



# Honeyguide

**WILDLIFE HOLIDAYS**

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ecOTOURS



## The Pantanal

22 October – 2 November 2017

### Participants

Julia Maynard  
Gill Page  
Barbara Wheeler  
Jo Simons and Mundi Smith  
Maria-José Friedlander  
Everard Daniel and Flo Harman

**Leaders and photos:** Gábor Orban and Andrea Kantona.  
Report by Gábor.

**Fact file:** start and finish in Cuiabá, Brazil; one of the best Pantanal lodges for three nights with excellent on-site bird- and wildlife-watching, then a spacious floating hotel with panoramic restaurant and bar for seven nights.

**Cover photos:** top – jaguar; middle – female bare-faced curassow, hyacinth macaws;  
bottom – scenes from the Pantanal ‘full circle’.  
Below: the group on the small boat, and squirrel cuckoo.



This holiday, as for every Honeyguide holiday, also puts something into conservation in our host country by way of a contribution to the wildlife that we enjoyed. With the holiday's conservation contributions plus gift aid we sent £300 to SAVE Brasil, the BirdLife partner in Brazil. This gives us a running total for all conservation contributions through Honeyguide of £119,322 from 1991 to 2017. We received this thank-you from the Executive Director of SAVE Brasil:

*Dear Chris,*

*Many thanks for your donation. It means a lot for SAVE Brasil. To get unrestricted money is one of the main challenges for non-profit organizations in Brazil and this kind of donation is very important for us.*

*Thanks to help us to keep our hard work to save the birds in Brazil!*

**Pedro F. Develey**

*Diretor Executivo - BirdLife/SAVE Brasil*

*Presidente Sociedade Brasileira de Ornitologia – SBO*



## INTRODUCTION

This is our holiday report of the first Honeyguide group in the Pantanal, Brazil, organised and led by Gábor and Andrea, owners of Ecotours & Kondor Ecolodge Ltd in Hungary. We had six regular Honeyguiders on the tour (Maria-José, Julia, Gill, Barbara, Jo and Mundi), joined by Flo and Everard to make it a perfectly sized group. Besides Gábor and Andrea we had several local guides to help find wildlife: Marcos at Transpantania, Max and Juliano on the boat, and Ric who amused everybody with his excellent photos during the whole tour.

Most tour companies spend a few days alongside the Transpantania road and pay a quick visit to the nearest, always busy, jaguar watching sites close to Porto Joffre, but almost nobody does a full circle on the huge river system in the southern Pantanal. It is a magical journey out in the wilderness without encountering other groups or any settlements for a week, surrounded by lush green forests and finding new birds, mammals, butterflies, amphibians and reptiles regularly. All this is on board a luxury boat with panoramic restaurant, excellent food and relaxing *caipirinha*, Brazil's national cocktail.

We had easy to moderate walks. Sometimes it was hot and humid, but mornings and evenings were nice. We had heavy rain once or twice. From the lodge we went out on 4x4 trucks to discover the famous Transpantaneira road and once with small boats on a river, and from the houseboat we went out daily on small motorboats to search for wildlife in the mornings and afternoons. This year horseflies were annoying, especially during the first days on the water, but as we went further into the jungle the problem eased.

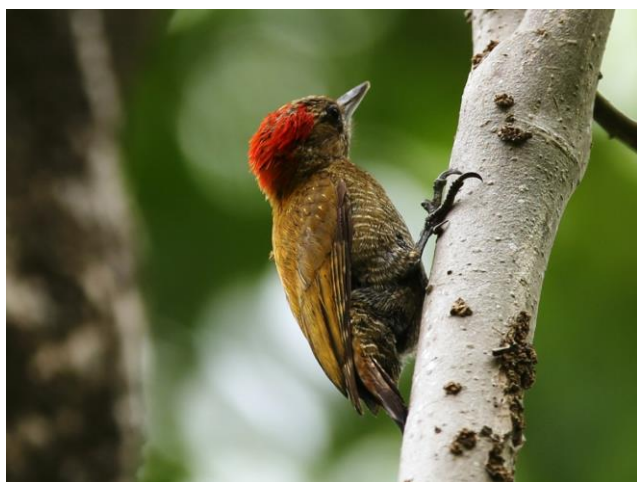
## DAILY DIARY

### Day 1, 22 October – arrival in Brazil

The holiday began this evening in Cuiabá but everybody had started the journey to Brazil much earlier. Most of the group came from the UK, but we (Andrea and Gábor) were the first to arrive in Cuiabá from Hungary via Rome and São Paulo. We were faster than one piece of luggage which unfortunately arrived days later, broken and heavily searched, but at least with nothing missing. Mundi arrived separately from Australia to Cuiabá; where she was met by Marcos. In the evening Gábor and Andrea travelled back to the airport to meet the main group and provide sandwiches, drinks and snacks for them. It took a bit more than one and a half hours to get to Piuval Lodge, check in and discuss meeting for the next day. Those who were not extremely tired could see crab-eating foxes, some pauraques (like a nightjar) and a pair of great horned owls in the garden. We went to sleep quickly after all the travelling and we wanted to be well prepared for tomorrow by being fresh and as early as possible.

### Day 2, 23 October – Piuval Lodge

After the very long and tiresome journey from home to the lodge no wonder that just half of the group were up and about at 5.30 in the morning. We started to see the first exciting birds such as yellow-chevroned and monk parakeets, yellow-billed cardinal, palm tanager, sayaca tanager, great kiskadee, tropical kingbird, rufous hornero, shiny cowbird, saffron finch, rufous-bellied thrush and smooth-billed ani. The first raptors were represented by black vultures and southern crested caracaras.



Little woodpecker and black-tailed tityra (both males).

At 7 o'clock we had our first buffet-style breakfast where you could choose from various cold and hot meals and drinks. Later from 8 o'clock we went out for our first safari ride on a transformed truck. We started from a wooden platform though it was still not easy to climb up on the metal ladders to reach one of the several rows of soft seats. But once we were sitting up there we could enjoy a panoramic view.

We stopped several times when we could see wildlife, and soon had a long list of various species such as orange-backed troupial, wood stork, plumbeous Ibis, coatimundi, grey-necked woodrail, chaco chachalaca, sunbittern and green-barred woodpecker.

