



Wildwings

WILDWINGS BRAZILIAN JAGUAR TOUR – 5-19 SEPTEMBER 2004

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INTRODUCTION

Whenever a tour is run for the first time you always wonder whether it can live up to expectations. I can safely say that this tour certainly met expectations with 4 stunning Jaguars providing prolonged close-range views. With a supporting cast which included 4 Giant Anteaters (one at touching distance), 3-4 Maned Wolves, 2 Brazilian Tapirs, 4 encounters with Giant River Otters, Jaguarundi (for some), Paca, White-lipped & Collared Peccaries, 4 species of deer and 8 species of primate not to mention 248 species of bird including Brazilian Merganser with young we could not really have asked for more.

5TH SEPTEMBER

After a long overnight flight the group arrived in Sao Paulo at 0545 and despite Varig's best efforts to confuse matters by sending some people through customs and others directly to the connecting flight, the group finally met up with the Richard and Regina in the departure lounge ahead of our internal flight to Belo Horizonte.

After clearing customs in Belo and loading our bus it was somewhat bemusing to discover that the currency exchange desk had run out of local currency and that those of the party who had been unable to change money in Sao Paulo were still unable to do so. Fortunately Richard was able to come to everyone's aid offering a highly competitive commission-free exchange rate.

Financial issues now resolved the group finally set off for the long drive to Sao Roque de Minas although with the roads relatively clear (despite it being a holiday weekend) we made good progress. Stopping for lunch on route at a roadside churruscaria gave many people their first experience of Brazilian cuisine, a splendid buffet offering salads, vegetables and a range of cooked meats washed down by soft drinks or (for some) remarkably cheap beer.

After several hours on the road we left the tarmac just beyond Piumhi for our first experience of Brazilian dirt roads and approximately 20 km short of our final destination made a short birding stop at a roadside pool. Highlights included Brazilian Teal, Blackish & Grey-necked Wood Rails, White-headed Marsh Tyrant and Chestnut-capped Blackbird with two Red-legged Seriemas (a cross between a bustard and a secretary bird) nearby being an added

bonus. As we continued our journey a Great Horned Owl flew across the road as we neared Sao Roque.

After checking in at the comfortable Pousada Barcelos our base for the next 3 nights some took the opportunity to have a quick swim before we were out again for the first of three excellent dinners at Restaurante Zagaia.

6TH SEPTEMBER

Unable to sleep the insomniacs among the group were up at first light and a pre-breakfast birding session in the grounds of the pousada produced a number of species such as Plain-breasted Ground Dove, Glittering-bellied Emerald and Rusty-margined Flycatcher.

After breakfast we had our first experience of Phil & Roger's timekeeping, something we were to become well acquainted with during the remainder of the tour but eventually we were on the road at 0800 for our short but somewhat tortuous drive to the entrance of Parque Nacional da Serra da Canastra. Once in the park the road improved slightly but any remaining discomfort soon evaporated when Chris spotted our first Maned Wolf hunting about a kilometre from the road. After scoping and photographing the wolf from the road we started to carefully walk out across the grassland towards it. Fortunately the grass was fairly short making for relatively easy walking and the wind was in our favour so we were able to approach downwind. Pausing at regular intervals to avoid spooking the wolf, we eventually approached to within 30 metres of our quarry. Needless to say that the photographers were by now having a field day. At close range a short antennae and a discreet radio collar was visible and we later found out from the local researchers from Pro-Carnivora that the wolf was a first year male.

With the wolf receiving star billing a nearby male Cock-tailed Tyrant and a soaring Crowned Eagle did not receive the attention they really deserved. Flushed with success we drove on seeing our first Peach-fronted Parakeets and Burrowing Owl as we did so.

Turning on to one of the side roads we stopped at a recently burnt area with freshly emerging shoots and no sooner had Regina and Richard said that it might be a good area to see Pampas Deer then two were spotted 200-300 yards away. Once again with careful manoeuvring to ensure that we remained downwind of the deer we managed to approach them to within 50 metres and once again the photographers had ample opportunity to use up their film and/or memory card capacity much quicker than anticipated.

Two targets down one to go. Stopping at one of the smaller waterfalls in the park for a quick look for Brazilian Merganser proved fruitless with the river being heavily disturbed by swimmers but a picnic lunch stop nearby produced our first Great Black Hawk of the trip.

Scanning for Giant Anteater during the morning had proved fruitless although this is often the case as they tend to be late risers, and Richard clearly confident had said he'd eat his hat if the group did not see them during the day. As the day went on and the anteaters remained elusive he was offered various suggestions for hat recipes. After lunch an anteater was seen albeit briefly by Regina and Richard as it disappeared over a distant ridge and this simply added to our frustration. Eventually however Regina spotted a second anteater about 2 kilometres from the road. Again the wind was in our favour and blowing towards us and approaching to within a kilometre in the coach we then set out on foot across the grassland towards it. Approaching to within 20 metres the photographers were quickly in action again as the anteater fed totally unconcerned at our presence. Giant Anteaters have very poor eyesight and rely heavily on smell to detect threats, as evidenced by the way this individual regularly stuck its nose up in the air to check for danger, and as long we stayed downwind it showed no concern. Having had their fill some members of the group returned to the coach but others remained to approach the anteater closer still and eventually the roles were reversed with the anteater approaching us to within touching distance and at one stage even walking between members of the group.

