



BRAZIL

- Rio grande do Sul and the Amazon

29 May - 16 June 2022



Pampas fox from Rio grande do Sul

Introduction

This was a tour basically set up for finding Margay and Southern Tigrina. For this I of course used the extraordinary service from Regina Ribeiro (guiaregis@yahoo.com.br)

She did ALOT of research and we sent tons of E-mails to eachother and also change place and itinerary more than one time during the months before the trip. I couldn't ask for a more dedicated person for scouting a new pioneering tour to places where mammalwatching like this probably has never been done.

If you want to go to Brazil, I can truly recommend to contact Regina. You will not be disappointed.

In the end we choosed an area in the very South of Brazil (Rio grande do Sul) for Margay at the very end of the distribution area for this cat. I will not point out exactly where we searched but we stayed in the small town of Candiota in a clean and comfortable hotel and did day/night-trips in the surroundings from this base.

The reason I will not point out exactly where we were is two. First, for respect to Regina and all the work she did with this tour. Second, it is almost exclusively private land with a lot of private gates to open and close and you must have permission for this.

We had a lot of help from a local “small cat project” who is based here and who does survey on Margay’s and Geoffroy’s cat. The project showed us the area where to search and also gave us permission for entering the private land areas.

The Candiota area is a very fragmented forest with mostly farmlands but also natural wetlands. Small patches of forest where the project has found at least 10 different Margay’s at the time I was there.

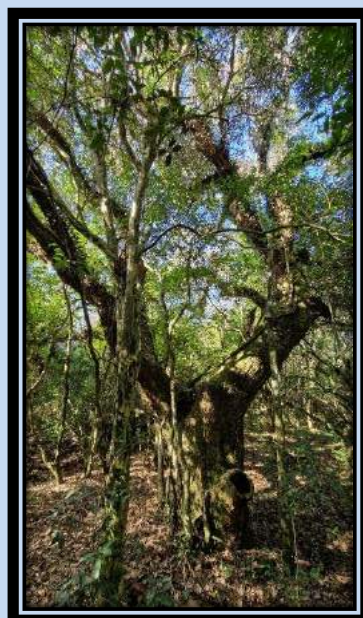


Dirty road in Candiota area where we found surprisingly much wildlife...

The idea was to search in the trees where the project has found the Margay’s resting during the day. They simply stay there the whole day and if you find one you will have a good view.

Small patches of forest has the benefit that the wildlife is very concentrated. Still... it is a needle in a haystack :)

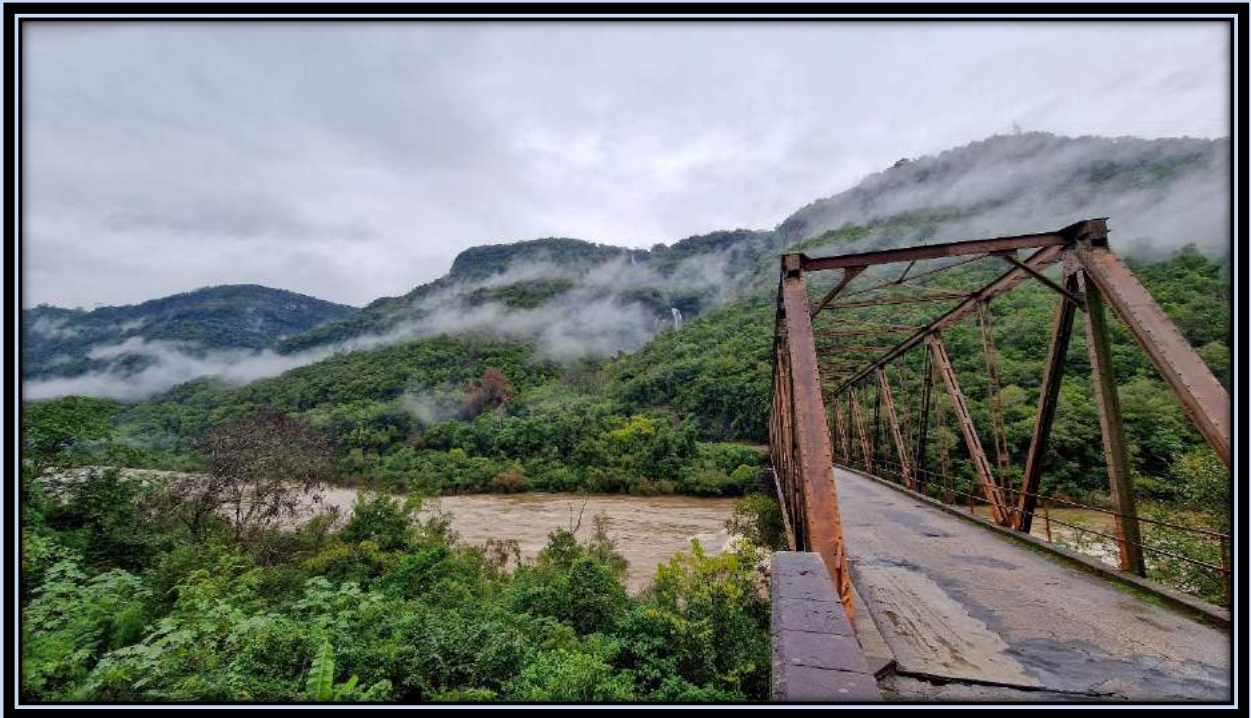
The Margay’s have a couple of tree species which are their favourites to stay in. It’s only a few of these trees in the fragmented forests so what we did was to scan those trees.



