

THE GEOFFROY'S CATS OF EL PALMAR

- A Five Day Quest for Mammals in Parque Nacional El Palmar, Argentina



Palm stand in Parque Nacional El Palmar.

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1 Introduction

I had heard about sightings of Geoffroy's Cat in Parque Nacional de El Palmar in Entre Rios province in Argentina, notably through Richard Webb's successful tour earlier in 2013 and also through looking at other sources on the Internet. This species is normally quite difficult and so hearing about these regular sightings caught my attention. I decided to make a quick "smash and grab" raid, with the intention of getting in, "doing the business" and getting out - all with the minimum necessary expenditure of time and money.

As things turned out, finding the cats proved relatively easy and I managed five sightings of six cats in five days/evenings, all being (as far as I could tell) different individuals. One was a melanistic black cat, a fairly common idiosyncrasy of the species. I also recorded Pampas Fox, Crab-eating Fox, Neo-tropical River Otter and Nine-banded Armadillo among a supporting cast of ten other mammals.

The trip ran from 3/9/13 to 8/9/13, during which time I was very ably assisted and guided by Mario Mosqueira and Nicolas Bejarano of Clark Expeditions in Salta. The ground arrangements were co-ordinated through Naturetrek.

2 Parque Nacional de El Palmar

The park lies 375 kilometres north of Buenos Aires in Entre Rios province. I chose to fly to Buenos Aires and get to the park by road but with hindsight it might have been a lot easier to take a connecting flight to Concordia, which is much nearer to the park and which offers much easier driving. As it was, the drive took five or six hours in each direction. And we were actually quite fortunate; if we'd hit rush hour traffic in Buenos Aires it could have been quite a bit longer.

El Palmar contains an interesting variety of habitats, including palm savannah (which predominates), riverine woodland, grassland and scrub. It is characterised by stands of palms which lend the place quite a distinctive atmosphere. The soil is dry and sandy, ideal for fossorial species such as Viscacha, Tuco-tuco and Armadillo. Overall, the park covers an area of around 8,000 hectares though only about half of this (the eastern half) is open to the public.

There is one main access road into the park which can be entered directly from Autoroute 14. From this road there are various spurs: the "La Gorieta" track, the "Arroyo de Los Loros" track and the "Mirador de El Palmar" track. The access road is about ten kilometres long and finishes in a three-way junction: the "Campsite" road, the "Ruins" road and the "Prefecture" road, the latter being out of bounds to tourists. There are also four or five walking trails, all of which are worth exploring. Despite its apparently small size, there are quite a few quiet little nooks and crannies and it took me all five days to get to grips with everything the park had to offer. Night driving and spotlighting are allowed and there are no particular restrictions on looking for nocturnal mammals, (except setting bait).

The best times to visit would probably be Spring and Autumn when the weather is mild and things are relatively quiet. The austral summer, according to Mario, is hot and unpleasant and the park is busy with campers and general tourists. Prospective mammal watchers might also be wise to book midweek visits as the weekends can get busy even in the cooler months and the roads can get quite disturbed.

3 Accommodation and Logistics

I stayed at the Hotel Rincon del Pueblo in Ubajay, about six kilometres north of the park entrance on Autoroute 14. The only other reasonable option, as far as I could see, would be La Aurora de El Palmar which is a little closer to the park (also on Autoroute 14) but is a tad more basic. (Of course, for hardier souls there is always the possibility of camping in the park itself).

There are several good places to eat in Ubajay, including the unprepossessing but nevertheless excellent Tia Ana's Cafe where huge portions of pork, beef and chicken are on offer. There are also shops in Ubajay where soft drinks and food can be obtained. Fortunately, Tia Ana's stays open most nights till around midnight and is thus ideal for mammalists who don't want to interrupt the evening's spotlighting with a tedious detour for dinner.

Inside the park there is a service area at the campsite where snack lunches are available at the "Sandwicheria". There is also a restaurant but in the "off" season it doesn't appear to stay open very late.

