

WildWings Limosa

BRAZIL: REMOTE AMAZON

Trip Report 2022



Pied Tamarin is highly localised and critically endangered © Chris Collins

BRAZIL: REMOTE AMAZON BIRDS AND WILDLIFE CRUISE

31 August – 17 September 2022

Leaders: Chris Collins and Regina Ribeiro

Text by Chris Collins with assistance from Regina Ribeiro

Introduction

This was the first “Remote Amazon” birds and wildlife cruise which Chris Collins and Regina Ribeiro had led since the pandemic and the tour was a great success with a spectacular range of wildlife being seen. We spent much of the trip exploring along the Rio Negro and some of its tributaries, such as the pristine Jaú River, but also had a day on the Rio Solimoes and visited the ‘meeting of the waters’ where the black water Negro and white water Solimoes join to form the mighty Amazon River.

For almost our entire holiday, we enjoyed passing mile-after-mile of pristine rainforest and our trip truly was ‘remote’, as it was over a week before we heard the news of the death of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

On a trip such as this, everyone inevitably has their own highlights but the special experiences we shared included the opportunity to get in the water with wild Amazon River (or Pink) Dolphins, finding a great selection of monkeys on our daytime excursions and some interesting species on our night canoe rides, seeing Capuchinbird on two occasions during the cruise and visiting a lek of Guianan Cock-of-the-Rock for those who joined Chris and Regina on the pre-cruise extension.

Inevitably birds were the most recorded group with a great range of species being seen including Hoatzin, Spectacled Owl, Agami Heron, Sunbittern, Sungrebe, Tawny-tufted Toucanet, Blue-and-yellow Macaw, Bronzy Jacamar, Wire-tailed Manakin and Capuchinbird. We also spent a percentage of our time looking for some of the more range restricted species which can be found in this region and those found included Cherrie’s and Klages’s Antwrens.

The trip was, however, not just about birds and we also made a special effort to look for mammals with thirteen species of monkeys being seen, as well as Southern Tamandua, Brazilian Porcupine, Giant River Otter and a range of forest rats and related species. Arguably the primate highlight was the reasonably localised Spix’s Black-headed Uacari but other species seen included Spix’s Night Monkey, Guianan Bearded Saki, Humboldt’s and Guianan Squirrel Monkeys, Pied Tamarin and Brown Capuchin.

As well as the aforementioned Amazon River Dolphins, we also saw Tucuxi on a more or less daily basis. Our reptile tally included three species of caimans, Black, Spectacled and the much more rarely seen Schneider's Smooth-fronted (Dwarf) Caiman, as well as a selection of lizards and frogs.

It was definitely an extremely memorable trip and this introduction must also pay tribute to our fantastic crew who were led by the brilliant 'Junior'. He not only knew the areas we visited intimately but also had a seemingly unquenchable desire to share his knowledge of this remote region with us.

The following text lists the species we encountered and will hopefully bring back many happy memories for those who joined us.

Chris Collins and Regina Ribeiro

September 2022

Itinerary including pre-cruise extension

31 August 2022

Arrive Manaus.

1-2 September 2018

Pre-tour extension to lodge near Presidente Figuerdo for Guianan Cock-of-the-Rock lek.

3 September 2018

Return to Manaus. Meet up with the rest of the group. Explore forest patch near our riverside hotel.

4 September 2018

Morning: Musa Tower and forest patch near hotel.

Lunchtime: Board *Iracema*

Afternoon and Evening: Xiboraninha, Rio Solimoes

5 September 2018

Morning: Anra, Rio Solimoes

Afternoon: Janauacá, Rio Solimoes

6 September 2018

Morning: Ariaú and 'Dolphin Swim' near mouth of Acajatuba River on Rio Negro

Afternoon: cruising in the Anavilhanas archipelago

7 September 2018

Morning: Tres Bocas in Anavilhanas archipelago

Afternoon: brief stop in Novo Airão. Cruising upstream on Rio Negro

8 September 2018

Morning: Jaú National Park HQ/entrance and Igarapé Preto, Jaú National Park

Afternoon: Nazare, Jaú National Park

9 September 2018

Morning: Nazare followed by cruising upstream on the Jaú River, Jaú National Park

Afternoon: Cachoeira, Jaú National Park

10 September 2018

Morning: Miratucu and cruising upstream on the Jaú River, Jaú National Park

Afternoon: Manapana, Jaú National Park

11 September 2018

Morning: Manapana and cruising downstream on the Jaú River, Jaú National Park

Afternoon: Igarape do Boto, Jaú National Park

12 September 2018

Morning: Smugglers' Channel, Jaú National Park. Depart Jaú National Park with stop at petroglyphs near entrance

Afternoon: Meduini, Rio Negro

13 September 2018

Morning: Cruising channels near Remanso village, Rio Negro

Afternoon: Agua Boa, Rio Negro

14 September 2018

Morning: Meduini, Rio Negro

Afternoon: Baependi, Rio Negro

15 September 2018

Morning: Camaleaó Island, Anavilhanas archipelago, Rio Negro

Afternoon: Novo Airão

16 September 2018

Morning: Igarapé Paje, Ariau River

Afternoon: Pagodão, Rio Negro

17 September 2018

Morning: 'Meeting of the Waters' and disembark in Manaus

Daily Diary

1 September 2022

Having met up the previous day at our comfortable hotel in Manaus which was located immediately adjacent to the mighty Rio Negro, those joining Chris and Regina on the extension set off shortly after 07:00am for Presidente Figueiredo. Whilst our main goal of the next couple of days was to hopefully see Guianan Cock-of-the-Rock, there were plenty of other species to look for and our local expert, Moacir "Junior", initially took us to a forested road that was barely five minutes from the hotel.

The objective here was to look for the critically endangered and highly localised Pied Tamarin, a small monkey with a very small world range and we had barely got out of the bus when some were heard calling. Although a handful of the group had the briefest of views, the troupe soon disappeared into the forest but another party were then heard and we were soon enjoying some nice, albeit slightly, distant views of these small primates with their bald black heads and smart tan and white fur.

With a passing local mentioning that there was a party of saki monkeys a little further along the road, we soon moved on for some fantastic views of this species as well. These monkeys were considerably larger than the tamarins, with thick black coats, long fluffy tails and the lead male had an impressive golden face.

It had been an amazing start and Chris and Junior then 'road shotgun' in the back of Junior's wife's pickup truck in the hope of finding some more wildlife. The strategy worked perfectly as a matter of minutes later another small group of Pied Tamarins were found and these showed exceptionally well for a couple of minutes before disappearing into the forest.

With the temperature still relatively cool, we decided to continue the strategy with Junior and Chris spotting from the pickup and five minutes later, everyone was once again out of the bus for some great scope views of three Scarlet Macaws. These were sat high in a large tree and were quietly feeding and mutual preening.

When the macaws flew off (and to our surprising there were four rather than three!!), we decided it was time for us too to depart. We soon left Manaus behind us and there was often forest on either side of the road as we headed north for Presidente Figueiredo.

Junior had conducted a short recce a couple of weeks before and at 10:30 we arrived at a spot where he had found a Point-tailed Palmcreeper. He explained that this species is highly localised only occurring in Moriche palms and a few minutes after playing a recording, the bird arrived. It had clearly been having a wash as it was extremely wet and bedraggled but it soon dried off and we had some nice views of this speciality.

It took a further hour to reach our destination, a modest little lodge sitting on a knoll surrounded by forest not far from Presidente Figueiredo and having settled into our rooms, we headed to the open-air restaurant for a tasty lunch. Here, Chris explained that to minimise disturbance at the lek, we would visit in two small parties with each group limited to a maximum of forty minutes.

