ROCKJUMPER

Worldwide Birding Adventures

Paraguay

Birds and Wildlife

18th September to 5th October 2024 (18 days)



Chaco Owl by Clayton Burne

Paraguay has seemingly been forgotten when compared to its more illustrious neighbours; Argentina, Brazil and Bolivia. While the country cannot compete in either the number of species or available endemics, it does offer a variety of scarce, marginal and rare species. Holding some of the last remaining large tracts of pristine Atlantic Lowland Forest, cerrado savannas, grasslands and most of the vast thorny Chaco, Paraguay appeals as both an introduction to Neotropical birding as well as a vital clean-up operation for the hardcore twitcher. Birds aside, Paraguay is also by many a mile the best mammal watching country in all of South and Central America. Where else do you stand an excellent chance of seeing Jaguar, Puma and Geoffroy's Cat in a single nation? Add the re-discovered Chaco Peccary, Lowland Tapir, Maned Wolf, Giant Anteater, a host of armadillos, monkeys and remarkable rodents, and you'll probably double your Neotropical mammal list in a single trip here!

What's more, this is a vast country with few inhabitants, and nowhere is this more noticeable than in the Chaco. For many, this Infierno Verde (Green Hell) is the major attraction of the country, and in fact Paraguay offers the only realistic chance of seeing all the Chaco endemics in a single trip. Add a handful of incredibly range-restricted or rare species such as White-winged Nightjar, Helmeted Woodpecker, Giant Snipe, Russet-winged Spadebill and Cock-tailed Tyrant, and you have the basis for an exciting and thoroughly rewarding tour of central South America!

THE TOUR AT A GLANCE…

THE ITINERARY

Day 1	**Morning departure from Asunción to Colonias Mennonitas**
Day 2	**Upper Yacare Sur**
Day 3	**Colonias Mennonitas to PN Enciso via Fortin Toledo**
Day 4	**PN Teniente Agripino Enciso & PN Medanos del Chaco & Night Drive**
Day 5	**PN Teniente Agripino Enciso to Colonias Mennonitas via Fortin Toledo**
Day 6	**Colonias Mennonitas to Asunción**
Day 7	**Asunción to Laguna Blanca via Arroyos y Esteros**
Day 8	**Laguna Blanca**
Day 9	**Laguna Blanca to Mbaracayú BR**
Days 10 & 11	**Mbaracayú BR**
Day 12	**Mbaracayú BR to Ciudad del Este via Salto del Monday**
Day 13	**Ciudad del Este to PN San Rafael**
Days 14 & 15	**PN San Rafael**
Day 16	**PN San Rafael to Ayolas via Coronel Bogoda**
Day 17	**Isla Yacyreta**
Day 18	**Ayolas to Asunción and final departures**

TOUR ROUTE MAP…



THE TOUR IN DETAIL…



Buff-necked Ibis by Clayton Burne

Day 1: Morning departure from Asunción to Colonias Mennonitas. We depart Asunción early, heading northwest towards the towns of Loma Plata and Filadelfia - known collectively as Colonias Mennonitas. Home to generations of ethno-German Mennonites, the area is located within the humid Chaco belt, along the Trans-Chaco Highway. While most of the surrounding habitat has been cleared for cattle *estancias*, we will find large tracts of palm savanna that once covered the entire landscape. We can expect to make a decent start to our bird list, with a number of commoner grassland and waterbirds species easily found from the road. Amongst the more interesting and attractive species are stately groups of Jabiru, Southern Screamer, Plumbeous and Buff-necked Ibis, Scarlet-headed Blackbird and possibly our first major Chaco tick in the form of Chaco Chachalaca. The roads are fairly quiet and in good condition, allowing us to reach the nationally famous Pirahu restaurant for lunch.