4 Day-by-Day Activities

Tuesday 3rd September

I arrived in the late morning on a flight from Dallas, (a two legged journey London-Dallas-Buenos Aires being considerably cheaper than a direct flight). Having met Mario and Nico, we then drove north to El Palmar, arriving at about 16.00. After the briefest of siestas we then set out for a preliminary night drive just before dusk.

There was a Green-barred Woodpecker at the park entrance and Monk Parakeets and Red-winged Tinamou along the main access road but otherwise all was very quiet. However, having turned off into the Mirador track, we encountered our first mammals. Capybara were grazing beside the road at several places and, as we approached the bird hide, Mario spotted something moving in the undergrowth to our left. It was a Pampas Fox, the first of many we were to see over the coming days, which obligingly strode out into the road ahead and ambled off.

By the time we reached the end of the short Mirador road it was almost completely dark. We got out of the vehicle and worked our way down the 400 metre trail to the El Palmar river, spotlighting as we went. There is open scrub-savannah here and (as we later discovered) a huge Tuco-tuco colony on both sides of the path. We scanned in all directions but found nothing either in the scrub or along the river. Given the vast quantity of potential prey here

one might have expected this area to be a goldmine for predators but, despite repeated attempts, we found nothing here except Capybara.

Returning to the main road, we continued to the junction and then to the Campsite road. On the grass just before the campsite itself were large numbers of Plains Viscacha grazing out in the open. We didn't attempt a count but there must have been at least fifty animals, possibly quite a few more. There were also, as a bonus, two Pampas Foxes hanging around.

We tried the Arroyo de Los Loros road briefly, finding only two more Pampas Foxes and a Great Horned Owl sitting on the signpost at the road's entrance. Then, with exhaustion overwhelming us, we called it a night. The drive back along the access road was uneventful.

Wednesday 4th September

We made an early start, arriving at the park entrance at 06.40 just as a very cold and clear dawn was breaking. A few Capybaras were still out and about on the access road and, later on the Mirador road, we found two Brown Brocket Deer. Otherwise, things were quiet. The Arroyo de Los Loros road produced two Pampas Foxes, probably the same pair we had seen the evening before. At 08.30 we headed back to Ubajaya for breakfast, a pattern we would repeat each day.

I had expected the middle part of the day to be quiet, at least as far as mammals were concerned, and so it proved. Nevertheless, our late morning wanderings in the park were useful in getting a feel for the place and in planning the spotlighting sessions we were to undertake in the evenings. During these daytime reconnaissance missions we found evidence of cat activity in a number of places (scats and the remains of dove kills). The chances of finding a cat in daylight were probably minimal but at least we were getting a better understanding of where to look when it really mattered - after dark. Each day we re-entered the park for a few hours after breakfast, took lunch at the Sandwicheria at the campsite and then returned to Ubajaya for a siesta.

We did, however, enjoy one amusing piece of action. On one of the fire-breaks along the main access track we spotted a group of Greater Rheas and paused to take a look. Suddenly, a very ambitious Pampas Fox broke cover, its hair bristling with the anticipation of the chase, making as if to run them down. Then, thinking better of it, and with its disappointment obvious, it stopped in its tracks. It stood panting and with its tail drooping, watching as the Rheas sprinted towards the horizon. They must surely have had little to fear!

At the Arroyo de Los Loros road we got out to examine a clearing in the undergrowth where a series of muddy lagoons had formed. We found no actual Geoffroy's Cats but we did find very recent evidence that one was in residence. There were two fresh dove kills, the little piles of feathers indicating where a cat had recently plucked its kill. (Cats usually pluck bird kills before eating them and then usually leave the feathers in a neat, tidy heap). Also, we found fresh footprints in the mud, either from the previous night or the one before. We painstakingly checked all the trees hereabouts for sleeping cats, (Mario has found Geoffroy's Cats in such circumstances before), but didn't find anything.