The first group set off shortly after lunch, with the second following 45 minutes later and the experience was truly incredible. There were at least eight stunning males almost permanently on view and these glowed an iridescent orange in the forest. Most of the time, the birds sat quietly but occasionally they would change position or drop onto the ground to display becoming decidedly excited when a female appeared.



Guianan Cock-of-the-Rock © Chris Collins

With some of them coming within a matter of metres of us, the photographic opportunities were brilliant, and time truly flew by as we marvelled at what is surely one of the most amazing birds on the planet.

Returning to the lodge, there was then the option to explore the clearing and a nice selection of species was seen during the last couple of hours of daylight including Swallow-winged Puffbird, Yellow-tufted Woodpecker, Swallow-tailed Kite, Grey-breasted Sabrewing, Spangled Cotinga, Pale-breasted Thrush and Yellow-rumped Cacique.

2 September 2022

The day began with an option walk around the clearing with the dual goal of not only looking for birds but also hoping to find the Golden-handed Tamarins which the lodge staff had told us were sometimes seen not far from the cabins.

It was not long before the tamarins were heard, however, getting decent views of these small primates proved more of a challenge but eventually most of the group had a reasonable view as a small troupe of at least four monkeys moved through the forest canopy.

The birding was also highly productive with one of the major highlights of the morning being some great views of a small party of Red-and-Green Macaws which were feeding quietly in a

palm. With a pair of Blue-and-Yellow Macaws flying over too, many of us had seen three species of these large and impressive parrots in 24 hours !!

After breakfast, there was an optional walk along the dirt road which ran past the entrance to the lodge. Whilst the temperature had started to rise, several new species were still found including some excellent views of Guianan Trogon.

Less obliging was a male Pompadour Cotinga which was heard several times and glimpsed by some of the group. We would have to try and find another of these colourful birds once we were on the Rio Negro.....

After lunch, some of the group decided to make a second visit to the Cock-of-the-Rock lek and it was fascinating how different the experience was to the previous day. Yesterday, the males had been reasonably active but today they seemed much more subdued and many of them spent a good percentage of the time almost motionless on the ground. Nevertheless, it was still an incredible experience with more fantastic views of this handsome bird.

For those who chose to stay around the clearing, plenty of other birds were found with some having some great views of Painted Parakeets feeding in the trees a matter of metres from the cabins, whilst a lucky few saw some Red-bellied Macaws in the palms close to the restaurant.

3 September 2022

It was the final morning of the extension and many of the group joined a walk to explore in the opposite direction along the entrance track and we had not even reached the gate before the first new species of the day was spotted with some nice views of two Guianan Tyrannulets. These were in a relatively low trees so we were able to see them very well which was good given how similar many of these small flycatchers are.....

The entrance track was forested on both sides and we continued slowly along this only covering a few hundred metres over the next couple of hours. We were fortunate to find about six more tamarins but birds were the main focus of the morning, with more views of Guianan Trogon as well as Black Nunbird, Ruddy Pigeon and Black-necked Aracari.

After returning to the lodge for breakfast, there were two options with Chris and Junior offering the opportunity to explore a nearby forest trail or to look for birds around the clearing with Regina. With many keen photographers amongst the group, the majority opted for the latter option and a nice range of species were seen including Painted Parakeet just by the restaurant.

The walk led by Chris and Junior involved a short ride in our bus and then we headed onto the trail. With the temperature rising, bird activity had inevitably eased but nevertheless some great species were recorded, with the highlights being some good looks at Guianan Warbling Antbird and Golden-headed Manakin although an Amazonian Pygmy Owl was less obliging.

After an early lunch, it was time to leave the lodge and return to Manaus and many took the opportunity to catch up on sleep during the 2.5 hour journey.

We arrived back at our Manaus hotel at about 4pm and having met up with the rest of the group who had arrived a few hours earlier, we set off for a brief visit to the forest patches near the hotel where we had seen the Pied Tamarins a couple of days before.

Although no monkeys were found, we still had a pretty successful time with two Little Chachalacas showing extremely well and more distant views of a Bat Falcon.

Back at the hotel, we enjoyed a group dinner which concluded with the arrival of a passionfruit cake for Tracey Barber who was celebrating her birthday.

4 September 2022

The day began extremely early with almost everyone assembling in the lobby of the hotel at 04:40 for our visit to the Musa tower on the edge of Manaus. Arriving at the entrance to the protected area at around 05:30, it was an 800m or so torchlight walk to the bottom of the tower where 242 steps took us to a height of 42 metres.

Our timing was nigh on perfect with dawn breaking as we reached the top. In one direction we could distantly see Manaus, whereas looking to our north, it was mile-after-mile of unbroken forest.

With light cloud cover, the birding was excellent and over the course of the next two and a half hours we saw a great range of species. One of the first birds to be spotted was a perched Black-and-White Hawk-eagle and a little while later, a Barred Forest Falcon was found also sitting patiently in an emergent tree.

Another highlight was the range of parrots with great looks at both Scarlet and Red-and-green Macaws. Several parties of Red-bellied Macaws also flew by with some of these going almost directly over our heads. Another notable species was Red-fan Parrot with excellent scope views of one bird which remained perched for several minutes with some even seeing it raise the distinctive 'fan' on the back of its head. Whilst our looks at Blue-headed Parrot were somewhat distant, we were able to watch several Dusky Parrots through the telescope.

We also did very well for toucans with Channel-billed and White-throated Toucans being a new species for some of those who had not been on the extension, whilst a party of Green Aracaris was enjoyed by everyone with these showing exceptionally well.



Green Aracaris from the Musa Tower © Chris Collins

As well as the birds, two species of primates were seen with a lone Guianan Red Howler found reasonably close to the tower, however, the major highlight was a troupe of Guianan Bearded Sakis. Although a little distant, the views were very satisfactory through the telescopes and we watched about eight individuals move through an emergent tree before disappearing from sight. It was fantastic to see these animals which are only very occasionally seen from the tower and was by no means a 'guaranteed' species on our trip. With another group of Guianan Red Howlers not far from the sakis, it had definitely been a successful morning for primates!!

All too soon, it was time to head down from the tower and as we approached the entrance, Junior spotted a sloth high in a tree adjacent to the trail. It soon transpired that this was a Pale-throated Sloth, a species which is recorded much less frequently than the commoner Brown-throated Sloth so a great bonus mammal for the trip.



Pale-throated Sloth near the Musa Tower © Chris Collins

Arriving back at the hotel for a late breakfast, we were now very much into the 'heat of the day' but decided to make a brief stop at the forested area not far away where those on the extension had seen their first Pied Tamarins a few days before.

Given the time of day, expectations were not high, however, the monkeys had other ideas and a small troupe was soon located. They were in relatively low vegetation immediately adjacent to the road and showed exceptionally well; indeed, those who had not brought their cameras out of the bus were able to fetch these and still get some fantastic photos. It was a genuine and rather unexpected bonus !!

Back on the coach, we then headed for the river frontage in downtown Manaus where Junior and the crew were waiting for us. As we headed for *Iracema*, the crew brought the luggage onto the boat, and we were soon settling into our cabins and acquainting ourselves with our home for the next 13 nights.

An introductory and safety briefing was held on the top deck as we supped on delicious caipirinhas (Brazil's national drink) and once this was complete, we set off. Both Large-billed and Yellow-billed Terns were flying by as we departed and we soon left the city behind and took a channel towards our afternoon destination at Xiboraninha.

Having enjoyed our first lunch aboard and rested up during the heat of the day, we set off in the late afternoon on our first of what would be many canoe rides.