As we continue our drive, we start entering somewhat drier habitat containing increasingly thornier bushes and spike-laden trees. The isolated water pools here host further common waterbirds alongside Black-backed Water Tyrant, Firewood-gatherer, Grey Monjita, Black-capped Donacobius, Great Black Hawk and Many-colored Chaco Finch (resembling a saltator rather than a finch!).

After a bird-filled day we head off to our accommodation in Loma Plata. Paraguayans love nothing more than to enjoy an *asado* (BBQ), and being the epicentre of cattle production in South America – it should come as no surprise that we will be enjoying our first *asado* tonight!



Chaco Chachalaca by Clayton Burne

Day 2: Upper Yacare Sur. All our birding today will occur around a series of waterholes and surrounding woodlands dotting the outskirts of Loma Plata. Weather in the Chaco can be rather unpredictable, and as birding here is closely associated with water, we may end up visiting various lagoons and waterholes. A host of special Chaco species that might be seen today include Brushland Tinamou, Chaco Chachalaca, Cream-backed Woodpecker, Scimitar-billed and Great Rufous Woodcreepers, Chaco Earthcreeper, Crested Hornero, Cinereous Tyrant and Black-

capped Warbling Finch. Birding activity is generally very good and the short, stunted Chaco allows for excellent photographic opportunities. Despite the Chaco specials, we will also search for the skulking Stripe-backed Antbird, Little Thornbird, Greater Rhea, Great Antshrike, White-fronted and Checkered Woodpeckers, Blue-tufted Starthroat and, hopefully, more Many-colored Chaco Finch.



Great Rufous Woodcreeper by Clayton Burne

Despite being surrounded by estancias, villages and towns, the area provides us with our first opportunity to find some of the larger mammal inhabitants such as Puma and Lowland Tapir, as well as the rather amiable Southern Three-banded Armadillo.

Day 3: Colonias Mennonitas to PN Teniente Agripino Enciso via Fortin Toledo. We leave Loma Plata early today and head deeper into the progressively drier Chaco. Our first stop will be at Fortin Toledo, one of a number of historical battle sites during the Chaco War of 1932-1935. During our stay here we may visit a captive breeding program for the Chaco Peccary. First described in 1930 from fossils, it was not until 1971 that scientists realised the animal was in fact alive and well. While the Chaco Peccary also occurs in neighbouring Argentina and Bolivia, it is most easily seen in Paraguay's Gran Chaco.



Tropical Screech Owl by Clayton Burne

Dwarf Patagonian Cavy (Chacoan Mara) is commonly found here, but most of our time will be spent putting in a concerted effort for the rare and elusive Black-bodied Woodpecker. We are likely to find the vocal Brown Cacholote, pairs of Greater Wagtail-Tyrant, Short-billed Canastero, mobile Stripe-crowned Spinetail and Cinereous Tyrant. Another dose of luck will be required to entice the skulking Olive-crowned Crescentchest out of the thorny brush (the resident sub-species *pallida* is liable to being split as Chaco Crescentchest).

After lunch we hope to get lucky and find Black-legged Seriema walking the road while we continue our journey to Parque Nacional Teniente Agripino Enciso. Despite the long day, we may take a short pre-dinner walk for any of a host of night birds including Chaco Owl, Tropical Screech Owl, and Little, Scissor-tailed and/or Rufous Nightjars.

Day 4: PN Teniente Agripino Enciso & PN Medanos del Chaco & Night Drive. After an early breakfast, we head out on foot to bird the stunning Chaco habitat around Parque

Nacional Teniente Agripino Enciso. Our main targets this morning include two of the "Chaco Big Six" – Crested Gallito and Quebracho Crested Tinamou – as well as the skulking Short-billed Canastero. Commoner species we should come across during our search include White-barred Piculet, Lark-like Brushrunner, Cream-backed Woodpecker, Rufous Casiornis, Masked Gnatcatcher, Suiriri Flycatcher, Red-billed Scythebill, Orange-backed Troupial and both Black-capped and Ringed Warbling Finches (the local sub-species of Ringed Warbling Finch, *pectoralis* is liable to being split as Chaco Warbling Finch).