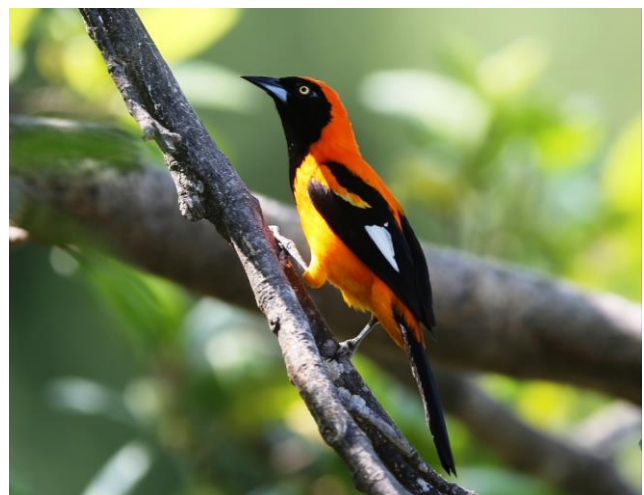
The next very colourful species were blue-fronted parrot and chestnut-eared aracari. We had our first straight-billed woodcreeper for the holiday and then we found several different mammals, such as agouti, which looks like as a strange cross between a hare and a gopher; followed by a cavy or Brazilian guineapig and finally a black-tailed marmoset. More birds came thick and fast such as crested oropendola, chestnut-bellied guan, bare-faced curassow, whistling heron, black-fronted nunbird, chalk-browed mockingbird and pale-vented pigeon. Smooth-billed anis were in small groups and we found short-crested flycatcher, grey-crested cacholote and white-tipped dove as well. Raptors were represented by a colourful savanna hawk, a quickly manoeuvring lesser yellow-headed vulture and a black-collared hawk.



Greater rhea family; savanna hawk.

Gábor pointed out a male rusty-coloured seedeater and soon we realized there was a whole flock around. Silver-beaked Tanager and grayish saltator we found, while Marcos heard yellowish pipit, but we could not see it. But we could not miss the first huge jabiru storks and southern screamers. We also saw a purplish jay and heard a great antshrike. Monk parakeet was quite common and soon we found the first black howler monkeys on the tour and also a black tegu (a large lizard). Later on we stopped at a riverside shady place and we just could not believe our eyes that in front of the truck on the nearest tree we had a pair of amazing hyacinth macaws. They were very cooperative and waited until everybody was off the truck with cameras and/or bins prepared so we got excellent views. It turned out they had a nest nearby. One of them was flying so close that it almost touched Gábor's head! What a unique experience to have the world's largest parrots so close.

We spent some time to lure out greater thornbird and later we found three different species of woodpeckers as well on the nearby trees: little, green-barred and golden-green woodpecker. Everybody had excellent views of an orange-backed troupial which this time moved at lower level and we also had a posing black-tailed tityra higher up. While some people tried to get a glimpse of a family of thrushlike wrens others enjoyed perfect views of Neotropic cormorants and a ringed kingfisher from a jetty. Eventually we retreated to our base and soon prepared for lunch. Lunch was again very rich, so after that we surely needed a bit of a siesta. Those who could not rest saw white woodpecker and toco toucan close to our buildings.



Yellow-rumped cacique; orange-backed troupial.



During the afternoon, after three o'clock, we walked out first across the open fields and then into the more wooded area. At the first part alongside the road at a small pond we had yacaré caymans and ringed kingfisher. Guira cuckoos moved along the fences and we saw monk parakeets. Later as we were crossing the fields we found great rufous woodcreeper and a rufescent tiger heron which we could admire through a Swarovski scope. When we reached a more forested area we found golden-collared macaws and grey-necked woodrails. We also saw a red-throated piping guan and squirrel cuckoo. It was quite hot and people felt too tired, so we asked the truck to come for us instead of walking further. The last bird we saw during this walk was a lurking white-browed spinetail. We spotted a grey brocket deer as well.

We had our dinner from 7pm and we were ready to go out for a night safari after 8pm. We missed Barbara who was coping with dehydration, but from time to time different members and leaders of the group tried to check her today and next day. The notable creatures during the evening outing were great horned owls in the garden, Brazilian rabbit alongside the road, common pauraques and a black and white snake, which we identified later as an Indigo snake *Drymarchon corais*.



Yacaré caymans; great potoo.

### Day 3, 24 October – Piuval Lodge

Out of the many species which were found during today's pre-breakfast walk we would mention streaked flycatcher, black skimmer, aplomado falcon and of course the omnipresent greater rhea. At 7am we had another excellent breakfast and at 8am we were ready for another safari ride. After a tropical kingbird the first exciting bird was a blue-throated piping guan. Later we witnessed a toco toucan actively searching nests for robbing them. No wonder all the small birds around tried to chase it away. Raptors were represented by a beautiful crane hawk and a plumbeous kite, plus suddenly we discovered a huge circling flock of snail kites, well over a hundred individuals migrating.



A cayman makes a catch; grey-necked wood-rail.

After a few blue-fronted parrots and a pair of scaled doves our truck suddenly stopped below a tree. The driver said there is a bird up there. At first we had a hard time to find anything until we realized that one of the broken branches was actually a great potoo. This was a very nice surprise and would have been quite difficult to find without the local knowledge. A bit farther on, a pond was full with caymans and they were surrounded by black vultures.

Later we stopped at a lakeside area. Not too far away we could finally see a lurking yellowish pipit. An immature great black hawk was much easier. Monk parakeets were quite loud and we admired roseate spoonbills, southern screamers and large-billed terns. Rusty-margined flycatcher was new and we had again orange-backed troupial and yellow-rumped cacique. We also saw lesser kiskadee and greyish saltator. Before we went back to the lodge Marcos explained the importance of the apple snails which secrete the necessary oxygen back into the ponds.

At noon we had our lunch and later Andrea and Gábor got a surprise, the airline after a lot of debate finally transferred our lost luggage. Andrea excitedly checked inside: it was obvious that somebody had searched all the contents, but it seemed nothing was taken out, so the papers were happily signed. Just when the courier had left they realized they should have announced that the suitcase itself was totally devastated, missing all the handles and with one of the wheels broken off.

