

Jewels of Brazil's Atlantic Forest | June 12-23, 2026

Trip Report by Greg Butcher



With Naturalist Journeys Guide Greg Butcher, Neblina Forest Guide Xavier Munoz, and participants Dana, Laura, Brad, Libby, Elena, Dave, Phillip, and Candance



The Atlantic Forest is renowned as one of the most heavily deforested regions on Earth, with only about 15% of its original forest remaining. With major cities like Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo in the region, I was initially unsure of what we might find. But living in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States, where much of the original forest has also been lost, I've seen firsthand how much birdlife and habitat can persist despite these changes. As it turns out, I needn't have worried. Despite its history of deforestation, the Atlantic Forest remains remarkably rich in biodiversity, offering an incredible abundance of birds and other wildlife.

We started in the big city of Rio, just across from Copacabana Beach; we moved onto a famous forest rehabilitation project (REGUA); we visited Brazil's first national park Itatiaia; and then we returned to the coast at Paraty and Ubatuba. The Atlantic Forest includes about 1,000 miles of coastline with Serra do Mar (Mountains of the Sea) all along, creating great elevational, and thus bird, diversity. When we bird the Neotropics, we often highlight tanagers and hummingbirds, and this trip produced. We saw 35 members of the tanager family (23 with tanager in the name) and 16 species of hummingbirds (only three with hummingbird in the name). Less discussed is the large number of flycatchers on all Neotropical trips, but we had 34 species, including 12 "flycatchers", nine tyrants, and four tyrannulets. we saw 14 of what a tour participant playfully deemed "ant-thingies", including antshrikes, antvireos, antwrens, and antbirds. Then we added six species of



toucans/toucanets/aracarís; eight species of parrots including five parakeets; and three monkeys (a marmoset, a tamarin, and a capuchin). You can see that we had a full tropical experience!

Thurs., Jun. 11 Early Arrivals / Copacabana Beach

Seven of us arrived between six a.m. and 2 p.m. today. Our Mercure Hotel was just across the street from the 2.5-mile-long Copacabana Beach. I was delighted during my first breakfast to see my first Magnificent Frigatebird; little did I know that we would see flocks of 50+ overhead regularly. There weren't many birds on the beach, mostly Brown Booby and Kelp Gull in addition to the frigatebirds. Human activity (until Saturday when the sunbathers arrived in full force) was focused on a variety of things that could be done with a volleyball net, including Footvolley (hands-free) and Eclipse Ball (using a small ball and a racket). The hotel restaurant was named QCeviche, so I indulged several times. I had my first Caipirinha of many!

Fri., Jun. 12 Botanical Garden / Pista Claudio Coutinho

The folks who arrived on the 11th took two Ubers to the city's botanical garden in the morning. We had our best luck before entering the garden: a White-barred Piculet and a flowering/fruited tree with both Swallow-tailed Hummingbird and Channel-billed Toucan. We acquainted ourselves with many species that would become our constant companions: Ruddy Ground Dove, Gray-headed Tody-Flycatcher, Great Kiskadee, Social Flycatcher, Tropical Kingbird, Blue-and-White Swallow, Southern House Wren, Pale-breasted and Rufous-bellied Thrushes, Rufous-collared Sparrow, Bananaquit, and Sayaca, Palm, and Green-headed Tanagers. We were happy that one of the cutest primates on the planet was easy to see: the White-eared Tufted Marmoset! We had all arrived by lunchtime, so Xavier introduced us to our driver Luciano and our van for a drive to Pista Claudio Coutinho, a seaside trail just below Sugarloaf Mountain. Highlights here were Curl-crested Jay, Long-billed Wren, and the glowing red Brazilian Tanager. We met a few more regulars here: Picazuro Pigeon, Rufous Hornero, Masked Water-Tyrant, Boat-billed Flycatcher, and Saffron Finch. Our official welcome dinner was around the corner from the hotel at a typical Brazilian churrascaria, with a varied salad bar and endless rounds of meat, mostly tasty versions of beef.

