo Grande / Flight to Cuiaba

After breakfast, we headed out for our first boat ride on the Aquidauana River, a tributary of the Paraguay River, and were introduced to the avian richness of the Pantanal rivers. We spotted our only Little Cuckoo and Band-tailed Manakin of the trip and our first Green Ibis, Rufous-tailed Jacamar, and Mato Grosso Antbird among the herons, egrets, cormorants, Anhingas, kingfishers, and swallows. Afterwards, we were off for the longest travel day of the tour. We drove back to Campo Grande, flew to Brasilia, and then to Cuiaba, the capital city of Mato Grosso. Luckily, everything was on time. We had said goodbye to the southern Pantanal and Mato Grosso do Sul and were about to visit the northern Pantanal in Mato Grosso in the good hands of our new driver, Jose.

Wednesday, October 15 Northern Transpantaneira Adventure Begins

I think this was the only morning we slept in. We made it to Parque Bernardo Berneck, a Cuiaba city park, by 8 a.m. The main target was Black-tailed Marmoset, the small 9-inch monkey with the 12-13-inch tail: Success! Pantanal doesn't host a lot of hummingbirds (at least at this time of year), so we were happy to see a couple of Glittering-throated Emeralds (not to be confused with Glittering-bellied Emeralds!). Other good finds were a Little Woodpecker, a Hooded Tanager, and a Chestnut-vented Conebill. On the edge of the small lake (large pond?), we found our only Purple Gallinules of the tour. Then we were off to the heart of the Pantanal! In the heart for two nights, we traveled by boat, but to get there, we drove the Transpantaneira, the infamous 90-mile-long dirt road with more than 120 wooden bridges (that often harbored interesting birds!). Luckily, we stayed at two lodges along the Transpantaneira, each about halfway along, so we never drove the entire 90 miles in a single day. The road was paved from Cuiaba to Pocone, but soon after we crossed under the sign that marked the start of the 90 miles of dirt. Before arriving at Aymara Lodge, we stopped several times to enjoy storks, ibises, herons, egrets, limpkins, lapwings, jacanas, and our first Black-backed Water Tyrant. There were cattle throughout the first part of the Transpantaneira, but they dropped out as we got closer to the end. After unpacking, buffet lunch, and a siesta, we were off in the safari vehicle. We enjoyed long views of our first tapirs and added a small Red Brocket (deer) and several of the large Marsh Deer. We continued our good luck with "game birds" with five different Undulated Tinamous (not just heard, we actually saw them!), our first Rusty-margined Guans, White-throated Piping-Guans, Bare-faced Curassows, and no fewer than 26 Chaco



Chachalacas. We had a close-up pair of Sunbitterns close to the lodge. We had entered the land of caciques with Yellow-rumped and Solitary Black, plus one Crested Oropendola. Everything was going great until our driver slowed down a bit as he was trying to navigate what seemed like a relatively small mud puddle, but . . . we were stuck. We must have worked an hour to try to get unstuck. Meanwhile, dusk fell, and at least three species of nightjar called loudly around us. We finally started walking back to the lodge, and after about 30 minutes and two miles, we were able to get a call through. Our van arrived to drive us five more miles back and a 4-wheel-drive vehicle headed back to unstick the safari truck. It was an adventure to remember!

Thursday, October 16 Birds & Wildlife on the Transpantaneira

We started the morning at 6 a.m. on the lodge grounds. A nestbox held a family of Bar n Owls (now officially called American Barn-Owls). We enjoyed a Pale-crested Woodpecker and our only White-eyed Parakeets of the tour. There were many small flycatchers this morning, including Yellow and Planalto Tyrannulets and a Fuscous Flycatcher. Among all the rufous birds, we picked out a Dull-capped Attila and a pair of Rufous Casiornises. After breakfast, our van took us back out to the Transpantaneira, where we found 57 bird species, with both Greater and Smooth-billed Anis (not for the first or last time). Some of our crew got quick looks at a Pantanal Snipe. The Solitary Sandpiper was more cooperative. We saw our first Capped Heron and our last Whistling Heron. It was a great morning for hawks with Great Black, Black-collared, Savanna, and Roadside, plus the rare Chaco Eagle. We found our first Collared Peccary and Black-and-white Tegu (lizard). After lunch and siesta, we bravely returned to the safari vehicle and repeated yesterday afternoon's route, amid great mea culpas from the driver and a display of a freshly charged radio. Highlights included our first Red-throated Piping-Guan, American Pygmy Kingfisher, and Chestnut-bellied Seed-Finch and our only Greater Thornbird (with a large stick nest like the Rufous-fronted Thornbird we had seen a few days earlier). Hopes for nightjars were dashed when we needed to dash back to the lodge ahead of a fast-approaching thunderstorm that hit just after we got back to our cabins.

