

## Southern Muriqui and other primates in Southeast Brazil (May-Jun 2022)

Recently a few trip reports about this part of Brazil were posted on Mammalwatching.com. So why another trip report about the same area? Well, for a number of reasons:

1. We organized the trip ourselves, so it's not an organized trip like the ones of Alex Meyer and Cheryl Antonucci who were accompanied by guides most of the time.
2. We went to the Carlos Botelho State Park and had great views of the **Southern Muriqui**. Until now mammalwatchers were heading to Fazenda Bacury where only a handful of Southern Muriquis survive and they are difficult to see.
3. We will also give information about primate species we missed (and why 😊).

In contrast to the authors of most trip reports on this website, we are no fanatic mammal watchers. We take it easy, spending at least 3 or 4 nights at every location. So it was not a wildlife watching holiday, but a holiday with wildlife watching. That is the reason we don't add a detailed itinerary to this report.



### General impression of the country

This was our first visit to Brazil, a country which doesn't have the reputation of being a safe country. We spend a few days in Rio and São Paulo, drove around in a rental car, don't speak Portuguese but ..... never felt unsafe! Of course we don't wear jewelry, don't take a big camera with us in towns etc etc. The people are very friendly and never got tired of us because we don't speak Portuguese. Google Translate is your friend, although it's far from perfect as the Portuguese which is spoken in Brazil is a bit different from the 'official' language spoken in Portugal. It's better to use an app where you can choose Portuguese -Brazil as a language.

Supermarkets, gasoline stations and ATM's are everywhere, so it's a very relaxed country to travel.

### Car rental

We rented a car for 2 periods and booked both cars through [economycarrentals.com](http://economycarrentals.com):

- We picked up our rental car (Alamo, represented by Unidas) from the local Airport in Rio (RJ Santos Dumont) and delivered the car in Vitoria. A good Citroen C4 Cactus for under € 20,-/day, a very good price.
- In São Paulo we picked up our rental car from Aeroporto de São Paulo/Congonhas and returned the car to Aeroporto Guarulhos. The car rental company was Foco Care Rental, a Brazilian company. They offered us a car full of dents, which we refused. Without any hassle they gave us a much better car (Fiat Doblo, hand shifted) for about € 18,-/day.

Both rental companies (Alama/Unidas and Foco) are recommended as their staff was friendly and there were no hidden costs. Driving in this part of Brazil is easy: the main roads are good (no potholes, good road signs), people don't drive like crazy and there are no police checkpoints. Be aware there are a lot of toll roads, which are reasonably priced. But if you drive long distances the costs will add up. The only downside to driving in Brazil are the speed cameras: there are a lot of those!! The good news is that nearly all of those are indicated in advance with signs.

We used Google Maps to navigate as you can download the maps in advance and use the maps offline. It all worked fine although local people prefer Waze.

### Weather

May and June are winter months in Brazil and are supposed to be pretty dry. Well... the first 2,5 weeks (From Rio to Vitoria) we had nice weather (25 degrees Celcius, just a few showers), but the last 2,5 weeks (Sao Paulo area and Igauzu Falls) we had cold weather (15-20 degrees Celcius) with a lot of rain. According to the locals this was a bit unusual...