Perfect Margay tree

For the Southern Tigrina we were in a place north of Caxias Do Sul some 2 hours north of Porto alegre.

We searched along the forest roads in the valleys where there is a surprisingly healthy Atlantic forest left. We did find some excellent small roads with absolutely no traffic and no other people around where we could do whatever we liked. It looked like a prime Southern Tigrina habitat.



Good healthy Atlantic rainforest in the Valleys north of Caxias do Sul

The last night in the south we spent in Itapua state Park outside Porto Alegre.

A very restricted park. We couldn't do anything on our own and despite a lovely 6 km road in the park we were not allowed to spotlight here. Southern Tigrina do exist in this park but without having a proper access to it, it is not very good for mammalwatching. It is very beautiful though! And I got a lifer here.

But yes, it was harder to get into the park than into Brazil itself...



Itapua state park

My guide during this 9 days in the south was Leo and we had a great time together. We are now officially experts in tree branches...

I am pretty sure he still walking around in a city park or whatever and thinking "Oh, this is a great Margay-tree..." :)

After this 9 days in the south I continued up north to Alta Floresta and the Southern Amazon.

I had for a long time wanted to visit the well known (and expensive) Cristalino Lodge, so this was the main purpose for being here. I also had 2 nights before this Lodge and after some research I found a lovely place called Fazenda Anaca, only 7 minutes outside of town.



Fazenda Anaca

It's a lovely place! With their own patches of forests between the farmlands. They plant trees and makes corridors for wildlife and doing a lot of good things to have a sustainable business. The Lodge they started 6 years ago and they have a very, very good in-house guide (who only speak Portuguese but who cares when he is great in finding what you want).

You can do morning/afternoon/night - drives/walks here and the food is homemade and extraordinary! The place is so relaxed, they even have a pool that you can use.



The best thing though is that this fragmented forest is a great place for Emilia's marmoset and the newly split Alta Floresta Titi-monkey. Both of which can be hard in Cristalino Lodge. Nowadays it's not even the same species of Titi monkey who lives in these two lodges and only because of this you should put in a stay in Fazenda Anaca.

Contact the owner Fernao on WhatsApp +55 66 8445 8376

My last section was 3 nights in the well renowned Cristalino Lodge where I had a list of target species for my guide Raphael and the next 3 days we walked at least 15-20 km per day to try to fulfill my list.



Cristalino Lodge

If you have stayed here you then now why it is quite famous. The lodge is simply beautiful, almost too much for me. With three course meals, very good and knowledge guides and a setting in the most pristine forest it also comes with a price. But yes, I am glad I visited this lodge and together with Danum Valley on Borneo this is the most pristine and beautiful forest I have ever been to.



Primary forest at Cristalino

In the end I saw **28 species** of mammals of which **17 were lifers** and this is the story about them...

My species list

1. Geoffroy's cat --- 2 individuals seen in Candiota area. One melanistic and one spotted. One in the afternoon and one at nightdrive. With a probably third thru my thermal-scope but couldn't ID it properly. The small-cat project also captured two Geoffroy's during one night in their traps for collaring. I got the impression that this is a very, very reliable place for Geoffroy's cat.