Totally elated we returned to the bus and headed towards the top of the falls at Casca D'Anta. Unfortunately being a public holiday the falls were still busy and not surprisingly there was no sign of the hoped-for Brazilian Merganser although we did see a few new birds including Campo Flicker, Crested Black Tyrant and Chopi Blackbird. Heading back out of the park we saw another Giant Anteater and two Red-winged Tinamous and eventually arrived back at Pousada Barcelos just before 1900, nearly 11 hours after setting out, and after a highly successful first day in the field. After a chance for a rest and a swim at the pousada we returned to the Zagaia for another excellent meal.

7TH SEPTEMBER

After yesterday's success today was always going to be a challenge but the pre-breakfast birding around the pousada got the day off to a good start with no fewer than 4 species of hummingbird including the superb Swallow-tailed Hummingbird and the localised Stripe-breasted Starthroat. As we boarded the bus after breakfast for the drive to Casca D'Anta a nice White-eared Puffbird on a nearby telegraph aerial provided a pleasant distraction.

Driving south towards Vargem Bonita we made a number of short roadside stops for good views of Red-legged Seriema, Toco Toucan and a range of passerines including surprisingly our only Yellow-rumped Marshbirds of the trip. Approaching Vargem Bonita itself we stopped at the bridge over the Rio Sao Francisco and saw numerous species including White-eyed Parakeet, Swallow & Burnished-Buff Tanagers, Masked Gnatcatcher, Spix's Spinetail and Long-tailed Tyrant.

The remainder of the morning was spent making numerous stops along the Rio Sao Francisco between Vargem Bonita and the falls at Casca D'Anta but despite considerable effort we were unable to find the hoped for Brazilian Mergansers seen in this area recently. However a variety of interesting species were seen including three more Red-legged Seriemas, our first Amazon Kingfisher and our only Planalto Hermit and Least Nighthawk of the trip. Approaching Casca D'Anta we made a brief stop at an area of forest known to hold Black-tufted Marmoset but with no sight or sound of the marmosets we quickly moved on to Casca D'Anta.

Arriving at Casca D'Anta shortly after midday it was a surprise to find the car park relatively quiet given that it was a public holiday and we were able to have our picnic lunch at a peaceful spot on the banks of the river. After lunch while some chose to have a swim in the river the others headed to the foot of the falls with the trail producing a few notable birds including a stunning male Helmeted Manakin, and a Black-goggled Tanager and female White-shouldered Fire-eye on a small ant swarm. The falls themselves although an impressive sight were relatively birdless with amazingly no sign of any swifts at all.

Returning to the coach at 1430 we found that one of the skylights on the coach had become stuck in an open position and that this was negating the effect of the air-conditioning, the temperature gauge in the coach registering 38C. Fortunately however this simply provided an opportunity for Regina to demonstrate yet another of her many guiding skills and she quickly climbed on to the roof to rectify the situation.

The coach fixed we quickly moved on and at a short stop for ice creams at a nearby café proved highly beneficial but not necessarily for those wanting ice creams. The café had totally sold out of ice creams but the owner did know that a Brazilian Merganser had been seen on the river behind the café earlier in the day. To our delight, on reaching the river, we quickly found a female merganser with four young, and although they spent most of the time under the overhangs of the opposite bank they did at times perform in the middle of the river. Good views were had by all although I suspect that some members of the group found the nearby Toco Toucan, Lineated Woodpecker and immature Black-chested Buzzard-Eagle far more interesting.

Unfortunately we were unable to repeat our success again missing the Black-tufted Marmosets on the return to Sao Roque and we arrived back at Pousada Barcelos just after 1730 before transferring to Restaurante Zagaia for our final dinner in Sao Roque.

8TH SEPTEMBER

Largely a travelling day with the journey from Sao Roque to Santuario do Caraca taking over nine hours including stops. However the early birds managed to add Yellow-bellied Seedeater to the trip list at the pousada and another stop at the roadside pool on the way to Piumhi produced a nice Red-breasted Toucan and some photogenic Peach-fronted Parakeets. Arriving at Caraca shortly before 1800 we quickly transferred to our rooms although Richard had a bad fall twisting his right knee and badly spraining his left ankle.

After dinner at the monastery everyone made their way to the terrace to wait for the Maned Wolves to appear but by 2130 most had succumbed to the considerable colder temperatures than we had grown used to at Canastra and had retired to their rooms. Only a hardy few remained to see and photograph the Maned Wolf that finally appeared at 2200 (three hours later than the night before). Fortunately however they were to be far more obliging the next day.