After a short siesta we went out again. This time we travelled first alongside the Transpantaneira road and then on a road of a private ranch where we had a comfort stop before reaching a riverbank from where we set off on a boat tour. Before we reached this point we saw white-headed marsh tyrant, undulated tinamou, plumbeous kite, orange-backed troupial, blue-throated piping guan and chestnut-bellied chachalaca. While we waited while for our boatmen to shovel out the earlier rainwater from the boats we had an excellent surprise in the form of landing golden-collared macaws just on the other side of the river. We started finally around 4.30pm and spent about 1½ hours on the water surrounded by incredibly lush vegetation. As soon as we got in the boats we started to find excellent species such as rufescent tiger heron, the rare green and rufous kingfisher and the tiny American pygmy kingfisher. Wow, what a start!



Green-and-rufous kingfisher; American pygmy kingfisher.

Later we managed to watch Neotropical otters up close for a while which was a unique experience. Ringed kingfisher and anhinga were quite common. Once we encountered a male muscovy duck and we saw a few yellow-billed cardinals on the bushes alongside the riverbank. We could observe limpkin and grey-necked wood-rail very well too. But perhaps the best was when we stopped the engine and silently waited at a little bay where a beautiful capped heron came out of the dense vegetation and crossed just in front of us. We also added striated heron to the daily list. Finally we travelled back in the same way to the lodge, but by now it was dark so it was almost like a night safari. The great horned owls greeted us again close to the reception building. We had our last dinner at this excellent place and discussed the plan for tomorrow. We returned to our rooms for a good sleep with a lot of nice experiences and tomorrow we planned to start early again.



Golden-collared macaws; capped heron.



#### Day 4, 25 October – from Piuval Lodge to the floating hotel

Everybody was quite tired, so just a few of us made the pre-breakfast drive out at 5.45. We waited till 5.55 to give a chance for the late arrivals but then we set off. Well, pretty soon it turned out it was worth the effort since within a few minutes we found a giant anteater. WOW, what an incredibly designed creature! It was very interesting to witness this amazing mammal walking around, checking termite nests. We followed it for a long time and could hardly pay any attention to birds although we had white-rumped monjita, hyacinth macaw, roadside hawk, yellow-headed caracara and rufescent tiger heron around. We also heard a nearby ferruginous pygmy owl which we tried to call closer without success.



Giant ant-eater.

We returned quite happily to have breakfast and after packing and checking out we got into two vans to make it even more comfortable and started our journey down to Porto Joffre through the Transpantaneira road. Soon we saw peach-fronted parakeets and blue-fronted parrots. But the real surprise was suddenly to see another giant anteater alongside the road. We all quickly jumped out and we were so happy that this time everybody had a great view of this enigmatic mammal. Every other vehicle stopped, with people taking photos or just simply looking at the animal. Afterwards we continued on our way and some of the group saw laughing falcon, while all of us had marsh deer, a big group of capybaras and white-rumped swallows.

We stopped at another bridge which gave us an excellent opportunity to watch two jabirus, a lesser yellow-headed vulture and a southern caracara. They were so close that we could even see a very interesting interaction: the caracara started to approach the feeding vulture and in the meantime the skin colour at the base of its beak turned from red into yellow, which is a clear sign that the bird was in an aggressive mood. Indeed, it chased away the vulture and got its food. But it was not the end of the story as one of the jabirus took the leftovers from the caracara and made the pecking order clear. The last impressive movement was when a male marsh deer with quite sizeable antlers was running closer and flashed most of the birds away.



Capybaras; and driving through a cloud of butterflies

Later on we saw a capped heron and we drove through a cloud or river of butterflies, mainly sulphurs. This amount of butterflies is hard to see anywhere in the world, we felt it was matched only by the wintering monarchs in Mexico. Driving miles through a constant stream of butterflies was a highlight for many of us.



We also stopped at a huge monk parakeet nest where the birds were very busy renovating the home of the colony, courting and mating. We had many yellow-rumped caciques nesting on the same tree as well.

As we drove further, suddenly a mammal ran across which we identified as a Neotropical river otter. Later on we also added snail kite, laughing falcon, little cuckoo, scarlet-headed blackbird and white-crested tyrannulet. We also stopped at a place which turned out to be very productive, finding several species here such as white-wedged piculet, little woodpecker, pale baywing, rusty-backed spinetail, barred antshrike, gray-crested cacholote, common tody flycatcher, fuscous flycatcher and dusky-capped flycatcher.

At around 13.30 we arrived at our new home for the next eight days, a nice riverboat with three levels. Most of the cabins were on the lower level, the mid-level had the kitchen, a bar and a spacious restaurant with panoramic view and a lecture hall extension. On the upper deck there was a jacuzzi and a barbecue bar and again perfect all-around views. We had two additional local guides on board, Juliano and Max, so the guide and guest ratio was really excellent. From 14:00 we enjoyed our first tasty lunch which was followed by many more during the next days.



Our first jaguar, a male.

Everybody was very excited by the possibility of going out as soon as possible for our first speedboat excursion so by 15:00 we were already searching for jaguars. Well, we did not need to wait too long, within half an hour we arrived at a spot from where a few people had already enjoyed excellent views of a jaguar from some small boats. We silently joined them and admired this top predator up close. For a while the jaguar just enjoyed laying down in the shallow water, but after a while he sat, looked around and later even stood up. The most exciting moment was when he started to walk in the water among some bushes and he was moving with a slow, cat-like, lurking motion, clearly hunting. Wow! We were not sure whether he was after a fish or a cayman, but there was no doubt that he was very much interested in something in the water.

In the meantime more and more motorboats arrived, so it became a bit crowded and noisy sometimes, so no wonder we could not witness more action. Still we had some interesting birds as well such as common piping guan, solitary cacique and lesser yellow-headed vulture. Suddenly a raptor flew across quite quickly and we identified it as a long-winged harrier, the only one seen during the whole tour. We saw blue-crowned trogon and yellow-billed cardinal as well and we heard undulated tinamu alongside the river.

Unfortunately after spending about two hours on the water a storm developed and chased us away, but we left with excellent experiences. After returning to the floating hotel we had hot showers and prepared for dinner. Juliano also presented a short talk about Pantanal wildlife.