Friday, October 17 Transpantaneira to Porto Jofre and Our Houseboat

Gray-headed Tanager and Buff-breasted Wren were the highlights of our 6 a.m. birdwalk on the lodge grounds. I got some great photos of a mama and baby Capybara right next to my room (which I had been sharing with three individual Chaco Tree Frogs). We left for the drive to Porto Jofre (the end of the road) right after breakfast and stopped for Scarlet-headed and Chopi Blackbirds, Southern Screamers, and a Gray Brocket (deer), among



others. At Porto Jofre, we ferried our belongings from the van to the boat and headed off to our houseboat, our home for the next two nights. Before reaching the houseboat, our boat driver slowed down for our first jaguar! That was easy! We got close and leisurely views, and we hadn't even had lunch yet. We hopped on the boat at 2:30 for our first full afternoon on the Cuiaba River in the heart of the Pantanal. We found six more jaguars this afternoon, some on our own and some by following radioed information from other boat drivers. At one point, we were surrounded by eight other boats, but the drivers were adept at getting us all good views without upsetting people in other boats. Despite the distraction of jaguars everywhere, we found 55 species of birds, including our first Sungrebe, Boat-billed Heron, and Black-capped Donacobius. The sand flats on the river hosted Pied Plovers, Large- and Yellow-billed Terns, and Black Skimmers. As it was getting dark and we were heading back to the houseboat, I was excited to see our first Band-tailed Nighthawk, but Xavier didn't seem very impressed. I soon found out why as we were surrounded by nighthawks all over the river. I estimated 30.

Saturday, October 18 Jaguars, Jabirus, & More from the Boat

We were off in the boat at 6:30 and found 70 bird species before lunch (mostly old friends by now), but we remember today because of the Giant Otters and their big fish and the big caiman eating the big anaconda. Oh, and the water buffalo – where did he come from? We found several Giant Otter groups today, and they were very obliging, foraging slowly down the river and occasionally catching a big fish, then finding a safe spot to chomp it down. The caiman startled us and created an unknown ruckus. At first, I thought it was two caimans fighting, but then it became clear that the caiman had attacked an anaconda. We were able to stick around for quite a while, and the caiman never lost his grip on the snake, but he never seemed fully in control of it either. We found a nesting tree with three Great Horned Owls, as Ray was quick to identify. Then we found a raptor that we could all easily identify: a Swallow-tailed Kite, a soaring bird with an obviously forked tail. We had an Osprey and Black Skimmers today too, so we were feeling quite at home. On the more exotic side, we had a perched Bat Falcon and a flying Crimson-crested Woodpecker, a close relative of the infamous Ivory-billed Woodpecker of North America.



Sunday, October 19 Transpantaneira: From Porto Jofre to SouthWild Pantanal

Today was another travel day, so we left on the boat at 6 a.m. to say goodbye to the waterbirds and mammals of the Cuiaba River and its tributaries. I carefully counted the Cocoi Herons one-by-one and achieved 34. Among 50 old friends, the one new species this morning was Rusty-backed Spinetail. We quickly packed up, transferred our gear first to the boat, and then the van, and we were back on the dusty Transpantaneira. Along the way, we found a spot with 40 Wood Storks, 20 Great Egrets, and 20 Snowy Egrets, I think the only place on the tour when Snowy Egrets were that common. We stopped again for Scarlet-headed Blackbird, and we were all glad we did! We arrived at SouthWild Pantanal for lunch and a siesta, then headed out on the Pixaim River at 3. Before we could get into the boat, Xavier tried for the tenth time to get a calling Striped Cuckoo to come out in the open. This time it flew across the river and landed right over our heads. Soon after, as we were sitting calmly in the boat, I looked up and a Tiny Hawk was hurtling toward me with a Great Kiskadee in pursuit. I thought I had to duck! Two Sungrebes were amazingly cooperative, and we all got great views of a usually secretive species. Ray was especially excited to see a Crested Caracara over the river. Every once in a while, we were reminded that we were at the edge of civilization where maintenance is often an issue. This reminder came when all of a sudden one of the boats could only go backwards. Luckily, we were in front of Hotel Pantanal Mato Grosso, and we ate ice cream while our van driver came to pick us up. SouthWild has an evening mammal-feeding station. We were hoping for an Ocelot and were surprised and pleased when a Crab-eating Fox showed up instead, an animal we had expected to see, but had missed up until then. After the dam broke, we saw several over the next few days.

