

Trip report Brazil: 1.10.11 – 7.11.11.

I had never been to South America, but as a fan of *big cats* I wanted to try my luck to see and photograph the big cats of the new World: *Jaguar* and *Puma* in the wild.

That's why I planned a trip to the Pantanal, Brazil and Torres del Paine, Chile for best chances for both big cats. Since I am a hobby photographer in general as well, I planned a big three months trip to South America with my backpack just to enjoy traveling. In total I traveled over more than 20.000 km by local public bus through Brazil, Argentina, Bolivia and Chile. Main goal was to see as much wildlife (mammals, birds and other stuff) as possible, but also enjoy the great landscapes and cultural highlights of this indeed beautiful part of the world.

During this trip I rented (with others) three times for a short period a rental car of which two times specifically for watching wildlife. The following report writes down the sightings of all mammals, most interesting birds and other specialties to mention for the part of **Brasil**. I will report it in following of the beneath mentioned places, since these are more or less separate to visit and in following of my trip

Since this was my first time to South America, I was a bit worried about some stories of risks of robberies. So I thought I will start with a guided jaguar tour. If this would be a success, I would send my photo's direct home as soon as possible, 'as an insurance'. But in the end during my three months trip I luckily had no bad moments at all. So it is possible to travel by yourself and visit South America without any problems. Obviously, as everybody says, I still would recommend to always mind your belongings, since I did hear some stories of people who lost their stuff. (at bus station swap of luggage and a brake-in a rental car (just don't leave stuff inside in vision...)).

I hope you will enjoy this report and feel free to commend or ask questions!

I specially want to thank www.mammalwatching.com for presenting such worth full trip reports. For me it was of great use and guidance and more or less I picked the right info from several writers.

Best regards,

Janco van Gelderen

Utrecht, Netherlands (Holland), Europe

info/contact:

e-mail: jancovg@hotmail.com

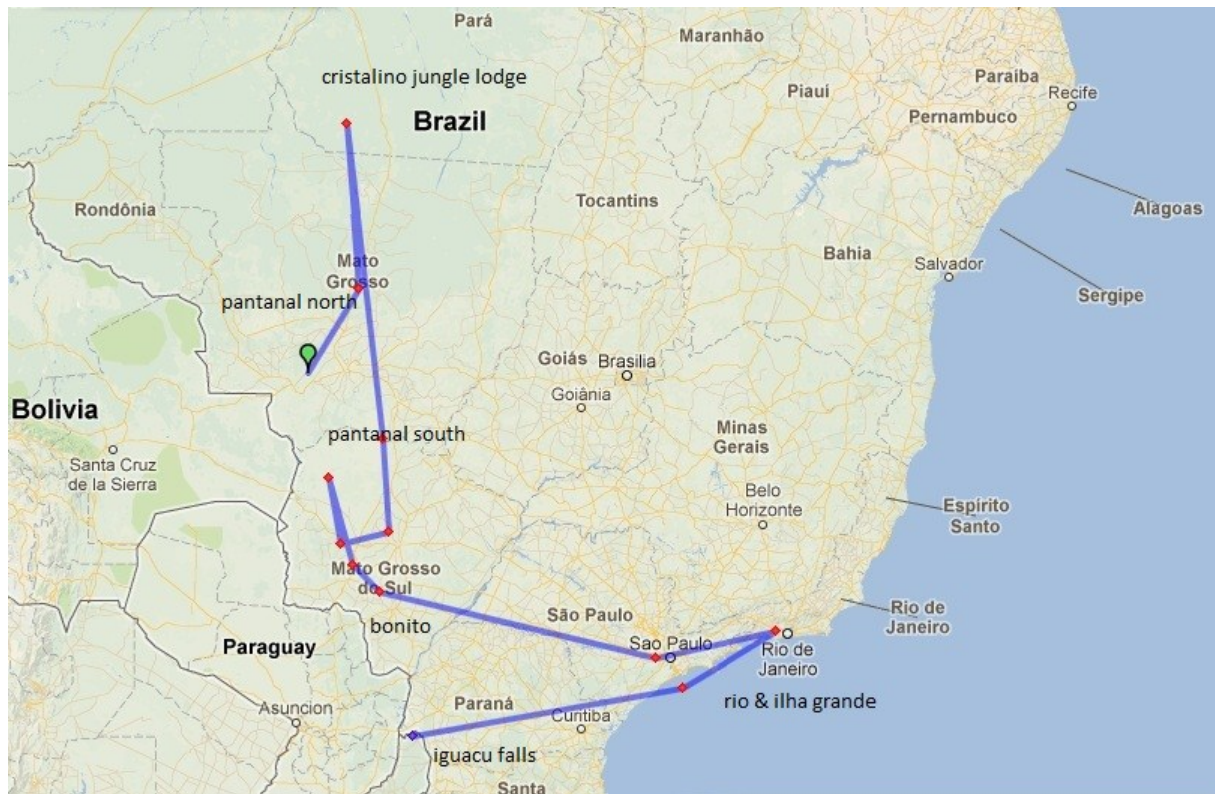
www.pbase.com/jancowildlifephotography
(for all photographic results of all my trips)

facebook: [janco van gelderen, utrecht area, the Netherlands](#)

