

Brazil: North + South Pantanal, Emas National Park

June + October 2025

This is my double trip report from Brazil, due to time and budget restraints I visited the North Pantanal in June and then came back to visit the South Pantanal and Emas National Park in October. My first visit to the Pantanal was part of a 3.5 month backpacking trip across Central and South America and the Pantanal was certainly the highlight. So naturally when I had the opportunity to return to South America for some Antarctic guiding work I had to make a stopover to see the other half of the Pantanal with the added bonus of Emas National Park, which I heard some really cool things about.

Overall I saw 25 species of mammals (and a huge variety of >200 bird species), with most of these being incredibly unique animals that I have wanted to see for a very long time including Jaguar, Puma, Ocelot, Maned Wolf, Tapir, Armadillo and Giant Anteater!

All photos are my own.

Day 1

18 June 2025

Fly into Cuiaba

I flew into Campo Grande (the main gateway to the Northern Pantanal) via Sao Paulo from Iguazu falls (highly recommend it if you have time!) and checked into a cheap hostel for the night. In the afternoon I went to the Parque Mae Bonifacia which is right in the middle of the city. It's a great place to see **Black Tailed Marmoset** and **Azara's Agoutis** as well as plenty of birds if you have a spare couple of hours.

Day 2

Transfer from Cuiaba

I got picked up by a driver from the Jaguar Ecological reserve - where I booked a 5 day/4 night tour (including everything) which was reasonably priced (as far as Jaguar tours go, 5,600R/1,000USD). This was part of a special deal they were doing which they advertised on their Instagram account and only local Brazilians seemed to know about. It was also significantly cheaper than any other tour I could find, although since then a friend has told me of a very low cost budget option which is available (I'm happy to share their number if you message me on my website or on instagram @ashtonreiser).

The drive South down the Transpantaneira highway was pretty awesome. The wetlands are full of life and there were a lot of caimans and birds to be seen. I've heard people also regularly see Giant Anteater on this drive too around the Pocone area. The water level was still pretty high so most of the land on both sides of the road was still flooded even though the dry season started in May, so I definitely wouldn't go any earlier in the season than late June to maximise the chances of spotting Jaguars on the banks of the river. It gets easier to see them as the river levels drop throughout the dry season until the end of October.

Overall the Jaguar ecological lodge was really nice, the food was great and the guides were amazing. The lodge is situated on a cattle ranch about an hour from Porto Jofre, which offered a lot of opportunity to see some awesome animals on the drive to the river each day. Every night we took the safari truck out for an hour-long night safari and there is a local pack of **crab eating foxes** which hang around the lodge and the surrounding fields as well as a couple of **capybaras**. We also saw **Red and Gray Brocket Deer** in the

surrounding fields as well as plenty of Great Horned Owls, Hyacinth Macaws and an Anaconda.

Day 3

Porto Jofre Boat Safari

On the hour long drive towards the river we had a great sighting of a **Marsh Deer** on the road as well as plenty of **Brazilian Guinea Pigs**, **Capybaras** and Caiman. At Porto Jofre we boarded a speed boat to spend the day cruising the three main rivers looking for **Jaguars**! Within 10 minutes our driver had already spotted a massive female hunting along the thick vegetation parallel to the river bank. It was hard to believe how epic and beautiful they are and we were very lucky to have the sighting all to ourselves as some of the sightings here can get very crowded with more than 20+ boats swarming the cats which is highly questionable. This normally happens as a lot of guides keep in contact on local radio channels to spread the word about jaguar sightings. About an hour later we came across a large male sleeping on the river bank and then after lunch we were told about a pair of jaguars which were mating further up the river which we managed to find. So a pretty crazy day, watching four different jaguars hunting, sleeping and mating. In addition to this we also saw a number of **Giant River Otters** playing in the water on the river bank which was great to see! The only other place I have seen them was in Cuyabeno in the Ecuadorian Amazon and that took a 4hr canoe river in dead silence to get a 20 second glimpse so it was great to see them for a decent length of time and they didn't seem concerned at all by the boat.

Later that night we went out on another night safari and had some incredible luck to see an **Ocelot** cross the road right in front of us! We also managed to spot a few more **Crab Eating Foxes**, domestic water buffalo (which are now living wild in the Panatanal) and a very briefing sighting of a **Nine Banded Armadillo**!





Day 4

Porto Jofre Boat Safari

The next day we headed back out on the river for a full day and spent an amazing couple of hours observing a mother and her almost fully grown cub. They switched between grooming, stalking caiman and we even witnessed them jump into the water twice attempting to catch a caiman. They also swam across the river in front of us and climbed up a massive tree on the river bank very close to where we were parked! It was a crazy thing to witness so many of their behaviours right in the middle of the day. We again saw some **Giant River Otters**, this time in full hunting mode as they managed to catch a couple of quite large fish right on the edge of the river. On the way back to the lodge, we witnessed an amazing sunset on the drive and we were stoked to see another **Ocelot** right near the lodge, prowling the riverbank!