### Primates seen/places visited

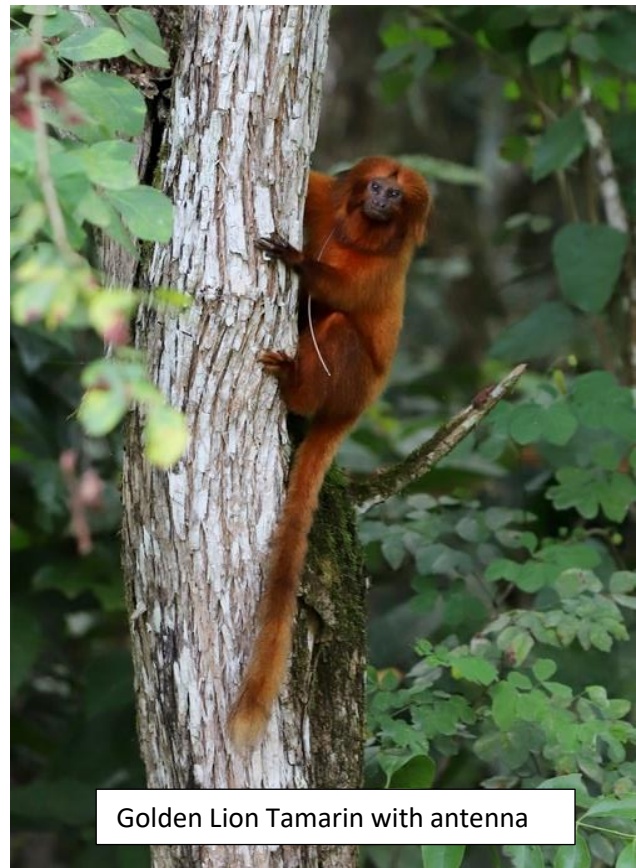
- **Golden-Lion Tamarin** (*Leontopithecus rosalia*). About 130 km east of Rio de Janeiro is a new visitor center and the headquarter of the Associação Mico-Leão-Dourado (AMLD). During the pandemic they moved from their original site in the Pocas das Antas Reserve to their new place alongside the highway 101. This organization does a wonderful job by saving rainforest where the golden lion tamarin lives. They also do reforestation, education, research etc. It's possible to visit the excellent project (make an appointment in advance!) as they have an exhibition hall, nice walks, viewpoints etc. The nature guides speak English. You also can do pretty good birdwatching around their headquarters. You can also see the golden lion tamarins in the wild. They probably take you to a location 30 km away. The habituated family of golden lion tamarin is marked with black paint to distinguish the individual animals from each other. Some of them also have a small antenna to be able to find the animals in the forest. Maybe not nice to see, but it's necessary for the research. We were a bit unlucky because it started raining hard after fifteen minutes, so we had a short visit. The yellow fever had a severe effect on the population which dropped from about 3700 to about 2500 individuals. They started a vaccination program to be sure to save at least a part of the population of the golden lion tamarin.

Be aware that the office/headquarters are easy to reach from the east along the 101, but if you come from the west you have to drive past it and make a U-turn where ever possible and drive a few kilometers back.

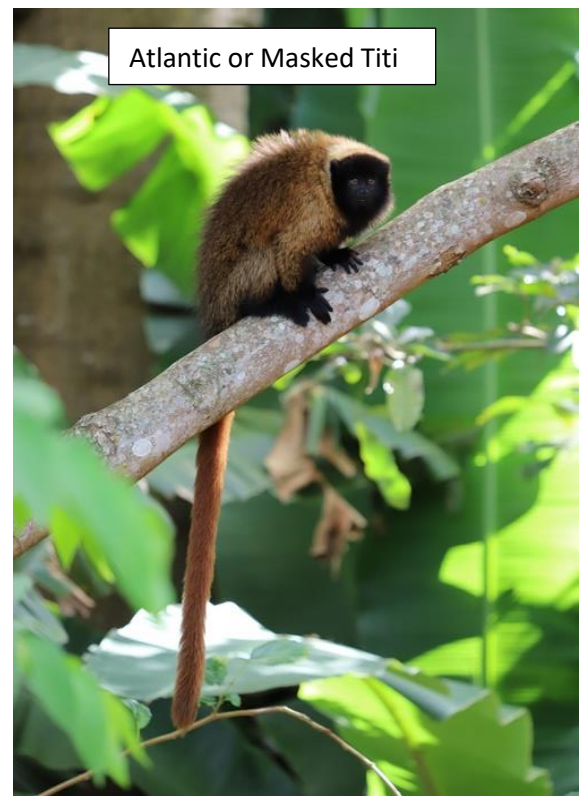
- **Atlantic Titi or Masked Titi** (*Callicebus personatus*)

We saw this species on three different locations:

