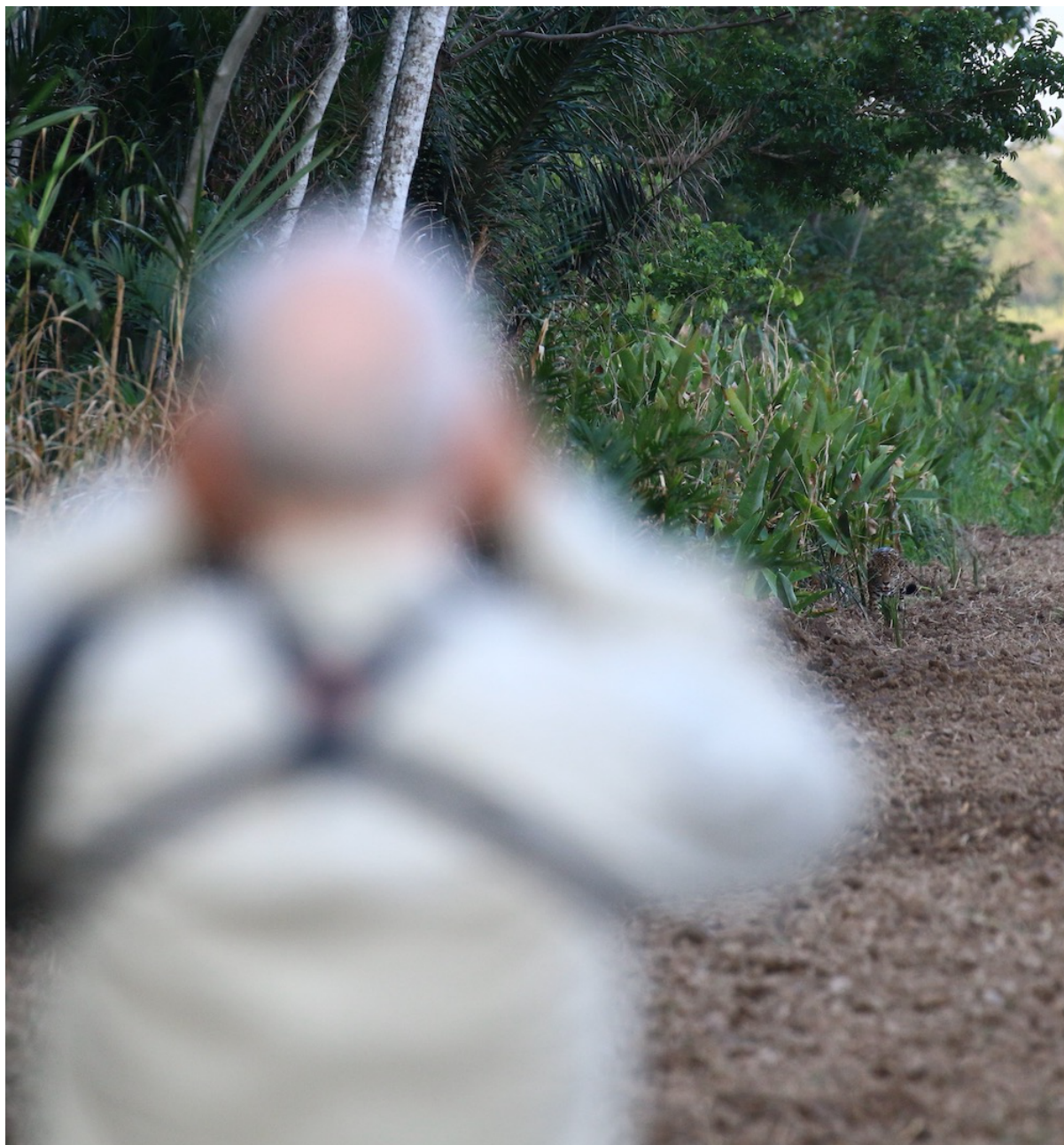


## Bolivia September 2023

There have been many excellent reports already written about trips in Bolivia with Nick's Adventure Tours, so I'll just provide some summary information about our trip here.



Four of us, Mac Hunter, Aram Calhoun, James Schiffer and I, took a 10-day trip to Bolivia in September 2023. We spent 4 nights at La Moneda Ranch aka 'Jaguarland' and another 4 nights at Kaa Iya. The logistics of this trip were quite straightforward. We flew into Santa Cruz, in central Bolivia, and Nick's Adventure Tours took care of the rest, except for our accommodation in the city which we booked ourselves. Nick uses Santa Cruz as a hub for his trips and we returned to the city both in the middle and the end of the trip. We spent the first couple of nights at the Wyndham Santa Cruz but switched to the Ibis Santa Cruz when we returned. I would recommend staying at the latter. It's cheaper and there is a fantastic

café/restaurant right next to it where you can get excellent food. There are a couple of species of primates and squirrels that you can see at the Santa Cruz botanical garden but are unlikely to find at the other locations in the trip, so it's probably worth spending an extra day in Santa Cruz if those are of interest to you.

If you're looking for good sightings of multiple species of cat in South America, you'd be hard pressed to do better than this part of Bolivia. Over the course of our visit we saw 3 jaguars, 2 pumas, 2 ocelot and 1 jaguarundi, and had excellent views of all four species. Based on other reports, I don't think our trip was particularly exceptional in terms of cat sightings - indeed a Royle Safaris trip a week later saw many more individual cats and added a Geoffrey's cat. There are plenty of other wonderful species to be seen both at La Moneda and Kaa Iya, though I must admit, we did become rather 'cat-focused' particularly at La Moneda and didn't spend as much time enjoying the other wildlife as I normally would.