2. Pampas fox --- Around 20 seen in Candiota area. They are everywhere and a 100% guarantee here.



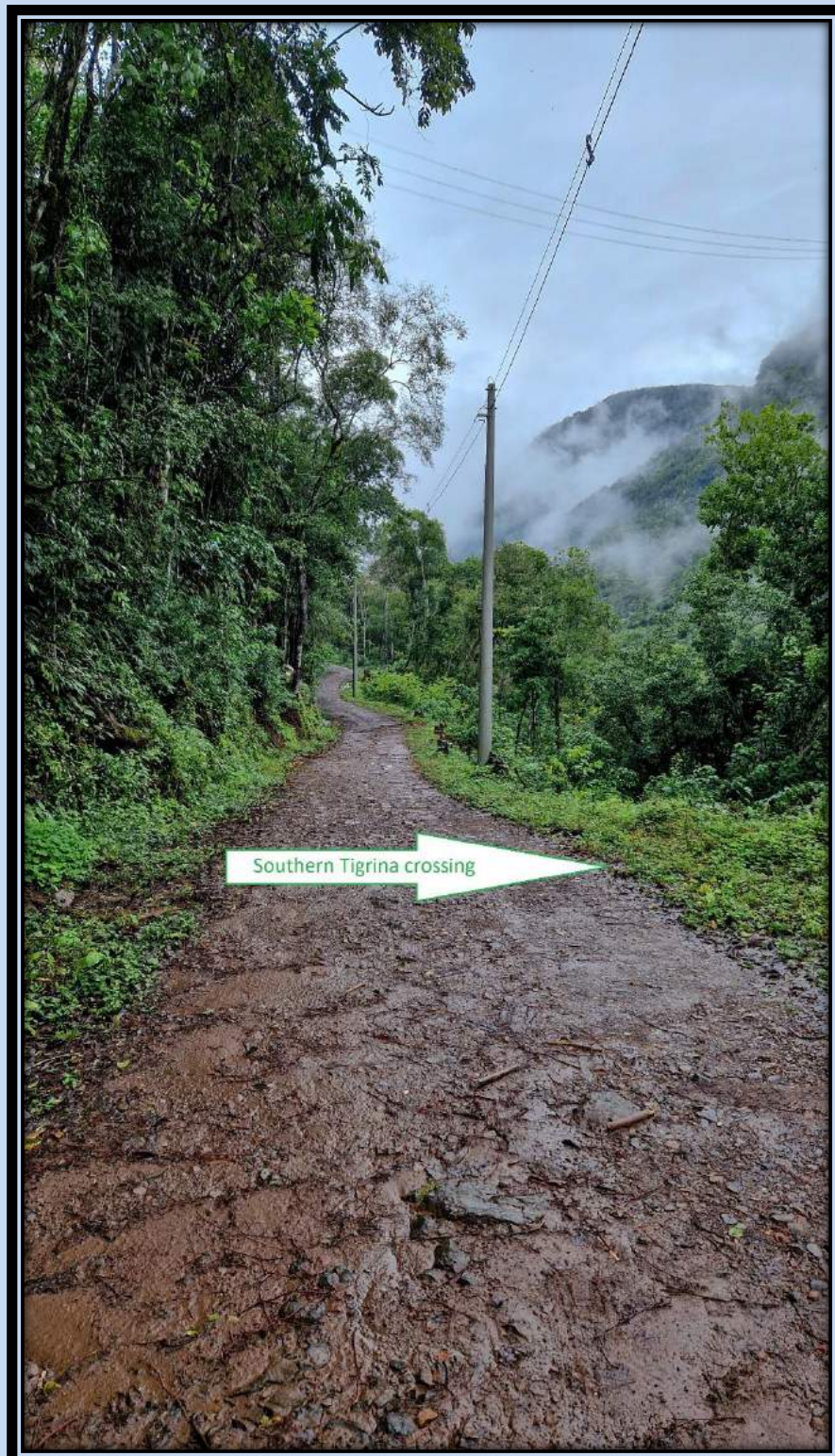
3. Southern Tiger Cat --- (Lifer) (Southern tigrina, Leopardus guttulus)

Fantastic sighting. Highlight of the trip and my 27th feline.

If not the first then at least one of very few reports of this elusive cat.

Seen in the valleys north of Caxias do Sul . It was 10AM in the morning a small, rather dark cat with a short tail crossed the road totally unexpected as we more or less was on a exploration drive for tonights spotlighting...

I could see it perfectly but brief. I could see the whole cat, the spots and the rather short tail. I have learned that Southern Tigrina is a bit darker and with shorter tail than it's cousin Oncilla further north. Which fits perfectly with my sighting. It looked even more dark as it was wet after more than 24 hours of heavy rain. That's probably the reason why we encountered this cat 10AM. It was cold and it had rained for long time with finally a break.



4. Crab eating fox --- One seen in Candiota area and a very unusual sighting of one in Cristalino Lodge. At Cristalino no guides had seen this fox in the forest before. Just a few records on camera traps. Jaguars are more common than this guy in this forest.



