The Pantanal and Buraco das Araras, Brazil

by Steve Brookes, Wild Parrots Up Close

In May 2023, I organised a Parrot Ecotour to see the Parrots in the Pantanal. I am now arranging another tour to the same place for members to celebrate the 60th Anniversary of The Parrot Society UK.

With this article, I would like to show a very small selection of what you would see on a tour like this by showing what we saw in May 2023.

Arriving in Sao Paulo and with a short internal flight transfer to Campo Grande, we checked out the Peach-fronted Conures (*Eupsitulla aurea*) and Yellow-chevroned Parakeets (*Brotogeris chiriri*) in the local park. After an overnight stay we took our transfer by road into the Pantanal stopping by the roadside for some Blue and Yellow Macaws (*Ara ararauna*) which were playing around a tower and some trees.

Arriving at our lodge in the Pantanal, we quickly recognised the calls of the Hyacinth Macaws (*Anodorhynchus hyacinthinus*) as they flew from tree to tree. These are probably one of the most sought after Macaws to see in the wild, and at this lodge we can get up really close and personal with them. On previous visits to this lodge, a pair nested in a tree directly outside the reception area although this has now been replaced with a man-made nest box, which they continue to occupy, as the tree has suffered over the years and there is a juvenile group of about eight to ten individuals, playing and feeding within the lodge grounds.

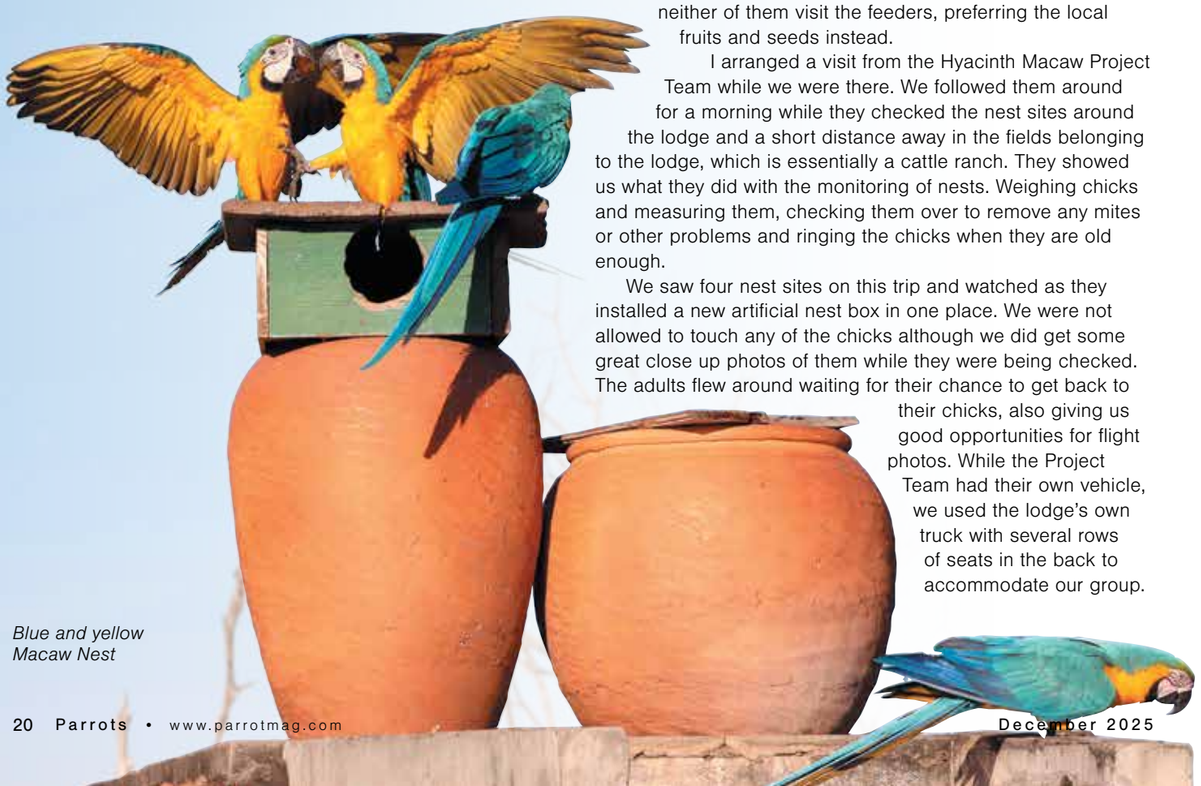
Our lodge has basic rooms with single beds and an ensuite bathroom, a dining area with a bar for relax time and a swimming pool. Meals are buffet style with three meals a day, for which vegans or other preferences can be catered for, and snacks in-between, as at all places on this tour. Bottled filtered water was available at all times, although we took our own reusable bottles to top up from the fountains provided, so as not to create plastic waste.

