



My Big Cat Year – The Pantanal in Brazil and a story about **Jaguars** – 07/10/26 to 22/10/26

Earlier in the year, I planned a trip to **Brazil**, focusing on **Emas NP** and the **Pantanal**. The reason was that it could offer a nice backup in case I missed some wildcat species in Bolivia. Also, I was there in 1992 with my partner Bea and loved the place. I would especially like to revisit the Pantanal as I do love wetlands and its wildlife. It would be more of a general wildlife trip with also a lot of birding so regarding the Wildcat species, except for the Jaguar, I would have limited chances.

All in all, we managed to see **26 mammal species**, **247 Bird species** and **8 Identified Reptiles and Amphibians!**

With regard to the mammals, the highlights for me were **Jaguar (16 sightings, 20 Jaguars in total and probably around 12 to 15 individuals)**, **Giant Otter**, **Neotropical Otter**, **Maned Wolf (5x)**, **Striped Hog-nosed Skunk**, **Giant Anteater (13x)**, **Southern Tamandua**, **White-lipped Peccary**, **Lowland Tapir (13x)**

Bird highlights for me were **Band-tailed Manakin**, **Helmeted Manakin**, **Streamer-tailed Tyrant**, **Cock-tailed Tyrant**, **Hyacin Macaw**, **Blaze-winged Parakeet**, **Rusty-backed Antwren**, **White-fronted Woodpecker**, **Collared Crescentchest**, **White-throated Spadebill**, **Coal-crested Finch**, **Yellow-faced Parrot**, **Black-capped Donacobius**, **Boat-billed Heron**, **Sungrebe**, **Great Horned Owl**, **Striped Cuckoo**.

Top 5 Mammals	Top 5 Birds	Top 5 Wildlife moments
Jaguar	Sungrebe	Jaguar behaviour during 16 sightings
Maned Wolf	Band-tailed Manakin	A Southern Tamandua watching for 30 minutes
Giant Anteater	Streamer-tailed Tyrant	Maned Wolf during Night drives
Giant Otter	Cock-tailed Tyrant	A first Giant Anteater next to the road
Neotropical Otter	Collared Crescentchest	Neotropical Otter catching a Banded Knifefish

The Big Cat Year is not just about spotting wild cats. It is also about habitat and wildlife conservation. The aim is to support a project/organization in every country visited. With regard to Brazil, we have made a contribution towards Felis and the School projects they support in Emas NP.

Currently I am still at 23 Wildcat species for the year and 26 in life. We have been able to contribute financially to 13 Projects and/or Organizations for a total of 17.500 USD. Many thanks to those who have contributed to make this possible! In addition, we have been able to give 12 Conservation Talks, Presentations and Interviews. It is hard work but we are getting there!





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The Pantanal in Brazil and a story about Jaguars ...

Earlier in the year, I booked a trip to **Brazil** with [BirdingBreaks](#). The reason was that it could offer a nice backup in case I missed some Wildcat species in Bolivia. Also, I was there in 1992 with my partner Bea and we loved the place. Especially the Pantanal, which I would like to revisit, as I do love wetlands and their wildlife.

The trip would start in the **South Pantanal**, followed by **Emas NP** (both areas were new for me) and would end in the **North Pantanal** with the world-famous **Transpantaneira**, a 147-kilometer (91-mile) unpaved seasonal dirt road that cuts through the heart of the northern Pantanal wetland in Mato Grosso, Brazil, running from the town of Poconé to the riverside outpost of Porto Jofre.

Regarding the Wildcat species, **the Jaguar** is guaranteed, in the North Pantanal the **Ocelot** is doable and **Puma** in the South Pantanal and Emas NP is scarce but there is a realistic chance. But obviously, I was hoping for a **Jaguarundi** or **Pampas Cat** crossing the road (both species I saw last year in Bolivia but which I missed last month there). The **Southern Tiger Cat** and **Margay** were unrealistic but there is always a chance.

I knew the trip would be a **birding trip** with an **additional focus** on the **well-known mammals** of **Brazil**. It would be very different from all other trips this year where I was always on my own or with other people and guides totally focused on mammals and especially Wildcat species.

So, after coming back from South Africa on the 6th of October, I arrived home at 12:30 and the following morning I was at 09:00 on the train again to Schiphol for the flight at 13:00 to Campo Grande in Brazil.

