

MANAUS, AMAZONAS, BRAZIL – 7th to 28th September, 2018

A SHORT REPORT FOR TRAVELING BIRDERS

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FIG. 1. An immature Grey Hawk at Ramal Bons Amigos, a confusing *Leucopternis*-look-alike not (adequately) portrayed in field guides.

The following text is going to include brief updates on car rental, accommodations and birding sites in the Manaus region of Amazonas, in an area within the triangle of Presidente Figueiredo – Rio Tupana – Novo Airão. It is based on subjective experiences of a solo visitor on a three week route of 3.100 km, between sites of public access, in September 2018. National parks, exclusive private reserves and upscale tourism services in general were avoided because of their inevitable red tape and time-consuming & anti-birding regulations, not to mention as a rule exorbitant entry fees.

At the time of the visit, I suffered from a broken sacrum and had to limit my explorations accordingly. It was challenging enough to manage the flight timetable changes by Latam, which made my frog-leaping return transits 42 h and 46 h long, respectively. Overall, I was nevertheless quite happy with the self-organized visit, to which Juha Honkala (Kon-Tiki Tours) and Bradley Davis (Birding Mato Grosso) also contributed with their expert advice. Birding was great and no significant problems were encountered on the road. All in all, 415 species of birds were recorded, about 150 of which were lifers for me, and 12 species of mammals. Food was good, accommodations were fair, people in most cases welcoming and expenses low because of an exceptionally weak real at the time of the journey, few weeks before Brazilian presidential elections.

A number of bird species and records are going to be mentioned for each site. Most of the easy-to-see and widespread ones have been omitted. It is time-consuming enough to write a trip report as it is.

CAR RENTAL, ROADS AND FERRIES

CAR RENTAL

In the case of Manaus, reserving a car with Localiza-Hertz, the largest operator in Brazil and my favorite choice, proved to be a strange experience. When contacting their central reservations in Belo Horizonte, I was told to phone the Manaus office by myself. The central reservations could not make the reservation, even though making reservations was what they are supposed to do, at least in theory. Fortunately, a few chats with Fernando I. Souza, by email, resulted in the helpful Localiza-Hertz employee to go the extra mile for me, by phoning Manaus domestically. An international call was, after all, not really an option, for a number of reasons; e.g. lack of common language, major time difference and the impossibility of documented reservation. Arriving on spot without a reservation was not an attractive option either, as there tend to be a shortage of suitable vehicles in Manaus.

Try Paula.Regina@localiza.com for direct contact with Localiza-Hertz Manaus, in Portuguese.

I reserved a Dacia Duster but was upgraded to a Jeep Renegade Longitude 1.8 16V Flex Gasoline/Ethanol (the full title was even longer). Both of these cars would have done the job well, by providing some extra clearance and durability on rough roads. In fact, I could have visited most of the sites in a small sedan (dry roads), but nevertheless preferred the extra capacity. The Jeep was brand new, with only 150 km under its belt and with many up-to-date gadgets, of which a parking camera proved to be most useful and a TomTom Navi most useless. The latter was downright dangerous. It was therefore only occasionally activated, for the fun of it. Let's see where the TomTom would have taken me this time, instead of the correct destination!

Gasoline cost around R4.50 (€0.90) per liter in September 2018. A total of 3.100 km was driven in the area, without any serious incidents, damage to the car or even a flat tire. I managed to miss all the tens of thousands of potholes, except one just before Manacapuru. The front suspension survived the hit, which was necessitated by two head-on lorries on my lane, they themselves trying to avoid some deep, pool-size potholes on the opposite lane. In Brazil, according to my experience, the most common cause of a flat tire is a situation such as this, involving a lorry or two, and inability to avoid a hole or some obstacle on the road.

In regard to navigation, I had prepared myself well, with for example street view photos of the planned routes in Manaus, with additional photo-shopped information such as distances between key intersections. In regard to side roads, it helped to know how the often inconspicuous junctions actually looked like, before spotting them with the help of distance information. Everything was stored in two (primary & backup) camera memory chips and learned by heart. The navigator of the car, even though too unreliable to be trusted in details, provided some general map information. I also had a GPS with a Brazil touring map as another backup, but never needed it.

In the end, I did not quite manage to avoid the Brazilian red tape. Before sunrise, in the last morning in Manaus, I drove about 80 km/h on the empty four-lane Avenida Torquaro Tapajos to the north, at the section of the road which has a 60 km/h speed limit (and 80-100 km/h day-time traffic), when a speed camera photographed the back of my vehicle. Unlike in the congestion of rush hours, the system worked.

As there was no flash, I had no idea what had happened and surprisingly received a traffic fine of €25 (+ €4 car rental office fee) at home in Finland, three weeks later.

Unfortunately, somebody at the Localiza-Hertz preferred to not spend the required five minutes in charging my credit card but forwarded the issue to their headquarters in Belo Horizonte. A nine week process followed, involving two dozen people and also the Embassy of Finland in Brazil, not to mention some 50 emails. Fortunately, soon after the deadline for the bill, the head of the staff broke the chain of negligence and told somebody to do the job, to the great relief of me myself and a few others. This would not have been possible without the help of Fernando, the resourceful Localiza-Hertz contact made during the car reservation process, and his attentive boss. My repeated requests for a credit card charge or pleas for bank transfer information certainly did not do the job.

ROAD CONDITIONS

In regard to road conditions, the streets of Manaus were in fine or good condition, with only occasional potholes. The Highway 174 to the north, to Presidente Figueiredo and beyond, was in excellent condition, just like the first 30 km of the Novo Airão road (AM-070), the upgraded four-lane highway section beyond the Rio Negro Bridge (Ponte Rio Negro). The latter road had, incredibly, a 60 km/h speed limit, which nobody obeyed.

The 50 km section before Manacapuru (in the west) is, however, currently undergoing a major upgrade from two-lane seriously potholed tarmac to a four-lane highway. The work has just started and one may expect increasingly difficult road conditions in the near future and heavy machinery on the road at least for the next two years. Beyond Manacapuru, the two-lane tarmac road to Novo Airão (AM-352) was fortunately a good one, with very few potholes.

In the north, the Balbina road (AM-240) was fine, after one had passed the pothole/speed bump roads in the eastern vicinity of Presidente Figueiredo and at Maruaga. In the south, the Trans-Amazonas Highway 319, the 101 km between Careiro da Varzea (ferry terminal) and Careiro do Castanho, was good tarmac with a number of short road improvement sections and several uncomfortable speed bumps at both ends. South of Careiro do Castanho, the first 26 km were also fine, but the rest (38 km) to Rio Tupana was slow going, because of a multitude of potholes. The Manaquiri road, AM-354, on the other hand, was fine, flawless tarmac all the way.

