

A search for mammals, birds and (briefly) stolen property in -

Bolivia

30th May to 7th July 2002

Dave Sheils and Steve Anyon-Smith

*What follows are some general observations, a diary, and a bird and mammal list.
In this report there is also a special section on what it's like to be robbed of all your
valuables and what you have to do about it.*



Areas visited

Trinidad area – Rio Ibore (3 days) and Blanco y Negro Reserve (6 days)

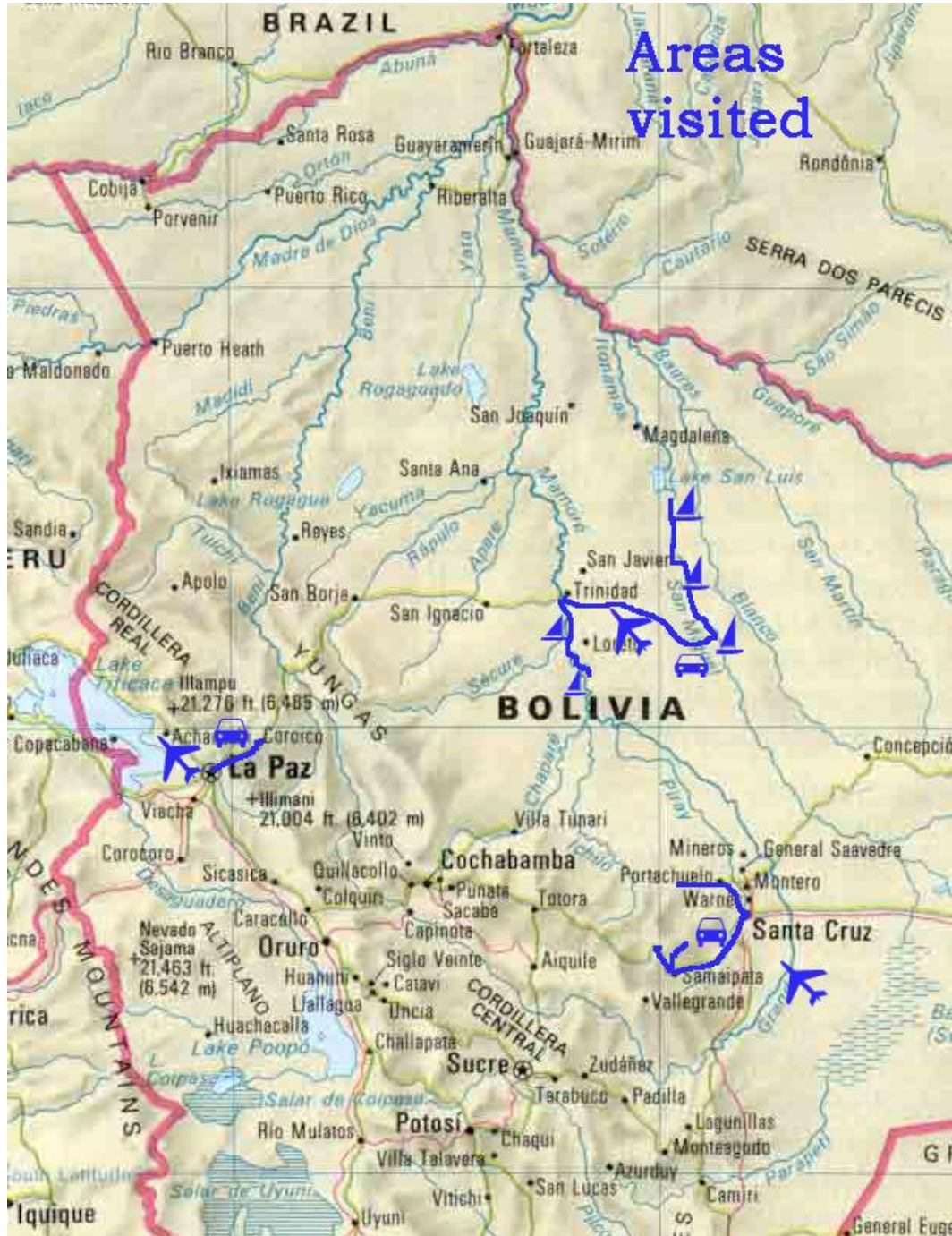
La Paz – 3 days

Coroico – 6 wet days

Samaipata – 7 days

Amboro NP – Matarucu – 7 days

Santa Cruz – 3 days



Some observations

People

Locals

I came away from Bolivia with a confused impression of Bolivian people. A skeptic might say my opinions were clouded by making a sizable involuntary donation to the local economy, but the reality is that there were such a mixture of locals that it was difficult to form a general impression, so I have put people into boxes.....

<i>Lowland people acting as themselves</i> There was a very distinct difference between lowland and highland people in appearance and character. The lowland ones were charming, helpful and relaxed. None did anything quickly, but considering the climate this was not really possible (see weather, below).	<i>Lowland people acting as guides</i> All our lowland guides from Trinidad, San Pablo and Buena Vista were fabulous, skilled and really helpful. And they could all cook. They deserved all they could get from life, which, I suspect, is not a whole lot, considering.....
<i>Highland people acting as themselves</i> Exceeding boring except when they had been drinking, when they rapidly ascended the Interesting Meter	<i>Highland people wanting to sell you something</i> Suddenly they had a tongue in their head.
<i>Taxi drivers who thought you had just arrived</i> Marginally wealthier than they should have been	<i>Taxi drivers who thought you had been in a taxi before</i> Real human beings. Chatty, always interesting and out to please. The taxis were something else, though.

<p><i>The women of Trinidad</i></p> <p>What can I say, Trinidad must surely be the World's last undiscovered paradise? Now I know where "Tarzan and The Amazons" was filmed, except now they have better diets and they are in living colour (a nice colour too).</p>	<p><i>Alleged Peruvians who have suddenly become wealthy</i></p> <p>In South America it is very fashionable to blame all bad things on those who have just arrived in the country but should be living across a border somewhere. It doesn't really matter which border. But for the moment I'll consider the "new rich" in La Paz as locals. Needless to say if you have an address for these guys let me know. I wouldn't mind some of my property back.</p>
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Ex-pats

The ex-pats were almost as diverse as the locals. Without exception I didn't entirely trust the stated reasons any of them gave for living in Bolivia. They all agreed on only one thing – they couldn't work with Bolivians. This will be explored later. Nevertheless they all loved to have an intelligent conversation with other Westerners. Most of them chatted with me as well. None appeared to stay sober for very long.

Aerolineas Argentinas employees

All welcome for drinks on Steve and Mayette's balcony any time. Bloody fabulous people.

The guy at the airport tax counter at Buenos Aires airport

He can have drinks and stay the night as well – see diary entry for 5th July.



Weather

One thing you can say about Bolivia is that they know how to put on some weather. I think the fact that they are land-locked has given them an excuse to get all the left-over bits of weather from all the surrounding countries. When you get a southerly change in Bolivia it is a real southerly change, none of this crap where it cools off just a bit. One minute you're dying of heat exhaustion, next thing you know all the cows have frozen solid.

The lowland Amazon section was very uncomfortable to walk around in at any time but more particularly after sunrise. Travelling along the rivers in canoes was great, especially at night. How anyone lives in this area defies understanding.

Prepare for everything.