Monday, October 20 Pixaim River & SouthWild Pantanal

We started the morning by walking around near the lodge with the usual assortment of Yellow-billed Cardinals, Saffron Finches, Grayish Baywings, Ruddy Ground-Doves, White-tipped Doves, and Shiny Cowbirds. We added a few more this morning: Plain-winged Ground-Dove, Scaled Dove, Rufous Cachalote, Cattle Tyrant, and Purplish Jay. We hadn't seen many hummingbirds, so a Gilded hummer was welcome. At 7:45, we were off on the boats on the Pixaim River again. We kept finding Sungrebe after Sungrebe for a total of five. We enjoyed the chorus of Chaco Chachalacas all morning; I counted an even dozen. The afternoon safari on the Transpantaneira produced our now-usual assortment of tall wading birds, raptors, and songbirds. We stayed out until dusk and were



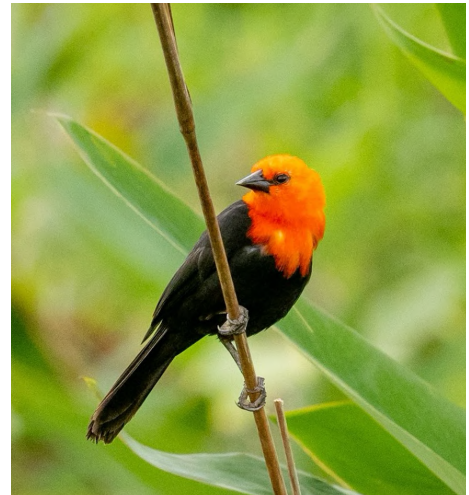
rewarded with a great assortment of nightjars: Nacunda and Short-tailed Nighthawks, Common Pauraque, and Spot-tailed Nightjar.

Tuesday, October 21 From SouthWild through Cuiaba to Jardim da Amazonia

Today was a travel day, so we started at 5 on the Pixaim River. We were up early enough to enjoy a couple of Band-tailed Nighthawks to start the morning. A couple of new songbirds were Fawn-breasted Wren and Rusty-collared Seedeater. The biggest surprise of the morning was a flock of 10 Greater Anis. After that, it was breakfast, Transpantaneira, dropping Kathy off at her hotel in Cuiaba, then off to Jardim da Amazonia. It was a long drive, and we were surprised at the huge corn and cotton fields we passed through. It reminded us of Iowa, but Nancy and I had lived in Iowa, and the fields here were even larger with many fewer houses or outbuildings. It was corporate farming on a grand scale. When we arrived, we hit a sharp demarcation: from a wide-open cotton field, we hit a wall of trees, and a few hundred yards later, we were at the lodge. We had a late lunch, unpacked, had a short siesta, and started our first field trip in this new habitat with our excellent local guide Jonathan. Wait, the chachalaca wasn't Chaco, it was Speckled. Ooh, those are Fork-tailed Palm-Swifts, and the smaller ones are Gray-rumped Swifts. That jacamar is Brown. That macaw is Red-bellied. That odd-looking bird is a Bare-necked Fruitcrow. And there are lots of tanagers: Silver-beaked, Blue-gray, Palm, Blue-necked, and Swallow. An Orange-bellied Euphonia. And those chubby birds on the treetops are Swallow-winged Puffbirds. We ended the evening with a Blackish Nightjar.

Wednesday, October 22 Jardim da Amazonia

We weren't really in the Amazon; we were in a transition zone between the Amazon and the Cerrado, which formerly was savannah and is now mostly corn, soybean, and cotton fields. But many of the new birds we saw have Amazonian affinities, fully justifying the name of our lodge. And we were in a lush rainforest, so we were happy. We started out in a boat before 6, heading for perhaps the rarest bird we would see the whole tour, the Critically Endangered Cone-billed Tanager. The tanager had been described in 1938, but not seen again until 2003, 65 years later. The bird we saw was discovered even more recently. We had wonderful luck, watching the male sing from a mostly open perch close above us. It was a tanager morning; we came upon a mixed canopy flock with a wide variety of species. We ended up with 14 tanager species for the morning (not all with tanager in the name), although I don't think any of us saw all 14 species. Canopy flocks can be frustrating! Another great bird for the morning was Amazon Umbrellabird, one of the more bizarre birds of the planet. We had three



hummingbird species this morning: Reddish Hermit, Fork-tailed Woodnymph, and White-chinned Sapphire. We also saw two species of jacamar (Blue-cheeked and Rufous-tailed) and two species of aracari (Red-necked and Chestnut-eared), so it was a wonderful tropical morning. During our siesta, many of us took a dip in the shaded pool; then we went back out birding at 4. The most interesting afternoon birds included two puffbirds (Pied and Eastern Striolated), Gould's Toucanet, a new tanager (Dotted), and a new hummingbird (Black-bellied Thorntail).

