

KAA-IYA del Gran Chaco N.P. from Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia

(August 7th – August 11th 2017)

.....probably the best place to see neotropical cats

I did this trip with Nick, from Nick's Adventures Bolivia, who already has sent some reports on this blog. Everything was well organized and Nick did not count the hours spent on the field.

The day before, I went to the Botanical Garden at 8.5 km from the center of Santa Cruz. It is a nice place to visit and a good spot for sloths viewing.



Kaa Iya is an amazing but atypical park. Far from the “jaguar industry” in Porto Jofre, this park, bigger than Belgium, receives no more than 20 visitors a year. There is only one road going deep into the park for more than 100 kms: the service road along the underground gas pipeline Bolivia-Brazil. On this road, the traffic is more than limited. In 5 days, we only crossed 2 vehicles. The park rangers, if there is one, do not have car and the gas company workers rarely use the road. There is an airstrip at Izozo gas pumping station in the middle of the park. Actually, only camping is permitted inside the park at the 2 park rangers stations: Tucavaca, close to the entry and Izozo, at 100 km inside the park. The vegetation is thick and the view outside the road is limited from 1 to 15 m, depending on places. On the other hand, the road is very straight and animals can be spotted far in advance on it.



In the middle of the park, the Izozo gas pumping station offers the surrealistic view of a modern industrial plant with his high amount of decibels....Fortunately, the thick bush of Kaa lya is an excellent visual and acoustic insulator.

1. Cats:

- 2 mating jaguars, observed from 30 to 40m, outside the vehicle, during 1h. Afterthat, the car approached to a few meters and it take long minutes before the jaguars decided to leave the road.
- 1 juvenile puma, well observed with binoculars but disappeared in the bush when the car was approaching.
- 5 ocelots, some of them coming close in front of the car. One stayed a couple of minutes along the front wheels.
- 1 jaguarundi, brief but good view crossing the road at close distance ahead.

With the exception of the jaguarundi seen during daytime, all the other cats were seen at night. On other tours, however, Nick saw jaguars, pumas and even ocelots during the day.



2. Other mammals:

- 1 tayra
- 2 grey brocket deers
- 10+ tapetis (brazilian rabbit)
- 20+ crab-eating foxes
- A group of 20+ white-lipped peccaries
- 1 collared peccary

3. **What we missed:**

- Tapir. It is unusual not to see tapirs in Kaa Iya but we were not looking for. However, we observed many signs: tracks, scats, pictures on camera traps, strong whistles close to the road.
- Solitary (Chacoan) peccary. They are there but difficult to find and rarely seen.
- Armadillos. They seem to be seasonal. During some periods of the year, several species are rather easily seen. But we found a picture of one giant armadillo in a camera trap.

Which future for Kaa Iya?

- At short term = difficult: due to the visitor unfriendly attitude of the actual direction of the park, Nick is thinking of not going there anymore next year.
 - At longer term = uncertain: during the first months of this year, the government allowed mining companies to prospect inside the park.....
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