At the campsite we found numerous Viscacha burrows, most of them fenced off and signposted "Viscachera". Obviously the park rangers were doing their best to protect the Viscachas. However, the Viscachas had also done their best to protect themselves, dragging sticks across their burrow entrances to deter predators such as Lesser Grison from attempting to dig them out.



Footprint of Geoffroy's Cat (with twenty pence coin for size comparison).

That evening we got under way at 17.30 eagerly anticipating our first cat of the trip. There was a Spotted Nothura along the main access road in addition to the usual Red-winged Tinamous but otherwise not much was stirring yet. We took a detour along the La Glorietta road - a four kilometre loop which covers a nice variety of habitats: grassland, palm savannah, riverine woodland and the El Palmar river. However, finding nothing, we carried on to the highly promising Los Loros track where we again found Pampas Fox. With dusk falling, we got out to check the lagoons and had another Pampas Fox calmly stroll past us at a range of four or five metres.

It was now fully dark and, finding nothing along the whole length of Los Loros, we moved onto the Campsite road where we finally struck gold. Here, on the right hand side as one heads towards the campsite, is quite a big open area. As we drove past I picked up bright eye-shine at about 150 metres on the edge of the distant tree-line. Mario stopped and slowly reversed the vehicle. For a few seconds I had nothing but then I got the same eye-shine a second time and we all realised, to our delight, what it was - a melanistic black Geoffroy's

Cat! Almost straight away I got eye-shine from a second animal, this time a conventionally spotted Geoffroy's Cat. Mario "squeaked" it closer and moments later we had both cats only twenty metres away right out in the open.



The melanistic black Geoffroy's Cat, (unfortunately not a great shot!).

It was then that we noticed that two Pampas Foxes had appeared on the left hand side of the road. They both moved closer and sat down on their haunches, looking intently at the cats. The melanistic cat advanced to the roadside until Foxes and Cat were barely five metres apart, staring fixedly at each other in our torch beam. The Foxes seemed relaxed enough though, tellingly, their ears were bent forwards. The Cat was less sanguine and its body was stiff with tension. The stand-off went on for some while but it was the Foxes who blinked first, slinking off behind our vehicle. The Cat then moved cautiously across the road and disappeared into thick vegetation just where one of the Foxes had been sitting a few seconds previously. Meanwhile, the spotted cat had vanished and, despite trying for another ten minutes to re-locate it, our encounter had come to an end at last. Fantastic stuff!

We paid the Viscachas another visit at the campsite, (I was hoping for a Lesser Grison), then moved on to the Ruins road via the junction. This road ends after about three-quarters of a kilometre at the ruins of an old Jesuit monastery and chalk pit. On the return to the junction I got very bright eye-shine at about sixty metres which I promptly lost. We got out of the vehicle to investigate and instantly the eye-shine re-appeared, this time moving up into the lower branches of a tree before suddenly dropping down again and out of sight. It was almost

certainly another Geoffroy's Cat but with our marvellous earlier encounter still fresh in our minds it hardly seemed to matter.



One of the two Pampas Foxes in the Cat stand-off.

We made one last tour of the Los Loros before drawing stumps, finding three Crab-eating Foxes and another Pampas Fox. Yet another inspection of the lagoon produced nothing though on returning to the vehicle we were astonished to see a Nine-banded Armadillo nonchalantly walk across the road five metres ahead of us. Then, instead of heading off directly into the thick stuff, as I expected, it paused right next to our vehicle where for a few priceless moments we had it perfectly in the torch beam barely two metres away. A great finish to a great evening!

Thursday 5th September

Another excruciatingly early start produced only a few Capybaras and a young Chital near the entrance of the Los Loros road. These deer have been introduced and are apparently quite common in the park. There are also Wild Boar, (feral *Sus scrofa*), though we didn't find any ourselves. Mario explained that these destructive interlopers were being eradicated by licenced hunting.