Lowland Tapir by Clayton Burne

After lunch we will head off to the nearby Parque Nacional Medanos del Chaco, situated near the Bolivian border. The sandier, more open terrain allows for much better photographic possibilities while searching for another member of the "Chaco Big Six", the diminutive Spot-winged Falconet. We can expect to see many of the same species as we did this morning, while also hoping for more, or better views of Quebracho Crested Tinamou and possibly Black-crested Finch.

As our afternoon light fades, we will switch on the spotting lights to search out some night birds and mammals. This area is very good for Chaco Owl if we haven't already seen it, as well as Lowland Tapir, Puma, Azara's Fox, Southern Three-banded Armadillo and Plain's Viscacha.

Day 5: PN Teniente Agripino Enciso to Colonias Mennonitas via Fortin Toledo. We have another morning to bird around Enciso for any species we may be missing before heading back towards Fortin Toledo for lunch. We will visit Fortin Toledo again in order to have another opportunity to find Black-bodied Woodpecker if our attempts to date have been unsuccessful. The remainder of the afternoon will be spent on the road to Loma Plata while keeping a close eye on all roadside raptors for Crowned Solitary Eagle.



White-rumped Monjita by Clayton Burne

Day 6: Colonias Mennonitas to Asunción. We'll spend more time this morning in the Upper Yacare Sur region. This gives us another opportunity to search out any species that may have eluded us so far, including the likes of Chaco Earthcreeper that can be a tricky customer on occasion. We'll have time to enjoy the last of the

Chaco species, with the gaudy Orange-backed Troupial, Solitary Cacique, Chaco Nothura and possibly some Chilean Flamingos to send us on our way. We'll depart from the Colonias Mennonitas area once the day heats up, returning to Asunción in the late afternoon.

Day 7: Asunción to Laguna Blanca via Arroyos y Esteros. The extensive marshes of Arroyos y Esteros are located only a few hours outside Asunción. The drastic change in habitat comes with a vastly different array of species to search for; Bearded Tachuri, Crested Doradito, Yellow-rumped Marshbird, White-headed Marsh Tyrant, a number of finches including Lesser Grass, Long-tailed Reed and Pampa, as well as numerous seedeaters such as Rusty-collared, Double-collared, White-bellied, Tawny-bellied, Marsh or Dark-throated. However, the main target of our birding this morning is the bizarre-looking Strange-tailed Tyrant. Hovering across the open grasslands, we can expect to find a number of males in full breeding plumage. After a successful morning we will continue north to Laguna Blanca, a small sea of tranquillity amongst the rather monotonous cerrado.



Black-throated Saltator by Clayton Burne

As the weather can be a little unpredictable here, we'll head straight out to take advantage of the remaining daylight hours. This small reserve of only 2,500 hectares hosts at least 14 globally threatened species. Cock-tailed Tyrant sits high on our priority list, which also includes White-rumped and White-banded Tanagers, White-rumped Monjita and Black-throated Saltator. We also hope to find noisy parties of Curl-crested Jays as well as small hunting groups of Red-legged Seriema moving through the grasslands. Weather permitting, we will make our first effort for the Endangered White-winged Nightjar this evening.



White-winged Nightjar by Clayton Burne

Day 8: Laguna Blanca. We have an entire day to explore the cerrado and associated humid forest around Laguna Blanca. Aside from the species mentioned above, we'll comb the cerrado for Sharp-tailed Grass Tyrant, Black-masked Finch, Rusty-backed Antwren, Dark-billed Cuckoo, Red-winged, Tataupa, Small-billed and Undulated Tinamous, Rufous Casiornis, noisy flocks of Peach-fronted Parakeet and further Cock-tailed Tyrant sightings.

