



NE BRAZIL 2011 – SHORT NOTES FOR VISITING BIRDERS

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In December 2010 and January 2011 I visited the northeastern part of Brazil, driving more than 5.000 kilometers in two weeks and observing almost 300 species of birds, and a number of interesting mammals. The route was Recife (Hotel Boa Viagem Praia) – Tamandaré/Saltinho/Cachoeira Linda (Pousada Marazul) – Crato/Chapada do Araripe (Hotel Encosta da Serra) – Canudos (Hotel Brasil) – Jeremoaba (Hotel Senhor do Bonfim) – Lencois/Chapada do Diamantina/Palmeiras/Mucugé/Ibicoara (Pousada Corona da Pedra) – Boa Nova (the pousada at the central square; Solar closed for New Year) – Serra Bonita (Pousada Fazenda Rainha do Sol) – Michelin Plantation (Michelin guest bungalow) – Crasto forest (Hotel Magnus, Estancia) – Tamandaré (Pousada Marazul) – Recife.

As a vacation, it was a complete nightmare, not so much because of the local conditions (heat, humidity, difficult orientation, restricted access to reserves, traffic), even though this part of Brazil is often considered a particularly difficult one for a solo globetrotting birder, but because of the following two features: 1) My luggage arrived in Recife 10 days later than me, TAP (Portuguese airlines) never losing the suitcase but just being grossly inefficient (to put it kindly) in its delivery from Lisbon. For 10 days I had but my travel clothes, fortunately a set of field gear (trekking sandals, trousers (1), underpants (1), shirt (1). My size clothes are not available in local shops. 2) For ten days, I had a combination of diarrhea, urinary tract infection and flu, partly as a consequence of being forced to wash my pants every evening and to wear them damp, the night being too short in the humid climate.

Birding and driving from 4 AM to 7 PM each day was a challenge, to say the least, in this situation. I also lost one day (planned to be spend at Frei Caneca) because of a misguided promise from TAP at Lisbon airport ('Your luggage will be delivered tomorrow evening'). After the second night at the Recife airport, where TAP lost luggage is open only at night and seldom answers the ever-ringing telephones, I left the city well before sunrise to finally start my program. In a survivalist fashion, I focused on locating the target species, making the distances on time, eating and drinking enough fluids, washing myself and sleeping as much as I could (most accommodations had a few mosquitoes in the room). Therefore, practically no pocket camera photography this time and only few illustrations in the report. I am still recovering from NE Brazil.

The following brief comments are there to provide some key pieces of update information for those who are planning do it by themselves. Despite my bad luck, I would encourage such trips, also for people like me who only speak about fifty words in Portuguese and oftentimes fail with their pronunciation. The locals are invariably hospitable and helpful, to lengths which put many other nationalities, including my own, in shame. Also, there are expert guides like Ciro Albano (ciroalbano@yahoo.com.br), who may be hired to lower the stress levels in a major way. Being a kind man, Ciro also helps, time permitting, solo travelers with information such as site access. Be sure to check his Brazil birdwatching articles at Neotropical Birding 6 and 7, an important reference to this report.

Excellent photographs of the target can be seen at www.flickr.com/photos/ciroalbanofotos/. For sound recordings, check Xeno Canto.

ROADS

For orientation, buy a Guia Quatro Rodas map at the airport bookstore on arrival. This appears to be the only reliable map available (not available in the Internet). Do not trust Google Maps route suggestions. They can be downright lethal, not to mention completely inaccurate. For example, I would have not reached even the Recife International Airport following the Google Maps suggestions. Leaving Recife, the first of the suggested streets was one way to other direction, the second one was a dead end and the third did not exist anymore. I have nothing against GM, it has worked perfectly in most other destinations.

