



Iguazu Falls Extension Trip Report (Nov 2023)

[Link: Iguazu Falls Extension Trip Report \(Nov 2023\)](#)

Iguazu, 2023 - without The Falls It should be indicated from the outset that every year the main reason for heading down to Iguazu on this extension tour is to view the Falls, and that in this regard our little group of four (including our enthusiastic local guide, Marcos) was out of luck - unless you consider a distant and rather obscured view of the destroyed walkway across the main falls from the balcony at the Melia Hotel some sort of view. But despite this, despite not being allowed into the National Park, despite the main birding destinations of Uruzu and Urugua-i being flooded and inaccessible, we actually fared rather well for birds!



Puddling butterflies © Paul Prior

October 29th

Our first stop after Alfredo and Marcos fetched us from the airport was at the junction with Ruta 101, a wide forest track that has proved fruitful in the past. There was a break in the recent nonstop downpours, and we jumped out of the van to view the wonderful array of butterflies puddling on the red mud road. The busy colony of **Red-rumped Caciques** at the top of the hike was a nice start, and we ambled slowly along the first 100 m of track. And then serendipity: a pair of splendid **Saffron Toucanets** posed for photos in the roadside trees -a species that was new to this tour, and which Marcos maintained he had not seen here for seven years! He was as excited as us three northerners! A pair of **Green-headed Tanagers** added to this colourful and auspicious beginning.



Saffron Toucanets © Paul Prior

With a return of the rain imminent, we opted to head to our hotel, located in the middle of the 600 Hectare Forest, and from there once rain had passed, we headed to the Jardin de los Picaflores. Here we enjoyed an hour of hummingbird viewing in comfort. **Black Jacobin, Glittering-bellied Emerald, Planalto Hermit** and more, visiting the array of feeders maintained by a local, hummingbird enthusiast. Another break in the clouds inspired us to start out on one of the wider 600 Hectare trails. We only lasted about half an hour before a recommencing of the torrential rain drove us back to Alfredo and his van, but this at least was enough time to afford us excellent looks at a very obliging **Rufous-capped Motmot** and a pair of **Black-crowned Tityras** attending their nest cavity at the top of a tall, trailside snag.



Finally, after a period of drying-off back at the Hotel Selva de Laurel, we decided to risk the evening lull in the rain and set out along the paved road from the hotel, making our way as far as the nearby lagoon. This short hike took us past a pair of tiny, cute **Eared Pygmy-tyrants**, and a handsome male **Chestnut-bellied Euphonia** feeding a fledgling near the entrance. We were afforded an excellent lesson in flycatcher identification with **Streaked**, **Piratic**, and **Variegated** in quick succession. The lagoon itself was rather birdless with local children swimming and their mothers doing the laundry. However, the single **Broad-snouted Caiman** did not appear too concerned. Small squadrons of seemingly all dark Swifts passed overhead and although it was very tempting to call these Sooty Swifts, subsequent review cannot rule out the much more numerous and likely great dusky Swift. The return walk took us past **Turquoise-fronted Parrots** at their nest cavity, a couple of **Dark-billed Cuckoos** and a pair of **Magpie Tanagers**.



Magpie Tanager © Paul Prior

October 30th

Marcos appeared early morning with the disappointing news that the park remained closed, and with a dramatic video which the park guards had shared with him, capturing the moment the main walkway along the lip of the Falls had been swept away. But with the weather forecast, indicating a dryer period for much of the morning we headed back to Ruta 101 with the intention of hiking the dirt road from the cacique colony down to the wetland lookout. Again, there was an astonishing collection of butterflies puddling at the damp patches left from yesterday's torrential rain, and we happily spent time capturing photos of this wonderful diversity. A slowly passing flock of mixed passerines was stopped in its tracks by our broadcast of pygmy-owl toots, and revealed our first sightings of **Red-crested Finch**, **Guira Tanagers**, and **Yellow Tyrannulets** among others. Our tooting also attracted an actual **Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl** which caused much excitement with the local songbirds - **Blue-naped Chlorophonia**, **Chestnut-vented Conebill**, **Creamy-bellied Gnatcatchers** and a very obliging pair of **Ochre-collared Piculets**. A little further along the first