Xiboraninha is noted for the good number and variety of parrots that can be found in the area and we were soon enjoying our first views of Tui Parakeet (with their distinctive yellow crowns), Festive Amazons and the appropriately named Short-tailed Parrot. Whilst the views were relatively brief, a pair of Chestnut-fronted Macaws also flew over. Finding this meant we had seen four species of macaws in the day !!

Other species found included Yellow-chinned Spinetail, Crested Oropendola and Yellow-rumped Cacique, as well several small groups of Humboldt's Squirrel Monkeys. As the sun began to set, we returned to *Iracema* for dinner and there was then an optional night excursion to explore the same area.

It was a very different experience being out on the water after dark and Junior had explained that this was a good area for Great Potoos and he was not exaggerating as the first of these was found within a matter of metres of the boat.

Using thermal imagers and powerful torches, we found several more with a lone Common Potoo also being seen by those in one of the canoes. A Tropical Screech Owl was, however, less obliging and whilst everyone heard the distinctive song, we were unable to find it perched, although it was seen to fly across the channel on a couple of occasions.

Junior also demonstrated his agility by grabbing a metre-long young Spectacled Caiman. Up close, he showed us that these amazing reptiles had a third eyelid which protected the eyes when the animal was underwater. We quickly began to appreciate how knowledgeable he was about so many aspects of the natural history of this region.

5 September 2022

The day began with the morning wakeup call a few minutes after 05:30am with the soundtrack *La Traviata* and after a coffee and an early morning snack, we set off in the three canoes to explore a channel at a place called Anra. This was significantly narrower than where we had been the previous evening and over the next couple of hours, we added plenty of new species to our rapidly growing list.

As usual, the birds were the most obvious wildlife and amongst the first species to be found was a pair of Glossy Antshrikes which is a relatively localised species which is primarily found south of the Amazon. Both sexes have a spiky crest and whilst the male was uniform black with a small white wing bar, we also got to see the female with her chestnut crest.

Good numbers of Hoatzins were also seen, and another addition was a fine Little Cuckoo which is a relatively uncommon species.

A new species for our 'Remote Amazon' cruises was a Yellow-browed Tody-flycatcher which put in a brief appearance and caused some confusion when it disappeared to be replaced moments later by a Spotted Tody-flycatcher (a much more numerous species) which appeared in more or less the same location.



Snail Kite © Chris Collins

The morning was also notable for primates with two further species being added with multiple sightings of Golden-backed Squirrel Monkey, as well as a lone Large-headed (Brown) Capuchin. Given the ranges of these two species, it was fantastic to find them both, as it was only on this morning that we stood a chance of seeing them.

All too soon, it was time to turn around and head back to *Iracema* for a well-deserved breakfast and after this, there were two options, piranha fishing with Junior or further exploring with Chris and Regina.

For the wildlife excursion, we were joined by Darlan, our ship's Captain, who Chris had previously mentioned had amazing eyesight and this was spectacularly demonstrated when not long into the trip, he spotted a Brazilian Porcupine high up in a tree. This was sleeping in what did not look like a particularly comfortable position with its belly resting on a horizontal branch and all four legs dangling downwards on both sides. The distinctive black spines with white tips could be clearly made out and when the animal briefly repositioned, we could see its face and pink nose.

A little further along, another notable highlight were three separate sightings of Agami Heron. Although this species has a pretty large range occurring from northern Central America to

southern Brazil, it often only occurs at relatively low densities, so it was fantastic to find three individuals.

With the temperature increasing, the two canoes began heading back towards *Iracema*, however, as we emerged from a side creek into a larger channel, we heard a Sunbittern calling. The bird was in some impenetrable vegetation but our drivers were able to nudge into a spot about 20 or so metres from where the bird appeared to be. Our plan was to sit quietly in the canoes and hope the bird would walk along the muddy edge towards us but it had other ideas as it responded to the recording by flying across the waterway and landing on a horizontal branch which was completely in the open.



Sunbittern © Chris Collins

The drivers carefully backed the canoes out of the vegetation and slowly paddled us across the channel closer to the bird which seemed utterly oblivious to our presence. To describe the views as stunning would not be an exaggeration and hundreds of photos were taken as it paced along its chosen branch calling at us.

Eventually it took off, flying back across the water in what was almost a display flight – a highly memorable end to our morning at Anra !!

Back aboard *Iracema*, we learnt that those who had been fishing had been highly successful as a good number of Red-bellied Piranhas had been caught. It was clear what the main option for dinner would be.....

Once the crew had secured the canoes, we set off towards our planned destination for the afternoon and evening, the vast seasonal lake of Janauacá. It took a couple of hours to reach this and when it began to rain heavily and the wind blew for a while, the crew selected a

convenient sheltered spot to wait out the inclement weather. Their choice was, however, perfect as a Ladder-tailed Nightjar was spotted from the top deck roosting on a snag a matter of metres from the boat allowing the photographers to get their first shots of this species.

A little later, we left our temporary anchorage and it was then only another kilometre or two to the starting point for our afternoon canoe ride at Janaucá.

Junior had promised us that this was an excellent location for Brown-throated Sloths and we had not been out in the canoes for long when the first sloth was spotted. As the vegetation was significantly lower than in some places, we were able to get some nice views including a female which had a youngster.



Brown-throated Sloth © Chris Collins

This area was also excellent for two similar looking blackbirds and we had some great views of both Oriole Blackbird and the somewhat smaller Yellow-hooded Blackbird, species we were unlikely to see elsewhere on our trip.

Three other new birds for our list were Red-and-white Spinetail, Black-backed Water Tyrant and Orange-fronted Yellow Finch which, again, were species we might not find subsequently.

Returning to *Iracema* for dinner, there was then an optional night ride which Junior had told us would be good for sloths and he was not wrong with well over a dozen individuals being found. A stunning male Ladder-tailed Nightjar was also seen and whilst we could not see the white in the wing and tail of the bird when it was perched, when it flew off, we got to see this nicely.

6 September 2022

During the night, we sailed out of the Solimoes River passing Manaus and under the impressive 2.7 kilometre long bridge that joined the city with the south bank of the river. We then turned into the Rio Negro, arriving shortly before 06:00am at our intended destination, a channel on the southern side of the river at Ariau.

For the next couple of hours or so, we explored a reasonably wide waterway which had some nice forest on both banks. Several troupes of Humboldt's Squirrel Monkeys were found with some of these showing very nicely.

For many of the group, however, the highlight of the morning was our first sighting of Long-billed Woodcreeper and we enjoyed some great views – it truly was a bizarre looking bird.

A number of other new species for the trip were also found including Plumbeous Kite, Green-and-rufous Kingfisher and Black-chinned Antbird and with some nice looks at Festive Amazons, the time flew by.

Returning to *Iracema*, we then headed to the mouth of the Acajatuba River which was the destination for our "dolphin swim". It was only a 2-minute shuttle ride in the canoes to the beach where we had a short briefing on how to behave in the water with the dolphins.

Junior had already told us that about 25 years ago, a couple of girls in the nearby community of Novo Airão had befriended a pod of dolphins and there were now several places where it was possible to get in the water with completely wild dolphins.



Amazon River Dolphin © Chris Collins

As the briefing concluded, the dolphins had already arrived and almost the entire group were soon in the water which was like standing in warm black tea. The local guide had a small bucket of fish but this was barely a light snack for such substantial animals and although the fish were soon eaten, the dolphins chose to stay and several of the group spent at least 45 minutes in the water.

It was a truly unique and very special experience and it was abundantly clear that these highly intelligent creatures knew there was no food left but were choosing to continue to interact with us.

