

# Brazil

Rio & Minas Gerais



## Independent Budget Birding June 29 – July 8 2018

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[www.budgetbirders.com](http://www.budgetbirders.com)



## Overview

This was a quick 8 day birding trip to the states of Rio and Minas Gerais concentrating on targets that cannot be found elsewhere in Brazil. Since I had birded NE Brazil in the past, the overall main target list was quite small, but a number of other SE Brazil specialties were possible that were not possible on my last trip. Overall we did very well seeing all of our main targets. We dipped a number of more “common” species, but those will be easier in the Sao Paulo area and were not a focus of the trip. Although we concentrated on a fairly “small” section of the country, the drives between locations are still quite far and in 8 days we drove 3997 kms! This is not a comprehensive trip report, but should provide some general logistics for visiting this section of Brazil as well as GPS coordinates for all the main endemics of the area.

## Acknowledgments

As usual there were a number of people that provided good information that made the trip more successful. Thanks to Julien Mazenauer for a bunch of GPS coordinates. If you're thinking of birding Brazil and want help with guiding, Ciro Albano and Cio Brito of Brazilian Bird Experts are the best of the best. Thanks to Ciro for providing contact info for the Blue-eyed Ground Dove and Cio for some tips on Rock Tapaculo. Thanks to Wagner Nogueira for some advice on Monte Claros. If you want a local guide for the Blue-eyed Ground-Dove/Monte Claros area, Wagner can be of assistance. Thanks to Warley Miranda, the ranger of Monte Claros, for taking us into the park before it opens and helping us find Reisler's Tyrannulet and Dry Forest Saberwing. And last, but not least, thanks to Albert Aguiar of SAVE Brazil who is the main point of contact for accessing the Blue-eyed Ground Dove reserve. Albert will be able to help you plan a visit and make sure the local ranger, Marcelo, can accompany you to the reserve.

**Rental Car:** We rented a manual Jeep Renegade from Localiza. The small/mid sized SUV did well on all roads that we visited. A small car could have been used for all sites except the road up to Canastra might have been a bit tricky with a smaller car (and wouldn't have been possible in the Renegade had it rained).

**Accommodation:** It was fairly easy to find accommodation close to most of the birding locations. Although we chose fairly economical options at all locations, we didn't always stay at the cheapest places. Most hotels were \$30-\$50 a night. We also spent two nights in the car when doing longer drives (just sleeping at truck stops for a few hours).

Cost Breakdown	
Lodging	\$295
Meals	\$175
Entrance Fees	\$127
Gas/Tolls	\$470
Rental Car	\$198
Other	\$17
Grand Total	\$1,265



## Birding Sites

### Regua

**Directions/Access:** This reserve provides easy access to lowland Atlantic rainforest with a great network of trails. In order to visit you either need to stay at the very nice lodge or pay a daily entrance fee of \$10. The lodge is quite pricey, so we decided to just pay the entrance fee. I contacted Nicolas ([aregua@terra.com.br](mailto:aregua@terra.com.br)) a few days in advance and told him we wanted to visit. He had no problem with us showing up early. We arrived just before light, the gate was open, and we drove in and parked near the office buildings. The website has a good pdf map of the reserve with the main trails being the “yellow” and the “brown” trail. There are also a series of trails that lead up to a small observation tower. In various trip reports/eBird it appears the trails near the tower are called the “red” and the “green” trails, but when we were there we never saw anything referring to the trails near the tower being referred to as “red” or “green”.

**Birding:** We only had one true target here, Shrike-like Cotinga, which from some quick research appeared to be most often found on the trails near the tower. Just before light we headed down the yellow trail towards the tower area. We took the lower trail to the tower and shortly after the tower at (–22.439392, 42.77523) found a male Shrike-like Cotinga that was tape responsive. After great views of our target, we returned back to the tower and then followed the trail out to the yellow trail, took a quick tour of the ponds, and went back to our car. No one was around, so we drove up to the lodge and left our entrance fee with some guests who said they’d pass it on to Nicolas. Along with the Shrike-like Cotinga, the entire reserve was very birdy and we had a very enjoyable morning. Other highlights included Uniformed Antwren, Saw-billed Hermit (near stream by the tower), Southern Antpipit, Blond-crested Woodpecker, White-necked Hawk, and Black-cheeked Gnateater.