There is no reason to expect terrible road conditions and 20-30 km/h average speed. The roads have either improved a lot or some of the earlier reports have been a bit exaggerated. The majority of the roads I drove were just fine. The trans-Pernambuco BR232 Recife – Salgueiro is a perfect 100+ km/h highway. The roads to Crato were also good, but slower, with the exception of a two km roadwork in the beginning and the slightly bumpy BR116 left Y-fork. The road to Arajara Water Park is tarmac. At Chapada do Araripe, keep in mind that the BR122 to Exú looks like a gravel road even though it is a tarmac one on the map and in *Ciro's* report (**Fig. 5**; more below). There are some remains of tarmac there, deep under sand nowadays.

The BR116 Salgueiro – Bendengo – Canudos was also a very fine 80+ km/h highway with a new bridge across Rio Sao Francisco, with the last 19 km Bendengo – Canudos being under construction (will eventually become tarmac, could drive 60 km/h in Dec 2010). It took only 5.5 hours to drive from Crato to Canudos (no stops counted). The Canudos – Jeremoabo is slow gravel, but this does not really matter because there are birds to be seen on the way, right next to the road. Approaching Jeremoabo, go right at the first Y-fork (the left one is a 4x4 river crossing) and left at the second Y. The Hotel Senhor do Bonfim is some distance to north in Jeremoabo, just beyond the central square.

BR110 Jeremoabo – Ribeira do Bombal was fine with relatively light traffic, just like the connection to Tucano and the BR116 to Feira de Santana. Towards FdS, the traffic became congested and I could find no signs to BR116 south, towards Rio de Janeiro and Chapada do Diamantina. According to the map, there should be a by-pass, but where? Going through the center was, fortunately, not too difficult, once the correct street to southwest was located (with the help of locals). BR242 to Lencois is nowadays fine tarmac all the way (**Fig. 9**), albeit with a number of *ondulados* (speed bumps, the main cause for road congestion in Brazil) and federal traffic police. I got a R190 fine for crossing a double yellow line at Serra Preta. In the Diamantinas, roads were in general fine, with slight bumpiness on the first stretch of the Mucugé road.

The BR116 to Boa Nova was also fine, but infested by a plenitude of slow trucks, which make driving and overtaking rather time-consuming and risky. From Boa Nova to Serra Bonita I took the Jequié – Ipiaú – Ubaitaba road, which was fast despite *ondulados* around settlements. At Jequié (BR116), take the third, northernmost junction to Gandu to get around the town, signs soon pointing right to Ipiaú. The road has new tarmac (70-100 km/h) but driving through Ipiaú is a bit slow. BR101 south had relatively heavy traffic, but was a good 80+ km/h road to Camacã, with an ample serving of *ondulados* towards the end. The gravel track to Serra Bonita is slow and rather bumpy (more details below). The Ibirabitanga (BR101) to Camamu road was good but may be slippery here and there after rains (red soil on tarmac at gravel road intersections). BA001 to Itubera is rather slow tarmac because of the many villages. At the Michelin Plantation, the gravel roads were a bit slippery and muddy, some more and others less, because this part of the coast gets its fair share of rain even during the 'dry season'. The main roads were, however, quite ok.

Driving up north on BR101 to Estancia, and further up to Aracaju, Maceio and Palmares I experienced the most frustrating driving of the visit. A large highway update program is going on, with road construction on

the side of the highway almost all the way (fortunately, not too many detours or stops on the existing road at the time of my visit). Moreover, traffic was both heavy and slow, truck drivers habitually blocking both lanes whenever an additional lane had been constructed to overtake them. Well, it was also slightly amusing to observe a truck with a maximum speed of 20 km/h to adamantly try to overtake another one with 19 km/h capacity, with 50 cars capable of 100+ km/h being blocked behind them. The road from Palmares to Barreiros (and Tamandaré) is tarmac, but with plenty of dangerous potholes around Água Preta. Also the Palmares – Jaqueira – Garanhuns – Arcoverde road was potholed here and there, but nevertheless fast enough to be recommended. North of Tamandaré, the coastal road to Recife was slow (towns, villages) but in fine condition. Driving south from Recife, be sure not to miss the junction to the coastal towns, the small sign being particularly difficult to spot at night.