Food is put out in feeding areas for some of the parrots. Directly behind the dining area and viewed from the seats in there, food is appreciated by the Nanday Conures (*Aratinga nenday*) and Monk Parakeets (*Myiopsitta monachus*) although many other birds come down to feed including the occasional Toco Toucan (*Ramphastos toco*). On the dirt road side of the swimming pool Blue and yellow Macaws are fed with Nanday Conures also visiting this feeder, and just around the corner is a place where palm nuts are put out for the Hyacinth Macaws. All the feeders are used regularly and create great photo opportunities even for a phone camera, but we had our SLR cameras with intermediate and longer lenses giving us great results when the parrots were using the natural perches in the trees or even flying.

A pair of Blue and Yellow Macaws have made a nest in one of the urns on the top of the swimming pool waterfall and to protect the nest from the rain a wooden structure has been created to fit on the urn. The Red-shouldered Macaws (*Diopsittaca nobilis*) also have nesting trees nearby, although they never come down to any of the feeders, perhaps they don't like what is on the menu, although they are still easily seen. There are also Scaly-headed Parrots (*Pionus maximiliani*) and Yellow-chevroned Parakeets around the lodge although neither of them visit the feeders, preferring the local fruits and seeds instead.

I arranged a visit from the Hyacinth Macaw Project Team while we were there. We followed them around for a morning while they checked the nest sites around the lodge and a short distance away in the fields belonging to the lodge, which is essentially a cattle ranch. They showed us what they did with the monitoring of nests. Weighing chicks and measuring them, checking them over to remove any mites or other problems and ringing the chicks when they are old enough.

We saw four nest sites on this trip and watched as they installed a new artificial nest box in one place. We were not allowed to touch any of the chicks although we did get some great close up photos of them while they were being checked. The adults flew around waiting for their chance to get back to their chicks, also giving us good opportunities for flight photos. While the Project Team had their own vehicle, we used the lodge's own truck with several rows of seats in the back to accommodate our group.



Blue and yellow Macaw Nest

We also used this safari truck to visit some other places around the lodge fields for the parrots that never seem to come to the grounds of the lodge. We found Yellow-collared Macaws (*Primolius auricollis*) in the trees in open fields whilst Blue-fronted Amazons (*Amazona aestiva*), White-eyed (*Psittacara leucophthalmus*) and Blaze-winged (*Pyrrhura devillei*) Conures were found close to the banks of the river.

As there is a river very near to the lodge, we had the chance of a boat trip and although it is unusual to see parrots, apart from a few flyovers, along this river there are many other birds that we do not normally see directly at the lodge such as herons, ibises, storks and kingfishers. This is where we saw giant-river otters (*Pteronura brasiliensis*) and occasionally jaguars (*Panthera onca*) can be seen although these are rare.

Whilst on this trip we saw about 160 bird species including all the parrots plus many mammals and other wildlife. The Tamandua or Lesser Anteater (*Tamandua tetradactyla*) gave us a special show and many photos were taken.

After four nights at the lodge we drove over to a place just on the edge of the Pantanal called "Bonito", a tourist town where we stayed while we visited Buraco das Araras and Rio Prata.

