

A jaguar with a distinctive spotted pattern is standing on a rocky bank next to a body of water. The jaguar is looking down towards the water. The background consists of tall, dry grasses and some green foliage. The scene is captured in a natural, outdoor setting.

Panthergonia

Tour Report

Pantanal and Torres del Paine
September 23 - October 6, 2016

PARTICIPANTS



Björn & Susanne, Sweden
Stuart, UK
Nozomi & Morten, NozoMojo (escorts)

Ricardo, Brazil (guide)
Diego & Rodrigo, Chile (guides)



SUMMARY



Our big South American adventure was a success! Originally, we had intended to visit three major sites (Pantanal, Torres del Paine and Peninsula Valdes), to target primarily Jaguar, Puma and Southern Right Whale, but insufficient bookings meant that we cancelled the Peninsula Valdes section and ended up doing the rest with only three participants. It was a lovely group with a nice chemistry, high activity desire and great enthusiasm and great sense of humour.

The weather was on our side. In the Pantanal, we had it dry and warm, but not too hot. And in Patagonia, we were blessed with practically no winds! The spring was late this year, and it seemed to have delayed the arrival of some migrants. But overall, we really lucked out.

Our guides were terrific. Ricardo Casarin came to us through Boute Expeditions and was good company in the Pantanal, while Diego Araya from Wild Patagonia and Rodrigo Moraga from NatPhoto were our expert Puma spotters in Torres del Paine.





The logistics worked out perfectly well. Our tour began in Sao Paulo. We flew domestic in Brazil with Avianca from Sao Paulo to Cuiabá and back. In Cuiabá, Ricardo was waiting for us with the van and driver. In the Pantanal, we spent one night at Pousada Poconé Araras (too short for this delightful location). We had 4 nights at the well-functioning Hotel Porto Jofre, superb location combined with great accommodation and food. Our last 2 nights were spent at Pousada Piuval, a great setting for a different array of species than in the more wet parts further south. Generally, we were pleased with the service, the rooms and the food, and our various boat drivers, vehicle drivers and other assistants were simply great.

We flew to Santiago de Chile with LAN (now LATAM), and we spent one night near the airport at the Diego de Almagro Hotel. Check-in was rather chaotic, but the rooms did what they were supposed to do for us - offered some rest. The shuttles back and forth worked fine. We then flew with SKY to Punta Arenas, no issues, and here we met Rodrigo with our driver and van. We drove together to Puerto Natales, where we had lunch, met up with Diego, and changed into the two jeeps that we would use for the park area. We drove to Torres del Paine and spent the 5 nights and had our meals at Ecocamp Patagonia. The superior domes were nice, and the food was generally good - but we did have some communication and service issues with the staff there. At the end of our tour, we drove back from the park via Puerto Natales to Punta Arenas, and flew back to Santiago de Chile with SKY again. End of voyage.

The diary notes made during the voyage have sadly disappeared with the death of our old laptop, so this report is made from memory and species notes alone. Altogether, it was a splendid tour. We got our target species, and we saw them well. In the Pantanal, we had a total of 6 Jaguar sightings of probably 5 different individuals, and in Torres del Paine we saw 6 different Pumas. In total, we registered almost 200 species of bird in the Pantanal, plus 17 mammal species and 4 reptiles. A number of mammals (bats), birds, reptiles and amphibians remained unidentified, as well as many insects. In Torres del Paine, we registered 70 bird species and 8 mammal species (plus an unidentified mouse species). Lists (abbreviated for the birds) follow at the end.

PANTANAL



September 23:

Part sunny all day, a few rain drops, light winds, 32-34 degrees C. Flight from Sao Paulo 06.05, arriving in Cuiabá 07.35, met up with Ricardo and our driver there. We drove via Poconé to the Transpantaneira, stopping along the way, until we reached Araras Lodge, where we would spend the night. In the evening, we went along the board walk to the "Howler Monkey tower".

The highlight of our first day was simply being in the Pantanal, along the Transpantaneira. The amount of birds and other wildlife was already a bit overwhelming, and we had our first of many excellent sightings of many of the more showy and common species of the area. We had our group picture taken at the "entrance" to the dirt road that leads into the Pantanal. We had our first experience of the many wooden bridges. We saw many herons and egrets, storks and ibises, raptors, doves and parrots and kingfishers, flycatchers and tanagers and caciques. Capybaras and Yacaré Caiman were numerous, and we saw our first deer, three species (Red Brocket, Grey Brocket and Marsh).

Ricardo told us about the surrounding Cerrado, and the threats to it, and how the environment changes as we head into the Pantanal. Here in the north, it is higher and drier than further south. Species seen today that reflect this were Greater Rhea and Red-legged Seriema. Of note were also Undulated Tinamou (only seen once more on the trip), an American Kestrel (seen before entering), 3 Purple Gallinules, 2 Black-necked Stilts, 5 Mato Grosso Antbirds, good views of a Buff-throated Woodcreeper, beautiful Sayaca Tanagers and a nice Green-barred Woodpecker at Araras Lodge.

September 24:

Overcast, dry, light winds, 26 degrees C.

Wildlife watching before breakfast, then from 7.00 until noon along the Transpantaneira to Porto Jofre, with many stops along the way, and a break at the Mato Grosso Hotel on the Pixaim River. From 14.30 until 18.00 boat ride on the Cuiabá River.

In the morning, highlights already before breakfast were the numerous birds at the lodge, including excellent views of Bare-faced Curassows and Chestnut-bellied Guans, a couple of Boat-billed Herons and a Ferruginous Pygmy-owl. It was also very special to get close views of the domesticated Hyacinth Macaw. We enjoyed a lovely meal outdoors, then got into the vehicle.

