



## Iguazu Birding Tour Trip Report 2022

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“Leave all of your warm puffy clothing in Buenos Aires!” This was the sage advice given by yours truly, the guide, at our welcome dinner in Argentina’s capital. It was the evening before embarking on the flight to Iguazu, located in balmy, subtropical northern Argentina. Not only would this save on luggage volume but it would emphasize the high temperatures normally found up in Misiones province. As a reference, the last time Eagle-Eye visited Iguazu it reached 39C with high humidity! Our flight had been adjusted weeks earlier, so we had more time in Buenos Aires than Iguazu on our first morning (officially the second tour day). Before we embarked on the flight, we stopped off at an area not yet visited by Eagle-Eye in the past: Otamendi Reserve. One hour northwest of Buenos Aires, this lowland grassy area within the floodplain of the Paraná River holds several difficult-to-find birds and the largest deer in South America, the Marsh Deer.



*Checking out Otamendi Reserve, looking at Brown-and-yellow Marshbird © Steve Ogle*

The Otamendi Reserve has recently been encompassed within the new Ciervo de los Pantanos (Marsh Deer) National Park, although the area did not seem to have much national park infrastructure, nor Marsh Deers. However, we did arrive in mid-morning, when a lot of wildlife activity may have subsided. Two target birds in our sights were both Curve-billed and Straight-billed Reedhaunter, though we only ran into the former.



*Curve-billed Reedhaunter © Steve Ogle*

Other interesting species not easily found closer to Buenos Aires included: Brown-and-yellow

Marshbird, Sooty Tyrannulet, Rufous-capped Antshrike, Freckle-breasted Thornbird, Great Pampa-Finch and Blue-billed Black-Tyrant. A distant Scarlet-headed Blackbird (or two) was all we had from this species. After this short visit we stopped at the headquarters only to use the washrooms then headed straight back to the airport enroute to Iguazu. After an uneventful flight we landed at a pleasantly cool Iguazu International Airport and met our local guide Marcos. We had enough time to stop at the junction to the side road known as Ruta 101, where we could walk for several hundred metres but mostly investigate a colony of Red-rumped Caciques near the van. Shortly after, we headed to the hotel and readied ourselves for the next morning at the Iguazu National Park. It was nice to eat conveniently at the hotel, and the fare was quite good by small hotel standards.



*Paul on the Green Trail, which connects the Macuco Trail with the main national park area*

Cold rain greeted us in the morning. In fact, near record-breaking low temperatures (around 7 degrees Celsius later in the trip) became the main talking point among locals and our group. Umbrellas and kiosk shelters were welcome components of our walks this morning. The recent rains had created some drama: a principal walkway and one major viewpoint were washed out two weeks previous! The falls were indeed pumping their rich, muddy waters, which is incredibly dramatic—especially when the spray merges with the rainy mist. Bird and wildlife activity was low on our first morning but the falls made up for it! Our plan to hike the Macuco trail did not materialize (closed due to rain) but we enjoyed the always busy Upper Falls Trail.



*The main falls on the Argentine side, in flood*

Between downpours we saw birds such as Swallow Tanager, Plush-crested Jay, Green Ibis, Large Elaenia, Fuscous Flycatcher, Purple-throated Euphonia, Yellow-fronted Woodpecker and Yellow-chevroned Parakeet. Several Red-crested Finches, Black-fronted Piping-Guan and a Red-breasted Toucan were welcome surprises, not to mention a white plastic bag that turned into be a Great Egret! We had views of high-flying flocks of Great Dusky Swifts that nest behind the falls and even saw a couple of birds diving through the waterfalls to their nests!



*Red-crested Finch*



*Swallow Tanager*



*Great Dusky Swifts roosting behind Iguazu cascade © Paul Prior*

After the national park, we visited the Jardin de Picaflors, where we recorded six species of hummingbird and a few other avian goodies. It was nice to birdwatch from a chair! An evening stroll

after the rains was very productive for the birders at the 600 Hectares reserve.



*Glittering-bellied Emerald, at the Hummingbird Garden*

Some interesting species found here included: Dark-billed Cuckoo, Gray-headed Elaenia, White-eyed Foliage-gleaner, Variable Oriole, and tanagers including Hooded, Black-goggled, Fawn-breasted, Sayaca, Guira, Blue Dacnis and Chestnut-vented Conebill. Owing in part to this tanager extravaganza we enjoyed a very exciting hour of subtropical birding before darkness closed in. The next morning is always an entertaining foray on the pre-tour, for birds and the hiking conditions. The destination was Urugua-í Provincial Park, at the Uruzú Sector about 1.5 hours from Iguazu town. Previously we had encountered overgrown conditions along the 3km loop trail, but thankfully the trail had been scouted and cleared by Marcos and park guards. From a walk two days prior Marcos reported some bamboo and a short, ankle-deep flooded section...



*Heading into the jungle!*

Birding started off winningly, with two species of becard in the parking lot (Chestnut-crowned and Crested!) and another colony of caciques. It was wet but not as rainy as the previous day, though some downpours prevented good looks at canopy birds. Bird activity was also dampened somewhat.



*Chestnut-crowned Becard © Paul Prior*

As we entered the forest we heard Brown Tinamou and a Gray-bellied Spinetail—the latter took some tries to get people onto it. Further along the trail we had heard-only encounters with White-bearded and Spot-backed Antshrike, White-browed Warbler and Rufous-capped Motmot. Luckily, we

had decent glimpses of some nice birds such as: Rufous Gnateater, Bertoni's Antbird, Southern Bristle-tyrant, Large-headed Flatbill, Blackish-blue and Temminck's Seedeaters, and Uniform Finch among others.



*Temminck's Seedeater* © Paul Prior

The measuring sticks (ie. our legs) on the flooded section near the end of the loop recorded knee-high conditions, but everyone did a great job busting through this swamp to the warm, dry van. It was much different than last visit where extreme temperatures and bamboo thickets were the main issues! In the afternoon, we had a short break at the hotel and headed again to the national park. Some combination of wetness and (more likely) staffing issues forced a closure of the park for the pm, therefore we decided to retreat and go back to a different part of 600 Hectares reserve. This turned out to be a fun hour and allowed us to see a few more birds of open country and wetlands. Another dinner at the hotel had us sampling some more malbec and other Argentine wine varieties, and some local orange juice. On the last morning, we had to make up for missing the park, so we went early using Marcos' early-entry permit. This allowed us to walk the lower trail before anyone else arrived, with the added bonus of finding some Great Dusky Swifts roosting at trailside.



*Looking at falls, lower path*

After some snaps of the falls we headed out to Ruta 101 where we first walked upon arrival. This time the sun was shining and the road was drying out, but not enough to allow us to drive the van down a big hill. So down we went, and back up before commuting to the airport. The highlight was likely scanning a wetland from a new wooden blind, where we saw Gray-rumped Swifts and similarly-hued Long-tailed Tyrants in action. Two of us went in search of more birds while others returned up the hill and we were rewarded with seeing some tapir tracks in the mud. A lovely surprise just before we finished the walk was a Surucua Trogon that came in to playback.



*Tapir tracks at the 101 road © Steve Ogle*



*Surucua Trogon* © Paul Prior

Thanks to all five guests who participated in the Pre-Tour!