

Dear friends of Regua

The weather here has been wonderful and fortunately we are far away from the south of the country hit by the cyclones. The remains of these cyclones, a recent phenomenon for Brazil generally bring the occasional few days of wet weather, gentle drizzle contrasting with the cool days and a more gentle sun typical of winter.

Everyone is working hard with their individual projects and we are most confident on their approval. Our Wetland project proposal is now ready and we are translating it into Portuguese for submission. The wetland restoration with original tree specimen planting, infra-structure for visitors, courses for degree students and teachers is the most promising of proposals, a definite niche in the state of Rio de Janeiro. The introduction of the original animal species would complete the resemblance of the original habitat and their adaptation generates excellent field work for the visiting students. This grant would enable us to prepare the land, add lime and develop the tree nursery and plant in the second year. The trails would be marked, trees staked and fertilized and we aim to have large swathes of herbaceous borders, and others untouched for comparative studies. An area of 45 hectares is a large area for reforestation but a wonderful opportunity to change poor grassland and turn it into an exciting dynamic forest. The wetlands with a total area of around 90.000 m² would offer the perfect habitat for reproduction of the wetland bird species. The caimans will find this a wonderful haven, as we witnessed once already in our wetlands a female Brazilian teal with her paddling chicks skirting the young to keep them away from a suspiciously uninterested caiman floating 3m away who was looking to be asleep but occasionally opened one eye to see if they were close by.

Piet is also preparing our next project, a primate inventory of the 3 Picos Park, a direct interest from the RJ state forestry institute (IEF) together with Conservation International. This project needs a few changes and then we can submit it to CI for hopeful approval. The IEF are most interested in projects conducted within the confines of this wonderful park, all useful and important data to reinforce its importance and design a strategy for the Park's management.

Finally Piet and Eduardo are working on the red-billed curassow or “Mutum” (in Portuguese) project and its introduction into the Regua reserve. We also consider presenting this project to the Schincariol beer group and have devised a most wonderful marketing ploy for them, that of the enigmatic “Mutum” this most endangered species already extinct in the state of Rio. An exceedingly large flightless bird now successfully raised in Belo Horizonte by Roberto Azeredo. The marketing of a threatened national bird species, with a curious comical expression could bring some great benefits to the industry.

Eleanora has been most industrious with the implementation of the Agenda 21 in the Cachoeiras de Macacu municipality and more recently starting with the Young Guard programme, an ever growing and responsible young crowd from our local village of Guapiaçu.

Fabio Olmos duly arrived on the 29th May to undertake birding at Regua's base camp 1 located some 2km above the waterfall and spent 4 wet days calling and sighting some rare birds. Eduardo, Regua's new field co-coordinator, sent a student likewise keen on birds to accompany Fabio and apart from the wet weather they both had a good time. The forest quality at this altitude left a marked impression on Fabio.

Our guests arrived 3 days later, a group led by Iain Campbell who created a very successful eco-lodge in Ecuador, a place named Tandayapa and coordinate the global bird tour named Tropical Birding. Iain and his two partners are very enterprising, successful, and dynamic and have an excellent knowledge of birds. TB wish to establish a base for their Brazilian tours, and perceive REGUA as being well suited and located for this function. The next day members of the Brazilian Atlantic Rain Forest Trust, Stephen, Phil and Alan all arrived at Rio and we also met Stephen Eccles and Jerry Bertrand.

We were able to go to David Millers and we spent a thoroughly nice afternoon at Andy Foster's birding in his garden fuelled by his mum's lavish refreshments. We all walked together and the TB team were most impressed with their sightings as well as the exquisite topography of this part of the Serra do Mar mountain chain and appeared most keen to develop their activity in Brazil. Of course the introduction of the Mutum (red

billed curassow) would be a major attraction. The aim is to free birds in the Manoel Alexandre valley and it would definitely become a major public attraction and fundraiser for REGUA.