Insects

Now here's some scope. It would be easy to tell the truth and scare away any potential tourist, including myself. The list of horrible things that can happen on account of the insects is endless. As it turned out, we got covered in bites. In some places, particularly around Trinidad, the biters, mainly mosquitoes, were present in truly biblical numbers. In other sites, like lowland Amboro National Park, there are none but you get covered in bites just the same. Nevertheless we escaped with no more than an interesting collection of bite-mark patterns.

The insects did not present a compelling reason not to go to Bolivia.

Food

The food was generally very good, varied, inexpensive and able to be digested in the normal way. We had one or two half-day "events" but nothing special. We were warned about going near anything that might have even remotely come into contact with "water" in Trinidad. The water supply and drainage system has more wildlife living in it than the rest of the Amazon Basin. We had to be absolutely certain that any water heated for coffee or whatever had been boiled for at least two weeks, then we threw it away and had one of the excellent beers instead (see below).

Restaurant food was generally excellent. The average cost for a main course in a better restaurant was about \$A6. Three-course buffet meals in good restaurants were about \$A4. Fresh fruit was freely given away when we were anywhere remote from towns, or otherwise we had to bring a wheelbarrow to carry a dollar's worth of fruit.

Beer

There were two types – cold and warm. Both proved to be efficacious, nutritious, reasonably inexpensive and readily available anywhere. They could do some work on the labels though. Perhaps they could put pictures of political candidates on them, although I am not sure that this would have increased sales.



Transport

We sampled most types with the exception of the mode commonly used by the Menonites.

Planes – internal flights were inexpensive, eg Trinidad to La Paz \$A80, or La Paz to Santa Cruz \$A130. The major carriers are AeroSur and LAB. They both fly 40 year old Boeing 727s. They all left and arrived on time. As far as the catering was concerned, if you're lucky you would get a stale bread roll to consider throwing at someone.

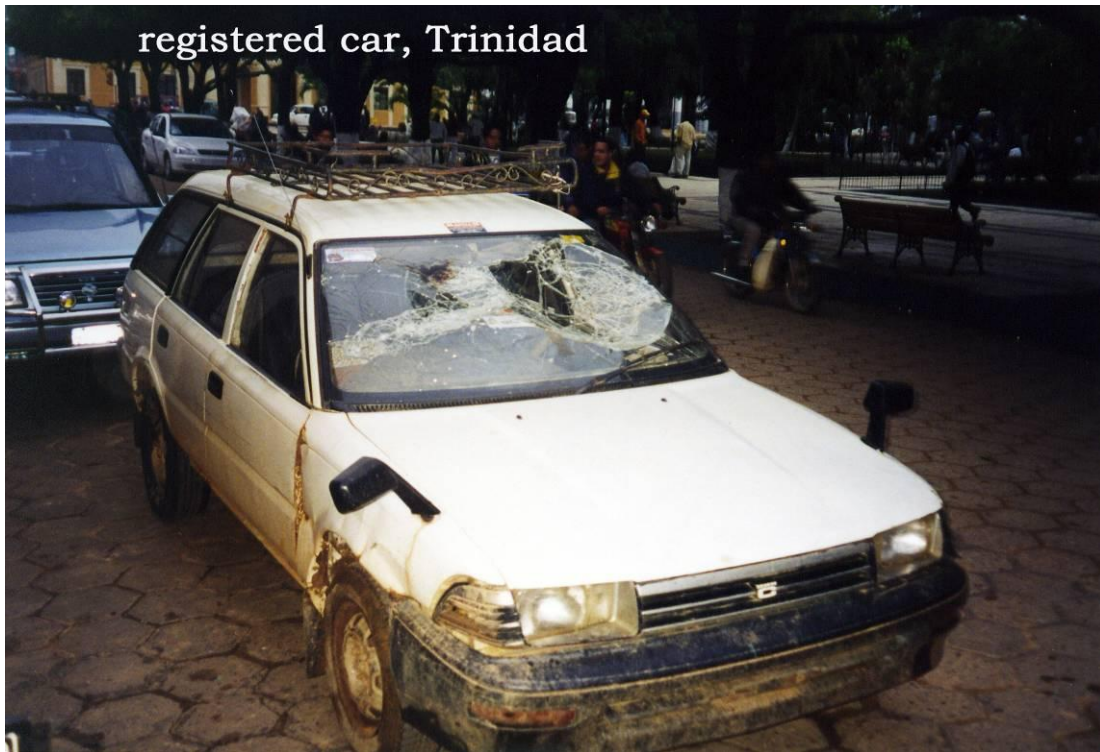
Buses – most were ex-US school buses. They are almost free to travel on but you had better not be in a hurry.

Long-distance taxis – brilliant idea. These were Toyota Corollas that had previously been driven in Japan so they had the steering wheel on the left mounted through the glove box and all the other instruments on the right. The fact that the driver would need to read the instruments in a different part of the vehicle was not important. Firstly they didn't work, and secondly they would have provided no useful information likely to be acted upon if they did.

Nevertheless, this transport option, where available, was very cheap, very fast and no more likely to bring you harm than any other mode of travel.

Local taxis – these were exactly the same as the long-distance ones. Very cheap if you speak Spanish. Less so if you don't. Never try to get change from a taxi driver. Always hoard coins for this reason.

Walking – forget it. It's too far or too hot or too cold or too many insects.



Costs generally

Bolivia is a very inexpensive country in which to travel if you don't get robbed. A two star plus hotel in La Paz or Santa Cruz cost us about \$A35 per twin. Cheaper hotels abound and accommodation in smaller towns is much cheaper.

We engaged several tour operators (see below for details). The standard cost per person for two people seemed to be about \$A55 per person per day for everything – transport, guides, food etc. The standard of service in terms of reliability, quality and the knowledge of guides was high. We had no problems on any of our tours.

Tour operators – details

All tour prices below were for two people travelling only, and not as part of a larger group.

International flights were booked with Antonio Nava at Trans Am Travel in Sydney – 9247 4235 or transam@tig.com.au. Antonio is the Hon. Consul of Bolivia, very helpful and offers keen prices – we paid \$A1650 for Sydney to Santa Cruz return with Aerolineas Argentinas.

Moxos Tours, Trinidad (Ernesto Rivera) turmoxos@sauce.ben.entelnet.bo

We paid \$US105 pp for a three day tour up the Rio Ibore with a guide and all food and transport. It was excellent value, with birds everywhere and surprising numbers of mammals.

Dieter, Santa Cruz, lastfrontiers@yahoo.co.uk

Dieter is not a tour operator but he ran tours into the Reserva de Vida Rio Blanco y Negro. We paid \$US200 pp for a six day tour. It was very good value but make sure the canoe from San Pablo has a reasonable-sized outboard motor. Ours (5hp) was far too small. Lots of wildlife was seen but we had to work for it. Our guides were very obliging, good cooks, and more than happy to spend several hours each night spotlighting. Oscar is very good.

Michael Blendinger Nature Tours, Samaipata mblendinger@cotas.com.bo

Michael had a somewhat bewildering schedule of prices. He is a biologist with a passion for birds, but has good general knowledge on everything in any nearby forest. We paid \$US72 for two or \$US85 for three for day trips. These left in the dark, got back in the dark and included transport in his 4WD + food etc. Strongly recommended.

Amboro Tours, Buena Vista (Marcos somebody-or-other) Just turn up, he'll find you.

We paid \$US171 pp for seven days, six nights including transport, a guide, a porter and food. Our guide, Reynaldo, was very talented and obliging. This company is recommended.