The different places I visited for wildlife were:

Brazil

- Pantanal (northern and southern part, resp. 8 days and 4 days)
- Chapa dos Guimareas (2 days)
- Cristalino jungle lodge (Amazon region) (4 days)
- Bonito (just 150 km south of Pantanal) (3 days)
- Rio de Janeiro / Ilha Grande (5 days)
- Iguacu (Brazilian side, 1 day)



BRAZIL

northern Pantanal, Cuiaba > Porto Joffre 31-9-2011 / 8-10-2011

I booked on internet a jaguar tour 4 nights - 5 days (of which 4 full days in a boat). By the agency: **Pantanal Nature** – www.pantanalnature.com.br

It was very expensive but I wanted a more or less guarantee of sighting and thought of best chances. Previous trip reports had almost all a sighting during a three days stay in the season (July-September). It turned out to be a good guess since I had four jaguar sightings on 2 days out of total 4.

My trip started at a small hotel in Cuiaba a bit late at 8.45 instead of the supposed 7.30 pick-up, the driver/guide was late. I was a bit worried about losing the nice cool and active morning to look for wildlife since temperature rose quickly and the city birds got already quiet. But anyway my trip started. Quite surprised about my rather young guide and his rental fiat punto (I expected a 4by4) but we were on our way to an excellent wildlife area! The 4by4 wasn't really necessary this time of year.

First we drove around 100 km through shrub and farmland and little towns. From then we started a road more or less into the pantanal. First you pass the last real village Pocone (fuel/gas) and then we drove on to the wooden post with 'transpantaneira'. Before this you pass here you can see already a lot of nice birds. From the transpantaneira we saw in the little canals and ponds a lot of water birds, birds of prey and loads of caiman. It is really easy spotting and photographing a nice list of birds.

But be sure, it is a long road of around 150 km to Porto Joffre and since I wanted to take pictures of almost everything which was ok by my guide, it took us finally all day and even the last bit of the road it was already dark when we arrived in jaguar camp around 19.30. So be prepared not to take too much time. But seriously almost all birds and most mammals are possible to be seen from the transpantaneira already! The landscape varies a bit with sometimes little forest or open areas and always some small ponds and canals along the sides with all kinds of water/wetland birds. The birds are also quite approachable, good for pictures maybe even best here since approaching is also quite easy from the car.

I extended my stay in the Pantanal with 3 nights in the Rio Claro lodge (camping) which is halfway the transpantaneira. That was a good choice for some nice other sightings and some good night drives. I would recommend to stay at least 2 nights somewhere halfway the transpantaneira.

Since I don't want to make a too long report I just write down and or show the mammals I saw from the transpantaneira and in the river during boating. I also made some night drives on my return. I'll mark if it was a night drive sighting. Not all mammals I got on pictures, but luckily most I got.

Mammals seen from *transpantaneira* and /or at *Rio Claro lodge*



capybara (common from half way)



marsh deer (only one couple, male and female in two way drive of 150 km *transpantaneira*!)



red brocket deer (2 at night drive and 1 in the morning along road)



giant anteater (1 near Porto Joffre, there it is a rare sighting according to the guide (photo is taken @ Bonito))



crab-eating eating racoon (2 groups at night drive aside road)



river otter (1 crossing road late afternoon)



coati (2 afternoon on road)



crab-eating fox (a few during night drives and one in the morning)



ocelot (2 at night drive, distant view)



tapir (3 times during night drive, roadside)



black howler monkey (during walks)



pantanal marmosets (a few during morning walk at Rio Claro lodge)

brazilian rabbit (1 night drive) (no photograph)



Agouti (1 walking) (photograph taken at Iguacu)



Colored Peccary (a few during walk, very shy)



feral pigs (horse riding)

unidentified small rodent, bodyshape like Pika (mountain rodent) on road night drive (no photograph)

The jaguar camp and boating:

I stayed in a 'safari tent', breakfast and dinner were in the central house. The organization is friendly and everything worked very well. Breakfast is served at 5:30 and around 6 am you leave in the boat for boating on Rio Cuiaba for trying to get your Jaguar. This is how you spend your time here: all day in an open boat up and down the river and a lunch break from 12.00-14.00, the hottest hours of the day. When I arrived here there were some other guest who had done some days already. They all had great sightings of jaguar in the days before, so I was thrilling... But the weather changed to rainy... not a good sign (there was one rainy day before and then no jaguar were seen).