Thursday, October 23 Ponte Sobre Rio Arinos / Jardim da Amazonia

We left at 6 to drive through the ag fields to another great patch of Amazonian forest: the bridge over the Arinos River, in the Rio Claro region. We were surprised (again) to see Greater Rheas and Burrowing Owls in the cornfields and stopped to enjoy a Red-winged Tinamou. The bridge provided a great viewpoint for many new species. Our only Channel-billed Toucan of the tour flew close by. We had great views of another tough-to-see species, the Cryptic Forest-Falcon. It was a three-dacnis morning, with Blue, Black-faced, and Yellow-bellied. Purple-throated Euphonia was another colorful sight. At the opposite extreme were a pair of dark antbirds, Blackish and Black-throated. We returned to the lodge in time for a morning walk through the rainforest. Some of us saw one of the smallest birds in the world, the Short-tailed Pygmy-Tyrant; others just assumed it was a bee. We knew we were in a tropical habitat because of all the "ant"birds we were seeing. Here we had two antwrens (Rusty-winged and Dot-winged) and an antshrike (Natterer's Slaty-). We added another hummingbird: the Black-eared Fairy. Did I mention that it was hot and humid? We broke siesta before 4 to visit a lake at the edge of the forest and the ag fields. The big attraction was the flight of Red-bellied and Blue-and-yellow Macaws. Southern Yellowthroat was only our second warbler of the trip. Black-faced Tanager was less colorful than most, but still dramatic. We added a hummingbird and a swift: Long-billed Starthroat and Chapman's Swift.

Friday, October 24 Through Cotton & Cornfields Back to Cuiaba

It was our last 6 a.m. start. Emily asked me not to remind everyone that everything this morning was the last of the trip, but I hope she doesn't mind if I do it in this report. Considering that it was the last morning, we added a lot of new species. Only a few of us got to see our second species of curassow (Razor-billed) in the road ahead of the van, but later, when we were on foot, everyone got to see the Ocellated Poorwill fly up from the trail. We had spent an hour the night before listening to it, so it was fun to actually get a view. We added our last new hummingbird – White-necked Jacobin – and a new macaw – Blue-winged. And a new puffbird -- White-necked – with a second Pied Puffbird as well. Rufous-capped Nunlet is related to puffbirds, but it's smaller and looks a lot

different. Ringed Antpiper may be the strangest looking flycatcher on the planet. On the more colorful side, we added Red-rumped Cacique and Pink-throated Becard. Then it was time to pack up and sit back while Jose drove us through the ag fields back to Cuiaba. We enjoyed a last caipirinha and dinner at a fancy Brazilian churrascaria restaurant near the airport in Cuiaba, and we said our goodbyes.

Saturday, October 25 Flights Home

Emily and Xavier left in the early morning with no sleep. Becky, Janet, and Lynn got to sleep and flew off in the late morning. Bill, Greg, Nancy, and Sue enjoyed lunch together before flying off to Sao Paulo and then Chicago together. And Ray's flight got bumped to the next day, so was the last one out. Thank you, Brazil, for a great two weeks in the world's largest wetland and at the edge of the world's largest rainforest. We created memories that we won't forget.

Photos: Group Boatride (Greg Butcher - GB), Giant Anteater and Young (Emily Roth - ER), Houseboat (GB), Jaguar (ER), Toco Toucan (ER), Hyacinth Macaw (Bill Gumbart - BG), Capybara (Wes Larson - WL), Cattle Farm (ER), Blue-and-yellow Macaw (ER), Sunbittern (WL), Yellow-rumped Cacique (WL), Tapir (BG), Birding (ER), Jaguar (ER), Capybara (ER), Bare-faced Curassow (ER), Group (ER), Caiman (GB), Gorgeous Skies (ER), Rio Claro (ER), Scarlet-headed Blackbird (ER)