Wildlife (see lists at end of this report)

Birds

Birds were abundant and generally fairly easy to observe. Despite hunting pressure in some areas some of the obvious targets were still common even near settled areas. We saw 320 odd different ones without being too committed to the task. We were more interested in seeing mammals. At no stage did we target any particular birds. We went to good habitats and saw what we saw. The most productive areas were around Trinidad.

Since tyrant flycatchers have all been lumped into one species – “highly variable flycatcher” – we regarded them as you might regard an individual army ant, interesting the first time, then safely ignored. Hummingbirds are not birds at all. They have been classified as insects in the dragonfly family. Nevertheless, these are insects worthy of interest. We had slightly more success with these.

Mammals

Our plan was to seek out the best mammal habitat and hope for some luck. We were very happy with our mammal sightings. South America is not an easy place to see large numbers of different mammals. As with the rest of the continent the locals hunt everywhere in Bolivia. There is no place too remote for hunters. But don't despair – there is a lot of good habitat and patience is rewarded.



Reptiles

Didn't see much.

Diary

Day 1 - Thursday 30th May 2002

I caught a taxi to Sydney Airport for our 0830 A340 Aerolineas Argentinas Airbus to Buenos Aires via Auckland. It proved to be an interesting flight. There were 55 passengers on a plane which seats 260. Among these were – a Dutch prince, his wife Shakira (apparently an entertainer of some sort), us, two plain clothes Aussie police, a violent deportee most recently resident of the Villawood Detention Facility and who had a novel approach to reducing the number of his friends there, and some new enrollees in the mile high club. It was one of those flights I suppose. Everyone who wished to could make a bed. But I got the impression that the flight was more interesting for those that chose not to sleep.

Auckland Airport confirmed we had left Australia. The accent of the girl on the PA had people rolling on the floor; well me anyway. Our time in Buenos Aires Airport, where we had a 10 hour stopover, was eased away by chatting to Tracey (Aussie copper) and her partner and Manuel, who was going on an extended prison holiday in Lima, and not coming back.

We left the forgettable transit lounge at Buenos Aires at 2300 for our MD88 flight to Santa Cruz. The flight was rough in parts as we caught and overtook a southerly wind change. The thought that we might starve to death on the foodless plane was our biggest priority.

Day 2 - Friday 31st May 2002

We slept in the surprisingly modern and well appointed Santa Cruz Airport for a couple of hours before seeing our first birds – burrowing owls which were in plague proportions all around the airport area. The car park was actually very productive generally with all sorts of things flying around or over it. The airport runways and aprons were also the home of many red-winged tinamous.

burrowing owl



We caught the 0815 flight to Trinidad via Cochabamba with Lloyd Aereo Boliviano. We arrived in the dry season to a drowned landscape. Cold and wet. Best of all, our contact, Dieter, was nowhere to be seen. We sat for an hour or so before paying enough money to a local taxi driver for him to retire, so that he would drive us to where we thought Dieter might be. He wasn't there either. We then booked a three day river trip up the Rio Ibore with Moxos Tours in Trinidad. As we were the first tourists they'd seen in a while we were offered a keen price without asking for it.

The number of birds seen around Trinidad defied belief. I had never seen as many anywhere, Africa included.

We stayed in the Hotel Paulista. Do not go there. Stay somewhere nicer, like the town rubbish tip.

Day 3 - Saturday 1st June 2002

Ernesto from Moxos Tours drove us to Puerto Alcemain past the greater rheas and capybaras that lined the road, and where our guide and international chef Carmelo met us. Carmelo was a great guy and very keen to please. As we left the riverbank we saw our first botos (or pink river dolphins), toco toucans, macaws, woodpeckers and many others. The area was said to be heavily hunted, but there was wildlife in profusion. There were hundreds of turtles and caimans and with as many squirrel monkeys, red howlers and white-fronted capuchins as we were to see in far more remote sites. Birds were everywhere.



part of a pink river dolphin (or boto)

Our first campsite was notable for the number of mosquitoes. If you have ever camped underneath an F18 revving its engines you would have some idea of the noise. I was scared, not because of the likelihood of catching a disease - that seemed certain - but that if I emerged from my tent for any reason (and in the middle of the night I thought of one), my family would not be able to identify the body.



Day 4 - Sunday 2nd June 2002

A short walk to a vegetation-filled oxbow lake was very productive. Dave treed a southern tamandua, an animal I really wanted to see, so up I went to have a chat with it. Shortly after we startled a group of collared peccaries before bumping into a large group of coatis feeding on fallen palm fruit. Army ants and attendant birds added to the wildlife feast. Impressive spot.

After seeing perhaps 50 dolphins we camped at a site that was to be the best site on the whole holiday. It was at the junction of the main river and a forming ox-bow lake. The dolphins relished the slightly cleaner water of the ox-bow. The evening brought out large numbers of nightjars and fishing bats.



Day 5 - Monday 3rd June 2002

A brilliant morning followed a late night thunderstorm. Carmelo motored us around the ox-bow lake slowly in the canoe. About eight dolphins followed us the whole way. I think they must have caught fish flushed by the outboard. They certainly weren't bothered by us. Large numbers of blue-throated (or common) piping-guans suggested there was little hunting pressure.

Later we went to another ox-bow lake to fish for piranha. We caught several including one of about 2kg. They were surprisingly okay to eat. Very flaky flesh not unlike shark. Huge mixed feeding flocks of birds were spotted as well. We cruised downriver for our 1700 pickup.

We returned to "Trini" to be met by Dieter and Marco. These guys told a tale of woe about how they couldn't meet us three days earlier and why I should have read my emails. I could think of five good reasons for why this was impossible. They were still keen for us to go to the grandly named Reserva Silvestre de Vide Rio Blanco y Negro. I couldn't think about anything at all until I had a suitable amount of local lubricant. We signed on anyway @ \$US200 pp for a six-day journey.



Day 6 - Tuesday 4th June 2002

We caught an aged ex-US school bus to the village of San Pablo, about 130km to the east of Trinidad and located on the Rio San Miguel. One thing about ex-US buses is that they were designed for long-legged Yanks so there is plenty of legroom. Our new guides Oscar and Daya met us at San Pablo. Nothing else was certain. Our “staff” changed as often as our outboard as negotiations were conducted in a language we couldn’t understand. We bought two boxes of beer so we didn’t really care.

After loading a mountain of food including a variety of rather curious bread rolls that didn’t go stale (I’d love to know how they were made), drums of fuel for our rather pathetic 5hp motor, much water, alcohol, itinerant campesinos and various weapons and ammunition “for our protection”, we headed down the narrow Rio San Miguel. We arrived at our campsite well after dark. The journey was the navigational equivalent of sailing along the length of the Great Barrier Reef blindfold at night without hitting anything. We had the distinct impression we could hear pigs during the night.



Day 7 - Wednesday 5th June 2002

Our suspicions were confirmed. We had camped next to a well-attended pigpen. The pigs had an entourage of voracious sand flies. The sound of the pigs was soon drowned out by howling red howler monkeys. These were in turn out-competed by thousands of macaws and Amazon parrots.

It took all day to get to the junction of the Rio Negro where we had the misfortune to be camped near a group of fat European hunters, complete with a chainsaw and some nice new guns.

An evening spotlight cum fishing trip down the San Miguel rewarded us with views of a water opossum and many capybaras.