During our drive towards the south, we enjoyed many good sightings. Apart from the more common or numerous species, it is worth mentioning more Greater Rheas, our first Piping Guans, our first Anhingas, one Maguari Stork, fine views of a Laughing Falcon, brief views of two Bat Falcons and one Aplomado Falcon (the only one for the voyage), one of our two sightings of Peach-fronted Parakeets and of two Scaly-headed Parrots, great views of a Great Horned Owl roosting in a palm tree, brief views of a Glittering-throated Emerald (little did we know that we would see almost no hummingbirds in the coming days), a Pale-crested and a Cream-colored Woodpecker both, and our only good views of Barred Antshrike. We stopped particularly to find Scarlet-headed Blackbird and did - what a bird! We also stopped in a grove of trees with a ruined house in it, this is where we found the Great Horned Owl and many other birds - there was also an abundance of huge "killer-bee" nests.





We checked in to our delightful rooms, set on the river bank, and enjoyed a brief siesta. All around us were as many birds as anyone cared to watch - Buff-necked Ibis, Hyacinth Macaws, Monk Parakeets, a male Vermillion Flycatcher - and many more. But there is no rest for the wicked, it was soon time for our first boat ride.

Our first half-day boat ride on the Cuiabá River gave us our first Sungrebe (we were to see unusually many over the coming days), as well as wonderful views of an array of herons, egrets, storks, ibises, raptors and kingfishers. There were numerous Yacaré Caiman and also many Capybara, we enjoyed the sulphur and swallowtail butterflies, and we enjoyed the setting itself. But of course we were there not least for Jaguar - and we had not been long on the river (actually just half an hour) before we had our first sighting of a fine male, striding along the banks. We watched it for a long time - walking, swimming, stalking. It was a very full day! We were back just before dark, we enjoyed dinner, and we looked forward to tomorrow.





September 25:

Overcast at first, then sunny, dry, light winds, 25-32 degrees C. Nice sunset. All day on the Cuiabá River, including the Black and Negrinho Channels. First ride from 6.00 to noon, the second from 14.30 until 18.00 (dusk).

We headed out early, up-river, and soon found ourselves enjoying our first encounter with a family of Giant River Otter. These delightful aquatic mammals were swimming along the bank, chatting to each other, and meanwhile hunting as well - one of them caught a fish. The call came that there was a Jaguar being seen, so we headed full speed towards the Black Channel - when our driver hit a submerged log quite hard. There was nothing we could do - the engine was broken, and we could only enjoy the quiet while we slowly drifted down stream, waiting for a replacement boat. In the meantime, we saw a few Black-and-Golden Howler Monkeys, another Sungrebe, an Osprey, and numerous other birds as well as many butterflies.

After having changed into our new boat, we managed to catch up with the Jaguar - this one a female. It was not showing well, but it was there. We then went into the Black Channel. We were quiet, and away from the other boats - and we were rewarded with the spectacle of a Yacaré Caiman catching a Yellow Anaconda right next to us. There was some thrashing for a little while, but then the caiman slid into the vegetation and out of view.

In the afternoon, we enjoyed more of the same, but this time in the Negrinho Channel, which we more or less had for ourselves. Wildlife including several Sungrebes, 4 Capped Herons, a beach with Pied Lapwings, Collared Plovers, 2 White-rumped Sandpipers and one Pectoral Sandpiper; great views of a spectacular male Blue-crowned Trogon, several Green Kingfishers, a difficult but in the end tickable female White-wedged Piculet, good views of Pale-legged Hornero (so different from the more common Rufous Horneros). A couple of Giant River Otters and a beautifully low-sun-lit female Black-and-Golden Howler Monkey were the mammalian highlights. On the way back towards camp, we saw hundreds of Southern Rough-winged Swallows and several Band-tailed Nighthawks (and one Nacunda Nighthawk) swirling in the sky.

September 26:

Sunny all day, no cloud, no wind, 36+ degrees C.

All day on the Cuiabá River, same timings as yesterday. In the morning to the Caxiri Channel and Three Brothers and back, in the afternoon to Piquirí River and back.

Today became the Jaguar day. We had 4 sightings of as many different animals - although one was the same male as on our first day. We spent a long time under the sweltering sun waiting for a female to sneak up on a Yacaré Caiman resting on a sand bank - eventually before anything else happened, the caiman slinked into the water, but the whole scene was exciting enough. Later in the day, we spent a long time watching the male, easing his way towards a family of Capybara on the opposite shore. He had no way of hiding, they had seen him - eventually he swam across the river in front of us, the Capybara went into the river and got away, and the Jaguar walked away while we followed along the river banks.

Over the course of a very warm and sunny day, we had many other good sightings. We saw a large flock of Bare-faced Ibises on one sand bar, and a large flock on Black Vultures on another. We saw many Jabiru, including a pair nicely perched on their huge nest. There were Black Skimmers, and there was our first Squirrel Cuckoo. In the narrow Caxiri Channel, we watched a caiman eat a fish, and we saw a Rufous-browed Pepper-shrike. In the morning, we watched a dust-bathing Giant River Otter, and coming home from the Piquirí River in the evening, we enjoyed another great sunset as well as many feeding Lesser Fishing Bats.