At the airport, I met with my fellow travelers **Yvonne and Peter, Marianne, Maaïke** and [BirdingBreaks](#) tour leader **Harvey van Diek**. Nice people with a general interest in Nature and all its wildlife. Except for Harvey, no dedicated birders or mammal watchers. We had a cup of coffee together and a nice introduction to one another.

The flight went smoothly and we arrived in **Sao Paulo** for a stopover to the domestic flight to **Campo Grande**. Although all luggage was through-tagged to Campo Grande, it became clear during the flight that all luggage needed to be retrieved from the luggage belt and checked in





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again. As we had only 2 hours I knew from the flight from earlier this year in August, from Chengdu, China to Santa Cruz, Bolivia with a stopover in Sao Paulo, that it could mean trouble.

And so it did. Everybody retrieved their bag from the belt and the only one missing was my bag. Before I went to the counter to report the missing luggage, I went for a quick look at the special area for odd-sized luggage, as I did have the same problem in August. Luckily, there it was and I had my bag (a normal duffel of less than 20 kg ...).

We continued our flight to **Campo Grande** where we arrived at 23:00 local time. Victor, the local guide, picked us up and transported us to the Mohave hotel where we stayed for the night. The next morning, the 8th of October, at 7 AM we had breakfast and met our last two travellers **Arjan** and **Ellen**. We then made a four-hour drive to the **South Pantanal**, where we stayed at **Pousada Aguipe** for 2 full days and 3 nights.



On our way into the South Pantanal, Harvey spotted a **Six-banded Armadillo**, new to all of us. Only 20 minutes later, I spotted the first **Giant Anteater** next to the road, again also new to all of us. Over the next few days, we saw many of both species but the first one is always exciting!!!

Pousada Aguipe was a great place and a real wildlife paradise. The **Hyacinth** and **Blue-and-yellow Macaws** fly around and you easily see six-banded Armadillos on the property. A quick walk around the trees at the back of the accommodations delivered species like **Nanday**, **White-eyed** and **Monk Parakeet**, **Ferruginous Pygmy Owl**, **Red-legged Seriema**, **Bare-faced Curassow** and many others.



At Pousada Aguipe, the people were really nice and the food was extremely good. The first night I shared a room with Harvey and we got along well. As there had been a mistake with the bookings for the rooms, the second and third night, I stayed with Harvey, Victor, Marianne and Maaïke at Pousada Caranada, a deserted place 8 km further on the road. Good news was that Harvey and I each had a private room.





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As Victor could not drive an automatic car, I drove the Toyota Hilux the next two days back and forth on the road to Pousada Aguipe where we would meet up with the rest for breakfast, lunch and dinner and would board on the safari jeep for the drives.

The Safari vehicle was comfortable with good height and space for everybody to have good views. The drives were typically from 6 in the morning until 11 and then from 16 until 19 hours in the evening. In addition, we had a nice walk close to the property, looking for some good birds and the last morning we had a good boat drive.

The habitat is very different from the North Pantanal, i.e. generally less water and fewer waterways. Instead, it is a vast, shifting mosaic of seasonally flooded grasslands, saline lagoons, winding rivers and has forest patches everywhere.

Wildlife was good and we had multiple sightings of the **Giant Anteater**, **13 in total**. At one sighting, we could approach the mammal on foot to less than 10 meters. If you position yourself downwind and keep quiet, you can observe them up close. Also good was our first **Southern Tamandua**. I had seen the species twice in Bolivia but both times at night in a palm. Now, the mammal was foraging through an open field and we stayed with it for half an hour, enjoyed its behaviour and could make some good photographs and videos.





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One of the best animal encounters was when we walked around the property towards the river. At one of the deserted buildings we encountered a 3.5-to-4-meter **Yellow Anaconda**!! What a great snake! During one of the other drives we released a **False Water Cobra** and another unidentified snake which they both had caught at the property.



The boat drive delivered two good birds. A **Helmeted Manakin** which was very difficult to see. The other one, a **Band-tailed Manakin** showed itself well and was in my view one of the great birds of the trip.