I should mention that Nick's Adventure Tours are working hard to find new areas to see some of South America's iconic wildlife. They have found a site that should be good for Andean bears, and, of course, they can also put you in the right spot to find Goeldi's monkey. Bolivia, and Nick's Adventure Tours in particular, could well become a 'one-stop shop' for seeing many of South America's great mammals. It doesn't hurt that Bolivia is also significantly cheaper than Brazil, which is where most people head to these days to look for jaguars, and Nick's trips are very reasonably priced.

The great thing about Nick and his team is that they go to extraordinary lengths to find you wildlife. It's basically non-stop action. In La Moneda, when two of our team had yet to see a jaguar, they moved the start-time of the first game drive to 4.30 am and were prepared to push it up to 3.30 am on our final day, even though it meant them getting only a few hours sleep following a late-night game drive. Top marks for commitment.

The accommodation at both places we visited is rustic though perfectly adequate. At La Moneda you sleep in tents while at Kaa Iya you have access to rooms. When we were at Kaa Iya it was blisteringly hot, but fortunately we were able to use a large hanger that had air conditioning which made the hot nights bearable. Nick has figured out that if you serve people good food and cold beers, their tolerance levels rise dramatically. And indeed, we were served three square meals a day, all of exceptional quality, thanks to the remarkable cooking skills of Yethey. I'd go as far as to say that Nick's outfit is the one of the few I've travelled with outside Africa that can provide excellent cuisine under camping conditions.

### **La Moneda (Jaguarland)**

As others have mentioned, La Moneda is a fully functioning farm, with 30% forest and 70% crops, with soya and maize seemingly the crops of choice. As you drive around you will see tractors, combine harvesters, large grain trucks etc hard at work. And yet because the owner doesn't allow his staff to hunt animals, the wildlife flourishes. There are huge flocks of screamers, and numerous chachalacas, which are large, tasty ground birds that are usually the first to go when an area has hunting pressure. Although it doesn't feel particularly wild, I love the idea of large ranchers protecting their land and opening it up for eco-tourism; it's an excellent model for other places and demonstrates how resilient wildlife populations can be if they are given some breathing space.

### **Kaa Iya del Gran Chaco National Park**

Kaa Iya is almost the polar opposite to La Moneda. It is a vast area of extremely dense thicket (chaco), with very few roads and even fewer people. It is probably about as isolated an area as you can find in South America outside the Amazon. The area is managed by the local gas company that runs a small base within the reserve and helps maintain the roads. The thicket is pretty much impenetrable (at least for humans), and the name of the game is to drive back and forth along the one road bisecting the north of the park looking for wildlife. Because the road runs along gas pipeline, it is absolutely straight, meaning you can see animals way ahead (and behind) you. It had rained a few days before we arrived and despite the 100+ degree Fahrenheit heat, there was still water in the ditches and, remarkably, some small pools in the road. Because of the high clay content in the soil, these pools unfortunately prevented us from traveling to the next base in the road, where we had planned on searching for tuco-tuco. Nick talks about wildlife sightings in Kaa Iya coming in waves; you can go for days seeing very little and then see lots of wildlife on one drive. That was certainly how it worked for us. We had most of the action on our first two game drives and relatively little after that. However, those sightings included one jaguar, a jaguarundi and two puma, including the striking sighting of a puma following a tapir and using it as a stalking horse, that we will be publishing soon.



In summary, I highly recommend a trip to this part of the world with Nick's company. You are likely to see extraordinary things.

## Mammal list

Common name	Scientific name	Santa Cruz Botanical Garden	La Moneda	Kaa Iya
Six-banded armadillo	<i>Euphractus sexcinctus</i>		x	
Azara's night monkey	<i>Aotus azarae</i>		x	x
White-coated (Pale) titi	<i>Plecturocebus pallescens</i>			x
Bolivian gray titi monkey	<i>Plecturocebus donacophilus</i>	x		
Black-tailed marmoset	<i>Mico melanurus</i>			x
Brown capuchin	<i>Sapajus apella</i>		x	
Bolivian squirrel monkey	<i>Saimiri boliviensis</i>		x	
Red howler monkey	<i>Alouatta sara</i>		x	
Black-and-gold howler monkey	<i>Alouatta caraya</i>	x		
Greater Capybara	<i>Hydrochoerus hydrochaeris</i>		x	
Southern Amazon red squirrel	<i>Sciurus spadiceus</i>	x		
Large vesper mouse	<i>Calomys callosus</i>		x	
Paraguayan punare	<i>Thrichomys pachyurus</i>			x
Common tapeti	<i>Sylvilagus brasiliensis</i>			x
Azara's agouti	<i>Dasyprocta azarae</i>		x	x
Black myotis	<i>Myotis nigricans</i>		x	
Jaguar	<i>Panthera onca</i>		x	x
Ocelot	<i>Leopardus pardalis</i>		x	
Puma	<i>Puma concolor</i>			x
Jaguarundi	<i>Heipailurus yaguarondi</i>		x	x
Crab-eating fox	<i>Cerdocyon thous</i>		x	x
Pampas fox	<i>Lycalopex gymnocerca</i>			x
Lowland tapir	<i>Tapirus terrestris</i>		x	x
Collared peccary	<i>Dicotyles tajacu</i>		x	x
Brown/Grey brocket deer	<i>Mazama gouazoubira</i>		x	x
Red brocket deer	<i>Mazama americana</i>		x	
Marsh deer	<i>Blastocerus dichotomus</i>		x	
South American coati	<i>Nasua nasua</i>		x	
Southern Tamandua	<i>Tamandua tetradactyla</i>		x	
Brown-throated sloth	<i>Bradypus variegatus</i>	x	x	
Bolivian river dolphin	<i>Inia boliviensis</i>		x	