After an hour or so on the beach, we returned to *Iracema* and continued our journey up the Negro. With an hour or so of light left, we arrived at the southern end of the Anavilhanas archipelago which is one of the largest riverine island archipelagos in the world. Junior had selected a comparatively narrow channel and we were able to navigate up this with pristine habitat on both sides enjoying great views from the sheltered top deck of our vessel.

As the daylight quickly faded, we saw our first Band-tailed Nighthawks of the trip and the team tied *Iracema* to a tree for the night with many opting for an early night as with rain during dinner, it was decided that a night-time trip would not be wise.

7 September 2022

After a quiet night tied to a tree in the southern part of the island archipelago, we set off in the three canoes shortly after 06:00am.

This area was the only place on our trip where we were likely to find the localised Klages's Antwren and our first attempt at taping in this small black-and-white speciality was unsuccessful but after sheltering from a passing rain shower under a conveniently located tree, our efforts were eventually rewarded with some nice views of this special bird.

We knew this area was very rich in birds and after the rain had gone, there was plenty to look at with another new bird for the list being Rusty-backed Spinetail and we had some great views of a pair which responded exceptional well to a recording.

Many of the group also saw *Varzea Schiffornis* in the same area before we continued a bit further along one of the many channels which make this area a veritable maze of waterways. At another stop, we found a pair of Black-crested Antshrike, with a Tropical Gnatcatcher also putting in a brief appearance.

All too soon, it was time to head back to the boat and those in one of the canoes were very fortunate to see a Razor-billed Curassow fly across the channel in front of them. Although the views were very brief, it was possible to see the huge red bill and distinctive white tailband of this large turkey-sized bird – it was a highly fortuitous sighting for those who were lucky enough to be in the right place at the right time !!

After another excellent and varied breakfast back on *Iracema*, there was a short shuttle ride in the canoes to a spot where we were able to land and do some exploring on foot. It was extremely muddy and wellingtons were certainly required but we were barely out of the canoes before two male Wire-tailed Manakins were spotted.



Wire-tailed Manakin © Chris Collins

It was clear that this must be a lek site for this extremely colourful bird with the two males constantly returning to the same branch and occasionally displaying. Their red, yellow and black plumage was absolutely stunning and although the light was not the greatest, the photographers were very happy to get the opportunity to get some decent shots of these amazing birds.

Returning to *Iracema*, we then headed for Novo Airão where Junior needed to organise some further supplies for the rest of our trip and we picked up our pilot for the Jaú National Park. Our visit coincided with some election campaigning and many of the group went ashore to experience this.

Once the additional food was aboard, we set off up the Rio Negro and as on the previous evening used the top deck of *Iracema* as a 'floating canopy tower' to watch for wildlife as the light began to fade. There were good numbers of Band-tailed Nighthawks and then a larger nighthawk was spotted which was quickly identified as a Short-tailed Nighthawk – a species we had only seen once on our previous "Remote Amazon" trips.

The goal for the evening, however, was to try to find Spectacled Owl and Junior had arranged for *Iracema* to be tied up on the opposite bank from where he had seen this species a few weeks before. With the group watching from the top deck, Junior paddled a canoe across the river and played a recording underneath the tree into which he wanted to attract the bird. The strategy worked perfectly and within a matter of moments the owl was in precisely the spot he had intended. It was a little obscured but everyone was able to see it before it and then another bird flew across the river landing out of sight on our side of the channel.

A few moments later, we were able to get it to return back across the waterway, however, once again the bird was a little tricky to see. Satisfied but feeling a little frustrated, we set off as it was a long overnight journey, however, we had only gone a matter of metres before it was realised that both owls were now perched in a spot where they were completely in the open. The crew, therefore, quickly changed course and we had some fantastic views of the pair sat next to each other on a completely bare branch. It was a great end to the day !!

8 September 2022

As usual, the day began with the morning wake-up call at 05:30 with *Iracema* tied up a few hundred metres from the Ranger Station at the entrance to the Jaú National Park. It was a glorious sunrise and many were up on the top deck to enjoy the scenery as the light quickly improved.

As soon as the Rangers had started work, the crew moved the boat over to the wharf and one of the team came aboard so everyone could fill in the visitor registration book. As soon as this task was completed, we set off up the Jaú River with the first new bird for the trip soon spotted, an Ivory-billed Aracari. Other new species followed including Brown-throated Parakeet and Black Caracara.

Continuing onwards, the habitat was pristine on both banks and we soon reached a creek, Igarape Preto, on the southern side of the river where we tied up and set off in the canoes to explore. Initially we passed through low varzea (flooded) forest but soon entered an area where there was dry land on both sides and much taller trees. With the temperature rising, it was much more pleasant being in the shade and amongst the species found was our first American Pygmy Kingfisher of the trip. With Amazon, Green, Green-and-rufous and Ringed Kingfishers also seen, we saw all five Neotropical kingfisher species – a feat we would actually (and rather unexpectedly) also achieve on four of the next five days !!

Other birds included Black-eared Fairy, Bronzy Jacamar and Lesser Kiskadee, however, the undoubted highlight was a party of four Pompadour Cotingas which showed well but briefly before flying off and out of view.

Returning to *Iracema*, we enjoyed another delicious lunch whilst the crew navigated upstream to one of the few spots along this section of the Jaú river where there was a decent trail through the forest. The plan, however, was to offer a walk on the trail that evening and the following morning with a canoe ride during the afternoon.

Initially, we headed for some low flooded forest where we were soon enjoying some nice views of Cherrie's Antwren. Although this species looked very similar to the Klages's Antwren we had seen the previous day at Anavilhanas, the song was quite different.

We then crossed the river and began exploring a side channel where there was a small party of Bronzy Jacamars. Although these responded well to the recording, it took a little while before we were eventually able to get some reasonable looks.

With the light starting to fade, we were about to return to *Iracema* when an Undulated Tinamou responded to the whistling of Brenden, a member of our crew who had been paddling one of the canoes. His imitation of the call was clearly nigh on perfect as the bird

walked into view and then spent at least 5-10 minutes showing on and off – it was an amazing end to our daytime activities.



Undulated Tinamou © Chris Collins

After dinner, some of the group joined Junior, Regina and Chris in a quest to look for Rufous Potoo as the three guides had seen this species previously along a nearby trail. Despite good conditions and an almost full moon (which is generally considered the best time to look for potoos), there was no response to the recordings, so we tried another trail where sadly we had the same result. Despite the disappointment of missing the potoo, some interesting creatures were seen with several knife fish and a large water scorpion being found in the shallows.

9 September 2022

We began the day with an early breakfast and two options available – a walk on one of the trails with Junior and Chris or a canoe ride with Regina.

Those who joined Regina explored a beautiful area of Igapo (flooded) forest where the group saw Cherrie's Antwren, Black-tailed Tityra and nice views of a pair of Cream-coloured Woodpeckers. Further along, both Scaled Pigeon and Chestnut Woodpecker were found along with a Bronzy Jacamar.

Leaving this area and exploring the river edge, a Northern Amazon Red Squirrel was seen, as well as Black Caracara and a female Yellow-crowned Manakin. Whilst it was easy to ignore them (as we had now seen so many), there were also good numbers of dolphins in the river.

Whilst those with Regina explored by canoe, Chris and Junior led a walk along one of the forest trails. The previous evening Junior had helped the crew in constructing a new path to

allow us to climb the steep bank and with newly installed ropes and supports, this proved invaluable and it made getting up to level ground very easy.

