

# Birding Intervalles, Brazil

## Fred Tavares

The Atlantic Forest at Intervalles, in São Paulo state, Brazil, has long attracted birders keen to see regional endemics, including a fascinating suite of globally threatened species. A Brazilian birder shares tips on birding this fabulous site.

**W**ith around 250 endemics among more than 1,700 resident or regularly visiting bird species, Brazil is undoubtedly one of world's top birding destinations. One of the country's richest habitats – in terms of rare and endemic species – is the much-depleted Atlantic Forest. One of the most important and best-

preserved areas of Atlantic Forest is Parque Estadual de Intervalles and its buffer zone, in southern São Paulo. Intervalles is a must-visit site for any birder looking for southeast Brazil's specialities. Part of the Serra de Paranapiacaba, the park lies within the largest area of continuous Atlantic Forest in Brazil. Its 40,700 ha range from 600–1,200 altitude.



1 Chestnut-backed Tanager *Tangara preciosa*, Intervalles, São Paulo, Brazil, September 2011 (Nick Athanas/Tropical Birding). Look for this stunning tanager in the canopy and along forest borders.

## Overview

More than 400 species have been recorded at Intervalles, including over 30 endemic to Brazil. To bird this fantastic area I recommend taking at least three full days. During such a timeframe, it is possible to see 200-plus species, including numerous Brazilian endemics and globally threatened species. A few roads traverse the park and these are complemented by several few trails that go deeper into the forest. Both roads and trails can provide fantastic birding opportunities.

A few years ago, local guides started a feeding station in the forest near Pousada Onca-pintada (▲ 24°16'06.84"S 48°24'35.14"W). Rather than trays or platforms, food is put on or near a big log. It is amazingly successful, attracting sought-after terrestrial birds such as Solitary Tinamou *Tinamus solitarius* (Near Threatened), Spot-winged Wood-Quail *Odontophorus capueira*, Rufous-capped Formicarius *colma* and Short-tailed *Chamaeza campanisona* antthrushes, and (from January–August) Variegated Antpitta *Grallaria varia*.

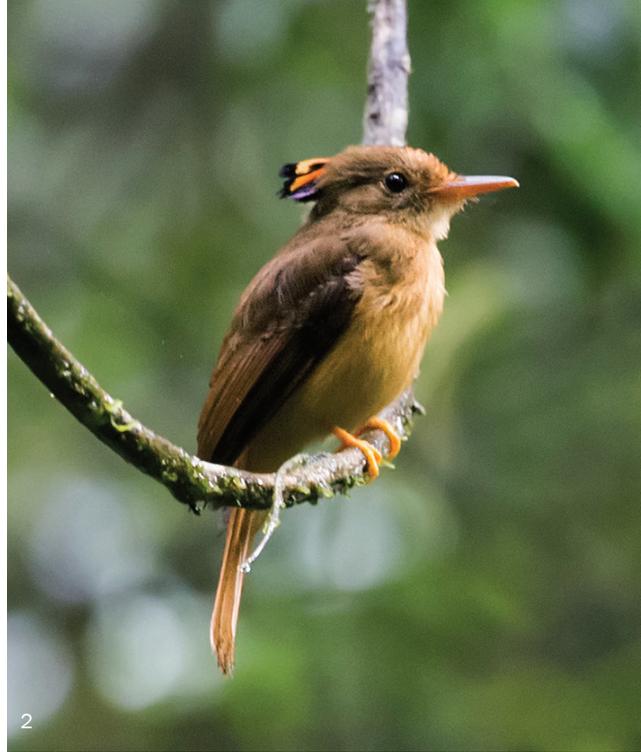
Note that there are no other feeding stations in the park – so no bird table piled with fruit and laden with feasting tanagers nor sugar-dispensers for hummingbirds. That said... whenever I visit Intervalles I take some bananas with me. You can buy them at the market in Ribeirão Grande, the last town before Intervalles. Leave some outside your accommodation during the day in order to attract tanagers such as the much-desired Chestnut-backed *Tangara preciosa* and perhaps the colourful Yellow-fronted Woodpecker *Melanerpes flavifrons*.

