

Trip Report: Buenos Aires and Northeast Argentina
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Hello all, I just returned from a 12-day trip to Buenos Aires and Northeast Argentina. This was not a primarily mammal-watching trip (sad, I know) but more of a general culture/nature trip. My mom is much more normal than me, and so when I mentioned that I had booked flights to Argentina, she asked if she could tag along. So of course I said yes and we landed in Buenos Aires, did cultural things for a few days, ate lots of great food (be warned: green vegetables are hard to find), and did a day trip to Colonia del Sacramento in Uruguay. From Buenos Aires, we flew from the Aeroparque (AEP) to Puerto Iguazú (IGR) for three nights there.

Iguazú

Upon landing in Misiones Province, you could feel the humidity and heat immediately, a strong change from the crisp mornings in Buenos Aires. The airport is in the middle of the Atlantic Forest inside the forest and the road to town passes through Iguazú National Park. The road to town has moderate levels of traffic but the speed limit is low, so I kept my eyes peeled for sightings. We stayed at a lodge in the Reserva Selva Iryapu, just outside of town, and I walked down to the river at sunset to listen to the boomboxes of dance music coming over from the Brazilian side, seeing my first mammal of the trip: a **red brocket deer** (*Mazama americana*) I spooked while slipping down a muddy trail. The next morning, at breakfast, we were greeted by a troop of **black capuchin monkeys** (*Sapajus nigritus*). After this, we spent the day kayaking and taking bike rides through the forest seeing birds and butterflies but no mammals. The next morning we went to the National Park to see the falls. Apparently the coatis, black capuchins, and plush-crested jays of the park are so notorious for stealing food from tourists that there are full cages for the humans to hide inside to wolf down their snacks. This morning, however, these mammals were nowhere to be found, and the only mammals I saw were **Brazilian guinea pigs** (*Cavia aperea*) sunning themselves on the rocks of the railbed of the tourist train that takes you from the main entrance to the Devil's Throat. The falls were stunning, and we did all three of the main tourist trails and I highly recommend adding it as a stop to your trip to Argentina or Brazil regardless of being able to take the time to go stomp around in the forest for mammals, as it is a guaranteed family member thriller.



Iberá

From there we took a longer than eight hour drive to the Esteros de Iberá, a giant network of wetlands in Corrientes Province. After about five hours on good sealed roads, we turned on the last 175km of dirt roads to the lodge Rincón del Socorro which took us the better part of four hours, given the deluge the night prior. The road tracks along the southern edge of the wetland and as we drove closer to Colonia Carlos Pellegrini, the main hub for tourism and activities on the southern end of the wetland we saw lots of rhea, **capybara** (*Hydrochoerus hydrochaeris*), and caiman. We stayed at the Rincón, a converted cattle estancia that was the Thompkins' headquarters in the area, for three nights, and had a really great time. For those that don't know, Iberá is a complicated jurisdictional area with a National Park, National Reserve, Provincial Park, and Provincial Reserve, as well as private conservation lands. The non-profit Rewilding Argentina (Of Doug and Kris Thompkins fame) bought ranches and donated them to the Argentinian government to form the National Park, and still retains some land in the National Reserve or outside. It is here that they are reintroducing jaguar, ocelot, pampas deer, giant anteater, and numerous species of birds. While we stayed at the Rincón because I don't think I could have convinced my mom to stay at a more normal eco-lodge, there are plenty of options in Colonia Carlos Pellegrini and heaps of activity options for trails, horseback, and kayaking on the Laguna to go see mammals self-guided or with a local guide. At the hotel, there are two artificial wetlands and lots of fresh grass around the buildings, and being inside the National Park proper, dogs are banned, and so the herbivores and foxes in the area are very habituated to people and can be found in and around the buildings all day. In the town, there's lots of dogs and cats, so finding capybara on the lawn is much less likely. For example, we saw **gray brocket deer** (*Subulo gouazoubira*), capybara, **pampas deer** (*Ozotoceros bezoarticus*), and **pampas fox** (*Lycalopex gymnoceros*) (locally called "grey fox" not to be confused with the other South American grey fox that inhabits just south of here in English), all casually within strolling distance from the main lodge. The first night at the wetlands we also saw a **crab-eating fox** (*Cerdocyon thous*), locally called the "forest fox," in the woods near these retention ponds.