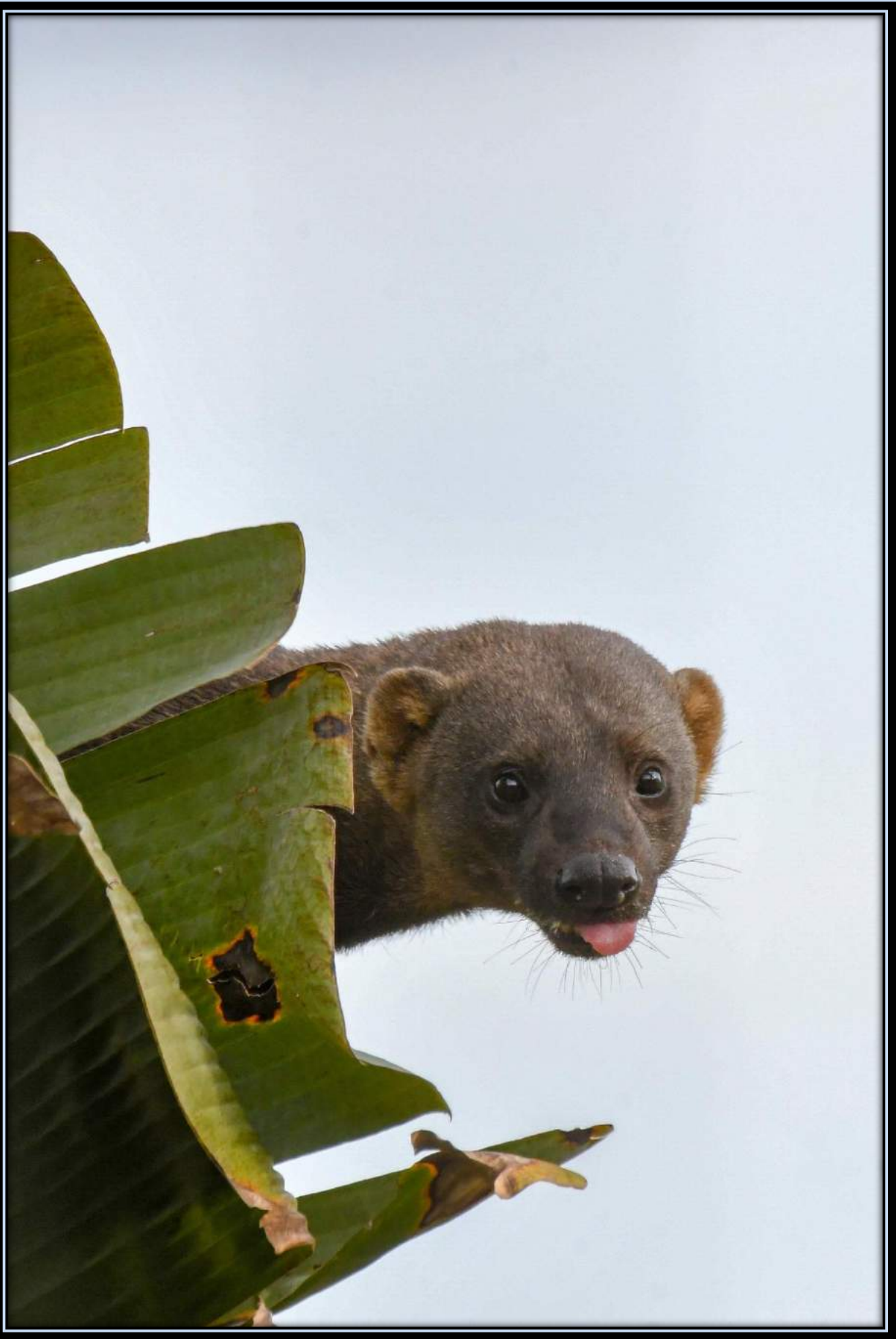
5. Molinas hog nosed skunk --- Almost as common as the Pampas fox in Candiota area. 10-15 individuals seen on nightdrives. Very common and a guarantee here.



6. Tayra --- One sighting at Fazenda Anaca. Imagine my surprise when I was in the pool and a dark shadow walked past me on the road 20m away – Tayra!

I could then follow him for 10 minutes as he raid the banana plantation just beside the pool.