### Pico de Caledonia

**Directions/Access:** Access to the top of the mountain is through the town of Nova Friburgo. There are two ways to access the road up to the top and I’d highly recommend taking the road that passes by Hotel Fazenda Caledonia Inn as the road that passes by Camping Peak Caledonia (in google) is in very rough shape. We took the bad road on the way up and it would have been a bit tricky with a small rental car. On the way back down we took the better road which could be driven by any car. Be advised that eventually the road gets very steep and could be hard to drive up if it has been rainy. You also can’t make it the whole way to the top as part of the road has been washed away (one large truck made it across this section, but all other cars parked before it). I forgot to mark the exact spot of the washout, but it is fairly far up the road. From here, it was a very steep, but fairly short walk further up to the best area for the Grey-winged Cotinga.

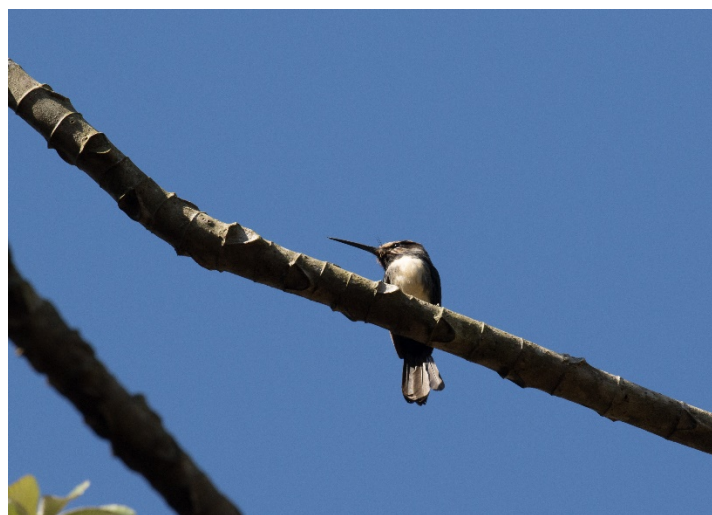
**Birding:** Our main target and reason for coming to Pico was Gray-winged Cotinga. We heard a bird near the small waterfall at -22.349373, -42.584803 and then continued up to almost the top where we heard another Grey-winged Cotinga at -22.35067, -42.583502. After trying to see the second bird for a while (it was downhill and didn't want to move) we gave up and headed back down to the area where we heard the first bird. This bird was much closer now and we watched for a while before finally seeing the bird twice before it disappeared down the hillside. The curve at -22.349373, -42.584803 provides good views of the area and would be a good area to stake out if you can't find/hear any. The morning here also produced a bunch of other good birds including Rufous-tailed Antwren, Serra do Mar Tyrannulet, Serra do Mar Manakin-Tyrant, Rufous-tailed Antthrush (heard only), Large-tailed Antshrike (heard only), many Black-and-gold Cotingas (more common a bit further downhill from the GW Cotinga area), and lots of Bay-chested Warbling Finches.

### Restinga Antwren Site

**Directions/Access/Birding:** This is about as straight forward as it gets. The restinga just east of Praia Seca is easily accessed and home to plenty of Restinga Antwrens. Even during the heat of the afternoon we found a very responsive pair at -22.935468, -42.284492 and another pair at -22.93766, -42.284007. Both pairs took about 3 minutes to find.

### Three-toed Jacamar Site

**Directions/Access/Birding:** The forests around Carmo are home to a stronghold of Three-toed Jacamars and makes a fairly convenient place to stop on the way to Belo Horizonte. We checked out a small side road at -22.02257, -42.6594 and found a group of three Three-toed Jacamars at -22.021062, -42.658037 in the middle of the day.



## Belo Horizonte Area

### Serra da Lapinha

**Directions/Access:** The road starts at -19.3406, -43.6378 and winds up to the small town of La Pinha da Serra. Road conditions are pretty good, but it might be tricky if it has rained a lot. Once you arrive in town, there's a small street at -19.1185, -43.6771 which heads downhill, wraps around a house (very narrow) and then opens up to a large clearing where you need to cross an awkwardly narrow bridge (I'm not even sure if vehicles are supposed to go over it, but I wasn't really thinking and drove over it before realizing that maybe I shouldn't have...). Anyways, once you cross the bridge you'll see a lake on your right and a gate in front of you. We arrived at dawn and this gate was locked and there was a sign saying it opened at 0800. There was no way around the gate/fence so we checked out the lake and found Cipo Cinclodes near the shore at -19.117241,-43.672266 and then headed up with dirt tract to another gate at -19.1171, -43.6710. This gate also said it opened at 0800, but was unlocked so we figured it'd be fine to go through and pay on our way back down (which it was, there was a guy at the entrance when we went to leave, we paid 15R per person, signed a log book, and continued on our way).