The group had only gone a few hundred metres when a Mouse-coloured Antshrike was heard calling. This species is usually only in the high canopy and getting good views can be a real challenge, however, on this occasion the bird responded to a recording by coming much lower than usual and landing on a snag only about 12-15 feet above the ground. It then just sat there for several moments allowing everyone to see it through the telescope – a very unusual experience.

Continuing onwards, we came across a group of antbirds which were calling from the forest floor. Getting good looks of any of them was really tricky and although some people briefly glimpsed a White-cheeked Antbird, a White-plumed Antbird which was also heard did not respond to the recording.

As a result, we decided to go off trail in the hope of locating some of the antbirds and whilst this was unsuccessful, Junior spotted a huge tarantula. It was certainly the largest spider that many of the group had ever seen !!!



Tarantula sp. © Chris Collins

The birding was, however, proving to be hard work this morning and whilst there was plenty calling, finding some of our targets was a challenge and despite hearing both Amazonian Motmot and Pavonine Quetzal, neither species could be found. Whilst we were trying to track down the motmot, some small toucans were spotted high in a flowering tree and it was quickly realised that these were Tawny-tufted Toucanets, a tricky species which had only been seen on one previous cruise.

The birds were feeding in the canopy and both male and female were present, although getting good views was not easy and all too soon they flew off. The flowering tree was, however, attracting a variety of other birds and several Screaming Pihás were present. Although this species is hardly the most inspiring to look at, its song is certainly one of the most iconic voices of the lowland rainforest.

As the group drifted off along the trail, those at the back were somewhat stunned when a Pavonine Quetzal flew in and Chris hurried along the path to alert everyone else. Just as the group got back, the bird flew off. To describe the experience as frustrating was a gross understatement....

We continued along the trail but after four hours, we turned around and our efforts were finally rewarded when another quetzal was heard singing. This individual responded to the recording, flew in, and we all finally had some nice views of this gorgeous bird. It had been a tough morning on the trail, but we certainly had got some rewards for our efforts.

Returning to *Iracema*, we set sail for Cachoeira, a remote community of just a handful of people, another couple of hours up the Jaú River. Despite it being the hottest part of the day, watching from the top deck proved highly productive with some nice views of a perched adult King Vulture and then we found one of the primate highlights of the trip, Spix's Black-headed Uacari. This species is relatively localised and uncommon and the team on the bridge quickly made a 180 degree turn to give us another opportunity to try and see this special monkey. There were at least three individuals and it was not easy to spot them through the foliage but eventually most of those who were on the top deck saw them.



Amazonian Black Tyrant © Chris Collins

Arriving at Cachoeira, Junior sent one of the canoes down to the village and this soon returned with one of the locals who joined us as a local guide as we explored some of the nearby waterways. Turning off the main Jaú river, Junior played recordings of Amazonian Black

Tyrant and Amazonian Inezia and both species arrived more or less together, however, the former is a much rarer and trickier species than the later, so we enjoyed the tyrant before turning our attention to the inezia.

Further on, our local guide heard some White-faced Capuchins and the canoes crept quietly into the flooded forest to attempt to locate these. Unfortunately, however, the monkeys spotted us first and with much crashing of the vegetation and loud shrieking, they soon disappeared with only a lucky few of the group catching a glimpse.

With what looked like the imminent arrival of a thunderstorm, we headed back to *Iracema* where the crew prepared a top deck barbeque dinner to round off a great day in the Jaú National Park.

10 September 2022

During the night, the crew navigated *Iracema* westwards along the Jaú River for a couple of hours and we awoke with the vessel secured to a tree at the mouth of a relatively narrow waterway. Once again, there was a fantastic sunrise and with Amazon River Dolphins swimming close to the boat, it was another magical start to the day.

After an early breakfast, we boarded the canoes and explored a waterway known as Miratucu. Initially this passed through flooded forest but this soon gave way to high ground forest on both sides. At one point, we passed the holt of some Giant Otters and it was obvious that this was occupied but there was no evidence of the animals themselves.

A little later, some distinctive shapes were spotted swimming in the water and we were delighted to realise we had found the otters. Seemingly not overly perturbed by our presence, they swam across the water coming moderately close to the canoes before diving, passing us and continuing downstream towards their holt.



Giant Otters © Chris Collins

One of the special birds of this particular location is Amazonian Antshrike and on both our journeys up and downstream this species was heard but despite persevering with a recording, it was a challenge to see the bird as it only occasionally showed itself despite singing back at us.

Returning to *Iracema*, it was then a long (6 hour) navigation to our most westerly point on the Jaú River, a remote creek at a location called Manapana. It was literally mile-after-mile of pristine forest for the entire journey with not a single house as we travelled westwards. At one point, a small boat containing a family of half a dozen or so people passed us going in the other direction and they were probably as surprised to see us as we were to see them !!

One of the species we hoped to find during the journey was Spix's Black-headed Uacari and whilst many of the group were having an afternoon siesta, a group of at least three of these handsome monkeys were spotted from the top deck. Once again, the crew quickly spun the boat round and whilst the uacaris were now trickier to see, most people got at least a glimpse of them before they disappeared off into the deeper vegetation.

There was also a sighting of Giant Otters behind the boat but the animals disappeared rather quickly and after our nice views earlier in the day, it was decided not to turn around and look for them.

Arriving at Manapana, we found some Neotropical Palm Swifts flying around the boat which were the first ones of the trip. Their distinctive shape and flight pattern was quite different to any of the other species of swifts in the area.

Setting off in the canoes, we explored a little further upstream, where there was a really attractive series of rapids with the water cascading down over the rocks. We then turned downstream and amongst the species found was a pair of Yellow-browed Tody-flycatchers. These responded reasonably well to a recording and whilst one of them was rather distant, it showed well for several moments giving us a good opportunity to watch it.

One of the main objectives from coming to this remote location, however, was to head out after dark as this was one of the best places in the area for both Black Caiman and Schneider's Smooth-fronted Caiman with the latter being a relatively tricky species elsewhere. We had not even got in the canoes before the first Black Caiman was spotted with some fairly large individuals swimming not far from the boat.

It took a little longer to find one of the much smaller Schneider's Smooth-fronted Caiman but after some diligent searching, we eventually located one hauled out on the bank and enjoyed some great views in the spotlight.

A little later, one of the canoes saw an intriguing opossum which showed well on a log before rapidly disappearing upwards into the canopy. Although the views were relatively brief, the animal had a very distinctive head pattern and a thick bushy tail which had thick fur all the way to the tip. On returning to *Iracema*, we established that this was the extremely poorly known Bushy-tailed Opossum as the tail and head pattern are unique amongst opossums. Definitely a significant sighting and a species Junior had not seen for over 10 years !!!

11 September 2022

Having spent the night tied to a tree at Manapana, Junior had hoped his team would be able to get the canoes above the rapids we had visited the previous afternoon (so we could explore further upstream) and as soon as there was enough light to see, they set off to establish if this would be possible, whilst we enjoyed breakfast aboard *Iracema*.

A little later, he returned to tell us that, unfortunately, their attempts had been unsuccessful so we cruised downstream in the canoes eventually reaching the Jaú River. Here, Regina found a perched falcon which we were able to approach. There was some confusion over the identification as the bird was rather backlit and the size seemed to be in the overlap zone between Bat Falcon and Orange-breasted Falcon and rather bizarrely it seemed to respond to recordings of both species !!

Returning to *Iracema*, Chris told everyone that the plan for the afternoon was to visit somewhere called Igarape do Boto, a spot which the Pilot had suggested as there was a trail, access to some high ground forest and Brazil Nut trees. The cruise downstream took several hours and as is always the case in Jaú National Park, we passed many miles of undisturbed habitat and saw no other people. We truly were somewhere very remote indeed !!