1. *Sítio Gute Stelle*. This is a wonderful, quite place located 30 km east of Afonso Claudio where you can have a lunch and have a chance to see the Atlantic Titi. The family put some bananas in a tree and usually the Atlantic Titi visits the place once a day. But the time and length of the visit varies per day. Late in the morning the first Titi was spotted in the forest and it took the monkeys 1,5 hours of resting, feeding in the forest etc before they arrived at the bananas. They took 1 or 2 (small) bananas per individual and went back to the forest, a kind of extra snack for the Titi's. The family who owns the property is nature-minded and very very fiendly. We also saw Black-horned Capuchin Monkeys on their property and later they send us pictures of Brown Howler Monkey and even Buffy-headed Marmosets on their property! Please get in contact with them before you go as they are not always there (Facebook page or [Sitiogutestelle@outlook.com](mailto:Sitiogutestelle@outlook.com) or +27 99941 1131) . The family only speaks Portugese, but Google Translate is your friend. They also have feeders for the birds and the owner (Atílio Zibell) is a good birdwatcher. They have plans to build a guestroom. The road towards Sítio Guten Stelle is OK for a normal car, no 4x4 needed. This is a hidden gem in the area of Afonso Claudio!!



Golden Lion Tamarin with antenna



Atlantic or Masked Titi

2. *Vale Reserve*. This is a nice reserve north of Linhares. The reserve (no entrance fee) itself is open for visitors, but the restaurant and the bungalows are still closed (at least until august 2022). So the nearest decent accommodation is in Linhares, 30 km away. We stayed in the BHS hotel in Linhares, which was excellent. There are nice trails in the Vale park and we saw the Atlantic titi 3 times. Their website states that the park closes at noon, but in practice it doesn't and you can stay from morning until late afternoon.
3. *In the gardens of the National Institute of the Atlantic Forest in Santa Teresa (Espírito Santo)*. It's just 1 family living in the botanical gardens and the female died in the beginning of 2022. so it is not certain whether the male with his older child will stay in the botanical garden or look for another area.

- **Crested Capuchin or Robust Capuchin (*Sapajus robustus*)**

This species was seen in the Vale Reserve, north of Linhares. We visited the reserve 1,5 day (1 afternoon and a full day) and saw only 1 group of these noisy monkeys. So take some time to visit the reserve to be sure to see this species.

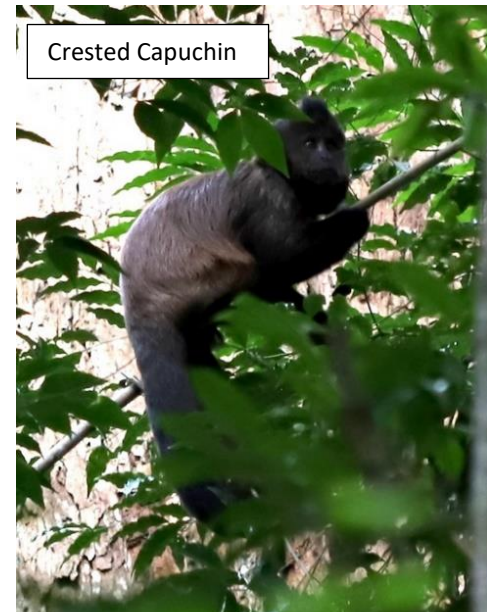
- **Black-horned Capuchin (*Sapajus nigritus*)**

After the outbreak of yellow fever, this is the most common primate in the region and we saw it at different locations like Rio de Janeiro (the forest around the Christ statue at Corcovado), Iguazu Falls (Brazilian site), Sitio Gute Stelle (see Atlantic Titi for more information about this magical place), Carlos Botelho State Park and Guarau. In the winter Guarau is a sleepy town on the coast, 15 minutes from Peruíbe. We stayed at Hostel Samambaia Azul, a beautiful place and a perfect destination for birdwatchers. We've never seen so many birds around feeders. As a bonus a group of Black-horned Capuchins visited the hostel.

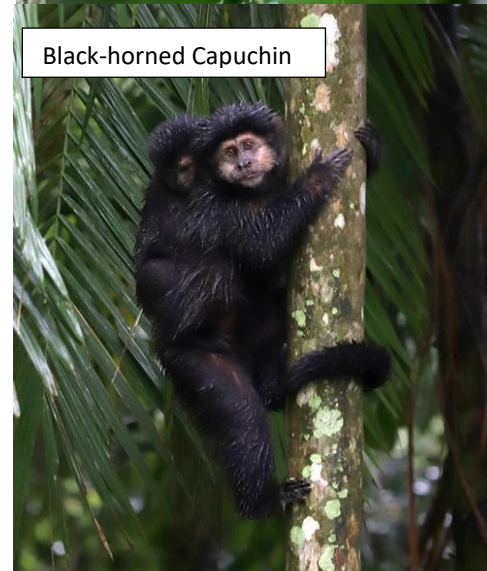
- **Geoffroy's Tufted-ear Marmoset (*Callithrix geoffroyi*)**

