

BOLIVIA TRIP REPORT

MAY 17-31 2023

Stuart Chapman

Puma in Kaa Iya National Park



1st May 2023 marked my 30-year anniversary with WWF and to celebrate the occasion I planned a month off work to continue with my Cat Quest. Based on a combination of selecting somewhere that I wouldn't ordinarily travel to and would give the maximum possibility of new cat species I picked Bolivia and Paraguay (see Paraguay trip report May 2 – 16) looking for three cats (Geoffroy's cat, Jaguarundi and Puma). I teamed up with Paul Carter who was keen to explore this area.

The second leg of the trip was in Bolivia organized by Nick's Adventures Bolivia. The tour in Bolivia was split into two sections: five nights in Jaguar Land and five nights in Kaa Iya National Park with a couple of rest days in the middle. Our first guide for Jaguar Land was Mauricio who worked in conservation for ten years before becoming a guide. Mauricio has extensive knowledge of the mammals of Bolivia and acted as both driver and guide to great effect. Our first 24 hours in Jaguar Land resulted in 20+ mammal species and most importantly, found the main target – jaguarundi. The food was prepared by Natalie and she did wonders given the conditions. Just as a heads-up, the mosquitos after dark at this time of year were numerous, persistent, and hungry. The second part of the trip to Kaa Iya was guided by Nick Mc Phee, the founder of Nick's Adventures. Tireless and enthusiastic, Nick was an excellent spotter who knows the how to find cats. My third target – puma – was spotted by Nick as it waited by the side of the road. Although Kaa Iya lacks the diversity and regularity of mammal encounters of Jaguar Land, the big cat encounters were up close and personal.

Day 1 - Santa Cruz de la Sierra Botanical Garden

Prior to the start of the trip we used our "rest" day to look for mammals in the botanical gardens which is about 30 minutes by taxi from the center of town. It opens at 9am and we walked around until 1pm. We spotted a couple of **Southern Amazon red squirrels** and also a few sightings of **Bolivian squirrel**. We also found two **brown-throated sloths**, a small group of **black-tailed marmosets** and a solitary **tapeti**. At dusk, from the rooftop of the hotel there were a large number of what we think were **velvety free-tailed bats** flying around. A great start!

Day 2-7 Jaguar Land Private Reserve

This 11,000 hectare farm is a mix of soy, corn, wetlands and forest. Not normally a formula for large cat conservation but with “no hunting” allowed the cats and other wildlife are doing well. As we began the drive through the adjoining areas we spotted a **South America coati**, **brown-throated sloth**, a family of **greater capybara** and a **southern tamandua**. As we entered Jaguar Land we had our first sightings of a small group of **red howler monkeys** and shortly before dark, a couple of **brown agouti**, a **marsh deer** and a **red brocket deer**. We also had our first cat encounter. Our guide, Mauricio, had a fleeting glimpse of a black cat-like tail on the side of the road which he was sure belonged to a **jaguarundi**. Both Paul and I missed it. After self-flagellation, I resolved to keep my eyes on the road ahead as this was my one of my two main targets for Bolivia.

Southern tamandua (Jaguar Land)



After reaching the camp, we quickly headed out for our first night drive and spotted a **nine-banded armadillo**, a solitary **lowland tapir** and probably a dozen **crab-eating foxes**. We had a brief view of a lone **jaguar** crossing a

soy field in the twilight. Finally, our cat-luck seemed to be changing. An hour later, as we approached what we were sure was another pair of crab-eating fox we soon realized the eye-shine belonged to a male and female **jaguar**. Unconcerned by our presence, the courting couple lounged on the road, copulated, and with the nonchalance of South America's largest cat, slowly walked down the road and eventually into the forest. What a start to the trip! We finished the night with a small group of **Azara's night monkeys**.