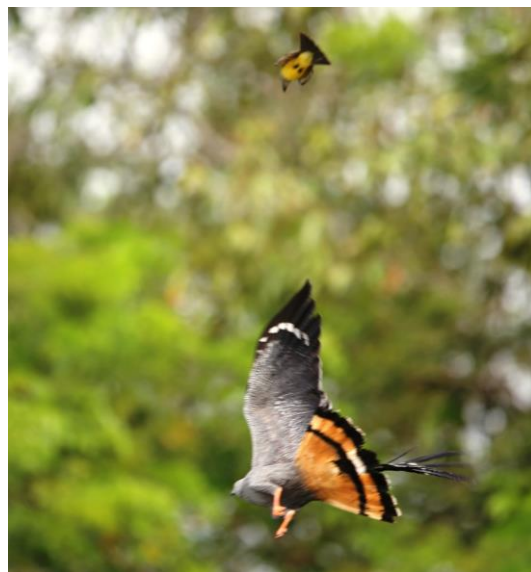


Pied plover; female barred antshrike; black-backed water-tyrant.



### Day 5, 26 October – floating hotel

Today we started quite early with a breakfast at 5.45, so an hour later we were already out in the small boats. The first birds were black skimmers which we had seen before, but pretty soon we started to see new species including pied plover and black-capped donacobius. There was no lack of striated herons, anhingas, cocoi herons, shiny cowbirds and yellow-billed cardinals either. We saw squirrel cuckoo, greater ani, black-fronted nunbird and a new pigeon, named picazurro.



Our second jaguar, a female; crane hawk chased by tropical kingbird.

Soon we reached a point where a few boats already waited and we realized that there was a jaguar enjoying the shade under the trees. We stopped nearby, watching this great predator. During waiting for any action we started to realize that this spot was full with life. Tropical kingbird moved back and forth and an up-close black-backed water tyrant was new. We witnessed common tody flycatchers visiting their hanging nest regularly and southern rough-winged swallows did the same thing at the riverbank. We also enjoyed excellent views of rufous-tailed jacamar and yellow-chevrons parakeets. The jaguar looked up a few times, we got excited once or twice when something caught her attention, but quite sensibly she decided to extend her siesta. We stayed a bit longer, surely not bored, especially since we continued to find more birds such as yellow-rumped cacique, yellow-billed cardinal and a lovely, hovering black-chested mango hummingbird which was new.

Finally we said goodbye to our second jaguar and travelled farther. We witnessed an osprey carrying a fish and a common piping guan flying across the river. All of us got excited when we saw our first brown capuchin monkeys. In the meantime we heard undulated tinamu. Later on we had orange-backed troupial, white-rumped swallow, green kingfisher, solitary cacique, and Gábor found a new species, epaulet oriole.

A bit farther on we witnessed the very interesting behavior of a striated heron – it first caught a large horsefly, then sat on a dead branch overhanging the river a foot above, then suddenly it dropped the insect into the water upstream, letting it float down a few feet while watching carefully to see if a fish came to eat it. If not then the insect was picked up again and fishing continued. It is proof that herons would not necessarily fail on a cognitive test!



A striated heron uses a fly for fishing.

Later we caught up with some raptors, namely great black, savanna and black-collared hawks. Before returning to lunch we had southern screamer, yellow-billed tern and two toco toucans. Between noon and 13:00 we enjoyed a great lunch which was followed by scanning the wildlife from the deck, and siesta until 4pm. Then we went out for two hours on small boats to find more birds. There were plenty of striated herons, a few jabirus and common piping guans, the roadside hawk Gábor started to nickname 'Riverside' Hawk and also a squirrel cuckoo. After having the first sungrebe of the holiday tour we saw a beautiful chestnut-eared aracarís again which was followed by yellow-headed caracara and common piping guan. We also found solitary and spotted sandpipers; the latter also new. Further species included picazurro pigeon, straight-billed woodcreeper, yellow-rumped cacique and thrushlike wren. We finished the day with a nice variety of parrots such as blue-headed and the new orange-winged parrots, plus white-eyed and monk parakeets.



Monk parakeet; black-collared hawk.

#### Day 6, 27 October – floating hotel

Today we started a bit later than usual and met on the upper deck at 6.30 to enjoy the view and the fresh air. Also it was a perfect time for the first birds such blue-fronted parrots and yellow-chevrons parakeets. Our floating hotel was on the move so we started to see the first striated herons, anhingas and Neotropic cormorants. But perhaps the main highlights were the first black-crowned night herons and howler monkeys.



Howler monkey.

After another fulfilling buffet breakfast we got into the smaller boats and started to discover the region. There were lots of large-billed terns, but a few yellow-billed terns as well, giving a good chance to compare them. Beside the many striated herons we had a few snowy egrets and chestnut-bellied chachalacas. Great egrets caused little attention, but three roseate spoonbills did. Soon we arrived at the headquarters of the National Park. Here we found first little woodpecker and nesting yellow-rumped cacique, monk parakeet and southern rough-winged swallow. We had a few white-tipped doves and one picui ground dove as well searching for food on the ground. A couple of southern caracaras were around and a few cattle tyrants. We said goodbye to our hosts, got into our boats and soon we saw an old man fishing from his boat. It turned out he is the last member of his original tribe, no one can speak his original native Guato language by now. He caught several piranhas, baited by capybara meat, all stored in the dugout canoe in the company of a machete and a rifle. We wondered which was older, the rifle or its owner?



Later on we went into a side channel to a rocky hillside where we had a short walk. We discovered ancient carvings and paintings on the surface of huge slabs of rock. It was fascinating to think about how many years ago this artwork was produced by the local people. Beside a thrushlike wren we had straight-billed woodcreeper here. As we left the area, black and lesser yellow-headed vultures were in the sky. Suddenly we flushed a least bittern out of the channel-side, close to the meeting point of the Paraguay and Cuiabá rivers. We also had snail kite and roadside hawk before we returned to the floating hotel to have our lunch. As usual we enjoyed a nice buffet lunch so everybody could find something tasty. The leaders decided to give time for an afternoon siesta, an idea quickly accepted by all members of the group.