9TH SEPTEMBER

The pre-breakfast session around the monastery proved productive with Guianan Squirrels, Dusky-legged Guans and a host of smaller birds including Velvety Black Tyrant, and Azure-shouldered, Sayaca, Magpie & White-lined Tanagers all providing excellent opportunities for photography. The first Azara's Agouti of the trip was briefly seen by Sue. However by now it was clear to see that Richard could hardly walk as a result of his fall the night before and he reluctantly decided to rest his by now heavily strapped ankle to give it a chance to recover for the rest of the trip.

After breakfast in the monastery Regina led the group off to look for Masked Titi Monkeys and the morning proved to be productive with no less than 4 groups (some with young) of this often elusive primate being seen along the Tanque Grande Trail together with a single Black-tufted Marmoset, the only one seen on the trip. Birding along the Tanque Grande and Piscina trails also proved productive with highlights including Serra Antwren, Swallow-tailed Cotinga, Cinnamon Piha and Swallow-tailed Manakin. Slaty-breasted Wood Rail and Blackish Rail were also seen.

After lunch back at the monastery there was ample opportunity for some of the group to rest while others took the opportunity to look around the immediate vicinity of the monastery. Towards the end of the afternoon Regina took some of the group out on another of the trails but as is often the case in the afternoons at Caraca this proved relatively quiet and little of note was seen before the group returned to the monastery for dinner.

While some of the group quickly returned to the terrace the early appearance of a Maned Wolf at 1930 brought dinner for the others to a premature end. Over the next hour and a half at least two if not three separate individuals came within feet of the group to feed on the meat put out by the monks. It was an interesting to see how long-legged they really are, something not really obvious in the long grass of Canastra. Needless to say this once again provided everyone with outstanding photographic opportunities as evidenced by the photographs below.

10TH SEPTEMBER

Another day spent largely on the road but an early start enabled those joining Richard on the terrace to add White-throated Hummingbird and Gilt-edged Tanager to the trip list. Meanwhile Regina (who had found to her surprise that it was light before 0600) led a highly successful early morning assault on the Piscina Trail where the stunning Hyacinth Visorbearer was quickly seen. Flushed with success they tried the Tanque Grande Trail for Surucua Trogon but unfortunately this proved less successful.

Much of the remainder of the day was spent travelling towards Ipanema in eastern Minas Gerais, the base for our visit to Estacao Biologica de Caratinga the following day. As we left

the park and came back into the range of the mobile phones a text arrived advising us of England's victory in the World Cup qualifier in Poland and brought a smile to many faces, not least Richard's, although Tom was decidedly less impressed with Scotland's result.

Breaking the long drive with a brief visit to Sitio Graciema a privately-owned finca just to the west of Manhuaca provided the unexpected bonus of a close encounter with a habituated group of at least 12 Geoffroy's Marmosets down to a few feet. This population which now consists of at least 24 individuals originates from an introduction of two individuals in the late 1980s. Unfortunately however there is some evidence that the growth in the population of the Geoffroy's Marmosets may be impacting on the local population of Black-tufted Marmosets as there is some evidence of hybridisation between the two populations.

Arriving at Hotel Italia Palace in Ipanema by early evening we were quickly joined at our hotel by a FocusTours group and their stories of recent sightings of Jaguar, Ocelot, Margay and Giant Armadillo in the Pantanal quickly whetted out appetites for the week ahead.

However we still had things to see in Minas Gerais and the first of these a Great Potoo was sitting on a lamppost in the town square as we made our way to dinner at the nearby Hotel Vasconcelos. John quickly decided (somewhat tongue in cheek) that the potoo was actually stuffed and had been put there by locals but the presence of droppings below the lamppost (plus the fact that it moved its head the following evening when we saw it again) finally convinced him it was for real.

The Hotel Vasconcelos provided an excellent dinner, and although the roll of the table left a bit to be desired, also turned out to be the first venue for what became a long series of pool challenges between Roger & Phil and Richard and Tom/John.

After an early breakfast we were out on the road by 0715 for the hour long drive to the Estacao Biologica de Caratinga (Caratinga Biological Reserve), a private reserve set up to protect the largest surviving population of Northern Muriqui (Northern Woolly Spider Monkey). It also provides a refuge for three other threatened primates and a wide range of other mammals and birds.

A short stop on route produced a pair of stunning Streamer-tailed Tyrants (surprisingly scarce this year) and we saw our first primates a family group of Brown Howlers even before we reached the research station.

On reaching the research station we quickly made contact with the researchers following the largest troop of Muriquis in the reserve to discover that they were within walking distance of the end of the main track. Returning to the bus we drove as close as we could to where the Muriquis were before setting off on foot towards one of the remnant patches of Atlantic rainforest within the reserve with Roberto, one of the staff at the research station. Maintaining radio contact with the researchers we obtained our first glimpses of Muriqui shortly after entering the forest. Unfortunately they were feeding on the far side of a small gully but with support particularly from Phil & Roger who helped people up the other side of the gully, we quickly crossed this barrier and soon found ourselves among a large troop of c.80 Muriquis. We saw about 30 ourselves. Over the next hour we had outstanding views of them down to a few metres, so close that times we had to take evasive action to avoid being urinated on or being hit by fruit thrown at us from above. One particular Muriqui apparently related to Shane Warne both in appearance and bowling accuracy was particularly accurate and managed to hit John on the head with laser precision. After a highly satisfying hour with the Muriquis we thanked the researchers for their help and left them to continue their long-term study of the Muriquis in peace.