The Jaguars of Jaguar Land



We headed out before dawn the next day and as first light broke we added two more primate species to the list with a group of **Bolivian squirrel monkeys** and an hour later, a troop of **brown capuchins**. Whilst engaged in side-

window spotting, another **jaguarundi** ran in front of the car, which we both missed. “Oh no, it’s gone and you missed it again” was still ringing in my ears and but before I could poke myself in the eye, it reappeared 5 meters off to the side and ran away through the grass. Brilliant! The mating **jaguars** were still in the same place as the night before and it was just fantastic to see these magnificent cats on the road and so clearly. On the way back we also spotted a couple of **collared peccary**, a solitary **six-banded armadillo** and a pair of **grey brocket deer**.

Nine-banded armadillo (Jaguar Land):



The following evening we had another cat night. It started with a male **jaguar** walking the road at dusk. This was in a different section of the farm so we believe this to be the fourth individual jaguar we have seen. An hour later, we staked out a crossroads in the vicinity of where a jaguarundi had been seen. After about 10 minutes, out stepped a **jaguarundi** onto the road about 100m away. This time I managed a grainy photo. Fantastic to get another sighting!!

Jaguarundi (Jaguar Land)



The following day we visited a stretch of river which had a pod of 10+ **Bolivian river dolphins**. On the drive back we picked up eyeshine in one of the soy fields which we initially thought belonged to another fox but after a second look turned out to be an **ocelot!**. Our third cat species in Jaguar Land.

Over the next couple of days we continued with the early morning, late morning and dusk/night drives. We had a number of repeat sightings of all three deer species, the primates, tapir and peccary. We found two species of bat living in the various cracks in the main campground building. Based on a quick ID, we believe these to be **silver-tipped myotis** and **riparian myotis**. One evening we walked near one of the lagoons and watched **greater bulldog bats** and **greater sac-winged bats** hunting over the water. Later over the soy fields a distinctive red bat flew overhead and the echo-meter gave readings for Eastern red bat but we believe it to be **Southern red bat**.

We also found a bat roost in a tree with roosting **Lesser bulldog bats**. We also added a **nine-banded armadillo** and a solitary **Bolivian spider monkey** to the trip list.

The wetlands of Jaguar Land



On the return to Santa Cruz we stopped for an hour at **Curichi La Madre city park**. This very small city park has a few resident animals. We saw two **brown-throated sloths**, a couple of very shy **Bolivian gray titi monkeys** and in a derelict park building (on the right side after a few hundred meters along the main trail) we found, two species of **spear-nosed bat** (to be identified).

Day 9 – Rest day in Santa Cruz

Day 10-15 – Kaa Iya National Park

This 3.4 million hectare park is the second largest park in South America. The 100km road that bisects the park runs along a gas pipeline and is the focus of the day and night drives. Anything that steps out or uses the track as a walkway can be seen from several hundred meters. Having a good pair of binoculars is key.

On the first day we had a **tayra** cross the road and the following morning a **lowland tapir** stepped out in front of the car for our first clear, day view of this impressive looking animal. Our cat sightings were limited to a brief road crossing of a **jaguarundi** on the third day when the weather changed to cold and wet and most of the sensible wildlife stayed hidden.

Lowland tapir (Kaa Iya)



Tayra on the road (Kaa Iya)



On day 4 everything changed. The drive in the afternoon was one of my best big cat viewing days. It started with a big male **jaguar** on the road. We got out of the car to take pictures and it approached to within 30 meters before turning off into the roadside vegetation once it had decided we were of little interest. Twenty minutes later we saw another older male **jaguar** walking along the road who also approached the vehicle until Nick decided it was too close for comfort. After two back-to-back jaguar encounters in an hour we were all on a high. We continued for another 30 mins when a grey shape on the side of the road morphed into my 30th cat species – a **puma!** Unbelievably it also approached the vehicle and stopped and sat 15 meters in front of the car! Just amazing.