We saw these tiny monkeys on two places:

1. In the garden of the BHS Hotel in Linhares;
2. on Morro do Moreno in Vila Velha. There are some trails going up the hill, where you have a good chance of spotting them. But we also saw and heard them a few times from the road (R. Fernando Monteiro Lindenberg) at the east side of the hill. The families of these species are quite vocal, so not too difficult to find. We also heard them in the Vale Reserve (but couldn't see them), but failed to see or hear them on the hill of Convento da Penha in Vila Velha. They are supposed to be easy there, but despite of spending a few hours in the forest around the monastery, we didn't find this species over there.



Crested Capuchin



Black-horned Capuchin



Geoffroy's Tufted-ear Marmoset

- **Buffy-tufted-ear Marmoset (*Callithrix aurita*)**

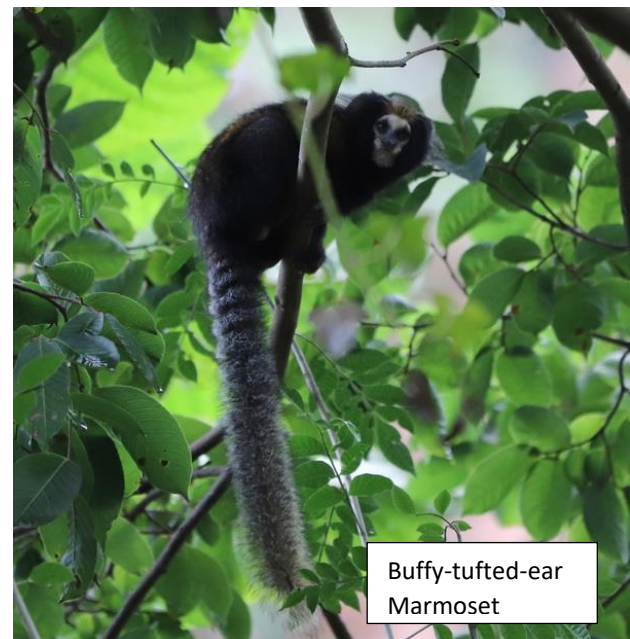
One of the best places to see this species seems to be the unpaved road leading to the IPÊ - Instituto de Pesquisas Ecológicas near Nazaré Paulista. We walked this road up and down twice and finally had a family of 4 of these marmosets. They were quite shy and disappeared into a small marshy area at the beginning of the road. They were not very vocal (cold weather?) and more difficult to find than other trip reports suggest.

- **Buffy-headed Marmoset (*Callithrix flaviceps*)**

A good place to see this species is the Feliciano Miguel Abdala Private Natural Heritage Reserve where the Northern Muriqui has its major stronghold. As we decided not to visit the reserve (see later in the report why we didn't visit the reserve) we had no hope at all to see this species during this holiday. But sometimes you must be lucky, very lucky. We stayed at the Cantinho dos 3 Pontões near Afonso Claudio as it's close to Sitio Gute Stelle (see Atlantic Titi). In advance we had a whatsapp conversation with the owner of the Canthino and told about our interest in primates. When we were relaxing on the balcony of our hut he arrived on his motorbike and showed us a translated text (he only speaks Portugese) on his smartphone: mountain marmoset. What???? Right now? Yes he said. So we jumped in our car, he jumped on his motorbike and we followed him on a steep track on his farm, just OK for our rental car. Suddenly he stopped and we got out of the car. In the distance we heard a strange sound, which he identified as the sound of the Buffy-headed Marmoset. The sound is so different from the high-pitched sounds of some other marmoset and tamarin species that it's useful to try to find it on the internet in advance. The owner hadn't heard the sound for several years, but our presence made him pay attention to primates. And with results! The marmosets were up on a steep hill and it took some effort to get closer and get a reasonable view. For 30 seconds we had good views and then the marmosets disappeared. Wow, they are fast, really fast. Later that afternoon the owner spotted a large group of these marmosets crossing the public unsealed road uphill from de Cantinho. We passed the sightings on to the Mountain Marmoset Conservation Program and they were very happy with it. No sightings of this critically endangered monkey species had been made from this region for about 5 years....