## Key birding sites

Although birding is generally really good throughout the park area, a few trails and other points stand out. This section summarises these, complementing the assessment with some tips on key birds to look for.

## Lodges and the self-guided trail

The central area of the park around the lodges contains a self-guided trail, which provides access to secondary growth, marsh and lakes. It offers plenty of good birding. At night, Rusty-barred Owl *Strix hylophila* (Near Threatened) is the most frequently encountered owl. Around the lodges, a Stygian Owl *Asio stygius* regularly shows up for a few days from time to time, favouring the same perch near the park reception. The marsh by reception is good for Blackish Rail *Pardirallus nigricans* and the normally elusive Red-and-white Crake *Laterallus leucopyrrhus*. Swallow-tailed



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2 'Atlantic' Royal Flycatcher *Onychorhynchus (coronatus) swainsoni*, Intervalles, São Paulo, Brazil, December 2013 (Nick Athanas/Tropical Birding). Famous for its fantastic crest, this chunky tyrant-flycatcher builds a large hanging nest, usually over a stream.

Cotinga *Phibalura flavirostris* (Near Threatened) breeds near reception from September–December, and gives excellent views. The endemic and Near Threatened Black-legged Dacnis *Dacnis nigripes* nests every year around the lake or near Pica-Pau Lodge. In forest, listen for the frog-like vocalisations of the endemic and Near Threatened White-breasted Tapaculo *Eleoscytalopus indigoticus* and look for include Giant *Batara cinerea* and Large-tailed *Mackenziaena leachii* antshrikes. Another great area to spend some time is around the research station at Sede de Pesquisa (▲ 24°16'24.39"S 48°24'58.84"W), which is *en route* to Carmo Road. This is a great place to look for species such as the highly vocal Bare-throated Bellbird *Procnias nudicollis* (Vulnerable; can be common August–December), Dusky-tailed Antbird *Drymophila malura* and Chestnut-backed Tanager.

## The Carmo Road

This 30-km-long road is probably the most productive place to bird, passing through well-preserved forest. It leaves the central park (930 m altitude), starting c.2 km southwest of the lodges (specifically, just beyond the research station of Sede de Pesquisa), and descends roughly southwest



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**3-5** Intervals' star trio of antshrikes. **3** Female Giant Antshrike *Batara cinerea*, Intervals, São Paulo, Brazil, October 2017 (Nick Athanas/Tropical Birding). A very large antshrike, with a loud and distinctive call that is frequently heard at Intervals. **4** Male Large-tailed Antshrike *Mackenziaena leachii*, Algulhas Negras road, Rio de Janeiro, October 2012 (Nick Athanas/Tropical Birding). A beautiful antshrike of higher-elevation forest. **5** Male White-bearded Antshrike *Biatas nigropectus*, Morro da Turquia, Pomerode, Santa Catarina, September 2012 (Adrian Rupp Birding Tours). To encounter this globally threatened species, listen and look in areas of *Chusquea* bamboo.



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## INTERVALES: THE PRACTICALITIES

**Getting there** Parque Estadual de Intervales (▲ 24° 16'06.3"S 48° 24'49.7"W; 📍 petaronline.com.br/intervalles/) lies 280 km west of São Paulo. From that city take the toll road SP280 (named Rodovia Castelo Branco) towards Tatuí. At Tatuí turn onto state (and toll) road SP127 to Capão Bonito. From here take road SP181 to Ribeirão Grande. Once in Ribeirão Grande look for the signs to Parque Estadual Intervales. From Ribeirão Grande to the park entrance is 25 km on a dirt road. Ribeirão Grande is the last possible place for fuel before the park. All roads are in good condition.