All in all we saw **Giant Anteaters (13x)**, **Southern Tamandua (2x)**, **Greater Capybara**, **Crab-eating Fox**, **Pampas Deer**, **Common Brocket Deer**, **South American**

Coati, **Hooded capuchin Monkey**, **Black-and-gold Howler Monkey**, **Azara's Agouti**, **Collared Peccary** and **Six-banded Armadillo**.

With regard to the birds, some other good birds were a **White-fronted Woodpecker**, **Red-billed Scythebill**, **Yellow-collared Macaw**, **Blaze-winged Parakeet**, **Rusty-backed Antwren**, **Pale-crested Woodpecker**, **Mato Grosso Antbird**, **Yellowish Pipit**, **Greater Thornbird**, **Pied Plover** and **Nacunda Nighthawk**. I was extremely pleased with a good sighting of the **Streamer-tailed Tyrant**, a species I missed in Bolivia.

As this was the first trip this year not focused fully on the Wildcat species and other mammals, I really had to **adjust to the different rhythm**. Normally, after dinner, we would go out again with thermals in search of Wildcat species and other mammals, but now you could just take a rest and have an early sleep New to me and I noticed it really took some time for me to accept this reality.





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Regarding the Wildcat species in South Pantanal and Emas NP, I was hoping for a **Puma** at the end of an afternoon/beginning of the evening. And even better, a **Jaguarundi** crossing the road. However, the other species would not be realistic given that we wouldn't go out at night with the Thermal. As we say in Dutch, **'It is what it is'!**

From the South Pantanal, we drove back to Campo Grande on the 11th of October and stayed there the night in the same hotel as before. Next morning, we left at 6:30 AM for a 6-hour drive to **Pousada da Gloria**, a camp at the edge of **Emas NP**. We arrived around lunch time and settled in the room I shared with Harvey.



The place was in the middle of a small forest and the food and people were great. It was a small place with a few buildings and some tents and offered accommodation for max 20 people. Next to the kitchen area, we saw two **White-lipped Peccaries**, a species new to me.

Around 16:00 we left in the safari vehicle for a drive in Emas NP. The sandy road takes about half an hour to get to the entrance of Emas NP, with the NP on the left side and on the right side of the track, there were agricultural fields with a few pockets of forest. Already on the sandy road towards the entrance, we spotted some **Pampas Deer** and even a **Marsh Deer** in the agricultural fields.



We entered the NP entrance and took the first sandy road to the right. About 1 or 2 kms into the NP, Harvey said firmly, **'Maned Wolf, Maned Wolf!!'**. We could feel the excitement, a Maned Wolf! However, it was hidden 75 meters away in the long grass and only after scanning a certain area with our binoculars, most of us could find the mammal. A good start!!





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That drive we spotted another two **Maned Wolves** with our spotlights in the dark. We could follow those intriguing mammals for a while. We were happy that on our first drive in Emas NP, we got three Maned Wolves. The only other mammals we encountered were **Crab-eating Foxes**.



We left Emas NP around 20:30 and drove on the sandy road back to Pousada da Gloria, with Emas on the right side of the road and the fields on the left side. I took out my Thermal and started scanning the fields. On the drive back to the camp, I found several **Pampas Deer**, our first **Lowland Tapir** and only ten minutes later I got another two **Lowland Tapirs**. A **Striped Hog-nosed**

Skunk was another highlight. Everybody was amazed and very glad what I could find with the Thermal.

Next morning the 13th, we left at 06:30 AM after having breakfast. No mammals on the morning drive but we found two great birds; a **Collared Crescentchest** and a **Cock-tailed Tyrant**. Happy with those two as the first one was a bird which I always wanted to see and the second one I missed in September in Barba Azul in Bolivia.



During the afternoon/early evening drive, I spotted a **Maned Wolf** in daylight. We got to take some nice pictures. We had a packed dinner meal with us which we ate during the drive and what enabled us to spend as much time as possible in Emas NP. When we left the Park's

entrance, we found another **Striped Hog-nosed Skunk**. During the drive back to the camp around 21:00, I found some more **Tapirs**.





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The 14th in the morning, we left again after breakfast at around 06:30 to Emas NP. Not that



much that morning but we found some good birds, a **Streamer-tailed Tyrant** and on our way back to the camp we even managed to observe a **King Vulture** on the ground. It is one of my most favourite Vultures, so colourful. We arrived back in the camp at around 10:00 AM and we went for

a one-hour walk along one of the trails. A **Helmeted Manakin** was a great find and the small and tiny **White-throated Spadebill** was another bonus bird.