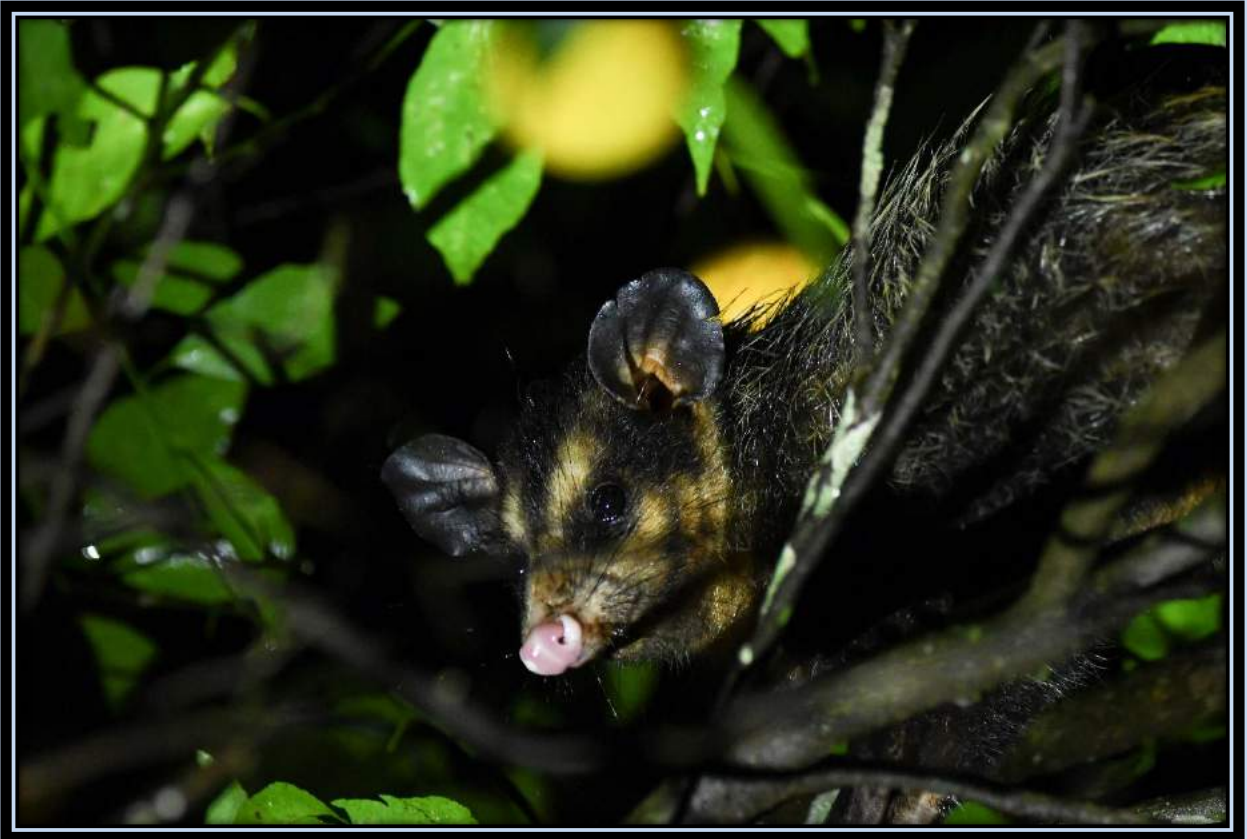
7. **Capybara** --- Seen everywhere except Cristalino.



8. **Collared peccary** --- Encountered a group an early morning at Fazenda Anaca.



9. **Big-eared opossum --- (Lifer)** Seen in the valleys north of Caxias do Sul when spotlighting along some dirty roads.



10. **Gray brocket deer** --- One seen in Candiota area and more in the valleys of Caxias do Sul. I tried desperately to turn it into a Brazilian dwarf brocket / Pygmy brocket (*Mazama Nana*) as they are also present in this remote hills but no... just a Gray brocket :)



11. **Coypu --- (Lifer)** Seen in Candiota area where they use to hang around in the swampy areas. Also seen along the road in the valleys north of Caxias do sul.



12. **Brazilian guinea pig --- (Lifer)** Seen a few times along the main roads in between the areas I visited. Quickly disappear when you stopped and want to have a better look.