CAR RENTAL

I rented my car with Sixt in Recife (**Fig. 1**). The steering wheel of my VW Gol was so heavy that my arms developed visibly during the journey! They deliver to your hotel or airport for no extra charge. The Gol was quite sufficient for all but one location, Serra Bonita. During a preliminary evening visit, I decided to test how far up I could make on the 6,5 km stony track in dry weather. The Gol lost its tire traction at km 3.5, few hundred meters before the worst part. Doing this, I also burned off the little what was left of my right front tire after 5.000 km, steel wire mesh becoming visible and the tire eventually leaking air. Towards the end of the journey, I replaced it with my one and only spare tire. Otherwise, I had one dented wheel, quickly fixed at a *borracharia* for R2, and a metal spike through the surface of another tire, without puncture. No dents or scratches.

In regard to the car, the main problem are the rims and tires because of potholes (up to 2 meter wide!) which may be obscured by the slow lorry in front of you, or by approaching car headlights at night, or by the black smoke of burning sugarcane fields (Yes, I did drive after sunset or before sunrise).



Fig. 1. VW Gol rental in Recife – a smart and clean vehicle (cf. **Fig. 10**).

SITES & SOME BIRDS AND MAMMALS

Reserva Biologica Salinho (opposite the Tamandaré junction)

The reserve is closed for birdwatchers. At the main gate (**Fig. 2**), one may park by the coastal highway to watch birds. The guards do not seem to mind as long as one does not park next to the gate. **Yellow-faced Siskins** (8), **Seven-colored Tanagers** (2) and a **Long-tailed Woodnymph** were seen on two visits. No need to enter the reserve for these species.

Towards Recife, close to the edge of the forest, there is a short private road open for birdwatching on the right. I saw a **Smoky-fronted Tody-Flycatcher** there, at the edge of the forest. An **Myotis** hunted low in the forest. At night, few short attempts to listen for owls were made but I only scored with a **Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl**.

Pousada Marazul (not Maracul!) in Tamandaré cost R50.00 to R70.00, depending on proximity to New Year, the tourist high season, and was adequate. Hotels were close to R300 around New Year, and full.



Fig. 2. Reserva Biologica Salinho, main entrance. No parking next to the gate. Pines with **Yellow-faced Siskins** on the hill, and in trees around the Tamandaré junction. **Seven-colored Tanagers** and a **Longtailed Woodnymph** were seen across the road.

Engenho Cachoeira Linda

Driving south from the Tamandaré junction and the Saltinho gate, turn right to Agua Preta and Palmares (S08.47.381 W035.11.095). After several kilometers on tarmac, at S08.49.637 W035.15.59, there are *ondulados* around a well worn gravel road junction to the left (south), and oftentimes huge sugar cane lorries. Follow this road to River Una and cross it on a narrow bridge damaged by age and floods. On the other side, turn right (T-junction) and follow the sandy track until you enter a small settlement, Engenho Cachoeira Linda, right after the Linda rapids on the right. For access permit and the rest of the road, contact Ciro Albano for details.

In the relatively dry conditions, I could drive my Gol almost all the way up to the forest, walking only the last 500 meters. The observation point was at the edge of the forest. The sky was mostly occupied by displaying **Rufous-thighed Kites** but a lone **White-collared Kite** was seen gliding across the valley twice, during the several hours of wait. At the forest edge, **Willis's Antbirds** and a calling **Black-headed Berryeater** were spotted.

About one kilometer after the Agua Preta/Palmares 'turn right' junction, there was a small valley south of the road. This is one of Ciro's several stake-outs for **Forbes's Blackbird**. None were seen early in the morning but a late afternoon (30 min before sunset) visit immediately produced one, with great views. There is just enough space to park off road.

