



Strange-tailed Tyrant – © Jorge La Grotteria

Northeast Argentina: Ibera Marshes & Atlantic forest of Iguazu Falls

14 days/13 nights tour

The most comprehensive tour to the best of Northeast Argentina

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Yellow Cardinal (male) – © Jorge La Grotteria

INTRODUCTION

Ibera marshes constitute an enormous wetland located in north-east Argentina, in the center of Corrientes province, and one of the wildest areas in southern South America. The marshland habitat hosts a remarkable variety of birds, many of them mainly found in this part of the world, including a newly described species: Ibera Seedeater. But Ibera is not just about marshes: other important ecoregions are found in the surroundings. The subtropical grasslands are the marshes main counterpart in the region, giving refuge to some of the most endangered bird species of the area, such as Strange-tailed Tyrant, Saffron-cowled Blackbird and Marsh Seedeater, threatened mainly by habitat loss. The Espinal forest is found south of the marshes, adding a high diversity of furnariids (oven birds) and one of the most sought-after species: the endangered Yellow Cardinal. Finally, the Humid Chaco forest to the west and the Atlantic forest to the north-east of the Ibera marshes add their strong influence to the area's biodiversity in the scattered patches of forest naturally found in the region. The combination of all these ecoregions and their bird species makes Ibera marshes an outstanding birding destination.

Having been protected for decades, first as a Provincial Park and currently in process of becoming a National Park (the strongest protection rank in Argentina), Ibera marshes' fauna is particularly tame and lots of animals are easy to spot, such as Capybara, Marsh Deer, Yacare and Broad-snouted Caimans, and Black Howler Monkey, as well as the many bird species (more than 400) found in the area. Current re-introduction programs are being carried out to bring back recently extirpated species such as Red-and-green Macaw, Collared Peccari, Brazilian Tapir, Giant Anteater, Giant Otter and the magnificent Jaguar.

The addition of a visit to Estancia Virocay provides with the perfect combination of birds, nature and local culture, in the most comprehensive tour to the best of Ibera marshes and its incredible wildlife.



Green-headed Tanager – © Sergio Castedo

The **Atlantic forest** (subtropical forest of Amazonian domain) is one of the most bio-diverse ecosystems in South America, with about 60 percent of its vertebrate fauna being endemic. Several different forest assemblages are found within it, each one of them having its different bird repertoire, which makes it one of the world's top birding destinations.

Once covering most of south-east Brazil, east Paraguay and the north-east tip of Argentina, nowadays less than 10 % of the original territory still remains as a forest. The Argentine province of Misiones has one of the world's largest continuous area of Atlantic Forest, and most of it is formally protected as national and provincial parks (such as Iguazu National Park and Urugua-i and Cruce Caballero Provincial Parks).

Most of its original fauna is still well preserved, with over 500 species of birds (including toucans, puffbirds, antbirds, manakins, tanagers and more) and many of South America's iconic neotropical mammals, such as jaguars, tapirs, peccaries, anteaters, monkeys, agoutis and many others.

Among the most attractive birds in this forest are the Atlantic endemic Spot-billed and Saffron Toucanets, the cryptic Helmeted Woodpecker, the colorful tanagers such as Green-headed and a striking variety of mid and large sized antshrikes, such as Spot-backed, Large-tailed, Tufted and Giant, just to mention a few targets that we will be looking for while birding in the forest.

This is a tour that comprises some of the best birding areas and most beautiful landscapes of northeast Argentina.

A visit to the magnificent Iguazu Falls, one of the world's seven natural wonders, will be the "grand finale" of our tour.



Marsh Seedeater – © Jorge La Grotteria

TOUR DESCRIPTION

The tour starts in the domestic airport of Buenos Aires (AEP), from where we will take a flight connection to the city of Posadas (Misiones). From there we will take a birding transfer in a 4x4 vehicle to Colonia Carlos Pellegrini, located right by Ibera marshes. During this transfer we will make birding stops where we will have our first chances of finding some of the main targets of the tour, such as the **Strange-tailed Tyrant**, **Streamer-tailed Tyrant**, **Black-and-white Monjita**, **Jabiru**, **Marsh Seedeater** (only in the summer) and **Crested Doradito**, among many others.

Once in Colonia Carlos Pellegrini we will accommodate in a perfectly located lodge surrounded by nature, where commonly seen species include **Southern Screamer**, **Rufescent Tiger-heron**, **Giant Woodrail**, **Black-capped Donacobius**, **Scarlet-headed Blackbird** and more. Near the town there is a strong influence of Espinal forest which constitutes the main habitat for **Yellow Cardinal**, one of the most attractive targets of the tour. Other typical species of this forest are **Brown Cacholote**, **Scimitar-billed Woodcreeper**, **Little Thornbird**, **Tufted Tit-spinetail**, and the great **Cream-backed Woodpecker**.