**When to go** Although definitely worth a visit at any time, the best period is early July to early December. Note that the austral winter of June–August can be fairly cold (with temperatures reaching freezing). Rain is standard, so come dressed accordingly.

**Where to stay and eat** There is ample, well-located and fairly cheap accommodation inside the park. The park administration operates four lodges (pousadas) within the upper (northwest) reaches of Intervales, all at or near the reception (▲ 24° 16'03.86"S 48° 24'53.82"W); a fifth lodge is on the way. All are popular, so book well in advance (✉ reservasintervalles@gmail.com; ☎ 0055 15 3542 1511). Birders favour Pica-Pau Lodge (which has a balcony from where canopy birds can be observed); Esquilo and Lontra are also good, while Onça Pintada is the cheapest. Rooms are simple and clean; most have private bathrooms and hot water. Lodges have common areas with a fireplace – which is very welcome when compiling your checklist of an evening. There is also a campsite; tents can be hired upon request. For food, the park restaurant adjacent to Pica-Pau serves breakfast, lunch and dinner; best to book in advance. Early breakfast can be obtained for a small supplement.

**Communications** Prepare to disconnect from the outside world. There is presently no mobile phone reception within the park. If necessary, you can arrange with reception to make landline calls. Internet is provided near the park reception, but is very slow.

**Local guides** On all trails and roads bar the self-guided trail, it is mandatory to be accompanied by a registered local guide. Book yours when you reserve your accommodation. The guides know the park really well, have fantastic eyes and ears, and really like birding. Although they do not speak English, they do speak fantastic 'birding' and know all the birds' scientific names. Show them your wish list, and they will show you the birds.



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**6** Male Helmeted Woodpecker *Celeus galeatus*, Intervales, São Paulo, Brazil, October 2016 (Nick Athanas/Tropical Birding). Generally a difficult bird to see, but Intervales is a great place to get a decent look at this globally Vulnerable species.

to reach the ranger station at Alecrim (200 m). It is quiet, free of traffic and packed with birds. Even on a busy day you might see no more than a couple of cars – probably other birders. All birding can be done along the roadside. On a good day you can see more than 130 species. Note that, unless it has been dry, you probably need a 4x4 to drive all bar the first 10 km of the road.

The road offers some great viewpoints for raptor-watching. In recent years, a pair of Grey-bellied Hawk *Accipiter poliogaster* has nested here. Other species to look for include Mantled Hawk *Pseudastur polionotus* (Near Threatened), White-necked Hawk *Amadonastur lacernulatus* (Vulnerable) and Black Hawk-Eagle *Spizaetus tyrannus*. Very recently there was a fantastic record of Crested Eagle *Morphnus guianensis* (Near Threatened).

This is the best place to see Black-fronted Piping-Guan *Pipile jacutinga* (Endangered): look for its main food source, the Jussara palm *Euterpe edulis*. Search areas of bamboo *Guadua tagoara* for seeding plants and you may find the specialist pair of seedeaters, Buffy-fronted *Sporophila frontalis* and Temminck's *S. falcirostris* (both



7 Spot-winged Wood-Quail *Odontophorus capueira*, Intervalles, São Paulo, Brazil, November 2017 (Fred Tavares/Brasil Aventuras Birding Tours). An unobtrusive terrestrial bird that often gives good views at the feeding station.

Vulnerable). In tracts of *Chusquea* bamboo, in particular, you stand a chance of the sought-after White-bearded Antshrike *Biatas nigropectus* (Vulnerable) and the striking Black-billed Scythebill *Campylorhamphus falcularius*. Three endemic furnariids – White-collared Foliage-Gleaner *Anabazenops fuscus*, Pale-browed Treehunter *Cichocolaptes leucophrus* and Pallid Spinetail *Cranioleuca pallida* – are easily found on the Carmo Road.