At 4 o'clock pm we ventured out again to a nearby private reserve, named Acorizal. A local NGO protects here more than 13,000 hectares of land. We had an interesting adventure here which involved first travelling on a tractor-drawn carriage followed by a walk through a forest on a local trail. The majority of the group crossed over a small stream, while Barbara and Julia stayed behind with Max who pointed out undulated tinamou and blue-crowned trogon.



Immature snail kite; large-billed terns.

Within a few hundred metres we reached a natural pool created by another stream. Gábor went ahead and since he was spared by piranhas and caymans most of the group members could not resist joining him to enjoy the fresh, cooling water. A beautiful butterfly landed on Gábor's nose, so he swam around with this strange decoration for a while. Mundi found several large tadpoles and Ric filmed fish. We heard a white-bellied warbler but unfortunately could not see it. When the group started to return on the trail Gábor found gilded hummingbird and fork-tailed woodnymph. Blue-crowned trogons were active alongside the trail, but just few of us managed to get a glimpse. The same was true for a small group of green-cheeked parakeets which are quite localised birds. We returned to the tractor and later on much to our surprise Max found close to the track a local endemic titi monkey species. Juliano imitated their voice which seemed successful so everybody managed to have a great view of these interesting mammals. In the meantime a plumbeous kite crossed and we also saw two pairs of macaws which turned out to be red-and-green macaws.



Titi monkey; a local goes fishing.

We arrived back to the small boats around 7pm and reached the floating hotel at 7.30 pm, so decided to have dinner at 8. After dinner we filled out the species list and exchanged some stories and finally retreated into our cabins after 10pm.

### Day 7, 28 October – floating hotel

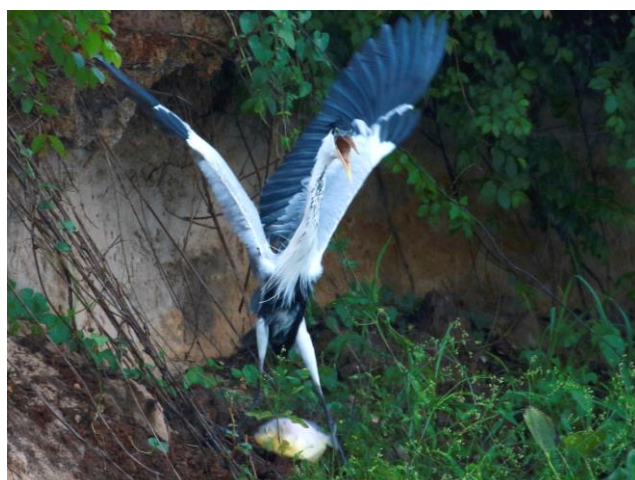
We had breakfast at 6am so we could leave the floating hotel around 6.45 to return to the Acorizal area. On the way there we saw the usual birds such as striated herons, smooth-billed anis, cocoi herons, yellow-billed terns and shiny cowbirds. We also saw orange-backed troupials, black-capped donacobius, southern lapwing and southern screamer. But perhaps the best was to see a sungrebe which instead of disappearing among the vegetation flew across the channel in front of us.

At the centre, first we looked around in the garden where we found brown-chested martin, rufous hornero, grey-crested cacholote and rufous-bellied thrush. Scaled dove was found for the second time during the holiday and one roseate spoonbill flew across close to the tree full with nesting yellow-rumped caciques. We continuously heard undulated tinamou and from time to time a group of noisy rufous-bellied chachalacas tried to cry out louder and louder.



Female green-barred woodpecker; Bolivian slaty antshrike.

Once a large group of fork-tailed flycatchers flew across. Later we entered into the forest on a trail, but it was very warm and humid with not much bird activity. Still, after a while, we found white-bellied warbler, silver-beaked tanager and black-fronted nunbird. The most exciting part was to find some new species for the holiday, such as flavescent warbler, buff-throated woodcreeper and the very localised Bolivian slaty antshrike which in Brazil lives just here at the Corumba region. We also added brown-crested flycatcher and tropical pewee. Finally we went back to the garden where we saw three little woodpeckers together.



Tropical pewee; cocoi heron in action.

We boarded the small boats again, continuously checking the sky, because we felt rain was coming. We were unfortunately right and during the journey back we got a bit wet. Around 9.30 we reached the boat and had a hot coffee or tea. We enjoyed the beautiful scenery and some birds from the upper deck and suddenly it was lunchtime again. We had excellent roasted chicken, followed by a very tempting passion fruit mousse. During the afternoon we sailed alongside attractive hills totally covered by amazing tropical forests. From time to time it rained, but from the comfortable upper deck we kept finding wildlife ranging from capybaras through southern screamer, great black hawk, snail kite, green ibis, limpkin, black-backed water-tyrant to yellow-billed tern and black-capped night heron. Once we thought we had found roseate spoonbills in the distance, but when we checked with our binoculars much to our surprise it turned out they were the beautiful flowers of the giant Amazonian waterlily. But we did find roseate spoonbills later, and a few bare-faced ibises as well which were new for the holiday.





Giant river otter with a fish; giant waterlily leaves.

Besides the common birds we have to mention a few pairs of golden-collared macaws, yellow-chevrons parakeets and white-eyed parakeets. Everybody saw sungrebe well and a few unicolored blackbirds too. At one point we had two giant river otters, and a pale-legged hornero was new afterwards. Raptors were represented by osprey and great black hawk. We watched the riverbank for hours, finding some capybaras but no other mammals. Mundi was taking a photo of a swimming capybara when suddenly she realized it had a different tail! It turned out to be a jaguar, which quickly disappeared in the dense vegetation. No one else managed to take a photo, but most of us had a view of this incredible predator again. We were still discussing this observation when a cream-coloured woodpecker flew across and not much later we had another new species of woodpecker, a female crimson-crested. Maria-José pointed out a black howler monkey and on the same tree we found brown capuchin as well.

At dusk we saw a band-tailed nighthawk and plenty of greater fishing bats. For a change we had a lighter supper than usual, but still we could choose from three different types of soups: chicken broth, pumpkin soup and the most exciting piranha soup. After dinner we had a lecture about the threats to the Pantanal.