Moving into the humid forests will provide us with our first opportunities for

the mega Helmeted Woodpecker, Rusty-margined Guan, confiding Surucua Trogon, Buff-bellied Puffbird and Sibilant Sirystes. We will have another chance to enjoy the spectacular night birding, with chances for Tropical Screech Owl and Ferruginous Pygmy Owl, Grey and Long-tailed Potoos, and White-winged, Rufous, Little and Scissor-tailed Nightjars. While rather uncommon, this is one of the best locations in Paraguay to see Maned Wolf.



Bare-throated Bellbird by Clayton Burne

Day 9: Laguna Blanca to Mbaracayú BR. We have a few hours to search for any species that may have evaded us thus far, while new additions could include Bearded Tachuri, Flavescent Warbler, Pale-breasted Spinetail, Grassland Sparrow or White-eyed Parakeet. We will then spend the majority of the hotter, mid-day hours driving towards Mbaracayú Biosphere Reserve.

Named by the WWF as one of the 100 most important sites for conservation on earth, this privately managed 65,000hectare reserve is among the key remaining Atlantic Forest and cerrado reserves. We will spend the remaining daylight hours walking short forest trails and the surrounding open habitat near our accommodation. One of the first sounds we are likely to hear is the metallic "hammer on anvil" clank of the male Bare-throated Bellbird. With a little effort we should find a favoured perch of one of these blue throated, bleached white vocalists. Our first afternoon will not be dull, with any number of new species liable to make an appearance. Possibilities include Scaly-headed Parrot, Maroon-bellied Parakeet, Bat Falcon, Euler's Flycatcher, Sharpbill, Helmeted, Yellow-fronted and Robust Woodpeckers, Rufous-capped Motmot and the drab Buff-fronted Foliage-gleaner.



Robust Woodpecker by Clayton Burne

Days 10 & 11: Mbaracayú BR. We have two full days to explore this sublime park. We will spend at least one full day birding the Atlantic Forests and another in the cerrado grasslands of Aguara Ñu. There are too many highlights to list comprehensively, but some of the more sought-after targets are Black-fronted Piping Guan, Saffron and Spot-billed Toucanets and Helmeted Woodpecker. More widespread species we should encounter during our time here include Green-billed Toucan, Chestnut-eared Aracari, Surucua Trogon, Blond-crested and Yellow-fronted Woodpeckers, Green-and-rufous Kingfisher, Olivaceous

and Planalto Woodcreepers, Band-tailed and Helmeted Manakins, a number of tanagers, Spot-backed Antshrike, Streak-capped Antwren, Solitary Tinamou and Red-rumped Cacique.



Jaguar by Glen Valentine

Amongst the cerrado specialities around Aguara Ñu are such species as Rufous-winged Antshrike, White-tailed Goldenthroat, Collared Crescentchest, Grey Monjita and Ocellated Crake. Night birds are particularly good here too, with Ocellated Poorwill, Short-tailed Nighthawk, Pauraque, Tropical and Black-capped Screech Owls, Spectacled and Ferruginous Pygmy Owls and Little, Spot-tailed, Rufous and White-winged Nightjars all possible. On the mammal front, we stand a good chance of seeing Azara's Agouti, Spotted Paca and even have an outside chance for Maned Wolf and Jaguar.

Day 12: Mbaracayú BR to Ciudad del Este via Salto del Monday. After a few more hours around Mbaracayú, we'll start today's drive to Ciudad del Este on the Brazilian and Argentinian border. En route, a short stop at Salto de Monday waterfalls should give us close-up views of Great Dusky Swifts. Time permitting, we will bird the surrounding woodland, which may reveal Golden-crowned Warbler, Greenish Elaenia or Hooded Tanager, before making our way to the banks of the Rio Paraná and Ciudad del Este.