This is also the best area for the elusive Helmeted Woodpecker *Celeus galeatus* (Vulnerable). It is good for Black-cheeked *Conopophaga melanops* and Rufous *C. lineata* gnateaters, and for Bare-throated Bellbird. Where streams cross the road, look for Star-throated Antwren *Myrmotherula gularis* in the undergrowth (it can also be seen elsewhere in the park). A must-see bird along the road is Crescent-chested Puffbird *Malacoptila striata* (Near threatened endemic). The endemic 'Atlantic' Royal Flycatcher *Onychorhynchus (coronatus) swainsoni* (considered Vulnerable by BirdLife International) breeds here from September–December. Of the park's four species of *Phylloscartes* tyrannulet, two are both endemic and Near Threatened: Sao Paulo *P. paulista* and Oustalet's *P. oustaleti*. Excitingly, neither is difficult to see along the Carmo Road.

Other classy species to look for here include: Solitary Tinamou *Tinamus solitarius* (Near Threatened), Saffron Toucanet *Pteroglossus bailloni* (Near Threatened), Slaty Bristlefront *Merulaxis ater* (Near Threatened; favours rocks or dense vegetation), Pin-tailed Manakin *Ilicura militaris*, Cinnamon-vented Piha *Lipaugus lanioides* (Near Threatened; can be common), Brown Tanager *Orchesticus abeilli* and Black-legged Dacnis.

### Trilha do Mirante da Anta

Mirante Trail begins just in front of Pica-Pau Lodge at  $\blacktriangle 24^{\circ}16'04.62''S 48^{\circ}24'34.69''W$  and ascends gradually for 2.5 km to reach 1,050 m altitude. Focus on finding bamboo-loving species here, including Spotted Bamboowren *Psilorhamphus guttatus* (Near Threatened), White-bearded Antshrike and an antbird trio: Ochre-rumped *Drymophila ochropyga* (Near Threatened), Dusky-tailed and Ferruginous *D. ferruginea*. Other highlights include Lineated *Dryocopus lineatus* and Robust *Campephilus robustus* woodpeckers, Such's Antthrush *Chamaeza meruloides*, Short-tailed Antthrush, 'Atlantic' Royal Flycatcher (which nests by Lago Negro) and Green-throated Euphonia *Euphonia chalybea* (Near Threatened).



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8 Azure-shouldered Tanager *Tangara cyanoptera*, Intervalles, São Paulo, Brazil, November 2013 (Fred Tavares/Brasil Aventuras Birding Tours).

9 Look for Long-trained Nightjar *Hydropsalis forcipata* (male, Intervalles, São Paulo, Brazil, September 2010; Fred Tavares/Brasil Aventuras Birding Tours) along the Capão Bonito road after dark.



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## Trilha do Lageado

This 5-km-long trail (starting at  $\blacktriangle$  24°15'47.41"S 48°26'00.91"W) is the most reliable place to encounter the endemic Blue-bellied Parrot *Triclaria malachitacea* (Near Threatened), which particularly visits 'carrapicho' *Acanthospermum australe* shrubs during May–July. Other good birds to look for here include Helmeted Woodpecker, Oustalet's Tyrannulet, the tricky-to-see Russet-winged Spadebill *Platyrynchus leucoryphus* (Vulnerable), Crescent-chested Puffbird and 'Atlantic' Royal Flycatcher.

## Barra Grande Road

This road starts near the lodges at  $\blacktriangle$  24°16'02.35"S 48°24'34.85"W, and twists roughly eastsoutheast for 45 km to São Pedro nucleus. There is really good birding throughout – including the first 2 km (which is best done on foot). Notable species include Mantled Hawk, Black-fronted Piping-Guan, Black-capped Screech-Owl *Megascops atricapilla*, occasional Silky-tailed Nightjar *Antrostomus sericocaudatus*, Crescent-chested Puffbird, Giant Antshrike, Bare-throated Bellbird, Pin-tailed Manakin, Golden-chevrons Tanager *Tangara ornata*, Azure-shouldered Tanager *Tangara cyanoptera* (Near Threatened) and Black-legged Dacnis.