As on our upstream journey the previous day, a family party of otters were spotted at exactly the same place where we had seen them less than 36 hours before and whilst the crew quickly turned *Iracema* around, the otters were not particularly cooperative and soon disappeared.

Arriving at our afternoon destination, Chris, Junior and the Pilot set off to establish if it would be possible to walk the trail and they returned an hour or so later to report that whilst going ashore would not be possible (as the path had almost completely disappeared), we would still visit the area as there was some tall flood forest and they had found something special for everyone to see.

As we travelled back to the location, the canoe ride degenerated into a game of (more than) twenty questions as the curious wanted to know what we would be looking for but only one person came reasonably close to guessing correctly. Arriving at the spot, Junior announced that everyone would have to find the discovery for themselves and it took a few moments for it to be found – a huge Witch Moth !!

This is one of the largest moths in the world and this individual was off white in colour with black patterning but as it had chosen to roost on a dark tree, it was rather obvious.

Having enjoyed the moth, our attention turned to birds as the flooded forest we had entered was much taller than most of the areas we had explored over the previous few days and Chris suggested we try for Zimmer's Woodcreeper, a relatively recently described species which looks very similar to Straight-billed Woodcreeper.

Playing a recording, two woodcreepers soon arrived and whilst they were a bit tricky to photograph, we had some good looks at the birds with Junior giving us an explanation about the discovery of the species and how to tell it from Straight-billed Woodcreeper.



Witch Moth © Chris Collins

Leaving the flooded forest, we continued exploring before returning to *Iracema* and as soon as everyone was back aboard, the crew untied the vessel (which as usual had been secured to a tree!!) and we continued downstream.

After dinner, we had a short night excursion returning to the place we had explored three days before. Visiting after dark was a completely different experience and whilst the nocturnal wildlife was a little less obvious than on some of our trips, we got some great views of a Common Potoo, a bird not everyone had seen earlier in the holiday.

12 September 2022

During the night, *Iracema* continued travelling downstream and the morning wakeup call came with the boat tied up off a waterway which Junior had told us the previous evening was known as Smugglers' Channel. He had explained that the reason for the name was because when the Jaú National Park had been declared, the authorities believed that there was only one way in and out, ie where the Jaú flows into the Rio Negro. The local people were, however, aware of another route and this had been used for many years to smuggle bush meat and other products out of the park.

We had barely set off in the canoes when several large lumps were spotted in a distant tree and careful inspection revealed these to be Colombian Red Howlers. Continuing onwards, we entered flooded forest, and the crew quietly paddled us through this as we weaved around

the trees occasionally getting stuck when we attempted to squeeze through a gap which was too narrow for the canoes.

At one point, there was a muddy bank and one of the crew spotted a piculet appear out of a small hole where it was presumably nesting. Some of the group went ashore in the hope of seeing the bird return but we had no luck, although a White-crowned Manakin was nice compensation.



White-crowned Manakin © Chris Collins

The area was excellent for Screaming Piha and whilst we didn't see any on this occasion, the forest resonated to their incredible calls.

There were plenty of other birds to see and over the course of the ride, we found Black-fronted Nunbird, Long-billed Woodcreeper, Cherrie's Antwren and finally had views of Snethlage's Tody-tyrant, a bird we had heard on a number of previous occasions but not seen, however, this individual responded well to a recording.

Another species which we had also heard but not seen so far was Yellow-throated Woodpecker and we had some nice looks of two birds quietly looking for a meal with another new bird being a male Fork-tailed Woodnymph whose throat and breast feathers positively glowed when they caught the light.

Returning to *Iracema*, we headed downstream towards the Ranger Station and not long before reaching this, one of the other boats owned by Junior's family came chugging along in the other direction. *Dorinha* had an American birding group aboard along with Junior's father. The two boats briefly tied together in the middle of the channel and everyone was able to have a chat before both vessels headed off in opposite directions.

Arriving at the entrance, we officially left the park after five fantastic days inside and made a stop a little further along to visit some petroglyphs. Junior told us that these were estimated to be between 800-1,600 years old and whilst most of the carvings were underwater (and

could only be seen when the river level was lower), we were able to see several rocks which were covered in drawings.

Crossing to the opposite bank of the Rio Negro, we cruised up the eastern side of a large river island where a female Amazonian Umbrellabird was found perched in a Cecropia tree. As a significant proportion of the group were not out on deck, everyone was soon advised to get to the top deck to see this river island speciality and whilst it was seen on two more occasions, unfortunately, it disappeared before everyone was able to see it. A little later, a male was found with his extraordinary head plumes but views of this were even briefer than the female.

Arriving on the eastern bank, we rested up for a short while and then when the conditions were somewhat cooler explored the Meduini Channel. This was a little wider than some of the other waterways we had explored previously and with tall trees on either bank, it clearly had great potential; indeed, we had only gone a short distance when a Southern Tamandua was spotted in a riverside bush. Although arboreal, these are close relatives of the Giant Anteater and when it emerged from the vegetation, we could see the similarities.



Southern Tamandua © Chris Collins

Several parties of Hoatzins were also found, a species we had not seen for several days, and another bird in this category was Black Nunbird. Although the Rio Negro was certainly a very wide river, nevertheless, it was still amazing that there was one species on the west bank, the Black-fronted Nunbird, and this species on the eastern side.

A little further along, a second tamandua was found – an incredible piece of luck as these animals are not common so to see two individuals on the same canoe ride was extraordinary. Unlike the previous one which had been feeding low in a bush, this individual was high up in a tree and we watched it for several minutes as it moved around eventually disappearing out of view.

It had unquestionably been a very enjoyable ride and when we returned to the vessel and began heading further upstream, there was a degree of disappointment amongst the group that we would not be spending the night here and exploring again the following morning. Chris, Regina and Junior explained, however, that there was another location they wanted to explore.

13 September 2022

It was the earliest start of the cruise as the plan was to be out on the water well before dawn to listen to the forest waking up with one of the goals being to hopefully listen to the Guianan Red Howlers make their extraordinary calls before the sun rose.

Unfortunately, however, not all ideas go as planned as we had only got a few hundred metres from *Iracema* when the wind started to pick up and it was clear that rain would be arriving soon. Reluctantly, we turned around and headed back to the boat and shortly after we got back aboard, it did indeed start to rain.

With our plans needing to be changed, Junior asked the galley team to bring forward breakfast and as we waited for this to be readied, many people watched from the top deck as the light improved and the rain eased. Several Festive Amazons were found close to the vessel allowing the photographers to get some reasonable shots, however, a party of Red-throated Caracaras were a bit too distant for photos and they looked decidedly bedraggled after the morning rains...

Once breakfast had been eaten, Chris announced that the plan was to explore some of the channels of the area viewing from the top deck and we spent the rest of the morning doing this. With plenty of tall trees on either bank and some fairly narrow waterways, the top deck really came into its own and we had an absolutely stunning time.

There were multiple sightings of monkeys with some great views of Guianan Red Howlers and Guianan Squirrel Monkeys, however, the major primate highlight of the morning was a large troupe of Guianan Bearded Sakis which we watched for an extended period as they gradually moved along through the trees adjacent to one of the banks feeding as they travelled. Although we had seen this species from the Musa Tower at Manaus, on that occasion the monkeys had been moderately distant and had only shown for a few minutes, however, on this occasion, we were able to follow them for about half an hour getting some great views and photographic opportunities.

Whilst the views were very brief in comparison and not everyone was looking when it appeared, another major highlight of the morning for some was when a huge eagle flew across the bows only a matter of metres ahead of the vessel before disappearing into the forest.