of our many attempts to encourage a singing **Tufted Antshrike** to reveal itself failed but did pull in a pair of **Ruby-crowned Tanagers**. A couple of **Plush-capped Jays** dropped by to investigate as did our first **Ochre-breasted Foliage-gleaner**. **Squirrel Cuckoos**, **Chestnut-eared Aracaris** and **Surucua Trogon** represented the larger birds on this busy hike, but perhaps strangest of all (at least according to the eBird flags) was a wheeling flock of 25 **Snail Kites**, presumably, recently emerged from their overnight communal roost. We reached the partly-covered blind overlooking the wetland just minutes before the predicted (but thankfully tardy) rain arrived, but those minutes allowed us the opportunity to scope distant **Long-tailed Tyrant**, **Scaly-naped Parrot** and **Black-crowned Tityra**; and to call into view a couple of splendid **Swallow-tailed Manakins**. In the distance, over the forest at the far side of the wetland, was a reeling flock of about 400 **Great Dusky Swifts**. We broadcast for the two local rail species from the blind, inspiring prolonged calls from both **Blackish Rail**, and **Rufous-sided Crake** - the birds approached within meters but remained tantalizingly invisible. And then the rainstorm hit: a lashing and torrential downpour turned the dirt road into a mud-slick and then into swift moving streams of red water! We were a little surprised when Alfredo in his van turned up just outside the blind to rescue us, but then we resigned ourselves to a drenching hike back up the hill when it became apparent that the van would be sliding all over the road if we attempted to ride up the hill. At the top of the hill we boarded the van and were whisked back to Selva de Laurel for lunch and laundry! The rain persisted through the afternoon, teasing us with the occasional brief respite when we would attempt and fail to head out for some afternoon birding, although such respites did at least present us with excellent looks at **Atlantic Black-throated Trogon** near the hotel.



Black-throated Trogon © Paul Prior

October 31st

Marcos presented us with the same news of floodings and closures; it seems the only way to approach the falls was by helicopter ... from Brazil! But he did, however, have a plan that would afford us some relatively dry birding. A paved "private" road runs along the edge of town, skirting the forest and leading to an Jesuit "shrine" by the river - Santuario Sta. Maria de Yguazu. The hope was that as long as the predicted rain held off, we would have the chance of some good and

comfortable birding on this solid footing. And it turned out Marcos had made an excellent choice. Straightaway we were presented with looks at **Squirrel** and **Dark-billed Cuckoos** while a **Tataupa Tinamou** called unseen from the thick trailside understory. A little way down the trail a trio of **Rufous-capped Motmots** responded well to playback. Passerine flocks were dominated by **Rufous-margined Antwrens** but we also managed smaller numbers **Chivi Vireos**, **Golden-crowned Warblers**, and more **Ochre-collared Piculets**. A gap in the trees provided the opportunity to get great looks at, first, a trio of **Rusty-breasted Nunlets**, and then even better looks at another **Ochre-breasted Foliage-gleaner**. Further along, we were dazzled by more **Chestnut-eared Aracaris** and then a pair of **Buff-bellied Puffbirds** posing out in the open. More broadcasting afforded us unbeatable looks at **White-eyed Foliage-gleaners**, and a very inquisitive pair of **Fuscous Flycatchers**. We reached the “shrine” via a couple of **Plain Antvireos** and settled down for a picnic lunch in the Jesuits’ amphitheatre.



Buff-bellied Puffbirds © Paul Prior

Rested and fed we embarked on the hike back up the same road and still no rain! **Black-throated Grosbeak** was in fine song around the complex of pilgrims’ cabins. We stopped to be teased again by the responsive but invisible **White-shouldered Fire-eye**, but fared much better with **Spot-backed Antshrike**. All in all an excellent hike through what on paper was rather unpromising habitat. It might actually have been that all the recent rain meant that the birds were simply desperate to get out and sing and forage, and were therefore more obvious than usual (well, except for the Fire-eyes!). After a well-earned siesta, and again, with the predicted break in the rain, we opted to repeat the walk to the lagoon. More productive than the previous introductory walk along the same route, we managed a couple of really good birds. First, however we caught up with commoner species such as **Rufous-browed Peppershrike**, **Black-tailed Tityra**, **Thrush-like Wrens**, a pair of **Plumbeous Kites**, and flyby **White-eyed Parakeets**. But then in quick succession Marcos spotted a flyover **White Woodpecker**, and then further close investigation of an obscure but suspicious call note from sparse roadside understory just yards from a local farmstead revealed a **Rufous Gnateater**! This was a species I had completely given up on for 2023 since the typical location at Urugua-i had been ruled inaccessible due to flooding. Wow, what luck, and kudos to Marcos for his initial suspicion.