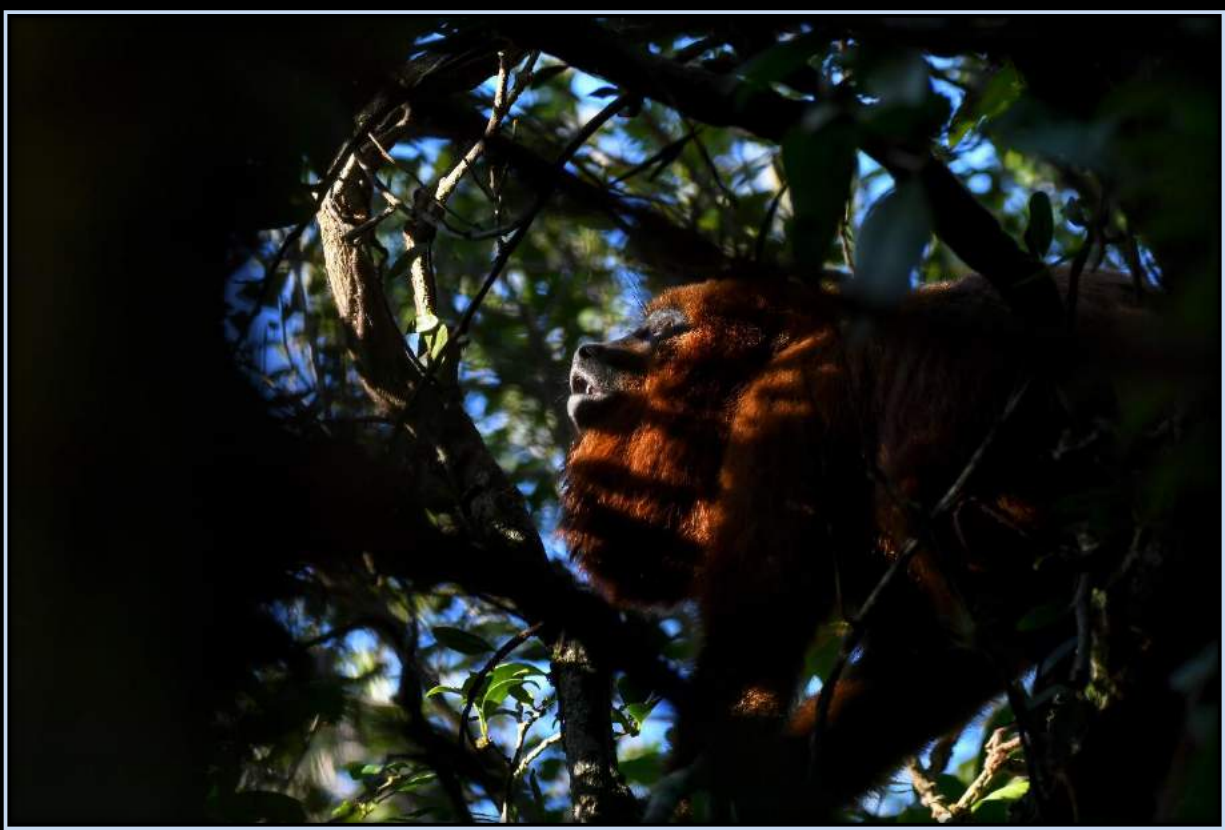
13. European hare --- Introduced species. One seen in Candiota area.



14. Tufted capuchin (*Sapajus apella*) --- Seen several times in Cristalino but also at Fazenda Anaca who has some families living there.

