



Blue Macaw (*Andorhynchus hyacinthinus*) is one of Brazil's colorful bird residents.

# Brazilian Bird Walk

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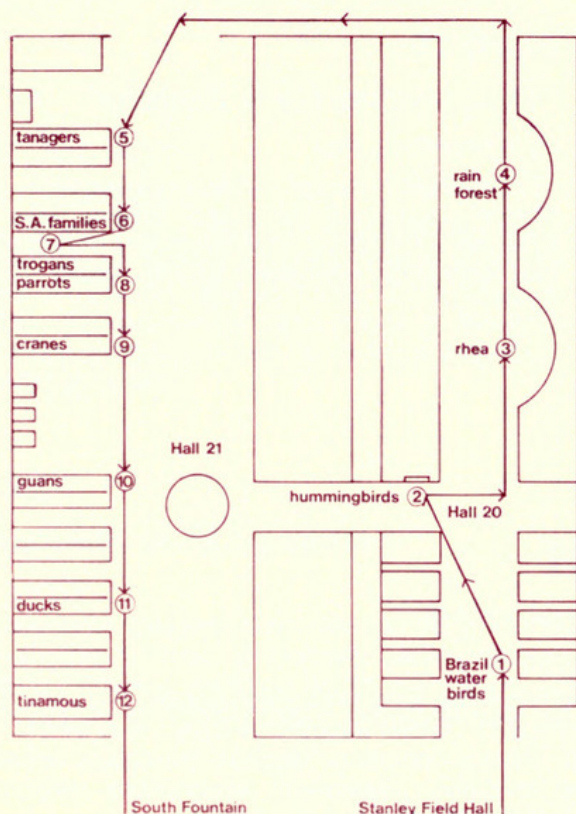
Those unable to take bird-watching walks in Brazil with Field Museum's Brazil Tour this winter can still enjoy a short, leisurely stroll to see that country's exotic bird life right here in the Museum's halls. On this simulated bird-walk, the travel begins at the South Fountain in Stanley Field Hall. (See the detailed map showing the bird walk route and stations.)

The marshes along the Amazon River are the first stop (Hall 20, Station 1). They appear here much as we would see them from a launch trip from Manaus, with floating lily pads, mud bars and great arum leaves backed by swamp forest and palms. A pair of giant jabiru storks with naked, blackish heads and necks dominate the scene, one with a captured frog in its foot-long bill. There are ibis of two sorts, one olive-brown, the other white-necked. A pair of the strange crane relatives called sun bitterns show their beautifully complicated brown, buff, grey and white pattern in a stately dance of male to female. Another strange crane relative with yellow, black-barred feet rests on an arum leaf beneath which nocturnal grey and black boat-billed herons are hiding from the light of day.

Here we also see the advantage of a simulated bird walk past Museum habitat groups. On the Amazon itself the birds would fly away, or hide in the foliage when we approached. Here, we can examine them at leisure—today, tomorrow and the next day, if we wish.

In a darkened recess (Station 2) we see a series of intensely vivid spots of color flashing in rotation. They are patches of iridescence on the plumage of hummingbirds on which a series of tiny spot lights are focused. One by one, the spot lights flash on to give reflections that are vivid half a hall away. No wonder these birds are called living jewels.

We move on to the great grass, tree-dotted plains that dominate Southern Brazil as the rain forest does the Amazon Basin (Station 3). A great, grey, flightless bird, the rhea (an American ostrich), stands watching its nest of eggs, some of which are beginning to hatch. Nearby, a black and white flycatcher rests in a bush and a burrowing owl, the same species native to our west and south, stands by its burrow





Tropical rain forests (Station 4) are similar from Guatemala to Manaus and the hills and escarpments above Rio. They all have the dark green leaves of the forest canopy, the dark, heavily shaded forest floor and an abundance of lianas (climbing vines). In this habitat group, two parties of toucans—big-billed, noisy, mischievous, playful acrobats, similar to jays in temperament—are eating fruits in the treetops. Less extroverted, the woodhewer and woodpecker on the tree trunks and the bishop grosbeak in the undergrowth might escape notice.

After observing the birds of Brazilian swamps, rivers, forests and grass plains in simulations of their habitats, it is valuable to take a close look at the birds themselves. These are in the adjacent hall, where Brazilian birds are represented in a systematic series of birds of the world. We concentrate on the group names first, such as Cotinga, Jacamar, Motmot, Toucan, Trogons, and Tinamous. These birds are unfamiliar to many people, since they live only in the warmer parts of the Americas, part of the great evolution of birds that took place in that most bird-rich part of the world.

Among the most highly evolved perching birds or song birds (Station 5) are the *tanagers*, gay colored fruit eaters of the trees, *sparrows*, including the crested, red-headed Brazilian cardinal and the flocks of seed-eaters of the grasslands, and the *icterids*—the oropendulas, which build hanging nests, the orioles and the grackles. All three are dominant groups of the New World Tropics.

Pausing before the panel of primitive perching birds (Station 6) we see tyrant flycatchers, oven birds (whose big stick or mud nests are conspicuous on the road to Belo Horizonte in Brazil), spinetails and ant birds. This group also includes many common birds of the forest and garden. The related wood creepers share the tree trunks with woodpeckers. There are also the cotingas, such as the bell bird and cock of the rock, and the manakins that dance in the undergrowth. The toucans are related to woodpeckers as are the fly-catching jacamars that look like giant hummingbirds when perched but not when in flight.

The jay-sized, soft-colored motmots (Station 7) which swing their long, spatulate tails in pendulum fashion are related to the kingfishers, birds poorly represented in the Americas. Trogons, with elegant, restrained brightness, are pan-tropical birds with no near relatives. Hummingbirds, in bewildering variety, are true Americans and are related to swifts.

Among the parrots (Station 8) the brilliant blue, yellow and red macaws are commonly seen in gardens, while the green Amazon talking parrots are widely kept as pets.

The great order of cranes and their relatives (Station 9) is an old group that has declined, leaving strange relics that are quite un-cranelike in various parts of the world. In Tropical America are the rails, the strange hump-backed trumpeters that vaguely recall guinea fowls,



Above, Brazilian water birds in a habitat setting. Left, Rhea watches her eggs begin to hatch, in another habitat setting.

the sun grebe and the sun bittern and the long-legged cariamias that run swiftly over the plains. The currawow, guan and chachalaca are fowl-like birds of tropical America related to the barn yard chicken, but are most likely to be found in trees eating fruit.

The muscovy duck (Station 11) is native to tropical America, where they were first domesticated and domestic muscovy ducks all over the world are descended from these. In the same panel are screamers, turkey-sized chicken-footed relatives of ducks, which frequent open marshes. The sharp spur on the wrist is used in fighting.

The tinamous (Station 12) restricted to Latin America, resemble tail-less partridges and are their ecological equivalent. They are related, however, to the ostrich-like rhea, which is seen in the same case.

On our bird walk, we have seen representatives of some birds found only in Latin America. These are part of what we call the Neo-Tropical avi-fauna that arose here while that area was separated from the rest of the world.

Emmett R. Blake, Curator of Birds, is an expert in these Latin American birds and planned and collected some of the exhibits we have seen. He is presently preparing a book of several volumes on Birds of South America, the first of its kind. This will be a valuable source of information for those interested in these birds and in the meantime, a bird walk through the Museum halls will provide an introduction to the birds of South America or almost any other part of the world.





Rand, Austin Loomer. 1969. "Brazilian Bird Walk." *Bulletin* 40(2), 4–5.

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