

Brazil – Amazon Wildlife Cruise

Naturetrek Tour Report

31st July – 9th August 2022



Brown-throated Three-toed Sloth



Amazon River Dolphin



Hoatzin



Wire-tailed Manakin

Tour report and images by Jack Blincowe



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Day 1

Sunday 31st July

We left London Airport for Brazil, flying overnight and landing in Sao Paulo early the next morning. We then went on to Manaus the following afternoon.

Day 2

Monday 1st August

At the airport we were greeted by enthusiastic and friendly staff who quickly guided us to our shuttle bus and then to our boat, the Iracema where we would be spending the vast majority of our cruise. Greeted by more helpful staff and handsome Yellow-headed Caracaras, we soon had our briefing and a quick rundown of the agenda for the trip.

Once that was out of the way, we wasted no time in setting off on our first adventure that afternoon, traveling up the Rio De Negro river to a nearby archipelago of sunken forest. Green-winged Macaws and a Striated Heron were the first creatures we saw as the Iracema anchored herself. We quickly descended into our dinghies for our first voyage and departed for the sunken treeline.

The sheer biodiversity was astonishing from the beginning, and we came face to face with many incredible creatures including at very close range. Green Iguanas, Roadside Hawks, various tanagers, a Chestnut-eared Aracari and incredible views of a handsome Scarlet Macaw were among the many highlights. We were also afforded our first tantalising glimpses of the elusive Tucuxi (also known as Grey-river Dolphin), though they would not be the last. Humboldt's Squirrel Monkeys watched from the branches as our dinghies sailed past with curious eyes but quickly retreated into the understory after inspecting us. The botanical highlight of this trip was the amazing Giant Water Lilies. There were only a few left this time of year, but it was more than enough to see that they were truly incredible forms of plant life.

However, the most impressive thing we encountered there was doubtlessly the Brown-Throated Three-Toed Sloths. We saw three large adults on this short excursion, with the first being a brightly coloured male at eye level. The views were incredible, with him being very active (for a sloth) and showing us some fascinating behaviour in the brief time we had together.

Our dinghies eventually headed back to the Iracema as the sun began to set over the amazon. Short-tailed Swifts escorted us up the river from high above as the dusk settled in and the rainforest fell dark.

After a pleasant meal we heeded out for our first evening excursion in Catalao Lake, a large open expanse of water in the middle of the archipelago. Our guide had previously explained to us that this was the best place in the world for observing the rare and impressive Great Potoo, the largest nightjar in the world, and they did not disappoint. Less than a minute's sail from the Iracema in the dinghy we were treated to fantastic views of this incredible and enigmatic bird. With his huge, inky black eyes, cryptic plumage and gaping maw of a beak, it is one of the most bizarre birds in the Amazon! He allowed us plenty of time to take our pictures and admire him before he went on

his way to pursue the many insects that also filled the night sky. We also saw many bats of several different species along the way and a juvenile caiman right beside the dinghy!

After a busy half-day we returned to the Iracema to rest. We would be up early again tomorrow morning for our adventure was only just beginning!

Day 2 highlights, clockwise from the top left: Scarlet Macaw, Brown-throated Three-toed Sloth, Great Potoo and Giant Water Lilies



Day 3

Tuesday 2nd August

Most of us awoke to the sound of Pavarotti and were greeted with a varied breakfast and a beautiful sunrise, though a few of us were up before this to share the first rays of dawn over the Amazon with some magnificent Band-tailed Nightjars. After fueling ourselves up for the journey, we boarded our dinghies and entered a very heavily wooded archipelago. It was here that we got our first views of the large and charismatic White-throated Toucans perched atop the trees. These large and beautiful birds would make a brief appearance virtually every day after.

As we went down the wide channels between the islands of trees we came across kingfishers, ibis, tanagers and exotic pigeons. The whole group also caught our first tantalising glimpses of the Hoatzin, though it remained very well hidden within the vegetation, its croaking cries and a few shadowy, brown feathers the only thing betraying its presence.

What did show very well though was the interesting woodcreepers! It was clear the chief guide had a passion for these birds in particular, and we took our time observing two different species, the Straight-billed and the Zimmer's Woodcreeper, both foraging on the tree bark side by side. The guide explained their behaviours and taxonomy as they performed on cue, demonstrating how they use their spiny tails to help them cling to the bark whilst feeding. We also had splendid views of a resting hummingbird (that stuck its tongue out at us!) and a Green-tailed Jacamar that posed for us at tremendously close range, allowing amazing views of its iridescent green feathers.

We also had our first glimpses of the Grey River Dolphins, also known as the Tucuxi. They would later frequently investigate the Iracema as we journeyed from locale to locale, but never stayed more than a couple of breaths before diving back into the murky depths of the Rio Negro. The shy little Tucuxi weren't as curious of people as their huge pink counterparts, but we'll get to the show-boating Botos later.

Up next was the high point of the excursion, and for some birders perhaps the whole trip. We entered a quiet grotto beneath some low hanging branches that was the lekking ground of the Wire-Tailed Manakin. Manikins are often known as the 'Michael Jackson Birds' due to their fancy footwork during courtship (as featured on QI). We weren't lucky enough to see these birds boogie, but we had very close views of several brightly coloured males in prime displaying positions. Unwilling to give up these prime spots just because some nosy humans had set foot on their stage, the tiny brightly coloured birds boldly stared us down with their eerie white eyes until we left. We headed back to the Iracema for lunch and to avoid the worst of the heat as midday came upon us and headed off to our next adventure.

On our way to our next destination we witnessed a magnificent display of scores of Plumbeous Kites whirling above our heads. I suspect that we saw more individual birds of prey in the sky in those precious few minutes than we did for the rest of the trip!

After an exciting time watching the canopy for various birds as we travelled, we reached the destination of our afternoon outing, Isla Camaleão. We went down a tributary in the Iracema herself, seeking the beautiful Umbrellabird. Sadly, the Umbrellabird did not make an appearance, but we saw a host of other fascinating creatures. The first unusual bird we saw was the long legged Crane Hawk. We caught it in the act of using its long, thin legs to reach inside deep crevices in search of bats! Apparently not thrilled to be caught in the act of breaking and entering, we soon left the Crane Hawk alone to observe the handsome orange and black Bat Falcon, perching in wait for the sun to set and its bat prey to emerge. Clearly, the bats were plentiful in this part of the rainforest! He eyed us with mild curiosity as we passed him by, with all the familiar aloofness of his close relative, the Peregrine Falcon.