Day 8 - Thursday 6th June 2002

Another day in an insufferably hot and humid place. We knew it would be like this and I dream of going back!! We steamed up the Rio Negro where the birds were bigger and more numerous. There were lots of guans, the odd curassow, and fine views of a sungrebe. Of mammals there were monkeys, giant river otters and the butchered remains of a tapir next to an illegal logging and hunting camp.

Our intended camp site could not be reached on account of a tree-fall across the river but the back-up site was fine. We had a great spotlight paddle as we drifted down the river with torches pointing in all directions. We managed bare-faced curassows, lots of capybaras and two beautiful pacas.

Day 9 - Friday 7th June 2002

We turned back downriver. We had our usual midday walk in the forest to remind us how good it didn't feel. Standing still in the shade made me sweat. Character building, maybe.



The evening spotlight along the San Miguel was fabulous. We saw the eyes of many things, only some of which we could identify. But there was no doubt about an ocelot as it came to the river to drink or to get shot, depending on the luck of the draw. Perfect views head-on and side-on, a spectacular animal! The common grey four-eyed opossum hardly rates a mention, but it gets one anyway.

Day 10 - Saturday 8th June 2002

We started the long grind back up the Rio San Miguel. With a river flow of about two knots and the canoe travelling at about five knots, you get the idea. But we weren't complaining and at 0900 we watched a jaguarundi walk down a *Cecropia* tree trunk where it had been sunning itself over the river. A number of red howlers were seen and heard but new birds were getting hard to find. Relaxing.

We stopped at an old coca-processing site to raid some fruit trees. An interesting cultural stop.

Day 11 - Sunday 9th June 2002

We returned up-river to San Pablo, but not before stopping at an Indian village. It was great to see how the beautiful and charming indigenous folk (well, the women and children anyway) had organized themselves. There was a school, sports field, internet cafes, well designed wells and lots of smiling kids. There weren't really any internet cafes.



We caught the 1400 minibus to Trinidad. One of the things that define Bolivians is their ability to make slow journeys even slower. There is a bus terminus at San Pablo so one would expect anybody without heavy baggage in the area near the terminus to catch the bus from there. But no, the bus departed, travelled 100m, I'm serious, then stopped to pick up passengers, and so on. On this particular journey I had attracted the attentions of a number of female passengers. I normally welcome this sort of behavior, but these particular women must have been from some kind of institution that had been set up to provide a foil for natural beauty.

We had a proper (cold) beer or three and a lovely meal at Carlito's Restaurant in Trinidad.

Day 12 - Monday 10th June 2002

We were supposed to fly to Rurrenabaque but the ever so helpful staff at the hotel failed to deliver the message that our flight had been booked until after the plane had left. We decided to bail to La Paz instead. In a rather curious fashion Ernesto at Moxos Tours wrote us some air tickets early in the morning without any desire or capacity to check that there were any seats on the plane. There were a couple of seats but he couldn't have known that. We flew with AeroSur for 323 Bolivianos (\$US45). A very pretty flight as well. The landscapes changed quickly from lowland Amazon to cloud forest then high Andes, before the plane failed to descend but rather just landed at El Alto Airport at La Paz.

We stayed at the Tiquini Palace Hotel, which was very central to all the touristy bits. It was also a very nice two star hotel costing \$US20 / twin including breakfast – recommended.

I started eating my dinner then fell over. I suspect that what blood I had at La Paz's altitude had rushed to service my stomach, which is admirable in itself, but it left none for the bit holding the fork and the other bit that the fork goes into. Placing myself upside down for ten minutes did the trick. Don't try this at home.

Day 13 - Tuesday 11th June 2002

We journeyed to Coroico along what is billed as the "World's Most Dangerous Road", hereinafter referred to as WMDR. Guess what?

From La Paz we charged up the hill to El Cumbre Pass, at 4800m, then down the other side on a sealed road. It was very spectacular and not all that dangerous. But it didn't last. It was somewhat disconcerting when waterfalls landed in the middle of the road or even beyond it. So the road is permanently muddy, narrow, winding, steep, foggy and full of trucks that can't get past. Consider this - in the six days we stayed at Coroico there were two fatal "over-the-sides" that we found out about. The next week there was another. At least 50 people died on this short section of road while we were in Bolivia.

We were met in Coroico by the Hotel Esmeralda courtesy wreck and driven to the best hotel in Bolivia, if not the whole world. It would want to be good too, because I didn't succeed in getting too far from it during the time we stayed there. The weather was abysmal. In the attached bird list any bird seen at Coroico can be considered to be a "backyard bird" for the hotel.

The hotel had lavish and cheap buffet meals, a pool table, pool, sauna, games of all descriptions, DVD, video, internet access, tourists and a garden full of birds, all for not very much money. We paid \$US18 per twin which included meals.

In the afternoon I wandered up the hill behind the hotel with Erika, a fresh and charming young Bolivian-born resident of the USA. Fog thwarted our ascent. This was to be a recurrent theme.

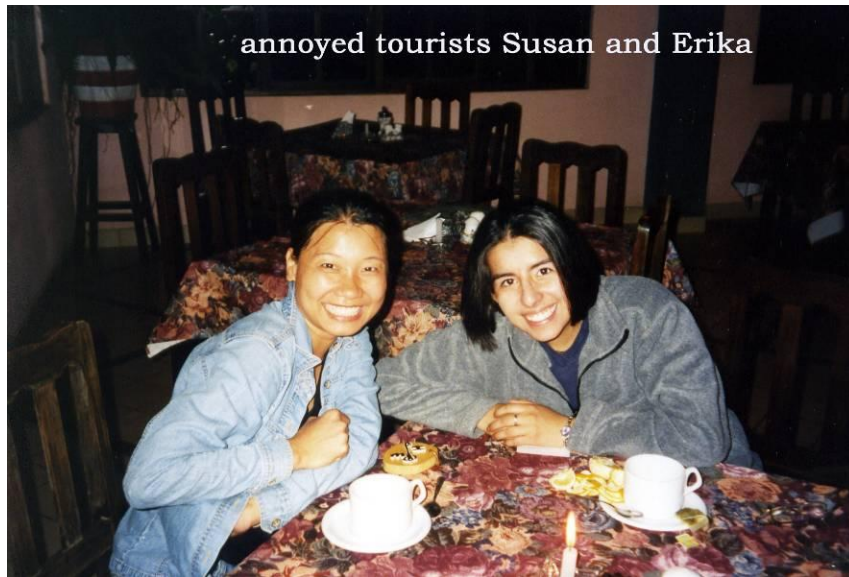
Day 14 - Wednesday 12th June 2002

Got drowned every time we stuck our head out of the door, the afternoon precipitation effort being particularly convincing. Much of my left knee went on a holiday somewhere else, leaving me with no choice but to drink beer, improve my pool game, and gasbag to tourists.

Day 15 - Thursday 13th June 2002

I foolishly tried to ascend the Coroico Everest once more, but no, more rain. Did see some nice birds though, including versicoloured barbet. Also squizzed at numbers of Bolivian

squirrels and a yellow-toothed cavi. I continued to work on my pool game having achieved a fine level of proficiency at drinking the local beer and annoying tourists – thanks to Erika and Susan.



annoyed tourists Susan and Erika



Zygopatelum mackayi (orchid)

I asked the owner of the hotel how much fun it was to work with the locals. He suggested it was not much fun at all. We were to hear this often in Bolivia – the difficulty in working with Bolivians. As an example, apparently after the hotel was built vast numbers of locals, one at

a time, would waltz up to the owner of the establishment and claim it was built on their land. Apparently one of the proofs of ownership of land is to find a judge (magistrate) and then roll around on the ground on the land “in question” in front of him (her?). That’s it. Nice. Apparently many Bolivians see corrupt politicians - the only type locally available - as role models.