Arajara Water Park

The town of Crato is a labyrinth without proper road signs. I spent one hour trying to find the access road to Arajara very early on the Christmas Day. Most of my volunteer guides were rather drunk but nevertheless polite and helpful. The correct junction was eventually discovered a short way uphill from the center at S07.14.219 W039.24.445 and it had a small Arajara Water Park sign, unfortunately visible only from one direction. I had passed it several times without noticing.

Thereafter, it was straight-forward. The park is well signposted at Arajara. They officially open at 7.30 AM but will let birders in earlier, even by 5, and collect the entrance fee (R2.00) later. A young lady guided me to the short nature trail where **Araripe Manakins**, including a splendid adult male (**Fig. 3**), were easy to observe at short distance. A **Tawny Piculet** was soon spotted, too, and the sought after summer visitors, **Bearded Bellbirds**, were vocal with one visible on top of a tree. On the downside for us diarrhea-suffering visitors, nobody had keys to the large toilet block close by. The results are perhaps best left undescribed...

Hotel Encosta da Serra was all but empty at Christmas and cost little less than R150 for a single visitor. Great rooms and facilities but the menu at the restaurant was a bit limited (no fruits etc.), and the servings were only for two persons. Moreover, they refused to arrange packed breakfast for me. Language barrier was more a problem at Encosta da Serra than in other places where I stayed. In regard to location, it is some distance steep uphill from the centre in Crato, well signposted towards the end. Ask around and you will eventually arrive there. For me, this took some 40 minutes in the maze of streets and with confusing local information. Out of the six most helpful people, two pointed me to a wrong direction, probably to another hotel with a somewhat similar name. My Spanish pronunciation of Portuguese did probably not help, the pronunciation being the very thing which makes Portuguese Portuguese.



Fig. 3. An adult male **Araripe Manakin** at Arajara Water Park, hopelessly out of focus because of light conditions and a 'sunny weather pocket camera'.

Chapada do Araripe

The road to Exú and the Araripe Plateau starts close to the above-mentioned 'Arajara junction', downhill a block or two and to the left (ask if in doubt). The tarmac street soon climbs uphill and becomes a sand-covered 'tarmac road' on top (**Fig. 5**), by a yellow ICMBio building on the left. Exactly 8.4 km later, a sandy track goes to the right through low forest. I am repeating these instructions by Ciro Albano instead of GPR waypoints because his GPS waypoints failed me for some reason at this site, pointing to another location a few kilometers to the west. It could also be that I made some mistake with my GPS device, being not very skillful with it yet. Therefore, no waypoints here.

Unfortunately, I was too sick to be able to walk much on the forest trail at km 1.6 but nevertheless saw most of the goodies listed for Chapada do Araripe, such as a **White-browed Guan**, a few **Ash-throated Casiornises**, **Silvery-cheeked Antshrikes**, a **Stripe-backed Antbird** and others, plus a surprise **Oncilla** (*Felis tigrinus*) (**Fig. 4**). A **Caatinga Antwren** responded rather aggressively to my tape at km 1.8. The **Oncilla** walked right past my car, at a distance of one meter, but could only be photographed through a dusty windscreen.



Fig. 4. An **Oncilla** walks towards me at the forest track, not aware that the parked car is occupied.



Fig. 5. A tarmac road to Exú, according to Quatro Rodas map.



Fig. 6. A pair of **Caatinga Parakeets** – a common species in dry *caatinga* habitats.

Canudos – Jeremoabo

Just before the petrol station at the edge of Canudos, a gravel road goes right to the municipality dumping grounds and beyond. It is peaceful road through good habitat for many kilometers, with **Caatinga Barred Antshrikes**, a **Bahia Wagtail-Tyrant**, a **Broad-tipped Hermit**, **Ruby-Topaz Hummingbirds** and many other species. At a muddy spot with water at km 8, I waited for birds in the evening and saw, among others, my only two **Red-shouldered Spinetails**. A dozen of **Lear's Macaws** flew by, both in the evening and morning, several more calling in the distant hills.