- **Southern Muriqui (*Brachyteles arachnoides*)**

On the website of <https://wildlife-travel.com/> I found information about the Southern Muriquis in the Carlos Botelho State Park, located about a 3 hour drive southwest of São Paulo. Through Facebook I got in contact with professor Mauricio Talebi (+55 11 976326998 or [talebi@unifesp.br](mailto:talebi@unifesp.br)), who runs a NGO in this State Park. He is very friendly, answers all your questions etc. He is the one who knows the most about the Southern Muriqui. So we planned a visit to his project with the hope of seeing the Southern Muriquis in their natural habitat. We stayed in a basic, but clean accommodation beside his house close to the state park. The house had a kitchen and we prepared our own meals. We spend 2 full days in the forest with Mauricio and his team and had good and prolonged views of this amazing primate species: females with little ones, a group of males etc. Unfortunately they were high up in the trees all the time,

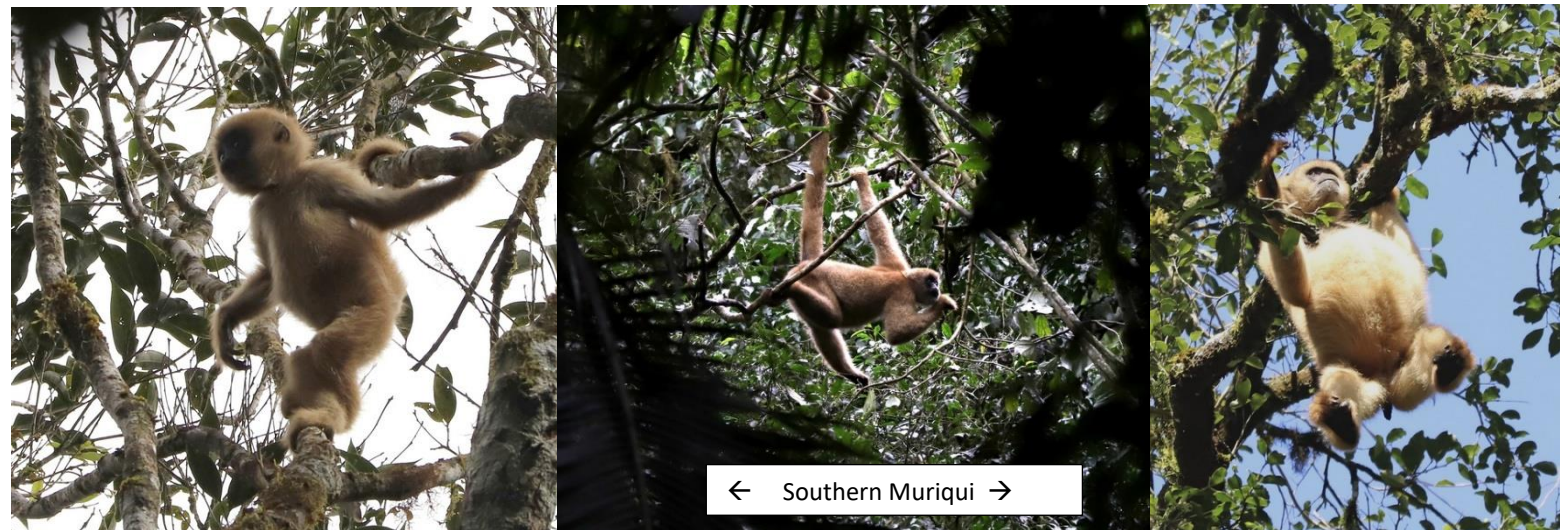


Buffy-tufted-ear Marmoset



Buffy-headed Marmoset

so the pictures are not award winning. But we were lucky in the way that we only had to walk less than half an hour to see (habituated) mureiquis. After our visit we really don't understand why so few people know about this project and this unique opportunity to visit the Mureiquis! The mureiquis are so beautiful and their behavior is so interesting and Mauricio and his team are so competent, caring and friendly. The costs are 100 USD per person per day for foreign visitors but it's worth every 'penny'. Don't forget the researchers spent a lot of time in the forest to be sure where the mureiquis are and where they sleep the night before. The mureiquis have been researched for 25 years and the researchers know a lot about the habits of the mureiquis. We've seen about 125 species of primates in the wild, but the Mureiquis are in our top 5, no doubt about that!