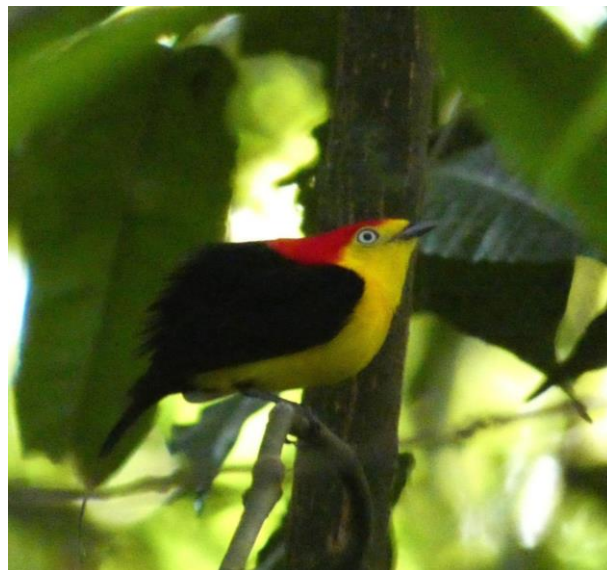
Shortly after this we encountered our third and most spectacular bird of prey of the trip, the enormous Crested Eagle! Perched high in the canopy, this elegant bird can be easily mistaken for the more famous Harpy Eagle, and is in fact its closest living relative. Whilst just as long, the Crested Eagle has a slightly smaller wingspan, a lighter weight and a more slender build when compared to the heavyweight Harpy. If the Harpy Eagle is the

Tyrannosaurus of the Amazonian skies, then the Crested Eagle is undoubtedly the Allosaurus. He watched us from the canopy for a few minutes before deciding that we lowly ground dwellers were beneath his notice, and then disappeared deeper into the rainforest.

Soon after we boarded our dinghy for a short voyage to explore the riverbank vegetation. Flycatchers and parrots were in abundance, but the most memorable animal encounter was a male Amazon Thornytail Iguana and his harem of at least two females. He stood his ground as our dinghies approached and kept a watchful eye on us, lest we try to woo his females. Thankfully, our fine utility vests and dashing binoculars were a poor temptation compared to his vivid colours, so he let us leave his territory unscathed. But as spectacular as he was, the most interesting encounter was the Amazon Moonflower Cactus, a bizarre almost-parasitic plant that scrapes out a living in the rainforest by covering most of its host tree's trunk and absorbs nutrients and rain dripping down from the canopy leaves and onto its host's trunk. It's very rare and only found in a few locations where it isn't completely submerged by the rising river in the wet season. Whilst the animals were the highlights of this trip, the cactus proved that the plants can be every bit as intriguing.

Soon after this, the sun began to set. Band-Tailed Nightjars and a whole host of bats raced us back as we prepared for a very impressive evening. After having our dinner, the darkness of the night had fully set in. We gathered together at the top deck as the lead guide ventured into the riverbank with his microphone, playing the territorial call of a Spectacled Owl! It wasn't long before an owl responded to the guide's challenge. It first perched above the guide's dinghy to investigate, giving us impressive views in the torchlight. Soon after, the lead guide joined us on deck to play the owl's territorial call to see if he could draw the curious bird closer. We were rewarded for his efforts by the huge owl swooping into the branches just beside the Iracema! It remained there at eye level for a couple of minutes, investigating us all with its huge, yellow eyes emerging from its feathered 'spectacles.' It soon decided there was no intruder worth challenging, and it disappeared back into the rainforest to defend its territory against real threats. We retreated to our rooms for the night at this time as well, leaving the owl to haunt the night-time canopy.

Day 3 highlights, clockwise from the top left: Green-tailed Jacamar, Wire-tailed Manakin, Crested Eagle, and a male Amazon Thornytail Iguana



Day 4

Wednesday 3rd August

We once again awoke to a beautiful sunrise over a sunken forest, with vast expanses of river to either side of us. The first animals we saw in the dawn light were the usual Band-tailed Nightjars, terns, Yellow-headed Caracara and a particularly handsome Black Skimmer. A Beardless Tyrannulet also added to the dawn chorus!

We soon made our way into Jau River National Park, pausing at the entrance whilst our documents were validated to take in the spectacular rainforest view. We shortly made our way up the river, deeper into the national park. Neotropical Cormorants, Muscovy Ducks and Blue-and-Gold Macaws flew alongside the boat as we made our

way deeper into the national park. It was here that we encountered the first Pink River Dolphins, also known as Boto, briefly surfacing to investigate us as we passed by. After this brief journey, we soon boarded our dinghies and proceeded to go on our morning excursion. We sailed down a slow tributary with foliage either side of us, the surface of the water thick with the pollen from the flowering plants. Kingfishers and puffbirds were in abundance as we made our way further along the tributaries. We had a surprisingly close encounter with the rarely seen Great Tinamou and a beautiful male and female Guianan Trogon pair. The most memorable encounter on this stretch was a tiny male Purple-headed Jacobin hummingbird perched right above us, allowing us excellent views as we passed beneath it.

Eventually the vegetation became denser and denser until we were sailing beneath the rainforest canopy itself. We were welcomed to the murky depths of the rainforest by a group of Lesser Fishing (or Bulldog) Bats resting on a tree trunk, virtually invisible until they flew off at our approach. Golden dragonflies and the occasional Blue Morpho swooped by. As we went deeper still, we encountered a Chestnut Woodpecker that flitted about the canopy above us, giving us many brief glimpses of the impressive, chocolate coloured bird.

As we continued down the channel we eventually met an obstacle in the form of a massive Night Wasp nest. These giant, nocturnal wasps are known to be highly aggressive, so the guides gave the nest a wide berth. The next animal we encountered was somewhat more appealing though; a Large-headed Capuchin Monkey! The fluffy primate was very curious of our dinghy, hopping back and forth in the canopy thoroughly examining us. The chief guide played some capuchin chatter to draw him in, something he responded very well to. After a few minutes he went on his way, satisfied in his assessment of these strange, hairless interlopers. With this cute and curious monkey serving as the highlight, we swiftly began to make our way back, briefly stopping for excellent views of a Greater Yellow-headed Vulture that soared above our heads.