So the next morning it was grey and rainy... so I had to wear my poncho. Not the start I thought it would be. But we took off and where only about 10 minutes up river (it's a 200 meter wide slow streaming river) the guide pointed at fresh jaguar tracks on a sandbank, but no jaguar. We headed on and at the end of a very long bend in the river the guide suddenly said '**jaguar right side!**'. I was really shocked since we were only 25 minutes on track and I wasn't even well awake yet, but there it was: a mother jaguar with 2 little cubs! She instantly walked off from the grass side into the forest with one cub. Luckily the other cub stayed at the waterside for half a minute and then walked to its mother, who was already deep in the bush. The circumstances for light were bad for pictures so I only got moved ones of the adult... But the cub I got clear. So I was out for 30 minutes on a rainy day in the pantanal and had seen what I hoped for! And this felt also definitely as I want more!

We put our Anker in the river and the guide and boatman kept watching the sides, they expected the jaguar might come again to the side and they were right, it was on a cliff of around 3-4 meters high 200 meter up river and we could see it from a distance. She and the cubs were in the open for 2 minutes and again they took off into the woods not to return.

After an hour or so the weather turned dry and sun came through.

Since I was the only guest the first two days, I could ask for a stop anywhere and enjoy everything I wanted to photograph: caiman, birds, capybara very easy! We also went to a dead river arm where we saw giant otters playing and fishing around their den.

The rest of the day no jaguars, until we were almost back at the lodge and the boatman pointed in front of the boat > '**jaguar!**'. We saw a head swimming 100 meters ahead to the right, indeed it was a crossing jaguar! I could take some pictures in the last light, as it quickly entered the riverside and in one jump disappeared in the jungle, so no good frontal view of it, but that was two sightings on my first day, satisfying!

The next day the weather was nice and everything was the same, boating and looking. But nothing special in the early hours. So it was getting warm and I was more relaxing in the boat... and again the boatman pointed in front of us: **jaguar!** Amazingly a jaguar was swimming across to the left and what was more cool, there was a very tiny cub swimming behind! So we got closer and stayed at around 30 meters and saw them swimming to the side. The mother climbed on a tree trunk and directly shouted at the cub which was 20 meters behind. The cub was getting tired and tried to hook on a floating piece of wood, but it kept rolling so it had to continue. The stream made that the cub was getting to the side 20 meters down where the mother was, she waited in the bush and they were reunited soon and not to be seen by us... The guide never had seen this before and I was thrilled by this great sighting off maybe 2 minutes in total. This was my earliest beer time of the trip :-)

In the afternoon I spotted a 3 meter thick **anaconda** in the riverbank, a special sighting and more difficult than jaguar told the guide.

No jaguars were seen by any other boat that day, so we were the lucky ones!

The next two days were not so good, no jaguars... only 2 times a radio call, but when arriving there which takes time, the jaguar was already back in the bush. I only saw a glimpse of a spotted back for a

second. So after 4 days I had my sightings and even very special ones! Not the sightings like most people do. I heard many stories about half an hour views of a relaxing jaguars on the riverbank. So maybe I have to return for that... but as far as my pictures I'm happy.

mammals seen from the river during boating:

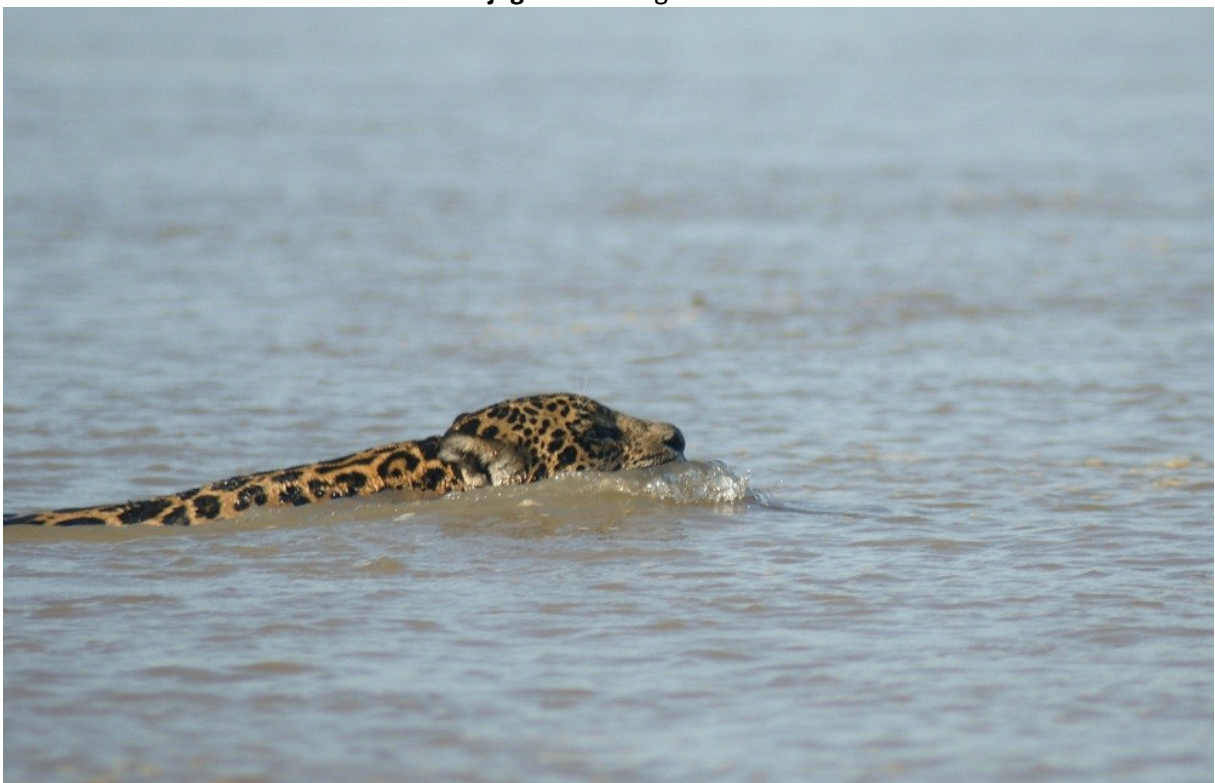
jaguar (4 sightings of which 3 good, but short views, and one glimpse)



jaguar, mother and two cubs



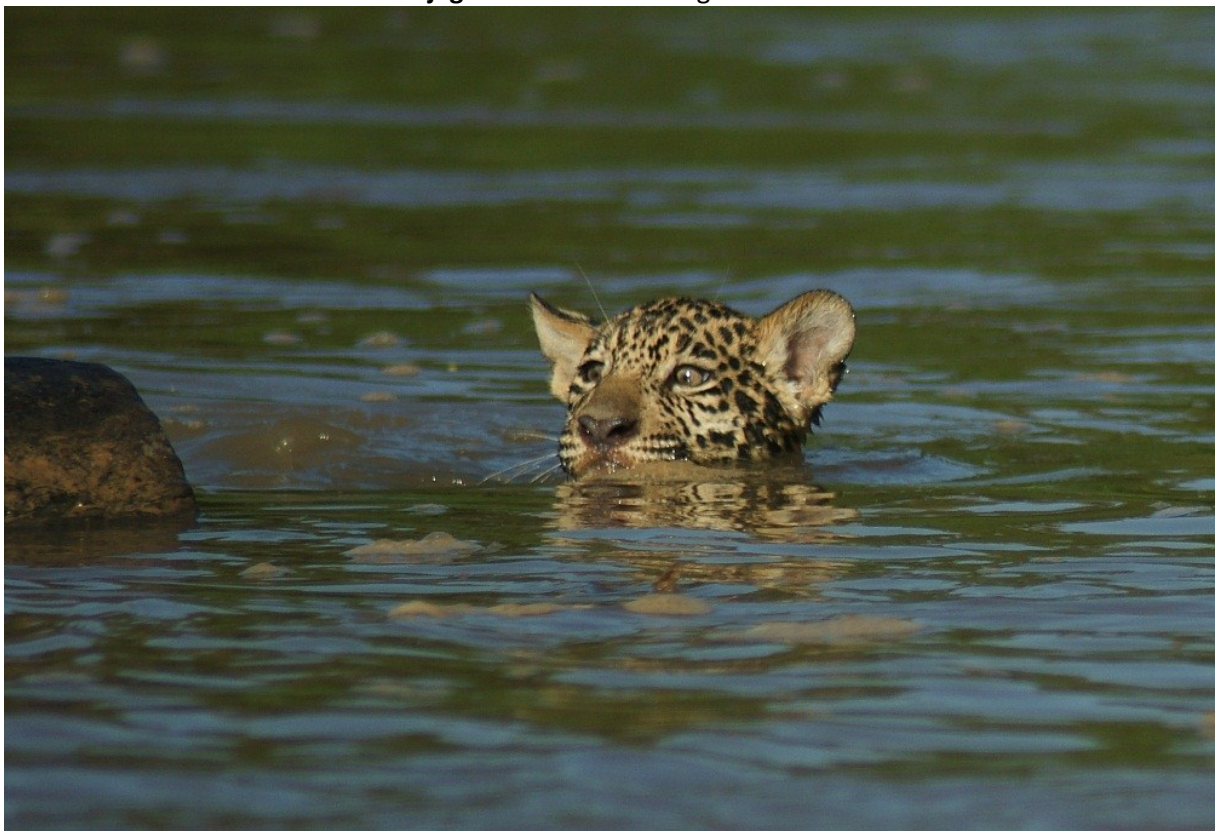
jaguar crossing river



mother jaguar crossing river, with cub swimming behind.



