

Wise Birding Holidays

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BRAZIL'S ATLANTIC FOREST:

REGUA BIRD LODGE: 10 Reasons why you should visit!

REGUA Bird Lodge www.regua.co.uk also known as Guapi Assu Bird Lodge, is fast becoming a popular birding destination. I have been lucky enough to visit this great place, in a working capacity as a bird tour leader and also in my own time whilst on holiday. REGUA already has a number of specific birding trip reports easily available online. However, the purpose of this trip report is something a little different, in that I try to give an overview on all aspects of a stay at REGUA rather than just the birds. I hope this inspires you to visit - you certainly won't be disappointed!

Chris Townend

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www.wisebirding.co.uk

1. Birding trails on the doorstep

One of the attractions of the bird lodge, is that you literally walk out of the door and you can be birding on well marked trails immediately. Two trails in particular, the **yellow** and the **brown** can easily be found from the door by using the excellent trail leaflets available from the lodge, that self-guide you along your route. The wetland (created in 2005) is visible from a newly constructed viewing platform just outside the lodge grounds and is an excellent place to start and end your day's birding.

The **Yellow trail** (2.8 Km) does a complete circuit of the wetland and passes a couple of bird hides. The trail is wide and flat and close to the water, allowing excellent viewing and photographic opportunities. Specialities of the wetland include: **Masked Duck, Blackish Rail, Rufous-sided Crake, Ash-throated Crake, Sooretama Slaty Antshrike** and many more!

Another trail, again easily found from the lodge is the **Brown Trail** (2.5 Km). This trail takes you through the forest and is slightly undulating, again with some key target species. These include: **Eye-ringed Tody-Tyrant, Tataupa Tinamou, Blond-crested Woodpecker, White-winged Becard, Blue Ground Dove** and the exceedingly difficult to see **Uniform Crake!**

2. First Class local bird guides

Regardless of whether you are a novice to forest birding or an experienced birder in such surroundings, the skill and fieldcraft of the two Brazilian bird guides employed by the lodge is simply first class.

Leonardo: A vet by training, fantastic knowledge of Brazilian avifauna, both visually and from vocalisations with razor sharp eyes and ears. Leonardo tends to specialise in guiding the excursions organised by the lodge. These are specifically designed to try and find the key species of different habitats outside of the REGUA Reserve. These include visiting the high altitude montane habitat of Pica da Caledonia, the lowlands of the Sumidouro region, the mid altitude forest of Macae da Cima and the coast at Cabo Frio. Leonardo is very calm and relaxed bird guide and is happy to cater for both the novice and the targeted birder.

Adelei: Born in one of the local villages and once a hunter of the very forest that he now spends so much time focused on his now true passion that is birding. His field skills and obvious connection with the forest are truly outstanding. Despite, being somewhat embarrassed about his previous life as a hunter, he perhaps shouldn't be, as this has no doubt provided him with the incredible tracking skills of both birds and mammals that he has today. I have been lucky enough to spend a number of days with Adelei birding on what is clearly "his patch" and it becomes apparent very quickly that he loves his job, but also, that he knows the forest birds like the back of his hand. Tireless patience at ensuring everyone can see the birds, an incredible skill at mimicking many of the birds and never happy until he finds you the birds that you want to see! All this and a very likeable and modest guy, complete with diagnostic beaming smile. Like Leonardo, he too has razor sharp eyesight and hearing. He is a good friend and a pleasure to go birding with!

3. Exciting night birding

If like me, you are a fan of night birding, then REGUA is certainly the place for you! The Lodge is very familiar with arranging night birding jaunts and they are all just a few minutes drive from the lodge. All nocturnal trips are only possible with the local guides, using a number of sites in order to alternate the visits and minimise any disturbance impact.

The key night specialities are:

Giant Snipe: With perseverance excellent views can be obtained by torchlight. Adelei is quite an expert in locating these birds.