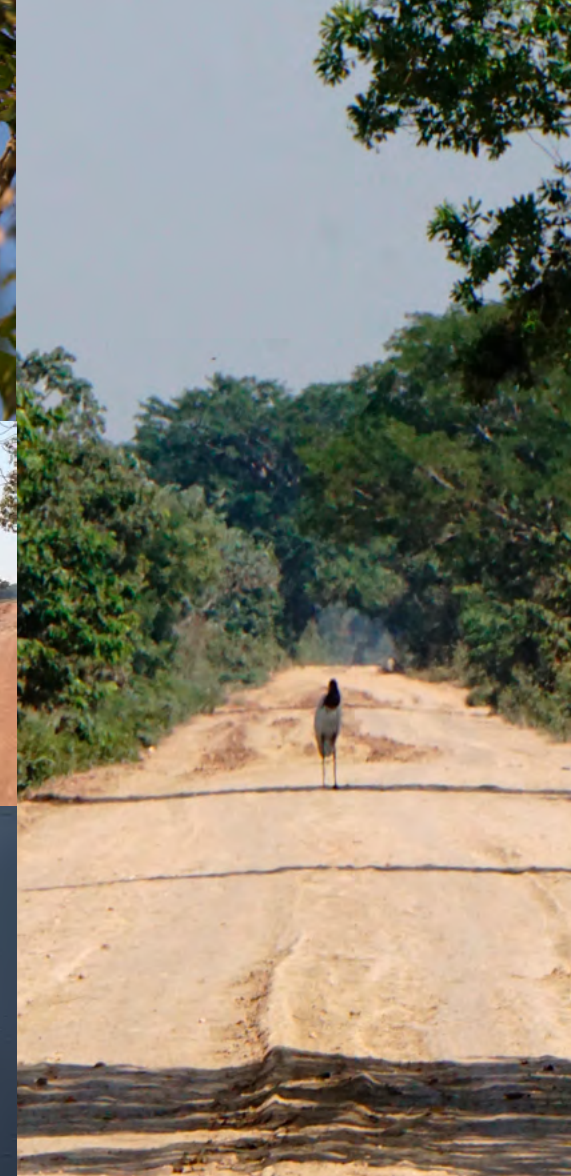


September 27:

Again sunny and windless, dry, no cloud, 37+ degrees C. Birding around the lodge 6.00 to 7.00, then birding on the Transpantaneira 7.00 to 11.00. In the afternoon 13.30 until 18.00 on the Cuiabá River to Negrinho Channel and back.

With only a half day on the river left in our programme, we decided to save that for the afternoon. Instead, we began the day with birding on the grounds of the lodge, enjoying great views of Bare-faced Curassows, many Toco Toucans, and a variety of other birds, some of them there because of feeding. We continued for some hours, using the car as a base and a place to get a bit of relief from the increasing heat, to make our way a few miles north along the Transpantaneira, stopping regularly and getting out. We spent a good while in one area, where Ricardo tried to get us on to a pair of Band-tailed Manakins, but they only showed very briefly. In the same area, however, we had good views of Little and Squirrel Cuckoo, a few Chesnut-eared Aracaris, and a small band of Tufted Capuchin Monkeys.

At one stop on a wooden bridge, we enjoyed the screaming of a pair of patrolling Giant River Otters in the water, while we also saw Yellow-chinned Spinetails and both Black-headed and White-headed Marsh Tyrants. At another stop, we spotted a distant Laughing Falcon and a somewhat closer White-tailed Hawk, as well as 3 Roseate Spoonbills and a male White-wedged Piculet, while the prize bird of the morning was a (for Pantanal rare) White-banded Mockingbird showing well. It soon became very hot, and there were insects making it slightly less enjoyable as well, and by 11.00 am we were back at the lodge for a cool siesta before the afternoon activity.



We had enjoyed the Negrinho Channel so much the other day, that we decided to go back there for our last afternoon. It was a quiet cruise, with Nozomi spotting a Bare-faced Ibis, all of us seeing a Jabiru chick in its nest, and generally just enjoying such birds as Southern Screamers, Blue-throated Piping Guans, numerous Anhingas and Rufescent Tiger-herons, many Black-collared Hawks, a couple of Sungrebes and Sun Bitterns, about 10 Rufous-tailed Jacamars, many Black-capped Donacobius', flocks of Yellow-rumped Caciques, one Orange-backed Troupial, and a majestic Pantanal cattle bull surrounded by many cows, and much more. Wonderful sunset again - and among the Lesser Fishing Bats Stewart spotted at least one Greater!





September 28:

Sunny and warm, light breeze from the SE morning, muggy but no cloud, 38+ degrees C.

Along the Transpantaneira 07.00 until 11.20 to Mato Grosso Hotel, with numerous stops along the way. After lunch a Jaguar lecture by Ricardo, then on the Pixaim River 15.15-17.15. On to Pousada Piuval further north, arriving after dark at 19.00.

One of the good stops in the morning was at the grove with the ruin again. The bees were still there, and many of the same birds too. Today, there was also a Cream-coloured Woodpecker. In the vicinity, there were hundreds of other birds - including several Little Blue Herons, Green and Plumbeous Ibises, Roseate Spoonbills, a flock of 12 Maguari Storks, three species of vulture, many Snail Kites and Southern Crested Caracaras, dozens of Limpkins, various parakeets and amazons, Guira Cuckoos, three species of kingfishers, various kiskadees and flycatchers, swallows and tanagers. At one bridge, we had good views of a flock of Rusty-collared Seed-eaters, we saw a White-banded Mockingbird (perhaps the same individual as yesterday?) - as well as the ubiquitous Capybara, Jacaré Caiman and now also several Green Iguana.

At another stop we failed to find any potoo (disturbance had made it shift from its usual roosting tree), but we did have excellent views of Scaly-headed Parrot and Black-crowned Tityra. At yet another stop Ricardo found Rusty-backed Antwrens for us.

On our final boat trip in the Pantanal, on the Pixaim River, we enjoyed as many as 10 Amazon Kingfishers, and great views of a Roadside Hawk, but missed the Agami Heron. Next time!

We drove the last stretch north to Piuval Lodge, watching the sun set from the car. There were a couple of Tegu Lizards along the way, and many wetland birds. A couple of South American Coati were also seen, and just before arriving at the lodge, we had brief views of a Crab-eating Racoon.



September 29:

A few clouds, but mostly sunny, light breeze at times, very warm day, 39+ degrees C. All day on the grounds of Pousada Piuval. Short drive/walk morning 05.00-07.00. Similar again 08.30-10.30. Siesta time, then safari truck excursion 15.45-19.00 including a visit to Green Channel.

