

Audubon International Alliances Program



Monk Parakeets. Photo by John Sterling.

Paraguay

Suggested Itinerary

Birding Paraguay

Paraguay is an incredible and undiscovered birding destination, particularly for the birder with a pioneering spirit, interested in adventure. This is the one place in South America where we may find large wild mammals including Jaguar, Lowland Tapir, Capybara and a variety of other mammals along with many birds. This is the country where you can sense the adventure of unexplored, unspoiled and remote wild sites, where you will venture to areas that few outsiders have seen, where living native culture thrives, and where some superb birding adventures await. Anyone interested in South American birds needs to come to the heart and center of the bird continent to appreciate the diversity and evolutionary history of South American birds. Here is a confluence of eco-regions: the Chaco in the west, the Atlantic Forest in the east, as well as influence of the Pantanal in the north, Cerrado of Brazil, and Mesopotamia of Argentina. The separation of the Atlantic Forest from Amazonia by



Lagunas Saladas. Photo by Tetsu Espósito.

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Saffron-cowled Blackbird. Photo by Alvaro Jaramillo.

find species and the chance to see **a wide assortment of mammals**, it is surprising that Paraguay has been flying under the radar for so long. The Paraguayan people are warm and friendly, welcoming and excited to see visitors. Traditional cultures and the Guarani language survive, melding with the colonial Spanish history. We will have an adventurer's spirit of pioneering and likely contribute to the birding knowledge base in a land that has not been birded much. Be among the first to discover this wonderful, diverse, and memorable country!

Our adventure begins in the capital city of Asunción on the shores of the Paraguay River. The river divides the country into ecologically distinct regions. To the west is the Humid Chaco and farther west, the Dry Chaco. To the east is the Atlantic Forest, and to the northeast is the Cerrado habitat where the **rare and endangered White-winged Nightjar** is found. Grasslands and wetlands of the east are influenced by the Mesopotamian or Pampas regions from farther south in Argentina where the **various “Capuchino” seedeaters** breed, as well as the **rare Saffron-cowled Blackbird** and the gorgeous **Cock-tailed and Strange-tailed tyrants**. We will visit both east and west, starting to the east, returning to Asunción before continuing west to the Chaco. This itinerary is a comprehensive birding survey of this fascinating nation*. The profound uniqueness of Paraguay is masked by the fact that it only has one endemic bird species. However it has a large number of regional endemics and specialties including the spectacular **Helmeted Woodpecker, Bare-throated Bellbird,**

the swath of Chaco and Cerrado savanna, woodlands, and grasslands is important as it explains much about the evolutionary history of the birds in South America. The mix of habitats holds a large number of species, with some unique and memorable regional specialties!

Paraguay is the most under-birded country in South America. Yet with **a list of over 700 species, including some extremely hard to**

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Saffron Toucanet, Black-bodied Woodpecker, Quebracho-crested Tinamou, White-winged Nightjar, and Black-legged Seriema, to name a few.

Unlike most nations in South America, we have a great possibility of seeing interesting and charismatic mammals including **Jaguar, Puma, and Maned Wolf**. There are various species of locally endemic armadillos, and oddities such as the **Plains Viscacha, and Chaco Mara** as well as **three species of peccary, brocket deer, and several types of monkey**.

This itinerary incorporates something special, and that is the opportunity to make you a partner in helping international conservation. **The National Audubon Society and Guyra Paraguay**, have teamed up to train local people in several parts of the country to become birding and nature guides. In addition to our primary guide, we will have their guiding help throughout this trip, and in turn are helping them make a living while protecting a healthy and diverse ecosystem. Birders who choose to visit these areas in order to see and enjoy Paraguay's natural riches will have a direct economic impact on the local people resulting in preservation of local habitats that maintain a healthy, viable ecotourism industry. Paraguay includes some very threatened habitats, including the Chaco, which is being converted at a frenetic pace into cattle farms. Deforestation rates are amongst the highest in the world. Furthermore, the Atlantic Forest in the east of the country is an imperiled hotspot of biodiversity, with recent estimates of only 7% of the original extent of this habitat remaining. The project sites incorporated in this itinerary are helping to shift the attention to the beneficial economy of preservation of these habitats for local employment and wellbeing through bird based tourism.