Guianan Bearded Saki © Chris Collins

The bird was clearly either a Harpy or Crested Eagle and those who got their binoculars on it were able to see a central crest and barred undertail as it flew away and with a pale head, it was clearly an immature. Its immense size suggested it was a Harpy Eagle (rather than the slightly smaller Crested Eagle) but the views were just a little too brief to be absolutely definitive about this.



Cocoi Heron © Chris Collins

A little later, Junior returned to the boat having been down to the nearby village of Remanso to see if the villagers had any fish they were willing to sell and he returned with a large Arapaima and some equally substantial catfish.

As our planned afternoon destination (Agua Boa) was only a little to the south, many people were able to take the opportunity to have an afternoon siesta and when we headed back to the top deck, the cloudy conditions which had lasted all morning had cleared and, once again, we had blue skies.

Setting off in the canoes, we explored a long but relatively narrow channel with huge trees on either bank and with the waterway being relatively narrow for large sections of the ride, the forest canopy shaded us from the afternoon sun. It was very different to some of the other locations we had visited and some of the immense trees had huge buttresses. Others almost seemed to defy logic being more than 50m high but seemed to have almost nothing to support them.

Hearing a close Undulated Tinamou, we hoped that we would be able to get this to respond and come into view but unlike the bird a few days before, unfortunately, this individual would not show its itself despite the best efforts of our crew to whistle it in. A Spot-breasted Woodpecker was, however, more obliging and everyone was able to get some reasonable looks, although getting photos was more challenging as it moved around behind some tangles of vegetation.

Leaving the higher ground behind, we entered a section of forest where the water was receding and the area looked perfect for Agami Heron, a species which some, but not all, of the group had seen at the very beginning of the trip. Right on cue, one of these fantastic looking herons was found and a few moments later, there was a second individual.



Agami Heron © Chris Collins

Although this species has a relatively wide range across Central and South America, it is rarely easy to see but the first of the birds we had found had clearly not been reading the right books about how it was supposed to behave (!!) as it moved into an open area allowing us to have prolonged and reasonably close views. The colours were stunning and with its almost

disproportionately long bill, it was a fantastic opportunity to watch this tricky species and dozens of photos were taken as it stood motionless in one spot for several minutes.

Eventually the channel through the forest emerged into a more open area where there were several Amazon River Dolphins. As we had seen so many of these special cetaceans over the previous days, it was all too easy to forget what a privilege it was to be with them.

Returning to *Iracema*, we headed a little further south and after another tasty dinner, there was an optional nocturnal excursion. After several night trips when we had not seen any sloths, Junior was confident that we would find some this evening and sure enough, it was not long before the first of five Brown-throated Sloths were found.

Several other smaller mammals were found in the thermal imagers and whilst most of these disappeared when the torches were switched on, a large chestnut-brown rat was more obliging allowing us some great views and photographic opportunities.

With multiple lookalike species, further research was required to identify this individual but a review of the literature we had on the boat suggested that it was probably a Robert's Arboreal Rice Rat.

Returning to *Iracema*, everyone headed off to bed but it was not the end of the activities as most lights had not been out for long when Chris hurried along both corridors announcing that a Black Jaguar had been spotted walking along the riverbank. Junior had been talking with the crew in the wheelhouse and had been casually scanning with his thermal imager and had spotted the animal.

Many of the group hurriedly dressed and headed to the top deck. Unfortunately, however, the Jaguar had headed away from the bank and it was eventually re-found in the imagers seemingly sitting a reasonable distance from the edge. We attempted to get it to move by playing a recording but this had no effect and whilst a few of the group saw some eye shine, sadly no one got to see the animal itself.

14 September 2022

Following the great afternoon at Meduini a couple of days before, it was decided to return there for a morning canoe ride and after an early breakfast, we set off to explore. Amongst the first birds to be seen was a flock of Blue-and-yellow Macaws. These were flying extremely high and were possibly on the journey to or from a clay lick which this species, along with many other parrots, has to visit on a regular basis to obtain certain nutrients.

A little further along, we heard an Ash-breasted Antbird but this did not respond to a recording so we continued onwards. A few bends in the creek later, a Pied Puffbird was spotted high in a tree and the canoes repositioned, as initially it was rather tricky to see. With a little coaxing from a recording, it was realised that there were actually two birds in the tree and then two more were spotted on the same side as we were watching from. Much to our surprise, one bird then flew across the river, briefly had an aerial fight with one of the original birds we had been watching and then flew back to its side of the river. It seemed that the channel divided the territories and the bird on our side of the water had mistaken the recording as the neighbours invading and had taken action to deal with the intrusion !!



Guianan Squirrel Monkey © Chris Collins

Returning to *Iracema*, we decided to check out the river island where the two Amazonian Umbrellabirds had been found a couple of days before. Sadly, our quest to relocate these was unsuccessful, although the sight of two Collared Plovers riding on a large barge loaded with sand was rather unexpected and we were left wondering if they had a floating nest scrape as it seemed so bizarre that they were choosing to stay aboard the barge as it travelled up the river.

It took several hours to reach our intended destination for the afternoon, a waterway known as Baependi and those who decided to come on the afternoon canoe ride were advised to bring their boots as we hoped to get ashore for a short walk. We cruised a nice channel and then entered some flooded forest where in places the crew had to clear the vegetation with their machetes for us to get through. Arriving at a muddy shoreline, we climbed out of the canoes with a weird calling echoing through the forest.

When he had been cruising this area a few weeks before, Junior had heard some Capuchinbirds but had been unable to land but that was what was now calling and a walk of less than 100 metres brought us close to where one of the birds appeared to be.

Playing a recording brought an immediate response and over the next 30 minutes or so we had some fantastic views of this utterly bizarre-looking bird which also surely has one of the strangest songs in the world. Although the bird was high in the canopy, it kept returning to one spot where the vegetation was pretty clear and we were even able to get the telescope on it. A definite highlight of our trip !!



Capuchinbird © Chris Collins

15 September 2022

During the night, *Iracema* continued downstream and we awoke back in the Anavilhanas archipelago of islands. With a vast range of options, we started the day by cruising and looking for wildlife from the top deck. There were some huge emergent trees and scanning these, Regina picked up a large grey raptor which almost immediately disappeared behind closer vegetation so the crew turned *Iracema* around and it was soon established that this was a Crane Hawk, only the third sighting of this species on the trip.

A little further along, a Grey-headed Kite was also found perched on a prominent snag and this was much easier to see than the Crane Hawk.

We continued onwards into a narrower channel hearing Klages's Antwren, the highly localised species we had seen earlier in our holiday. At times, the vegetation was very close to us on both sides and we passed the trees where we had enjoyed some great views of a pair of Spectacled Owls several days before. It was only because Junior knew the area so intimately that we recognised the spot !!

After the crew had tied *Iracema* to a tree (as usual !!), we set off in the canoes and whilst it was now fairly hot out in the sun, when we entered an area of flooded forest, the temperature was much more pleasant.

Our goal for this particular canoe ride was, however, neither an animal nor bird as Junior wanted to take us to a spot where there was a Moon Cactus. Unlike the other species of cactus we had seen, this one wrapped itself around the trunk and he explained that it was pretty rare and he only knew of ten or so other examples of this plant in all the areas he visited.

Returning to *Iracema* we cruised for an hour or so and then stopped to allow those who wished to go for a swim in the river. It was like swimming in lukewarm black tea, however, the current was incredibly strong and swimming even a few metres was fairly hard work.