Our day began early, it was hardly light yet when we drove down the road. Ricardo was still briefing us on what we would do if we were to find Giant Anteater when --- there they were. We scrambled out of the car and approached on foot, making sure we were downwind. There were two adult anteaters on the grassy fields full of termite mounds. One of them was carrying a baby. We watched them walk about nose to the ground, but soon they split up, and while one walked away from us, the other stayed a while, then made its way into cover among the bushes and trees as the sun rose above the horizon. What a start to the day!

After breakfast, we did something similar again - this time enjoying great findings along the road such as several Plumbeous Kites, a flock of 10 Eared Doves, superb views of 6 Peach-fronted Parakeets and of 4 stunning Golden-collared Macaws, as well as a fine Chotoy Spinetail. Further off was a Wedge-tailed Grassfinch, normally a Cerrado inhabitant. Good woodpeckers of the morning were 2 White and 3 Crimson-crested, as well as 3 Campo Flickers.

From the lodge grounds, for those who did not nap, we enjoyed many birds as well, among them Roseate Spoonbill, Crane Hawk, Savannah Hawk, Monk and Yellow-chevroned Parakeets, Sayaca and Palm Tanagers, Saffron Finches and the trip's only 2 Red-crested Cardinals.

After our much enjoyed siesta, we set off for an afternoon and evening in the safari truck provided by the lodge. It was a delight to drive among the multitude of species. One Greater Rhea male proudly strutted about with 20 chicks around his feet. A pair of Hyacinth Macaws loudly occupied their nesting tree. A female Bat Falcon sat just a silently in hers. A Six-banded Armadillo ran across the grass, but too quickly disappeared under the bushes. The prize of the afternoon was when Nozomi, during a stroll away from the vehicle, found a family group of 3 Feline Night Monkeys. Ricardo was very excited, he does not see those very often in the Pantanal, or anywhere for that matter.

Everywhere there was life. Towards the later part of the day, we ended at an area called Green Channel, and what a way to end the day! Here were Jabiru and Hyacinth Macaws in the trees, also a small flock of Greater Ani and a pair of Great Horned Owl. There was an Azara's Agouti on the ground in the bushes. But in the open, near as well as in the water, there were literally Jacaré Caiman and Capybara everywhere. Along and above the water, there were Roseate Spoonbills and any variety of herons and egrets. In the water, there were 6 Giant River Otters. Further along in the distance, there were at least 60 Large-billed Terns, hundreds of Limpkins and even more hundreds of Wood Storks. We stayed here until the sun had set.

Our drive continued until after dark, and while we did not find any large mammals, we did see both Greater and Common Potoo, as well as several Pauraque and one Little Nightjar. Back at the lodge, we were treated to close-up views of a family of Crab-eating Fox, it turned out they had their den right out in front of the main entrance of the lodge. There were the adults, and there were no less than 5 very tiny and very cute kits. A very fitting end to another long day.



September 30:

Departure from Piuval Lodge at 04.30, to arrive Cuiabá 06.00 for an 08.10 flight to Sao Paulo. Good-byes to our driver and Ricardo. Arrival Sao Paulo 11.15, departure again 16.20 for Santiago de Chile, arrival 20.20 local time.

In the morning, we spent a few minutes again watching one of the foxes, then we had to leave. It was an eventless drive to the airport of Cuiabá, where we had to bid farewell to our excellent driver and to Ricardo our guide. A long day lay ahead, but somehow, we got through it, and we arrived with all our luggage, not only back in Sao Paulo, but also across the continent in Chile. We had a short shuttle drive to our hotel near the airport in Santiago, and were quite relieved to put our heads on our pillows that night.



TORRES DEL PAINE



October 1:

Drizzle and fully overcast in Punta Arenas, later half-way clearing to become dry and partly sunny, light winds all day, 10 degrees C. An early morning flight from Santiago via Puerto Montt to Punta Arenas had us there by 11.15. We drove to Puerto Natales for a late lunch and a bit of shopping there approximately 15.30-16.30, then on in two vehicles with several stops along the way for a late 21.30 arrival at Ecocamp Patagonia.

When we arrived in Punta Arenas airport, it was suddenly chilly for the first time since our tour began, and drizzle too. We pulled out an extra layer from our bags, and then we drove towards Puerto Natales, stopping along the way for Magellanic Plover at a location that Rodrigo had heard the species should be viewable at. And indeed, we found a pair, as well as a fair number of other more common southern Patagonian bird species, including 20 Silvery Grebes (and a suspected Hooded Grebe that got away!), a pair of Flying Steamer Ducks, a pair of Two-banded Plovers, and 4 Bar-winged Cinclodes.

We continued on to Puerto Natales, enjoying views along the way of numerous Lesser Rheas and Chilean Flamingos, hundreds of Upland Geese, several Chimango and Southern Crested Caracaras, a huge flock of Brown-hooded Gull, and lots of Guanacos as well.



In Puerto Natales, we enjoyed a lunch at Mesita Grande, we greeted Diego, we shopped a bit, we shifted into our two jeeps, and then we continued. En route to Ecocamp Patagonia, we saw more good wildlife, including lots more Lesser Rheas, more wild fowl species and raptor species such as Andean Condor, Cinereous Harrier and Black-chested Buzzard Eagle, and some of us also had brief views of a Patagonian Haired Armadillo and a Patagonian Gray Fox. The weather improved and the views were spectacular. The Torres massif stood majestically against a painted sky behind the Sarmiento Lake.

A few miles before the park entrance, we spotted a recently deceased Guanaco near the side of the road. We stopped the cars and took a closer look - no sign of predation of it. While we were there, we might as well begin scanning for cats, so one car drove a bit further down the road, while the other set up the telescope. It wasn't long before Morten spotted our first Puma, walking slowly near the skyline on the hilltop nearby. Unfortunately, the cat disappeared behind the horizon before everyone had a chance to see it. But what a promising beginning.