#### Day 8, 29 October – floating hotel

Today we took it lazily, so breakfast was at 7 o'clock. In the meantime we cruised through nice, intact forest and saw a few things such as two crane hawks beside each other on a tree, a common piping guan crossing the river and a perched juvenile rufescent tiger heron. A blue-crowned trogon or a boat-billed heron were more difficult to find. Later we left the floating hotel around 8 o'clock. After a few miles we found a group of howler monkeys with a baby among them and we also saw a crane hawk on a nest. Solitary cacique, pale-vented pigeon and sungrebe were seen and we heard little cuckoo. Ringed and Amazon kingfishers side by side offered good comparisons. We had a few pale-legged horneros alongside the river and we found rufescent tiger heron from time to time as well.



Snail kites on a thermal; immature rufescent tiger heron.

Among roosting large-billed terns we found one yellow-billed tern which was brave enough to stay when we approached despite all his larger cousins leaving and making alarm calls. We also stopped at a tree-trunk which was covered by long-nosed bats. We enjoyed close views of yellow-rumped caciques at a tree full with nests and witnessed how an orange-backed troupial occupied one of the nests. When we looked up higher we realized that more than 100 snail kites had travelled with the help of a thermal from one area to another.

We also continued our journey and later on we saw a group of birds flying in the sky forming a V shape. They turned out to be bare-faced ibises. Barn swallow was a new species and although it is common at home it was clear that for local birders it is a rarity. The morning also produced a new woodpecker species which caused a bit of debate later on, but with a photo and using several guidebooks Gábor identified it as a female pale-crested woodpecker. We returned to the main boat and in the early afternoon we had a barbecue on the upper deck which was a pleasant surprise. During the afternoon we were sailing further while some of us enjoyed the scenery and others rested. At around 4 o'clock we ventured out again, this time visiting a side channel at Porto Conceição. We had close views of solitary sandpiper, a beautiful male muscovy duck, a handsome group of white-faced whistling ducks, great black hawk and lesser yellow-headed vulture. We also saw white-tipped dove, white-headed marsh tyrant and pale-legged hornero. South American snipe was a new species; it was well camouflaged.



White-faced whistling ducks; green ibis; muscovy duck showing natural warty growths about the face.

As we turned back we saw amazing cloud formations beautifully coloured by the descending sun. It was obvious that a large area was covered by a huge storm. We had common piping guan, green ibis, black-collared hawk and blue-fronted parrot and saw hundreds of Neotropic cormorants before we reached our floating hotel. We enjoyed a beautiful sunset and saw several band-tailed nighthawks and heard a few common pauraques. After dinner we completed our lists and watched a slideshow of today's photos. For days we had not seen any other sign of humans, maybe at the beginning occasionally a couple of local fishermen, but no other boats of travel agents and loud tourists. We were simply surrounded by pure nature, enjoying the relaxed atmosphere and searching for whatever wildlife could show us.



*Diastatops pullata*, dark-winged skimmer; great black hawk.



### Day 9, 30 October – floating hotel

Today we spent most of the day in the Taima Reserve. It is basically a huge island created by the Paraguay River and it became a protected area in 2009. Our original plan was to send the floating hotel ahead on the main branch while with the smaller boats we would go on the other side and then down to meet up with it. But that could involve several hours of high speed transiting, so instead we decided to travel at a slower pace and concentrate on finding mammals, stopping for birds when we came across something new or interesting. This strategy worked very well since after the first caymans and capybaras within less than an hour we found a jaguar. Unfortunately since we were quite close and jaguars here are not habituated it disappeared in the dense vegetation very quickly, so lot of the group members could not have a view of it. Leaving that area we saw lesser yellow-headed vulture, common piping guan, a distant flying toco toucan, a nice pair of great curassows and great egret. A bit later on we found some black howler monkeys. A small green iguana was discovered on a tree, but we had to find a large adult on the riverbank later to successfully photograph it. We added to the day list solitary cacique, black-collared hawk and Amazon kingfisher, but a group of boat-billed herons and two flying roseate spoonbills caused much more excitement among the members of our group. At one point Gábor called out greater antshrike, but it disappeared too fast.

At a side channel which opened up into a huge lake we saw a large family of capybaras who could not feel really safe since they were surrounded by caymans. On the other hand the caymans were not safe either, a nearby carcass of one of them, half eaten by a jaguar, was clear evidence of that. Southern screamers were in good numbers and we had a few savanna hawks as well, one flying across with a snake hanging down from its talons. Black-capped donacobius were around in good numbers alongside unicolored blackbirds. Some of us very briefly glimpsed another elusive mammal, an ocelot, which disappeared very fast among the roots of large trees at the riverbank.

With the engines turned off we had prolonged and excellent views of a few giant river otters which we followed up and down for a while. This gave a great chance to photograph or simply just enjoy the view of these unique mammals. After 11am we returned to our boat and prepared for lunch. As always we had again different choices and very tasty food. After lunch a few of us checked both sides of the river for a couple of hours while others enjoyed a drink or the comfort of the cool cabin. Those who looked could see some sungrebes, anhingas, donacobius, parakeets and many more. We managed to have few glimpses of great antshrike as well.



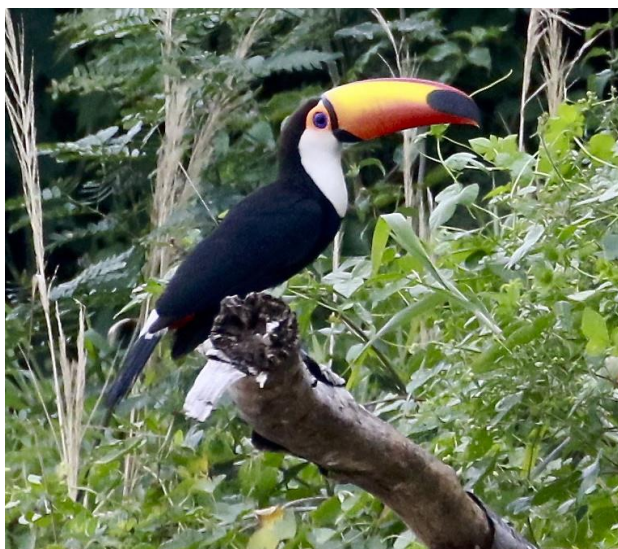
Boat-billed heron; male scarlet-headed blackbird trying to look bigger; black skimmer.