Sooty Tyrannulet. Photo by John Sterling.

*Paraguay also boasts a UNESCO World Heritage site at a group of Jesuit Mission ruins and is accessible to one of Argentina's UNESCO World Heritage sites, the impressive Iguazu Falls. This itinerary is bird-centric, but if you want to include these other

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Maguari Stork. Photo by John Sterling.

ca, it is not merely a place to break up a trip, but an amazing birding spot. **A highlight is the Strange-tailed Tyrant.** Some other great birds of this area include the **Crested Doradito, Yellow-rumped Marshbird, White-headed Marsh-Tyrant, Maguari Stork, as well as herons, egrets, and ibises.** It is a good area to find open country raptors, as well as the apple snail specialists—the **Snail Kite and Limpkin.**

Laguna Blanca

This birding spot has gained international prominence in the last few years as it is perhaps the best place in the world to see the endangered **White-winged Nightjar.** This is also the only site we will visit that is in the Cerrado eco-region. This habitat type is otherwise restricted to Brazil and a tiny part of Bolivia and has many specialties. The Cerrado is a patchwork habitat of savannah, where grassland and woodland mingle. Cerrado specialties include the **Curl-crested Jay, Black-throated Salta-**

elements, please inquire with your tour operator.

The Birding Sites We Visit

Asunción

On the Paraguay River, this is the major city and political center of the country. If time permits, we will visit the grasslands and wetlands of the Bahía de Asunción.

Arroyos y Esteros

This is a wetland and grassland area east of Asunción. On the way to Laguna Blanca, it is not merely a place to break up a trip, but an amazing birding spot. A highlight is the Strange-tailed Tyrant. Some other great birds of this area include the Crested Doradito, Yellow-rumped Marshbird, White-headed Marsh-Tyrant, Maguari Stork, as well as herons, egrets, and ibises. It is a good area to find open country raptors, as well as the apple snail specialists—the Snail Kite and Limpkin.

Guyra

The **Asociación Guyra Paraguay** is a private non-profit organization that works towards defending and protecting the biodiversity of Paraguay and organizing actions to safeguard Paraguay's natural wealth for future generations. The participation of local communities and individuals is one of the most important tools for conservation work. Guyra works in partnership with a number of local and international organizations.



Red-legged Seriema. Photo by Alvaro Jaramillo.

tor and the Lesser Nothura, which is threatened and a near endemic to Brazil. Other specialties of the site are the **White-rumped Monjita**, **White-rumped Tanager** and the **White-banded Tanager** (a tanager that looks like a shrike). While night birding, we may come across **Rufous and Little nightjars**, the fantastic **Scissor-tailed Nightjar**, **Tropical Screech-Owl** and **Common Potoo**. At night, **Crab-eating Fox** is possible, and maybe even the amazing **Maned Wolf**, as well as **armadillos** and **Collared Peccary**. The moist grasslands could provide a diversity of **seedeaters**, including the rare **Chestnut, Marsh, Dark-throated and Plumbeous**. Also in this area we may find some other stunning birds such as **Sharp-tailed Grass-Tyrant**, **Bearded Tachuri** and **Black-masked Finch**.

Mbaracayú Forest Nature Reserve

This reserve protects high quality Atlantic Forest and is a desirable destination for birders visiting Paraguay. With **over 400 species**, the rich forest is pristine enough to provide habitat for **Jaguar** and **Tapir**, although rarely seen. Special birds of this area include **Black-fronted Piping-guan**, **Helmeted Woodpecker** and the spectacular sounding **Bare-throated Bellbird**. Also here is the **Saffron Toucanet**, known as the 'flying banana', as is its darker plumaged relative the **Spot-billed Toucanet**. Restricted to this part of the world are other large and colorful species including **Red-breasted Toucan**, **Purplish Jay**, **Rufous-capped Motmot**, **Surucua Tropicbird**, **Yellow-fronted Woodpecker**, and a host of parrots and tanagers. The drab but always interesting **flycatchers**



Greater Rhea. Photo by Alvaro Jaramillo.