The humid subtropical grasslands around Ibera marshes are the main habitat for a variety of **seedeaters** and other species such as **Wedge-tailed** and **Lesser Grassfinch**, **Great Pampa Finch**, **Long-tailed Reedfinch**, **Greater Rhea**, **Red-winged Tinamou** and **Bearded Tachuri**.

A boat trip in Laguna Ibera will increase our chances of seeing **White-headed Marsh-tyrant**, **Great Black Hawk** and three species of **kingfishers**, as well as enjoying the beautiful landscape and other wildlife of Ibera, including Marsh Deer, Yacare Caimans, Capybaras and good chances of finding Neotropic River Otters and Yellow Anacondas.



Saffron-cowled Blackbird – © Andrés Terán

After spending three nights in Pellegrini we will take a transfer eastwards, in order to visit a different birding hotspot of the region: Estancia Virocay. This 5000 hectares cattle ranch practices sustainable management of the natural grasslands as part of the “Grassland’s Alliance for the Conservation of Southern Cone Grasslands and their Biodiversity” (a regional initiative known as “Alianza del Pastizal” in Spanish), giving refuge to hundreds of bird species that are disappearing from the area due to pine forestry.

Among its many specialties, Estancia Virocay has lots of endangered and rare species such as **Saffron-cowled Blackbird**, **Sharp-tailed Tyrant**, **Sickle-winged Nightjar** (the estancia constitutes one of the very few places in the world where this species is reliably seen), **Streamer-tailed Tyrant**, **Ochre-breasted Pipit** and a variety of seedeaters, being **Capped Seedeater** the most typical species of that habitat. It is also the best place in Argentina to see **White-tailed Goldenthrroat** (found only in the summer). Other commonly seen species in the very well preserved subtropical grasslands of Estancia Virocay include **Buff-necked Ibis**, **Lesser Yellow-headed Vulture**, **Aplomado Falcon**, **Chopi Blackbird** and **Yellow-rumped Marshbird**, among many others.

Besides some very well preserved subtropical grasslands, the estancia has natural patches of Atlantic forest where species such as **Common Potoo**, **White-spotted Woodpecker**, **Lineated Woodpecker**, **Olive Spinetail**, **Plush-crested Jay**, **White-browed Warbler**, **Green-winged Saltator** and **Crested Oropendola**, are often seen or heard.

Estancia Virocay constitutes one of the highlights of any trip to north-east Argentina, and a great example of how conservation efforts in private land can make an important difference. As well, by staying in this place we will be supporting their work and the “Grassland’s Alliance” initiative.



Vinaceous-breasted Parrot - © Jorge La Grotteria

From Estancia Virocay we will drive northwards back to the province of Misiones, where we will begin our Atlantic forest journey. Our first destination in this province is a private reserve and lodge where we will be specially looking for species such as **Olive Spinetail**, **Azure Jay** and the endangered **Helmeted Woodpecker**.

Afterwards we will travel further north to the town of San Pedro, which is conveniently located near two provincial parks that protect a very endangered type of forest within the Atlantic forest: the monkey-puzzle (Araucaria) forest. This ecosystem gives refuge to endangered and very local bird species such as the **Vinaceous-breasted Parrot**, **Canebrake Groundcreeper** and **Araucaria Tit-spinetail**.

The first park that we will visit is La Araucaria provincial park, and is located right next to San Pedro, being one of the best places to see the three species mentioned above. An afternoon visit to this park will give us good chances to find those and more species. We will spend the night in cabins near San Pedro, where there is a breeding territory of **Stygian Owls**, which we will try to find in the evening.

The following morning we will have an early start to visit Cruce Caballero provincial park, which protects one of the most spectacular patches of primary forest still left in South America, with huge elder monkey-puzzle trees and a dense tree-fern forest under them. Bird specialties in this park include the rare **White-bearded Antshrike**, **Black-billed Scythebill** and **Planalto Tyrannulet**. Good chances of seeing the spectacular **Long-trained Nightjar** before sunrise are the main reasons for the early start.