In regard to minor tarmac roads, the one between AM-070 and Rio Solimoes in Iranduba was in a bad state, degraded and in a need of restoration. The same can be said of the Ramal Pau de Rosa road, towards Ramal Bom Destino; slow and with many potholes. The quality of gravel side roads, on the other hand, largely depended on soil quality. In white sand areas, the tracks were in a clearly better shape than their counterparts on laterite topsoil. As an example, most of the roads at Iracema Falls were pretty difficult to bird whenever the surface was damp, because one could not really walk or stand on the sticky and slippery red mud. Conversely, the Ramal do Tucumanduba track remained pleasant regardless of weather, because of its predominantly sandy composition.

The Ramal do 2000 track, by the Manaquiri road, was a special case. Even though it had not rained for two weeks and the sky remained clear, moisture in the air concentrated in the trees along this 2 km track,

creating a strong drip each morning and a muddy, soft road for the first two hours after sunrise. My Jeep lost all traction there, prompting the car computer to shut down some of its more sensitive functions. They nevertheless returned after a 20 km drive on dry tarmac, and it was possible to slide through the track anyway. In the afternoons, the surface was dry and hard as a rock!

East of Balbina, just beyond the airfield, the track to Balbina Forest proved to be beyond the capacity of Jeep Renegade. As a result of ongoing logging operation in that direction, and some rain, the track had become too muddy to drive. I tried to go in and barely managed to slide down back to the airfield, with 10 cm of slick laterite muck on my tires. It would have been easy to bury the car in the wet trackside ditches but I managed to avoid this by a narrow margin, by very slow and measured movements.

The good, sandy gravel tracks included the Mari Mari road, Cachoeira das Araras (beware the soft parking area at the end) at Iracema Falls, Lago Mamori and Lago Mirauá (Manaquiri) tracks in the south, Ramal Bons Amigos, Ramal do Mutum (first 2 km), Sitio San Jose (with reservations, first 2 km) and Ramal Semidios around Novo Airao, and the Manacapuru Ponds access road (details will be explained later).

AMAZON FERRIES

There is a ferry service across the Amazon River in Manaus, running between the ports of Ceasa and Careiro da Varzea. The ferries run once every hour, during the operating hours (see moovitapp.com), and are supposed to follow a schedule. In practice, expect both delays and early departures.

To give some idea of the situation, the English language information page in the Internet informs that the first ferry will run at 4.30 AM. In Manaus, the local Internet only provided pages in Portuguese, and the ferry timetable was not available, because only foreigners are thought to require such information (in English). The receptionist at Hotel Talissa II called the ferry office for me and was informed that the first departure was going to be at 5.00 AM.

Desiring to drive the 25 km to Ceasa at wee hours, with minimum traffic around the city center, I arrived there already at 3.40 AM. A sedan fee of R35 (€6.80) was collected for the Jeep and we started to load the five vehicle in the line to the ferry almost at once, by reversing up on a rather steep and a rather narrow ramp without railings. A careless move and one was at the bottom of the river! The reason for the hurry became apparent, when a military police convoy arrived, in order to cross the river, too. Soon the ferry was full and we departed at 4.10 AM! Surrounded by a plenitude of arms and military vehicles, not to mention the gun-toting men and women, some of whom seemed anxious for immediate action, we few civilians certainly felt secure against any interference.

The crossing took 55 minutes and was aided by powerful searchlights. There may, after all, be trees and other surprising obstacles sailing downstream, in addition to the large container ships parked in front of Manaus. The ocean cargo ships may sail all the way to Iquitos, Peru, on this mighty river. It is perhaps worth mentioning that Manaus is a major drug trafficking hub, among other things. At night, it is therefore best to stay on the main streets, to keep one's eyes open and to definitely avoid the commercial port area, not to mention the favelas.

Towards the end of the run, we sailed rather close to the shoreline of the large island with Lago de Rei, where the lights revealed some night-active birds, including a **Sand-colored Nighthawk**. On the daytime return journey, five days later, a larger ferry (took an hour to load it) kept more distance to the island. I guess some island specialities might be spotted on a sunrise run from Manaus to Careiro da Varzea, but the shoreline appeared rather/increasingly degraded and devoid of natural vegetation (many gardens, cleared land). The meeting of black Negro and brown Solimoes waters could be seen also at night!

Incredibly, the ferry service for cars runs only on weekdays, from Monday to Friday, and ceases around 8 PM. Recently, they informed that Tuesdays were closed, too. Check the timetables before you go. Moreover, entering and leaving the ferry may be impossible for a sedan with a low clearance. Reasonably high clearance is required because of the steepness of some of the ramps. If too late to find space on the last ferries on Friday, one may get stuck in Careiro da Varzea for the weekend. That is, however, not the end of it all. There are plenty of birds in the area and crossing the Amazon as a passenger, without a vehicle, can be organized also during the weekend, if necessary.



FIG. 2. One of the mid-size ferries, crossing from Manaus to Careiro da Varzea.

SITES AND ACCOMMODATIONS

MANAUS

Accommodation

In Manaus, I spent a total of eight nights at **Hotel Talissa II** (Rua Parana, Flores), about 4 km southeast of the airport, as a crow flies. Taxi cost R65 either way, at a fixed rate. The first two nights, booked at Booking.com (R128 = €27) did not include breakfast, which could be purchased on spot for R9 (€1.70). Otherwise, I paid R139 – R99 (€19–€29), depending on the quality of the double room. A suite (upstairs) would have cost R159 (€33) per night.

It is best to book directly, by email (reserva@talissa.com.br) or at their internet booking link (<http://www.hoteltalissa.com.br/contato/>). For a rental car, there is a free secluded parking at the hotel. Driving to the hotel, however, does involve a dangerous cross-lanes U-turn by the Fish Maria airfield, 3.8 km from the international airport. It is possible to turn left under a causeway (need to cross 2+3 lanes) or little later, in front of Carrefour (safer, 3 lanes of slower, more congested traffic). Be sure to have a look on this intersection at Google Street View before actually driving there.

The simple but mostly comfortable rooms (I had four different doubles) had a net television with CNN, a fridge and air-conditioning. Breakfasts were included in the room rate, just like dinners, albeit the latter only on weekdays and strictly between 7 and 8 PM. The receptionists were quite friendly and helpful, even though in most cases not able to speak English. The man fluent in English worked in a night shift (24 hour service). The manager also spoke English, but was unfortunately not helpful, unlike his staff.