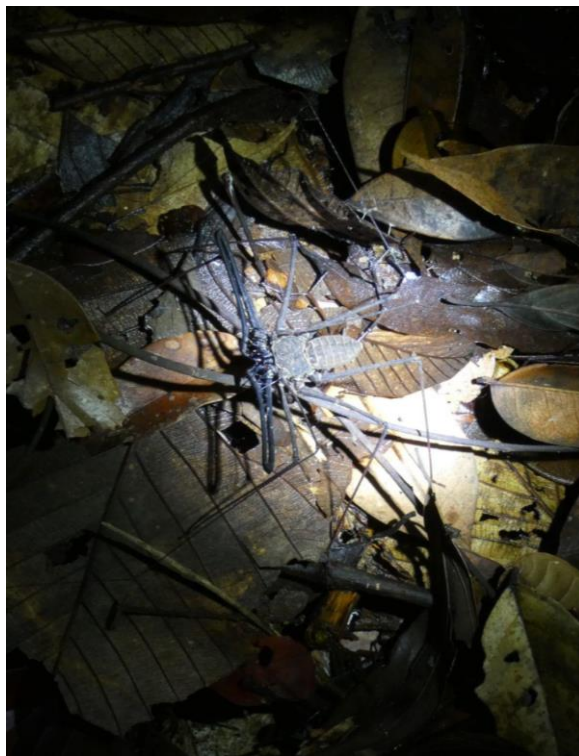
The most impressive part of the day happened as we sat about the Iracema for the afternoon. A pod of three Pink River Dolphins, two adults and one juvenile, came in very close to investigate us. They displayed breaching and spy hopping, giving us exquisitely close views of them in their natural habitat for a good couple of hours before they went further up the river.

After the heat of the midday sun began to dissipate we headed inland to set foot on solid ground and explored the forests of the Jau River National Park. We heard the calls of several birds that afforded some fleeting views through the undergrowth, but headliners of this excursion were much smaller. As we investigated the trees we saw a plethora of insect life! Giant plant hoppers, rain termites and giant ant nests were all interesting, but the two mating Flat-faced Longhorn beetles were the scene stealers! Two large adults were found mating on a tree trunk. Upon our return it seemed like this might've been the first time this particular species had been recorded since its discovery, so it was quite the find! Having seen a great wealth of hidden wildlife, we soon returned to rest, stopping briefly to see toucans, woodpeckers and a pair of beautiful Capped Herons perched by the river on the way.

As the evening drew in, we prepared to set foot on dry land for a night time adventure! We primarily left in pursuit of a Rufous Potoo, which unfortunately didn't grace us with its presence. However, we did encounter a wealth of nocturnal creatures in its stead. As we pulled into the same dock that we explored earlier that day, we encountered a White-bellied Slender Mouse Opossum fleeing from the canopy. The most impressive of these was a huge Whip Spider the size of a dinner plate from leg tip to leg tip! We also came in close contact with the infamous Bullet Ant, one of the largest ants in the world with one of the world's most painful stings! Thankfully she kept her

distance, but bared her mighty jaws at our torchlight! A delightful supporting cast of bark mantids and termites kept every step exciting. Perhaps the most unusual thing about that night-time adventure was hearing a Nocturnal Curassow calling! Tempted to try and gain a sighting of the elusive bird that was far from the beaten path, common sense won out in the end and we headed back to the Iracema, content to enjoy its haunting call.

Day 4 highlights, clockwise from top left: Male Guianan Trogon, Large-headed Capuchin, Giant Whip Spider and mating Flat-faced Longhorn Beetles



Day 5

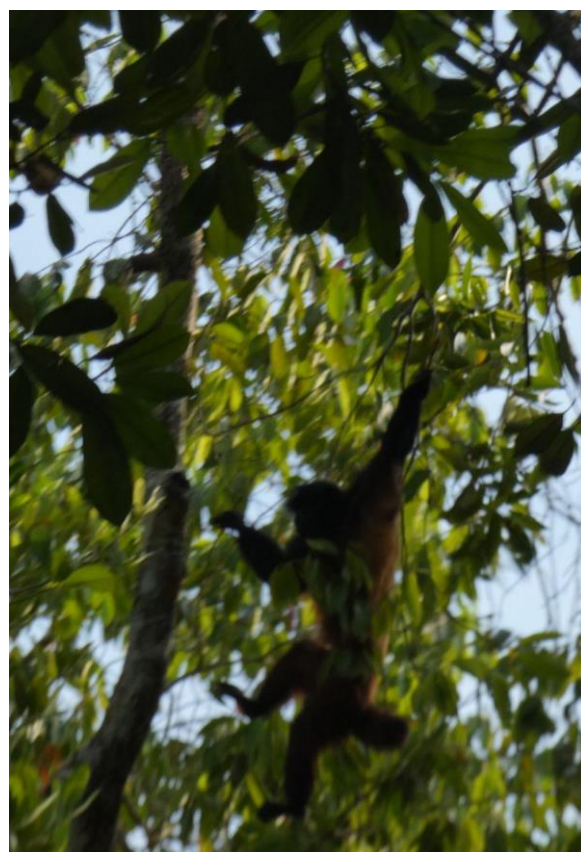
Thursday 4th August

We began our early morning excursion traversing through submerged shrubs in our dinghies, observing various small birds darting about the foliage. We were joined on this excursion by more Pink River Dolphins, navigating the same tight channels we were and keeping a curious eye on us as we went. Our highlights that morning included a pair of Orange-winged Parrots, apparently on a pre-breakfast date, that showed very well and a magnificently striped Tiger Heron. Another Beardless Tyrannulet serenaded us once again and this time gave us incredible views as it emerged from the undergrowth.

We then ventured deep into the vegetation at the side of the bank in search of the rare Green-and-Rufus Kingfisher. Our guide played a call to try and attract it, but a tiny Pygmy Kingfisher responded to the call first! Shortly after this the genuine article arrived, giving us incredible views of the most difficult to find kingfisher species in the Amazon.

We finally pulled up alongside a small village whilst the guides went ashore to speak to the locals. As we waited for the heat of the midday sun to diminish we received a rare visitor; a King Vulture! This huge, brightly coloured bird soared in the midday thermals right over the boat, giving us amazing views before she continued her journey over the horizon into the unknown. Shortly after this, we would begin our own journey into the unknown! The guides took us into the village where the locals prepared small canoes for us to board. They took us two at a time, rowing us by hand into a thick submerged forest. The first animals we came across were a troop of Spix's (or Noisy) Nightmonkeys! The troupe of four emerged from the top of a stump to observe our canoes, their huge eyes brimming with curiosity, particularly at our cameras! As we ventured further into the sunken forest we saw Helicopter Damselflies wheeling overhead, a troupe of White-faced Capuchins loudly chattering to each other, and finally the highlight and target animal of our trip: The Golden Backed Uakari! Whilst high in the canopy, the Uakaris were active, giving us brief but memorable views of them swinging through the claustrophobic forest. After a triumphant expedition we emerged from the sunken trees back into the open river. As we made our way back to the Iracema we were met with curious Squirrel Monkeys and more Pink River Dolphins, both giving us excellent views as we watched each other. After an excellent, but exhausting afternoon, we retired and had a restful night as we left the Jau River National Park under the stars