**Birding:** We followed the trail/signs towards Lapinha (the trail is fairly well marked, but also accurately shown on maps.me so use that if you're a bit confused). The trail goes uphill before flattening out where you cross a large flat area, before another steep climb and the trail flattens out again. Once you make it up the steep climb, you should be in a good area to hear Cipo Canasteros on the hillside on your right. We found Rock Tapaculo at -19.102424,-43.676178 in a small ravine, but other small forested ravines past this point should be good as well. In theory all the little forested areas should be good for the tapaculo (including the nice section just before the second climb, but I couldn't find any there). It was extremely windy during our visit so we never saw the Cipo Canasteros and very few other birds were seen on the hike up/down. On the drive back down to the main highway, we made a few stops and found Cinereous Warbling Finch although the GPS point I took isn't accurate.



## Cipo Plateau

**Directions/Access:** This seems to be the typical area that most people search for Cipo Canastero and some of the other specialty birds. We were a bit confused about access, but finally decided that a trail that starts at a small pull off at -19.28668, -43.58969 is the right spot. It's easy to find as there's a large green sign in the field that says "don't enter, armed surveillance". Not necessarily the friendliest welcome, but I am assuming this is the right spot. Melissa wasn't feeling well so she stayed at the car, but I jumped the fence and followed the trail up the grassy pass which gives access to the backside of the closest ridge. The trail eventually veers to the right and passes behind the ridge and goes through great habitat.

**Birding:** I only spent about 1 hour in the afternoon in the area hoping to finally see Cipo Canastero. I covered a lot of ground quickly since Melissa was at the car and didn't want her to have to wait too long. I found a nice group of Hyacinth Visorbearers at -19.293575,-43.585359 as well as Blue Finch and Grey-backed Tachuri at the same spot. I also had brief views of a single Cipo Canastero along the backside of the main ridge. I was pretty surprised I didn't hear more, but it could have been the time of day.



## Marsh Tapaculo Site

There's a small marsh at -19.218992,-43.497042 which seems to be a surprising stronghold for Marsh Tapaculo. Melissa and I spent the last hour of the evening at this spot hoping to see one. We heard 3-4 birds calling and had a single bird on the hillside just behind the marsh in the sparser vegetation that we hoped we'd get to see, but despite being only a few feet away from it, the bugger remained hidden and had to be left as a heard only.

## Monte Claros

### Blue-eyed Ground Dove Site

**Directions/Access:** The road from Monte Claros to Botumirim is in great shape (recently paved) and only takes about 2-2 ½ hours. In order to access the reserve you need to go with the local guard, Marcelo. The best way to arrange a visit is to contact Albert at [rolinhadoplanalto@savebrasil.org.br](mailto:rolinhadoplanalto@savebrasil.org.br). It is 50R per person to visit the reserve.

**Birding:** The ground-doves were quiet first thing in the morning, but after finding way too many Ruddy Ground-Doves and Scaled Doves, the Blue-eyed Ground Doves finally started singing around 0745. We had fantastic views of a male that actually flew down to our feet and started walking around and feeding. Silly little bird. Although we concentrated on the doves, other good birds along the dirt road at the reserve included Horned Sungeem and Cinereous Warbling Finch.



### Cipo Spot

**Direction/Access:** Along with the ground-doves, there's another good birding area, just outside the town of Botumirim. The road starts at -16.866132,-43.012059 and goes steeply uphill. Once you reach the top, take the dirt road on your right (forgot gps) and park at the gate. From here continue walking down the road and keep right at -16.862285,-43.023224 and then left at -16.860547,-43.022931. This fairly flat trail takes you along the side of the mountain before climbing up to a rocky area (-16.853323,-43.032222) good for the canastero and visorbearer. We visited here between 1000-1200 so it wasn't the greatest time of day. We were hoping for Cipo Canastero, but only managed to hear a single bird sing three times. There are a few trails in the area that can be explored. We also had a few visorbearers a bit higher up.