Day 5

Porto Jofre Boat Safari

On the final day on the river, we witnessed a further two **Jaguars** sleeping and patrolling the river bank. We again saw a few **Giant River Otters** playing on the river bank and we also saw a couple of **Capybaras** and so many amazing birds too.

We had an incredible last night safari too, with a **Puma** crossing the dirt road right in front of us, which I think is quite an uncommon sight in the Pantanal! What a crazy way to end the Pantanal safari.



Day 6

This morning we did a quick 30 min walk through the forest at the back of the property before being transferred back to Cuiaba for flight the flight out. I did look for Giant Anteaters which are occasionally seen on the side of the road but I didn't see any sadly.

Unfortunately this was the day I had to end my north Pantanal trip. I would highly recommend either hiring a car here to drive to Emas National Park on the way to the South Pantanal or flying to Campo Grande to visit Emas and the South Pantanal from there (which I did 4 months later – see below). Either way if you want to see Emas National Park there is a decent amount of driving involved (6-9hrs each way) but I think it's worth the effort.

Day 7*

20th October 2025 (4 months later...)

Flight into Campo Grande

After a couple of months back in New Zealand, I took a late night flight into Campo Grande from Sao Paulo and hired a rental car to visit Emas National Park and the Southern side of the Pantanal. For Emas you don't need a 4WD but it is definitely better to have a larger car with a high ride height to get over the rough dirt roads in the park.

Day 8

Drive to Emas National Park

Early in the morning I visited Paque das Narcoes Indigenas right in the middle of the city which was quite a good spot for **Caybaras**, **Agouti** and a lot of blue and yellow macaws. After the visit I drove 6 hours to Chapadao do Cue, gateway to the Southern side of Emas National Park. I opted to stay at Pousada Cajueira, which was very nice and 100 Reals per night. The drive from here to the park is only 20 minutes as well. There is one place to stay just outside the park but it is significantly more expensive.

Day 9

Emas National Park

Entry into Emas is free and there is one main gate on the Southern side of the park, however, your options are limited to just three short roads unless you have an accredited

guide that has the keys to unlock the gates to the vast majority of the park. If you go with a guide you can also get into the park an hour earlier and you can stay in the park later (although I'm not even sure if anyone is checking who is leaving after 9pm). So I opted to hire a guide (Valter Krukk) for Emas who was very knowledgeable about all the animals, plants and birds. I'm happy to send out his contact details if you message me on Instagram (@ashtonreiser or on the form my website ashtonreiser.co.nz) Our daily schedule was as follows:

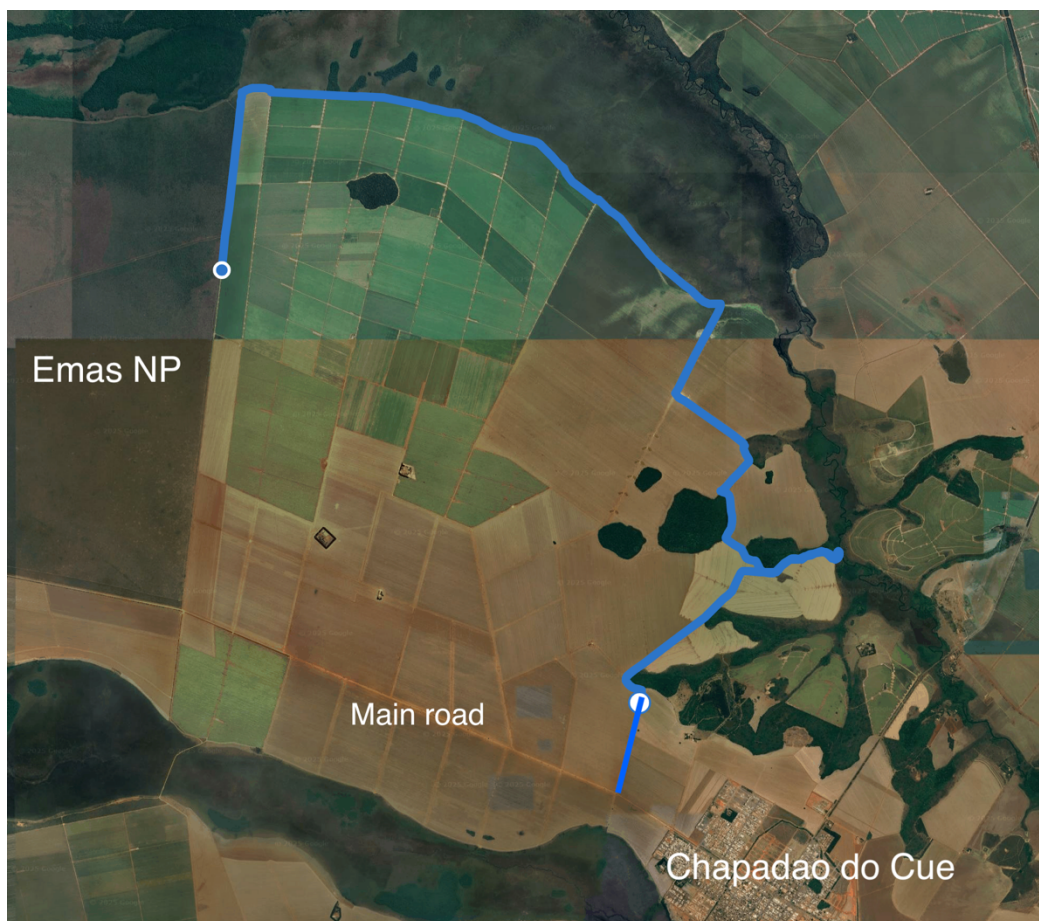
6am -11am looking for wildlife

11am -3pm rest

3pm -9pm looking for wildlife

This worked really well as the park is super hot during the day so its almost impossible to see much wildlife between 11 and 3.

The first day wasn't so successful in terms of mammals. We actually didn't see any mammals until 7pm when we finally saw a **Pampas Deer**. This was then shortly followed by a group of **Crab Eating Foxes**. And then a super cool **Amazon Hog Nosed Skunk!** Then then left the park at 9pm after a long day in the car, with limited success. But on the way home we saw three **Tapir** and a couple of **White lipped Peccary!!** I spotted these with the new thermal scope I just brought which was well worth it. Ironically all of these Tapir were outside of the park in the corn fields which surround the park. Overall, I think we actually saw more animals in the corn fields around the park at night then we did in the park! So it is definitely worth exploring the dirt roads that run all throughout the corn fields in between the town and the park. See the map below for an example of some of the best dirt roads that you can drive on to the South East of the park.



Day 10

Emas National Park

The next day was far more successful. We again started early and saw some more **Pampas deer**. In the afternoon, we saw a couple more **Tapir** (inside and outside the park), **Crab Eating Fox** and best of all, two sightings of **Maned Wolf**! We saw the wolf at the main entrance gate. Apparently it visits the main gate around 6pm on most nights looking to drink some water from a leaking tap. So even if you don't have a guide, it may even be worth waiting at the main gate for a couple of hours to see if it visits! We saw presumably the same individual again at 9pm at the main gate when we were driving out. So if your goal is to see **Maned Wolf** and **Tapir**, you may not even need to enter the park or go on any drives inside the park to see them. I've also heard the dirt roads within the park to the north and west of the main gate are also some of the best places to see the Pampas Cat but unfortunately I didn't see any. In fact, a large group that did a safari tour inside the park for a couple of hours completely missed the **Maned Wolf** that was right at the gate twice that evening because they were roaming inside the park when it visited the gate. On the way home we saw a really cool **Six Banded Armadillo** right in the middle of the main dirt road. Overall, I would say that Emas didn't have a great abundance of mammals but the ones that we did find were super unique and incredible lifers, so it was definitely worth the effort to get there!





Day 11

Drive to Aquidauana

Today I checked out of the motel and drove around 8 hours to Aquidauana, the gateway to the South Pantanal. I opted to stay in the town and use it as my base to drive into the Southern Pantanal but there are a number of really nice lodges you can stay at such as Pousada Aguape that offer safari tours for their guests.

Day 12

South Pantanal

I left Aquidauana very early in the morning and drove on the dirt road towards Pousada Aguape which was very successful. I saw five **Giant Anteaters** including a baby riding on its mothers back!! All of them were in the paddocks on either side of the dirt road and two of them crossed the dirt road in front of me. All of them were seen along the dirt road between the main highway and Pousada Aguape in the early morning. I also saw **Capybaras** and **Crab Eating Fox**. I rested during the hottest hours of the day and in the evening I went out again and saw **Collared Peccary, Nine Banded Armadillo, Six Banded Armadillo, Red Brocket and Pampas deer**. There are also a few tame **Six Banded Armadillo** that are fed at Pousada Aguape.



Day 13

Drive back to Campo Grande

After a rainy morning that didn't yield much, I drove back to Campo Grande (2hrs).

Day 13

On the final day I flew out of Campo Grande to Sao Paulo before flying to Buenos Aires and then onto Ushuaia for Antarctica for some guiding work in Antarctica (report coming at the end of the season in April 2026).

25 Mammals Species Observed:

Species	North Pantanal	South Pantanal	Emas National Park
Jaguar	X		
Puma	X		
Ocelot	X		
Maned Wolf			X
Giant Anteater		X	
Giant River Otter	X		
Brazilian Tapir			X
Crab Eating Fox	X	X	X
Amazon Hog Nosed Skunk			X
Six Banded Armadillo		X	X
Nine Banded Armadillo	X	X	
Capybara	X	X	
Hooded Capuchin	X	X	
Black Tailed Marmoset	X		
Azaras Agouti	X	X	X
South American Coati		X	
Gray Brocket	X		
Red Brocket	X	X	
Pampas Deer		X	X
Marsh Deer	X		X
Collared Peccary		X	X
White Lipped Peccary			X
Brazilian Guinea Pig	X		
Brazilian Rabbit	X		
Proboscis Bat	X		

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