

PARAGUAY TRIP REPORT
MAY 2-16 2023
Stuart Chapman

Geoffroy's cat



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 Paraguay and Bolivia looking for three cats (Geoffroy's cat, Jaguarundi and Puma). I teamed up with Paul Carter (PC) who was both keen to explore this area (as he is also Asia based) and was flexible with timing.

The first leg of the trip was in Paraguay with Paul Smith as our guide and the owner of Fauna Paraguay. Paul works hard to find mammals and is extremely knowledgeable on the local fauna and was able to identify rodents and bats at a glance, which in the mammal watching world is a huge bonus. We left the breakdown of the number of days and location to Paul based on two criteria: firstly our target cat species and secondly, finding as many mammals as possible.

Day 1-3 – Laguna Capitan

Expectations were high that we would get off to a flying start. However, the weather changed for the worse, and a combination of rain and a cold snap and anything bigger than my hand went into hiding. We did get the trip list going with a **small vesper mouse** and a **Chaco rice rat** in an old storage building near the lodge. We persisted with a combination of night drives and early morning /night walks around the lagoons and spotted a number of roadside dwelling **lowland yellow-toothed cavies**, a single **brown brocket deer** and a couple of **greater capybara**. On the night walk, PC found a **Chacoan fat-tailed opossum** which would never have been seen without his thermal scope. The night drives on the second and third day produced **Southern three-banded armadillo**, **Screaming hairy armadillo**, **Crab-eating fox** and a number of **Pampas fox**. As the rain continued, we decided to move to the next location.



Day 4-6 - Fortin Toledo

There is a small (400 hectare) reserve at Fortin Toledo surrounded by a mixture of forest/scrub and less intensively grazed pasture than at Laguna Capitan. It just felt more cat friendly. Prey species were abundant with birds galore and also frequent sightings of **Chacko Mara**. Although rain interfered with our first night drive we did see another **three-banded armadillo** and the first night walk produced another **Chacoan fat-tailed opossum** and a **Chaco leaf-eared mouse**.

On the second day, we were on the road by 6am and in a remote back road when a dark colored, slim small cat darted across the road in front of the car. Both PC and I had good views and I was sure it was **Geoffroy's cat**. Unfortunately, Paul Smith, our oracle on identification missed it. My doubting demons were silenced a few hours later when an identical looking cat ran across the road and was seen by all. No doubt it was a **Geoffroy's cat**. A few hours later, the same cat reappeared at the same spot. Three sightings in one day but all too fleeting for a photo. We also had a brief glimpse of a **collared peccary** at dusk and on the night drive a **Pearson's chaco mouse**. On the final night we spotlighted another **Geoffroy's cat** in a tree which gave the first chance to capture the moment. This was the highlight of the trip for me and my 28th species of cat.

See video link below of the Geoffroy's cat:

https://youtu.be/fnC1cRq_yno

Day 7 and 8 – Teniente Enciso National Park

On route to the park, we pulled over after Paul spotted a not-so-recently-deceased bird that obligingly donated its feathers to science. As Paul was in mid-pluck, I noticed something crossing the road. It turned out to be a **Chacoan tuco-tuco** which was an unexpected bonus as we failed to spot one the day before when we staked out a non-moving mound of earth that had been recently deposited by the said beast.

The first night drive resulted in a number of **Plains viscacha** on the road which was a first for the trip and a few other repeat sightings of other mammals. The main drive was along a road that ran alongside the park and although the habitat looked great (and the rain finally stopped) we didn't find any of our targets. The next day we walked the main 2km trail in the park, plenty of cavy activity and also evidence of tuco-tuco. We excavated a couple of tunnels which on one occasion the resident tuco-tuco filled in but not during our vigil.

The last night was quiet but over the final furlong we were finally rewarded with a new mammal for the trip when a **lowland/Brazilian tapir** was brilliantly spotted through the dense roadside vegetation.

Day 9 – Estancia Iparoma

As we left Enciso National Park, and as Paul predicted, we saw a **Greater hairy armadillo** on the roadside which was a great start to the day. Unfortunately, that was the only highlight as we dipped on the Azara's night monkey at this location and there was little else on show in the farm-scape.