At Los Loros lagoon we made another thorough search, this time finding no fewer than ten Dove kill remains. Obviously the resident cat had become an expert Dove hunter and the lagoons were at the heart of a well established cat territory. I felt confident that we would soon see the owner in the flesh.

After breakfast we explored the La Glorietta trail in more detail. On the open grass at the start of the road were a Greater Rhea and a Whistling Heron. Further along we found a very short walking trail, a loop of perhaps two hundred metres. Here we discovered a fresh cat scat, still damp and obviously the work of a Geoffroy's Cat the previous night. This looked like another cat territory and we decided to invest time later that evening to spotlighting the whole area. As we completed the short loop we found a Crane Hawk perched high above our heads in a palm tree.

At the apex of La Glorietta is a car park where there is a glorious panoramic view of the surrounding area. In the distance are grassy, boulder-strewn slopes which look ideal for Pampas Cat, a species which has been recorded in the park in the past. This might be as good a place to look for them as any.

There is a five or six hundred metre walking trail here that takes a semi-circular route down to the El Palmar river and back to the car park. We quietly crept along it to see what we could find. Along the river an Amazon Kingfisher whistled past and in the soft mud we found fresh tracks of Crab-eating Raccoon. We didn't find any actual mammals but the area looked so interesting that we decided to do a night walk there later that evening in addition to spotlighting the Glorietta loop itself.

With time to kill before lunch we went to explore another walking trail adjacent to the campground. There is a very short trail here that goes down a series of steps to the El Palmar river and another, slightly longer, trail that forms a loop through woodland and which is obviously used by campers as a picnic site. We found two Dove kill remains here, indicating that Geoffroy's Cat were active hereabouts too.

After lunch, on our return along the main access road, we were disconcerted to find that an operation had begun to burn the grass over quite a wide area, extending down as far as the Los Loros track. Apparently this action is undertaken each year by the park authorities to reduce the chances of a catastrophic natural fire. It does appear to be justified and seemingly it has only a minimal impact on wildlife, though it is of course a very disruptive nuisance to visiting mammal watchers. We were horrified to discover that the Los Loros road had been temporarily closed. A park ranger told us shortly afterwards that the road there might be closed for one or two days.

That evening we went down to the Mirador El Palmar at dusk to check for Otters on the river and to see if any Bats were emerging. A few Bats did indeed appear, one of them a medium sized, brown-bodied animal that might have been a species of Bonneted Bat. Another, hawking for insects over the river itself, produced a lively "snap, crackle and pop" on the bat detector at a peak of 41 KHz and might have been Black Mastiff Bat (*Molossus molossus*), though by then it was too dark to see if they had tell-tale visible protruding tails in flight.

The road alongside the burning area was clouded in thick smoke and orange flames could be seen licking the scorched earth between the trees. However, to our surprise, the Los Loros had re-opened and we were able to go in. We were rewarded with several Crab-eating Foxes and we were pleased to see that the burning hadn't yet reached the Los Loros. Perhaps we still had a chance of finding the resident cat early the following morning.

We kept the Glorietta road for last, saving our best hope for the latest and, hopefully, least disturbed part of the session. This proved a very sound tactic as no sooner had we turned off the main road onto the Glorietta than I picked up bright eye-shine at around 100 metres. It was obviously a cat and seconds later we had a beautiful spotted Geoffroy's staring back into our torch beam. It sat bolt upright on its haunches using its tail as a balance, rather like a Meerkat. (Geoffroy's Cats are renowned for performing this trick). It sat still for a minute or two, then turned round and stretched itself to reveal its fabulous spotted coat. Then it was off, slowly at first but then more urgently. We followed it with the torch beam for a while but eventually we lost it in thick scrub.

As planned, we did the night walk along the walking trail down by the El Palmar river, though no amount of creeping around with low-powered head torches could turn up a Raccoon or Opossum, as we had hoped. Right at the end of the trail, on the edge of the woodland, we found a lone Brown Brocket Deer, its widely spaced bright yellow eyes gleaming back at us forty metres away.

