

A paradise lost in the mountains of Rio de Janeiro – and the hope of finding Kinglet Calyptura there

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Rio de Janeiro state in Brazil boasts a number of cracking sites that have long been on the birding itinerary. But there are also plenty of locations off the beaten track that demand exploration. Members of a local team explain how they tracked down one promising area – and started revealing its avian riches.

All photos were taken at Sumidouro, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, during 2022. Unless otherwise stated, all photos were taken by Daniel Mello/Irmãos Mello Birding Tours (irmaosmello.com.br/birdwatching).

1 Surveying birds off Rio de Janeiro's well-beaten track, at Soumidouro, January 2022.



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2–4 Forest habitat at the study site, January 2022.

Although interest has grown greatly during recent decades, birdwatching is still not a popular activity in Brazil. As a consequence, many areas remain unexplored or little explored, even in the small state of Rio de Janeiro. Not far from the state capital, the Serra dos Órgãos is an extensive mountain range about which two of us have written previously in this magazine (Mello & Mello 2017). These mountains have been an object of scientific interest since the first European naturalists visited Brazil to study its biodiversity. Johann Baptist von Spix and Carl Friedrich Philipp von Martius, for example, were there on an expedition from 1817–20. However, even after two centuries of scientific exploration, there remains lots to learn and understand about the region’s avifauna.

It was precisely in the Serra dos Órgãos that we started to observe birds in mid-2007. It was always part of our ‘mission’ to explore new (or perhaps forgotten) areas. A mission motivated, in large part, by the lingering hope that remains of finding the legendary Kinglet *Calyptura calyptura cristata* (considered Critically Endangered by BirdLife International but, encouragingly, still without the addition of the words ‘Possibly Extinct’).

The last sighting of this enigma took place in this region during October 1996, when Ricardo



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