See puma and jaguar videos below:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QQ4DXwRNLeg>

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCGr70vccZ3-Nd0LIbUIR7bw>



On the final day and on a section of road that Nick predicted was the best place for peccary, we stopped the car and within 5 minutes, a group of **Chacoan peccary** walked onto the road! Other mammals that featured during the trip included a group of **Pale titi monkeys** and **Black-tailed marmosets** during early morning drives and an **Azara's night monkey** during an evening drive. Paul found two **Chacoan mouse opossums** around the camp during a night walk. We also had a repeat sighting of a **tayra** on a day drive. Other common species seen during our stay included **Grey brocket deer**, **Red brocket deer**, **tapeti**, **Azara's agouti**, **South American coati**, **vesper mouse spp** and **crab-eating fox**.

Chacoan peccary (Kaa Iya)



SUMMARY:

In total we saw 44 species of mammals of which 24 were lifers for me. In addition, we photographed 5 species of rodent which we have yet to identify. We saw four cat species (Jaguar, Jaguarundi, Ocelot, Puma) with three cat species and multiple viewings of Jaguar at each site. For those wanting to see all four cats, I recommend visiting both sites but if time is limited then Jaguar Land is probably the best location which also offers a chance of seeing puma and easier viewing of mammals (overall mammal tally = 28 spp in Jaguar Land v 17 spp in Kaa Iya). That said, Kaa Iya was my favorite site. Firstly it's a national park (as opposed to a farm) and secondly, the wildlife is, what's the word,wilder.

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MAMMAL LIST

Species	Scientific Name	Botanical Gardens	Curichi La Madre	Jaguar Land Private Reserve	Kaa Iya National Park
Six-banded armadillo	<i>Euphractus sexcinctus</i>			X	
Nine-banded armadillo	<i>Dasypus novemcinctus</i>			X	

Azara's night monkey	Aotus azarae			X	X
White-coated (Pale) titi	Plecturocebus pallescens				X
Black-tailed marmoset	Mico melanurus	X			X
Brown capuchin	Sapajus apella			X	
Bolivian squirrel monkey	Saimiri boliviensis			X	
Red howler monkey	Alouatta sara			X	
Peruvian spider monkey	Ateles chamek			X	
Bolivian gray titi monkey	Plecturocebus donacophilus		X		
Chacoan mouse opossum	Cryptonanus chacoensis				X
Greater Capybara	Hydrochoerus hydrochaeris			X	
Bolivian squirrel	Sciurus ignites	X			
Southern Amazon red squirrel	Sciurus spadiceus	X			
Vesper mouse spp	Calomys spp ?				X
Common tapeti	Sylvilagus brasiliensis	X			X
Brown agouti	Dasyprocta variegata			X	
Azara's agouti	Dasyprocta azarae				X
Velvety free-tailed bat	Molossus molossus	X (Santa Cruz)			
Spear-nosed bat spp (x 2 spp)	Phyllostomus spp		X		
Silver-tipped myotis	Myotis albescens			? X	
Greater bulldog bat	Noctilio leporinus			X	
Riparian myotis	Myotis riparius			X	
Southern red bat	Lasiurus blossevillii			? X	
Greater sac-winged bat	Saccopteryx billineata			X	
Lesser bulldog bat	Noctilio albiventris			X	
Jaguarundi	Heipailurus yaguarondi			X	X
Puma	Puma concolor				X
Jaguar	Panthera onca			X	X
Ocelot	Leopardus pardalis			X	
Crab-eating fox	Cerdocyon thous			X	X
Tayra	Eira Barbara				X
Lowland tapir	Tapirus terrestris			X	X
Collared peccary	Dicotyles tajacu			X	
Chacoan peccary	Catagonus wagneri				X
Brown/Grey brocket deer	Mazama gouazoubira			X	X
Red brocket deer	Mazama americana			X	X

Marsh deer	Blastocerus dichotomus			X	
South American coati	Nasua nasua			X	X
Southern tamandua	Tamandua tetradactyla			X	
Brown-throated sloth	Bradypus variegatus	X	X	X	
Bolivian river dolphin	Inia boliviensis			X	