Rufous Gnateater © Paul Prior

November 1st

Our last morning and our last chance to view the falls. Sadly, despite Marcos's efforts to secure us an opportunity to view them, the National Park remained very shut, and we would have to make do with the aforementioned visit to the Melia Hotel's restaurant balcony. We spent the first half of the morning picking our way very carefully along a rather saturated and much-rutted trail through the extensive forest behind our hotel (600 Hectare Forest). First off, we were presented with excellent looks at our first **Planalto Woodcreeper** and a **Blonde-crested Woodpecker**, and then a small flock with more **Plain Antvireos**, **Golden-crowned Warblers**, **Black-goggled Tanager** and **Yellow Tyrannulets**. More notable, however, was the entirely rufous-coloured thrush feeding in a trailside fruiting shrub - a **Cocoa Thrush**, out of its text-book range but this is a species that is currently undergoing southern range expansion into northern Argentina. The trail got wetter and wetter, but at least the rain was holding off. Band-tailed Manakins were calling off-trail, deep in the understory, but unfortunately they remained unresponsive to our broadcasts. And then a weird distinctive low groaning call in the mid-distance alerted us to a **Spot-billed Toucanet**. This time playback was effective and although the individual did not approach closely it climbed into view and sat for several minutes on a snag a 100m away. Excellent! Strangely, on this trip we'd seen both of the hard-to-come-by toucanets but the two typically "easy" larger toucan species remained elusive - perhaps these latter are not fans of persistent torrential rain! Back at our excellent Hotel Selva de Laurel we checked out and then Alfredo drove us to the National Park entrance where Marcos had negotiated our passage to the splendid Hotel Melia. Here we made our way to the restaurant balcony from where we were able to scope the rim of the main falls of Iguazu. The muddy-brown waters rushed over the lip and despite the distance it was easy to see just how easily this force had mangled the walkway. As far as we had heard there had fortunately been no casualties from the extensive damage.



The falls © Paul Prior

With a good hour before our lunch reserved in the Melia Hotel restaurant we strolled the hotel grounds, picking up additional species and searching in vain for the missing toucans. **Great Dusky Swifts** wheeled overhead, and we found **Cobalt-rumped Parrotlets** feeding nearby. A brief blast from our speaker brought an immediate response from our first **Yellow-fronted Woodpecker** and then we bumped into a small family group of **Burrowing Owls** sunning just outside their burrow-entrance. The two fledglings looked like entirely different species - the red-mud of their recent subterranean life having stained their plumage a uniform rufous! A pair of **Campo Flickers**, **Chopi Blackbird** and a very confiding **Cattle Tyrant** were also new for the trip, as were the **Saffron Finches** feeding alongside a female **Double-collared Seedeater** at the chain-link fence.



Yellow-fronted Woodpecker © Paul Prior

Lunch was a pretty up-market affair; we felt a little out of place in our birding togs, but we could see the falls raging in the distance and were treated to lovely views of **Plumbeous Kites** sailing past the balcony. And then Alfredo taxied us to the nearby airport and that was it! The end of our brief visit to Iguazu. Despite the wet weather denying us the opportunity to venture close to the famed falls we had amassed an impressive list of forest bird species which we were now to leave far behind as we proceeded south into Patagonia. Throughout the main tour, despite the spectacular scenery and the unique denizens of southern landscapes, I found myself occasionally day-dreaming of the wonderful diversity of birds and insects that we had encountered in Misiones Province. Quite honestly, if one is heading as far south as Buenos Aires it makes perfect sense to prime oneself for two weeks of open habitat birding with this little side adventure!