Buraco das Araras is a natural sinkhole of approximately 500 metres in circumference, which has two viewing platforms, one at each end to take advantage of the morning or afternoon sunlight for photography. We had two visits here to watch the Green-winged Macaws (*Ara chloropterus*) as they flew below us giving an opportunity for unique photographs from above. They fly in ones, twos or any amount up to about twenty at a time, but you have to be fast to take the flight photos. These macaws

Hyacinth Macaw Project Team 2

were also seen feeding and perching within the sinkhole. Large groups of Peach-fronted Conures were also seen here as well as numerous other birds.

Not far from Buraco das Araras is the Rio Prata, a clear natural river that runs through this area. It is here where I arranged for us to partake in a bit of snorkelling. All the equipment, wet suit, goggles and snorkel are provided so all we had to do was take a towel and our swimwear as well as our waterproof cameras to take advantage of this. Waterproof cameras can be hired from the reception to avoid the extra expense just for this one time during the trip. I took a Go-Pro which is useful for underwater, but also for other times such as fixing to the front of the safari truck or the river boat to get a unique insight into the journeys we take.

It is said that this river is like swimming in an aquarium with many fish species and in the past some of my clients have seen Tapir (*Tapirus terrestris*) although these and Giant Anteaters (*Myrmecophaga tridactyla*) are more likely to be seen in the fields enroute to this river from Bonito. On this last trip, one of my clients opted to spend more time at Buraco das Araras and did not do the snorkelling. He concentrated on his photography of the Macaws and came away with some amazing photos.

Lunchtime was at the Rio Prata dining area and whilst there we had the chance of seeing many other parrots and birds in the surrounding trees. Green-winged and Blue and Yellow Macaws as well as White-eyed and Peach-fronted Conures and Blue-fronted Amazons were seen, but the one parrot I love to see here, and this is the best place I have been able to see it, is the Yellow-faced Parrot (*Alliopsitta xanthops*) in both morph colours.

After two nights here we took our transport back to Campo Grande and after an overnight in our hotel, we met up with the Hyacinth Macaw Project Team again, but this time they showed us some of the other work they do with the Blue and yellow Macaws. There are over four hundred natural nest sites within the boundaries of the city for these Macaws and work is being done to find out why they have decided to take refuge here. However, these are not the only Macaws to be seen in the city as we saw Red-bellied, Red-shouldered, Green-winged and the occasional Hyacinth Macaws as well as numerous other Parrots and Parakeets. There are also some hybrid macaws. Green-winged and Blue and yellow Macaws have hybridised which is another phenomenon that the Project are looking into. After here, our group broke up into smaller groups to go to other various places within Brazil.

Scaly-headed Parrot

Hyacinth Macaws feeding

I will be doing an extension trip to see the roosting, breeding and feeding areas for the Lear's Macaws as well as the Blue-winged Macaws (Illiger's). We will then be going over to the Eastern Atlantic Rainforest for some other Brazilian endemic parrots.

I hope this has given you an insight into what the Parrot Watching Ecotour in 2026 will be about, but if you have any questions about any aspects of this trip please email me steve@wildparrotsupclose.com. ■

For more information about the trip and the full itinerary check out this webpage www.wildparrotsupclose.com/brazil-psuk-60th-tour-2026.html

Lodge Swimming Pool

To Celebrate the 60th Anniversary of the Parrot Society UK in 2026

Would you like to join The Parrot Society UK and Steve Brookes (Wild Parrots Up Close) on a very special trip to Brazil with a chance to see up to 18 species of parrots? These include six Macaws including the Hyacinth Macaw along with many other Brazilian Birds and wildlife as we travel through the Southern Pantanal in this stunning South American country.

Throughout this trip, we are likely to see in excess of 150 bird species with many opportunities to photo, video or just observe them in their Natural Habitats.

We also have chances of some rare mammals such as the Giant Anteater and Giant River Otter with a very outside chance of Jaguar as we travel on the river in the Pantanal plus snorkelling in the Rio Prata likened to swimming in an aquarium.

If you have any questions about any aspects of this trip please email Steve Brookes steve@wildparrotsupclose.com

If you would like to see more information about the trip and the full itinerary check out the webpage

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