Guira Cuckoo. Photo by John Sterling.

and even some rarer species such as **Ocellated Poorwill**, **Black-banded Owl** and **the Silky-tailed Nightjar**.

San Rafael Area

This region in the southeast of the country includes both moist grasslands as well as the largest piece of forest in the country. It is the most biologically diverse location in Paraguay. Forest species found here are those of the Atlantic Forest, but with some differences from the more northern Mbaracayú Reserve. Perhaps we will hear, or even see, the **Brown Tinamou**. There are **Three-striped Flycatchers** here, the oddball and attractive **White Woodpecker**, as well as the **Spot-backed and Tufted Antshrikes**. The **Plovercrest**, a hummingbird with a crest like a lapwing, can be seen here. The San Rafael forest includes areas of *Chusquea* bamboo with species of birds restricted to this habitat including **Dusky-tailed Antbird**, **Blackish-blue Seedeater**, **Yellow Tyrannulet**, **Rufous-capped and**

are represented by some unusual ones, such as **the rare Russet-winged Spadebill**. The **Sharpbill**, a species that at one time was the only species in its family, is also found here. The list is rounded out with **Black-capped Foliage-Gleaners**, **Chestnut-bellied Euphonia**, **Rufous-crowned Greenlet**, a variety of **hummingbirds**, **Buff-bellied Puffbird**, **Rusty-breasted Nunlet** and the garulous **Red-rumped Cacique** to name a few. Night birding opportunities are available, with **Black-capped Screech-Owl**,



Red-crested Cardinal. Photo by John Sterling.

Gray-bellied spinetails, as well as the **Chestnut-headed Tanager**. There is a diversity of **woodpeckers and woodcreepers** in this forest, including **Robust and Blond-crested woodpeckers and Planalto, White-throated and Scaled woodcreepers**. There are canopy forest flocks with **euphonias, tanagers, and Blue Dacnis**, as well as the **Creamy-bellied Gnatcatcher** and the unusual **Wing-barred Piprites**. There are bird communities in the forest undergrowth such as the auspicious sounding **Drab-breasted Bamboo-Tyrant, Large-tailed Antshrike, White-eyed Foliage-Gleaner**, and the beautiful sounding **White-browed Warbler**.

Grassland birding includes some of the **Capuchino seedeaters** we may not have found elsewhere, such as the **Capped Seedeater**. Several unusual **flycatchers** are found here, such as the amazing **Cock-tailed Tyrant and Bearded Tachuri**. The rare and brilliant **Saffron-cowled Blackbird** also inhabits these grasslands. The **Red-winged Tinamou** is much easier to see than the forest tinamous. With luck and perseverance, a night trip may provide sightings of the **Giant Snipe or Rusty-barred Owl**.

The Chaco

Although shared with all of its neighbors, the Chaco is most associated with Paraguay and covers a huge area in the western half of the country. It is a hot and harsh environment in summer (October-March), yet much cooler in winter (June-August); the rainy season is October and November. Chaco woodland is not necessarily tall and is dry and often deciduous. There are open grasslands and ephemeral wetlands. This is an area that is fascinating for wildlife but is increasingly being converted to agriculture. Sustainable tourism could have a real impact in its conservation. In contrast to the drier western Chaco, the eastern portion of the Chaco, closest to Asunción,



Southern Screamer. Photo by John Sterling.



Tropical Parula. Photo by Alvaro Jamarillo.

is moister and known as the Humid Chaco, where Palm Savanna is common. There are many specialty birds of the Chaco including the **Quebracho-crested Tinamou**, **Black-legged Seriema**, **Spot-winged Falconet**, **Black-bodied Woodpecker**, **Chaco Owl**, and **Crested Gallito**. With some luck and local knowledge, a visit to this area al-

lows one to see **nearly 200 species of birds**. Mammals include some oddities such as the **Plain Viscacha** and the **Chaco Mara**.