Around 4pm we ventured out again on smaller boats. First we saw a male muscovy duck, later a sungrebe and a black-collared hawk. At a small sandy beach we found an immature black skimmer which we witnessed feeding. In the same area we compared an adult yellow-billed cardinal with a juvenile which still had an orange head. Later we found two scarlet-headed blackbirds and beside them a unicoloured blackbird, giving a good chance to compare. It was funny to see how the male scarlet-headed blackbirds puffed themselves up to look bigger.

Farther up in the channel a few of us had little cuckoo and also southern caracara. A few great egrets were around as well, but a really great find was a least bittern. Hundreds of American cliff swallows searched for a site to sleep, so the sky was full. While we looked for a second least bittern, Juliano found a big rarity, a subtropical doradito, a species which is very rare and uncertain. It could be a new split in the future. A few photos were taken of this small but attractive bird. We also found a small snake pretending he was just a dead twig. As we were about to leave the channel we realised how beautiful the sunset was, so we spent some time enjoying the scenery, taking photos and videos. Finally we boarded again our floating hotel and got ready for the dinner. As darkness fell we became surrounded by band-tailed nighthawks and greater fishing bats. We heard several pauraques as well.

### Day 10, 31 October – floating hotel

We had breakfast again at 6am and right after that we left the boatel, passing a huge former beef meat factory which was nicely painted. A toco toucan flew across and in one bay a group of roseate spoonbills waited for sunshine. Blue-fronted parrots were around in good numbers and about 10 adult black skimmers flew low about the water in small groups. An orange-backed troupial landed on top of a tall tree while an osprey went alongside the riverbank. As we entered into a smaller channel we saw a sungrebe and a pale-legged hornero. Juliano found a new species for us, a male white-bellied seedeater. The next amazing bird was a gray-headed kite which we all saw very well. Jabirus flew overhead and soon we found a great group of giant river otters. We watched them popping up and disappearing under the water surface several times and witnessed how they consumed fish.



Toco toucan; blue-crowned trogon.

Nobody paid too much attention to the kingfishers despite the fact that beside the regular ones an American pygmy kingfisher was around as well. We had limpkin, chaco chachalacas, orange-winged parrots and a perfectly posing female great curassow as well. Another new species came in the form of gray-fronted dove and later on a juvenile snail kite offered excellent observation possibilities. Many of us felt that floating in this calm side channel was one of the nicest experiences of the tour. The beauty of the place, the giant otters, the various birds and the air full of bird song made this site really unforgettable. Just as we were about to leave, our boat driver pointed out a great potoo on a large dead branch.

We returned to the main river, but suddenly a huge black cloud came down and within a minute we were surprised by heavy rain. Almost everything got soaked; we just managed to protect our cameras, books and notes. Fortunately the boatel was not too far, so soon we dried ourselves in our cabins and gathered in the restaurant for a hot drink. Even during the rain there were very good birds such as a male bare-necked fruitcrow which was found by Ric. This section of the river was full with sand banks and little islets and these were perfect gathering places for pied plovers, lesser yellowlegs and black skimmers.

From now on we started to see jabirus and wood storks as well. At noon we had lunch and agreed that afterwards we would leave the boat and explore one of the last side channels. But unfortunately it started to rain again so the weather disrupted our plan. Still we could watch the scenery from the boat and also check out the islands and both sides of the river. Among the shorebirds we found a new species for the tour which was white-rumped sandpiper. As we travelled further north we started to see more and more jabirus and wood storks. Quite regularly pairs of parrots flew across; most of them blue-fronted and orange-winged, but a pair of red-bellied macaws was a great new surprise. We heard a distant call which Juliano identified as piratic flycatcher. Later we saw large colonies of black skimmers and terns, some still with large babies. We gathered in the restaurant and spent some time exchanging stories, comparing photos and of course looking around and checking birds regularly. Not without success since in this way we added black-crowned tytila as a new species to the list.

From 4.30 till 6pm we ventured out again, but by the end it was raining again. We saw a group of capybaras swimming in front, so we approached them slowly and found a mother with a baby on the bank. Suddenly a male giant cowbird approached them and hopped on the back of the mother and later also on the baby, checking their fur and skin for anything edible. They patiently endured the cleaning process. We also saw some pied plovers. Later on we found a toco toucan and from time to time a pair of orange-winged parrots flew across as well. We visited a side channel as well where we had chachalacas, greater ani, Amazon kingfisher, a female great antshrike, green ibis, striated heron and another toco toucan.



### Day 11, 1 November – Cáceres to Cuiabá

The first day of the new month was sadly our last day on our floating hotel. We were travelling alongside long sandy beaches and between islands and although the river was very wide the water was not very deep, so we actually got stuck a couple of times. But our crew was very professional and however we were dreaming about remaining here for longer they made sure that we reached Cáceres in time. Today we saw more ospreys than during the whole holiday and we started to see more jabirus and wood storks again. Orange-winged parrots were regular today as well. We had a juvenile great black hawk, a black-fronted nunbird and plenty of capybaras. Suddenly two red-and-green macaws flew across which was a beautiful surprise.



Red-and-green macaws.

Later on we witnessed how a toco toucan worked hard to get out a chick from a nest. Further on we saw a large group of white-headed whistling ducks. A few people saw blue-crowned motmot and we also had several different kingfishers as well. We heard a new song which Juliano identified as fawn-breasted wren. Another new species was swallow-winged puffbird which sat out for a while very cooperatively. We also heard white-lored spinetail. We spent quite a lot of time observing a male and a female green iguana searching for food at the sandy riverbank. We also found a river turtle with a baby, giving a good photo opportunity. As usual around noon we had our lunch. Later on at one point beside hundreds of black vultures we witnessed several hundreds of jabirus and wood storks circling in the air majestically. We felt it was a kind of saying goodbye to this marvellous area.



Capybaras and screamers from the small boat; green iguana.