Day 5 highlights, clockwise from top left: King Vulture, Spix's Nightmonkey troupe, Golden-backed Uakari Monkey and a Helicopter Damselfly



Day 6

Friday 5th August

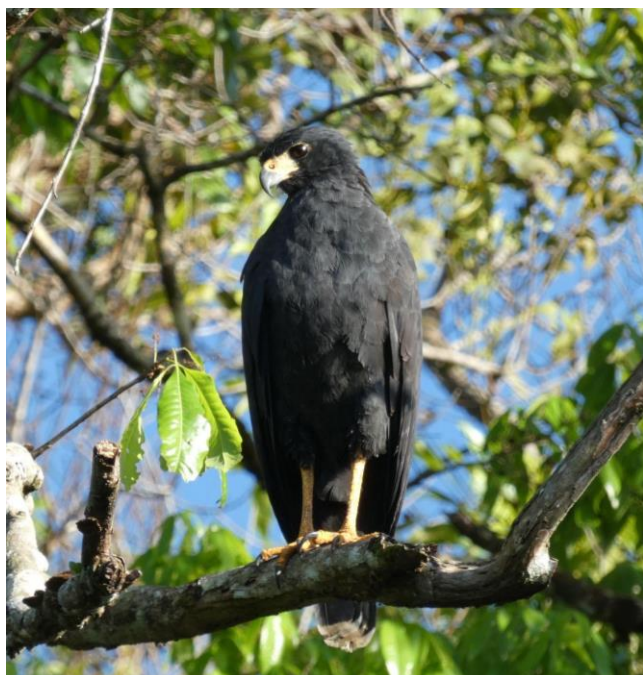
Unfortunately, circumstances out of our control meant we had to return to the nearest city. This cut our time in Jau National Park short, but allowed us to visit the Anavilhanas archipelago on the way, an archipelago previously unvisited by any of our guides making it a true adventure for all of us! We had unparalleled news of the Great Black Hawk, only a distant figure perched upon a distant tree up until now. We once again heard Hoatzins croaking in the trees, but only glimpsed some shadows and movement before they retreated further into the rainforest. We saw a wealth of birds as we explored the new archipelago including Black-necked Aracari, Green-backed Trogon, and Yellow-tufted Woodpecker. The most impressive, however, was easily the Spangled Cotinga, with its bright blue feathers blending into the sky. After a trip filled with a surprising number of exceedingly colourful birds, we made our way back to the Iracema for lunch.

After a short journey, we made landfall at an Amazonian city, Porto do Novo Airão. We waited out the worst of the midday heat whilst watching an Amazonian Kingfisher hunt from the boat, then explored the city. We saw Orange-fronted Yellow Finches, Plumbeous Kites, both Turkey and Black Vultures and even a giant millipede as we explored the city. Once our unscheduled but enjoyable trip was finished, we went swiftly back on our scheduled journey, making our way up river once again to a new archipelago near the mouth of Rio Apuau.

We had a briefer trip in the dinghies this afternoon as darkness was soon falling. We saw some more Common Squirrel Monkeys and a brief view of some White-faced Capuchins fleeing from our boats. After seeing a beautiful Amazonian rainbow above us with the soaring vultures, the rainforest lived up to its name as the heavens opened. It was a race against time to get back to the Iracema with each of us soaked through, but we made it back with our dignity almost intact!

After dinner we headed to the dinghies once again and set off down the river in the dead of night in search of nocturnal mammals and birds with the aid of a thermal scope. We found some more nightjars, Red-nosed Rats and some impressively huge Giant Gladiator Treefrogs. The star of this particular adventure though was a very surprised Common Potoo, posing well and looking just as ridiculous as the pictures on the internet would have you believe. After enjoying the serene nocturnal scenery once more, we returned to the Iracema and to bed.

Day 6 highlights clockwise from top left: Great Black Hawk, Spangled Cotinga, Giant Gladiator Treefrog and an Amazon Kingfisher



Day 7

Saturday 6th August

In our morning excursion we once again set foot on dry land just downriver from Rio Apuau to try and see one of the Amazon's most bizarre birds; the Capuchinbird! We met up with another friendly local guide who knew exactly where the bird liked to sing from. After a brief stroll through the undergrowth we found it, all thanks to the help of the chief guides' recordings and microphone. We played the Capuchinbird's call, which sounded like a chainsaw going through a hot air balloon, into the canopy and it was soon answered by the genuine bird himself.

It flew from tree to tree for a few minutes before we managed to get a decent view of the magnificently strange creature, second only to the Hoatzin in sheer weirdness. We left the bird in peace after this to explore more of the rainforest. We came across a Musician Wren, whose song was quite the melodic contrast to the Capuchinbird's unnerving call. After some more close encounters with various insects and spiders, and a brief run in with an Agouti, we came across another fascinating bird, the Amazonian Pygmy Owl! No bigger than a tennis ball and camouflaged to blend into the brown branches, the tiny owl was extremely hard to spot in the canopy. Guides played its call on the recording equipment to entice it in closer and once we figured out exactly where the tiny bird was, the views we got were incredible, with its piercing yellow eyes looking right down our binocular lenses! After this wonderful encounter we once again returned to the Iracema I to travel to our next destination and prepare for our next outing.

As we made our way up river once again, we were accompanied by a stunning visitor; a Swallow-tailed Kite! Easily one of the most beautiful birds in the Americas, she flew with us for at least a mile, dipping in and out of the treeline as we kept pace with each other. When we did eventually anchor at the next archipelago, another locale as-yet unexplored by our guides. As we anchored up by the treeside we were welcomed by more of the shy Tucuxi dolphins. They gave us our best views of them for the whole trip, though they were still very brief as they were almost immediately chased off by the larger and bolder Pink River Dolphins! Again keen to examine a new object in their territory, it was fascinating to see the grey fins be quickly replaced by pink humps in an unseen interspecies interaction. A Yellow-headed Caracara stayed right beside the boat as we watched vultures and a distant Swallow-tailed Kite ride the thermals over the rainforest, quite possibly the same one we journeyed down with!

Once the afternoon grew cooler, we boarded our dinghies and ventured deeper into the archipelago. We heard the chainsaw cry of the Capuchin once more as we went deeper into the archipelago. We also had a view of a Black-faced Antthrush, but with it being so well camouflaged most of us still can't say for sure whether we saw it or not! We got very close views of a Brown-throated Three-toed Sloth, but this one was fast asleep. However, this one was so close we could actually make out the fabled 'sloth moths' on its fur! An entomological experience nobody asked for, but everyone enjoyed!