White-throated Seed-eaters were most numerous at the edge of the town, especially in a crossing which can be located by driving right (Y-crossing; left is the main entrance to center) after the above-mentioned petrol station and turning left to center at the first possible left turn. There are open fields with trees on the right at this junction and a bushy backyard on the left. The site had plenty of seeding grasses and a source of water, and therefore also **Pale Baywings**, **Caatinga Cacholotes** and others, not to mention a single **Brazilian Wagtail-Tyrant** (not sure of the correct name, but it is the *Stigmatura (budytoides) gracilis*).

On the way to Jeremoabo, there were several water pools and ponds along the road. One of them had **South American Comb Ducks**, with very close views (**Fig.7**). **Red-throated Tanagers** were also seen along the road, just like the colorful **Campo Troupials**, and several **Common Marmosets**. Dozens of roosting (early afternoon) **Lear's Macaws** were observed at Fazenda Toureiro, which is easily identified 45 km east of Canudos, the house located high on an open hill on the right side of the road (only 100 m from the road), with great views to the left side green valley with scattered large trees and macaws.

I stopped and went in with the farmer, Zé Hilton, giving him a R10 tip afterwards. The **Macaws** are easy to photograph here, with the right kind of equipment.



Fig. 7. South American Comb Ducks, along the Canudos – Jeremoabo road.

With **Pectoral Antwren** I had problems, as the site could not be located. There is a discrepancy in Jan Vermeulen's otherwise very helpful map, as the correct spot is located both 20 km before Jeremoabo and 23.7 km from there. I checked the whole 4 km stretch, but could not find the track. Fortunately, the species was spotted soon afterwards, in one of the very few pockets of natural *caatinga* along the road, with the help of a tape.

Hotel Brasil (Canudos) is a relatively basic one, but had air-conditioning and private parking, and cost only R30. The main problem was its location in the center, which became alive with noise (I mean serious noise from a variety of ear-shattering sources) late in the evening. Bring your ear plugs! (Well, this was the Christmas – New Year season).

Hotel Senhor do Bonfim (Jeremoabo; R70) was ok and the women who run the place lovely. Initially, they were not willing to cook a dinner at such a short notice, because I was the only customer, but eventually changed their minds and made 8 dishes for me. The food was great and plentiful, with lots of cold juice (*suco* – one of the key words!). At the end of the day, they almost force-fed me, the breakfast at 4.30 being equally lavish, even though I had several times said that I would not need it, being still full after dinner and leaving so early.

A few kilometers south of Jeremoabo, there were overgrown ponds on both sides of the highway, just before a village. The one on the left was the kind which **Masked Ducks** love and a splendid male was soon spotted. Many such ponds were later seen along BR101 on the coast, in Sergipe and Alagoas, but I had no time to stop there.

Chapada do Diamantina: Lencois – Pai Inácio – Palmieras – Remanso – Mucugé – Ibicoara

At Morro do Pai Inácio, a well-know scenic site between Lencois and Palmieras it was not necessary to climb up with the many tourists. Two splendid male **Hooded Visorbearers** held territories 200 m before the parking area, on the left. **Pale-throated Pampa-Finches** (Fig. 8) were tame and singing all over the place in the evening, but nowhere to be seen at sunrise.



Fig. 8. A **Pale-throated Pampa-Finch** at Pai Inácio, enjoying the last rays of sun before sunset.

Driving through Palmieras was complicated as there is no direct way through to village and it was therefore necessary to ask advice on the first time. It is almost like a trap for visitors as following the widest streets takes you nowhere, the right way being through rather narrow bottle-necks. Thereafter, locating the right Y-fork to Guiné for the bridge site (one km later) for **Sao Francisco Sparrows** and others was easy. In the first morning, three males sang in the thorny bushes beyond the bridge, one on the other (left) side of the river, but could not be seen despite some effort and playing a tape. In the second morning, after slight rain, all of the three territories were dead silent but I saw one and then a second bird 200-300 meters further up the road, on ground and in roadside bush. Not necessarily a difficult species to find?