Sat., Jun. 13

Botanical Garden / Sugarloaf Mountain

Our first official trip to the garden was busier than yesterday because it was a Saturday so admission was free. In addition to people-watching, we added Rusty-margined Guan, Lesser Woodcreeper, and Creamy-bellied Thrush. We thought we were happy with yesterday's Channel-billed Toucan, but today we found a flock of 10 in a fruiting tree. New regulars were Violet-capped Woodnymph, Ringed Kingfisher, Roadside Hawk, and Violaceous and Chestnut-bellied Euphonias. We identified Yellow-chevrons and Maroon-bellied Parakeets out of the



flocks. After lunch we boarded the cable car up Sugarloaf Mountain (Pao de Acucar in Portuguese) for the amazing views of Rio de Janeiro. The birds were few, but we had a close-up Curl-crested Jay, and we added a Bat Falcon, a Gray-breasted Martin, a couple of White-collared Swifts, and a flock of Scaly-headed Parrots. We had an Italian dinner around the corner from our hotel and enjoyed the excitement of Brazil's first World Cup match. Unfortunately, it ended in a tie, so the city remained quiet, and we were able to sleep through the night.

Sun., Jun. 14

Road to REGUA (Reserva Ecologica de Guapiacu)

After an early departure from Rio, we made a couple of stops en route to REGUA. The highlights included a Black-necked Aracari, a couple of Peach-fronted Parakeets, a couple of Streamer-tailed Tyrants, and two flocks of three Blue-winged Macaws. Other new species included a Muscovy Duck, three Smooth-billed Anis, three Limpkins, a Savannah Hawk, a Crested Caracara, a Chalk-browed Mockingbird, and our first Southern Rough-winged Swallows. Before arriving at the lodge, we stopped at a tree-lined field and picked up a bunch of new species, including a Chestnut-vented Conebill, a couple of Blue Dacnises, a Flame-crested Tanager, a pair of Hooded Tanagers, a Purple-throated Euphonia, a pair of Yellowish Pipit, a Chivi Vireo, a pair of Cliff Flycatcher, a Chestnut-crowned Becard, a pair of Chestnut-backed Antshrike, a Streaked Xenops, a pair of Cobalt-rumped Parrotlet, and a Versicolored Emerald (hummingbird).

REGUA is Reserva Ecologica de Guapiacu. They specialize in habitat restoration, which is so important in the Atlantic Forest, where 85% of the land has been deforested. Fortunately, they keep adding acreage. From the grounds just before lunch, thanks to fruit feeders and a big fruiting tree, we picked up a Golden-chevrons Tanager, a pair of Red-rumped Cacique, and dozens of Maroon-bellied Parakeets. After lunch, we produced our biggest afternoon list of the trip with 52 species. If you want to know if we had any luck, we did: both Greater and Smooth-billed Anis. We also had a small group of three Guira Cuckoo. The parakeets today were White-

eyed. A pair of Streamer-tailed Tyrants pursued elaborate displays on a telephone wire for dozens of minutes. For other flycatchers, we added a Cattle Tyrant, a White-headed Marsh Tyrant, a Southern Beardless-Tyrannulet, a Cattle Tyrant, and a pair of White-rumped Monjitas. Among the Ovenbirds (family Furnariidae), we saw our



first Wing-banded Hornero, a pair of Yellow-chinned Spinetails, and a Rufous-fronted Thornbird at the nest. We got good photos of a couple of woodpeckers: Campo Flicker and Green-barred Woodpecker. A fly-by Toco Toucan caught our attention. We were also very excited by the Wedge-tailed Grassfinch, which we saw in addition to the Grassland Sparrow and Chopi Blackbird. We ended the day with a Giant coup: a Giant Snipe to be precise, close-up in a flashlight. Meals at REGUA Reserve Lodge were all buffet-style, with lots of yummy choices. We ate late tonight because of the snipe.

Mon. Jun. 15 Reserva Ecologica de Guapiacu (REGUA)

The tall trees near the lodge were very productive this morning with two species of toucans (five Tocos and two Channel-billeds) as well as Yellow-backed and Swallow Tanagers as highlights. On the other side of the birdfeeders were 20 Maroon-bellied Parakeets, a fly-by Giant Cowbird, and a Blond-crested Woodpecker. After breakfast, we had our best morning list of the trip with 61 species. On the large side, we had a fly-over Black Hawk-Eagle, a Surucua Trogon, and a Spot-billed Toucanet. On the small side were White-throated Spadebill, White-thighed Swallow, Moustached Wren, and Blue-naped Chlorophonia, plus a pair of manakins: Swallow-tailed (both male and female) and Pin-tailed (alas, no males). Smallest of all was the Black-cheeked Gnateater. On the colorful side, we had Yellow-green Grosbeak and on the cryptic side, we had Ochre-breasted and Buff-fronted Foliage-Gleaners. For some reason, species came in groups of three this morning. Most colorful were three species of Yellow- Woodpeckers: Yellow-fronted, Yellow-eared, and Yellow-throated. Less colorful were the Antwrens: White-flanked, Unicolored, and Streak-capped. Among the Becards, we had Chestnut-crowned, Black-capped, and Crested. We had our first large tanager flock away from birdfeeders this morning, including nine species. The three new ones were Ruby-crowned, Red-necked (one of our all-time favorites), and Rufous-headed.