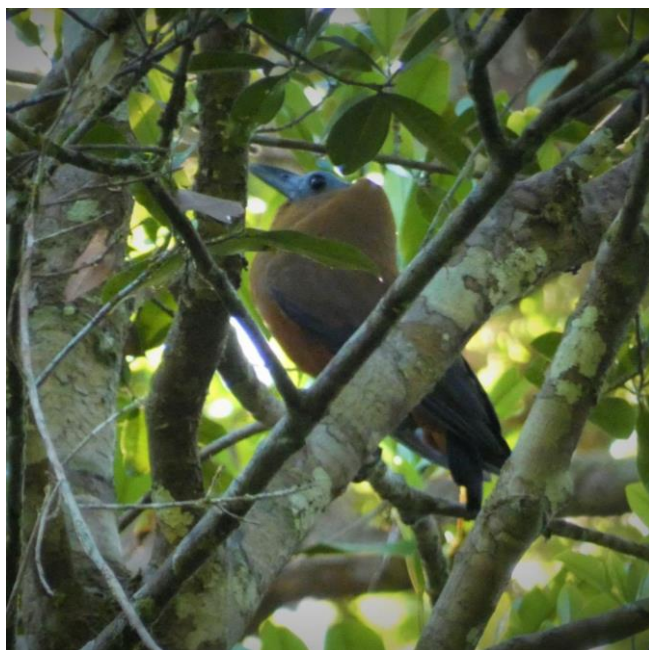
A Paradise Jacamar provided the best and most memorable views though. Just as we were wondering what these magnificent birds ate, it delighted us by snatching butterflies out of the air and then eating them on a perch just above us. The sun began to set as our adventure continued, and we had spectacular views of a few Black-necked Aracari silhouetted against the sunset as we sauntered back to the boat.

For me, this is when the entomological highlight of our trip happened. The lights of the Iracema had attracted a huge male Southern Mole Cricket! I had previously found a few dead ones that morning that had come to the lights. Sadly, they soon become overheated, dehydrated and die once onboard, so I asked the staff to kindly bring me any live ones they come across. With all the staff and other guests knowing by now how much I loved insects, a mischievous staff member thought it would be a good idea to drop one on me whilst having my dinner! It was fantastic to have such a close interaction with such a fantastic creature, and all present took it in good humour, sharing in my delight! I took him to the top deck in the hope he'd fly back to the soil of the river bank and continued my meal with the biggest smile imaginable on my face.

That night we had our final nocturnal journey, venturing deep into the archipelago. We saw more Red-nosed Rats, Smoky Jungle Frogs, sleeping dragonflies and even a sleeping Pygmy Kingfisher. Many bats swooped in and out

of our torchlight, including a Ghost Bat. However, the grand finale of this trip was a magnificent Crested Owl. This impressive bird was summoned by playing the call of a rival male, one he was only too keen to chase off from his prime territory. He afforded us excellent views as he looked down upon our dinghy with contempt. We soon left him to his patrol and went back to the Iracema preparing ourselves for a last few adventures the next morning.

Day 7 Highlights, clockwise from top left: Capuchinbird, Amazonian Pygmy Owl, Crested owl and Tucuxi Dolphin



Day 8

Sunday 7th August

Our final full day began in Rio Ariaru and it was perhaps our most spectacular, at least for myself. Greeted once again by the Slender-tailed Nightjars, that were now part of our morning routine as every sunrise, we were also joined for breakfast by a huge, green praying mantis! Like most insects she had been attracted to the lights, or perhaps the breakfast pastries. After sending her on her way, we boarded the dinghies to find a pair of Barred Antshrikes hunting insects in the river bushes beside the Iracema. The red-headed female and the zebra striped male made for impressive specimens on their own, but seeing the pair court and hunt in tandem was especially interesting.

Immediately after we left the ant-shrikes, we came across the Long-billed Woodcreeper. This bird had been built up over our adventure by our lead guide as 'The Tarantula Killer.' Apparently, one had flown right over his head with a huge adult tarantula in its beak! This one simply flew back and forth across the tributary, giving us brief but excellent views as it perched.

After that, we set off towards the main event, encountering more kingfishers and parrots as we went. We passed the skeleton of an abandoned hotel on the riverbank, apparently abandoned by developers due to it violating the building code. An eerie sight in a dense forest, and soon to be reclaimed by nature. Just past this eerie site we went down a small channel, densely packed with thick vegetation. One of the guides gave me a gentle nudge and informed me that this was the lair of the Hoatzin! It was quiet as our boat went down the channel, with only a Cowbird perched high above us being visible. It seemed like there was nothing but still water and thick rainforest on both sides - and then the guide excitedly whispered 'There's a Hoatzin!' We all spun around to see the bizarre bird finally sat out in the open. We took a few shots but it was with us for less than a minute. After it realised it had been discovered, it clumsily flew back into the thick understory of the canopy, having one last bewildered glance at us from the vegetation before it disappeared for good. We heard the rumbling squawks of several others lurking out of sight in the canopy, but no more were to be seen. A brief encounter, but one worth waiting for!

As we left the hoatzins behind, we encountered a strangely long-toed Wattled Jacana wading across the water plants and a large Crimson-crested Woodpecker. And just beyond this channel we came across what appeared to be a speciality restaurant! With interesting East-Asian-styled architecture, the building seemed somewhat out of place, but more of the intricate floating village it was a part of revealed itself as the adventure continued. The Jacana heralded our arrival into a more swampy landscape, still waters thick with green vegetation. After a short but fruitless search for Anacondas, we were rewarded with stunning views of a female Snail Kite perched right beside our dinghy. Her huge, hooked beak and piercing yellow eyes were clearly visible as she watched us sail past. Not a species I expected to encounter on this trip and a delightful surprise!

With that concluded, we headed back to the Iracema to prepare for our final Amazonian excursion. We passed through the lair of the Hoatzin once more, but the forest seemed to have fallen silent and empty under the midday sun.

After we had our lunch, we boarded the dinghies and headed towards Acajacua lake and what was one of the highlights of the trip: We were able to swim with the Pink River Dolphins! The guides introduced us to the local fisherman who had been working with the dolphins for years, and their families for generations. They themselves directed us to a shallow inlet where it was clear there were at least three dolphins already waiting for us; a large,

battle-scarred male, an adult female and an enthusiastic youngster. Whilst the dolphins certainly come for the fish, it is not so much that the dolphins become dependent on it. Many different pods visit the inlet too, so this allows the population to be monitored by ecologists as well as financing local trade through tourism.