Tawny-browed Owl: A great looking owl sometimes heard within the vicinity of the lodge but other sites are visited, usually with great success.

Black-banded Owl: Probably the most exciting of all the species and a particular area of woodland often allows some incredible views by torchlight.

Mottled Owl: Sometimes seen in the near vicinity of the Black-banded Owl.

Striped Owl: An owl of more open country and sometimes seen on night excursions.

Other commoner and more expected night species include: **Common Pauraque, Tropical Screech Owl and Common Potoo**

4. Speciality birds on the doorstep and great day excursions

With 453 species recorded on the reserve, including 117 Atlantic Forest endemics and 61 Brazilian endemics, birders can expect a list of 250-300 species from a five day visit, with another 50 or so species possible on excursions from the lodge. REGUA supports a number of difficult species that feature on many birders wish-lists. No fewer than 12 threatened species are found at REGUA, a high number for one locality! Six species in particular are classed as Vulnerable and you have an excellent chance of connecting with them.

These are: **White-necked Hawk, Golden-tailed Parrotlet, Salvadori's Antwren, Russet-winged Spadebill, Bare-throated Bellbird and Black-legged Dacnis.**

However, one bird in particular, the **Shrike-Like Cotinga** is probably the most sought after of all. Although classified as least concern, the population in South-East Brazil is believed to be in decline and the species has always been notoriously difficult to catch up with until now. At REGUA, a number of regular breeding and wintering places have been located. From September to November the birds move to higher elevations to breed, when the most accessible territories are on the Elfin Forest Trail. From April to August they are found at lower elevations (more accessible) at the São José Trail and at the Waterfall Trail.

Day Excursions: If you feel like you have explored the lodge and its associated trails enough and want a change of scenery, you can quite simply and easily organise a day out straight from the lodge. After breakfast a vehicle and guide will take you on an excursion of your choice. Whether it is in search of the high altitude species at Pico da Caledonia, the lowlands of Sumidouro and the Three-toed Jacamar, or to Macae da Cima and the beautiful Orchid gardens of the late David Miller (orchid expert) there is something for everyone.

5. Committed conservation work

By staying at the REGUA bird lodge, you will be contributing to the fantastic conservation work taking place around you on REGUA owned land. Nicholas and Raquel Locke are the owners of the bird lodge and are two quite extraordinary individuals who you will undoubtedly meet if staying for any length of time at the lodge. They are both purely and simply totally dedicated to conserving the Atlantic Forest.

Nicholas, an Englishman born in Surrey and Raquel born in Argentina have an ever visible presence around the lodge. Nicholas is easily identifiable by his infectious laughter and diagnostic head plumage (a collection of caps!) that varies dependent on the day of the week! Raquel, with her very friendly and welcoming smile is a pleasure to speak to and always more than happy to discuss numerous subjects over a glass of Caipirinha! (Brazil's refreshing national cocktail made from cachaça, sugar ice and lime). The Atlantic Forest stretches from north-east Brazil south along the Brazilian Atlantic coastline just into coastal Uruguay, and inland into north-east Argentina and eastern Paraguay. Once covering an estimated 1,477,500 km², centuries of deforestation has seen the Atlantic Forest become the second most threatened biome in the world.

REGUA's key objective are:

- to protect the remaining forest and biodiversity from deforestation, hunting and over-extraction of natural resources.
- to improve biodiversity by restoring lost and damaged habitats, particularly through an on-site tree nursery and re-planting scheme
- to attempt to reintroduce some of the lost species where practical
- to organise and involve volunteers from all over the world in various research projects
- to educate local communities, especially children about the great wildlife to be found in the forest and most importantly
- to convince them of the importance of this work

6. Relaxing accommodation

As soon as you set foot on the lodge grounds, you cannot but help feel relaxed and stress free! Just take a comfortable seat outside on the shaded veranda and slowly sip your daily complimentary Caipirinha whilst gazing at the beautiful Serra dos Órgãos Mountains and watching hummingbirds at the feeders. You will soon feel the stress slowly drain away! Then, when a little cooler in the early evening sunshine, take the short stroll to the two storey viewing platform at the end of the garden. Watch the sun go down over the amazing wetland, all to the sound of a cacophony of bird sounds.