Just after turning off towards Ecocamp Patagonia after the entrance to the park, and just before dusk, Rodrigo spotted our second Puma! A young animal (like the first one), it lay motionless in the landscape, focused on a potential prey (a hare?) a bit further down the slope. We watched it quietly for quite a while, as it slowly crept forward, but when it disappeared out of our view, we left it to continue its hunt, and we headed into Ecocamp to check in and settle into our domes.





October 2:

Mostly overcast with a few breaks in the cloud, light drizzle during siesta hours, practically no wind, 2 degrees C morning rising to about 12 degrees when warmest.

After an early basic breakfast, out 6.00 until 13.00, mostly in the area of "the Curve" not many kilometres from the park entrance, and adjacent to the border of the park and the Goic brothers' land. Afternoon 16.00-20.30 along the coast of Lago Sarmiento.

Our morning was spent scanning for, searching for, waiting for a Puma. We did not prevail today, but the time was enjoyed none the less. In those surroundings, with the Torres del Paine majesty in the background, and a colourful sunrise, and the rolling hills of the park all around, who could not love where we were? - even if restrictions now do make it illegal to walk away from the roads and trails. The area here is a sort of transition, or mix, of typical Patagonian steppe and typical Patagonian (or Pre-Andean) shrubland. We watched large flocks of Guanacos as they were feeding, always on the alert. The large herds of the winter had not quite dissipated yet, so some of the flocks were quite substantial. On the lakes, there were numerous waterfowl, including Spectacled Ducks, we enjoyed good views of Scale-throated Earth-creepers, many of them singing, we had lovely views of Austral Negritos, Grey-hooded Sierra Finches and Long-tailed Meadowlarks, and Morten had brief views of a White-bellied Seedsnipe (usually at higher altitude at this time of year). Back by camp, we enjoyed the antics of three Chilean Flickers.

After our siesta hour, we rolled out again, this time scanning along the shores of Lago Sarmiento. More birdlife, more Guanacos, and also several alarm calls from them. The trackers know which sounds from the Guanacos mean what, and there were several Puma alarms - but the landscape did not allow us to spot them this afternoon. On the way back home, we saw several European Hares (an introduced species that rather unusually seems not to be doing any harm here).



October 3:

Overcast, dry, no wind morning, but in the afternoon picking up to moderate, 5 degrees C early rising to 10-12 degrees.

06.30 until 12.30 first at "the Curve", then a drive to Cascada Paine and a circuit route back to camp. In the afternoon from 15.30 at the river near the gate, then "the Curve" again and Laguna Goic.

We began our day as yesterday, but our luck was different. We had not been at "the Curve" for long, before we heard alarm calls from the Guanacos that were spread out on the hills across from us. We began scanning, from triangulations of the calls we knew more or less in what direction to be searching. And there it was. A female Puma, a known individual as it is one of the "sisters", a famous sibling pair, was walking slowly down the hill in front of us on Goic land. We hastened to meet it in its path, and soon we were having the incredible experience of walking with a wild Puma! Pretty much ignoring us, the cat walked slowly and methodically through the landscape, searching the ground for prey, investigating bushes and shrubs, pausing, then continuing. At one stage, we were walking merely meters away from it, parallel with it, while it did what Pumas do. After the Puma had departed from the private lands, and departed from being right next to the road we were on, it laid down. The Guanacos fell quiet, and we left the scene after a quick coffee break, knowing that soon it would anyway find a resting spot for the day. We were humbled, and a bit overwhelmed, with that we had just seen and done.

We drove to Cascada Paine, where we not only spotted our first Torrent Duck, a male, but also enjoyed the waterfall and surrounds, as well as a pair of Dark-bellied Cinclodes and a few Chilean Flickers. We continued on to a circuit road that took us by some small lakes with numerous ducks, swans and geese, as well as Chilean Flamingos and a flock of Wilson's Phalaropes, we encountered another large flock of Guanacos, and we saw fine raptors. Before heading back to camp, we visited the grounds of Hotel Las Torres, where we saw a very fine male Striped Woodpecker.

From 15.30 until 20.00, we went back to "the Curve", and from there towards Laguna Goic. Walking across the hills, we enjoyed a variety of smaller song birds, as well as the omnipresent Guanacos of course. In the lake, we could see ducks, swans, geese and flamingos, and along the way, we came across an unusually showy field mouse. Diego described how the taxonomy of Patagonian mice is still very much debated, and we eventually gave up on identifying the critter to species level. Despite concentrated efforts by everyone, not least our trackers who went far afield in the search for Puma, we did not see any more cats this afternoon.





October 4:

No cloud and no wind, sunny and with a moderate breeze all day, up to 15 degrees C, and only in the afternoon a few cumulus clouds appearing.

From 08.00 until 20.30, all day outing to Laguna Grey and back, with packed lunches.

Having seen Puma so well yesterday, and wanting to see a greater diversity of landscapes as well as animal species, we dedicated today to a long drive. It was a most memorable one. Even before leaving camp in the morning, we had a new species seen - a Culpeo (Red) Fox was happily running around in camp. There were also few Magellanic Snipe flying about at dawn, and the Southern House Wrens, the Austral Thrushes, the Rufous-collared Sparrows and other birds were singing.

We drove along the Torres del Paine massif, with Lago Nordenskjöld in between it and us, and stopped several times. At one stop, Rodrigo decided to lift a few rocks, and beneath them we found both an unidentified lizard and a specimen of an apparently endemic Torres del Paine National Park scorpion. At our next stop, the kiosk at the parking lot by Salto Grande, we were searching for an armadillo, but there were too many people - so we continued, and aimed to have lunch at a large parking area / camp site / kiosk area set on the shore of Lago Pehoe. Along the way, we saw several Great Grebes, 3 Flying Steamer Ducks and one Andean (Ruddy) Duck.

As we walked the grounds for a while before settling in at the picnic tables for lunch, we had excellent views of a Plumbeous Rail and a Rufous-tailed Plantcutter. As we were enjoying our sandwiches, fruits, snacks and drinks in the warm, sunny, quiet weather at the picnic tables, we were joined by a delightful gathering of one Patagonian Haired Armadillo, one Southern Crested Caracara, a few Austral Blackbirds and a band of Patagonian Sierra Finches.