Leaving the forest we briefly returned to the bus for refreshment before heading back down the main track on foot in search of capuchins and marmosets. Regina (ably assisted by Eileen) set off ahead to prepare lunch, while Richard walked slowly back with the rest of the group seeing 2 more groups of Brown Howler, several Scaled Antbirds and a couple of female White-bearded Manakins on route.

After an excellent lunch with a nice Rufous-tailed Jacamar for company some of the group set off for a brief sortie near the research station and were rewarded with nice views of two Black-necked Aracaris. Returning to the research station to meet up with the remainder of the group we then headed back up the main track. Splitting into two groups to cover more ground the value of the CBs again became quickly evident as Regina found a single Black Capuchin (formerly a sub-species of the widespread Brown Capuchin). The two groups quickly became one again and the capuchin proved to be the forerunner of a group of about 10 capuchins although this group did not provide particularly good opportunities for photographs.

Delighted at yet another success we headed back to the bus in order to visit another area in search of the elusive marmosets. However this plan was quickly shelved as another group of capuchins appeared by the main track as we drove out of the reserve. This group proved to be far more photogenic and the bus quickly emptied again. While most of the group watched and photographed the capuchins Richard walked ahead and found further troops of capuchins and howlers (or wailers as they became known by one member of the group) which provided yet further photographic opportunities. Eventually time caught up with us and we headed back to the bus for the journey back to Ipanema but even then Eileen found another group of howlers as we headed out of the reserve.

Another nice dinner at Hotel Vasconcelos, with Great Potoo again seen on route, rounded off another terrific day. We had been extremely lucky to see such a large troop of Northern Muriqui so easily and can only hope that the work of Eduardo and his team at Caratinga will help preserve the forest that they depend on for their survival.

12TH SEPTEMBER

After the exertions of the previous day the 12th was decidedly restful. Thoughts of a short pre-breakfast marmoset hunt had been scrapped the night before so after a late breakfast we set off for the long drive back to Belo Horizonte. The drive was largely uneventful although a roadside Red-legged Seriema near Ipanema was unexpected.

Arriving back at the airport by late afternoon we quickly checked in for our flight to the Cuiaba and the Pantanal and retired to the small park opposite the terminal. This proved considerably cooler and more comfortable than the terminal building and provided a base for forays to souvenir shops, banks cafes etc. Tom's visit to the souvenir shop even added Long-nosed Bat to the trip list. We were also able to catch up on the previous day's Premiership results. Unfortunately Arsenal were still unbeaten although at least Roger was happy.

Catching our flight to Cuiaba via Sao Paulo at 1900 we finally arrived in Cuiaba half an hour later than scheduled at 2300 after two flights and a one-hour time change. Following a quick transfer to the Amazon Plaza Hotel (a bit of a misnomer in the Pantanal) everyone quickly headed to bed with high expectations of the week ahead in the Pantanal.

13TH SEPTEMBER

After our late night arrival in Cuiaba a later start was the order of the day and we left the hotel in our air-conditioned coach at 0800. By 0930 having already seen Greater Rhea in roadside fields on route we reached Pocone at the start of the Transpantaneira. At Pocone we left the comfort of the tarmac and headed south on the gravel and sand of the Transpantaneira reaching the entrance to the Pantanal itself half an hour later.

From here on the richness of this huge ecosystem was clear for everyone to see and after a short stop for a roadside Marsh Deer (a species that we were to see on numerous occasions over the next week) we made a longer stop to view and photograph the wealth of waterbirds and birds of prey on some roadside pools. Species seen included Jabiru, Maguari & Wood Storks, Great & Snowy Egrets, Little Blue Heron, Rufescent Tiger Heron, Snail Kite, Black-collared & Savanna Hawks, Black Skimmer, Large-billed Tern and our first Yellow-billed Cardinals. Rather more unexpected was the small group of Collared Peccaries which briefly came out of a patch of forest to drink from one of the pools.

Continuing south we made a brief stop at Araras Ecolodge before continuing on our way to Pixaim with further stops for Grey Brocket Deer (subsequently proved to be a tame individual from the lodge), a brief Red Brocket Deer and an amazing South American Coati which performed at close range on and near the road to the delight of everyone.

Eventually arriving at the Beira Rio Hotel at Pixaim at 1315 we quickly had lunch before checking in to our rooms. After lunch while some took the opportunity to have a rest in or around the pool others chose to spend time watching and photographing the wealth of birds in and around the hotel itself. These included Ringed Kingfisher, Yellow-billed Cardinal, Bay-winged Cowbird, Shiny & Giant Cowbirds, Purplish Jay and Crested (Southern) Caracara.