Driving back along the main access road we found two Chital, one of them a very splendid male with huge antlers. We noted with interest that these animals were already back on recently burned grass, the ground around their hooves still smouldering!

Friday 6th September

With the burning now apparently finished we tried the Los Loros once again at dawn. There were two more Dove kill remains on the Los Loros road itself, though still we couldn't find the perpetrator. In fact, it was extremely quiet and we had only a single Pampas Fox to show for our efforts.

The proprietress of the hotel told us, over breakfast, of a Bat roost at the Ruins and so, suitably intrigued, we went off a bit later to investigate. But there was no sign of any roost anywhere thereabouts, though at the bird hide nearby we did find evidence of Bat droppings on the floor. Clearly, Bats had been there recently, possibly using the hide as a hibernaculum through the winter. There were also fairly fresh Raccoon scats on the floor suggesting that the animal had visited at some point in the previous days looking to scavenge dead Bats which might have dropped onto the floor. A few birds were present, including Grey-necked Wood Rail, Narrow-billed Woodcreeper and Golden-billed Saltator.

With evidence of Bats roosting at the Ruins hide, we speculated about the possibility of a similar roost at the infrequently used Mirador hide and drove over to see if our instincts were right. Disappointingly, there were no Bats there either though again we found fairly fresh droppings on the floor and scratch marks on the wooden walls of the hide, (where Bats had

been clinging on). Looking out from the hide there is a nice wetland which appears to be the permanent home of six or seven Capybara. A Brown and Yellow Marshbird was perched on reeds and two American Kestrels were sitting in a nearby tree. A Giant Wood Rail was creeping about in the wet grass and, all in all, it was a very pleasant scene in the warm, spring sunshine.

That evening we decided to do something a little different and explore an area outside the park to the west. Mario drove us along a rough sandy track past the Aurora de El Palmar lodgings into palm savannah and farmland. We soon found a little colony of Brazilian Cavy adjacent to a stream where wide pools had formed either side of the road. There were quite a few freshwater turtles in the still water and Limpkin and Cattle Egrets on the shoreline. It looked a perfect spot for Lesser Grison and we hung around for a while to see if one would miraculously appear. (Needless to say it didn't!).



Brazilian Cavy on the Farm Road near Aurora de El Palmar.

We carried on along the track for another three or four kilometres, crossing a shallow stream in attractive deciduous woodland before stopping when it got dark enough to start spotlighting. Our plan was to drive slowly back, spotlighting as we went in the hope of Opossum, Lesser Grison, Yellow Armadillo or whatever might present itself. The habitat looked a fair bet for Jaguarundi as well. As we turned round to begin the return drive we were pleased to see a Scissor-tailed Nightjar, its glorious tail streamers flowing behind it as it quartered the field.

The drive was staggeringly uneventful, with no mammals whatsoever being spotted - at least until we had almost got back as far as the Cavy colony, only a few hundred metres from the Aurora lodgings. Then, Nico suddenly and unexpectedly announced that he had eye-shine and we stopped abruptly to take a closer look. It was a cat and, once I had got my powerful X21 torch lined up on it, we could see that it was in fact a Geoffroy's. We watched it for a couple of minutes at about fifty metres range before it eventually wandered off into the trees. An unexpected result!

Flushed with this last minute success, we decided to have a quick spin round the park itself, the entrance being only three kilometres away. I fancied the Ruins road, having been frustrated by the eye-shine of a probable but unconfirmed Cat two nights previously. I felt it owed me a cat - but my instincts were wrong and we found only a Crab-eating Fox at the junction. The Los Loros had been closed once more, as had the Glorietta and so that appeared to be that for the evening.