### Primate species NOT seen

Well, we missed 2 species of primates and didn't try for 3 species of primate.

#### *Species we missed:*

- **Brown Howler Monkey.** In the past this was the most common primate in the region and easy to see, but the yellow fever has been a disaster for them. Other mammalwatchers have seen this species near Curitiba, but that was too far from our planned route. It's also easy to see in the Botanical gardens of São Paulo, a green oasis in an urban desert. The musquitos, which transmit the Yellow fever, haven't reached the Botanical Gardens yet. But keep in mind that the gardens are closed on Mondays (the intended day of our visit) which was not clearly mentioned on their website (I could order a ticket online for Mondays.....). We had a few hours on Tuesday morning to try for the Brown Howler Monkeys, but in contrast to the nice weather on Monday, it was cold and rainy weather on Tuesday. No sound, no movement, no howler monkeys. We heard stories of local people near Afonso Claudio (west of Vitoria, Espiro Santo) about Howler Monkeys falling from the trees because of the yellow fever and a smell of dead animals coming from the forest... We heard them far away from our room at Cantinho dos 3 Pontões near Afonso Claudio.
- **Black-fronted Titi.** This species is not so easy to see. We looked for it around Nazaré Paulista (north of Sao Paulo), but haven't heard or seen a sign of this primate species. We had cold and rainy weather in the area, not the best time for them to vocalize.

#### *Species we didn't try for:*

- **Northern Mureiqui.** This species is easy to see in the Feliciano Miguel Abdala Private Natural Heritage Reserve. Until a few years ago it was possible to enter the reserve without a guide, but nowadays all visits are guided. I got in contact with them through Whatsapp, but was negatively surprised by the prices they asked: 2500 reais for a visit of just 4 hours for 2 persons. With the currency rates in May 2022 that is 520 USD. No accommodation or food included, just a walk of 4 hours in the reserve with a guide. I asked them why the price was so high, but didn't get any explanation. I had a very unpleasant feeling about the communication, so we decided not to go there. This reserve is only for the happy

few... I really hope they have reduced prices for local people and also hope they reconsider their extremely high prices....

- **Black Lion Tamarin.** This species is easily seen at Fazenda Garibaldi. But... be aware they only have 1 guide available (the owner) and when he is not around, you can't enter the forest where these species of tamarin live. Even his wife can't replace him. After we booked the accommodation and told them the tamarins were the reason for us to come to their place it turned out the guide was not at the Fazenda for 5 days. It was too close to our departure to change our dates, so we cancelled our reservation and spent a few days somewhere else.
- **Superagui lion tamarin or black-faced lion tamarin.** After reading some trip reports, it was too much hassle for us to try for this species of lion tamarin.

### **Other mammals seen**

We saw a few other mammal species during our trip:

- **Three-toed sloth** near the Cantinho dos 3 Pontões near Afonso Claudio.
- **(Greater) Capybara.** A small family at the Argentinean side of the Iguazu Falls.
- **Red Brocket Deer.** 1 animal at the Brazilian side of the Iguazu Falls.
- **South American Coati.** Many of them at the last train stop on the Argentinean site of the Iguazu Falls. They check the train for food just after the train makes its final stop.

### **Final thoughts**

Despite the bad weather in the last 2 weeks we had a great time in Brazil. Primate-watching is a bit different than in most other countries as there are just a few species in a certain area. It's not like Kibale Forest in Uganda where you can see 10+ primate species in one area. In the eastern part of Brazil you have to move to another area to see other 1 or 2 new species.

The stars of the show in Brazil are the Southern Muriqui and we really hope more people will visit them in the Carlos Botelho State Park. For us, it was something we will never forget.

If you would like to have some information about our trip, please get in contact with us:

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