As a result, I could only have one dinner, being informed too late for the rest. The breakfasts, on the other hand, were served too late (9 AM) for me, in most cases.

One of the perks of Talissa II is its proximity to key services. The nearby Carrefour Hypermarket (with limited selection of goods, if compared to average Carrefour standards) may be reached by a circular alley route Av. Prof. Nilton Lins (U-turn) – Estr. da Palestina – Tv. Dois de Agosto – R. Barreirinha – Av. Djalma Batista – Av. Prof. Nilton Lins. Close to the hotel, when turning right to Nilton Lins on Rua Alagoas, there is a Lavamania car wash service (R50 for complete hand wash, an hour of work by two men) and a Petrobras station, and a take away pizza/meal joint right beyond the latter. At Carrefour, a sizable reserve of water and other drinks (50 liters) was bought in the beginning. In fact, I was not quite able to finish it all before the departure.

Birds could be observed at Talissa II, too. Parrots were especially common, including the occasional **Diademed** and **Festive Amazons**, and **Tui Parakeets**.

I had a bad experience with **Hotel Ibis Airport**. It would have been an ideal base for my last two nights, but the receptionist tried to inflate the room rate, claiming high demand. He mentioned a rate of R280, also for a half day. This was double the regular fee. He insisted that all the accommodations in Manaus were going to be fully booked for the next two days, and would therefore charge more. They were not. Ibis was next to empty and at Talissa II, they had several vacant units. It was, after all, Wednesday!

MUSA Tower

I never went to this observation tower, because each of its regular species except one (**Red-billed Pied Tanager**) could be seen at other, less complicated places.

The problems with the MUSA Tower were: 1) The gated garden opens late and closes early, 2) for a sunrise visit, one needs to call Mrs. Karla Arakaki (92) 99111-2878) to apply for a permit, 3) the special visits involve an extra fee (€50?) and the date may need to be fixed (weather may impede), and 4) one has to park one's car some distance away from the tower. On the other hand, it probably is a great option for a short, public transportation based visit in Manaus only, or for a group of birders.

IRANDUBA AREA

Lago Janauari

The wetland may apparently be reached only by (expensive?) organized boat tours from Manaus, in most cases together with main stream tourists and at hours inconvenient for birding. I decided to skip the site, for obvious reasons, despite its potential for certain varzea species I still today miss.

Varzea do Iranduba

The varzea proved to be more difficult to visit than anticipated. After dealing with the rough 15 km access road, locating the Port of Iranduba was easy enough. Unfortunately, the port area was busy with people at sunrise and there was no space to park on the embankment road. The riverside tracks were deep under water in September. I did some short observations by parking the car on a lane, but did not stay long, after realizing the difficulty of reaching the desired habitats. A **Red-and-White Spinetail** and **Wing-barred Seedeaters** were my best records.

East of Iranduba, rural roads appeared to provide another access to the river. I tried my luck at Ramal do Creuza road, east of Iranduba access road, 6.4 km north of the port and 6.1 km south of AM-070. Unfortunately, a section of the gravel track had washed out and I failed.

The access would probably have been available 3 km east on the AM-070, along the Ramal do Iranduba road, but I had already wasted so much time in exploration that I had to give up and keep on going towards Manacapuru and Novo Airão.

Novo Airão Rd (KM50/AM-070)

The site is at -3.186420, -60.441504, 59 km west of Ponte Rio Negro. As already explained, the section of the highway is currently disturbed by the massive roadworks of AM-070. I nevertheless stopped there twice, arriving too late for the morning and too early for the afternoon. The best bird was a **Waved Woodpecker**.

The path to the forest was seriously tangled by vines and not really accessible without a machete. 4.2 km further west, there is a short drivable track to a Petrobras pumping station also on the northwest side of the highway. It could be productive at a right time of the day.

PAU ROSA AREA

Accommodation

Frustratingly, there appears to be no suitable accommodation available in the neighborhood of Ramal do Pau Rosa. One therefore has to stay in Manaus and drive 1.5 hours to arrive in Ramal Bom Destino, for example. Fazenda Soares Nunez (by BR-174) was closed during my visit. Recanto Tukanos (also by BR-174) had several shortcomings; it is really a place for families with children, who look for a pool and a bar.

Ramal do Pau Rosa and Ramal Bom Destino

The Ramal do Pau Rosa junction is located 21.4 km north of the highway 174 Y-junction in north Manaus (police checkpoint), towards Presidente Figueiredo. I visited the area three times, once in the afternoon and twice in the morning. Largely cleared for agriculture, Ramal do Pau Rosa area is nowadays little more than an access to Ramal Bom Destino, 18 km west of the highway. The latter area is, unfortunately, following suit, at a fast pace.

Ramal Bom Destino can be reached by turning west at Ramal do Pau Rosa junction, driving straight on potholed tarmac, turning left to a gravel road (may be upgraded) at km 14.3, and turning right to another gravel track at km 16.5. **Spotted Antpitta** has occurred at km 17 (track into the forest), by the main road, if one skips the km 16.5 turn and continues 500 meters forward. Earlier along the access route, lone wintering **Southern Martins** were seen in two spots on all three visits.

Personally, I focused my searches mostly around the road between -2.778223, -60.162722 and -2.720382, -60.213760, with some shorter visits along other roads in the general area. In the beginning, there was a partly cleared and burned area with tall trees, attractive for parrots, woodpeckers and others. At 2.720382, -60.213760 there is a viewpoint, from where a long ridge with treetops may be observed. With luck, a **Crimson Fruitcrow** could perhaps be spotted there? It has been recorded in the area.

Beyond a village (terrible road) there, a new road was constructed towards the west. Consequently, the forests are bound to disappear in the near future. At the end of the day, the area was a disappointing one, even though I had my moments there, too. There is a need to follow the new roads further west, to discover more forest, before it (sadly) disappears, too.

The best birds included: **Caica, Dusky, Red-fan** and **Black-headed Parrots, Black-spotted Barbets, Black Nunbirds, Green Aracaris**, especially good views of several **Red-necked Woodpeckers**, a **Thrush-like Antpitta**, a **Cinereous Mourner**, a **Musician Wren, Glossy-backed Becards**, an **Olive Flycatcher**, a **Spangled Cotinga**, a **Golden-sided Euphonia** and **Wing-barred Seedeaters**. The only mammal seen at Ramal Bom Destino was a lone **Collared Titi**.