Day 16 - Friday 14th June 2002

Another crap day. Walked about the mud, looking at town birds and dodging the rain.

Day 17 - Saturday 15th June 2002

Decided to bail out of Coroico as the weather wasn’t looking any different to any of the previous days. Along with three Norwegians we chartered a sturdy looking Daihatsu for the journey back up along the WMDR. At least two of the three whale-eaters didn’t enjoy the trip judging by the amount of time they had their eyes closed. I probably didn’t help their cause by my commentary. The driver didn’t help matters either. Another curious social aspect of Bolivian behavior was their obvious joy at the misfortunes of others. So naturally our driver was ecstatic as he pointed out a truck with five dead people in it that went over the edge of the WMDR a few days before. He stopped right on the edge of a slippery precipice so I could take photos. Considerate. Apparently a car went over while we were on the road but we missed seeing it.



We arrived safely in La Paz at 1500. Did a little wandering before ensconcing ourselves in a bar with three local piss-heads. Yet another aspect of Bolivian social behavior is their capacity to drink enormous amounts of alcohol. We learnt how to say “cheers” in several

different languages just before the singing started. It was all downhill from there. We only escaped when the local chaps became incapable of thought or speech. We ate at a fancy restaurant where I ordered fillet of llama. Tasted something like I would expect roadkill to taste.

Day 18 - Sunday 16th June 2002

Visited the Valley de la Luna. Interesting. Not much else happened.

Day 19 - Monday 17th June 2002

The idea was to hire a car and go to Lauca National Park in Chile. Got robbed instead. As it pains me to write the details here I will copy the report I wrote for the insurance company:-

“Attachment A

My friend Dave Sheils (tel 9735 1248 – office, 9527 1555 – home) and I were waiting outside Imbex Car Hire, which was due to open, where we had intended to hire a car. I was sitting on part of my day-pack on the footpath with my back to a roller shutter door, with Dave standing beside me. A man with a set of keys arrived to apparently open the roller door. He asked for assistance. I stood to help, but he indicated that he had apparently tried to use the wrong key. Unbeknown to me two other men had distracted my friend who I had assumed was watching what was going on. A further man must have picked my pack from behind me. The first man then walked away. I turned to see where my pack wasn't. A further man pointed to a car in traffic that I chased down rather pointlessly as my pack wasn't there. The tourist police indicated that I had fallen to a gang of five Peruvians.

The loss of my passport meant we could not travel to Chile as planned, although we had not booked any accommodation or tours.

This was my eleventh holiday in third world countries, including PNG, Madagascar, South Africa, Peru, Chile etc and this was the first time I have had anything stolen.

I would welcome a personal interview, if required, to discuss any of the circumstances of this claim.

Should you dishonour this claim for any reason I will graciously understand. I have read your disputes procedures and understand them. However, I will settle any dispute by hunting down all your assessors and their families one by one and etc etc.”

I spent the next ten hours standing in queues, in this order:

- Tourist Police
- Hotel phone
- Australian Honorary Consul
- Passport photo place
- Australian Honorary Consul

- Aerolineas Argentinas
- Bank
- Bank
- Bank
- Australian Honorary Consul
- Aerolineas Argentinas
- Bank
- DHL office
- AeroSur

Travel tip: never lose your passport. Luckily I had taken colour photocopies of passport and air tickets.

I decided that the day was somewhat ruined, and that I had no money, binoculars or camera. Tomorrow I would start a new holiday, one not burdened by owning very much. Dave was a great help in all of this. He didn't get too excited by radical changes in our travel arrangements. Another travel tip: don't try to get a cash advance on a credit card in Bolivia. Our last stop was the AeroSur office where we bought tickets for the first flight available out of La Paz for Santa Cruz (about \$A130).

Day 20 - Tuesday 18th June 2002

We used the hotel courtesy taxi to go to the airport, flew quickly to Santa Cruz, caught the airport minibus to town, walked to the Samaipata share taxi rank and by 1100 we were at our very swish accommodation at Samaipata, (La Vispera @ \$US14 per twin, share kitchen). Pieter de Raad, the owner, lent me a pair of binoculars, and was a wealth of knowledge on the area. On the down side, if you think there is any decent forest within walking distance of Samaipata, think again.

We were very fortunate to find a great guide, Michael Blendinger, who was very knowledgeable on the local birds and forests. He was busy for a couple of days so we engaged him for a few days after that. In the meantime we thought we might freeze to death. We huddled around the pilot light on the gas water heater.

Day 21 - Wednesday 19th June 2002

The day dawned clear. We caught a taxi to the pre-Inca ruins of El Fuerte. We spent the rest of the day on our feet. The ruins are worth a look for their setting, aside from anything else. Nothing is written in English but nobody really knows what had happened there anyway, although it was generally agreed that it happened a long time ago. We saw a surprising number of birds in the forest around and behind the ruins, especially when we located an army ant column. Here we also found low altitude Andean condors. We saw three or four cruising around along with the more common vultures.



Day 22 - Thursday 20th June 2002

We were up at 0430 for our 0530 pick-up with Michael. We went to a sensational cloud forest site on the southern edge of Amboro NP where crested quetzal was said to be guaranteed. We saw none, but we did see lots of other goodies, including crab-eating fox, short-tailed ant-thrush and mixed flocks of tanagers, woodcreepers and euphonias. Ground-hugging mixed flocks had tapaculos, brush-finches and other things that are often difficult to see.

I would have been happy to spend the evening replacing fluids, but someone had a hair-brained idea to go to El Fuerte where there was allegedly some sort of festival to celebrate something that didn't matter any more. Lots of people stood about in the cold then gradually they all went home.



Day 23 - Friday 21st June 2002

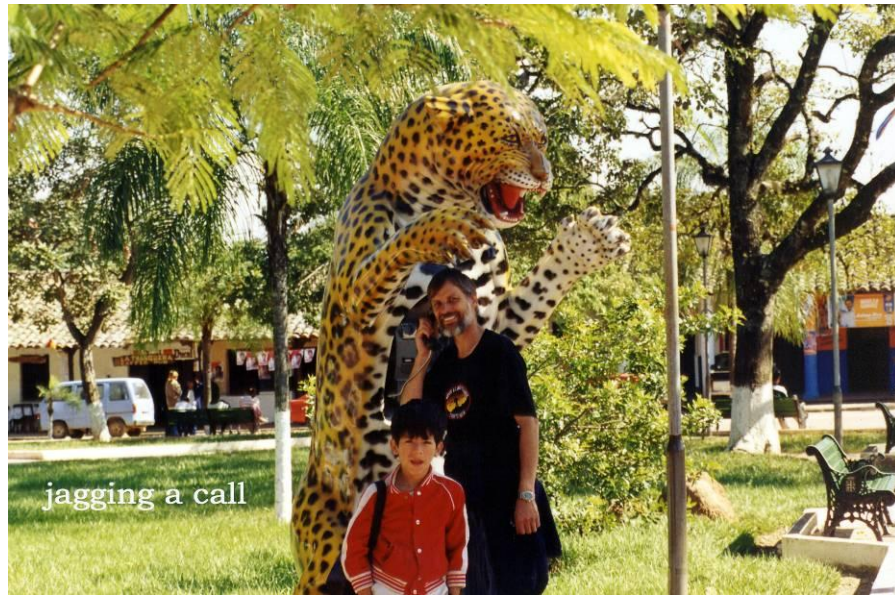
Another 0530 start and off with Michael to a place named Bella Vista. After driving a long bumpy road we left the vehicle and descended a steep tangled gully. Undoubtedly there were good birds to be seen, but only by whoever was in front so we decided to change sites. The new site had fabulous mountain scenery with fantastic canyons and abrupt changes to vegetation. Apparently it was a famous bird-watching site, but alas, not this day. We did see a few things, including a large troop of brown capuchin monkeys, a few squirrels and plenty of locals with donkeys and sling-shots.