In the afternoon all hell broke loose and we had a severe storm. Luckily it stopped at around 16:30 enabling us to go to Emas again around 17:00. Just before entering the park, our



accompanying guide Joao spotted two **Tapirs** outside the park. We were all thrilled to see those creatures, a mother and subadult young, in daylight. That night, Harvey and I spotted a **Maned wolf** (nr 5) in the Park with both using the spotlight and the thermal. We also had three **Crab-eating Foxes** of which one I thought for a

moment, was a Wildcat species ... unfortunately not. When exiting the park, on the fields I spotted again several **Tapirs** with the thermal and another **Striped Hog-nosed Skunk**.

The 15th we left after breakfast at 06:30 AM for a nine-hour drive to Cuiaba. On our way out we saw two groups of **White-lipped Peccary** on the land and a very nice **Ash-throated Rail**. In Cuiaba we spent the night at a nice hotel, it is always good to have a hot shower again. Next morning, we left after breakfast at 6 AM for a 6-hour drive to the **North Pantanal** on the world-famous **Transpantaneira**.

The Transpantaneira is a 147-kilometer (91-mile) unpaved seasonal dirt road that cuts through the heart of the northern Pantanal wetland in Mato Grosso, Brazil, running from the town of Poconé to the riverside outpost of Porto Jofre.





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I had been there in 1992 together with Bea and it would be interesting to see what had changed. One thing for sure that would have changed is the **Jaguar** ecotourism. Back in 1992, it was nearly impossible to see a Jaguar on the Transpantaneira. Our guide at the time told us that the only chance you would see one, is if it had killed a prey close to the road where it would stay for a few days. Sometimes that happened. But otherwise, very little chance. Also, at the time many local farmers killed the **Jaguars** as it was a kind of a pest for their livestock.



That really has changed. In the last 20 years or so, the **Jaguar** Ecotourism started to develop itself and now people come from all over the world to see the Jaguars in the North Pantanal. They pay good money and with it, the **Jaguars** meant income for many local people and protection for the Jaguars and its habitat. There is no place in the world where it is so easy to see **Jaguars**. I think it is the easiest place in the world to see one of the normally more difficult Wildcat species. Torres del Paine in Chile has basically done the same with **Pumas** and Ladakh in India follows with the **Snow Leopards**. Before 20 years ago or so, it was extremely difficult to see those species but now it is doable.

During our drive on the Transpantaneira we made regular stops and saw many **Greater Capybaras** and **Yacare Caimans**. A **Crab-eating Fox** wandered along the road and for a moment I thought it was a **Jaguarundi**. Not so. Some **Marsh Deer** showed itself nicely and the birdlife was phenomenal, as expected.





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Around 12 o'clock we arrived at the riverside outpost of Porto Jofre and one of the typical 12-seater Jaguar speedboat took us to the Jaguar do Pantanal lodge, i.e. a ship on the water. We would stay there for three nights and would do boat drives, each morning from 5:30 to 11:00 and from 15:00 to 18:00 hours.

The boat had 9 small cabins for tourists and 4 decks. All but one cabin were at the first deck, the base of the ship. The kitchen and the dining area were on the second deck. On the third deck there was a lounge room (which we never used) and one spare cabin. On the fourth deck, there was a sun deck with a great view. There was a crew of five, one cook, one deck assistant, one cleaner, one overall caretaker and one driver of the Jaguar boats. We were lucky to be the only ones on board so we had the ship to ourselves.

We got our first **Giant Otter** that day as Harvey ran up the stairs, screaming, 'Giant Otter, Giant Otter, Giant Otter!'. As he looked out of his cabin window, he spotted a **Giant Otter** traversing the river and most of us were quick enough to get a good view. I even managed to take a few decent pictures.



That first afternoon, we went on a boat drive and we were overwhelmed with the **Jaguar** Sightings. To cut a long story short, over the next few days, we had **15 Jaguar sightings** with a total of **20 Jaguars** (once a female with two subadult cubs and twice we had two Jaguars together).