The next morning, we took a horseback ride to the coast of the wetlands about an hour, seeing mostly the same species, but also the bait station where the scientists reintroducing the ocelots have set up as a remote monitoring spot. There were two **marsh deer** (*Blastocerus dichotomus*), the largest species of South American deer at the wetlands, and heaps of capybara. Back at the lodge, a whole family of **collared peccary** (*Dicotyles tajacu*) were roaming around the grounds. In the afternoon, we took a truck to another part of the wetland, a palm forest, and went for a walk to spot critters. More of the same. That night we walked around the lodge grounds after sunset for spotlighting. We saw one bat but the guides nor I have any expertise on that so it will remain anonymous. We saw many foxes, the nighttime munching of capybara, introduced **axis deer** (*Axis axis*), a **southern long-nosed armadillo** (*Dasypus novemcinctus*) and two adorable **plains viscacha** (*Lagostomus maximus*). You could hear the axis deer barking all evening but they are very wary of humans as they are actively hunted.



The next day, we took another walk at the edge of the wetlands in the morning, seeing mostly capybara, marsh deer, and lots of birds. In the afternoon, we drove to Colonia Carlos Pellegrini for a boat spotting session along the banks of the Laguna Iberá in the Provincial Park, and had stunning sightings of heaps of marsh deer, capybara, and both species of caiman in the area, and at sunset the colors really popped off on the marsh deer. If you want good photography of smallish but friendly crocodilians or big orange deer, this is the spot. On the way back at night, we saw pampas foxes every kilometer or so, as well as capybara laying on the road constantly, and spooked a medium-sized **feral pig** (*Sus scrofa*) that was trying to eat baby capybara.



I did not get to see the famous species of the area – jaguar, ocelot, maned wolf, or giant anteater. Per the guides, the giant anteater are common now near the lodge but hard to spot in the fall. There are four ocelot which have been reintroduced near the lodge and are seen by the scientists on camera traps but rarely in person. The feral pigs have been killing maned wolf pups, and so they are dwindling in the park, and as they prefer drier habitats anyways, they may move out. There are three jaguars known to inhabit the area around the lodge/Carlos Pellegrini, and one young male with a short tail, known as Ombú, was filmed on the sendero boardwalk in the Provincial Park by Carlos Pellegrini the we arrived in Iberá for the first time by tourists. That footage was shown to us in the local area guide WhatsApp group, and I'm sure has started floating around the internet by now. It seems like reintroduction efforts for tapir have stopped for now, as those have been shifted to El Impenetrable National Park in the Gran Chaco region, and the collared peccary reintroductions have waned as they have started to become established. Overall, I had a great experience and think this is an up and coming spot that in the future could be a full-fledged destination in future.



(Not Mammals I Know, but for the ~ambience~)

Buenos Aires again

Just as an ending to the trip, my mom departed and I had a day to bounce around Buenos Aires myself. I saw an introduced **Pallas' squirrel** (*Callosciurus erythraeus*) in the Buenos Aires Botanical Garden. I also went to the Buenos Aires Ecoparque, which is the former zoo which has been turned into a rehabilitation center and educational spot for native wildlife. It's free to enter and kind of interesting. The old exhibits have either repurposed as homes for native species but allowed to be overgrown with native plants and purposely obscured for visitors, making it a real challenge to spot some of the animals. Additionally, Patagonian mara and nutria are free ranging around the park and seem to be free to leave. As it's free and conservation focused, it's a nice place to walk around and get some kind of mammal fix of Argentina's native species if you're in town and can't make it out to the countryside.

Overall, I had a great trip to Argentina, even if it was more culture and general nature focused, and hopefully will get my mom slowly more and more addicted to nature and mammalwatching. Thanks for reading!

Stats:

Argentina Total

Native Mammals: 12 species

Introduced Mammals: 3 species

Total: 15 species

Lifers: 15

Native/Reintroduced

black capuchin monkeys (*Sapajus nigritus*)

Brazilian guinea pigs (*Cavia aperea*)

plains viscacha (*Lagostomus maximus*)

capybara (*Hydrochoerus hydrochaeris*)

gray brocket deer (*Subulo gouazoubira*)

pampas deer (*Ozotoceros bezoarticus*)

marsh deer (*Blastocerus dichotomus*)

collared peccary (*Dicotyles tajacu*)

red brocket deer (*Mazama americana*)

crab-eating fox (*Cerdocyon thous*)

pampas fox (*Lycalopex gymnoceros*)

southern long-nosed armadillo (*Daspyrus novemcinctus*)

Introduced

Pallas' squirrel (*Callosciurus erythraeus*)

axis deer (*Axis axis*)

feral pig (*Sus scrofa*)