All rooms are en suite and all very clean and tidy with air conditioning. There are two premier rooms located upstairs, complete with their own balcony.

7. Tasty home cooked food

The food at REGUA is quite simply great! The friendly kitchen staff produces tasty home cooked food on a daily basis. Also, if like me, you enjoy your puddings, then prepare yourself for the lemon tart, the passion fruit mousse and the caramel pudding!

8. Non-birding partner friendly

Many birders clearly have long suffering non-birding partners and this can cause problems! However, a visit to REGUA can work well for a non-birding partner at REGUA. The lodge is perfect if you are happy just relaxing in the garden with a good book and cooling off in the lodge swimming pool. There is always a lodge manager on site to assist with any queries that you may have and there is a self-service mini-bar in the lodge lounge.

9. Mammal Watching

If mammals are more your thing, REGUA can also accommodate for you.

An impressive list of over 70 mammal species (nearly 50% of these are bats) have been recorded on REGUA land. As with most mammals, to see them involves some effort and many have only been recorded on camera traps during the hours of darkness! The two most exciting species on the mammal list are probably, the **Southern Woolly Spider Monkey or Muriqui** and the **Puma**.

The **Murqui** is the largest primate found in the Neotropics and the largest endemic mammal to be found in Brazil. Though sightings are rare, they can sometimes be seen on the Red Trail, but you need to be lucky!

Pumas have been recorded around REGUA land on a number of occasions, again mostly at night caught on camera traps. There have been odd occasions when a ranger has seen an animal on the trails in daylight, but these sightings are exceptional!

The more commonly encountered species that can be found around the lodge garden and associated trails are as follows:

Common Marmoset: A regular visitor to the garden feeders in the morning.

Common Grey Four-eyed Opossum: Regular night visitors to the feeders. If you sit quietly at night with a torch, you should see them.

Bare-tailed Woolly Opossum: Sometimes visible in the purpose made "nests" in the Tower Hide.

Paca: Have been recorded coming to the garden feeders at night.

Crab-eating Fox: Have been recorded coming to the garden feeders at dusk.

Brown-throated Three-toed Sloth: Worth scanning the Secropia trees with a scope, or just get out for a day with Adelei – he always finds them!

Orange-spined Hairy Dwarf Porcupine: Sometimes seen when walking on the trails. Again, Adelei is your man; he can usually sniff them out – literally!

10. Moths and Dragonflies

There is a huge diversity of moths present at REGUA, most of which remain unidentified due to the lack of any field guides! However, over the last few years REGUA staff and volunteers have been photographing and cataloguing the moths at REGUA in order to build a comprehensive database of the species present along with their flight times. **Hawkmoths** are the exception with at least 110 species having been recorded in the whole of the Serra dos Órgãos Park and a great identification guide has been published.

In the lodge garden, the construction of a "moth wall" and associated fluorescent light allows you to experience just some of the amazing species that can be found on the doorstep of the lodge. Either take your Caipirinha with you after dinner and see the moths as they are attracted to the light, or simply have a good night's sleep and wait until morning, when many of the moths will still be on the moth wall before breakfast, waiting to warm up in the sun.

There have been at least 173 species of **dragonfly and damselfly** recorded at REGUA. A great deal of research has gone into this particular group of insects at REGUA and more information should be available soon. In the meantime, start at the wetland and take some photographs to assist with the identification process!

Wise Birding Holidays Ltd

3, Moormead, Budleigh Salterton, DEVON, EX9 6QA

Website: www.wisebirding.co.uk

Facebook: www.facebook.com/wisebirdingholidays

Email: chris@wisebirding.co.uk

Telephone: **07973 483227**