Since we lost some time being stuck in the riverbed we decided to load all the luggage into the speedboats since our transfers were already waiting for us at Cáceres. But before that we took several group photos, also with the very helpful and smiling crew. Within less than half an hour we arrived at Cáceres where we got into two Mercedes Sprinters. Andrea and Gábor were surprised to see that the other boat on the riverbank was one that they had used before on tour. From Cáceres to Cuiabá the distance is about 230kms, mainly on good roads. Instead of rushing we took our time and also broke the journey to have a comfort stop and stretch our legs. Even in the garden of the shop we found shining cowbird, scaled dove, house sparrow and monk parakeets. We arrived at a modern airport hotel around 5pm, checked in and met at 7pm in the hall. From here we walked to a nearby restaurant which was a final surprise: a great *churrascaria* where you select several side dishes from a buffet table while freshly roasted meat is cut and served by busy waiters at your table. Of course we celebrated with *caipirinha* as well. This was an excellent finish to a holiday of a lifetime. We said goodbye to each other sadly.

## Day 12, 2 November – departure

Maria-José had to leave early in the morning for her flight, Gábor and Andrea a bit later on their continuing journey to another marvellous area of the Atlantic Forest, while Ric volunteered to show the others the monument of America do Sul and a city park in Cuiabá before their later flight back to the UK.



## HOLIDAY HIGHLIGHTS

At the end of our last dinner Gábor asked everybody for their highlights and what they felt was the best experience of the holiday, and it was no wonder that many of us replied without too much hesitation that it was the floating hotel and boat tour experience itself. Travelling through huge protected areas full of wildlife, visiting side channels on smaller boats, but also the Transpantaneira road itself, especially driving through snowing clouds of butterflies for many miles - all were parts of a lifelong experience. Even well-experienced travellers said this was their best ever wildlife tour! Regarding mammals, out of the 19 species observed, three species were almost equally mentioned as the best ones: giant otter, giant ant-eater and jaguar, with jaguar at the top of the list.

We saw almost 200 bird species, 190 seen by the group, four just heard and another four seen just by guides. Regarding the best birds, Mundi mentioned orange-backed troupial, black-capped donacobius and toco toucan. Barbara and Everard named hyacinth macaws and the fishing striated heron which were also a bird observation highlight for Jo. Everard added parrots and kingfishers as well. Julia, Ric and Flo were amazed by the close by hunting black skimmer having its longer lower part of bill in the water, skimming the surface for food. Maria-José loved the funny looking boat-billed heron, the strikingly coloured scarlet-headed blackbird and the strange great potoo. Gill added rufescent tiger heron, the well camouflaged but up-close least bittern and pied plover. Flo and Andi said that the jabiru is so ugly that it stands out from the crowd by not just its size.

\* \* \* \* \*

We hope that with reading this daily diary and looking at the photos we can make you travel back in time and bring back all the lovely memories of this amazing journey! We hope that sooner or later we can enjoy again an amazing Honeyguide holiday together in such a great company!

Hope to see you soon!!!

With hugs,  
Gábor and Andrea.



**BRAZIL PANTANAL WILDLIFE LISTS, 22 OCT – 2 NOV 2017**

<b>MAMMALS</b>	
Six-banded or yellow armadillo <i>Euphractus sexcinctus</i> – a hole seen on 27 <sup>th</sup>	Crab-eating fox <i>Cerdocyon thous</i> – on 21 <sup>st</sup> and 25 <sup>th</sup>
	Black howler monkey <i>Alouatta caraya</i> – 23 <sup>rd</sup> , 28 <sup>th</sup> , 30 <sup>th</sup> , 31 <sup>st</sup>
Giant anteater <i>Myrmecophaga tridactyla</i> – seen on 25 <sup>th</sup> , 1 during prebreakfast outing and 1 during transfer South	Black-tailed marmoset <i>Mico melanurus</i> – 23 <sup>rd</sup>
	Brown capuchin monkey <i>Sapajus paella</i> – 26 <sup>th</sup> , 28 <sup>th</sup>
Feral pig <i>Sus scrofa</i> – on 22 <sup>nd</sup> and 23 <sup>rd</sup>	Titi monkey (species unknown) – 27 <sup>th</sup>
Giant river otter <i>Pteronura brasiliensis</i> – on 5 days : 25, 28, 30, 31 Oct and 1 Nov	Azara's agouti <i>Dasyprocta azarae</i> – 23 <sup>rd</sup>
	Capybara <i>Hydrochaeris hydrochaeris</i> – almost daily
Neotropical otter <i>Lontra longicauda</i> – 23 <sup>rd</sup>	Brazilian cavy <i>Cavia aperea</i> – 22 <sup>nd</sup>
Jaguar <i>Panthera onca</i> – 25 <sup>th</sup> male lurking and cooling in water, more than 1,5 hours 26 <sup>th</sup> female in shade at riverbank, more than 1,5 hours 28 <sup>th</sup> one swimming across in front of boatel 30 <sup>th</sup> 1 quickly disappearing from riverbank	Brazilian rabbit <i>Sylvilagus brasiliensis</i> – 22 <sup>nd</sup> and 23 <sup>rd</sup>
	Marsh deer <i>Blastocerus dichotomus</i> – 23 <sup>rd</sup> and 25 <sup>th</sup>
	Grey brocket deer <i>Mazama gouazoubira</i> – 23 <sup>rd</sup> and 25 <sup>th</sup>
	Long-nosed bat <i>Rhynchonycteris naso</i> – 29 <sup>th</sup> and 30 <sup>th</sup>
	Lesser fishing bat <i>Noctilionidae albiventris</i> – 22 <sup>nd</sup>
	Greater fishing bat <i>Nocilio leporinus</i> – 28 <sup>th</sup> , 30 <sup>th</sup> , 31 <sup>st</sup>
<b>REPTILES, AMPHIBIANS AND INVERTEBRATES</b>	
Yacare Caiman <i>Myrmecophaga tridactyla</i>	Indigo Snake <i>Drymarchon corais</i>
Cayman Lizard <i>Dracaena guianensis</i>	Leopard Keelback <i>Helicops leopardinus</i>
Green Iguana <i>Iguana iguana</i>	Yellow-spotted Turtle <i>Podocnemis unifilis</i>
Black Tegu <i>Tupinambis merianae</i>	Peppered Treefrog <i>Trachycephalus typhonius</i>
False Water Cobra <i>Hydrodynastes gigas</i>	Millions of butterflies for miles at Transpantaneira mainly Sulphurs and Whites, plus some Daggerwings, etc.
Black False Boa <i>Pseudoboa nigra</i>	Dark-winged Skimmer <i>Diastatops pullata</i>