Day 10 and 11 – Defensores del Chaco National Park

The forest and general habitat condition around the park was the most intact region we had visited. There were few farms and the parks eastern boundary road was hardly used by vehicles. The first night we broke the jinx of the previous night when we spotted a small group of **Azara's night monkeys** in a roadside flowering bottle tree. The rest of the drive was pretty quiet but there were lots of cat sign (scat/footprints) along the road. The next morning, we drove around the western boundary of the park and found a few small family groups of **Pale titi monkeys**. We had daily sightings of both species of primates and a number of other repeat sightings including the splendid view of a **Lowland tapir** on the road. We felt our luck was changing as we started the final night drive, but despite evidence of cat presence we just ran out of time.

Defensores del Chaco National Park



Azara's night monkey



Day 12 and 13 - Pilar

It took all day to traverse the country from the north to the southern city of Pilar. The following day we visited a site near the town to see a small family group of **black howler monkeys** which are commonly seen around town. Then we headed to a cattle pasture known for the **Pilar tuco-tuco**. There were numerous burrows, and by excavating a small area around the entrance the tuco-tuco eventually returns and refills the hole. How long to wait for the return is the question. On the first day we waited for 90 minutes, took a ten-minute break and sure enough, the tuco-tuco took the opportunity to refill the hole whilst we were gone. We repeated the process, but this time it returned after five minutes, and we got a glimpse of its head. The next day we tried again and we managed to photograph the same animal after only a ten minute wait. The final mammals of the trip were a few roadside **Pampas cavies** on the last morning.

Pilar tuco-tuco



SUMMARY:

In total we saw 28 mammal species of which 21 were lifers for me. We were unlucky with the cats. There were plenty of sign (footprint and scat) at Defensores del Chaco of ocelot, puma and jaguar but despite concerted effort, we just never seemed to be there at the right time. Some of the other more commonly seen species also eluded us and this may have been due to a combination of factors including rain and high roadside vegetation. We stood on the back of the vehicle at all times and used both a thermal and two spotlights to maximize our chances but for some of our targets it just wasn't to be.

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Pampas fox



Greater hairy armadillo



MAMMAL LIST

Species	Scientific Name	Fortin Toledo	Estancia Iparoma	Teniente Enciso	Defensores del Chaco	Laguna Capitan	Neembucu (Pilar)
Screaming hairy armadillo	Chaetophractus velloerosus					X	
Greater hairy armadillo	Chaetophractus villosus			X			
Southern three-banded armadillo	Tolypeutes matacus	X	X	X		X	
Azara's night monkey	Aotus azarae				X		
White-coated (Pale) titi	Plecturocebus pallescens				X		
Black howler	Alouatta caraya						X
Plains viscacha	Lagostomus maximus			X			
Lowland yellow-toothed cavy	Gelea leucoplephara	X		X	X	X	
Pampas cavy	Cavia aperea						X
Chacoan mara	Dolichotis salinicola	X	X	X	X	X	
Greater capybara	Hydrochoerus hydrochaeris					X	
Small vesper mouse	Calomys laucha			X	X	X	
Chaco rice rat	Oligorusi chackoensis					X	
Pearson's chaco mouse	Andalgalomys pearsoni	X					
Chaco leaf-eared mouse	Graomys chacoensis	X		X	X		
Common tapeti	Sylvilagus brasiliensis		X	X	X		X
Wagner's bonneted bat	Eumops glaucinus			X			
Black mastiff	Malossus rufus	Hotel in Ascuncion					
Black myotis	Myotis nigricans			X			
Geoffroy's cat	Leopardus geoffroyi	X					
Pampas Fox	Lycalopex gymnocercus	X	X	X		X	
Crab-eating fox	Cerdocyon thous			X	X	X	X
Brazilian Tapir	Tapirus terrestris			X	X		
Collared peccary	Dicotyles tajacu	X					
Brown brocket deer	Mazama gouazoubira	X		X	X	X	
Chacoan tuco-tuco	Ctenomys canoveri	X					
Pilar tuco-tuco	Ctenomys pilarensis						X
Chacoan fat-tailed opossum	Thylamis pusillus					X	