We decided to quit while we were ahead and go back for dinner at Tia Ana's. I half-heartedly spot-lighted along the main access road as we went, not really expecting anything to turn up; (this road had so far been very unproductive). But, just as we were in sight of the park entrance, I got bright eye-shine at close range. I was certain it was a cat and, sure enough, when we stopped to investigate, yet another Geoffroy's presented itself. It was barely twenty metres away but enveloped in thick vegetation - so we didn't get particularly good views. We got out to see if we could get closer but that predictably spooked the cat and off it went, bounding away into impenetrable scrub.

Tia Ana's had shut early we discovered when we got back to Ubajaya but we found a Pizzeria nearby that was doing barbequed meat even at that late hour. As we sat eating our beef and pork, Mario suddenly pointed out something behind me. Turning round I was surprised to see a small rodent running along the back of a pick-up truck parked there. With its small size, big ears, a slender pointed muzzle and tail about the same length as the body I guessed it might be House Mouse, (a common introduced species in towns here), though obviously a definite identification was not possible.

Saturday 7th September

We had one last crack at the Los Loros road at dawn but inevitably, it seemed, the resident cat once again eluded us. It seemed that we had found cats almost everywhere except the one spot we had most expected to see one.

For the rest of the day I staked out the rocky look-out on the El Palmar river at the end of the Mirador road. Mario and Nico dropped me off and then went fishing on the Rio Uruguay. My plan was to chill out, have a picnic lunch and a siesta and see if a Coypu or an Otter turned up. It would be a pleasant, relaxing day whatever happened. Mario and Nico were to return at dusk to pick me up for one last spot-lighting session and a final crack at the cats.

The day wore on with only a pair of Savannah Hawks and a Cocoli Heron to look at. The early sunshine disappeared and, in the distance, the ominous rumble of thunder began to

suggest a storm brewing. There were a few spots of rain but, thankfully, it didn't amount to anything substantial. Then, in the late afternoon, I suddenly noticed a swirl on the far side of the river, directly opposite where I was sitting. My binoculars were on it in a flash. It was what I had immediately suspected - a Neo-tropical River Otter. It paused to rest its front paws on a sunken branch and began munching on a fish it had caught. I could hear the chewing from seventy or eighty metres away and watched in fascination as it devoured its prey. Then, it was gone. For about five minutes I searched in vain before finally I re-located it about 150 metres upstream, porpoising along in a series of shallow dives. It made for a dead tree in the water where it hauled itself out and sprayed to mark its territory. Then it returned to the water and I watched another long porpoising sequence before eventually losing it altogether. I had watched it on and off for about twenty minutes. Mission accomplished!



The El Palmar river at the look-out.

Mario and Nico returned at just after six o'clock as planned and we began the walk back to the vehicle along the trail. It was only then that I realised how extensive were the Tuco-tuco colonies on each side of the path. We could clearly hear them calling and we stopped for quite a while to try to spot one, though without success.

The storm, which had been simmering gently for hours, was now drawing closer and savage forks of lightning began stabbing earthwards. A breeze sprang up and within minutes the breeze became a gale. The first few spots of rain began to fall and we fled to the vehicle

expecting to be drenched at any second. with heavy rainclouds overhead, darkness had come early and we began spotlighting our way back up the Mirador road.

Almost immediately I picked up eye-shine and a momentary glimpse of a pale face and front. It was another Geoffroy's Cat, but this time it spooked straight away and we lost it in thick vegetation before we had the chance for a proper look.

The wind was by now ripping off leaves and small branches and throwing them across the road ahead of us and so Mario drove us quickly back to the main access road. I suggested a brief look at the first few hundred metres of the Glorietta road (where we had seen a cat on the third evening) but by the time we had reached the turning the rain had become a downpour. So there was nothing for it but to quit.

It was a little frustrating to be blown out so abruptly but at least we had had four good days and nights and seen most of what the park had to offer. We had an early dinner at Tia Ana's, gorging ourselves on pork steaks so large that three of them completely overwhelmed a regular sized dinner plate.