Blue Manakin - © Adrián Heredia

After spending the morning in Cruce Caballero, we will continue our way northwards to get to one of the main destinations of the tour: Karadya Birding Lodge. This outstanding private reserve with accommodations is located in a hilly area with a type of forest that is different to the one found in Iguazu National Park, therefore having a different bird assemblage. At Karadya we will be looking for Atlantic Forest specialties such as the **Red-breasted Toucan**, **Blue Manakin**, **Black-throated Grosbeak**, **Bay-ringed Tyrannulet** and the more skulky **Planalto Tapaculo** and **Spotted Bamboowren**, among many others. Antbirds are especially diverse here (although yet hard to spot) with remarkable species such as the **White-shouldered Fire-Eye**, **Bertoni's Antbird**, **Dusky-tailed Antbird**, **Streak-capped Antwren**, **Tufted Antshrike** and even **Giant Antshrike**, although this last one is not found all the time in the area. The reserve is located in a green corridor which connects Urugua-i provincial park with Foerster provincial park, being a real hotspot for birdwatching. It is also a good place to look for soaring raptors such as **King Vulture**, **Black-and-white Hawk-Eagle** (particularly often seen in the area) and the much scarcer **Ornate Hawk-Eagle**. At night this reserve offers great chances of finding some Atlantic Forest endemics such as the **Tawny-browed Owl** and **Rusty-barred Owl**.

Our next destination will be also one of the most exciting birding spots in our tour: Surucua Reserva & Ecolodge. Accommodating in this comfortable birding lodge we will be experiencing a different type of Atlantic Forest at its best, more similar to the forest found around the falls, but without the crowds of people that usually visit that park every day. The place is surrounded by rainforest, bordering Iguazu national park in the Argentine side (west of the reserve) and Do Iguacu national park to the north (right across Iguazu River) in the Brazilian shore. On the way between Karadya and Surucua reserves we will make a short but important birding stop at Urugua-i provincial park to look for the endangered **Black-fronted Piping-Guan**.



Spot-billed Toucanet - © Andrés Teran

Surucua lodge has a good network of trails, including part of the coast of Iguazu River with an amazing view of the forest landscape. Here we will be looking for species such as **White-bearded** and **Band-tailed Manakins**, **Surucua** and **Black-throated Trogons**, **Blond-crested** and **Robust Woodpeckers**, **Ochre-collared Piculet**, **Spot-backed Antshrike**, **Red-ruffed Fruitcrow**, **Buff-bellied Puffbird** and **Spot-billed Toucanet**, among many others. **Rufous-capped Motmots** start their activity before dusk calling loudly from their hidden spots in the forest, and in the evening **Common Potoos**, **Pauraques**, **Semicollared Nighthawks**, **Black-capped Screech Owls** and **Mottled Owls** are commonly heard (depending on the season) just around the lodge's rooms.

From Surucua lodge we will travel across Iguazu National Park, making birding stops along the way on the road 101. The views of the forest along this road are some of the best still found within the Atlantic forest, with its unique combination of tall rosewood trees and “palmito” palms. When we reach Puerto Iguazu, we will visit the “Jardin de los Picaflores” (Hummingbird's Garden), a place where it is possible to spot from very close distance many hummers of different species that are very hard to find in the forest. **Black Jacobin**, **Planalto Hermit**, **Violet-capped Woodnymph**, **Versicolored Emerald** and the astonishing **Swallow-tailed Hummingbird** are some of the species that visit the garden. The feeders also attract songbirds such as **Green-headed Tanager** and **Purple-throated Euphonia**. After that, we will travel a short distance to our accommodations, in a lodge located inside a natural reserve, surrounded by the Atlantic forest.

Finally, on the very last day of the itinerary, a visit to the amazing Iguazu Falls (one of the world's most outstanding waterfalls) will be the perfect ending for the most complete tour to the best of northeast Argentina.



White-bearded Antshrike - © Adrián Heredia

ITINERARY*

DAY 1: arrival in Posadas airport, and transfer in private vehicle to Colonia Carlos Pellegrini (with birding stops in search of Strange-tailed Tyrant and others). Check-in at the lodge, lunch and afternoon birding the trails around the Interpretation Centre of Ibera Provincial Park. Dinner and night at the lodge.

DAY 2: early breakfast and birding tour to Camba Trapo, in search of Yellow Cardinal, Jabiru and Black-and-white Monjita. Lunch in the lodge. Afternoon birding in the marshes. Dinner and night at the lodge.

DAY 3: early breakfast and boat tour in Laguna Ibera in search for wetland specialties. Lunch in the lodge. Free afternoon at the lodge (or bonus time to look for missed species). Dinner and night at the lodge.

DAY 4: breakfast and transfer in private vehicle to Estancia Virocay with birding stops along the way. Check-in, lunch and walking tour in trails around the Estancia's main house. Nocturnal birding walking tour, dinner and night in Estancia Virocay.

