Paraguay
The Heart of South America
(18 Days)

Paraguay, wedged between Argentina, Brazil and Bolivia, along with the last mentioned, is one of only two South American nations without a shoreline. Isolated from the sea, and with a fraction of the population of its neighbors, Paraguay offers a stupendous cross-section of intact, special habitats. Here stand some of the last remaining large tracts of pristine Atlantic Lowland Forest, as well as cerrado savannas, grasslands and perhaps best of all, the seemingly endless thorny Chaco.

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 endemic Chaco birds on one single trip. Birds aside, Paraguay is also one of the best mammal watching countries in all of South and Central America. Where else do you stand decent chances of 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 might double your Neotropical mammal list in just a single trip here! And speaking of mammals, here in Guacho country, we’ll have ample opportunity to enjoy typical asado (BBQ), just as the Paraguayans do.

And this trip is special in providing an opportunity to make you a partner in helping international conservation. The National Audubon Society and Guyra Paraguay have teamed up to train local people in several parts of the country to become birding and nature guides. In addition to your Rockjumper guide, we will have Audubon-trained guides helping along the way. By choosing this trip to see and enjoy Paraguay’s natural riches, you have a direct, positive economic impact on the local people, resulting in the preservation of local habitats that maintain a healthy, viable ecotourism industry. The sites we visit are chosen because they are top birding areas and also allow us to help shift attention to the beneficial economy of preservation of these habitats for local employment and wellbeing through bird-based tourism.

Paraguay appeals as a wonderful introduction to Neotropical birding, as well as a vital clean-up operation for the experienced traveler. Add together some incredibly range-restricted or rare species such as White-winged and Sickle-winged Nightjar, Helmeted Woodpecker, Giant Snipe, Russet-winged Spadebill, Saffron-cowled Blackbird and Cock-tailed Tyrant, plus great mammals, and unique habitats and you have yourself a thrilling and enriching tour to South America.

Rockjumper & Audubon

Rockjumper is proud to partner with the National Audubon Society in support of their unrivaled, on the ground work protecting birds and the places they need while training area residents in guiding, business, and hospitality. Through Rockjumper’s Impact Adventures with Audubon, we showcase amazing nature spectacles while celebrating the efforts and expertise of local businesses and conservationists, fostering sustainable economic growth in Neotropical hotspots with high biodiversity. Support the National Audubon Society’s work by joining a Rockjumper Impact Adventure today.

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Rockjumper Birding Tours

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**TOUR ROUTE MAP**

**THE TOUR IN DETAIL...**

Day 1: **Morning departure from Asunción to Colonias Mennonitas.** We depart Asunción early, heading north-west 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 some of the surrounding habitat has been cleared for agriculture, 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 wetland...
Itinerary – RCT Paraguay - Heart of South America

birds 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.

**Day 2: Upper Yacare Sur.** Our birding today is around watering holes and the surrounding woodlands that dot the outskirts of Loma Plata. Weather in the Chaco is usually hot and dry, but water levels vary a bit; and as birding here is closely associated with water, we will visit a variety of lagoons and watering holes, hoping to cross paths with a constellation of Chaco specialties, including a couple of the Chaco Big 6! The Chaco Big 6 include the spirited Crested Gallito, the Chaco Owl, Black-legged Seriema, Black-bodied Woodpecker, Quebracho Crested Tinamou and the dapper Spot-winged Falconet.

A great host of special Chaco species are possible for us today even beyond the Big 6, including Brushland Tinamou, Chaco Chachalaca, Cream-backed Woodpecker, Scimitar-billed and Great Rufous Woodcreeper, Chaco Earthcreeper, Crested Hornero, Cinereous Tyrant and Black-capped and Ringed Warbling Finch. Birding activity is generally very good here, and the short, stunted Chaco allows for excellent photographic opportunities. Other than the Chaco specials, we will also search for the skulking Stripe-backed Antbird, Little Thornbird, stately Greater Rhea, Great Antshrike, White-fronted and Checkered Woodpeckers, and Blue-tufted Starthroat.

Surrounding the villages and towns are estancias and other properties with good habitat, and the area provides us with our first opportunity to search for animals. Possibilities include Crab-eating and Pampas Foxes, Southern Three-banded and Six-banded Armadillos, Grey Brocket Deer, Crab-eating Raccoon and perhaps even the elusive Geoffroy’s Cat.
Day 3: Colonias Mennonitas to PN Teniente Agripino Enciso via Fortin Toledo. We leave the Central Chaco 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 neighboring Argentina and Bolivia, it is most easily seen in Paraguay's Gran Chaco.

The Chaco Mara, a rather unusual long-legged species related to guineapigs, 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. A star of the thorny brush in this area is the skulking Olive-crowned Crescentchest (the resident subspecies *pallida* is likely to soon be split as Chaco Crescentchest).

After lunch, we would hope to tick off the second of our Chaco Big 6, a Black-legged Seriema walking the road! Only two species of strange seriemas exist, making up their own unique bird family. Thereafter, 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 Rufous Nightjars.