jaguar mother shouting to cub



baby jaguar, trying to hold a floating log while crossing river.



giant-river otter (easy around the den (guide will bring you there))



capybara (common)



tufted brown Capuchin (a few sightings in trees)

other interesting stuff: reptiles and amphibians:



Teju



anaconda (3m)



Brazilian cobra



iguana



caiman(baby)

Birds to mention:



blue macaw



toco tucan



aracari

golden colored macaw, woodpeckers, almost all herons and birds of prey.

Rio Claro lodge:

I decided to try my luck by asking for an extension at the rio Claro lodge, to camp there (so no booking officially) other travelers told me it was possible and I had a tent. Anyway I was lucky the owner of jaguar camp offered me to transfer me there and pick me up 3 days later to bring me back to Cuiaba. Since they had to go there anyway for other guests and my tour included this transfer. This was very kind because otherwise this would have cost a lot of money, now I saved some. At Rio Claro I could do whatever I want and joined a boat excursion. It is a nice place where you can make some nice hikes and find stuff yourself. I also joined their night drives which were good and brought me **red rocket deer, crab-eating fox, crab-eating raccoon, ocelot and tapir**, you don't see many animals, but there is chance of all! I was told that in a big tree just beside the lodge **black pantanal marmosets** were seen. I found them during a morning walk, very tiny and quick animals. Here I also saw my only **colored peccaries**, a short sighting but clear.

Since my experience of the pantanal was very good, I felt that I wanted more!
(But I first went to Amazon and Chapada so for logical reasons I'll first finish the pantanal part)

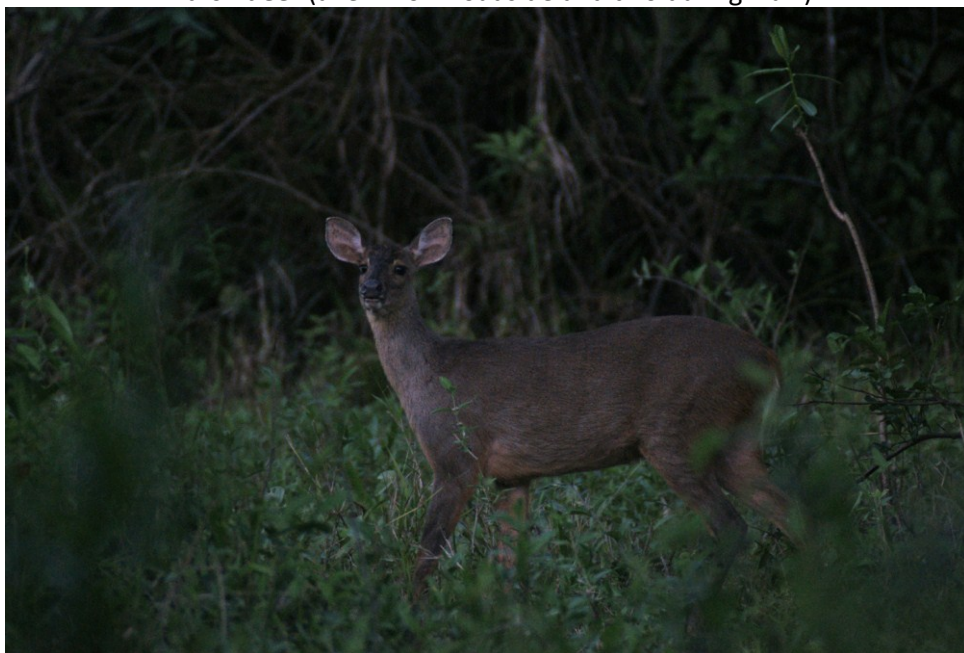
Southern Pantanal > miranda > Lontra Pantanal hotel (15-10 t/m 18-10)

I went to Campo Grande, the southern big City and enter place for the pantanal to organize a tour. Here I joined a 3 day 'backpacker' tour. This is a more easy and cheaper trip with also some fun extra's like horse riding, piranha fishing and floating on a rubber band in the river (with piranha and caiman around..., but I did it ☺). Anyway this worked out as a good choice, obviously I had to adapt to the group, but the guide was willing to show animals. The southern pantanal looks a bit different and the wildlife is in all a bit less easy to access. In the end I think you can see all the same stuff here as up north. Along the road I saw my first **armadillo** crossing (no specifications, no photo), **capibaras** and **two single marsh deer**. We stayed in the *Lontra Pantanal hotel*. An easy lodge near the river from where you make boat tours. I followed the whole program but made an extra early morning walk myself where I saw a **marsh deer stag** and a **grey brocket deer**. While horse riding we saw a group of

