

Pantanal, Brazil: Jaguar and Ocelot trip: 12-18 May, 2018



Although I knew it was “early” in the season for Jaguar, as the water levels in the Pantanal were high, I had an opportunity to spend a week in South America so I decided to give it a go. This vast wetland was initially deceptive when viewed from the transpantanal road which runs through it. First impressions of fenced farms with cattle were misguided. When viewed from the air, the farms are a tiny 500m roadside sliver of agriculture with vast untouched wilderness beyond. Many of the farms are now operated as eco-lodges and the open pastures make it relatively easy to spot many of the Neo-tropical animals that are hard to see in the forest, especially at night. My aim was, of course, to see Jaguar but I was also hoping to see Ocelot and a range of other mammals which frequent the vast wetlands of this region. In 7 days we saw both Jaguar and Ocelot (!!) and recorded 20 mammal species.

Ocelot was seen on three occasions from the transpantanal road at night. The first was seen running along the side of the road for about 5 minutes, followed by the second animal seen in a tree 20m from the road in what must be one of the best “spots” by my son, Kristjan. On the third occasion, we watched it walking along the road. All were seen between 9-11pm.

After 5 days, and having failed to reach Porto Jofre by road due to flooding (Porte Jofre is the riverine end of the transpantanal road where jaguars frequent the river banks), I decided to take the 40 minute

flight from Pocone for my last night. Incredibly, it paid off, with two animals seen on the day I arrived. One resting on the only exposed river bank in the area and another in a tree. Amazing.

My guide, Jardes Gomez, knows the geography and the lodges extremely well. He works as a freelance guide so is not restricted to where he takes you unlike the lodge guides which tend to stay within their lodge grounds. Jardes is cheaper than most and worked very hard to get me to the right places at any time of day or night. Night drives were always offered and he believes in moving around so you get the best chance to see the incredible mammal diversity that randomly appears at any time of day or night.

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Itinerary

12 May Landed in Cuiaba in the early hours and stayed the night in airport hotel. Morning pick-up and drove to Piuval lodge (looks like a big farm rather than the wild Pantanal). Afternoon walk and short night drive

13 May Early morning drive and then moved to the wild Pouso Alegre lodge. Incredible night drive on the lodge road and the transpantanal from 8-11.30pm).

14 May Early morning drive then moved 10km down the transpantanal to Rio Claro lodge. River boat ride and night drive (8-12 pm)

15 May Mid morning left for Jaguar Ecolodge near the end of the transpantanal.

16 May Attempted to drive to Porto Jofre but the road was still flooded. After a long day of walking, wading and getting very wet, we decided to head back to Piuval Lodge.

17 May Flew from Pocone to Porto Jofre and stayed at the Porto Jofre Pantanal hotel. On the river from 11am to 5pm.

18 May Flew back to Pocone and then drove back to Cuiaba.

MAMMALS SEEN

1	Jaguar <i>Panthera onca</i>	One large male on the river bank of the “three brothers’ river” at Porto Jofre which rested all day in the same area. Another seen sleeping in a tree in a magical “Nat Geo” pose. Fantastic
2	Ocelot <i>Leopardus pardalis</i>	One seen at night in a tree on the transpantanal at km 40, which sat whilst I could take all the photos and video I wanted! Trip highlight! Two more walking along the road.
3	Crab-eating fox <i>Cerdocyon thous</i>	Seen on every night drive
4	South American Tapir <i>Tapirus terrestris</i>	Two animals seen at 11pm on the track to Pouso Alegre lodge and one seen at night on the transpantanal.
5	Marsh deer <i>Blastocerus dichotomus</i>	One seen on the daytime drive to Rio Claro lodge
6	Brown brocket deer <i>Mazama gouazoubira</i>	One seen crossing the road in the forest near Piuval lodge
7	Red brocket deer <i>Mazama americana</i>	Several animals seen at dusk in the forest near Piuval lodge
8	Hooded/Azara’s Capuchin <i>Sapajus cay</i>	Several family groups seen in the forest near the Piuval lodge
9	Giant otter <i>Pteronura brasiliensis</i>	Seen on the river at Rio Claro lodge and also several animals seen on the Cuiaba river at Porto Jofre.
10	Tayra <i>Eira barbara</i>	A pair seen crossing the road at 11 am at km 40 on the transpantanal.
11	Brazilian rabbit <i>Sylvilagus brasiliensis</i>	Seen regularly on every night drive
12	Six-banded (yellow) armadillo <i>Euphractus sexcinctus</i>	Seen at 11 am on the track to Rio Claro lodge
13	Nine-banded armadillo <i>Dasyus novemcinctus</i>	Seen twice at 11pm on the transpantanal and the track to Pouso Alegre lodge

14	Azara's agouti <i>Dasyprocta azarae</i>	Several seen in the palm forests near the Piuval lodge
15	Southern Tamandua <i>Tamandua tetradactyla</i>	Seen on a night drive on the track to Pouso Alegre lodge
16	Giant Anteater <i>Myrmecophaga tridactyla</i>	One animal seen on the road at night near Piuval Lodge.
17	Black howler monkey <i>Alouatta caray</i>	A group seen on the Pixain river on the boat at Pantanal Mato grosso lodge
18	Tube nosed bat <i>Platyrrhinus spp</i>	A small colony seen in an old building at Pouso Alegre lodge
19	Brazilian guinea pig <i>Cavea aperea</i>	A few animals seen crossing the transpantanal road near the jaguar ecolodge
20	Capibara <i>Hydrochoerus hydrochaeris</i>	Commonly seen everywhere in the Pantanal.