We drove all the way to the end of the road, at the Lago Gray Guardaria, also here a large parking lot, a camp ground, a hotel, etc. And a wonderful change of scenery, with large stands of twisted Antarctic Beech trees and other trees forming a typical rich Magellanic deciduous forest. We were to have a very busy afternoon.

Rodrigo soon found a female Huemul, or South Andean Deer. It was - as that species is - very gentle in its manner, allowing us to have close views at a distance that many deer species would not tolerate. It was wearing a huge collar, the local researchers are doing a lot of surveillance in this species - hunted almost to extinction and still threatened.

Another highlight of the afternoon was a pair of Torrent Ducks, showing extremely well as they made their way upstream and came right by us. This bird's ability to live in fast-flowing icy-cold rivers is inspiring.

Another highlight this afternoon was prolonged viewing of 3-4 Magellanic Woodpeckers on a fallen log. There was a lot of calling, displaying and other antics going on, as one of the females continuously made the male feed her. This is a spectacular bird anytime, and the sighting today was exceptional.

In this general area, we also enjoyed encounters with such diverse species as Variable Hawk, Austral Parakeet and Thorn-tailed Rayadito, among others, and we also took our time to simply be present - enjoying the weather, the woods, the air, the lake, the blue glacier icebergs floating or grounded near the shore, the walk through the forest and onto the sand bar, and so on. It was a happy and tired bunch that got into the cars to drive the long way back to camp.

But it was not over yet. Just before arriving at the camp, the front car saw a Puma lying near a cliff face just off the road. The sighting lasted about one minute, then the cat got up and slinked into the bush - never to be seen again, even though we stayed a while. The other car had caught up by now, and having missed the Puma, it decided to stay two minutes longer. When it too eventually gave up and drove the last stretch to camp, it saw another Puma instead - this one virtually in camp, right before the parking area of the cars. This Puma also managed to slink into the bush and disappear, despite a concentrated search effort. During the search, we heard Austral Pygmy Owl (a species that we tried hard to see, but only managed to hear).





October 5:

Part overcast part sunny all day, but towards evening fully overcast, light drizzle evening, again no wind all day, up to 10 degrees C. From before dawn until lunchtime at Laguna Amarga (for sunrise) and at "the Curve", then afternoon from 15.00 to 19.00 a drive to Cerro Guido Estancia outside the park.

The cloud had been of a nature so far that it had seemed unlikely that we would have a spectacular sunrise on the "Torres", but the forecast for today was more promising. While Diego and Rodrigo drove up to "the Curve" to begin a Puma search there, the rest of us went to Laguna Amarga and enjoyed an hour of orange sunrise there, with sightings around the lake of good birds like White-tufted and Silvery Grebes, Coscoroba and Black-necked Swans, several duck species, Red-gartered Coot, Southern Lapwings and another flock of Wilson's Phalaropes.

On we went to "the Curve", and from there onto Goic land and to their laguna. The walk to the lake rewarded us with prolonged views of a foraging Molina's Hog-nosed Skunk, a delightful creature on its morning patrol. We also saw another 2 mice, probably the same species as the other day, one was recently squashed (by a Guanaco?), the other running along. We had good views of a couple of Cinnamon-bellied Ground Tyrants, and we heard several (and Nozomi saw one) Least Seedsnipe. Nozomi also found a Plumbeous Sierra Finch. We came across an abandoned Lesser Rhea nest, complete with frozen eggs. At the lake side, from our elevated vantage point, we could look down on steamer ducks, swans and flamingos - and across from us, after some searching, we were able to enjoy distant but clear views of an adult Puma, first sleeping, later walking slowly down the slope. It was a full last morning.

This afternoon, we decided to drive outside the park, in the direction towards Puerto Natales, and then head off the main road to the left towards some private estancia lands that Diego and Rodrigo knew to be productive in terms of wildlife. It was once again a change of scenery, and this time again very beautiful surroundings. Along the way, we registered many birds, not least good numbers of Lesser Rhea, Black-faced Ibis, Southern Lapwing and Southern Crested Caracara.

In a wet valley among low hills, with a beautiful mountain backdrop, we got out of our cars and enjoyed some different birds. Here we saw a pair of (Magellanic) Great Horned Owl, one of them lying on the nest underneath a bush, overlooking the wetlands. We also saw 5 species of duck (Spectacled Duck, Speckled Teal, Chiloe Wigeon, Yellow-billed Pintail and Silver Teal), and we had good views of 2 Patagonian Mockingbirds, plus much more.



October 6:

A calm and sunny day, part overcast only, with temperatures reaching 15 degrees C.

All day drive, from 08.00 until 15.00, from Ecocamp to Puerto Natales and on to Punta Arenas. SKY flight back to Santiago - end of tour.

The more common open area birds were numerous on our drive today - rhea, ibis, flamingo, swans, geese, ducks, condor, eagle, caracaras, coot, lapwing, gulls, negrito and meadowlark. We added a couple of new and good species to our list of sightings - notably approximately 10 Ashy-headed Geese, and finally we all had views of a Patagonian Gray Fox. We enjoyed the spectacle of many Andean Condors and Southern Crested Caracaras feeding on the carcasses of livestock, or in one case waiting near a new-born lamb to see if it would get up and join its mother - which it eventually did.

We stopped briefly for some shopping in Cerro Castillo, then on to Puerto Natales, where we bid good-bye to Diego. Onward to Punta Arenas, where we bid good-bye to Stewart, who would stay another day there. The final part of our tour was an eventless flight back to Santiago, where we sadly dispersed. The NozoMojo Panthergonia 2016 tour had ended.