feral pig/wild boar. Seeing wildlife from the riverside while boating is slightly more difficult here since animals are more shy than in the northern pantanal. Caiman jump in the water if approached. I asked for a night drive instead of night boating since I thought we might see *ocelot* again. Everybody agreed and it was arranged. As we drove off in a big truck with spotlight nothing showed up during the first 20 minutes, so I start feeling a bit worried since it was my idea... (from the boating the previous day we at least saw bats and night herons. So I saw all, not especially wildlife interested, people getting a bit bored on the bumpy road. Our guide was still spotlighting the sides and suddenly he shined on a quit big animal in a marshy grassland, in front of a forest ridge about 100 meters from the road... I directly was shocked, it was clear: **a maned wolf!** It was walking around. I was allowed to try to get a picture and it was a quit relaxed animal, but focusing was a crime in dark, so I couldn't get the best pictures. This was absolutely a stunning en completely unexpected sighting! The guide had never seen one in the area and only two times in his life so I felt privileged.



marsh deer (a few from roadside and two during walk)



grey brocket deer (female during evening walk)



maned wolf! (1 during nightdrive)



Chapada dos Guimaraes NP (8-10 t/m 10-10)

This NP is a bit north of the pantanal and consists of more highland plateau and is a drier park. Very great views and nice waterfalls here. I visited the 'geodetic center point' of South America which has also an enormous wide view over the lowlands.

Only two mammals seen here: **tufted brown Capuchin** and a **9 banded armadillo** (no photo). Quite a lot of different bird species and nice flowers here so if time it's worth full to bring a one day visit.



tufted brown Capuchin

Cristalino jungle lodge > Altafloresta (11-10 t/m 14-10)

I went by night bus to Altafloresta and went to the Amazonica hotel. Got a room and luckily could make a reservation to go to the Cristalino lodge (they have an office in the hotel). I booked for three nights. First I had one day relaxing in the hotel, which offers also quite nice birding and some **agouties**. **Monkeys** were also possible in the small jungle tracks in the private forest but I found out too late. To recommend near the lodge is a great harpy eagle nest just in the forest, I had a good view of one adult bird.

The trip to Cristalino is really special and gives you definitely the real 'Amazon, David Attenborough effect'. Don't expect to see many things here. But the whole atmosphere, the surrounding, sounds and smells are really amazing. Here I made some boat tours and some walks which is business as usual at the lodge. Not very lucky here I missed the *spidermonkeys*, and *marmosets*, but I did see **Saki monkey** (walk), 2 **Paca** and a **bamboorat** (night boating) and a **9 banded armadillo** crossing the track before my bungalow 9 (it was a big armadillo, nobody had seen that one there before as I told that I saw one). Also saw some **bats** with sharp noses, **azara's night monkey** up in the trees spotlighting around lodge. On the day boat excursion a nice **river otter** swam in front of the boat. What is really amazing here are the great views from the watchtower over the canopy of the rainforest. Seeing and hearing the forest waking up is a really special experience. You sure feel thankful with all intense nature around you. The flying by macaws in misty clouds make it complete. The walks were somewhat disappointing since it's hard to see stuff, but I would not want to miss this part of my trip. It is quite expensive though, so keep in mind.



Saki monkey (walk)



Paca (night boat)



Azara's nightmonkey (near bungalow)



river otter (boating)



bat (from boat on hanging tree)

Other interesting stuff:



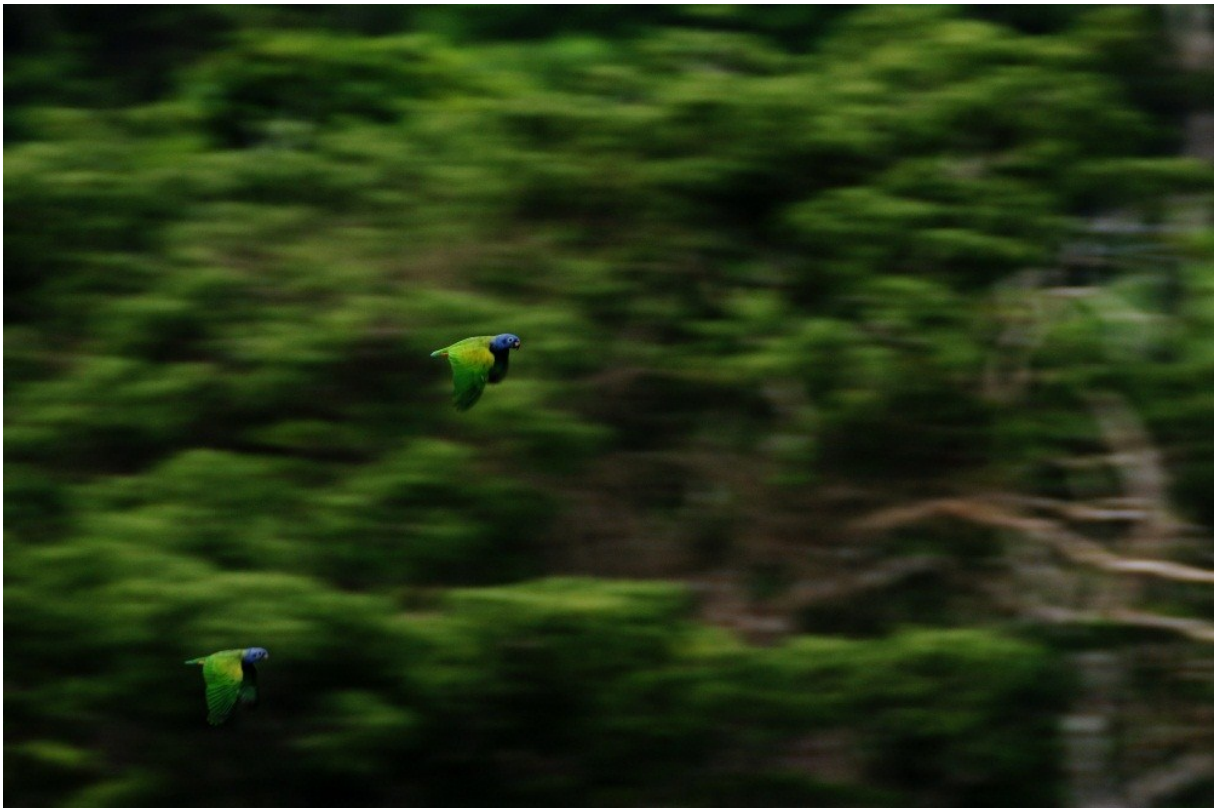
Cristalino frog (only first found and identified 6 years ago!)



harpy eagle (hotel Amazonica)



red and blue macaw (watchtower)



blue headed parrots (watchtower)

Bonito > south of pantanal (19-10 t/m 21-10)

My backpack trip extended with a transfer to Bonito. This a center touristic town from where you can make some nice excursions: Snorkeling in a crystal clear river (not to be missed), cave viewing (blue cave and abseiling and snorkeling in Anhumis cave is an extremely bizarre thing, but expensive. If you have the money and time do this once in a lifetime experience. The San Miguel cave is less interesting but good for **two species of bat and a sleeping owl**). I also visited the 'Buraco das ara's' to watch the *macaw* colony. All these tours are recommendable and give also opportunities to see wildlife as I saw **4 pampas deer** and **3 giant anteaters** from the road to. Also I saw a group of **5 peccaries** running from a distant back to the bushes, according to the description and spreading they are likely to be **white lipped peccary** (but no certain determination). Evening returns are best. The macaw excursion to the cave/hole is very nice. With all macaws flying frequently around gives you good photo opportunities. (if not interested in birds, I saw my only **pampas deer** here near the entrance in the fields, pretty shy though).



Pampas deer (just before Buraco das ara's)