KM30 W of BR-174

The access is located 11.5 km north of Ramal do Pau Rosa junction, 74.5 km before Presidente Figueiredo. The AFPAM site, with its gardens, was gated on top of a short but rather steep and rough access track to the west (gate is not visible from BR-174). That was a pity, because satellite images indicate good access to forest (hopefully, it still exists?) there. One probably needs to contact AFPAM before a birding visit.

KM63 E of BR-174

The junction is 42 km north of Ramal do Pau Rosa junction and 44 km south of Presidente Figueiredo. The rough track leads some distance to some research in a large protected zone of forest. Access is strictly forbidden, without a special permit. Bird tour groups used to go this way before less complicated alternatives were discovered.

BALBINA

Accommodation

The village of Balbina is located 80 km east of Presidente Figueiredo. My choice for accommodation for three nights was **Vicana's Pousada**, which had a central (parkland) but significantly more peaceful location than Pousada Balbina, for example. In Google Maps, the Vicana's is misleadingly labeled as Pousada Balbina. In reality, the latter is located in the northeastern section of the village, close to the access to the Balbina airfield.

Being initially the only customer at Vicana's, I got the best room with flawless mosquito screens. As the rate of occupancy varies, it may pay to bring some tape to be able to close small holes in the screens, if necessary. The basic but adequate room with ac and fridge cost R90 (€18) per night. There was space for parking in front of the reception and place with good pizzas, hamburgers etc. the next door. The nights were surprisingly cold in Balbina, around +20C, more than ten degrees below afternoon temperatures. It is therefore best to shut the ac down for the night.

I guess parking is quite safe in Balbina. The access road has, after all, a military police checkpoint, and all traffic is strictly monitored, because of the strategically sensitive Uatuma River Dam, across which one enters the village area.

Ramal do Tucumanduba

This well-recommended forest road was visited from Balbina. The four visits were made early in the morning (3), with before the sunrise arrivals, and late in the afternoon (1). It was a 25.8 km and a 25 minutes ride from Balbina (roundabout at entrance) towards Presidente Figueiredo, after the correct entry point at -2.012109, -59.574333 had been identified.

The track was level and sandy, without mud or wet weather troubles. Good habitat (with sections of tall trees) continues for 3.5 km (measured from the edge of the forest, where nightjars were common on the road early in the morning). It is best to make a U-turn as soon as the road starts descending. The downhill section is soft and unstable, and things do not improve further down. On the contrary, I once went down to the fields (see Google Maps) and had it difficult to return, despite the 4WD.

The locals on the road were polite, friendly and welcoming. There was no tree-cutting activity along the track and the traffic was light and occurred mostly towards the hot midday hours. One gun-toting hunter on a motorbike probably explained the difficulty of observing guans, chachalacas and trumpeters there, despite their vocal presence. As a rule, I could bird between 5.30 - 8.30 AM without any interference. After 10 AM, the weather became too hot and bird activity ceased.

The best birds were: **Marail Guans**, a **Grey-winged Trumpeter** (heard only), **Dusky Parrots**, **Scarlet-shouldered Parrotlets**, **Black-bellied Cuckoos**, a **Pavonine Quetzal**, a **Bronzy Jacamar**, a **Black-banded Owl**, a **Guianan Toucanet**, **Black-spotted Barbets**, **Guianan Puffbirds**, **Black Nunbirds**, **Waved Woodpeckers**, a **Racket-tailed Coquette**, a **Chestnut-rumped Woodcreeper**, **Curve-billed Scythebills**, a lone **White-chinned**

Swift (breeds close-by?), **Ash-winged** and **Spot-backed Antwrens**, a **Guianan Warbling Antbird**, **Black-throated**, **Spot-winged** and **Rufous-throated Antbirds**, a **Thrush-like Antpitta**, a **Saffron-crested Tyrant-Manakin**, a **White-fronted** and **White-throated Manakins**, a **Dusky Purpletuft**, a **Painted Tody-flycatcher**, a **Todd's Sirystes**, **Guianan Tyrannulets**, **Guianan Gnatcatchers**, **Blue-backed Tanagers** (prolonged views of a pair with a juvenile!), a **Pompadour Cotinga** and **Cayenne Jays**. A **Guianan Red Cotinga** was displaying close by, by the main road. Others did locate a **Capuchinbird** soon after my departure.

Mammals included a **Red Brocket Deer**, a **Red Acouchi**, **Guianan Red Howlers** and **Tufted Capuchins**.



FIG. 3. My Jeep at Ramal do Tucumanduba; see the excellent road, even after heavy rain.

Balbina village & airfield

In Balbina, I focused on the airfield, scanning the sky and surrounding bushland mostly from the northern end of the runway. As already mentioned, the tracks east of the airfield were too muddy for my vehicle. I went to the runway three times, always in late afternoon or at midday, after arriving in Balbina or on my way to the pousada, after finishing at Ramal do Tucumanduba. Some birding was also done along the tracks by the eastern edge of the village. In the evenings, **Blue-and-Yellow Macaws** and other parrots were guaranteed to cross the runway on their way to their roosts. No scarcer parrot species were, however, recorded. The scrub had good variety of widespread bird species, including a **Northern Slaty Antshrike**, a **Spangled Cotinga** and my only **Tawny-crowned Greenlet**.

As one approaches Balbina, there is a roundabout at the entrance. On the right, the street immediately becomes a grassy track and runs into some tall bush. This used to be another access to the airfield but currently the track soon ends at a rubbish dip. In the surrounding open landscape with tall trees, birds may be observed. On the 9th of September, there was an adult **Orange-breasted Falcon** there.

PRESIDENTE FIGUEIREDO AREA

Accommodation

A cabin at **Iracema Falls Resort** cost R115 (€24) per night, with ac, fridge and an out-of-order television. As the place was next to deserted, I was able to pick a unit with space for close-by parking, an important feature during rains. The cabin had plenty of bats upstairs. I stayed there for four nights, but never had a breakfast (included, but at impossible times) at the resort restaurant, and also had only one meal there, because the restaurant was closed for most of the time. Instead, lunches were had and groceries bought at Presidente Figueiredo, in addition to my Carrefour reserves. For a lunch, I am able to recommend the daily lunch buffet at the tiny bakery of the Pontes Supermarket at Rua Taboca 12. Tasty meals (chicken/beef/fish etc.) were available for R10 (€1.90) and I never had problems with digestion after eating there. Overall, the level of food hygiene is very good in Brazil. A nearby shop sold my favorite, cold Yara Tonica Quinine cans.