Once we entered the water, it was clear that the dolphins loved the human attention they were receiving too! They swam in slow and close to investigate us and were happy to be petted, with the large male even cuddling up on our laps like an enormous, rubbery dog even chasing away other dolphins from his favourite human! The baby Boto was less sure of us, but very curious of our underwater cameras. The experience was incredible, affording one of the most intimate experiences with a wild cetacean one could ever wish for. With the added benefits of carrying on a generations long tradition between dolphins and man, promoting eco-tourism and the fun the dolphins are clearly getting out of it, it had to be one of the best experiences any wildlife holiday has to offer!

The next event was one based on spectacular scenery rather than wildlife, the meeting of the waters! We had spectacular views of the brown, chocolatey coloured water of the Rio Negro colliding with the pale, turbid waters of the Amazon river. This phenomenon lasts for miles before the two rivers merge into a pale brown further down the waterway. We couldn't even see the two merge from the plane on the way home!

After that grand spectacle we had our lunch and prepared to adventure deep into some swampy woodland terrain. The air was filled with vultures as we approached the swamp, hinting at the farmland and just beyond the horizon. We had very close views of an Oriole Blackbird, thousands of Yellow-Headed Blackbirds, and a beautiful view of a singing White-headed Marsh Tyrant. As we went deeper into the swamp we had a brief but spectacular view of the impressive but unfortunately named Horned Screamer. It flew out of the thicket as we approached, and posed briefly atop the trees for us afterwards before flying onwards.

We returned back to the Iracema to a sky full of bats and Blue-and-Gold Macaws. We had one last meal as a celebration rather than an evening excursion, with everyone in good spirits. The staff had prepared a fantastic meal for us and we shared stories and relived our many fantastic adventures over the last few days. We retired to our beds one last time, but it would not be our last experience.

Day 9 highlights, clockwise from top left: Hoatzin, female Snail Kite, and a baby Pink River Dolphin and the meeting of the waters



Day 10

Monday 8th August

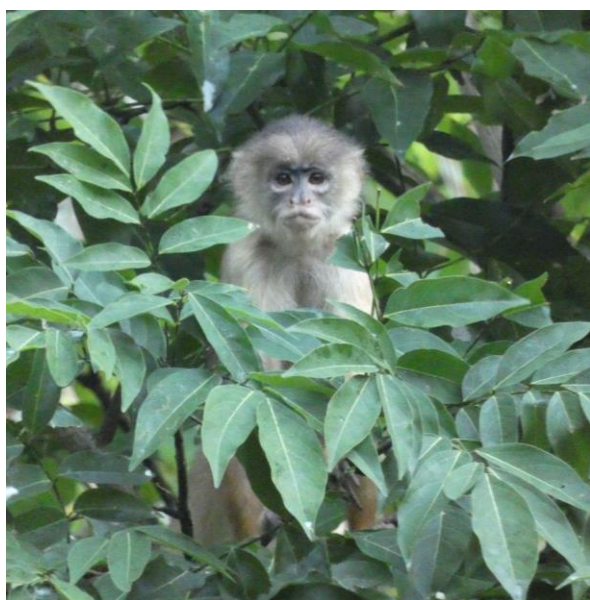
Our final morning began with another spectacular sunrise. This was made even more impressive by a Black Skimmer hunting off the back of the Iracema, silhouetted against the burning orange reflection as it skimmed the surface of the river. We embarked early in the morning for our final adventure in the Isla Carieo varsia forest, sailing beneath the canopy of the rainforest once more. The final dawn chorus of the Colombian Red Howler Monkeys was especially loud this morning, and with good reason! This was the first and only time we were able to glimpse the elusive red primates, with one sub-adult looking directly into my camera lens before disappearing out of sight high in the treetops. The White-faced Capuchins we encountered were far friendlier though, with one inquisitive youngster being very interested in our dinghies passing by, eying-up these strange, hairless monkeys without fear.

As we ventured deeper into the swamp we had the best views yet of the familiar Orange-Winged Parrots, with a beautiful pair curiously eyeing us side by side. Our guides were keen to get on our way to our next stop at Manaus at this point, but not before we stopped to admire one of the most impressive birds of our whole trip, the fabled 'Pikachu' woodpecker! With its bright yellow plumage and the male's scarlet cheeks, it's not hard to see where this charismatic Cream-Coloured Woodpecker got its nickname from - but on top of that, it put on an electrifying performance that put Pikachu to shame!

We spotted it flying under a branch and land upon a hanging ant nest. It drove it's four sharp claws into the outside of the ants nest and began breaching the walls of the insect fortress, hammering away at it with its beak in a uniquely woodpecker fashion. It used its long, barbed tongue to lap up the defenceless, and clearly delicious, ant larvae within. This dine and dash was a race against time, however. Whilst this woodpecker was eating it's fill, the ants were not going to sit idly by whilst their babies became lunch. Swiftly, they launched a coordinated assault. Scores of ants started biting and stinging at the woodpecker's legs in unison, gradually moving up her scaled legs towards her vulnerable body. Whilst she tried to peck and lick them off herself as she ate, the woodpecker was soon overwhelmed by sheer numbers. She fled to the next tree to avoid injury, preening off any remaining insect interlopers. The whole event lasted less than a minute, but was fascinating, wildlife in action at its best, and the perfect finale to our adventure!

We made our final return to the Iracema shortly after this. Sailing passing industrial complexes and ports buried within the trees as we made our way back to Manaus. It was obviously a shame to see such obvious industrial areas within the rainforest, but oddly uplifting to see that the two could indeed co-exist. Within a couple of hours, we disembarked and said goodbye to the fantastic guides and other staff onboard and once again thanked them for a magical experience. We finished our amazon adventure in style as we were driven back to the airport, passing the fine architecture of Manaus as we did.

Day 10 highlights, clockwise from top left: Black Skimmer, Colombian Red Howler Monkey, Cream-coloured 'Pikachu' Woodpecker, and a White-faced Capuchin Monkey



Sadly, once dropped off at the airport, our plane didn't take off. Once we got in touch with Naturetrek back in the UK we were settled into a nice hotel and replacement flights were booked.

Whilst a slightly disappointing end to the adventure, it was nice to know that even in a worst case scenario, help was available.

As a silver lining to this event, we got to observe geckos and Fork-tailed Flycatchers at the hotel and airport before we finally left.