Sincora Antwren, on the other hand, was rather difficult. At Ciro's divisa Lencois/Palmeiras bridge site, I parked my car by the highway and walked into the rocky habitat (easy to walk), playing my tape in a number of places. No response, but another **Hooded Visorbearer**. At the Mucugé *grantsaui* site (see Ciro's article), I did not park my car by the ruins of a house but drove a bit further, parking in by an electric line, where there is good space for a car. This time, I used only a call recording and played it sparingly.

In the early morning, one **Sincora Antwren** crossed the gravel track and disappeared in the bush, never to be seen again. In the late afternoon, I made another attempt, parking at the same site, playing my tape couple of times and waiting silently in the car, windows open. After 30 or 40 minutes, one bird arrived, scolding at me in the trackside bush, at the same spot as in the morning. Have they become shy because of too much playing of tapes? Or was the breeding season at a late stage and the nest too close by?

Lower down, a pair of **Rusty-backed Antwren** constructed their nest quite boldly, in the open *cerrado* habitat. Most of the habitat along the side road 300 m after the Boninal junction (cf. *Ciro*) was gone, fields having been expanded, but a few pockets of original habitat could still be located, with two **Rufous-sided Pygmy-Tyrant** territories. An immature **Orange-breasted Falcon**, resting on a clump of earth, was a pleasant surprise. Could they breed on the Diamantina mountains or was the bird just a vagrant?

At the Ibicoara bridge site, I was too late for the **Diamantina Tapaculos**. They apparently sing actively only very early in the morning. I did, however, get a consistent response to the tape at the SW corner of the bridge: *Scytalopus* style rapid scolding under the thick riverside forest undergrowth. The song of the **Tapaculo** is very similar to its cousin species but its calls are different.

Next to Lencois, the Remanso road was rather silent in the afternoon and with a multitude of mosquitoes, but after few hours I had managed to score with a **Rusty-breasted Nunlet**, a single **Bahia Tyrannulet** and a splendid pair of **Ceará Gnateaters**. Four **Crab-eating Foxes** run on the road. No **Bahia Spinetails** at the track close to Lencois junction (three visits), but a number of other nice birds such as **Spotted Piculets** and **White-naped Jays**, and **Marmosets**.

In regard to accommodation, New Year probably is the worst time to visit Chapada do Diamantina. Casa do Geléia (casadegeleia@hotmail.com) was fully booked. Furthermore, one has to pay double the normal rate for the New Year period (30th Dec to 4th Jan). I stayed at Pousada Corona da Pedra, in a tiny youth hostel style room for a whopping R200 per night. Florestano Tavernier and his wife were very nice and helpful. They organized both early morning take away breakfasts and the delivery of my long lost suitcase, but this clearly was not the most suitable location for birdwatcher accommodation.

Given a second chance, I would try to avoid the crowded and (to me) not so appealing Lencois with its parking problems and stay at Palmeiras or Mucugé, or perhaps at the Pousada Pai Inácio, with its strategic location along the highway and restaurant next door. On the other hand, if there had been a vacant room at Casa do Geléia, the chance to meet local birdwatchers with fluent English and to observe hummingbird feeders would have been a definite attraction. The petrol station at the gate of Lencois accepts Visa.

Hitting the road once again for Boa Nova, I kept on looking for an old hobo I had noticed dragging himself to the east along the highway during the past three days, about 15 km per day. Eventually, the man was spotted limping east on the road. I stopped and gave him a plastic bag with bottled water, an apple, a cheese sandwich, some candy and money. I would have not done this for a *cachachero*, but he was something else.



Fig. 9. The former ‘bad section’ of the highway towards Lencois.