Iracema Falls

The well-signposted junction is 8.6 km north of Presidente Figueiredo. At Iracema Falls, there were four areas available for birding: the resort compound, the 1.5 km Cachoeira Iracema track (gated), Cachoeira das Araras track (accessible from the cabins) and the 2.4 km long access road. The most productive one was the Cachoeira Iracema track, unless some male members of the staff decided to motorbike it at sunrise and scare all the large birds off (they did this, once). For the invaluable mixed bird parties (scarce, one or two per day), the best spots were (A) just before the top of the first uphill climb after a small bridge by the resort, and (B) at a shady left hand curve later on. The very tall tree on the right and low fruiting trees opposite of it, in-between A and B, also attracted a few birds, and at the end, the parking area always had something interesting to see.

I did the Cachoeira Iracema track five times, both before the arrival of day visitors (the gate opens at 8 AM) and late in the afternoon. The road is narrow and the shoulders may be soft, in places too soft or too narrow for parking. The access road was not very productive because its shoulders had been extensively cleared. Nevertheless, I checked it few times. The more closed and peaceful Cachoeira das Araras track was also relatively unproductive, despite of three visits.

The compound was a good, relaxed place for late afternoon/evening scoping, because of the wide views of treetops available there, not to mention the various avian visitors such as several species of hummingbirds at its flowering trees. There was little human disturbance during my stay there, because for most of the time, there were no other staying customers. The compound had, among others, reliable **Painted Parakeets** and **Green Aracaris**, a **Guianan Toucanet** and a **Black-throated Antshrike** (heard), not to mention the treetop **Spangled** and **Pompadour Cotingas**.

The Cachoeira Iracema track was the site for **Black Curassows** and **Grey-winged Trumpeters**. Between 8 and 12 of the former were seen on the road early in the morning, the parking lot being the most reliable spot for them. The parking lot was also good for **Caica** and **Red-fan Parrots**, a **Black-faced Hawk** (once, difficult to locate, only at Iracema Falls), **Amazonian Antshrike**, a **Guianan Schiffornis**, a **Plumbeous Euphonia** and cotingas. A wintering group of three **Tawny-headed Swallows** were seen there, too (bit unexpected).

Once, a splendid group of five **Grey-winged Trumpeters** slowly crossed the Cachoeira Iracema track, soon after the initial climb, early in the morning, the blue and purple decorative feathers sparkling in the sun. Other goodies in this section were a **Fiery-tailed Aowlbill** (on top of the first climb, after bridge), a **Pavonine Cuckoo** (with a mixed party), a **Red-billed Woodcreeper**, a **Chestnut-rumped Woodcreeper**, **Guianan Woodcreepers**, a **Rufous-rumped Foliage-Gleaner**, a **Pelzel's Tody-Tyrant**, a **Rufous-throated Antbird**, a **Guianan Red Cotinga** (with a mixed party), **McConnell's Warblers** and a **Golden-sided Euphonia**.



FIG.4. Black Curassows, at the Cachoeira Iracema track parking area, at the end of the road.

On the way to Cachoeira das Araras, the best bird was a **Rufous-bellied Antwren**. Along the access road, a **Brown-bellied Antwren** and a party of five **White-chinned Swifts** were the best records. Once, there was an immature **Black-faced Hawk** at the Iracema Falls junction, by the highway. Other birds seen in the general area included **Marail Guans**, **Dusky Parrots**, **Sapphire-rumped Parrotlets**, **Black-spotted Barbets**, **Black Nunbirds**, **Golden-collared Woodpeckers**, **Spot-backed Antwrens**, **Tiny Tyrant-Manakins**, a **Buff-cheeked Greenlet** and **Glossy-backed Becards**. A rewarding selection of mammals was also seen: **Guianan Red Howlers**, **Tufted Capuchins**, **Red-handed Tamarins**, a **Tayra**, **Black and Red-rumped Agoutis**, and **Red Agoutis**, not to mention the many unidentified bats.

Mari Mari

The area was visited only once, for a full and rather hot and mostly disappointing day, with a lunch break in Presidente Figueiredo. The Mari Mari road junction is 6.9 km west of Maruaga, on the Balbina Road. The access road (turn north) is a rather poor substitute of the proper forest which would be available (for a fee!) at Aldeia Mari Mari (guesthouse). It was, however, all that I was able to visit. The best sections of the

hot and dusty, mostly cleared area, were between the Mari Mari access and a small village about 850 m beyond it, and at the steep hillside just after the village, at a spot with a view. Because of my fractured sacrum, I did not dare to drive the road all the way down there, in order to explore the rest on foot, even though the forest in that direction appeared to be very good indeed.

At the viewpoint, there was an active nest of a **Guianan Schiffornis** and a resident pair of **Caica Parrots**. After sunset, a **Rufous Potoo** was discovered there. Even more lucky was a discovery of a roosting **White-winged Potoo**, in roadside forest close to the Aldeia Mari Mari entrance. Other good ones there included a **Collared Puffbird**, **Black Nunbirds**, **Green Aracaris**, a **Waved Woodpecker**, a **Ferrugineous-backed Antbird**, a **Glossy-backed Becard**, a **Pelzel's Tody-Tyrant** and my best views of a **Buff-cheeked Greenlet**. In addition, there was a **Guianan Cock-of-the-Rock** lek in a large valley by the Balbina road, right east of the Mari Mari junction. One was also heard in the direction of Aldeia Mari Mari (a well-known lek site).



FIG.5. A 'welcoming' sign with a 'pitty bull' at a private lot, Mari Mari. I doubt there was a dog there but nevertheless was happy to have no need to enter the fenced area...

Lajes Reserve

The old access is 1.7 km south of the Iracema Falls junction, and 7 km north of Presidente Figueiredo, on the east side of the highway. The area was gated in September 2018, but it would probably have been possible to enter after negotiations with the caretaker. As far as I know, it is doubtful if the main target species, **White-naped Seedeater**, still breeds there. In any case, I did not know in which corner of the reserve they have occurred.

The white sand campina site was therefore listed as a secondary one in my program, with predominantly mid-day visits (four, once one hour at sunrise) and preference to hummingbirds, at flowering bushes either at the former entrance area, or at a gate with space for one car, 400 meters south towards a bridge, the rapids and Presidente Figueiredo. As it was exceedingly hot during the visits, I spent lot of time inside the car, having meals, relaxing and observing the birds by a window-mounted telescope.