REGUA continued to produce new birds in the afternoon. When we spent time in open grasslands, we picked up Sooty Grassfinch, Uniform Finch, as well as Picui and Plain-chested Ground Doves. In the woods, we saw

Crescent-chested Puffbird, Chestnut-backed Antshrike, Plain-winged Woodcreeper, Gray-hooded Attila, and White-bearded Manakin. All tropical birders love a motmot, and unfortunately, Rufous-capped is shyer than most, but most of us finally got a look. Tanagers are also high on the wish list, so we were happy to see White-bellied and Yellow-backed Tanagers in addition to Black-legged Dacnis.

Tues., Jun. 16 REGUA / Pousada Altos de Luminar

We had a late start because of rain this morning, so of course we walked to a wetland. We had Muscovy and Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks, Striated and Black-crowned Night Herons, seven Wattled Jacanas, at least 30 Common Gallinules, and both Ringed and Amazon Kingfishers. Then we were off to Pousada Altos de Luminar in the Serra dos Orgaos mountains (a range in the Serra do Mar near Nova Friburgo). The pousada had a large hummingbird station that was dominated by Sombre Hummingbirds, quite a difference from the usual colorful species. A pair of Plain Parakeet continued the unadorned theme, as did the predominantly tan Burnished-buff Tanagers. By comparison, the Rufous-browed Peppershrike seemed downright colorful, as did the Slaty-breasted Wood-Rails we saw walking on the grounds. The pousada is located on a slope overlooking a steep valley, but the view played peek-a-boo throughout our stay as clouds and fog came and went.

Wed., Jun. 17 Sites near Nova Friburgo

This morning we visited another feeding station with five hummingbird species and seven tanagers. The new hummingbirds for us were Scale-throated Hermit, Brazilian Ruby, and White-throated Hummingbird. The new tanagers were Brassy-breasted, Gilt-edged, Black-goggled, and Magpie. From the feeders, we kept our eye on a thornbird nest and were rewarded when an Orange-eyed Thornbird emerged and stayed at the entrance just long enough for a few photographs. Playback brought a White-shouldered Fire-eye into the open, and good luck allowed us to catch views of a pair of Saffron Toucanets. We also got great views of the cryptic Green Schiffornis (a relative of tityras and becards) and the bright brown Fuscous Flycatcher. We had been hearing the booming calls of a Bare-throated Bellbird all morning, and we scanned the hillsides to no avail. As we were walking down the road after visiting the feeders, we turned a corner and two participants called out simultaneously, "There it is!" After lunch and a break, we were treated to a family group of White Woodpeckers on the pousada grounds. Then we were off to the intriguingly named "Bird Nest Site" - Sitio Ninho das Aves - where we picked up White-



throated Woodcreeper, Southern Tropical Pewee, as well as both Yellow-legged and White-necked Thrushes. This made for a five-thrush day with the more frequently seen being the Pale-breasted, Rufous-bellied, and

Creamy-bellied. As usual, we heard but didn't see Rufous-capped Motmot, and we ended the day by listening to multiple vocalizations of a Tawny-browed Owl that never showed itself.

Thurs., Jun. 18 Itatiaia National Park / Hotel do Ype

As we pulled into Hotel do Ype, we were astonished by the multitude of Dusky-legged Guan. They put on quite a show throughout our stay, including first thing the next morning. The guans acted like they ruled the roost, but the Black Capuchins (monkeys; at least four) dominated the roof of the restaurant. The multitude of birds at the feeders included our first Black-eared Fairy and our first Olive-green Tanager, among 11 species of tanagers (including three without tanager in their name). A Long-tailed Tyrant oversaw the action, and a Chestnut-bellied Euphonia male and a pair of Red-rumped Caciques provided close-up views. After lunch, we wandered the lower portions of the park and were introduced to a large number of "suboscines": flycatchers, antbirds, spinetails, and related species that have more stereotyped songs than the "oscines" such as wrens, thrushes, warblers, and tanagers. As previously mentioned, one of the members of our group playfully coined the phrase "ant-thingies", for birds more formally known as suboscines. The oscines predominate in North America, but the suboscines proliferate in South America (on this trip, we ended up with 79 oscines and 79 suboscines.) Our new Antbirds were Ferruginous and Ochre-rumped. Our new Spinetails were Rufous-capped and Spix's. Our new flycatchers were Sepia-capped, Hangnest Tody-Tyrant, and Blue-billed Black-Tyrant. Atlantic Plain-Xenops is another