Day 24 - Saturday 22nd June 2002

Michael picked us up at 0500 to go west to a site known as Mataral. What a fabulous place! Here we spent time in some kind of chaco forest which was brim-full with birds. We must have seen 50 birds in a few hours. The highlight for me was a very obliging brown agouti, thanks to Dave.

Day 25 - Sunday 23rd June 2002

This was what is known as a lay day. Planned to do little and did even less.



Day 26 - Monday 24th June 2002

We had tried many times to ring the owner of Las Volcanos, promoted as a superb place half way back to Santa Cruz. We eventually gave up and went back to Santa Cruz. We stayed at the Excelsior Hotel @ \$US22 per twin including breakfast. We found the best lunchtime restaurant in Bolivia, if not the free world – Don Caito's in Santa Cruz.

The afternoon's fun included getting my stolen air tickets re-issued at the Aerolineas office. It only took 90 minutes, but the lady who issued them was charming and apologetic. I can't imagine any South American company ever making a profit. I signed so many forms that I felt personally responsible for de-forestation. Of course all this activity led us to seek out an appropriate bar. The beer at the first one we tried cost more than at home, then we couldn't find a bar at all. After a short period of panic we located the Victory Bar, where I single-handedly caused the average age of the patrons to rise by fifteen years.

Day 27 - Tuesday 25th June 2002

The sun came up just as the church bells became eerily silent, having done their job, whatever that was.

Dave and I caught a taxi to the Buena Vista-bound share taxi rank. Our Corolla (what else?) and its seven occupants and luggage sped off to Buena Vista at a cost of \$A5 each. As soon as we arrived we arranged a seven day / six night tour (\$US141 per person + \$US12 per day for a porter if needed) in Amboro National Park with Amboro Tours. Our guide Reynaldo was 19 years old, spoke a little English, and was very obliging. He could also cook surprisingly well.

We had lunch in Buena Vista at Los Franceses Restaurant. This establishment is managed by the world's least likely Frenchman - Sergio. Sergio rabbitted away in woeful Spanish (even I

could tell that) despite the fact that we had absolutely no idea what he was talking about. This seemed common in Bolivia. The less you understood what someone was saying the more likely it was that they would keep saying it. The food was fine and in incredible quantities.



The road to our camp at the ranger station at Matarucu (or something) is the worst in the world. I'm serious. The committed 4WD nut gets everything – mud, sand, rivers, steep inclines, cattle, people, large rocks and trees. Not all the trees were located in the forest. We had one flat tyre and one “hopelessly bogged vehicle” event.

Remarkably the park campsite was quite good. We rested and then went spotlighting and saw an olingos which was very obligingly staring at us from a low treetop.

Day 28 - Wednesday 26th June 2002

Got up in the dark and started trekking deeper into the park. We didn't spotlight anything but scared a few things on the ground. Saw some great birds including screaming piha, Cuvier's toucan, lettered aracari, black-faced and chestnut-tailed antbirds, blue ground-dove and red-necked woodpecker. Had breakfast then walked up a beautiful boulder-filled stream in time for lunch at a waterfall. We saw plenty of good things along the way, including about five mixed foraging flocks of birds. There was some of the best forest I've seen anywhere and plenty of evidence of a healthy mammal population; all the evidence I needed without actually seeing anything.



After lunch we found out why Reynaldo carried a length of rope with him. But alas, it was too late, Dave and Steve had already negotiated the walk of death along the cliff edge.

Our campsite was notable for two things; it was incredibly beautiful, and it had the best biting insect diversity yet discovered. The only problem was that we didn't find out about the latter until the next day. I couldn't see Dave. All I could see was the bites. Interestingly we felt nothing and saw nothing. Anyway, I learnt why we have fingernails.

Day 29 - Thursday 27th June 2002

We marched all over the forest, but saw little on account of very strong winds and noisy creeks. We advised our guide that we would like to descend back to the lowland forest as there appeared to be little food for the critters higher up.

We camped on a ridge inside some interesting forest but strong winds ruined any chance of going spotlighting.

Day 30 - Friday 28th June 2002

It was still very windy and the forest deathly quiet. But luck was with us as we saw some fine wildlife. First was a grey tinamou, then a pair of horned curassows and finally a very large troop of white-bellied spider monkeys in a fruiting fig tree. We camped near a salt lick but had no luck spotlighting. Managed to get lost on the 80m walk back to camp! Never mind, we knew how to get back via the river. It was getting to the river that was the fun part.

Day 31 - Saturday 29th June 2002

I spent a good part of the morning following a column of army ants and the attendant birds. It was fascinating, with insects running and hopping in all directions. These were being cleaned up by antbirds, ant-thrushes, thrushes, ant-tanagers and woodcreepers. I have no idea how the poor bloody ants find anything the birds don't get.

After lunch we marched back to the ranger station. We thought we were going to be alone for the weekend but a very noisy contingent of French “people” thought otherwise. Has anyone found a cure for French yet? Why they came to the national park I have no idea. It certainly had nothing to do with the forest or wildlife. The noisy radio was much unloved.



Day 32 - Sunday 30th June 2002

Woke early and made as much noise as possible in case any French folk were asleep.

We managed to find lots of brown capuchin monkeys at a fruiting fig tree. Had breakfast then had great views of a great tinamou followed by an enormous flock of feeding tanagers and allies. Eight different tanagers were present in 16-18 different birds in a flock of about 150 to 200 strong. The amazing thing was that it didn't seem to be going anywhere, affording a magical couple of hours viewing.

The afternoon was spent walking up creek beds where a remarkable number of mammal spoor was seen, including numbers of jaguar, tapir, ocelot, paca, agouti and various opossums.

Reynaldo very of matter-of-factly asked us if we wanted to see an owl sitting in a tree. Probably. And so on our second last day in the forest we saw a spectacled owl.

Our spotlighting was spectacularly unsuccessful. Tip: don't bother spotlighting up trees. We spent probably twenty or thirty hours each on this trip and saw just one mammal. Stay on the ground.

Day 33 - Monday 1st July 2002

Had a great early morning walk that turned up rufous motmot, crested becard and lots of hummers.

We left at 1000 for Buena Vista. Marcos, Amboro Tours' owner, tried to wreck his 4WD by driving like an idiot on the basis that he had been put out by being obliged to carry our porter Julio's wife and baby to the doctor. Children having children.



After lunch with our chatty mate Sergio we caught a share-taxi to Santa Cruz. I picked up my passport from the DHL office, then to the Victory Bar and dinner at Don Caitos.