The best birds were **Greentailed Goldentthroats**, a **Crimson Topaz**, a **Pompadour Cotinga** and a **Pale-bellied Mourner** (excellent views of singing bird at the former entrance). **Moriche Orioles** were nesting in palms.

Cachoeira da Onca (entry fee R10)

Not visited as there was already plenty to do at the selected sites. The signposted entrance is at about 1.5 km north of Presidente Figueiredo.

Cachoeira da Asframa

Not visited because of time restrictions. The main target bird, **White-chinned Swift**, had after all already been observed at Ramal do Tucumanduba and at Iracema Falls. The site is 75 km north of Ramal do Pau Rosa junction and 11.5 km south of Presidente Figueiredo.

Maruaga Caves

Not visited despite some potential. The office hours were not really attractive for birding. One would need to gain access earlier, but in that case there was the problem with parking. Leaving the car by the highway would potentially not be safe. I did, however, scan the roadside treetops of Maruaga (west) twice, during transits between other sites in the area. The area can be good for birds of prey.

Ramal do Urubui

Just north of Presidente Figueiredo, there is another access to forest at -2.042349, -60.026181 (to the west). By following the road for about 10 km, one should arrive in productive habitat. Personally, I kept the site in reserve, being already busy enough with the above-mentioned sites. Iracema Falls was peaceful, productive and accessible, and there consequently was motivation to spend most of the time there.

CAREIRO (DO CASTANHO) AREA

BR-319 may be a trans-Amazonas highway, but do not expect primary forest right next to it. Most of the time, it is dusty agricultural land: pastures, duck ponds and small farms.

Accommodation

In Careiro (do Castanho), 101 km south of Porto Careiro da Varzea, I stayed at **Hotel Arruda's** for four nights, paying R100 (€20) for each night, without breakfast (regular room rate was reduced by R15 (€3),

because of the long stay). For the money, I got a second floor (highway-side, which is cooler in the afternoons and also more peaceful than the street-side) double with an ac, a television and a fridge, and a cold water shower (actually lukewarm, quite fine in the climate). A third floor room with hot water would have been R150 (€30) per night. They also had a no frills alternative for R80 (€16).

Tasty dinners with fast service could be had in the premises for the price of R15 (€3). There is a secure parking area at the hotel, with a bothersome (on another street, one way streets and u-turns) need to visit first the reception to get the gate open. A pharmacy is located next door.

There is a new management and they look after their customers very well. Bookings and inquiries are best made by email, at mcida.bm@gmail.com. The tall white building is well visible on the right as one arrives in Careiro and well located close (but not too close) to the highway, Posto 555 petrol station and other services such as a Bradesco ATM. There is a 9 kg cat with a jacket in the premises, as well!

The highway-side balconies offer some close views to roosting birds. From my balcony, I once saw a **Black-and-White Hawk-Eagle**.



FIG. 6. Two of the many **Fork-tailed Flycatchers** which roost behind Hotel Arrudas.

Careiro is a very convenient base for Ramal do 2000 and other potential Manaquiri Road side tracks. It is, however, a bit less convenient for Tupana River area, because it is long and slow drive there. It is, however, possible to do some night bird observations on the way.

Furthermore, the accommodation choices closer to or at Rio Tupana are extremely expensive (each night costs 10 to 15x more than one at Arrudas), less comfortable and predominantly geared for groups & tour operators.

Manaquiri Road (Ramal do 2000 track etc)

10.3 km north of Careiro, a fine tarmac road (AM-254) exits to the northwest, to Manaquiri (no sign). The road is unfortunately not covered by Google Streetview. With my sketchy pre-visit information, I spent the first noon and afternoon around the end of the road, close to Manaquiri, in vain looking for remnant varzea forest. The best track was at -3.476819, -60.456590 (to Lago Mirauá), and hours of search there were rewarded by my only **Bar-breasted Piculets** and a male **Wing-barred Seedeater**. Burning or clear-cut forests, smoke, dust and hot sun, for the most of the time... Only on my way back to Careiro, I spotted the welcome sign of Ramal do 2000 (at -3.624550, -60.385269), on the south side of the road, 18 km west of the Manaquiri junction. Later, I went there twice, once in the afternoon and once at sunrise.



FIG.7 Ramal do 2000 sign, 18 km west of the BR-319 highway.

The first visit was, however, cut short because I lost my balance on the track, injured a leg and had to return to Careiro for additional disinfectants and bandages. Adhesive bandages or proper band aid were not available there, neither in Manaus. The Brazilians rely on WWI style treatment of cuts and abrasions. Well, they may have certain advantages in the hot and humid climate, I presume.

The site has some considerable potential, even though it may initially not look very promising. The best birds recorded during the two short visits there were a pair of **Brown-banded Puffbirds**, **Rufous-necked Puffbirds**, a **White-throated Antbird**, a **Madeira Stipple-throated Antbird**, a **Black Antbird**, a tame pair of **Humayta Antbirds**, **Hairy-crested Antbirds** and **Reddish-winged Bare-eyes**. A **Rusty Tinamou** was discovered in the more swampy and open habitat just east of Ramal do 2000. Mammals included **Black Howlers** and a pair of **Tayras**.

There is hunting at Ramal do 2000, but the guy with a shotgun there had no luck with prey. He was polite and carried his gun open, over the crook of his arm, in a safe manner. Looking at Google Maps, there are a few similar side tracks in the area. They also appear to be worth exploring, clearly more so than the burned and clear-cut surroundings of Manaquiri. I cannot recommend going there.

Rio Tupana Area

It is a difficult birding destination, because there is practically no off-road access and the few spots where the forest still exists close to the BR-319 are about to disappear, as a result of rampant population explosion. Wherever there is a new public road, all the forest next to it is soon cut down and burned, and a number of farms established. For millions and millions of Brazilians, the idea of sustainable future appears to be constituted by a small slash-and-burn farm, named after a Catholic deity and with a plenitude of children.

In few years, in most cases, it is going to be a plot of semi-desert and any farming will require massive piles of fertilizers, oftentimes too much to be economically sustainable. Some extra income may be obtained by poaching and illegal logging in nearby government forests, but sooner than later, it is a dead end, for the children. It is such a pity. If the problem did not exist, great birding would also be available in Tupana region. Alternatively, if a side track or two existed, with access to forest and no cutting of trees, it would be a completely different experience to bird there. Extensive forests can be seen from the highway.