The Humid Chaco is quite good for **water birds** including **Roseate Spoonbills**, **Jabiru** and **waterfowl** as well as **open country and wetland raptors** such as **Savannah Hawk**, **Black-collared Hawk** and **Great Black-Hawk**. The huge **Giant Wood-Rail** may make an appearance. Water is at a premium in the Dry Chaco, but there are a few saline lakes where **waterfowl** and sometime **Chilean Flamingos** can be found. The dry forests here have an interesting assortment of birds, including some of the most spectacular **woodcreepers** including **Red-billed Scythebill**, **Great Rufous Woodcreeper (which is huge)**, and the ground loving **Scimitar-billed Woodcreeper**. Restricted to this region are the **Stripe-backed Antbird** and **Chaco Earthcreeper**. The local form of the **Golden-green Woodpecker** is a real beauty, along with the cactus loving **White-fronted Woodpecker**. The **Many-colored Chaco-Finch** and **Orange-backed Troupial** provide a good dose of color. **Chaco Chachalaca** and **Crested Horneros** are not rare, but restricted to the Chaco as is the “**Chaco**” **Nothura**, a form that is of dubious taxonomic status, but is currently considered as Paraguay’s only endemic species. **Lark-like Brushrunners** look like a species that you should see in Africa rather than South America. **Black-crested Finches** walk like little quails in openings near grass, and at any time, the massive **Crowned Eagle** could make

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Campo Flicker. Photo by John Sterling.

an appearance. This rare and awe-inspiring raptor is widespread in the Chaco. During a night drive, we have a decent chance to see the **Lowland Tapir**, **Greater Hairy Armadillo**, and even three species of peccary including the legendary **Chaco Peccary**, a species only known from the fossil record until rediscovered in recent times.

Itinerary for Paraguay

Day 1 – ARRIVAL IN ASUNCIÓN.

Please book flights to arrive into Asunción during this day. If time allows we will visit the wetlands

and shores of the Bahia Asunción. Overnight in Asunción.

Day 2 – ARROYOS Y ESTEROS BIRDING. ON TO LAGUNA BLANCA. Before lunch we will bird the Arroyos y Esteros area, hoping for many waterbirds but also some rare and unusual flycatchers. The target bird is the **Strange-tailed Tyrant**. We will continue to Laguna Blanca after lunch. If time permits, **afternoon birding is possible at Laguna Blanca**, and we certainly will try for our first shot at the **White-winged Nightjar**. Overnight in Laguna Blanca.

Day 3 – RESERVA NATURAL LAGUNA BLANCA. We have an entire day to devote to the Cerrado habitat, **lake shores of Laguna Blanca**, and of course another round of **night birding** particularly if we have not yet found the White-winged Nightjar. Overnight in Laguna Blanca.

Day 4 – TO MBARA-CAYÚ RESERVE. We will drive during the morning, starting out early in order to maximize our time at



Brazilian Ducks. Photo by Alvaro Jaramillo.

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Fork-tailed Flycatcher. Photo by Alvaro Jaramillo.

the Mbaracayú Reserve. Overnight in Mbaracayú Reserve.

Day 5 – MBARACAYÚ RESERVE. All day birding at the reserve. Overnight in Mbaracayú Reserve.

Day 6 – MBARACAYÚ RESERVE. All day birding at the reserve. Overnight in Mbaracayú Reserve.

Day 7 – DRIVE TO SAN RAFAEL AREA. The drive to San Rafael will take all day. We will leave early and have lunch on the road. If at all possible, we will **look for birds once we arrive in the afternoon.** Overnight in San Rafael.

Day 8 – ESTANCIA NUEVA GAMBACH; PARQUE NACIONAL SAN RAFAEL. Birding in the forests and grasslands of San Rafael. Overnight in San Rafael.