Day 34 - Tuesday 2nd July 2002

We caught a taxi to the Santa Cruz Botanic Gardens. It was really good except we made the mistake of not carrying any food or water. The gardens are fine and the chaco forest behind is huge and with a long list of birds. We even met our first trip-bird-nutter here. A Norwegian missionary with a stroller and baby who moved so fast we couldn't keep up with him.

After 4km of walking fruitlessly up the road looking for food we gave up and went back to town in a taxi.

We ran into our old friends Marcos and Dieter in the street. We joined them in a German-owned drinking establishment called El Aleman just round the corner from the hotel. The clientele included pay-by-the-hour women and pissed idiots of various persuasions, the most

interesting of which was definitely Randy, an American who reckoned Shrub (son of Bush) was a great leader.

Day 35 - Wednesday 3rd July 2002

This was a shopping day for Mayette and I, but it didn't last very long.

Fortunately we found time to go back to El Aleman for beers and a bit of Yank-baiting. Randy was a one-man brain-free zone. He reckons Clinton stuffed the forests in the US by not cutting them down enough. They then got diseased and died. I'd like to disclose here what Randy did for a living but I'm sworn to secrecy. *(actually, he worked for the CIA but he's probably dead by now).*



Day 36 - Thursday 4th July 2002

It bucketted down with rain and then became freezing cold. Apparently elsewhere in Bolivia there were record snowfalls in progress. Good day to leave, I thought.

A number of ales were had at El Aleman, where our host Wolfgang charmed the local female passers-by with his insightful knowledge of their tits. He did rather restrict his potential sales market.

Day 37 - Friday 5th July 2002

We caught the very convenient 0230 Aerolineas Argentinas flight to Buenos Aires.

After arriving we hotfooted it to the Hotel Posada de las Aguilas. The posada folk picked us up from the airport and fed us for \$US70. Some say this is cheap for Argentina. After a sleep

and a tub we relaxed and wandered about the streets before being delivered back to the airport in the evening.

We achieved a major coup by managing to convince the airport tax people we weren't in fact going to pay them any on the arguable basis that we hadn't spent a night in the country, and therefore should be considered as transit passengers. They finally and cheerfully agreed. How good is that? So we had some money to spend on beers at the airport.

Our flight to Sydney via Auckland left at midnight. Then followed 25 hours of darkness, a missing day as we crossed the date line, and a glitch that meant no video screen on the plane. The cabin crew made up for this by forcing us to drink vast quantities of 1999 vintage Aussie merlot.

Day 38 - Sunday 7th July 2002

We arrived on time in Sydney at 0800, where we felt right at home with a chatty Bangladeshi taxi driver.....

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20th July 2002

Bird and Mammal List

Notes:

Sorry about the bird list – it may not reflect the latest name changes, or even a few before that.

We saw many birds that others didn't and vice versa. There are two main reasons for this – the time of the year (winter) and our focus being on good mammal habitat. Consequently we saw a number of fat edible chook things that others miss by not being eaten alive by insects in lowland forest. Whilst we looked at birds most of the time we were in forest, we made no attempt to maximize our list by visiting every habitat available, hence only one duck etc. We had no record of calls so we largely ignored the tyrant flycatcher.

Sites recorded for many common birds are likely to be understated. One reason for this was that I “lost” all my records mid-trip.

Sources:

Birds of Ecuador

Birds of Peru

Birds of Southern South America

Birds of the High Andes

Neotropical Rainforest Mammals 2nd Edition - Emmons

Bird	Trinidad	Coroico	La Paz	Samai-pata	Amboro	Santa Cruz
Gray Tinamou						
Great Tinamou						
Black-capped Tinamou						
Small-billed Tinamou						
Red-winged Tinamou						
Greater Rhea						
Neotropic Cormorant						
Anhinga						
Southern Screamer						
Muscovy Duck						
Whistling Heron						
Snowy Egret						
Capped Heron						
Cocoi Heron						
Great Egret						
Cattle Egret						
Striated Heron						
Agami Heron						

Bird	Trinidad	Coroico	La Paz	Samai-pata	Amboro	Santa Cruz
Black-crowned Night-Heron						
Boat-billed Heron						
Rufescent Tiger-Heron						
White-faced Ibis						
Plumbeous Ibis						
Buff-necked Ibis						
Roseate Spoonbill						
Wood Stork						
Maguari Stork						
Jabiru						
Black Vulture						
Turkey Vulture						
Lesser Yellow-headed Vult						
Andean Condor						
King Vulture						
Gray-headed Kite						
Hook-billed Kite						
Swallow-tailed Kite						
Snail Kite						
Gray-bellied Goshawk						
Tiny Hawk						
White Hawk						
Great Black-Hawk						
Black-collared Hawk						
Solitary Eagle						
Roadside Hawk						
Variable Hawk						
Red-throated Caracara						
Mountain Caracara						
Crested Caracara						
Yellow-headed Caracara						
Laughing Falcon						
Barred Forest-Falcon						
Slaty-backed Forest-Falcon						
American Kestrel						
Bat Falcon						
Speckled Chachalaca						
Andean Guan						
Spix's Guan						
Blue-throated Piping-Guan						
Horned Curassow						

Bird	Trinidad	Coroico	La Paz	Samai- pata	Amboro	Santa Cruz
Bare-faced Curassow						
Gray-necked Wood-Rail						
Purple Gallinule						
Sungrebe						
Sunbittern						
Limpkin						
Wattled Jacana						
Southern Lapwing						
Andean Gull						
Large-billed Tern						
Rock Dove						
Scaled Pigeon						
Band-tailed Pigeon						
Plumbeous Pigeon						
Eared Dove						
Plain-breasted Ground-Dove						
Ruddy Ground-Dove						
Picui Ground-Dove						
Blue Ground-Dove						
Bare-faced Ground-Dove						
White-tipped Dove						
Blue-and-yellow Macaw						
Red-and-green Macaw						
Chestnut-fronted Macaw						
Golden-collared Macaw						
Blue-crowned Parakeet						
Mitred Parakeet						
White-eyed Parakeet						
Dusky-headed Parakeet						
Green-cheeked Parakeet						
Monk Parakeet	B Aires					
Blue-winged Parrotlet						
Yellow-chevroned Parakeet						
Turquoise-fronted Parrot						
Black-winged Parrot						
Blue-headed Parrot						
Yellow-crowned Parrot						
Mealy Parrot						
Dark-billed Cuckoo						
Squirrel Cuckoo						
Black-bellied Cuckoo						

Bird	Trinidad	Coroico	La Paz	Samai-pata	Amboro	Santa Cruz
Little Cuckoo						
Hoatzin						
Greater Ani						
Smooth-billed Ani						
Guira Cuckoo						
Striped Cuckoo						
Spectacled Owl						
Burrowing Owl						
Pauraque						
Little Nightjar						
White-collared Swift						
Gray-rumped Swift						
Short-tailed Swift						
Ashy-tailed Swift						
Long-tailed Hermit						
Reddish Hermit						
Sparkling Violet-ear						
Ruby-topaz Hummingbird						
Rufous-crested Coquette						
Glittering-bellied Emerald						
Golden-tailed Sapphire						
White-bellied Hummingbird						
Glittering-thr Emerald						
Speckled Hummingbird						
Andean Hillstar						
Booted Racket-tail						
Red-tailed Comet						
Tyrian Metaltail						
Black-tailed Trogon						
Collared Trogon						
Masked Trogon						
Blue-crowned Trogon						
Ringed Kingfisher						
Amazon Kingfisher						
Green Kingfisher						
Rufous Motmot						
Blue-crowned Motmot						
Rufous-tailed Jacamar						
"unknown" Jacamar						
Spot-backed Puffbird						
Black-streaked Puffbird						