Raquel and I were invited to accompany the birding group to Itatiaia and we stayed at the well known Hotel Simon located very close to the park itself. Raquel and I went up the 3 Picos trail (not to be confused with the 3 Picos Park) and we were amazed to see how many people were also using this trail. In fact some people had come across the wild peccaries whilst we met with parrots, guans, ant birds, diademed tanagers, black and gold cotinga who all seemed quite used to people thundering up and down this one trail. In fact I changed my mind regarding limited public intrusion seeing that the objective of this intrusion helped reduce hunting by frightening away the hunters. We also climbed the famous plateau to look for the Itatiaia spinetail and after 3 days left to go on to the state of Bahia.

Our destination was the town named Boa Nova, which is in quite an impoverished part of Brazil, but the countryside made up for it. The municipio on one side has the dry mountainous vegetation called the Catinga and the other side was the more humid forest at the edge of this highland plateau which then tips in the direction of the sea. Within 12 km there was this very varied habitat totally different from each other with their incredible birds, some endemics only known to this region. Both habitats have been heavily eroded, pressure from the logging, firewood and conversion to pasture. Another recent threat has been the extraction of granite. Much of the highlands of this state as well as Espirito Santo are known for having wonderful granites and these are cut and polished for export. People are there cutting and extracting as much as possible, to the detriment of the environment and roads.

Spending 3 days here we moved to Serra do Teimoso, a private reserve, much nearer the coast, with once again totally different vegetation. This is located almost at lowland level and Fabio explained that the small hills were the remnants of the Serra do Mar mountain chain coming from the south of the country, with their rich and diverse Atlantic rain forest vegetation. In fact Birdlife Brazil has just acquired a parcel of excellent forest very close to this area we visited. The area we stayed has been farmed for well over a century in the form of cocoa plantations, a crop benefiting from the old technique of shading from bigger trees. As these plantations are so old and the technique involved thinning the old forests and clearing of the undergrowth, these shade trees are now of gargantuan proportions. Ipês, Sapucaias, Jequitibás, Pau Brasil and Braunas to name a few and over 500 years of age I was told in absolutely magnificent form supporting orchids bromeliads, lianas and an array of birds, insects and other wildlife. This private reserve we stayed at had a 32 m high tower and we were all quite nervous regarding the climb. In fact I think we might all have chickened out if it were not for Phil who stormed up as if he were climbing to hoist the sails of the Cutty Sark. I could well imagine his shouting from the top, "Ahoy get up double-quick you lot of lousy land-lubbers before I jump down and drag you up by your collars", if we hadn't started climbing after him. The view was a little disappointing, perhaps due to the time of day and we were pleased to feel the ground once more. We spent another day at another site of the recently described pink-legged cravateiro. This was atop a large hill and Fabio accidentally trapped two wheels of his rented car on the curb. We did a magnificent team effort by putting the car back on the road and got home weary, tired but satisfied.

Our last day was spent by the coast at the Una ecological reserve; another RRPN and we went for a great walk to see more interesting birds. All in all we saw a vast collection of birds of differing species and some wonderful specimens as well. In between hummers, parrots, ant birds, wrens and shrikes and tyrants and flycatchers my favorite was the Rufous cachelote (*Pseudoseisura cristata*) from the Catinga.

We scrubbed up, had tea together and took a photo of the group and came back home. I still passed Itatiaia to pick up the Land Rover to bring it home.

All in all we had a thoroughly enjoyable time together and it was a wonderful introduction to some of the birds of Brazil. The group saw 400 species, which left everyone very content.

I'm sure we will benefit enormously from the effort that Tropical Birding will be putting in the project, and they will figuratively whip us to get things in motion to everyone's benefit. So it's roll up the sleeves and push forward. Quite exciting.

I will shortly be sending some more good news shortly regarding our trip to Belo Horizonte and visit of the Crax project.

Nicholas and Raquel