Well, somebody might point out that there are two jungle lodges in the area. On the other hand, as long as they charge as much as they do (transit, accommodation, food, compulsory guide), staying in these places is not really an option for all of us. A package visit of two days may cost as much as flights between Europe and Brazil or more than a monthly rent of an apartment in Finland.

Fully aware of the existing pitfalls, I nevertheless did roadside birding there, between -4.164371, -60.792815 and -4.210444, -60.818944, on three consecutive occasions between 18th and 20th September. The focus was on mornings, and once, late afternoon. The first hour after sunrise being most productive, I left Careiro already at 4.00, night-birding on the way. Because of a seriously pot-holed section, towards the end, the 64 km drive took 1.5 h one way. The afternoons were mostly waste of time. Birds were really active only during the last 30 minutes before sunset. Ramal do 2000 track would have been a more productive alternative for the afternoons.

Kawall's Amazons were common but not numerous in the Tupana area. **Curl-crested Aracaris** were more difficult to locate. Once, the swifts included a group of **Amazonian Swifts**. About 1 km south of the high Rio Tupana bridge, I was surprised by a roadside territory of a **Razor-billed Curassow**. The bird was not only seen but also heard displaying there. The same spot had breeding **Capped Herons**, a **Western Striolated Puffbird** and a **Dull-capped Attila**. A short track to the right, just south of the bridge had, among others, a **Lesser Nighthawk**, a **Pied Puffbird**, a **White-fringed Antwren** and a displaying **Flame-crested Manakin**.

Other interesting roadside species in the area included **White-throated** and **Cinereous Tinamous**, a **Great Potoo**, a **White-chinned** and a **Blue-cheeked Jacamar**, **Green-tailed Goldentthroats**, a **Rufous-necked Puffbird**, a **White-chinned Treecreeper**, **Plain-winged/Tefe Antshrikes**, **Sclater's Antwrens**, **Predicted Antwrens**, a **Humayta Antbird**, a **Madeira Stipple-throated Antbird**, **Thrush-like Antpittas**, a **Grey-**

crowned Flatbill, **Zimmer's Tody-Tyrants**, a **Cinereous Becard** and a **Plum-throated Cotinga**. A pair of **Black-faced Tanagers** looked like an omen of final destruction in the degrading environment of Tupana.

The long drive did not produce that many birds: Widespread species such as **Burrowing Owls** (range expansion), **Ferruginous Pygmy Owls**, **Common Potoos**, **Common Pauras**, **Short-tailed Nighthawks** and a **Grey-chested Crake** at night, and a **Citron-bellied Attila** and a very nice **Purple-throated Cotinga** during the day. The only mammals recorded during the three visits were a **Grey Four-eyed Opossum** and a pair of **Bare-eared Squirrel Monkeys**.

Overall, I felt rewarded by the roadside birding in Tupana, because the area had many species which were otherwise not seen on this trip. Trekking on expensive lodge trails is not necessarily easy either, with their hot and humid conditions, wet terrain and closed views. On the highway, it was always possible to have a short rest in the air-conditioned vehicle.



FIG.8. A total of six trogon species are common around Manaus, including **White-tailed Trogon**.

Porto Careiro da Varzea area

The site was visited twice; Once, at sunrise, after arrival from Manaus, when there were more birds moving around than I was able to identify (e.g. parrots), and once, during hot afternoon hours, before entering the return ferry to Manaus. During the first visit, temperature at the ferry (river, just before sunrise) was +27C and +23C at Porto Careiro da Varzea. The river stores heat. In the afternoon, on the way to Careiro do Castano, the temperature reached +38C.

At the southern edge of the town, by a tiny gas station, a rough sandy track goes west between the settlement and some park-like habitat (see Google Maps satellite images). Heavy lorries frequent the dusty

track, but there is space to pass. The route soon ends at the big river. I found the track disturbed but nevertheless productive, especially early in the morning, and there really are not many options in Porto Careiro. The birds were observed either from the car or by standing close to it. There were many **Diademed** and few **Festive Amazons** there at sunrise, not to mention three riverside specialists: a **Green-throated Mango**, a **Brownish Elaenia** and the best of all, a **Brown-headed Greenlet**. The south of Manaus presence of the last species is a recent discovery not yet included in field guides (e.g. my choice, Ber van Perlo, Birds of Brazil).

Otherwise, a lot may initially be seen along the BR-319, between the above-mentioned gas station and the first major bridge, 2.8 km to the south. There are roadside wetlands there, with herons, egrets, wildfowl, terns, shorebirds and many **Wattled Jacanas**. Some of the best birds included **Horned Screamers**, **Humayta Antbirds** and **Glossy Antshrikes**. Also further on, there are wet meadows (**Spot-breasted Woodpeckers**) and occasional ponds by the highway, but the bird activity tended to die off as soon as the temperature rose above +30C degrees. Closer to Careiro do Castano, a lone **Dusky-headed Parakeet** was seen, at the northern edge of its distribution.

MANACAPURU AREA

Pousada e Balneário Cirandeira Bela

The pousada is located 99 km from Ponte Rio Negro, Manaus and 89 km south of Novo Airao. The plan was to stay there for one night and watch birds on their trail in the morning. The place was, however, fully booked and not really attractive for me (too many visitors, noise). It took three women almost an hour to figure out if there were vacancies, or not. At first they said that they had one for me. Booking ahead had not been an option for me, because they have made it difficult for international customers (prepayment etc.). Extra charges apply also on the spot, e.g. for credit card payments. A cabin cost R170 (€36) per night.

Neither was staying the night in Manacapuru an attractive choice. It is a noisy, crowded town with no obviously suitable accommodation, even though the options are aplenty. Somebody probably knows a decent place there, but I do not.

E Manacapuru Ponds

When studying Google satellite images, an extensive area of large artificial ponds was noted east of Manacapuru, by Rio Solimoes. I decided to visit the gated area, to see if access was granted and if there were any birds present. Ponds such as these, and the adjacent natural marshland, frequently hold species also present during the hot mid-day hours and the birds may be comfortably observed (and photographed) by using one's car as a mobile hide. A stop such as this may therefore be an ideal break on the long drive between Novo Airao and Manaus, especially in the conditions of current road works. Nevertheless, bring plenty of drinks for the hot ride.

The access was as follows: On AM-070, east of Manacapuru, turn south at -3.250096, -60.612500, 2.4 km east of the AM-070/AM-352 junction. It is 7.9 km south to the gated pond area: first right at km 5.5, again right after 300 meters and then straight 2.1 km to the gate. The gate was not locked and was actually

opened for me by one of the residents, who arrived there just before me, and welcomed a foreign birder in. Remember, however, to close the gate after you pass. Later on, the few people inside the extensive enclosure either ignored or welcomed me. It was possible to drive on embankment roads, in order to visit all the corners of the area.