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Species lists

Birds

		August 2022								
Common name	Scientific name	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Great Tinamou	<i>Tinamus major</i>					✓				
Red-legged Tinamou	<i>Crypturellus erythropus</i>						✓		✓	
Variegated Tinamou	<i>Crypturellus variegatus</i>			✓						
Neotropic Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax brasilianus</i>	✓		✓	✓		✓		✓	
Anhinga	<i>Anhinga anhinga</i>						✓			
Cocoi Heron	<i>Ardea cocoi</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>	✓			✓					
Snowy Egret	<i>Egretta thula</i>				✓					
Western Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	✓								
Capped Heron	<i>Pilherodius pileatus</i>			✓	✓					
Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>				✓					
Rufescent Tiger Heron	<i>Tigrisoma lineatum</i>				✓				✓	
Striated Heron	<i>Butorides striata</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓			✓	
Green Ibis	<i>Mesembrinibis cayennensis</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓			✓	
Wood Stork	<i>Mycteria americana</i>			✓						
Jabiru	<i>Jabiru mycteria</i>				✓					
King Vulture	<i>Sarcoramphus papa</i>			✓						
Black Vulture	<i>Coragyps atratus</i>	✓		✓		✓	✓		✓	
Turkey Vulture	<i>Cathartes aura</i>	✓				✓				
Lesser Yellow-headed Vulture	<i>Cathartes burrovianus</i>					✓			✓	
Greater Yellow-headed Vulture	<i>Cathartes melambrotus</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Black-bellied Whistling Duck	<i>Dendrocygna autumnalis</i>	✓							✓	
Muscovy Duck	<i>Cairina moschata</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Western Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>								✓	

Common name	Scientific name	August 2022								
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Crested Eagle	<i>Morphnus guianensis</i>		✓							
Black-and-white Hawk-Eagle	<i>Spizaetus melanoleucus</i>	✓								
Swallow-tailed Kite	<i>Elanoides forficatus</i>						✓			
Grey-headed Kite	<i>Leptodon cayanensis</i>				✓					
Plumbeous Kite	<i>Ictinia plumbea</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓			✓	
Bicolored Hawk	<i>Accipiter bicolor</i>						✓			
Roadside Hawk	<i>Rupornis magnirostris</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Black-collared Hawk	<i>Busarellus nigricollis</i>	✓		✓					✓	
Great Black Hawk	<i>Buteogallus urubitinga</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓			✓	
Crane Hawk	<i>Geranospiza caerulescens</i>		✓							
Laughing Falcon	<i>Herpetotheres cachinnans</i>	✓								
Black Caracara	<i>Daptrius ater</i>					✓		✓		
Yellow-headed Caracara	<i>Milvago chimachima</i>	✓		✓	✓			✓	✓	
Bat Falcon	<i>Falco rufigularis</i>		✓							
Merlin	<i>Falco columbarius</i>			✓	✓					
Nocturnal Curassow	<i>Nothocrax urumutum</i>			✓						
Hoatzin	<i>Opisthocomus hoazin</i>	✓	✓			✓		✓		
Wattled Jacana	<i>Jacana jacana</i>	✓						✓		
White-rumped Sandpiper	<i>Calidris fuscicollis</i>							✓		
Large-billed Tern	<i>Phaetusa simplex</i>	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓		
Yellow-billed Tern	<i>Sternula superciliaris</i>			✓				✓		
Black Skimmer	<i>Rynchops niger</i>			✓					✓	
Scaled Pigeon	<i>Columba speciosa</i>	✓	✓				✓			
Pale-vented Pigeon	<i>Patagioenas cayennensis</i>			✓	✓		✓			
Ruddy Pigeon	<i>Patagioenas subvinacea</i>	✓		✓	✓					
Common Ground-Dove	<i>Columbina passerina</i>					✓				
Blue-and-Gold Macaw	<i>Ara ararauna</i>			✓	✓				✓	
Scarlet Macaw	<i>Ara macao</i>	✓		✓	✓					
Red-and-Green Macaw	<i>Ara chloropterus</i>	✓					✓		✓	
Blue-headed Parrot	<i>Pionus menstruus</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Dusky Parrot	<i>Pionus fuscus</i>			✓	✓					
Red-lore Amazon	<i>Amazona autumnalis</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓		
Festive Amazon	<i>Amazona festiva</i>		✓							
Yellow-crowned Amazon	<i>Amazona ochrocephala</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓			
Squirrel Cuckoo	<i>Piaya cayana</i>	✓		✓		✓	✓		✓	
Greater Ani	<i>Crotophaga major</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Striped Cuckoo	<i>Tapera naevia</i>							✓		
Tropical Screech-Owl	<i>Otus choliba</i>						✓			
Amazonian Pygmy Owl	<i>Glaucidium hardyi</i>					✓				
Crested Owl	<i>Lophotrix cristata</i>					✓				
Spectacled Owl	<i>Pulsatrix perspicillata</i>		✓							
Common Potoo	<i>Nyctibius griseus</i>	✓				✓				
Rufous Potoo	<i>Nyctibius bracteatus</i>	✓								

Common name	Scientific name	August 2022								
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Band-tailed Nighthawk	<i>Nyctiprogne leucopyga</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Pauraque	<i>Nyctidromus albicollis</i>				✓	✓				
Grey-rumped Swift	<i>Chaetura cinereiventris</i>			✓	✓	✓				
Band-rumped Swift	<i>Chaetura spinicaudus</i>				✓	✓				
Short-tailed Swift	<i>Chaetura brachyura</i>	✓	✓			✓				
White-necked Jacobin	<i>Florisuga mellivora</i>			✓	✓					
Green-backed Trogon	<i>Trogon viridis</i>		✓		✓		✓	✓		
Blue-crowned Trogon	<i>Trogon curucui</i>		✓		✓					
Guianan Trogon	<i>Trogon violaceus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Ringed Kingfisher	<i>Ceryle torquata</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Amazon Kingfisher	<i>Chloroceryle amazona</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	
Green Kingfisher	<i>Chloroceryle americana</i>					✓			✓	
Green-and-rufous Kingfisher	<i>Chloroceryle inda</i>					✓				
American Pygmy Kingfisher	<i>Chloroceryle aenea</i>					✓		✓	✓	
Amazonian Motmot	<i>Momotus momota</i>				✓					
Yellow-billed Jacamar	<i>Galbula albirostris</i>							✓		
Bronzy Jacamar	<i>Galbula leucogastra</i>					✓		✓		
Paradise Jacamar	<i>Galbula dea</i>							✓		
Great Jacamar	<i>Jacamerops aureus</i>				✓			✓		
Pied Puffbird	<i>Notharchus tectus</i>		✓	✓	✓					
Black-fronted Nunbird	<i>Monasa nigrifrons</i>	✓	✓		✓			✓	✓	
White-fronted Nunbird	<i>Monasa morphoeus</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓			
Black Nunbird	<i>Monasa atra</i>						✓			
Chestnut-eared Aracari	<i>Pteroglossus castanotis</i>	✓								
Black-necked Aracari	<i>Pteroglossus aracari</i>							✓	✓	
White-throated Toucan	<i>Ramphastos tucanus</i>		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Spot-breasted Woodpecker	<i>Colaptes punctigula</i>						✓			✓
Yellow-throated Woodpecker	<i>Piculus flavigula</i>							✓		
Chestnut Woodpecker	<i>Celeus elegans</i>				✓					
Cream-colored Woodpecker	<i>Celeus flavus</i>									✓
Ringed Woodpecker	<i>Celeus torquatus</i>				✓					
Lineated Woodpecker	<i>Dryocopus lineatus</i>			✓		✓		✓		
Crimson-crested Woodpecker	<i>Campephilus melanoleucos</i>						✓	✓		
Long-tailed Woodcreeper	<i>Deconychura longicauda</i>	✓	✓			✓		✓		
Straight-billed Woodcreeper	<i>Xiphorhynchus picus</i>	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓		
Zimmer's Woodcreeper	<i>Xiphorhynchus kienerii</i>	✓			✓	✓				
Rusty-backed Spinetail	<i>Cranioleuca vulpina</i>	✓	✓							
Black-crested Antshrike	<i>Sakesphorus canadensis</i>		✓		✓					
White-shouldered Antshrike	<i>Thamnophilus aethiops</i>					✓				
Grey Antwren	<i>Myrmotherula menetriesii</i>		✓							
Black-chinned Antbird	<i>Hypocnemoides melanopogon</i>				✓	✓	✓	✓		
Black-faced Antthrush	<i>Formicarius analis</i>						✓			
Snethlage's Tody-Tyrant	<i>Hemitriccus minor</i>			✓						