## Lapa Grande

**Directions/Access:** The entrance road to the park is at -16.700309,-43.889765 not what google maps says to do. The park is only open from 0800-1700 with last entry at 1600. The best way to visit the park is to get in contact with local birder Warley Almeida Miranda (on facebook or warleymontes@yahoo.com.br, doesn't speak English). He works at the park and will be able to guide you/get you in at dawn (which is necessary if you want to try for White-throated Woodcreeper). Otherwise, arriving at 0800 should be enough to get the Reisler's Tyrannulet and Dry Forest Sabrewing, but it does get hot quickly, so birding time will be limited.

**Birding:** The two main trails to visit are the Boqueirao Trail and La Pintada trail. We arrived at dawn and started down the Boqueirao Trail which parallels a river before reaching a cave and then goes up a small hill and flattens out again. The best area to try for the White-throated Woodcreeper is the hill just past the cave, which is where we spent the first part of the morning, but never managed to even hear it (Warley has only seen it here a few times). At the top of the hill we had our first Minas Gerais Tyrannulets. Eventually we moved on further down the trail to -16.716403,-43.942891 where we had a pair of Reisler's Tyrannulets. We then headed back to the parking lot and headed down the La Pintada Trail. This trail goes through much drier habitat. Where we had Caatinga Black Tyrant at -16.701817,-43.941031 and Sao Francisco Sparrow at -16.701391,-43.940927. There were plenty of other good birds for the morning including Wager's Woodcreeper, Black-bellied Antwren, Rufous Gnateater, Sooty-fronted Spinetail, and Red-crested Finch.



## Canastra National Park

**Directions/Access:** There are two main areas of the park. The lower section accessed through the town of Vargem Bonita and the upper section accessed through Sao Roque de Minas. Both sections of the park open at 0800 with last entry at 1600 and close at 1800. If you want to enter the park before 0800 it is possible, but you need to take a guide with you. This is a bit annoying and we tried to get around this, but in the end had to find a guide for our second day so that we could start birding the upper section at dawn. Although you'd probably do just fine starting at 0800, we were pressed for time and wanted to bird all morning so went with a guide. It was surprisingly difficult to find a guide last minute, even with the help of the owner of Restaurant Velho Chico who speaks some English. Luckily he was able to eventually find use a guide, Chico, who can be reached at +55 37 9997-5554 (whatsapp). His wife speaks very good English and he speaks a good bit as well. Even though we didn't care who guided us as long as we could get in to the park early, Chico actually knows birds (he studies the merganser) so it was nice having someone who was interested in birding for the morning. He charged 150R for the morning (we only wanted the morning because we had to leave at 1000, not sure if it'd be the same price as well for the whole day). Cost to enter the park is 20R per person per day, but you only need to buy one ticket even if you leave the upper and visit the lower or vice versa. The road to the upper section is rough, but was still fairly easy in our Jeep Renegade. If it has rained a lot, you won't be able to get up the road without 4wd. If this is the case, there are plenty of 4wd to hire in the town.

### **Birding:**

**Lower Section:** Not much birding (if any) needs to be done in the actual park portion of the lower section. This is helpful as you can start birding at dawn without having to hire a guide. The road to the lower section of the park parallels the Sao Francisco River, but actually provides very few good vantage points from the road. Instead it is necessary to take a few side roads and small trails down to the river's edge to scan for the mergansers. The best viewing area from the main access road is at -20.336402,-46.461468, but at this point the river is quite far away. This is where we first scanned when starting in the morning and after 6 straight hours of scouring the entire river, we finally found a pair of mergansers from that original spot. They were quite far away, but after crawling under the fence there are a number of trails leading down to the river and we managed great views at -20.335898,-46.46067. Other recommend viewing areas include -20.3297, -46.48527, -20.3255, -46.4915, and -20.32466, -46.50790. There's a nice campsite at -20.322744,-46.50443 along a beautiful stretch of river which in theory you could get the merganser from your tent! It's a dirt road down to the camping area and although we didn't stay here, we asked if we could drive down to look for the merganser and the guy sitting out front had no problem with us visiting. We did enter the park along the lower section and found a very bold Brasilia Tapaculo at -20.311569,-46.527283. We also did a quick hike up to the bottom of the waterfall. Since we were still looking for the merganser at that point we didn't stop to bird,

but could hear numerous Helmeted Manakins and a few Great Dusky Swifts were flying near the waterfall.