Rusty-barred Owl by Dubi Shapiro

Day 13: Ciudad del Este to PN San Rafael. An early start from Ciudad del Este will see us arriving at Parque Nacional San Rafael in the mid-afternoon. Along with Mbaracayú, this 73,000hectare park protects a massive swathe of virgin Atlantic Forest. Late afternoon birding could produce some interesting forest inhabitants with Green-winged Saltator, White-spotted Woodpecker, Pileated Parrot, Saffron Toucanet and the gaudy Green-headed Tanager all being possible.

Days 14 & 15: PN San Rafael. Over the course of our two full days here, we can certainly expect some cracking birding in the surrounding forests and grasslands. While San Rafael and Mbaracayú share a similar species composition, a number of rare or localised species are much easier to find here. The Atlantic Forest endemics are obviously high on our list of targets with such mouth-watering prospects as Spot-backed and Tufted Antshrikes,

Solitary Tinamou, Southern Bristle Tyrant, Blackish-blue Seedeater, Drab-breasted Bamboo Tyrant, Green-headed Tanager, Russet-winged Spadebill and Rusty-barred Owl. We won't be caught up only on the above specials though, as a number of other forest species are sure to grab our attention; the tiny Plovercrest, shy White-shouldered Fire-eye, Large-tailed Antshrike, Wing-barred Piprites, Ochre-breasted and White-eyed Foliage-gleaners, White-throated Woodcreeper, Grey-bellied, Rufous-capped and Spix's Spinetails, White-spotted Woodpecker, Greenish Schiffornis Red-capped Parrot, Red-crowned Ant Tanager, Dusky-tailed Antbird, Rough-legged and Yellow Tyrannulets, Red-ruffed Fruitcrow and Chestnut-headed Tanager.



Green-headed Tanager by Forrest Rowland

The extensive grasslands around Kanguery hold Sedge Wren, Capped Seedeater, Saffron-cowled Blackbird, Lesser Grass Finch, Sharp-tailed Grass and Cock-tailed Tyrants, and possibly a handful of the migratory seedeaters such as Marsh, Dark-throated and Chestnut. A large lake holds some rather typical waterbirds in the form of Brazilian Teal, Anhinga, Ringed, Green and Amazon Kingfishers, as well as Grey-rumped and Sick's Swifts. However, it is only once the light dims that we can hope to find the star of the show, roding Giant Snipe! Nightbirds are again good, with more chances of finding Common and Long-tailed Potoos as well as the scarce Tawny-browed and Rusty-barred Owls.

Day 16: PN San Rafael to Ayolas via Coronel Bogoda. Today is set aside largely for travel, though we will make a stop at Coronel Bogoda to search for Saffron-cowled Blackbird and Pinnated Bittern.



Scarlet-headed Blackbird by Clayton Burne

After an hour's birding, we'll then make a quick stop in town to sample some cheesy cornbread called *chipa*, a local speciality for which Coronel Bogado (*Capital de la Chipa*) is famous. After a little rest, we'll head off to Isla Yacyreta to look for the rather incredible Sickle-winged Nightjar.

Day 17: Isla Yacyreta. Located in the Rio Paraná, Yacyreta is a fantastic Mesopotamian grassland site with some surrounding gallery forest. Much of our time will be spent searching for the threatened Ochre-breasted Pipit amongst the commoner Hellmayr's and Short-billed. Other species we are liable to see in the grasslands include Spotted Nothura, Red-

winged Tinamou, South American Snipe, White-bellied Seedeater and Scarlet-headed Blackbird. With some luck we may also stumble upon a Pinnated Bittern, Black-masked Finch or a roosting Sickle-winged Nightjar. The gallery forest provides us with an excellent chance to see some normally tricky species such as Saffron-billed Sparrow, Bare-faced Curassow and Pheasant Cuckoo, while we may also get some good views of Black Howler Monkey. We will then head out for some more night birding this evening, again looking for Sickle-winged Nightjar if necessary, otherwise concentrating on the very difficult Striped Owl.