SPECIES - PANTANAL



CR = Cuiabá River and tributaries
TP = along the Transpantaneira

Mammals

Six-banded (Yellow) Armadillo - 1 Sep 29 (Piuval)
Giant Anteater - 3 Sep 29 (Piuval)
Azara's Agouti - 3 Sep 24 (Araras) & 1 Sep 29 (Piuval)
Capybara - up to nearly 100 daily
Jaguar - 6 sightings of 5-6 individuals Sep 24-26 (CR)
Crab-eating Fox - family of 7 Sep 29-30 (Piuval)
Giant (River) Otter - 12 individuals over 4 days
Crab-eating Raccoon - 1 Sep 28 (Piuval)
South American Coati - 6 individuals on 3 days
Lesser Fishing (Bulldog) Bat - more than 100 on each of 3 days (CR)
Greater Fishing (Bulldog) Bat - at least 1 Sep 27 (CR)
Bats spp. - several unidentified species seen at several locations
Black-striped (Tufted) Capuchin - heard once, then approx. 15 seen on 3 days
Black-and-Gold Howler Monkey - near 40 on 4 days
Feline Night Monkey - 3 Sep 29 (Piuval)
Red Brocket Deer - 1 Sep 23 (TP) and 2 Sep 24 (Araras)
Grey (Brown) Brocket Deer - 1 Sep 23 (TP)
Marsh Deer - 4 on 3 different days (TP & Araras)

Reptiles

Yellow Anaconda - 1 Sep 25 (CR)
Paraguayan/Pantanal Yacaré Caiman - up to several hundred daily
Common (Green) Iguana - 8 on 5 different days
Common (Golden) Tegu Lizard - 6 on 3 different days (mostly TP)



Birds

(only specialties or those seen less than 3 times included here)

Chestnut-bellied Guan - more than 10 on 4 different days
Boat-billed Heron - 2 Sep 24 (Araras)
Whistling Heron - 1 Sep 23 (TP) & 8 Sep 29 (Piuval)
Capped Heron - 15 on 5 days
White-faced Ibis - 1 Sep 27 (CR)
Bare-faced Ibis - 1 Sep 25 & scores Sep 26 (CR)
Maguari Stork - 1 Sep 24 & flock of 12 (arriving on migration?) Sep 28
Jabiru - more than 10 daily, some days many more
Osprey - 2 on 2 days
White-tailed Hawk - 1 Sep 27 (TP)
Hook-billed Kite - 1 Sep 24 (TP)
Plumbeous Kite - 1 Sep 28 & approx. 10 (arriving on migration?) Sep 29
Crane Hawk - 3 on 3 days
Laughing Falcon - 2 on 2 days (TP)
Bat Falcon - 3 on 2 days (Pixaim & Piuval)
Aplomado Falcon - 1 Sep 24 (Pixaim)
Purple Gallinule - 3 Sep 23 (Araras)
Sungrebe - 13 on 5 days (CR)
Red-legged Seriema - 1 seen Sep 23 (TP), 1 heard Sep 29 (Piuval)
Pied Lapwing - 11 on 3 days (CR)
Collared Plover - 3 on 2 days (CR)
Black-necked Stilt - 2 Sep 23 (TP)
Lesser Yellowlegs - 2 on 2 days (TP)
Solitary Sandpiper - 3 Sep 24 (CR)
Pectoral Sandpiper - 1 Sep 25 (CR)
White-rumped Sandpiper - 4 on 2 days (CR)
Black Skimmer - 14 on 4 days (CR)
Eared Dove - approx. 10 Sep 29 (Piuval)
Hyacinth Macaw - up to 10's daily
Golden-collared Macaw - 4 Sep 29 (Piuval)
White-eyed Parakeet - 2 pairs on 2 days (TP & CR)
Peach-fronted Parakeet - 2 flocks of 6 on 2 days
Blue-winged Parrotlet (probable, but very brief

sighting) - 1 Sep 28 (TP)
Scaly-headed Parrot - 2 pairs on 2 days (TP)
Little Cuckoo - 2 Sep 27 (TP)
Greater Ani - 4 Sep 29 (Piuval)
Striped Cuckoo - 2 heard & 1 seen on 3 days
Great Horned Owl - 1 on 2 days (TP) & 1 pair Sep 29 (Piuval)
Ferruginous Pygmy-owl - 1 Sep 24 (Araras) & 1 heard Sep 29 (Piuval)
Great Potoo - 1 on night drive Sep 29 (Piuval)
Common Potoo - 1 seen & 1 heard on night drive Sep 29 (Piuval)
Band-tailed Nighthawk - 50+ seen on 3 days (CR)
Nacunda Nighthawk - 1 Sep 25 (CR)
Little Nightjar - 1 on night drive Sep 29 (Piuval)
Glittering-throated Emerald - 2 on 2 days (TP)
Fork-tailed Woodnymph - 1 female Sep 27 (TP)
Blue-crowned Trogon - 1 male Sep 25 (CR)
Toco Toucan - a few, up to 10, daily
Chestnut-eared Aracari - 11 on 5 days
White-wedged Piculet - 1 female Sep 25, 1 male Sep 27, 1 heard Sep 28
Green-barred Woodpecker - 1 Sep 23 (Araras)
Golden-green Woodpecker - 2 on 2 days (TP)
White Woodpecker - 1 Sep 25 (Porto Jofre) & 2 Sep 29 (Piuval)
Campo Flicker - 3 Sep 29 (Piuval)
Pale-crested Woodpecker - 1 Sep 24 (TP)
Cream-coloured Woodpecker - 1 Sep 24 & 1 Sep 28 (TP)
Crimson-crested Woodpecker - 3 Sep 29 (Piuval)
Great Antshrike - heard on 5 days
Barred Antshrike - 1 male seen Sep 24, heard on 2 other days
Long-billed Antwren - 1 heard Sep 27 (CR)
Rusty-backed Antwren - 1 pair Sep 28 (TP)
Mato Grosso Antbird - 5 Sep 23, 2 heard on 2 other