**Upper Section:** The majority of the key targets at Canastra can be found in the upper section of the park. The steep dirt road up to the entrance gate is good for birding, but since all of our targets were inside the park, we bypassed birding the entrance road. We visited the upper section in an afternoon and then the following morning. Brazilian Merganser is often seen along the upper part of the river near the waterfall (-20.2973, -46.5226) but we didn't see it here (only checked in the afternoon, although another group saw it there the previous morning). The recently burned areas are good for Campo Miner (-20.225186,-46.486827) and Ochre-breasted Pipit (-20.227209,-46.448207). We also had Black-masked Finch at -20.237625,-46.504497, -20.244245,-46.529134, and the largest concentration at -20.25361,-46.550842. The spring at the start of the Sao Francisco River (-20.242944,-46.446552) has Brasilia Tapaculo and Torrent Tyrant (from the little bridge). The small creek crossing the road before here is also good for the tapaculo. We also managed to see one Red-winged Tinamou and a few Spotted Nothuras. The first evening we saw a single Giant Anteater, but were unable to find any more the following morning despite a lot of searching. If you're pressed for time, I'd recommend getting a guide for the first morning and starting in the upper section at dawn (well actually before dawn as it's about a 35 min drive to the waterfall). I'd start with the tapaculo at the spring and then pretty quickly drive to the waterfall to look for the merganser. Then I'd spend the rest of the morning looking for the other upper section targets and if you haven't seen the merganser, then spend the afternoon along the lower section searching the river for the merganser.



## Itatiaia National Park

**Direction/Access:** The two main sections include the Agulhas Negras Road for higher elevation species and the main park entrance for lower elevation species. We only had one late afternoon and one morning here so we only visited Agulhas Negras Road. I am not sure if the lower section (which involves an entrance fee of 35R per person has an opening time or not). The Agulhas Negras Road starts at -22.3767, -44.7604 and heads up through good forest for quite a ways. We arrived late evening and drove up to -22.369055,-44.711417 to get Itatiaia Spinetail. After getting the spinetail it was already quite late so we decided to try and find a place to sleep. Instead of driving all the way back to the town of Itatiaia which is about an hour away, we took a side road at -22.3561, -44.7356 and went to Pousada dos Lobos. It was already after dark when we arrived so we planned to stay no matter way. It ended up being 150R per person which was a bit insane, but oh well. Consolation was the great looks at Long-trained Nightjar nearby when we left early the next morning (only a few hundred meters from the Pousada in the direction of the main birding road).

**Birding:** Before first light we had great looks at Long-trained Nightjar after leaving the pousada. We then drove back up to the main Agulhas Negras road and went a bit further downhill to -22.368344,-44.745532. There are some Araucaria trees here and we quickly found a few Araucaria Tit-spinetails just after dawn. From here we spent some time walking down the road seeing Large-tailed Antshrike (-22.368344,-44.745532), Gray-capped Tyrannulet (-22.368288,-44.744762), Grey-bellied Spinetail (-22.367944,-44.742416), White-spotted Woodpecker, Rufous-tailed Antwren, Rufous-backed Antwren, Serra do Mar Tyrannulet, Mouse-colored Tapculo, and plenty of Buff-throated Warbling Finches. We then drove back up hill a bit to the large clearing where there's a large stand of Araucaria trees (-22.356254,-44.734178). In the scrubby field we had Itatiaia Spinetail and in the trees we had more tit-spinetails, Buff-throated Warbling Finches, and Golden-winged Cacique. We then headed back downhill seeing plenty of Buff-throated Warbling Finches (almost every stop), another Gray-capped Tyrannulet (-22.367858,-44.748458), and some Red-breasted Toucans at the very bottom on the road. We then left the area making a quick stop near the entrance of the lower section of the park (-22.461551,-44.591923) for Orange-eyed Thornbird. Unfortunately we didn't have time to actually visit the lower section of the park as we decided to go for Black-hooded Antwren instead.

## Mambucaba:

**Directions/Access/Birding:** This is the site for Black-hooded Antwren. We arrived mid afternoon, around 1530 and took the dirt road heading north out of town which passes through mostly disturbed habitat with a few decent sections of forest along the way. We stopped near -22.9569, -44.5551 and found a pair of Black-hooded Antwrens at -22.957866,-44.555223 and another pair a few hundred meters down the road at -22.958711,-44.554828. We heard a number of Saw-billed Hermits, but didn't see any. We didn't stay long as we had to head back to Rio for our flight the next day, but a number of other interesting species have been reported in this area.

