

Southern Pantanal trip report 2015-2016

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I have lived in the Pantanal of Brazil for two-and-a-half years. Back in the 1990s I worked there as a guide for two years. In the beginning of the noughties I came back as a mammalogist and conducted mammal surveys in two unstudied areas, among others using camera traps. In 2015 and 2016 I went on two trips to the southern Pantanal (Mato Grosso do Sul), spending a total of 6 weeks in the region, with the main objective of photographing jaguar. This report lists the mammal species observed on these trips.

COMMENTS ON PLACES VISITED ON THE TWO TRIPS

Fazenda San Francisco (www.fazendasanfrancisco.tur.br). Situated in the Miranda region on the southern edge of the Pantanal. The lodge is in my view pretty uncharming and likewise the very touristy activities. The game drives are in large trucks which seat up to 50 people. Plus, the game drives take place amongst rice fields and cattle pastures, so it's not the true unspoiled Pantanal experience. BUT!!! This has got to be one of the best places in South America to see wild cats (probably because of the high biomass of rodents in the fields). In one night game drive, I saw a jaguar mother with cubs, an ocelot and my first ever puma. On four night drives we had more than 10 ocelot observations plus a sighting of the maned wolf, which is rare to see inside the Pantanal. So this is definitely a place to include for a mammal aficionado.

Rio Miranda. The Miranda River is probably the best place to see jaguar in the Southern Pantanal (possibly along with the pricy but wonderful Fazenda Barranco Alto on the Rio Negro (www.fazendabarrancoalto.com), where they are now getting serious about developing the jaguar tourism). You should not expect to see nearly as many jaguars on the Rio Miranda as in the famous jaguar place in the northern Pantanal (Rio Três Irmãos/Porto Jofre region), however, you will most likely be the only mammal watcher/photographer on the Rio Miranda and will have the jaguars to yourself (in sharp contrast to the north where there are allegedly often several boats surrounding the jaguars). If you want to be on the safe side, you should plan on spending several days on the Rio Miranda (I would say at least five days; I spent a total of three weeks on the river during my two trips). This should give you a decent chance of seeing jaguar if you come here during the good season, July-September, in particular if you make sure to have the best jaguar guide in S Pantanal, Luiz Marcelo. (If you want jaguar guarantee, though, include some days in N Pantanal.)

A good place to start your visit to Rio Miranda is **Passo do Lontra** (www.passodolontra.com.br/passo-do-lontra). It's close to the main dirt road entering the southern Pantanal. Again, this is not the most charming of hotels, but the setting right on the river front is excellent. From here you can explore the small tributary Rio Vermelho; both Rio Miranda and Rio Vermelho render frequent jaguar sightings plus regular encounters with giant otters. Tapir tracks are very common on the river banks and you might be lucky to see one crossing the river.

If you are serious (!!!) you should extend your Rio Miranda trip to sail half a day upriver and stay at the small, basic **Beira Rio hotel** where the Rio Aquidauana enters Rio Miranda, a place where normally only Brazilian anglers stay (not to be confused with the Hotel Beira Rio in the town of Aquidauana). From here you can easily reach a place where jaguar is regularly seen at close range and for extended periods (Luiz knows all about this place). This region is teeming with jaguar and tapir tracks on the river banks. We had two observations of jaguar (including one of a breeding couple while we were walking inside the forest) in this region.

Pousada São João (www.passodolontra.com.br/pousada-sao-joao). This is one of the first fazendas, cattle ranches, in the Pantanal to work with eco-tourism. It's a small, charming and reasonably prized place with a couple of basic rooms and a dormitory for travelers on a shoe string. From Rio Miranda it's situated about 50 km further into the Pantanal along the main dirt road (it has the same owners as Passo do Lontra so organizing going there is easy). It's a fantastic place for hyacinth macaw that gather in large numbers at the lodge itself (along with many other parrot species). The immediate surroundings of the lodge are dominated by cattle pastures (it is still an active cattle ranch), but once you get into the woods the large area has some excellent Pantanal landscapes, a mixture of forest islands, cerrado vegetation, grasslands, wetlands and small lakes. If you spend some days here you have good chances of finding giant anteater, tamandua, six-banded and nine-banded armadillos, coati, howlers, agouti, pampas deer and gray brocket. The area is also rich in white-lipped peccary. At São João they offer the typical range of tourist activities that you find almost everywhere in the Pantanal: Horseback riding and piranha fishing. None of these are ideal for mammal watching. I would recommend exploring the area on foot. And organizing a drive to the bottom of the fazenda, where the area gets really wild, from where you might consider returning to the lodge on foot. Also, this is an interesting area for night game drives, which you may be able to organize even though they usually don't offer it, but you could also just walk around at night yourself.

Baía das Pedras (www.baiadaspedras.com.br/en). Simply one of the best and most beautiful places in the Pantanal! It's situated in my favorite part of the Pantanal, the Nhêcolândia region, characterized by large grasslands interspersed with forest islands and wetlands. It's not a cheap place, but if you can afford it definitely worthwhile staying some days at. It's a lovely old fazenda kept in an authentic style with a handful of rooms (and, not least, some of the best traditional food in the Pantanal). The tourism operation is run by the owner of the place, Rita, who is very professional and friendly and has a large knowledge of the area and the wildlife (she is an avid bird watcher). Rita guides many of the game drives in the area. Besides having an amazing birdlife, the area is good for giant anteater, tamandua, six- and nine-banded armadillos, crab-eating raccoon, coati, pampas deer, white-lipped peccary, capybara and tapir (which we saw twice). Baía das Pedras supports and houses a couple of research projects, including one on giant armadillo (the recent documentary "[Hotel Armadillo](#)" was filmed at Baía das Pedra while I was there). If the giant armadillo researchers are there when you visit they'll be happy to give you an interesting presentation of the project. However, you have to be quite lucky to see the actual giant armadillo in the flesh.

