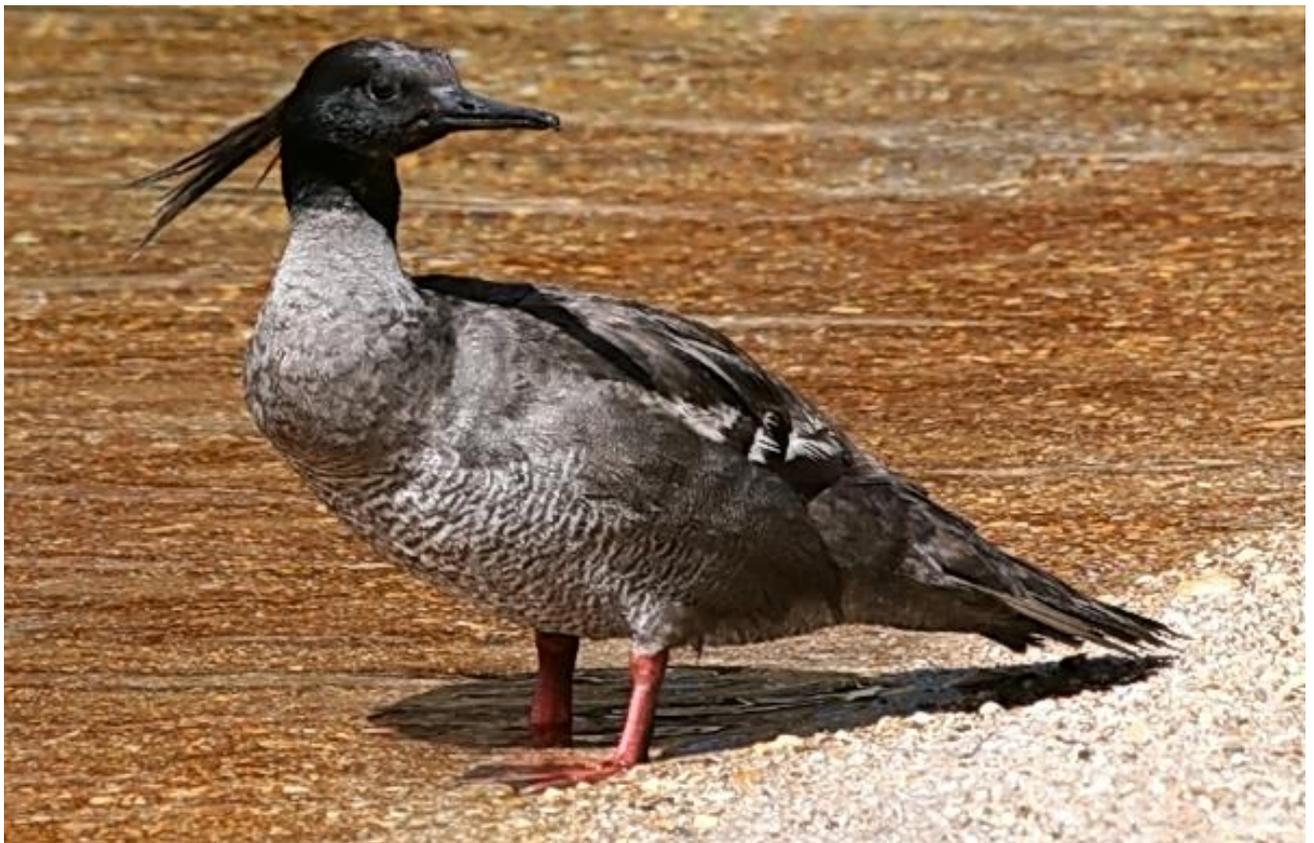




SMALL GROUP AND CUSTOM-MADE BIRDING ADVENTURES WORLDWIDE

BRAZIL: CERRADO ENDEMIC AND BRAZILIAN MERGANSER

12 - 20 SEPTEMBER 2017



Brazilian Merganser (photo © Prof. Sávio Freire Bruno) is one of our targets on this trip.