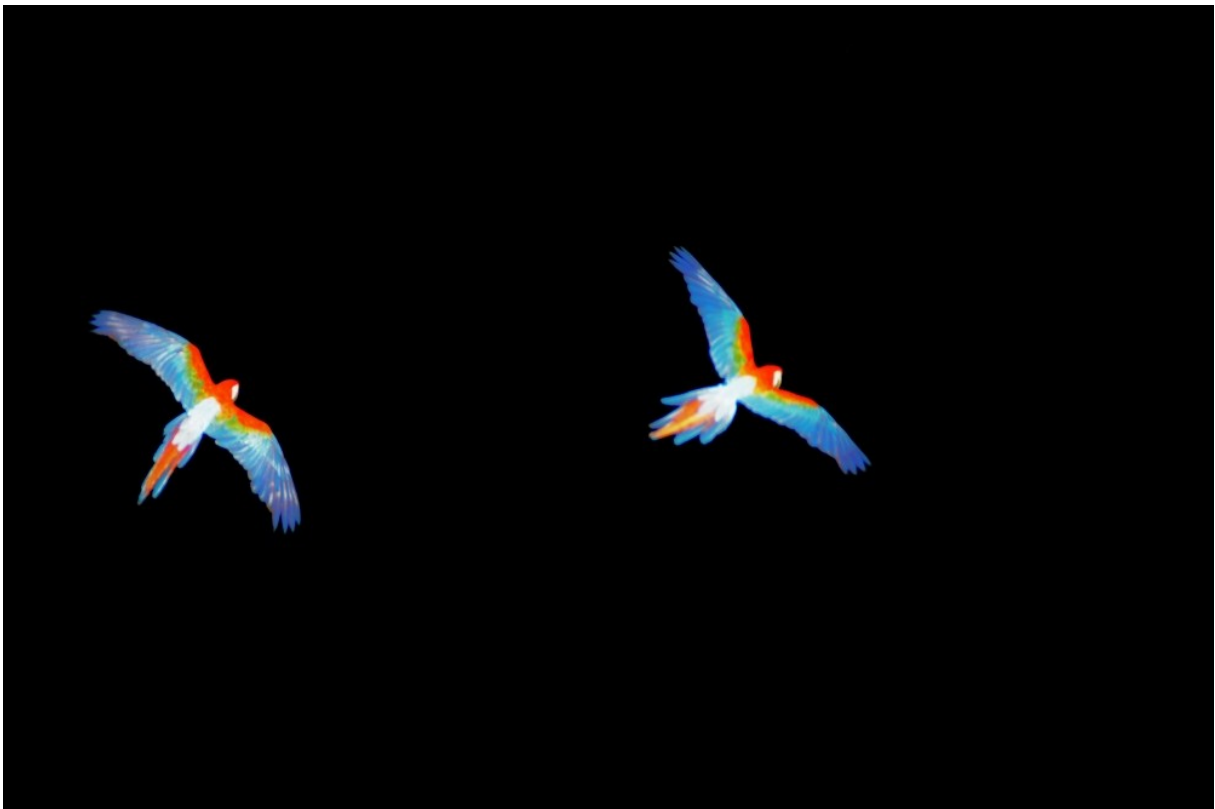
blue cave



anhumis cave (biggest underground cave! Like a cathedral)



Buracco das aras



buracco das aras

Rio de Janeiro > (22-10 t/m 24-10)

Great city with nice view from Corcovado and Sugar loaf. I walked up Corcovado mountain with to the Christ statue and saw a *yellow tucan* and a *coati*. Down Sugar loaf rock is an easy track from where you can see **tufted marmosets** and some nice birds. I also made a visit (excursion) to a favela which was very impressive.



tufted marmosets (at sugar loaf trail)

Ilha Grande > (25-10 t/m 27-10)

A nice boat ride to the green island. Good relaxing and some bird watching here. On one of my hikes I saw a **squirrel** of which I don't know the name.



squirrel

Paraty (28-10 t/m 30-10)

A very touristic and nice place, worth a visit. The harbor has some wetlands good for birds. Also nice to make a relaxing boat excursion where we were shown some ***lion marmosets*** on a small island which I believe were captive ones. Also good for frigates and brown boobies.



lion marmoset (probably captured)

Iguacu (1-11 t/m 3-11)

Both Argentinean and Brazilian sides are nice and slightly different. Great views and on the tracks easy spotting of **coati**, **agouti**. Also my first **cavy** just in front of the restaurant. A special little mammal is to mention it was a **species of opossum** (a shrew type light brown) that lives somewhere mostly on the ground in the moist part of the forest. A plate is shown on one of the trails it shows 3 types of them. I got to see two running on the ground but they were too quick to get good identification. Some nice birds here as well, but the falls are obvious the highlights. Many colored butterflies to be seen.



cavy (near restaurant Argentinean side)



coati (Iguacu)

TRIPLIST of Mammals

- 1 capybara (pantanal, amazon)**
- 2 marsh deer (pantanal)**
- 3 red brocket deer (pantanal)**
- 4 grey brocket deer (pantanal)**
- 5 pampas deer (bonito)**
- 6 giant anteater (pantanal and bonito)**
- 7 crab-eating eating racoon (pantanal)**
- 8 river otter (pantanal and amazon)**
- 9 giant otter (pantanal)**
- 10 coati (pantanal & rio & iguacu)**
- 11 crab-eating fox (pantanal)**
- 12 tapir (pantanal)**
- 13 maned wolf (pantanal)**
- 14 black howler monkey (pantanal, amazon)**
- 15 tufted capuchin (pantanal, amazon, rio)**
- 16 saki monky (amazon)**
- 17 azara's nightmonkey (amazon)**
- 18 paca (amazon)**
- 19 bamboorat (amazon)**
- 20 agouti (pantanal and iguacu)**
- 21 9 banded armadillo (pantanal and chapada guimaraes)**
- 22 pantanal marmoset (pantanal)**
- 23 tufted marmoset (rio)**
- 24 squirrel (ilha grande rio)**
- 25 feral pig (panatanal)**
- 26 colored peccary (pantanal)**
- 27 white lipped peccary (bonito)**
- 28 brasilian cottontale/rabbit (pantanal)**
- 29 unidentified pika like rodent (pantanal)**
- 30 opossum (Iguacu)**
- 31 cavy (Iguacu)**

Utrecht, 14 november 2012

Janco van Gelderen