By 1530 everyone was fully refreshed and we set off for a two-hour excursion on the adjacent Rio Pixaim. The trip lived up to expectations with a wealth of waterbirds as well as the first of many Bare-faced Curassows, being seen as we headed away from the hotel. Brief views of two Neotropical River Otters provided a further appetiser but these were quickly superseded as the main course a family group of at least 9 Giant River Otters appeared. The latter performed superbly swimming literally right up to the boat often even too close for photographs. Over a period of 45 minutes we enjoyed the otters at close range both in and out of the water and many people began to realise that they were in danger of running out of film.

While the otters were clearly the star turn birds such Blue-crowned Trogon, Great Antshrike, White-lored Spinetail, and Ringed, Amazon, Green & Pygmy Kingfishers also vied for our attention. After leaving the otters and seeing our first Greater Fishing Bats and Band-tailed Nighthawks over the river we returned to the hotel for an early dinner.

The day had already exceeded most peoples' expectations but there was more to come and while the spotlights were set up on our new vehicle, an open back safari-style truck, a Great Horned Owl performed on a telegraph pole right by the hotel. Spotlights attached we were soon back out on the road for our first spotlighting session on the Transpantaneira around Pixaim. Compared to our two recesses the road was relatively quiet but we still managed to see Common Potoo, two Crab-eating Foxes and two Crab-eating Raccoons.

When we eventually returned to the hotel although tired most agreed that rather than being unlucky for some the 13th had actually been lucky for us and an excellent start to our stay in the Pantanal.

14TH SEPTEMBER

An early pre-breakfast start saw some of the group heading back out on the river with Regina for a further encounter with the Giant River Otters and the added bonus of more prolonged views of a Neotropical River Otter. Meanwhile Linda and Sue took a walk with Richard on a trail behind the hotel. The hoped for Pantanal Marmosets proved elusive but a good range of birds was seen including Golden-collared Macaw, Helmeted Manakin, Chestnut-bellied Guan, Rufous Cachalote, Great & Barred Antshrikes, Mato Grosso Antbird and Rusty-fronted Tody-Flycatcher. A nice Great Horned Owl was found near the hotel itself.

After a buffet breakfast at the hotel we were on the road again for the long drive to Porto Jofre. The first leg of the drive was relatively quiet although Marsh Deer, a brief Neotropical River Otter, our first Black-striped Capuchins (another split from Brown Capuchin) and increasing numbers of Pantanal Caiman were seen as we approached Pousada Jaguar for lunch. Bird wise our first Hyacinth Macawa (surely the world's most impressive parrot), Yellow-chevroned & Monk Parakeets and several Sunbitterns livened up a sometimes bumpy journey.

Following a stop for lunch at Pousada Jaguar and a chance for a rest we were back on the road again for the final stretch to Porto Jofre. The drive remained relatively quiet but Marsh & Red Brocket Deer, lots of Capybara and our first Black (and Gold) Howlers provided light relief and a cow impersonating a Puma caused some amusement.

Continuing south as we approached Porto Jofre the state of some of the 128 wooden bridges that you cross as you traverse the Transpantaneira became increasingly interesting and more than a few raised eyebrows surfaced. However having been assured by Regina and Richard that the bridges are perfectly safe and regularly crossed by vehicles much larger and heavier than ours (as we were to witness ourselves later in the trip) we pushed on with our driver skilfully negotiating each of the bridges we crossed.

Eventually arriving in Porto Jofre shortly after 1700 we quickly checked in and some started their exploration of the hotel grounds complete with Hyacinth Macaws, Bare-faced Curassow and a wide range of additional species. The adjacent lake held a wide range of waterbirds including Pied Lapwing. Richard & Regina meanwhile discovered that the driver of the minibus carrying our luggage to Porto Jofre had seen a Jaguar on route. Aagh!

After dinner and having already re-confirmed our boat reservation for the following day our frustration intensified as we discovered that the hotel had re-let our boat to another group. Despite Regina and Richard's protestations and best attempts to find an alternative boat in the nearby village we had to resign ourselves to going out in the boat later than planned. Little were we to know what an advantage this would prove to be.

Putting these disappointments to one side we were soon out again spotlighting along the road to the north of Porto Jofre but this proved disappointing partly due to the unusually early grass burning along the nearby Rio Cuiaba. This made spotlighting difficult with lots of small dust particles in the air and having only seen a Red Brocket Deer and a domestic cat we gave up somewhat earlier than planned.

15TH SEPTEMBER

There are some days when things just go amazingly well and this was certainly one of those.

While some took advantage of the non-availability of the boat to have a lie-in Richard led a short pre-dawn walk near the hotel with Reg, Sue and Roger. Although cats remained elusive a Blue-throated Piping Guan being pursued by a Long-winged Harrier entertained us as it sought protection by landing within a few yards of us. The strategy worked with the harrier immediately giving up the chase.

After breakfast we headed north again on the Transpantaneira as we waited for our boat to return. Seeing little more than we had yesterday afternoon we returned to the hotel by 1030 and decided to catch up on the log for the previous day. As we did so the hijacked boat reappeared and Regina set off to see if they had seen anything interesting. Minutes later she was back with the news that they had seen two Jaguars 40 minutes from the hotel and we quickly arranged a Jaguar twitch rapidly finishing the log as the boat was re-fuelled.