DAY 5: breakfast and birding walking tour looking for grassland specialties. Lunch at the Estancia and afternoon walking tour. Dinner and night in Estancia Virocay.

DAY 6: breakfast and transfer to Chacra Mariposa (Misiones). Lunch and PM birding in Chacra Mariposa. Night in Chacra Mariposa.



Black-fronted Piping-Guan – © Marcelo Gavensky

DAY 7: AM birding in Chacra Mariposa. Transfer to San Pedro (Misiones). PM birding in La Araucaria Provincial Park. Night in San Pedro.

DAY 8: Early transfer to Cruce Caballero Provincial Park (AM birding there). Transfer to Karadya Birding Lodge. Evening birding and night in Karadya.

DAY 9: Full day birding in Karadya Birding Lodge. Night in Karadya.

DAY 10: Full day birding in Karadya Birding Lodge. Night in Karadya.

DAY 11: AM transfer to Surucua Reserve & Ecolodge with birding stop in Urugua-i Provincial Park (looking for Black-fronted Piping-Guan). PM birding in Surucua Reserve & Ecolodge. Night in Surucua.

DAY 12: Full day birding in Surucua Reserva & Ecolodge. Night in Surucua.

DAY 13: Early transfer to Puerto Iguazu across Iguazu National Park birding along the way. Lunch in Puerto Iguazu. PM visit to Hummingbird's Garden. Night in Puerto Iguazu.

DAY 14: AM and early afternoon tour to Iguazu Falls. Transfer to Iguazu Airport. End of the tour.

** The itinerary may change due to force majeure*

TOUR DETAILS

Price

Please contact us to find out about our prices for the current and/or following seasons.

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Black Jacobin – © Jorge La Grotteria

Our prices **include** all accommodations, three meals a day (breakfast, lunch and dinner), all land transfers in private vehicle, local guide/driver and tour leader with quality spotting scope, and snacks and drinks (bottled water) during the birding outings. Our prices **do not include** flight tickets (unless asked on request), personal insurance, drinks in Colonia Carlos Pellegrini's lodge, Chacra Mariposa, Karadya Birding Lodge and Surucua Reserva & Ecolodge, entrance tickets to Hummingbirds Garden and Iguazu National Park, guide at Iguazu National Park, tips nor anything not mentioned on previous sentence.

Group size

We run this tour on request for groups with a minimum size of 2 and a maximum of 4 passengers. Please contact us for information about larger groups and options for single travelers.

Physical difficulty

Easy to moderate.

Accommodations

Very comfortable lodges in Colonia Carlos Pellegrini, Chacra Mariposa, Karadya Lodge, Surucua Reserva & Ecolodge and Puerto Iguazu. Traditional and comfortable "estancia" accommodation in Estancia Virocay. Rustic cabins in San Pedro.

Best time of the year

This is a tour that can be made at any time of the year, although we recommend early spring time (September-October) for more bird activity, the summer (November-February) for the seedeaters in Corrientes (most of them are summer visitors), and winter time for milder weather and more chances of soaring forest raptors in Misiones.



Jabiru – © Jorge La Grotteria

Weather in Corrientes and Misiones provinces

Corrientes province has subtropical humid and warm weather, with summer temperatures between 20 and 35° C. Winter can be cold (between 5 and 10° C) when southern wind blows. Spring time and early summer is the rainy season, with passing storms, although rain may fall throughout the year. Misiones province weather is generally warmer except for the winter, as some of the places visited are in higher altitude (hence, weather can be colder than in Corrientes). Winter time in Misiones is usually the rainy season.

Packing for the trip

Bring light clothing (long-sleeves shirts and long pants to avoid insect bites) and a light coat. In case of low temperatures, dressing layers would work well. It's also essential to bring closed shoes (2 pairs if possible), a rain coat ("ponchos" are very useful) and a good hat. Along with that you should bring sun glasses, sun screen and insect repellent (this last one mainly for the rainforest). If you are coming in winter you should add more warm clothing.

Best combined with

Northwest Argentina in Jujuy Birding Route 10 to 16 days tour

Mbaracayu Reserve Specialties (Paraguay) - 4 days/3 nights tour

South Patagonia Birding Tour (El Calafate & Ushuaia) 7 days/6 nights

Northeast Patagonia Birding Tour 8 days/7 nights



A view of Iguazu Falls, surrounded by Atlantic forest

Important (READ): our tours are designed for small groups, with low impact, personalized attention and hiring local guides whenever possible, in order to increase their quality. We keep the use of play back down to a minimum possible so to avoid stressing the birds or affecting their natural behavior, thus actively contributing to the conservation of the same and promotion of responsible birding and ecotourism practices.

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