

## Ornifolks in Carajás: September 2006

*Photo by Will Price*



One question that tour guides are frequently asked is: how do you guys keep up the enthusiasm to keep going back to the same places? One retort that readily springs to mind is, if you return again and again to a place like Carajás,

about what can one complain? Lying between the Xingu and the Tocantins rivers, the Serra dos Carajás sports the largest open-cast mines in the world *and* one of the richest avian biodiversities on the planet, 575 species and counting (our latest trip yielded not one, not two, but seven species new to that list). Add comfortable accommodations, decent (and plentiful, as always in Brazil) food and good roads into the mix, and you have the perfect recipe for a great tour that bears repeating.

In picking over the many highlights, let's get a couple of the disappointments out of the way; first, the Harpy Eagle nest I found back in December 2005 had been abandoned a couple of months before our arrival, and, secondly, a Crested Eagle in the same area of forest remained, frustratingly, a heard-only. The 'frustration' list also numbered two encounters with Peruvian

Recurvebill, neither of which offered a perfect look, or to all. Compensations were, however, multifarious. Black-chested Tyrant, of which we had perfect views of a pair on our first morning in the field, did not even feature in most participants' top five birds of the trip! Families that rarely disappoint at Carajás are woodcreepers and antbirds. We logged an incredible 16 species of Dendrocolaptidae and a summed total of 35 Formicariidae and Thamnophilidae. Amongst the latter, the Banded Antbird that came in for the stunning looks we craved, after one false start; several encounters with Sclater's Antwren (not only a new bird for the region and a neat range extension, but also apparently a vocally quite different population; they also vary across the Madeira); and that simply 'pumping' Amazonian Antpitta (we could see the blood vessels in its neck expanding and contracting as it sang), were some of the principal highlights.

Then there was the Amazonian Pygmy-owl that came bounding into the tape, only to be mobbed by a Dot-eared Coquette; a couple of a really neat sightings of Yellow-shouldered Grosbeak; a surprise Xenopsaris (one of two new species for Carajás found in the space of minutes, and another range extension); a Russet-crowned Crake atop a bush in the *cerrado* on the same morning (unfortunately only Hemme and I got to savour that one); great looks at a group of White-crested Guans parading on the road at dusk; so many perfect sightings of Bare-faced Curassow that we were *almost* sick of them (really!); a couple of missile-like views of the recently described (but proven widespread) Cryptic Forest-falcon; several scope views of the rare and endemic Pearly Parakeet; five species of jacamars and eight puffbirds, including Rufous-capped Nunlet and a couple of brief sightings of the rare Rufous-necked Puffbird; lots of ace woodpeckers including four species of *Celeus*; three different day-roosting Great Potoos (always a crowd-pleaser); that surprise Slate-headed Tody-flycatcher whilst we were lunching on our last full day; a very tape-responsive Black-and-white Tody-tyrant; a couple of nice looks at the generally rare, but seemingly easy here, Blackish Pewee (hey, I'm still trying to convince you guys that tyrant-flycatchers are coooool!); several magical male Opal-crowned Manakins; stacks of cotingas; a Point-tailed Palmcreeper that, at first, held out on us then did its 'thang'; and, finally, as we had to work so hard for it (compared to usual), that Black-bellied Gnateater that eventually played for us so nicely, after seemingly

innumerable heard-only and non-tape-responsive individuals.

I mustn't forget the mammals either (at least 13 species), and those of you fortunate enough to see the Puma that was on the road in front of us one morning as we rounded a tight corner will certainly not! But there were also two superlative daytime encounters with Brazilian Tapir and those 15 minutes spent up-close and personal with the Southern Tamandua remained one of the trip highlights for me; I just love that animal!

Out of diversity springs success, I try and remember to convince myself. Due to an airline error, we had an unscheduled day in Rio during which we visited Tijuca and Serra dos Órgãos national parks, took our total species list for the trip well over the 400 mark, and saw a bunch of neat Atlantic Forest endemics and significant others, from the rare and diminutive Unicoloured Antwren to the gigantic show-off Giant Antshrike.

Dates for the 2007 Carajás trip are listed in the calendar elsewhere in this newsletter, and on the website. The price has been raised slightly, due to rising airline fuel and ground costs, but still represents great value at US\$2,350 (Rio/Rio). Early booking is strongly advised, as the tour will be limited to a maximum of six participants. Contact me at [GMKirwan@aol.com](mailto:GMKirwan@aol.com).

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