Boa Nova

Dry forest

Most of my time was spent in the dry forest because its target species – **Slender Antbird** and **Narrow-billed Antwren** – were surprisingly hard to find. The cell tower site 5 km NW of Boa Nova, on top of a hill, was a pleasant one and easy to access despite one rather deep crevice on the way. The birds were, however, very passive during my visit. Tapes made no difference at all. Only very early in the morning, and late in the afternoon, there was a short peak in activity. A female **Narrow-billed Antwren** was seen once (I had seen a roadside male on arrival the day before) and two **Slender Antbirds** sang from their bush hideaways in the late afternoon, with brief views of another male. Nice views of a male **Ruby-Topaz Hummingbird**, though.

A **White-bellied Nothura** walked across the Boa Nova access road downhill towards the BR101, in an easy to spot section with some grass on both sides of the road.

Wet forest

Ciro’s wet forest site nr. 1 at km 8.9 (turn left) after Boa Nova bridge was so productive and easy, that I decided to visit it twice, once in the afternoon (better) and once in the morning. The access may appear a bit narrow in the beginning, but it was actually quite easy to drive into the forest. The track was quiet with only few people (and a pig!) walking on it, or riding a horse. I failed to locate the trail mentioned in Ciro’s article. There is a 400 m wide section of primary forest and a spot for parking by a stream but I decided to

park by the edge of the forest, 150 m later on, opposite a farmhouse gate. The farmer welcomed me and said this to be a very safe place to park. Also, there was space to turn around and great views to a rather productive bush during periodical morning showers. **Striated Softtails** were there, as well as a nice male **Black-bellied Thorntail** and a **Pectoral Sparrow**. The forest part had a **Bahia Spinetail** (splendid views), a **Rio Janeiro Antbird**, **Yellow-green Grosbeaks**, a **Cinnamon-vented Piha**, and many others.

Hotel Solar was closed for New Year and I stayed in another pousada at the main square 50 meters away (forgot to write down its name). They have two better rooms upstairs, for R25 *solteiro* (no New Year extras!), and a restaurant downstairs (great lunch with 6 dishes for R10). I had brought more than enough groceries with me for dinners, which are not easily available in the small town. Being the only customer, I went in and out as I wished and had to leave the main door unlocked on departure, because there was nobody there at 4.30 AM.

Serra Bonita

The Serra Bonita access junction is 10.2 km from Camacã bus station. When entering Camacã, turn left at the edge of town (no signposts) and drive forward on a street over a hill, and continue straight across a large one-way street in the end. Some open areas (left), large buildings, the central square and a bus station will follow. After the latter one, continue straight for hundred meters or so and go left (on the right, a supermarket). This is the start of the 10.2 km gravel road (bumpy, slow) to Serra Bonita junction. There will be a large signpost for Serra Bonita on the left.

It is not necessarily a good idea to drive further than 2.5 km on the 6.5 km Serra Bonita track, even in best conditions. According to Vitor Beck (fluent English), the owner of the private reserve, most sedans fail to proceed beyond km 3.5 and there are some tire burning spots already earlier on. After a shower of rain, also going down becomes a rather dangerous mission above km 2.5, the stones being too slippery for normal tires. One could of course walk higher up but it is a steep climb (with guard dogs by the road at one spot). The goodies are at km 5.5, along the level reserve access road to the left (the main road continues to towers on top of the mountain).

The best option is to stay at the Serra Bonita Reserve and ask Vitor to give a lift up and down (www.uiracu.org.br/en//serrabonita.html; phone number also on the above-mentioned sign). Even though expensive, the rooms are very nice and modern, with peaceful forest surroundings, and birds are everywhere around the research station and along the access road. There are hummingbird, tanager and parrot feeders at the research station in the mornings and evenings, with ample opportunity for photography. **Marmosets** are there, too, as well as a tame **Brown Howler Monkey**, which just loves to sit on one's lap for company.

Vitor saw me at km 2.5 at 5 AM in the morning and graciously gave me a lift up and down, declining my donation to the project which has recently received an award and funding from National Geographic. He showed me a **Pink-legged Graveteiro** nest. It proved not to be active but a family of **Graveteiros** was eventually spotted close by. The forest and feeders had numerous other species, including several **Golden-spangled Piculets** and a **Rufous-brown Solitaire**. I had less interest in the southern Mata Atlantica species, being already familiar with them. There are a **Scytalopus** and a **Heliobletus** new to science in the forests for those with luck and time.