Many people know of the immense Brazilian Amazon with its astonishing biodiversity. Some people might know about the highly endangered Atlantic Rainforest that once stretched across large sections of the Brazilian coast. However, even within Brazil, very few people are aware of the cerrado: a fascinating biome of vast grasslands, lightly wooded savannas, and ribbons of gallery forest growing along winding rivers. As one of the world's most biodiverse tropical savannas, there are approximately 10,000 plant species in the cerrado. It also supports the greatest variety of large mammals in all of South America, including such iconic species as the stilt-legged maned wolf and tube-nosed giant anteater. By birding the spectacular landscapes of the inland state of Minas Gerais, we hope to encounter these mammals, as well as many of the cerrado's most special birds, including, but not limited to, **Brazilian Merganser**, **Cock-tailed Tyrant**, and **Cipo Canastero**.

Our trip begins at the scenic Serra da Canastra National Park. The main focus here is finding the near-endemic **Brazilian Merganser**, a specialized denizen of clear-water streams and one of the Western Hemisphere's most critically endangered birds. In addition, the rolling grasslands, wooded savannas, and gallery forests are home to an excellent assortment of range-restricted species, such as **Brasilia Tapaculo**, **Golden-capped Parakeet**, and **Stripe-breasted Starthroat**. This site also offers our best chance for giant anteater.

Next, the Serra do Caraça lies on a transition zone between the drier cerrado and verdant Atlantic Rainforest, providing an interesting mix of birds from both habitats, such as **Gilt-edged Tanager**, **Serra Antwren**, and **Swallow-tailed Cotinga**. However, the main attraction here is the nightly appearance of maned wolf at the monastery.

Our last port of call is Serra do Cipó National Park, a location renowned for its spectacular gorges and waterfalls. The rocky grasslands found in the higher elevations of this park are home to a highly localized set of Brazilian endemics: the spectacular **Hyacinth Visorbearer**, demure **Cinereous Warbling Finch**, and recently described **Cipo Canastero**. Our trip ends back in Belo Horizonte.

For those wishing to continue exploring this magnificent country, this tour can be combined with **Heart of Brazil: Pantanal, Cerrado and the Amazon**, **Comprehensive Southeast Brazil: Intervalles to Linhares Part I** and **Comprehensive Southeast Brazil: Intervalles to Linhares Part II** for an overall 51-day Brazil mega tour.

Please note that the detailed itinerary below cannot be guaranteed as it is only a rough guide and can be changed (usually slightly) due to factors such as availability of accommodation, updated information on the state of accommodation, roads, or birding sites, the discretion of the guides and other factors.

Itinerary (9 days/8 nights)

Day 1. Arrival in Belo Horizonte

You will arrive at the airport and be transferred to your hotel in Belo Horizonte.

Overnight: Belo Horizonte

Day 2. Transfer to São Roque de Minas

This is mostly a travel day. After an early breakfast we drive to the town of São Roque de Minas for arrival in the afternoon. This picturesque town will be our base for exploring Serra

da Canastra National Park and its environs for the next three-and-a-half days. We will spend the afternoon birding around the town of São Roque de Minas to begin familiarizing ourselves with many of the common bird species of inland Brazil, including **Toco Toucan**, **Campo Flicker**, and **Cinnamon Tanager**. Feeders in the nearby town of Vargem Bonita usually hold a fantastic assortment of hummingbirds. **White-vented Violetear**, **Planalto Hermit**, and **Swallow-tailed Hummingbird** regularly attend these feeders; however, the true star here is the endemic **Stripe-breasted Starthroat**, a specialty of the drier interior of Brazil.

Overnight: Chapadão da Canastra, São Roque de Minas

Days 3 – 5. Birding Serra da Canastra National Park

Occupying over 700 square kilometers in Minas Gerais, the magnificent and remote Serra da Canastra National Park preserves a stunningly beautiful expanse of prime cerrado as well as the headwaters of the São Francisco River, the longest river lying totally within Brazil. Most of this park consists of a high plateau that rises abruptly from the surrounding countryside. This plateau harbors seemingly endless open campo grasslands, dotted with an innumerable number of termite mounds and crisscrossed by several streams lined with low, bushy gallery forest.