## Main road from Capão Bonito

Along the main road between the park and Capão Bonito, a nocturnal highlight is the spectacular Long-trained Nightjar *Macropsalis forcipata*. The bird shows up shortly after dusk, and local guides know its favoured couple of spots. Not long ago there were a couple of sites inside the park where it was possible to see the species, but those sites no longer seem active.

## Other birding tips

Nearly 20 hummingbirds have been recorded at Intervales. Some only occur at lower altitudes (i.e. away from the birding trails) and are best looked for elsewhere in southeast Brazil. The three key species are Purple-crowned Plovercrest *Stephanoxis loddigesii*, Dusky-throated Hermit *Phaethornis squalidus* and Brazilian Ruby *Clytolaema rubricauda*. The latter is widespread and can be seen in almost every trail and road of the park; it particularly favours flowers of *Fuchsia* sp. The best places to see the Plovercrest and Hermit are close to one another, for they lek near



**10** Violet-crowned Plovercrest *Stephanoxis loddigesii* (male, Intervales, São Paulo, Brazil, October 2015; Renato Paiva) leks along the Carmo Road.

the entrance to the Carmo Road along the trail that starts at  $\blacktriangle$  24°16'32.59" S 48°25'05.18"W.

Long-tufted Screech-Owl *Megascops sanctaecatarinae* can also be seen quite frequently, especially outside the park. Tawny-browed Owl *Pulsatrix koenigswaldiana* also occurs. Plain Parakeet *Brotogeris tirica* can be seen frequently in many areas of the park. Pileated Parrot *Pionopsitta pileata* can be seen fairly often. White-browed Woodpecker *Piculus aurulentus* (Near Threatened), Blond-crested Woodpecker *Celeus flavescens* and Ochre-collared Piculet *Picumnus temminckii* are all fairly common and should be easily found.

Perusing mixed flocks moving through the understorey, you should also encounter White-browed *Anabacerthia amaurotis* (Near Threatened) and Black-capped foliage-gleaners *Philydor atricapillus*, Gray-bellied *Synallaxis cinerascens* and Rufous-capped *Synallaxis ruficapilla* spinetails plus Sharp-billed Treehunter *Heliobletus contaminates*.

## >> BIRDING SITES INTERVALES, BRAZIL

**11** Swallow-tailed Cotinga *Phibalura flavirostris* (Intervales, São Paulo, Brazil, October 2015; Fred Tavares/Brasil Aventuras Birding Tours) breeds near reception, as does **12** Black-legged Dacnis *Dacnis nigripes* (Intervales, São Paulo, Brazil, August 2015; Renato Paiva).

**13** Look among mixed flocks for Sao Paulo Tyrannulet *Phylloscartes paulistus* (Intervales, São Paulo, Brazil, August 2015; Renato Paiva).



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Intervales has a superb collection of antbirds. In addition to those already mentioned, Squamate Antbird *Myrmoderus squamosus* is fairly widespread. Mouse-coloured Tapaculo *Scytalopus speluncae* is also easily found, as is the endemic Hangnest Tody-Tyrant *Hemitriccus nidipendulus*. The endemic Hooded Berryeater *Carpornis cucullata* (Near Threatened) can be seen in several areas; listen for its loud, distinctive call. Red-ruffed Fruitcrow *Pyroderus scutatus* can be seen all year round and generally is a bird you will bump into at some point. The endemic Serra do Mar Tyrant-Manakin *Neopelma chrysolophum* is not difficult to find. Finally, three endemic tanagers to look for are Brassy-breasted *Tangara desmaresti*, Rufous-headed *Hemithraupis ruficapilla* and Olive-green *Orthogonys chloricterus*.

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