Pousada Fazenda Rainha do Sul lies about 2.5 km north of the Camacã junction, right next to the highway, with rather nice (albeit with some highway noise) motel style rooms for R60 per night. The other options in Camacã appeared less appealing.



Fig. 10. Dust and tire damage after 5.000 km on the road.

Michelin Plantation

The Michelin headquarters are few km south of Ituberá, on the eastern side of the highway. I went first there to meet Zildomar Magalhães (zildomar.magalhaes@br.michelin.com; speaks Portuguese and French), another very nice and helpful local expert. Soon afterwards, we continued few kilometers south, where the controlled entrance to the plantation is (to the west). We picked up my accommodation keys and continued to 'Hotel Michelin' (**Fig. 11**), the R100 per night guest bungalows, the best accommodation I had in NE Brazil. Everything was there, including cold water in the freezer, mosquito repellent device, torch, shampoo and other amenities.

The next morning, I went to a **Bahia Tapaculo** site with a forest ranger arranged by Zildomar. The ranger did not accept any money for the service but said that guiding visitors is a part of his job. He had, however, nothing against a cold drink. Unfortunately, it rained a bit in the morning. Consequently, we had to park the Gol 2 km before the territory and walk (downhill) there in rain, being pestered by gnats. Moreover, the territory was partly flooded. As a result the **Tapaculos** had moved a bit and could not be seen at the usual spot. The male responded to my tape three or four times further away in the swampy habitat but could not be approached. There was another territory 2 more km away, but this was clearly too far for me, and would have involved wading through the flooded area. I barely made it back to the car (uphill), having been ill for some time already. A **Margaritta's Hermit** and a **Southern Tamandua** showed at the site.

In the late afternoon, after some rest, and in the next morning, I drove around the plantation by myself and did some roadside birding. One needs to keep record of all the junctions but even if getting lost or stuck in mud, there are always Michelin workers around, sooner or later. Looking after the millions of rubber trees and all the shade cacao takes a sizable workforce. The best natural forest tracks could not be entered

because of mud, but there was nevertheless a lot to see. Among the best birds were a rather tame **White-bellied Chachalaca** sunning itself on a telephone wire (more calling in the forest), great views of **Chestnut-backed Antshrikes**, **Bahia Antwrens**, a **Red-headed Manakin**, a **Thrush-like Schiffornis**, a **Smoky-fronted Tody-flycatcher**, a **Silver-breasted Tanager**, and a few **Yellow-faced Siskins** (as well as **Hooded**). A male **Spotted Piculet** was also an interesting record for the site.



Fig. 11. 'Hotel Michelin', Ituberá.

Crasto Forest

At this site, I was already very tired and not capable of venturing to the forest to search for **Pernambuco Foliage-Gleaner**, for example. The Crasto forest was relatively easy to find, by taking the BA099 (perfect tarmac, little traffic) to Salvador at Estancia and driving to Santa Lucia do Itanhi (S11.20.704 W037.25.58), where a Y junction to the left (starts as a street) uphill leads to a bridge downhill and continues as gravel straight to the coast, to Crasto (Castro, according to Google Maps!). The forest was larger than I expected and there was also a wetland with heronry afterwards. The **Fringe-backed Fire-eyes** were there, with brief views of a male, but not easy to see. A **Cinereous-breasted Spinetail** was equally skulking. **Plain-bellied Emeralds** and a **Stripe-necked Tody-Tyrant** were much more obliging.

In Estancia, Hotel Magnus is simple but very practical and affordable for R50 per night. The hotel is easy to spot, day and night, on an open and well-lighted hill on the right along a long straight stretch of the highway (BR101) through the town, couple of kilometers north of the BA099 junction to Salvador.

GOOD LUCK FOR YOUR VISIT IN NORTHEASTERN BRAZIL!