Ensuring that we were well protected with sun block, sun hats and long-sleeved shirts we set out on the boat with the 115 horse power engine coming into its own as our boatman quickly covered the ground to the area along the Rio Piquiri where the cats had been seen. As we approached the area and after a few anxious moments scanning the riverbanks Tom spotted the first Jaguar sitting in the shade of a bush with Regina spotting the second nearby shortly afterwards. The delight of everyone was clear to see and for the next 20 minutes we watched and photographed both animals at close range as they moved along the bank our boatman carefully manoeuvring the boat to enable us to continue drifting past them with the engine turned off. After losing both animals in riverside vegetation we continued slightly upstream and waited for 10 minutes before slowly drifting back downstream. Once again the strategy worked and both cats reappeared on a nearby sand bank and continued to give superb views for another 30 minutes. Eventually Richard, concerned that the Jaguars were moving around too much in the midday heat decided that they should be left in peace and we headed back to the hotel even arriving back in time for a celebratory drink and lunch. No one anticipated that this was only the appetiser and that there was better to come later in the day!

From our views and examination of the photographs taken they appeared to be a pregnant female with a young one probably a male from a previous litter.

After a short post-lunch siesta or for some a pool challenge, we set out again in the boat hoping for a repeat performance. We were not disappointed.

Shortly after re-entering the Rio Piquiri the day got even better as Regina spotted a huge adult male Jaguar lying flat out on the bank. Again carefully manoeuvring the boat to maximise the opportunities for photography we approached the male to within a few metres. After a few minutes lying out flat it briefly rose to its feet only to quickly sit down again to watch us as we sat watching it for another 30 minutes.

After gorging ourselves on the male we decided to return to look for the original Jaguars but within 5 minutes we found ourselves watching a Brazilian Tapir at the water's edge. Unfortunately the tapir did not linger and quickly disappeared into the forest so we pushed on upstream and quickly re-found the two Jaguars on the bank about 500 metres from their original location. Yet again we had amazing close range views and film, video and memory card all took another serious pounding.

Eventually we left them to return to the hotel. On our way back a flotilla of fishing boats returning from a day on the river had also discovered the male sitting on the bank but by the time we reached them it had disappeared into the forest, perhaps not surprising given the noise made by the fishermen.

We returned to the hotel for dinner even more elated than we had done 4 hours earlier, how many people can claim to have seen three separate Jaguars and a Brazilian Tapir within 25 minutes?

Given that our luck was in we decided to try the Transpantaneira again for Ocelot but this was pushing our luck a bit too far and we returned to the hotel Ocelot-less but ecstatic at possibly the best day's Jaguar watching ever.

16th September

After yesterday's excitement it would have been easy to sit back and take it easy but three hardy souls again joined Richard at 0500 for a pre-breakfast walk which produced a troop of Black-striped Capuchin and a few nice birds including a Laughing Falcon.

After breakfast we headed out on the water again this time to another tributary of the Rio Cuiaba where Richard and Regina had seen a large male Jaguar on several previous trips. Although our search was unsuccessful a group of Black (and Gold) Howlers provided some compensation and a male Long-winged Harrier performed nicely for us as we headed back towards the Rio Piquiri.

Astonishingly within minutes of entering the Piquiri we struck gold again Chris spotting a different (presumed) female Jaguar at the water's edge. Unlike yesterday's cats this individual proved far more mobile and appeared to be hunting along the river. We followed her keeping further offshore than we had done yesterday as she moved nearly a kilometre upstream. Although more difficult to photograph as she continually moved in and out of the riverside vegetation we still managed to obtain excellent photographs and video.

Eventually we lost her in the riverside forest and landed briefly on the opposite riverbank for a comfort stop only for a shout of 'Tiger' to alert us to the fact that she was standing on the bank opposite us watching her intently. She then disappeared into the forest and although we waited for another half-hour we never saw her again.

Content with another excellent morning's Jaguar viewing we returned to the hotel for lunch but not before a group of three Giant River Otters appeared briefly in front of the boat.

After a well-deserved rest we set off north again heading for Pousada Jaguar. The Transpantaneira was quiet again but a short excursion along the Santa Isabel Road produced three Azara's Agouti before we headed to the pousada for dinner. Sufficiently revived by the excellent meal, not to mention the champagne generously provided by John to toast the Jaguars, we set off on a long spotlighting session back to Porto Jofre. Starting off along the Santa Isabel Road proved fortuitous with a Paca (a lifer for Richard and only Regina's second) being seen early on. A larger, spotted, relative of the agouti Pacas are rarely seen anywhere and this was a real bonus. Continuing along the road a small unidentified cat was seen briefly by Richard & Tom but unfortunately it disappeared as we reversed towards it. Adding to the frustration as we sat waiting for the cat to reappear a large mammal crashed around in the forest on the opposite side of the road but refused to show itself.

