

Milpe Magic Forest

By Jorge Cruz, Jr.

The last drops of rain falling in the wet tent awoke me at 6 am. I feel tired and lazy after a night of hiking in this Milpe magic forest that belongs to San Jorge Reserve. For some reason we didn't see anything, but heard lots of sounds. One sound was terrific in the middle of the dark forest. It was the sound of a baby crying! It was impossible to move. The tent was located at least 1 km from this area. It was very scary. The forest also is very crowded and you cannot see a finger if you turn off your lantern. Later on my Father asked everybody to relax. It was the voice of a Mottled Owl!

Yes, we find them around here. For these situations we have bought a special lamp that you can see at night. But this owl is smarter than us! He screams and screams, but when he sees us coming close, he stops screaming and we can't see him! He was fooling us!

The day promised to be a decent day to bird. The rain stopped and many sounds came alive. Understanding that the best moments in the day for birding are early in the morning, Claudio, my Father and I got ready to see something fresh and good. So, we began to look in the clears, which are a type of window that you find in the middle of the thick forest. We didn't walk too much, but we smelled something good. A bunch of birds!

In most cases a bird comes with company, and will always be stopping to eat or relax in a place, and soon they will leave for another place, over and over. So this was the dramatic moment to see lots of birds flying and jumping in front of your eyes. We began to see and name them in our minds.

The first bird I saw was the scarce Scarlet-rump Cacique, which is a middle sized bird, black and red rump. The eyes are blue. The little Tawny-face Gnat Wren was on the ground as was the Immaculate Antbird, a mysterious bird, with black and blue around the eyes. The Brown-billed Scythebill, with a Wedge-billed Woodcreeper walking fast up a small tree were also part of the party. The Woodcreeper is small with a tiny bill, brownish with some spots and stripes. I don't know of another small woodcreeper with such characteristics. Up in the canopy we found the Silver-throated Tanager, yellow-green with silver colored throat, the Blue-necked Tanager, sharing food of an old Secropia with a Rufous-throated Tanager. There was even the Barred Puffbird, a strange animal that I have not seen more than twice, outside in crowded areas. It's a beautiful bird.

We quickly changed our view and saw the exotic Green Glistening Tanager playing with the Dusty Bush Tanager. So different and so similar at the same time. One is electric bright green and the other is a grey dark green tanager. Same family. The Orange-bellied Euphonia and his wife were invited to the meeting and the Ornate Flycatcher accompanied by the Buff-rump Warbler, arrived late to the party. This euphonia has a beautiful color, dark blue and yellow-orange. That's the male. The female is not so attractive. She is the same gray-green color of the other females euphonias. They love to eat anturios flowers. The Masked Trogon female and the Choco Trogon didn't stay. The nearby voices of the unmistakable Cock of the Rock, Choco Toucan, and my partner, the Golden-headed Quetzal, sounded in the distance.

It was time to move for more, but the wren male with such beautiful black and white dot and feathers said hello, and the forest owners, the Grey-breasted Wood Wren also appeared with his loud musical voice and the strong kick of the Lineated Woodpecker made his appearance. Well, those 30 minutes were one of the best experiences I have had in my life! We saw 34 species in

that moment. And not to cause anyone envy, we did see 120 species that day! Some of them we already saw the day before, but most were new.

My Grandpa that stayed at the tent and was looking for us said that brunch is ready. It's 11:30 and we had not imaged that we had spent so much time. Time flies for birders!!!