
Opportunities to observe Hyacinth Macaw in the Brazilian cerrado

The cerrado or 'wooded savanna', which covers an immense area of central Brazil, has been repeatedly overlooked by scientists and conservationists, despite its high biodiversity. While the world's concern over environmental destruction has focused on the Amazon rainforest, the cerrado destruction has gone largely unnoticed. Nearly 44% of the original habitat has given way to agriculture. A mere 1.5% of the area is officially protected, while the rest is in the hands of private landowners and is being rapidly converted for soy plantation and cattle rearing.

Given the accelerated habitat destruction and official insouciance with its fate, the cerrado is in need of bold conservation initiatives. Fortunately, portions of intact dry forest are still too remote for viable agriculture, but these areas cannot maintain immunity from human encroachment indefinitely. Relatively cheap land prices, present opportunities for responsible environmental organisations to protect large tracts of this ecosystem and ensure the preservation of watersheds of some of the country's major rivers. BioBrasil Foundation, a non-profit environmental group based in Salvador, Bahia, has for the past four years been working in an area within the watersheds of the Parnaíba and Tocantins rivers. The foundation's primary goal is to create a protected area sufficiently large to sustain significant populations of wildlife and serve as a venue for reintroduction of fauna once native to the region.

The flagship species of BioBrasil's 4,000 ha reserve in south Piauí, is Hyacinth Macaw *Anodorhynchus hyacinthinus*. Visitors can witness groups of up to 60 at close quarters. In addition, there are opportunities to see many other typical cerrado species, including Blue-and-yellow *Ara ararauna* and Red-and-green Macaws *A. chloropterus*, and Sun Parakeet *Aratinga solstitialis*, as well as several species of monkey. Accommodation in a fully equipped lodge, with breathtaking views of the red mesa cliffs that surround the camp, is available. The nearest large urban center, Barreiras, has an airport with flights to Brasília and Salvador. Bilingual nature guides are available. All money generated from the tourist venture is funneled into conservation efforts. If you would like to know more about the area, how to get there or how to become involved with the project, please e-mail Richard Hartley at biobras@provider.com.br, or telephone 55-71-374-1354.