days
Band-tailed Antbird - 1 female Sep 28 (TP)
Buff-throated Woodcreeper - 1 Sep 23 (TP)
Red-billed Scythebill - 4 on 3 days
Chotoy Spinetail - 1 Sep 29 (Piuval)
Cinereous-breasted Spinetail - 2 Sep 27 (TP)
Greater Thornbird - 1-3 Sep 23 (TP)
Forest Elaenia - 1 Sep 27 (TP)
Southern Beardless Tyrannulet - 1 Sep 25 (CR)
Piratic Flycatcher - 3 on 2 days
Short-crested Flycatcher - 2 on 2 days (TP)
Brown-crested Flycatcher - 2 Sep 27 (TP)
Black-crowned Tityra - 1 pair Sep 28 (TP)
Band-tailed Mannakin - 1 pair heard (& seen by Ricardo) Sep 27 (TP)
Helmeted Mannakin - 1 heard Sep 28 (TP)
White-rumped Swallow - 1 Sep 24 (TP)
White-banded Mockingbird - 1 Sep 27 & 1 Sep 28 (same bird?) (TP)
Moustached Wren - 1 heard Sep 25 (CR)
Thrush-like Wren - 4 on 2 days (TP)
Pale-breasted Thrush - 4 on 2 days (TP)
Greyish Saltator - 1 pair twice on 2 days (TP)
Rufous-browed Pepper-shrike - 1 Sep 26 (CR) & 1 Sep 27 (TP)
White-bellied Warbler - 1 Sep 27 (TP)
Grey-headed Tanager - 1 Sep 25 (CR)
Chestnut-vented Conebill - 1 Sep 27 (TP)
Rusty-collared Seedeater - 6 on 2 days (Porto Jofre & TP)
White-bellied Seedeater - 1 Sep 27 (TP)
Red-crested Cardinal - 2 Sep 29 (Piuval)
Epulet Oriole - 5+ Sep 23 & 1 Sep 28 (TP)
Scarlet-headed Blackbird - 3 Sep 24 (TP)
Wedge-tailed Grassfinch - 1 Sep 29 (Piuval)
Shiny Cowbird - 5+ Sep 24 & 1 Sep 28 (TP)

SPECIES - TORRES DEL PAINE



Mammals

Big Hairy (Patagonian Haired) Armadillo - 1 Oct 1 en route & 1 Oct 4
Puma - 6 sightings of probably 6 individuals over 4 days
South American (Patagonian) Gray Fox - 6 individuals over 4 days
(but several seen only by the trackers)
Culpeo (Red) Fox - 1 Oct 4
Molina's Hog-nosed Skunk - Smelled in camp Oct 4 & 2 seen Oct 5
Guanaco - up to more than 400 daily
Huemul (South Andean Deer) - 1 (collared) female Oct 4 (Lago Gray)
European Hare - up to more than 10 daily
Mouse sp. - 3 seen on Goic land on 2 days

Birds

(only specialties or those seen less than 3 times included here)

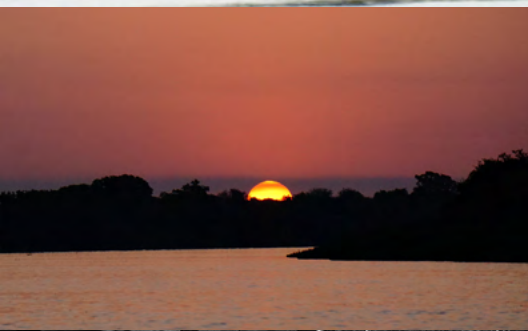
Hooded Grebe (suspected) - 1 Oct 1 (en route)
Great Grebe - 1 Oct 2 & 4 Oct 4
Snowy Egret - approx. 5 Oct 6 (en route)
Black-crowned Night Heron - 1 Oct 1
Ashy-headed Goose - approx. 10 Oct 6 (en route)
Spectacled Duck - 4 pairs over 3 days
Silver Teal - 1 pair plus 1 Oct 5 (Cerro Guido Estancia)
Torrent Duck - 1 male Oct 3 & 1 pair Oct 4
Andean (Ruddy) Duck - 1 Oct 4
Andean Condor - almost 50 total over almost every day

Black-chested Buzzard eagle - almost 20 over all days
Variable (Red-backed) Hawk - 1 Oct 4
Magellanic Plover - 1 pair Oct 1 (en route)
Least Seedsnipe - heard on 2 days, 1 seen Oct 5
White-bellied Seedsnipe - 1 on Oct 2
Wilson's Phalarope - 2 flocks each of 25-30 on 2 days
Plumbeous Rail - 1 Oct 4
Two-banded Plover - 1 pair Oct 1
South American Tern - 1 Oct 2 & 1 Oct 6 (en route)
Austral Parakeet - more than 10 Oct 4
(Magellanic) Great Horned Owl - 1 pair Oct 5
Austral Pygmy Owl - 2 heard Oct 4
Striped Woodpecker - 1 male Oct 3 & 1 heard Oct 5
Magellanic Woodpecker - 4 Oct 4
Dark-bellied Cinclodes - 1 pair Oct 3
Bar-winged Cinclodes - 4 Oct 1
Blue-and-white Swallow - 1 Oct 2
Thorn-tailed Rayadito - 1 Oct 4
Cinnamon-bellied Ground-tyrant - 1 Oct 2 & 2 Oct 5
Ochre-naped Ground-tyrant - 1 Oct 4
Grass Wren - 2 Oct 3
Patagonian Mockingbird - 2 (1 pair?) Oct 5
Correndera Pipit - 1 Oct 1 & 1 Oct 3
Rufous-tailed Plantcutter - 5 on 3 days
Plumbeous Sierra Finch - 1 male Oct 5
Patagonian Sierra-finch - 20+ on 2 days

GALLERY - PANTANAL

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GALLERY - TORRES DEL PAINE

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