At the natural marsh, a **Grey-breasted Crake** was calling. At the ponds, there were a variety of herons and egrets, two **Ospreys** and passerines such as a **Red-breasted Blackbird**. An **Amazonian Tyrannulet** and a **Tui Parakeet** (seen at other riverside sites, too) occupied the riverfront trees. The most interesting birds were, however, shorebirds, some of which are scarce in the Amazonas: four **Lesser** and four **Greater Yellowlegs**, 20 **Solitary** and two **Spotted Sandpipers**, 16 **White-rumped Sandpipers**, one **Semipalmated Sandpiper**, one **Pectoral Sandpiper** and six **Least Sandpipers**, and breeding **Southern Lapwings**.



FIG. 10. Spotted Sandpipers winter at ponds east of Manacapuru.

NOVO AIRAO AREA

Accommodation

In regard to accommodation, my first choice in Novo Airao, **Poudada Novo Airao** (160, €34), was unfortunately fully booked for the three nights I planned to stay in the town. The pousada appeared to be nice and tidy, with private parking and a row of eight relatively small rooms. Locating an alternative was a challenge as none of the Novo Airao accommodations get much praise in the Internet and always charge more than their counterparts in Manaus, for example. It is a tourist area, with inflated charges.

In the end, I opted for **Pousada Bela Vista**, where a four-bed room cost R180 (€36) per night, the highest rate on my tour. Breakfast was included, but impossible to have, because of its inconvenient service hours. They made no effort to organize something as compensation, nor reduced the room rate. The room had a small ac unit (not quite up to its task), a television and a fridge. It was possible to park one's car right in front of it. The pousada was undergoing a major renovation, but fortunately nobody was working there during my stay. With the exception of daytime pool visitors, I had the pousada practically for myself, because there was only the staff and me sleeping there. There was, nevertheless, some loud music in the neighborhood (once) at night and domestic chickens were noisy early in the morning (not a problem for an early bird birder).

There is a Bradesco ATM and a small supermarket with limited choices in the village.

Ramal dos Bons Amigos

Thirteen (13.1) kilometers south of Novo Airao, a gravel track turns right (west) off the AM-352 road, right beyond a roadside rubbish dump, and follows the edge of the dump down into forest. There used to be a sign there, but not anymore. In the beginning, there is a round clear-cut area on the left, as one enters the forest proper. The narrow tree corridor between the opening and the dump proved to be favorite route of some large mixed species parties. The trees were tall there and it was a struggle to scope the many birds high in the canopy.

The one-lane track (only limited parking space) runs down to a stream in a valley, where a homestead exists about 300 meters beyond the sandy, narrow and shallow stream (no problem to cross). One may make a U-turn at the homestead, or by the stream (sand). I met the landowner and he welcomes visiting birders.

With a prolonged effort, many great birds were recorded at this site. At night, there were a resident **White-winged Potoo**, **Spectacled Owls** and a **Black-banded Owl**, among others. During the day, the best ones included **White-throated Tinamous** (e.g. one on the track, with close views), **Dusky** and **Orange-cheeked Parrots** (scarce), a **Streak-throated Hermit**, **Ringed Woodpeckers**, a **Spot-throated Woodcreeper**, **Curve-billed Scythebills**, an **Olive-backed Foliage-Gleaner**, **Rufous-tailed Xenopses**, a **Spotted Antpitta**, an **Undulated Antshrike** (along the highway), **Pearly Antshrikes**, **White-shouldered Antshrikes**, **Spot-backed Antwrens**, a **Yellow-throated Antbird**, **Yellow-browed Antbirds** (at the very beginning of the track, by the dump), **Negro Stipple-throated Antbirds**, a **Spot-backed Antbird**, **Black-chinned Antbirds**, a **White-crested Spadebill**, a **Chestnut-belted Gnateater**, a **Dwarf Tyrant-Manakin**, **White-browed Purpletufts** (territorial at the corridor) and a **Plum-throated Cotinga**. **Two Chimney Swifts** spent their nights at the dead trees of the cleared area.

With its fine and undisturbed access to forest habitats, I focused on this site, spending all the best birding hours there, predawn to 11 AM and between 4 PM and 6 PM in the afternoons, with some time spent along AM-352 (especially 400 m S of the RBA junction) late in the evening. During my transits, at night or in the midday, short stops were made in places, e.g. at Ramal Semidios (viewpoint; e.g. a **Spangled Cotinga**). Other Novo Airao sites were only visited during the hot hours of the day. The Anavilhanas Jungle Lodge track would have added a few species to my life list, but it has unfortunately been gated and the access is subject to an exorbitant entrance fee.

Ramal do Mutum

It was a secondary site for me, signposted to the right 3.8 km south of Novo Airao. I did not drive too far, because the road deteriorated and one particular bridge did not look too inviting. There is, however, a wide opening, a hill with a viewpoint, at about km 2. It was good for afternoon scanning of treetops (e.g. **Orange-cheeked Parrots** and a **Plum-throated Cotinga**).

Novo Airao town

In the Rio Negro outskirts of the town, it is possible to try one's luck with varzea species, at the few and scattered remnants of bush between the many riverside houses. I did my short searches in mid-afternoon heat, and did therefore not expect much. A lone **Snethlage's Tody-Tyrant** was the best discovery.

Sitio San Jose Track

The fact that the good riverside forest east of Novo Airao is out-of-bounds for birders, as a result of the locked gate, motivates one to look for alternatives. While doing so, only in the afternoons, as the search was likely to be more or less futile, I also visited the Sitio San Jose track. The junction is at -2.641872, -60.944073, 750 meters south of the Novo Airao entrance roundabout. The narrow sandy trail, on which cars had obviously not been driven for months, unfortunately deteriorated before reaching the proper varzea, if there was any left. I drove about 3 km west to a Y-fork, turned left and made a u-turn after some 500 meters.

The best birds were a **Pale-tailed Barbthroat**, a **Spotted Puffbird**, close views of an **Undulated Antshrike**, a **Spangled Cotinga** and a **Bare-necked Fruitcrow**. My only snake of the trip – a pretty **Amazonian Whipsnake** – was seen crossing the track.



FIG.11. 'Progress' at Ramal Bom Destino. Soon the remaining forest will disappear, too.