suboscine that we saw today. We worked our tail off to see a Slaty Bristlefront, but it remained a "heard-only" bird. Two new oscines today were the easiest of today's new birds to see – Half-collared Sparrow and Golden-crowned Warbler.

Fri., Jun. 19 Itatiaia National Park / Hotel do Ype

This morning we visited a part of the park where someone had built a large hotel with a lot of infrastructure that apparently has never been used. The work created a lot of open areas that improved our visibility for birdwatching. A case in point was our ability to see a Sharp-shinned Hawk zooming by. And most of us were able to get our eyes on a Plain Antvireo and an Eared Pygmy-Tyrant, just as small as its name implies. Unfortunately, the good visibility didn't allow us to see the Brown Tinamou we heard. We had five individual Black-Tyrant this morning, two Blue-billed and three Velvety. We finally got our first Saltator, Green-winged. In some ways, the most interesting bird of the morning was the Sharpbill. It is a small, spotted green bird that is scattered throughout Latin America, but rarely seen. Recently, it was put into its own family, loosely related to flycatchers,



but unique. While enjoying the hummingbirds and tanagers at the hotel's feeders before lunch, a classy Golden-winged Cacique paid a visit. We enjoyed a Toco Toucan and saw our first Planalto Woodcreeper. Some of us got good looks at Sepia-capped Flycatcher and Yellow-olive Flatbill, typical but cryptic forest birds.

Sat., Jun. 20 Paraty / Parque Mambucaba

We left Itatiaia early to go to Parque Mambucaba near Paraty. We had a very successful morning with 51 species. We added a good variety of new suboscines: Tufted Antshrike, Spot-breasted Antwreio (adding to yesterday's Plain Antwreio), and White-eyed Foliage-gleaner. We were more excited by close-up and leisurely views of a Rufous-tailed Jacamar, a Neotropical favorite. After listening to Tropical Parulas for most of the trip, most of us finally got a good look today. Our newest Tanager was Orange-headed. We re-acquainted ourselves with a few species we'd seen earlier in the trip: Common Squirrel-Cuckoo, Cobalt-rumped Parrotlet, and Long-billed Wren. In a more open area, we had good views of a dark morph Short-tailed Hawk beginning to soar, followed by a female Lined Seedeater and a large flock of Common Waxbills, a non-native species that probably descended from escaped cagebirds. The afternoon was quiet, but we did add a Scaled Antbird. Paraty is a scenic old coastal village that retains many charming old buildings. We stayed at the Sandi Hotel with a gelato store right around the corner.

Sun., Jun. 21 Paraty Boat Trip / Itamambuca Eco Resort

Our morning was devoted to a boat trip in the Bay of Ilha Grande. We visited an island to see a colony of Golden Lion Tamarins (monkeys) that came down to the shore to eat our bananas. The bay was good for South American, Sandwich, and Royal Terns. The mangroves hosted a Slaty-breasted Wood-Rail as well as Yellow-crowned and Black-crowned Night Herons. For landbirds, we added a Rusty-margined Flycatcher and many Gray-breasted Martins. We enjoyed an outdoor lunch on another island. After the boat trip, we left Paraty for the Itamambuca Eco Resort. The resort has a feeding station dominated by Bananaquits that also produced a Glittering-bellied Emerald. The nearby river hosted a Short-crested Flycatcher (related to Ash-throated and Great Crested Flycatchers) and a pair of Rufous-margined Antwrens along its shore.