Common name	Scientific name	August 2022								
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Zimmer's Tody-Tyrant	<i>Hemitriccus minimus</i>							✓		
Citron-bellied Attila	<i>Attila citriniventris</i>		✓							
Cinnamon Attila	<i>Attila cinnamomeus</i>				✓		✓			
Great Kiskadee	<i>Pitangus sulphuratus</i>	✓	✓					✓		
Lesser Kiskadee	<i>Philohydor lictor</i>							✓		
Social Flycatcher	<i>Myiozetetes similis</i>					✓				
Streaked Flycatcher	<i>Myiodynastes maculatus</i>		✓							
Piratic Flycatcher	<i>Legatus leucophaeus</i>		✓				✓	✓		
Tropical Kingbird	<i>Tyrannus melancholicus</i>	✓	✓			✓		✓		
Fork-tailed Flycatcher	<i>Tyrannus savana</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓		✓
Black-crowned Tityra	<i>Tityra inquisitor</i>			✓						
Varzea Schiffornis	<i>Schiffornis major</i>			✓		✓				
Thrush-like Schiffornis	<i>Schiffornis turdina</i>					✓				
Wire-tailed Manakin	<i>Pipra filicauda</i>		✓				✓			
Spangled Cotinga	<i>Cotinga cayana</i>						✓			
Screaming Piha	<i>Lipaugus vociferans</i>	✓								
Bare-necked Fruitcrow	<i>Gymnoderus foetidus</i>	✓				✓	✓			
Capuchinbird	<i>Perissocephalus tricolor</i>					✓	✓	✓		
Black-necked Red-Cotinga	<i>Phoenicircus nigricollis</i>	✓		✓				✓		
Brown-chested Martin	<i>Progne tapera</i>	✓				✓				
Gray-breasted Martin	<i>Progne chalybea</i>					✓		✓		
White-winged Swallow	<i>Tachycineta albiventer</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓					
Buff-breasted Wren	<i>Cantorchilus leucotis</i>		✓							
Wing-banded Wren	<i>Microcerculus bambla</i>						✓			
Guianan Gnatcatcher	<i>Poliophtila guianensis</i>					✓				
White-necked Thrush	<i>Turdus albicollis</i>			✓						
Cocoa Thrush	<i>Turdus fumigatus</i>					✓	✓			
Silver-beaked Tanager	<i>Ramphocelus carbo</i>	✓								
Blue-gray Tanager	<i>Thraupis episcopus</i>					✓		✓		
Palm Tanager	<i>Thraupis palmarum</i>			✓						
White-vented Euphonia	<i>Euphonia minuta</i>					✓				
Turquoise Tanager	<i>Tangara mexicana</i>	✓	✓							
Yellow-bellied Dacnis	<i>Dacnis flaviventer</i>					✓				
Green Honeycreeper	<i>Chlorophanes spiza</i>						✓			
Bananaquit	<i>Coereba flaveola</i>					✓	✓		✓	
Red-breasted Blackbird	<i>Sturnella militaris</i>		✓					✓		
Velvet-fronted Grackle	<i>Lamprosar tanagrinus</i>							✓		
Giant Cowbird	<i>Molothrus oryzivorus</i>		✓							
Red-rumped Cacique	<i>Cacicus haemorrhous</i>									
Yellow-rumped Cacique	<i>Cacicus cela</i>			✓	✓			✓		
Crested Oropendola	<i>Psarocolius decumanus</i>							✓		
Olive Oropendola	<i>Psarocolius bifasciatus</i>				✓	✓				
Russet-backed Oropendola	<i>Psarocolius angustifrons</i>							✓		

Common name	Scientific name	August 2022								
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Buff-throated Saltator	<i>Saltator maximus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓		
Orange-fronted Yellow Finch	<i>Sicalis columbiana</i>							✓		

Others

		August 2022								
Common name	Scientific name	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Mammals										
Red Howler Monkey	<i>Alouatta seniculus</i>							✓		
White-fronted Capuchin Monkey	<i>Cebus albifrons</i>				✓	✓		✓		
Golden-backed Uakari	<i>Cacajao melanocephalus</i>				✓					
Squirrel Monkey	<i>Saimiri sciureus</i>	✓			✓	✓				
Greater Fishing Bat	<i>Noctilio leporinus</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
Pink River Dolphin	<i>Inia geoffrensis</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Tucuxi (Grey River Dolphin)	<i>Sotalia fluviatilis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Three-toed Sloth	<i>Bradypus variegatus</i>	✓					✓			✓
Red-nosed Tree-rat	<i>Phyllomys brasiliensis</i>					✓	✓			
Reptiles & Amphibians										
Green Jungle Runner	<i>Ameiva ameiva</i>	✓								
Amazon Thornytail Iguana	<i>Uracentron flaviceps</i>		✓							
House Gecko	<i>Hemidactylus mabouia</i>									✓
Spectacled Caiman	<i>Caiman crocodilus</i>	✓								
Giant Toad	<i>Bufo marinus</i>		✓							
Smoky Jungle Frog	<i>Leptodactylus pentadactylus</i>						✓			
Giant Gladiator Tree Frog	<i>Hypsiboas boans</i>					✓				