Day 4: PN Teniente Agripino Enciso & PN Medanos del Chaco. After an early breakfast, we head out on foot to bird the stunning Chaco habitat around Parque Nacional Teniente Agripino Enciso. Our main target this morning is another of the Chaco Big 6, the sociable 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 be split as Chaco Warbling Finch).
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 6, the diminutive Spot-winged Falcoet. We can expect to see many of the same species as we did this morning; while also keeping an eye out for the localized 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, and Plains 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 bird the 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 Chaco Eagle. This species is one of the largest eagles on Earth. Formerly known as Crowned Eagle or Crowned Solitary Eagle, this behemoth raptor frequents Chaco or open woodlands and is sometimes near open wetlands too, as it hunts for armadillos, large rodents, and even monkeys and reptiles. Seriously threatened by loss of habitat, we’ll need to keep our eyes out, and have some luck as we scan posts and large snags for this impressive raptor.

**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 the chatty Chaco Earthcreeper. 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, or best of all the newly described Ibera Seedeater. 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. As we proceed through the expansive cerrado, Laguna Blanca is a small sea of tranquillity. The cerrado is a mosaic of wooded savanna-type habitats mixed with gallery forest, and habitats around Laguna Blanca are rather isolated and so attract a number of interesting species.

We’ll head straight out to take advantage of the remaining daylight hours. This small chunk of habitat is only 2,500 hectares but hosts at least 14 globally threatened species. Sharp-tailed Tyrant and Cock-tailed Tyrant sit 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. This will also be our first shot at one of Paraguay’s star birds, the endangered White-winged Nightjar.

Day 8: Laguna Blanca. With a full day today in the Laguna Blanca area, we’ll make a thorough exploration, and bird the swamps of the Arroyo Mborevi, where Streamer-tailed Tyrant, White-tailed Goldenthroat and Ash-throated Crake will be amongst our targets. Thrush-like Wren sings noisily from nearby trees and at the right time of year there is the possibility of some seedeater flocks, often with Chestnut-bellied Seedfinch mixed in.

Day 9: Laguna Blanca to Mbaracayú BR. Named by the WWF as one of the 100 most important sites for conservation on earth, this privately managed 160,000-acre reserve is one of 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 favored 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, Yellow-fronted and Robust Woodpeckers, Rufous-capped Motmot and the acrobatic Buff-fronted Foliage-gleaner. Of these, the
Helmeted Woodpecker warrants particular attention, as it is only found in the Atlantic Forest, a very rare species, and a tough one to find. Only three nests of this species have ever been described, and the total population may number just a few thousand in total.

**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 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 White-bearded Manakins, a number of tanagers, Spot-backed Antshrike, Streak-capped Antwren, Solitary Tinamou and Red-rumped Cacique.

Amongst the cerrado specialties 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 Tropical and Black-capped Screech Owls, Spectacled and Ferruginous Pygmy Owls, Ocellated Poorwill, Short-tailed Nighthawk, Pauraque, and Little, Rufous and White-winged Nightjar 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 Saltos del Monday.** After a pre-breakfast walk, we’ll start today’s drive to Ciudad del Este on the Brazilian and Argentinian border. En route, a short stop at Saltos del 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.

**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. This park is over 180,000 acres, protecting 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 localized 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 Large-tailed 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 Purple-crowned Plovercrest, shy White-shouldered Fire-eye, Streak-capped Antwren, White-throated Woodcreeper, Wing-barred Piprites, Ochre-breasted and White-eyed Foliage-gleaner, Grey-bellied, Rufous-capped and Spix’s Spinetail, White-spotted Woodpecker, Greenish Schiffornis, Red-crowned Ant Tanager, Dusky-tailed Antbird, Rough-legged and Yellow Tyrannulet, Red-ruffed Fruitcrow and Chestnut-headed Tanager.

The extensive grasslands around Kanguery hold Sedge Wren, Pearly-bellied 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. Once the light dims, then we can hope for the scarce Giant Snipe! Nightbirds are again good, with a shot at finding Common and Long-tailed Potoo, as well as both the scarce Tawny-browed and Rusty-barred Owls.

Day 16: PN San Rafael to Ayolas via Coronel Bogado. After breakfast, we head west, with a stop off en route at Isla Alta for Pinnated Bittern, these secretive birds are easy to see in ricefields at certain times of the year. We'll then make a quick stop in town to sample some cheesy cornbread called chipa, a local specialty for which Coronel Bogado (Capital de la Chipa) is famous. After a little rest, we’ll head off to Isla Yacyreta. Birding the marshes en route we have another chance to enjoy Saffron-cowled Blackbird, and with luck some migratory seedeaters. However, two of our biggest targets await, the rare Ochre-breasted Pipit in the grasslands before we get up close and personal with the other huge draw, 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 Yellowish. 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 more 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.

**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 Río Paraná and Río Paraguay near Ayolas. This species-rich environment could turn up any number of new birds, including Green-backed Becard, Golden-winged Cacique, Ultramarine Grosbeak, Orange-headed Tanager, Blue-winged Parrotlets, Dusky-legged Guan 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 prices can be adjusted to accommodate different group sizes in some cases. For more info on pricing, please contact Rockjumper’s Conservation Tours Department at: conservationtours@rockjumperbirding.com.

- **Tour Price:**
  - €6,200 per person with 6 participants
  - €5,900 per person with 7 participants
  - €5,700 per person with 8 participants
  - €5,500 per person with 9 participants

- **Single Supplement:** €560

**The tour fee includes:**
- All meals from dinner on day 1 to lunch 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;
- Flights;
• Drinks besides water;
• 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:**
• 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.

**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.
Rockjumper has an in-house travel agent who can assist with booking flights. Ask us for help at conservationtours@rockjumperbirding.com.

**IMPORTANT:** If you opt to book your own flights, please DO NOT book any international flights until you have consulted the Rockjumper office for confirmation on the status of the tour.

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