The crew then took *Iracema* on to the small town of Novo Airão where we set off in the canoes for the short ride to a property that Junior's family owned. Unfortunately, our timing wasn't great as there was a short but very heavy shower, the first time we had been out on the canoes and been unable to find anywhere to shelter....

The objective of coming here was twofold, as there had been a family of Spix's Night Monkeys living in a tree on the property for many years and to also look for Pink-toed Tarantulas.

Disembarking from the canoes, we sheltered under the roof of a conveniently located building until the rain had stopped and then quietly headed to the tree to look for the monkeys. Unfortunately, the weather had pushed the vegetation down somewhat and it was tricky to see the hole but we were able to get a scope on it but, unfortunately, there was nothing to see.

As the sky darkened, it seemed increasingly apparent that the monkeys were no longer living in this particular location and some of the group drifted off towards the buildings, however, a few persisted with Chris and Junior.

Turning to using his thermal imager, Junior began scanning the tree and with it now almost completely dark, he spotted some shapes higher up. It seemed the monkeys had changed where they lived !!

He put a torch on them for a few seconds and we had some great views – persistence had certainly been worthwhile....

The group then reassembled up at the hotel and Junior then led a nocturnal walk to look for Pink-toed Tarantulas. Although there was a small one in a bush close to the buildings, he was determined to find some adults and it did not take long for the first one to be found.

Junior explained that despite their reputation, this species was actually very placid and he carefully manoeuvred the spider onto his arm so we could see it up close. Various members of the group then had their photo taken with the spider on their arms or shoulders before it was returned to the area where we had found it.

Several more tarantulas were found over the next half hour or so but all too soon it was time to return to *Iracema* where the galley team had prepared another tasty dinner.

16 September 2022

Having continued downstream during the night, we awoke to *Iracema* secured to a tree several miles up the Ariau River. Our plan for the day was to offer two options with a canoe ride with Regina or a walk on a forest trail with Chris, Junior and a local guide and those going ashore set off at 06:15am for the short ride to the trailhead.

We soon left the more stunted vegetation close to the river edge and entered some nice terra firme with some huge trees. One of our goals was to try and see Musician Wren and reaching a spot where Junior had seen this species a few weeks before, we played a recording and waited patiently but there was no response.

Moving further along the trail, the forest seemed very quiet despite it being the cool part of the day but we began to find some nice birds with scope views of a Green Oropendola in a bare tree where there were several of their very distinctive nests.

As we continued on, the wren was heard singing, however, getting to see it was another matter altogether, as it flitted from perch to perch and was only ever on view for a few seconds before disappearing again. We persevered for quite a time and eventually most of the group got to see it before we made our way further along the trail.

Hearing an Amazonian Pygmy Owl singing, we went off the trail in search of this and with the bird clearly high in the canopy, it took a little while to find it, however, it was eventually located, and we were able to put a telescope on it. From time to time, the owl would sing its rather monotonous song and its entire body would quiver as it sang.

Turning around, we walked back along the trail and when a large bird was heard taking off from the ground (but not seen), Chris speculatively played the song of Grey-winged Trumpeter in case that was what the bird had been. In the background of the recording, there were Capuchinbirds singing and almost immediately, we heard a response.

Switching to a Capuchinbird recording, a bird soon flew in and whilst viewing was trickier than a couple of days ago, nevertheless, everyone was able to enjoy some decent looks at this amazing looking bird.

We had only gone a little further and Junior told us he had found a Yellow-billed Jacamar and this was soon brought into view with a recording. It had been a fantastic few minutes on the trail !!

Whilst Chris and Junior had been leading the walk in the forest, Regina took everyone else on a canoe ride which was very successful for raptors with a great range of species being seen. As well as finding some of the species we had become familiar with over the previous ten or so days, both Black and Black-and-white Hawk-eagles and White Hawk were found with two of these being new for the trip.

Once everyone was back aboard *Iracema*, we set off back down the Ariau River and then re-joined the Negro. With packing to be done and bar bills to pay, not much watching from the top deck was done during the heat of the day but once most people had organised their belongings, the majority of the group joined Chris and Regina on the top deck.

The journey to the destination for our final canoe ride at Pagodão took longer than expected and it was well after 4pm before we were able to depart. At the entrance to the waterway we planned to explore, there were at least a couple of hundred Purple Martins perched on some overhead wires and some of them were coming down and deliberately crashing into the water to bathe – it was a rather unusual sight with dozens of splashes as the birds briefly hit the water.

Entering the channel, Regina excitedly told everyone over the radios that there was a huge raptor in a distant emergent tree which her canoe driver had spotted. Even a cursory glance was enough to see that this was an adult Harpy Eagle, an incredibly fortunate find.

Junior set off down the channel in the hope of getting closer views but as we got closer, the tree went out of view, so we turned around and headed back to where the bird had initially been seen. Thankfully, it was still there but a matter of moments later, it took off and disappeared.

Continuing onwards, we entered one of the side channels and there was a King Vulture feeding on carrion immediately adjacent to the waters edge. We paddled quietly towards it and whilst it soon flew off, nevertheless, we were able to get some decent views.

All too soon, the light started to dim and as it got darker, we heard Brown Capuchins and Guinan Red Howlers calling from the surrounding forest.

Unlike all our previous excursions where we had returned to *Iracema* once it got dark, on this occasion, the plan was to stay out to see what we could find immediately after sunset. Almost immediately, the thermal imagers picked up a reasonable sized animal not far from us moving through the vegetation and when the spotlights were switched on, Junior identified it as a Green Acouchy, only the third one he had ever seen and thus a fantastic additional to our mammal list.

Several small rodents were also found and when we got close to one of these and Junior gently pushed a paddle into the leaf litter where he thought it was hiding, the rat made a huge leap almost landing in one of the canoes before swimming off and quickly disappearing.

Frustratingly, a small cat hunting what appeared to be an agouti was picked up in the thermal imagers but when the lights were put on nothing could be seen and both animals disappeared. Whilst it was disappointing to have not seen either creature, the encounter demonstrated once again the difference in what could be detected when using a thermal imager.

After no luck with trying to call in a Crested Owl, we returned to *Iracema* where the preparations for a farewell BBQ were well advanced and everyone soon assembled on the top deck for a delicious final dinner. Despite having only a tiny galley to prepare our meals, there was no question that the cooks had done a fantastic job in catering for us with an excellent selection of tasty dishes throughout our voyage.

Following an opportunity to thank the crew for their efforts, some stayed on top deck for music and dancing but people soon drifted off to bed as the long journey home would start the following day.

17 September 2022

After a couple of weeks of wakeup calls which were rarely any later than 05:30, many people took the opportunity for a lie in and we awoke to find *Iracema* at anchor on the opposite bank from the outskirts of Manaus. For the first time on our trip, the crew had needed to use the anchor as they had been unable to tie up to a suitable tree !!

Once everyone was awake, we headed off to the 'meeting of the waters', the point where the Rios Negro and Solimoes meet to form the Amazon River. With one being a 'black water' river and the other having 'white water', it was extraordinary to see the two basically flowing adjacent to each other and, at this point, not mixing.

Junior gave us a helpful introduction to the phenomenon and explained that it was tens of kilometres before the two rivers completely mixed and that they actually flowed at different speeds and, for example, had very different pH values.

All too soon, it was time to head for the wharf in downtown Manaus and, sadly, it was time to say goodbye to Junior and his fantastic and extremely hardworking team and begin our respective journeys home.

Our "Remote Amazon" holiday had been a fantastic adventure and we had been truly privileged to get to such a rarely visited part of the world and see not only mile-after-mile of pristine rainforest but a great selection of the birds and other wildlife that make their home in this amazing region.



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