Pinnated Bittern by Clayton Burne

Day 18: Ayolas to Asunción and final departures. We have a few more hours this morning to bird the gallery forests stretching along the banks of the Rio Paraná and Rio Paraguay near Ayolas. This species-rich environment could turn up any number of new birds including Green-backed Becard, Golden-winged Cacique, Orange-headed Tanager, Ultramarine Grosbeak, Blue-winged Parrotlets and Little Woodpecker. All good things must eventually come to an end however, and we'll start heading back to Asunción for lunch before our final departures.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS:

Tour dates, prices, single supplement rates, approximate flight costs and spaces available for this tour are displayed on our website. Please see under IMPORTANT INFORMATION below.

The tour fee includes:

- All meals from dinner on day 1 to breakfast on day 18;
- Bottled drinking water;
- All lodgings;
- Ground transportation;
- Extra activities mentioned in the itinerary;
- Reserve entrance fees; and
- All guiding services (including tips for local guides and services).

The tour fee does not include:

- Visa fees;
- **ANY** flights;
- Any drinks;
- Special gratuities; and
- Telephone calls, laundry and other items of a personal nature.

Single Supplement: The single supplement cost for this tour will be charged if you wish to have single accommodation. If RBL cannot provide you with a rooming partner for these nights although you choose to share, the single supplement will become applicable. We will make all reasonable efforts to ensure that a rooming partner is found if you do wish to share.

IMPORTANT NOTES:

- **Due to constantly fluctuating exchange rates, we quote our tours in 4 currencies. The tour price is however fixed only in the currency printed in bold, and the actual cost in the other currencies listed will be adjusted according to prevailing exchange rates at the time of final invoicing (usually 4 months before the tour.) The same applies to approximate flight and single supplement rates, which are also quoted in the respective fixed currency.**
- **Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registration a small party supplement will have to be charged.**
- **Furthermore, these costs are subject to unforeseen increases in tour related costs and may have to be adjusted as a result.**
- **Lastly, we may be forced to change or alter the itinerary at short or no notice due to unforeseen circumstances; please be aware that we will attempt to adhere as close to the original program as possible.**

Tipping: As noted above, gratuities (drivers, hotel staff, restaurants etc.) are included on this tour. However, this does not include your Rockjumper leader/s. If, therefore, you feel that he/they have given you excellent service, it is entirely appropriate to tip them.

Special Notes:

- This tour involves very little arduous walking. We will however spend large amounts of time vehicle-bound while traversing the vast plains of Paraguay. If you have any physical limitations or medical conditions of any sort please do let the Rockjumper office know in advance of the tour.
- We will be birding in some remote areas well away from modern medical facilities.
- The hotels fluctuate from a very good standard to quite basic in more remote locations.
- Transport is by small coach or minibus, and 4x4 vehicles where required. Road conditions fluctuate from good to rather poor. Some areas are prone to flooding, and may interfere with our trip, though we have minimized this risk by undertaking the tour during the driest part of the season.
- We expect the weather to be dry, sunny and very hot in most areas. Broad hats, sunscreen and sunglasses will certainly be required.

ARRIVAL & DEPARTURE DETAILS:

This tour **does not** include **ANY** airfares. The tour will depart from the capital city of Asunción on Day 1 and, as we have an early departure today, you are expected to be in the country the day before the tour begins. The tour will conclude in the mid-afternoon at Silvio Pettirossi International Airport, Asuncion (IATA: ASU) on Day 18.

The above information in respect of arrivals and departures is a guide only. Precise arrival and departure information will be sent to you in your **Tour Confirmation** package once the tour has been officially

confirmed. If you wish to arrive early and/or depart late and would like assistance in this regard, kindly contact the Rockjumper office.

FLIGHTS:

Silvio Pettirossi International Airport, Asuncion (IATA: ASU) is the main port of entry for international flights into Paraguay. **Please DO NOT book any flights until you have consulted the Rockjumper office for confirmation on the status of the tour.**