Day 9 – ESTANCIA KANGUARY GRASSLANDS. We will concentrate on grassland birding today, hoping for **Cock-tailed Tyrant** and **Saffron-cowled Blackbirds** as well as **Giant Snipe after dark.** Overnight in San Rafael.

Day 10 – ESTANCIA NUEVA GAMBACH, RETURN TO ASUNCIÓN. After some **morning birding**, depending on what species we have yet to see, we will depart for Asunción. Overnight in Asunción.

Day 11 – HUMID CHACO. We will cross the Paraguay River and begin our drive west towards the region of Filadelfia. Known for its history as a settlement of Russian Mennonites fleeing the Soviet Union in the 1930s, this is also the gateway to the Gran Chaco. **We will bird our way through the humid Chaco** on our way to the west. Overnight in Loma Plata.

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Day 12 – LAGUNA CAPITAN: CAMPO MARIA PRIVATE RESERVE. Our **birding of the Dry Chaco begins** today. We will visit some saline lakes as well as Chaco woodlands and will make sure to try some **mammal watching at night**. Overnight in Loma Plata.

Day 13 – FORTIN TOLEDO, PARQUE NACIONAL TENIENTE ENCISO. We will have some time to **bird and visit a breeding facility for the Chaco Peccary** today in the morning. Later on, if we have not found most of our Chaco specialties by now, Parque Nacional Teniente Enciso will hopefully make up the difference as **this is a key place for the rarer Chaco birds**. Overnight in PN Teniente Enciso.

Day 14 – PARQUE NACIONAL TENIENTE ENCISO. A final **full day of birding the dry Chaco**. Overnight in PN Teniente Enciso.

Conditions

Paraguay is a relatively flat, low-elevation country. **We will not take strenuous hikes.** The environmental considerations for the birder are that **the east is humid, and the west can be very hot but relatively dry** in the middle of the day. Due to its incipient level of ecotourism and birding tourism, **there are few luxury lodges in Paraguay; however, conditions are continually improving**. One has to be prepared for the fact that **foreign tourists are still a novelty and as such accommodations are simple**. In the Chaco and San Rafael area, accommodations are dorm style such that sharing a bathroom will be necessary. There may not always be hot water for showers. In general, **a certain adventurer's spirit is necessary to enjoy one of the last unexplored corners of South America**. Bottled water will be available throughout, and **expect meals to be home cooked and relatively mild rather than spicy**. Beef and, to a lesser extent, chicken are staples as are various types of corn "pies" and dishes made with yuca. Close to the rivers, wild fish is a staple. In the countryside, beef barbecue (asado) is common—similar to Argentina and Uruguay. Yerba Mate "tea" is a staple, and in Paraguay they create a different version with cold water called Terere.

One should be prepared for early morning birding, as it is important to be out before it becomes too hot. Whenever possible, we shall have **an early afternoon break**, before continuing out in the late afternoon. Also for those interested in mammals and night birds there will be **ample opportunities for night birding and spotlighting**. In many cases, these will be optional. **There are several travel days** on this itinerary including **some days when we will drive for many hours** to get to our next hotel. Of course **we will break up travel with birding and lunch**. It is a large country, so that in order to see all corners we need to spend some time on the road. **Some areas have unpaved roads**, which vary greatly in quality and condition depending on the time of the year.

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Great Pampa Finch. Photo by John Sterling.



Day 15 – PN TENIENTE ENCISO, RETURN TO LOMA PLATA. Today will be the start of our journey back towards Asunción. The road is slow and does not allow us to do it all in one day, so we will stop in Loma Plata overnight. This gives us a chance to move at a more leisurely pace and hopefully find **the last of the Chaco specialties**. Overnight in Loma Plata.

Day 16 – RETURN TO ASUNCIÓN. As yesterday, we have a day to make our way back towards the east, and we will make sure to **stop and enjoy some birding and scenery** as we head to Asunción for our final dinner together. Overnight in Asunción.

Day 17 – RETURN TO NORTH AMERICA. You may leave for home any time today as your schedule allows.