These grasslands support a rich and diverse set of specialized birds, many of which can only be found in Brazil. The skulky **Brasilia Tapaculo** creeps around in the low, gnarled forest found along streams. Patches of brush and scrub hold the cute and endemic **Grey-backed Tachuri**. **Red-legged Seriema**, South America's answer to Africa's Secretarybird, often patrols the grasslands in pairs. The endearing **Cock-tailed Tyrant** flutters over areas of tall grass with a flight profile reminiscent of a toy airplane. **Campo Miner** prefers recently burned areas, while tall, wet grass can harbor rare **Seedeaters** such as **Tawny-bellied** and **Black-bellied**. The tops of termite mounds will always be worth a check, as birds like the vulnerable **Black-masked Finch** and the unique **Firewood-gatherer** often perch on them to curiously survey their surroundings.

Several rivers cascade over the escarpment into the lower elevations of Serra da Canastra National Park, creating spectacular waterfalls, behind which **Great Dusky Swift** nests. The forests lining the rivers at the lower elevations are wet enough to support a variety of birds more typical of the wet Atlantic Rainforest, such as **Gilt-edged Tanager**, in addition to widespread gallery forest species such as **Helmeted Manakin** and **Toco Toucan**. Lightly-wooded savannas predominate in drier areas away from the rivers, harboring several delightful endemics, such as **Golden-capped Parakeet**, **Rufous-winged Antshrike**, and **Collared Crescentchest**.

Of course, any birding trip to Serra da Canastra must include a dedicated search for the elusive **Brazilian Merganser**, one of the most critically endangered birds in the Americas with an estimated population of less than 250 birds. As the highest-priority bird of this tour, we will allot an ample amount of time to persistently scan all stretches of river throughout Serra da Canastra for this enigmatic duck.

Overnight: Chapadão da Canastra, São Roque de Minas

Day 6. Transfer to Monasterio do Caraça

After a final round of early morning birding at Serra da Canastra National Park, we make the long trek to the Monasterio do Caraça. Maned wolves make an appearance every night at this hilltop monastery in search of food scraps purposefully laid out for them. This tradition began in 1982, when the priests began putting out meat for the wolves to keep them from raiding their trash cans.

Overnight: Monasterio do Caraça

Day 7. Birding in the morning in Serra do Caraça, transfer to Serra do Cipó

The forest surrounding the Monasterio do Caraça has an eclectic mix of birds from both the drier cerrado and wetter Atlantic Rainforest. Our main target here is the endemic **Serra Antwren**, although a wide variety of birds such as **Hyacinth Visorbearer** and **Swallow-tailed Cotinga** are possible. After lunch we make the short drive to Serra do Cipó National Park, famous for its incredible rock formations and majestic waterfalls.

Overnight: Fazenda Monjolos Pousada

Day 8. Birding Serra do Cipó National Park

Rugged Campos Rupestres montane savanna grasslands dominate the upper elevations of Serra do Cipó National Park, supporting an exceptional and highly endemic flora adapted to poor, rocky soils. Although diversity is low in this challenging habitat, the birds that occur here are very special. Only recently discovered in 1985, **Cipo Canastero**, an inhabitant of rocky outcroppings, is our main target here. Flowering bushes may attract two stunningly beautiful hummingbirds, the endemic **Hyacinth Visorbearer** and near-endemic **Horned Sungem**. Other species we specifically target during our stay at this national park include **Cinereous Warbling Finch**, **Blue Finch**, **Coal-crested Finch**, and **Serra Finch**.

Overnight: Fazenda Monjolos Pousada

Day 9. Birding Serra do Cipó National Park, transfer to Belo Horizonte, departure

After some early-morning birding around Serra do Cipó for any misses from the previous day, we drive back to Belo Horizonte, where the tour ends.

Duration: 9 days
Limit: 2 – 8
Date: 12 – 20 September 2017
Start: Belo Horizonte
End: Belo Horizonte

Price: US\$4323 per person sharing
Single supplement: US\$409

Price includes:

Meals
 Accommodation
 Guiding fees
 Entrance fees
 All transport while on tour
 Tolls

Price excludes:

International flights
 Items of a personal nature, e.g. gifts
 Alcoholic drinks
 Personal insurance
 Gratuities