As we reached the end of Santa Isabel Road a Crab-eating Fox was seen and the journey back produced brief views of a Nine-banded Armadillo crossing the track and good views of Pauraque and Spot-tailed Nightjar. Given the good start it might have been expected that we would continue to see things as we returned to Porto Jofre but somewhat surprisingly the sightings again dried up and we arrived back at the hotel somewhat earlier than expected.

17TH SEPTEMBER

The early morning walk was abandoned today due to lack of interest and after breakfast we packed our bags to head north to Pousada Jaguar. As we left the hotel a Bare-faced Curassow posed on the roof of the cab in order to have its photo taken with Regina.

The drive north produced a few more Black (& Gold) Howlers and Marsh Deer. Nearing the pousada the guys took a short walk along a trail at the start of the Santa Isabel Road in another unsuccessful search for Pantanal Marmoset although a few new birds were seen including Black-fronted Nunbird, Buff-throated Woodcreeper and Stripe-necked Tody-Tyrant. The ladies in hindsight sensibly headed straight for the pousada.

After lunch a short search for Black-striped Capuchins most people retired to their rooms for an early afternoon siesta but by 1530 half the group were back out in the field walking the Santa Isabel Road with Richard. Two groups of Black-striped Capuchins were seen together with amazing numbers of curassows, guans and chachalacas suggesting that there is very little hunting pressure in the area. New additions to the trip list included Undulated Tinamou, Hooded Tanager and two more Azara's Agoutis were seen.

Meanwhile the remaining members of the group having elected to have a longer rest followed on the truck with Regina. On meeting the group on foot John joined the walkers with Reg & Sue joining the truck riders as it continued further down Santa Isabel Road. Shortly after stopping to wait for the walkers those on the truck were in luck as a Jaguarundi crossed the road in front of the truck. Unfortunately however it did not linger long enough for the walkers to see it and even some people on the truck missed it such was its rapid passage.

With the walkers back on board the truck continued to the end of Santa Isabel Road before spotlighting back to the pousada. The spotlighting proved disappointing with a small group of Nacunda Nighthawk the only species of note. On reaching the pousada the owners informed us that not only had a Jaguar been seen nearby at 1700 but we had just missed a Yellow Anaconda which had crossed the lawn twice shortly prior to our arrival. Although frustrated we pushed on having another short spotlighting session to the north of the pousada before returning to the pousada for dinner.

After discussions at dinner with the local guides at Pousada Jaguar it was decided to abandon the after-dinner spotlighting session in favour of an early session the following day and everyone retired to bed earlier than normal.

18TH SEPTEMBER

And an early start it was with six hardy souls plus two leaders up and raring to go at 0230 while the others perhaps sensibly remained asleep. Unfortunately although we tried areas both north and south of the pousada including Santa Isabel Road, we could only find Red Brocket Deer and Brazilian Rabbit as Ocelot continued to elude us. As dawn broke Richard, Tom, Phil & Roger decided to walk along the Santa Isabel Road while the others returned to the pousada. The latter did manage to see a distant cat on the road as they approached the pousada but unfortunately the views were inconclusive.

The walkers meanwhile missed a Brazilian Tapir by minutes, its tracks overlaying the tracks of the truck which had dropped them off a few minutes earlier. They did however see two South American Coatis, Azara's Agouti, Undulated Tinamou and had excellent views of Golden-collared Macaw.

After breakfast a short walk on the trail at the start of Santa Isabel Road again failed to produce Pantanal Marmoset and by 1045 we were on the road again heading north to Pixaim. As we approached Pixaim Regina spotted a White-lipped Peccary (the larger relative of the Collared Peccary seen earlier in the trip) on the edge of the forest and a few minutes later a second individual appeared. Nearby the amount of tooth-clacking (the noise made by the peccaries when they are nervous) coming from the adjacent forest suggested that they were only two of a much larger group of peccaries hidden away in the forest. White-lipped Peccaries normally travel in large herds (or sounders) consisting of up to 200 individuals. With another unexpected species under the belt we reached Pixaim in time for lunch before checking in to our rooms and a well-deserved siesta although Roger and Phil (two of the early risers) still had enough energy for a unsuccessful search for Helmeted Manakin near the hotel

By 1600 the group were in the field again with six people joining Regina for another boat trip on the Rip Pixaim although heading off in the opposite direction to the previous two trips proved to be less successful. Meanwhile the other four and Richard walked the trail behind the hotel and quickly had superb views of a group of at least 4 South American Coatis. One individual proved to be particularly inquisitive as it investigated Richard's squeaking. Continuing further on the trail produced nice views of Black-striped Capuchins but little else.

With the two groups becoming one again we set off on a pre-dinner spotlighting session to the south of Pixaim but one Red Brocket Deer was a poor return and we were back at the hotel for the farewell dinner at 2000.

Refreshed by the food a still enthusiastic group of eight including the leaders set off for a final stab at Ocelot while two decided to catch up on their sleep and John and Eileen went clubbing with the minibus driver and his wife. Although Ocelot continued to elude us it proved to be probably the most exciting and eventful spotlighting session of the trip with 2 Crab-eating Foxes, 4 Crab-eating Raccoons, Red Brocket Deer and Great and Common Potoo all being seen as we headed north. The journey back was even better with another fox, two more raccoons, excellent views of a Giant Anteater and best of all superb views of a Brazilian Tapir found by Regina. To add to the fun the truck broke down twice as the battery succumbed to the pressure of long hours of spotlighting and on the second occasion the vehicle had to be bump started.