Bird	Trinidad	Coroico	La Paz	Samai-pata	Amboro	Santa Cruz
Black-fronted Nunbird						
Versicolored Barbet						
Lettered Aracari						
Chestnut-eared Aracari						
Cuvier's Toucan						
Toco Toucan						
White-barred Piculet						
White-wedged Piculet						
White Woodpecker						
Yellow-tufted Woodpecker						
White-fronted Woodpecker						
Checkered Woodpecker						
Smoky-brown Woodpecker						
Little Woodpecker						
Yellow-throated Woodpecker						
Golden-olive Woodpecker						
Spot-breasted Woodpecker						
Green-barred Woodpecker						
Campo Flicker						
Scaly-breasted Woodpecker						
Lineated Woodpecker						
Red-necked Woodpecker						
Crimson-crested Woodpecker						
Cream-backed Woodpecker						
Olivaceous Woodcreeper						
Strong-billed Woodcreeper						
Black-banded Woodcreeper						
Straight-billed Woodcr						
Buff-throated Woodcreeper						
Olive-backed Woodcreeper						
Narrow-billed Woodcreeper						
Spot-crowned Woodcreeper						
Pale-legged Hornero						
Rufous Hornero						
Plain-crowned Spinetail						
Ochre-cheeked Spinetail						
Stripe-crowned Spinetail						
Pearled Treerunner						
Buff-browed Foliage-gleaner						
Buff-throated Fol-gleaner						
Tawny-throated Leaf Tosser						

Bird	Trinidad	Coroico	La Paz	Samai-pata	Amboro	Santa Cruz
Great Antshrike						
Chestnut-backed Antshrike						
Amazonian Antshrike						
Variable Antshrike						
Rufous-capped Antshrike						
Plain Antvireo						
Stipple-throated Antwren						
Black-capped Antwren						
Black-faced Antbird						
Band-tailed Antbird						
Spot-winged Antbird						
Chestnut-tailed Antbird						
Scale-backed Antbird						
Black-faced Antthrush						
Short-tailed Antthrush						
Slaty Gnatcatcher						
Southern White-crowned Tap						
White-tipped Plantcutter						
Screaming Piha						
Streak-necked Flycatcher						
Ochre-bellied Flycatcher						
Pearly-vented Tody-Tyrant						
Buff-throated Tody-Tyrant						
Sclater's Tyrannulet						
Sohn's Beardless-Tyrannulet						
Greater Wagtail-Tyrant						
Cinnamon Flycatcher						
Eastern Wood-Pewee						
Black Phoebe						
Vermilion Flycatcher						
Streak-throated Bush-Tyrant						
Rufous-bellied Bush-Tyrant						
White Monjita						
Puna Ground-Tyrant						
Black-backed Water-Tyrant						
Yellow-browed Tyrant						
Rufous Casiornis						
Dusky-capped Flycatcher						
Swainson's Flycatcher						
Brown-crested Flycatcher						
Tropical Kingbird						

Bird	Trinidad	Coroico	La Paz	Samai-pata	Amboro	Santa Cruz
Eastern Kingbird						
Lesser Kiskadee						
Great Kiskadee						
Chestnut-crowned Becard						
Crested Becard						
Black-tailed Tityra						
Purplish Jay						
Plush-crested Jay						
Rufous-browed Peppershrike						
Tawny-crowned Greenlet						
White-capped Dipper						
Chiguanco Thrush						
Great Thrush						
Glossy-black Thrush						
Andean Slaty-Thrush						
Rufous-bellied Thrush						
Creamy-bellied Thrush						
Black-billed Thrush						
Lawrence's Thrush						
Chalk-browed Mockingbird						
Brown-backed Mockingbird						
Black-capped Donacobius						
Thrush-like Wren						
Moustached Wren						
Buff-breasted Wren						
House Wren						
Mountain Wren						
Southern Nightingale-Wren						
Masked Gnatcatcher						
White-winged Swallow						
Gray-breasted Martin						
Blue-and-white Swallow						
Pale-footed Swallow						
House Sparrow	bah					
Hooded Siskin						
Tropical Parula						
Slate-throated Redstart						
Brown-capped Redstart						
Two-banded Warbler						
Golden-crowned Warbler						
Three-striped Warbler						

Bird	Trinidad	Coroico	La Paz	Samai-pata	Amboro	Santa Cruz
Rufous-collared Sparrow						
Saffron-billed Sparrow						
Rufous-naped Brush-Finch						
Stripe-headed Brush-Finch						
Red-crested Cardinal						
Red-capped Cardinal						
Bananaquit						
Capped Conebill						
Black-faced Tanager						
White-rumped Tanager						
Common Bush-Tanager						
Orange-headed Tanager						
Guira Tanager						
Hooded Tanager						
Olive Tanager						
Yellow-crested Tanager						
White-shouldered Tanager						
Black-goggled Tanager						
Red-crowned Ant-Tanager						
Hepatic Tanager						
Silver-beaked Tanager						
Blue-gray Tanager						
Sayaca Tanager						
Palm Tanager						
Blue-and-yellow Tanager						
Hooded Mountain-Tanager						
Scarlet-bellied Mtn-Tanager						
Blue-winged Mountain-Tanager						
Fawn-breasted Tanager						
Purple-throated Euphonia						
Thick-billed Euphonia						
Golden-rumped Euphonia						
Orange-bellied Euphonia						
Blue-naped Chlorophonia						
Turquoise Tanager						
Paradise Tanager						
Green-and-gold Tanager						
Bay-headed Tanager						
Blue Dacnis						
Red-legged Honeycreeper						
Swallow-Tanager						

Bird	Trinidad	Coroico	La Paz	Samai-pata	Amboro	Santa Cruz
Red-crested Finch						
Black-crested Finch						
Gray-crested Finch						
Ringed Warbling-Finch						
Black-capped Warbling-Finch						
Greenish Yellow-Finch						
Saffron Finch						
Wedge-tailed Grass-Finch						
Rusty Flower-piercer						
Black-backed Grosbeak						
Golden-billed Saltator						
Blue-black Grosbeak						
Crested Oropendola						
Dusky-green Oropendola						
Russet-backed Oropendola						
Amazonian Oropendola						
Yellow-rumped Cacique						
Solitary Cacique						
Troupial						
Chopi Blackbird						
Velvet-fronted Grackle						
Bay-winged Cowbird						
Shiny Cowbird						
Giant Cowbird						

Mammals

	Trinidad	Coroico	La Paz	Samai- pata	Amboro	Santa Cruz
Common Grey 4eyed Opossum						
Water Opossum						
Squirrel Monkey						
Red Howler Monkey						
White-fronted Capuchin						
Brown Capuchin						
White-bellied Spider Monkey						
Southern Tamandua						
Bolivian Squirrel						
S Amazon Red Squirrel						
Guinea Pig						
Yellow-toothed Cavies						
Capybara						
Paca						
Brown Agouti						
Fishing Bat						
Boto						
Crab-eating Fox						
Coati						
Olingos						
Giant River Otter						
Jaguarundi						
Ocelot						