Sunday 8th September

We had the luxury of a lie-in and a leisurely late breakfast before starting the boring six hour journey back to Buenos Aires. On the way, we picked out a few birds such as South American Stilt and Snail Kite and passed through habitat near the Parana River that Mario reckoned was good for Geoffroy's Cat. By late afternoon I was bidding farewell to my two driver/guides and beginning the long and arduous two day return to London via Miami.

5 The Mammals of El Palmar

5.1 General Impression

I was very pleasantly surprised to discover how confiding all the mammals were in the park. Foxes and Capybaras by the roadside seemed to take no notice of passing cars at all and even the Geoffroy's Cats we found were all remarkably tolerant of us, even when we blazed powerful torches into their faces! On foot, we had Pampas and Crab-eating Foxes walk right in front of us only metres away, apparently unconcerned at our presence.

5.2 Geoffroy's Cat

The best places to look seem to be:

- Arroyo de Los Loros, where Richard Webb had success in March and where we found innumerable clear and recent signs of activity.
- Campsite Road, where we had two cats together on the second evening.
- La Glorietta Road, especially the fenceline at the edge of the open grassland in the first 500 metres and the small walking trail just before the car park.
- The Mirador trail from the car park to the El Palmar river, where there is a huge Tuco-tuco colony and a big open area to spotlight.

- The Ruins Road, where I had eye-shine (almost certainly a cat) on the second evening.

However, Geoffroy's Cat could turn up almost anywhere in the park and two of our sightings were in unfancied areas close to human activity.

5.3 Pampas Fox and Crab-eating Fox

Pampas Foxes were seen all over the park and you would be unlucky not to see at least one or two on the access road. Crab-eating Foxes seemed to be more limited in distribution, the Arroyo de Los Loros and the junction being good areas. The former were equally active day and night, the latter more or less exclusively nocturnal.

5.4 Neo-tropical River Otter

The most obvious place to look is the rocky look-out at the end of the Miradote de El Palmar walking trail. From here you have a clear view upstream and downstream about a kilometre in each direction. I found a fresh spraint on the rocks from which I carried out my stake-out on the fifth day and it was from here that I got my sighting. It appears that this point is bang in the middle of an Otter territory.

5.5 Plains Viscacha

A night time visit to the campsite should provide easy views of as many Viscacha as you would ever want.

5.6 Tuco-tuco

The Mirador walking trail has Tuco-tuco colonies on both sides. We heard much "tuco-tuco" calling on the fifth evening, (though we didn't manage to get an actual sighting or confirm which species were present). Those with time to spend here should get an easy "tick".

5.7 Brown Brocket Deer and Chital

Anywhere with woodland or thick scrub should yield deer sightings. Riparian woodland at the La Glorietta walking trail is worth trying.

5.8 Capybara

Likely almost anywhere in the park but guaranteed at the look-out at the end of the Mirador walking trail and at the bird hide on the Mirador Road.

6 Tips for Future Mammal Watchers

To summarise, to get the most out of a visit, I would recommend that visitors:

- visit in spring or autumn and stick to midweek dates.
- allow 3-5 days/nights
- focus on early morning and evening, especially the first few hours of darkness

- drive slowly and spotlight carefully; the cats often seem to be just off the road
- explore on foot where possible in addition to driving the roads.

Such an approach should produce a mammal list of 8-12 species with multiple sightings of Geoffroy's Cat.

Annex 1 List of Mammals Recorded

The full list of mammals recorded is as follows:

Species	Latin Name	Notes
Geoffroy's Cat	<i>Lynchailurus geoffroyi</i>	Five sightings of six individuals, one melanistic.
Pampas Fox	<i>Lycalopex gymnocercus</i>	Seen daily both by day and night. Common.
Crab-eating Fox	<i>Cerdocyon thous</i>	Seen each evening in small numbers.
Plains Viscacha	<i>Lagostomus maximus</i>	Numerous at campsite.
Chital	<i>Axis axis</i>	Two sightings, one a fine, antlered male.
Brown Brocket Deer	<i>Mazama gouazoubira</i>	Four sightings.
Nine-banded Armadillo	<i>Dasypus novemcinctus</i>	One sighting on Arroyo de Los Loros.
Capybara	<i>Hydrochaeris hydrochaeris</i>	Abundant and visible all over the park.
Neo-tropical River Otter	<i>Lontra longicaudis</i>	One sighting on El Palmar river.
Brasilian Cavy	<i>Cavia aperea</i>	Seen at two places on farm road near Aurora EP
House Mouse	<i>Mus musculus</i>	One in Ubujaya.
Total Species	11	

Also, at least three species of Bat were observed, none of which could be identified.