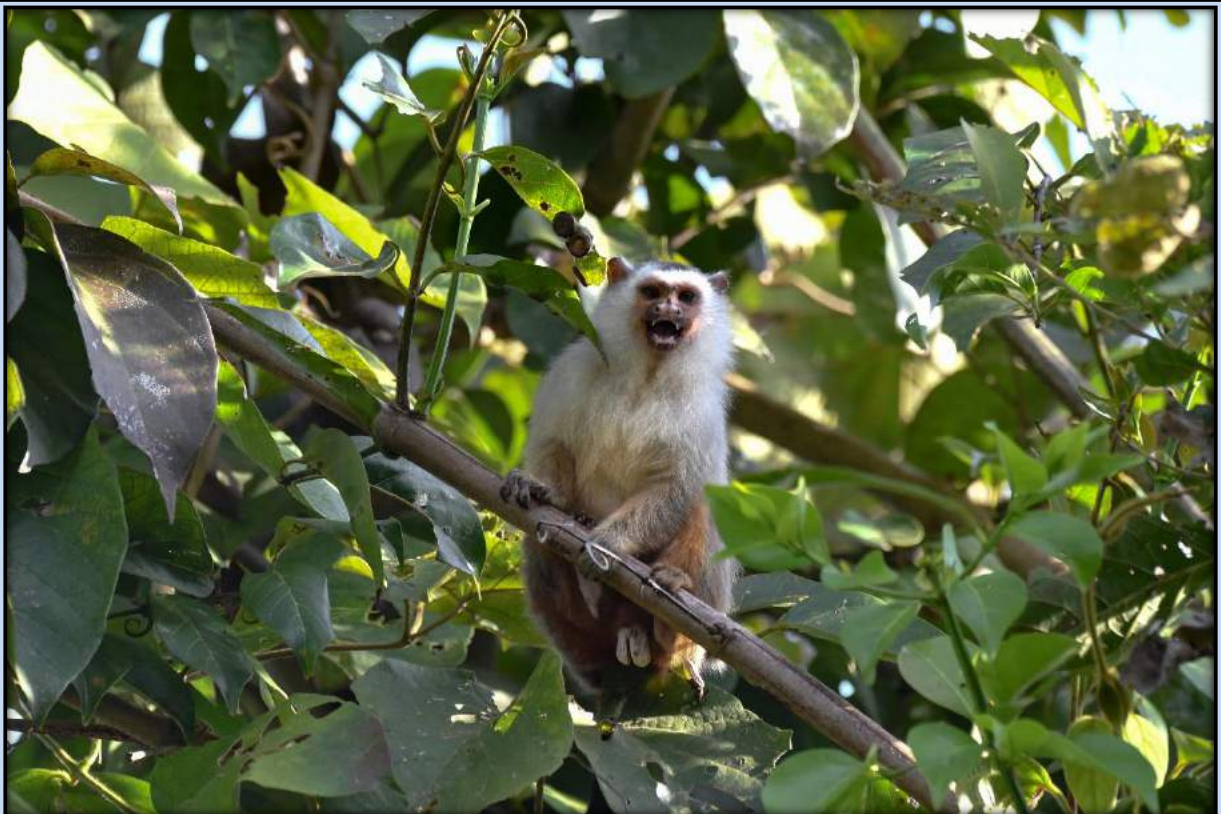


15. Brown howler --- (Lifer) Easily seen two times in Itapua state park. Initially my main purpose for visiting this park was that they have records of Southern Tiger cat. But as it is impossible to stay after dark and even enter early morning, this park is more for trekking than for mammalwatching. But we focused on Brown howlers which was a lifer for me!



16. Emilia's marmoset --- (Lifer) (Snethlage's marmoset, *Mico emiliae*)

Great sighting at Fazenda Anaca of this range restricted species. Here they are easy to see. Much more so than in Cristalino. My guide quickly found a group which we could study for about 15 minutes. If you want to see this species Fazenda Anaca is a superb place.



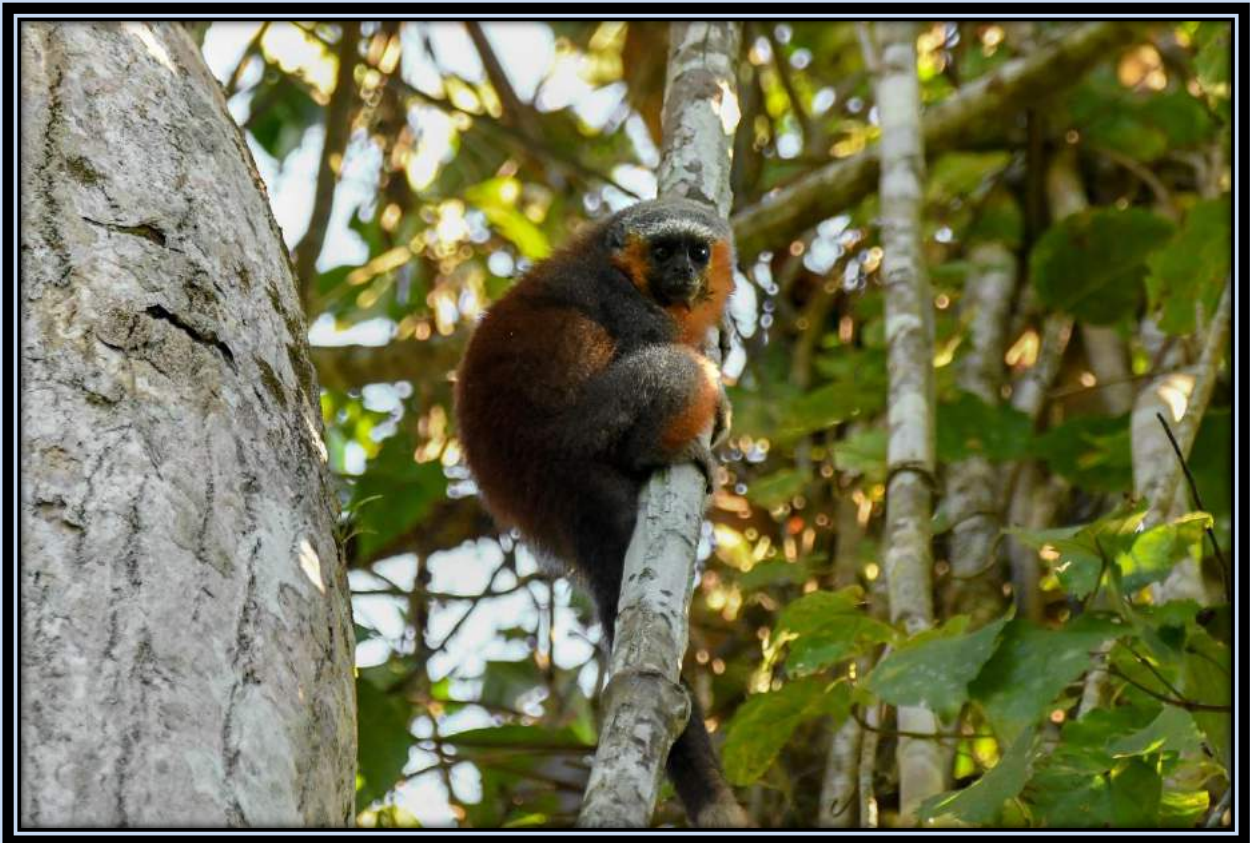
17. Alta Floresta titi monkey --- (Lifer) (*Plecturocebus grovesi*)