Mon., Jun. 22 Itamambuca / Ninho da Cambacica / Farinha House Road

Even though it was the last full day of the tour, we weren't done adding new birds. Itamambuca had a 7:30 breakfast, so lots of time to bird before. Libby was one of the first to start, and she was rewarded with a

Riverbank Warbler. Several folks saw a swimming family of Capybaras, the world's largest rodent. We were accustomed to Slaty-breasted Wood-Rails, so we were surprised when a closer look revealed a Gray-cowled Wood-Rail. We had been hearing Green-backed Trogons for several days and were delighted when we finally saw one this morning. A little coaxing drew a pair of Spot-backed Antshrike into view. Not bad for a short walk before breakfast! It's always good when the local guide gets excited, and Xavier was ecstatic when we were close to five Swallow-tailed Cotingas eating fruit from a palm tree. Then we walked up to the feeders at Ninho da Cambacica with nine hummingbird species and six species of tanager. We had four Festive Coquettes at one feeder at one time; occasionally, a female Frilled Coquette would join them. We had great looks at Saw-billed Hermits, and some of us saw a Reddish Hermit, too small to stay long at busy feeders. We had been staring carefully at all the Sayaca Tanagers earlier in the trip, and our diligence paid off with three individual Azure-winged Tanagers here – very similar to Sayaca, but more colorful. For some reason, Double-collared Seedeaters loved this feeding station, and we had a dozen at one time. When we dragged ourselves away from the feeders for a walk, we were rewarded with a Black-capped Foliage-gleaner, a Variable Antshrike, and a few Hooded Siskins. After lunch, we did a wetland hike where a Laughing Falcon perched high and a Southern Yellowthroat perched low. We had leisurely looks at a group of three Black-capped Donacobiuss; like the Sharpbill, the



Donacobiuss is the only species in its family. In the “brown bird group”, we had good looks at a Rufous Casiornis, a pair of Brown-chested Martins, and a pair of Bran-colored Flycatchers. More colorful was the one Silver-beaked Tanager we saw. Everyone in the Neotropics wants to see an oropendola, but we were without a sighting until near the end of this walk where we started with one and kept adding others until I estimated eight (which the eBird reviewer thinks is too many).

Tues., Jun. 23

Sitio Folha Seca / Hummingbird Feeders / Departures

Today was departure day, but we weren't done yet – the first flight out wasn't until 9:30 p.m. So, at 9:30 a.m., we found ourselves at our last bird feeding station. I almost forgot one of our favorite parts of the trip – it's that hummingbirds in Portuguese are “beija-flores” – flower-kissers, a truly wonderful name. We had six species of flower-kissers at this feeding station, including our first White-chinned Sapphire. Our host explained that it was very difficult to see a Reddish Hermit at the feeders because they are so small and picked on, but we were determined and found one around the corner on our way out. A few folks had seen a female Green Honeycreeper earlier in the trip, but here we found three pairs constantly coming and going. We started our last bird walk from the feeding station and picked up our last two new birds: Whiskered Flycatcher and Rufous-headed Tanager. We had our second encounters with White-bearded Manakin and Yellow-throated Woodpecker. We saw our last tanager flock, dominated by Green-headed Tanagers, a species we saw every day but one. From what I've heard, everyone had easy flights home, and I hope you're all dreaming of our next adventure.

Photo Credits: Group Photo (Greg Butcher, GB), Blue Dacnis (David Keeling, DK), Green-headed Tanager (Elizabeth Lyons, EL), Waterfall (GB), Violet-capped Woodnymph (DK), Sombre Hummingbird (DK), Violaceous Euphonia (DK), Brazilian Ruby (EL), Black Capuchin Monkey (DK), Cocoi Heron (DK), Rufous Hornero (DK), Rufescent Tiger-Heron (DK), Black-bellied Whistling-Duck (DK), Black-necked Aracari (DK), Brown Booby (DK), Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl (DK), Moon (DK), Dusky-legged Guan (EL), Burnished-buff Tanager (DK), Blue and White Swallow (DK), Saw-billed Hermit (EL), Green Honeycreeper (EL), Blue-naped Chlorophonia (DK), White-eared Tufted Marmoset (DK), Brassy-breasted Tanager (DK), Sombre Hummingbird (DK), Azure-shouldered Tanager (DK), Golden-chevroned Tanager (DK), Black Capuchin (DK), Surucua Trogon (DK), Savannah Hawk (DK), Rufous-bellied Thrush (DK), Chestnut-bellied Euphonia (EL), Gray-cowled Wood-Rail (DK), Magnificent Frigatebird (DK), Great Kiskadee (DK), Scaly-headed Parrot (DK), Toco Toucan (DK), Capybara (DK), Sunrise (DK), Butterfly (DK), Channel-billed Toucan (DK), Bromeliad (DK), Festive Coquette (EL), White-headed Marsh Tyrant (DK), Scale-throated Hermit (DK), Ruby-crowned Tanager (DK), Brazilian Tanager (DK)