Fazenda Barranco Alto is not far from Baía das Pedras so it would be ideal to combine these two places. It's possible to organize 4x4 transportation from Pousada São João or Paso do Lontra through Nhêcolândia to either of these places – this is a very exciting drive that is guaranteed to give many good sightings. Nilson Rossi has an excellent transportation service: transpantanal4x4@gmail.com.

Table. List of mammal species observed on two trips to the southern Pantanal in December 2015 and July 2016, respectively, plus comments on a couple of species seen on earlier occasions in the region.

Species	Site of observations	Comments
Jaguar <i>Panthera onca</i>	Rio Miranda, Fazenda San Francisco	6 observations; 5 on river trips on the Rio Miranda, 1 on a night game drive at San Francisco.
Puma <i>Puma concolor</i>	Fazenda San Francisco	1 observation on a night game drive.
Ocelot <i>Leopardus pardalis</i>	Fazenda San Francisco	+10 observations on 4 night game drives.
Jaguarundi <i>Herpailurus yagouaroundi</i>	<i>Not seen on the trips in 2015-2016</i>	I have had a couple of diurnal observations of jaguarundi in the southern Pantanal, but not an easy species to see (or camera trap).
Giant otter <i>Pteronura brasiliensis</i>	Rio Miranda	Numerous observations.
Neotropical river otter <i>Lontra longicaudis</i>	Rio Miranda	
Tayra <i>Eira barbara</i>	<i>Not seen on the trips in 2015-2016</i>	You bump into the tayra once in a while, but it's not common.
Maned wolf <i>Chrysocyon brachyurus</i>	Fazenda San Francisco	On a night game drive.
Crab-eating fox <i>Cerdocyon thous</i>	Fazenda São João, Nhêcolandia, Fazenda San Francisco	3 observations; 1 during the day time, 2 at night. Relatively common in S Pantanal.
Crab-eating raccoon <i>Procyon cancrivorus</i>	Baía das Pedras, Fazenda San Francisco	3 observations; 2 during the day time at Baía das Pedras, 1 on a night game drive. Common in the Pantanal.
South American coati <i>Nasua nasua</i>	Fazenda São João, Baía das Pedras	Frequently seen during day time.
Black-and-gold howler monkey <i>Alouatta caraya</i>	Common everywhere in the Pantanal	Occurs both in gallery forest and in the forest islands.
Hooded capuchin <i>Sapajus cay (Cebus apella paraguayanus)</i>	Fazenda San Francisco	Seen on a river trip in gallery forest. This is an edge species in S Pantanal.
South American tapir <i>Tapirus terrestris</i>	Rio Miranda, Baía das Pedras	3 observations, 2 of these at Baía das Pedras.
Marsh deer <i>Blastocerus dichotomus</i>	Nhêcolandia	Relatively common in marshy areas in S Pantanal.
Pampas deer <i>Ozotoceros bezoarticus</i>	São João, Nhêcolandia, Baía das Pedras	Numerous observations. Common at Baía das Pedras and in the grasslands of Nhêcolandia in general.
Gray/brown brocket <i>Mazama gouazoubira</i>	São João, Nhêcolandia	A couple of observations. Typically seen in cerrado woodland and scrub at the edge of forest islands.
Red brocket <i>Mazama americana</i>	<i>Not seen on the trips in 2015-2016</i>	Typically found inside the forest islands.
White-lipped peccary <i>Tayassu pecari</i>	Baía das Pedras	A couple of observations.
Collared peccary <i>Pecari tajacu</i>	Baía das Pedras	A couple of observations.
Giant anteater <i>Myrmecophaga tridactyla</i>	São João, Nhêcolandia, Baía das Pedras	During my July visit to Baía das Pedras/Nhêcolandia a cold spell made the giant anteaters more diurnal than normally and we had +30 observations during one week.
Southern tamandua <i>Tamandua tetradactyla</i>	São João, Nhêcolandia, Baía das Pedras	Numerous observations, both in forest, woodland and open savanna feeding on termites.

Six-banded armadillo <i>Euphractus sexcinctus</i>	São João, Baía das Pedras	Many observations. Common in the southern Pantanal.
Nine-banded armadillo <i>Dasyopus novemcinctus</i>	São João, Baía das Pedras	Many observations. Common in the southern Pantanal.
Giant armadillo <i>Priodontes maximus</i>	<i>Not seen on the trips in 2015-2016</i>	There is an interesting giant armadillo research project going on at Baía das Pedras and the researchers there are very forthcoming, however, seeing the shy, nocturnal species is difficult.
Southern naked-tailed armadillo <i>Cabassous unicinctus</i>	<i>Not seen on the trips in 2015-2016</i>	Another cryptic armadillo species that has been researched at Baía das Pedras. Maybe even more difficult to see than the giant armadillo. I have never seen it.
Capybara <i>Hydrochoerus hydrochaeris</i>	Common everywhere in the Pantanal	
Azara's agouti <i>Dasyprocta azarae</i>	São João, Baía das Pedras	Encountered inside the forests. You often see acuri palm nuts with the flesh eaten by the agouti on the ground.

NB: Additional mammals that have been recorded in the southern Pantanal are pampas cat, Geoffroy's cat, oncilla, margay, bush dog, hoary fox, grison, three-banded armadillo, paca, prehensile-tailed porcupine and white-eared opossum.





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