Highly satisfied we returned to the hotel and there was still time for the final two frames of the Predatours Pool Challenge. Unfortunately although the frames were shared Phil & Roger triumphed by one frame overall.

19TH SEPTEMBER

The final day dawned with Phil & Roger up remarkably early but unfortunately dipping again on Helmeted Manakin before breakfast. After our final breakfast we headed north for our final excursion in the truck seeing two groups of South American Coati and three Marsh Deer on our way to Araras Ecolodge. On arrival at the lodge we had time for a walk along the boardwalk to the impressive tower hide. The hide itself produced views of 3 Giant River Otters

and another White-lipped Peccary while the boardwalk was productive with some highly photogenic Black-striped Capuchins, 3 Black & Gold Howlers and an excellent selection of birds including a stunning Blond-crested Woodpecker.

Although Pantanal Marmosets were heard from the tower hide and from a trail behind the lodge they remained elusive to the end and we returned to the lodge for lunch with a tame Grey Brocket Deer for company. Changing into our travel gear we transferred back to the coach for the return to Cuiaba with another five Marsh Deer being seen as we headed towards the airport.

Arriving back at Cuiaba mid-afternoon we checked in for flights to various destinations in Brazil and the UK bringing a highly successful inaugural Predatours Jaguar tour to a conclusion.

It is difficult to imagine bettering our encounters with Jaguars or our views of Giant Anteater, Maned Wolf and Giant River Otter and our final species list exceeded my expectations despite the absence of Ocelot and Buffy-headed and Pantanal Marmosets. Why the bottom end of the Transpantaneira proved so disappointing for spotlighting this year will remain a mystery given that 5 Jaguars and 4 Ocelots were seen on this stretch during the two recesses but it does show that looking for cats can be as frustrating as it is exciting.

Finally it must be said that without Regina's fantastic contribution the trip would not have been such a success and I am extremely grateful for the tremendous effort that she made to ensure the success of this trip. Let's hope we can repeat the success in 2005 and beyond.

**RICHARD WEBB
SEPTEMBER 2004**

Species	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
Nine-banded Armadillo <i>Dasypus novemcinctus</i>												1			
Giant Anteater <i>Myrmecophaga tridactyla</i>		3												1	
Forest (Brazilian) Rabbit <i>Sylvilagus brasiliensis</i>										1			2		
Guianan Squirrel <i>Sciurus aestuans</i>					5+	10+									
Paca <i>Agouti paca</i>												1			
Azara's Agouti <i>Dasyprocta azarai</i>					1							3	3	2	
Capybara <i>Hydrochaeris hydrochaeris</i>									25+	100+	c.50	100+	100+	100+	20+
Jaguarundi <i>Felis yagouarondi</i>													1		
Jaguar <i>Panthera onca</i>											3	1			
Maned Wolf <i>Chrysocyon brachyurus</i>		1		1	2-3										
Crab-eating Fox <i>Cerdocyon thous</i>									2			1		3	
Neotropical River Otter <i>Lutra longicaudis</i>									2	3					
Giant Otter <i>Pteronura brasiliensis</i>									9+	6+		3			3
South American Coati <i>Nasua nasua</i>									1					6	5
Crab-eating Raccoon <i>Procyon cancrivorous</i>									2					6	
Long-nosed Bat <i>Rhynchonycteris naso</i>								1							
Lesser Fishing (Bulldog) Bat <i>Noctilio albiventris</i>												100s		1	
Greater Fishing (Bulldog) Bat <i>Noctilio leporinus</i>										2		100s			
"Pantanal" Marmoset (yet to be formally described)															H
Geoffroy's Marmoset <i>Callithrix geoffroyi</i>						12+									
Black-tufted Marmoset <i>Callithrix penicillata</i>					1										
Black-striped Capuchin <i>Cebus libidinosus</i>										10	2	4	10+	4	15
Black Capuchin <i>Cebus nigritus</i>															
Masked Titi (Monkey) <i>Callicebus personatus</i>					10+	3									
Northern Muriqui <i>Brachyteles hypoxanthus</i>															
Black (and Gold) Howler Monkey <i>Alouatta caraya</i>										c20	4	5			3
Brown Howler Monkey <i>Aloatta guariba</i>															
Collared Peccary <i>Tayassus tajacu</i>									8						
White-lipped Peccary <i>Tayassu pecari</i>														2+	1
Pampas Deer <i>Ozotoceros bezoarticus</i>		2													
Red Brocket <i>Mazama americana</i>									1	2			1	3	
Gray Brocket <i>Mazama gouazoubira</i>									1						1
Marsh Deer <i>Blastocerus dichotomous</i>									5	5	1		1	3	8
Brazilian Tapir <i>Tapirus terrestris</i>								1						1	