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Some of the sightings highlighted;

1. The mating behaviour of a male and female
2. A Jaguar killing a Yacare Caiman
3. A female with two subadult Cubs
4. Two male jaguars crossing the river
5. We observed the hunting behaviour of one Jaguar along the river for almost half an hour while most of the time we were the only boat out there

Of all the 15 sightings, I made the following analysis;

1. We had 5 sightings which we did manage to find ourselves and, except for one, we were the only people out there observing. I.e. 33% of all sightings.
2. I think we had 5 sightings where we were with a couple of boats, not ideal but it was fine to me, i.e. 33% of the sightings.
3. There were 5 sightings where we were with 10 to 20 boats. Especially, in one small tributary which was frequented often by a few well-known Jaguars. I really disliked it but that's also the North Pantanal. i.e. 33% of the sightings.

Panthera, the well-known organization for the research and protection of all Wildcat species in the world, has a big research station near Porto Jofre. In 2016, they published a nice booklet with all the 70 or so **Jaguars** which they had been observing in the area. Together with the guides, we could identify for sure 8 individual **Jaguars** by name. We saw a few **Jaguars** twice and we suspect that we have observed between **12 and 15 individual Jaguars**.



For some photos and videos of the **Jaguars**, please see the [wildcat part of the gallery section on the website](#).





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In addition to the **Jaguars**, we had twice a group of 5 **Giant Otters** which we followed for close to 30 minutes and could observe all kinds of behaviour. Very special was the sighting of a rare **Neotropical Otter** catching a Banded Knifefish.

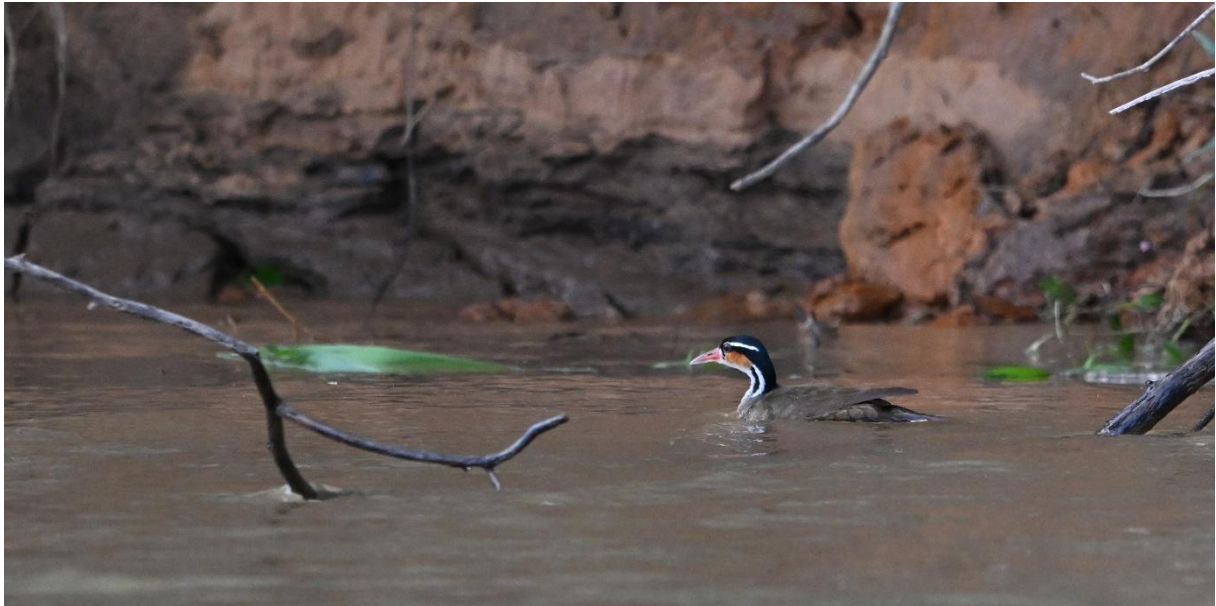




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Other mammals were very limited and we only managed to observe **Greater Capybaras**, **Hooded Capuchin Monkey** and **Black and Gold Howler Monkey**.

Bird life was good and very special for me was the sighting of a **Sungrebe**. Other good birds were **Sunbittern**, **Red-throated Piping Guan**, **Great Horned Owl**, **Black-capped Donacobius**, **Bat Falcon**, **Striped Cuckoo** and **Boat-billed Heron**.