Annex 2 List of Birds Recorded

This was not a birding trip and I am no birder, but the following is a rather incomplete list of some of the birds we saw.

Species	Latin Name
Greater Rhea	<i>Rhea americana</i>
Red-winged Tinamou	<i>Rhynchotus rufescens</i>
Spotted Nothura	<i>Nothura maculosa</i>
Cocoi Heron	<i>Ardea cocoi</i>
Whistling Heron	<i>Syrigma sibilatrix</i>
Great White Egret	<i>Egretta alba</i>
Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>
White-faced Ibis	<i>Plegadis chihi</i>
Maguari Stork	<i>Ciconia maguari</i>
Southern Screamer	<i>Chauna torquata</i>
Brasilian Teal	<i>Amazonetta brasiliensis</i>
Turkey Vulture	<i>Cathartes aura</i>
Snail Kite	<i>Rostrhamus sociabalis</i>
Crane Hawk	<i>Geranospiza caerullescens</i>
Savannah Hawk	<i>Heterospizias meridionalis</i>
Roadside Hawk	<i>Buteo magnirostris</i>
Crested Cara-cara	<i>Polyborus plancus</i>
American Kestrel	<i>Falco sparverius</i>
Grey-necked Wood-rail	<i>Aramides cajanea</i>
Giant Wood-rail	<i>Aramides ypecaha</i>
Limpkin	<i>Aramus guarauna</i>
Southern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus chilensis</i>
South American Stilt	<i>Himantopus mexicanus</i>
Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>
Eared Dove	<i>Zenaida auriculata</i>
White-tipped Dove	<i>Leptotila verreauxi</i>
Spot-winged Pigeon	<i>Columba maculosa</i>
Monk Parakeet	<i>Myiopsitta monachus</i>
Guira Cuckoo	<i>Guira guira</i>
Great Horned Owl	<i>Bubo virginianus</i>
Scissor-tailed Nightjar	<i>Hydropsalis brasiliana</i>
Amazon Kingfisher	<i>Chloroceryle amazona</i>
Green-barred Woodpecker	<i>Colaptes melanochloros</i>
Campo Flicker	<i>Colaptes campestris</i>
Narrow-billed Woodcreeper	<i>Lepidocolaptes augustirostris</i>
Rufous Hornero	<i>Furnarius rufus</i>
Plush-crested Jay	<i>Cyanocorax chrysops</i>
White-rumped Swallow	<i>Tacycineta leucorrhoa</i>
Rufous-bellied Thrush	<i>Turdus rufiventris</i>
Creamy-bellied Thrush	<i>Turdus amaurochalinus</i>
Grey Monjita	<i>Xolnis cinerea</i>
Great Kiskadee	<i>Pitangus sulphuratus</i>
Golden-billed Saltator	<i>Saltator aurantirostris</i>
Yellow-billed Cardinal	<i>Paoaria capitata</i>
Ringed Warbling-finch	<i>Poospiza torquata</i>

Black-capped Warbling-finch	Poospiza cinerea
Rufous-collared Sparrow	Zonotrichia capensis
Saffron Finch	Sicalis flaveola
Shiny Cowbird	Molothrus bonariensis
Bay-winged Cowbird	Molothrus badius
Hooded Siskin	Carduelis magellanica
Brown and Yellow Marshbird	Pseudoleistes virescens
House Sparrow	Passer domesticus
Total Species	53