I think we were lucky to be at the end of the season so it was not that busy. Also, as we stayed far into the Pantanal and did some long boat drives from there, the number of other boats we encountered was really limited. Exception being the earlier mentioned tributary, to me that was too much and I disliked it.

On the 19th of October, we said farewell to the great people on the ship and thanked them warmly for the good time we had. We made our way back to Porto Jofre where we jumped onto the vehicle for a three-hour drive to the **Aymara Lodge on the Transpantaneira**, our last stop for the trip.

During the drive we managed to see our **20th Jaguar** in the **open fields**, immediately taking off when it heard our vehicle. Clearly not all **Jaguars** in the Pantanal are habituated with people and rightfully so!





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Arriving at Aymara Lodge was nice, it is a great place with abundant wildlife. Many [Bare-faced Curassows](#) walk at the property and [Hyacinth](#) and [Blue-and-yellow Macaws](#) fly around. [Agoutis, Crab-eating Foxes, South American Coatis, Hooded Capuchin and Black-and-gold Howler Monkeys](#) are there as well.

On the 20th we had a nice morning drive with a few good birds and in the afternoon, we sat out at a spot where the [Ocelot](#) frequently visits. Hopefully we are lucky!

All in all, it was a very nice overall nature trip and we managed to see [26 mammal species](#), close to [250 bird species](#) and [8 Reptiles](#) we could identify. Regarding the Cats, it obviously was not my most successful trip of the year but in all fairness I could have expected it as it was more a general birding trip with additional focus on some key mammal species which we all managed to observe very well.

Many thanks to Harvey, Yvonne, Peter, Ellen, Arjan, Marianne and Maaïke for a nice trip and [BirdingBreaks](#) for the excellent organisation.

Tomorrow I fly home to see Bea and the kids again. I will also stay one evening in Wallonie to search for the European Wildcat. On the 30th I am off to Chile, Western Sahara, Uganda and I will finish around the 20th of December in the USA.

The Big Cat Year is not just about spotting wild cats. It is also about habitat and wildlife conservation. The aim is to support a project/organization in every country visited. With regard to Brazil, we have made a contribution towards Felis and the School projects they support in Emas NP. Read more about this project here: [Brazil | Felis](#)

Many thanks to my friend [Remmelt van der Woude](#) who has sponsored this project and made the donation possible. Remmelt, on behalf of My Big Cat Year and the school children, many thanks! Your support is greatly appreciated!!

Would you like to contribute to supporting these important projects and/or organizations in the world with regard to conservation and protection of nature and wildlife, please have a look at the [funding page](#). All help is appreciated! Big and small, it all counts. You can already help [by buying the projects a coffee](#)





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Mammal List Brazil Oktober 2026

Species	Seen 2026	New / Before	South Pantanal - 3 nights - 8/9/10/11 Aug	Emas NP - 3 nights - 12/13/14/15	North Pantanal - 5 nights - 16/17/18/19/20 Aug
6-banded armadillo	1	New	13 x	3 x	
9-banded armadillo	1	Before		(1 x)	
Azara's agouti	1	Before	6 x	1 x	3 x
Azara's capuchin	1	Before	1 x		2 x
Bat unidentified species	1	New		1 x	
Black-and-gold Howler	1	Before	3 x		8 x
Capybara	1	Before	> 50 x		20 x
Collared Peccary	1	Before	2 x		
Common Brown Brocket	1	Before	1 x		1 x
Common Tapeti	1	Before			1 x
Crab-eating Fox	1	Before	5 x	4 x	3 x
Giant Anteater	1	New	11 x		
Giant Otter	1	New			3 x (1 5 5)
Jaguar	1	Before			16 x (1 3 1 2 1 1 1 1 1 1 2 1 1 1 1 1)
Large -eared Woolly Bat	1	New		1 x	
Lowland Tapir	1	Before		11 x	2 x
Maned Wolf	1	Before		5 x	
Marsh Deer	1	Before		1 x	5 x
Neotropical River Otter	1	New			1 x
Pampas Deer	1	Before	11 x	12 x	
Proboscis Bat	1	New			1 x
Red Brocket Deer	1	Before			3 x
South American Coati	1	Before	8 x		3 x
Southern Tamandua	1	Before	2 x		
Striped Hog-nosed Skunk	1	New		3 x	
White-lipped Peccary	1	New		2 x	
Total	26				