This critically endangered species, recently split in 2019 from *P. moloch* is easily found at Fazenda Anaca. So this is a different species than in Cristalino. I wasn't aware of this until the guides in Cristalino told me this and I did some research online. Very reliable in Fazenda Anaca.



18. Red-bellied titi monkey --- (Lifer) (*Dusky titi monkey, plecturocebus moloch*)

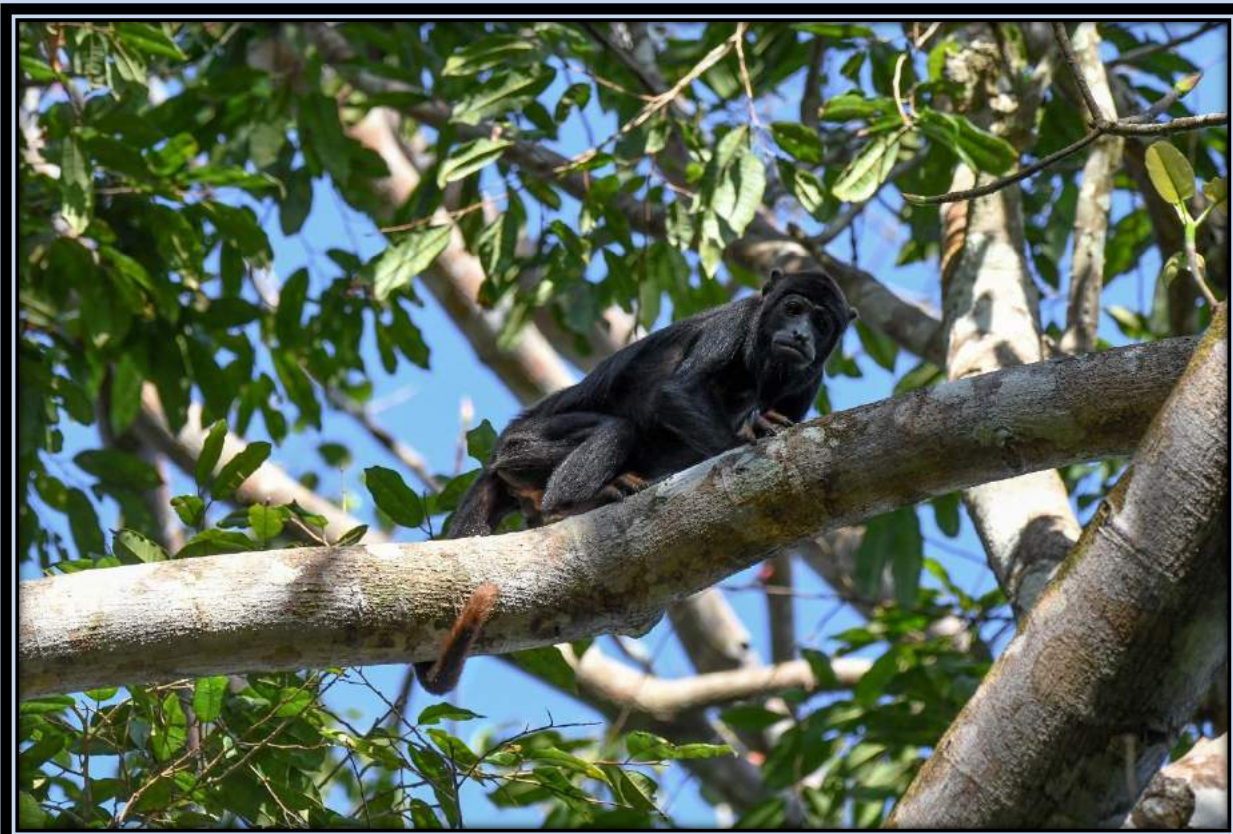
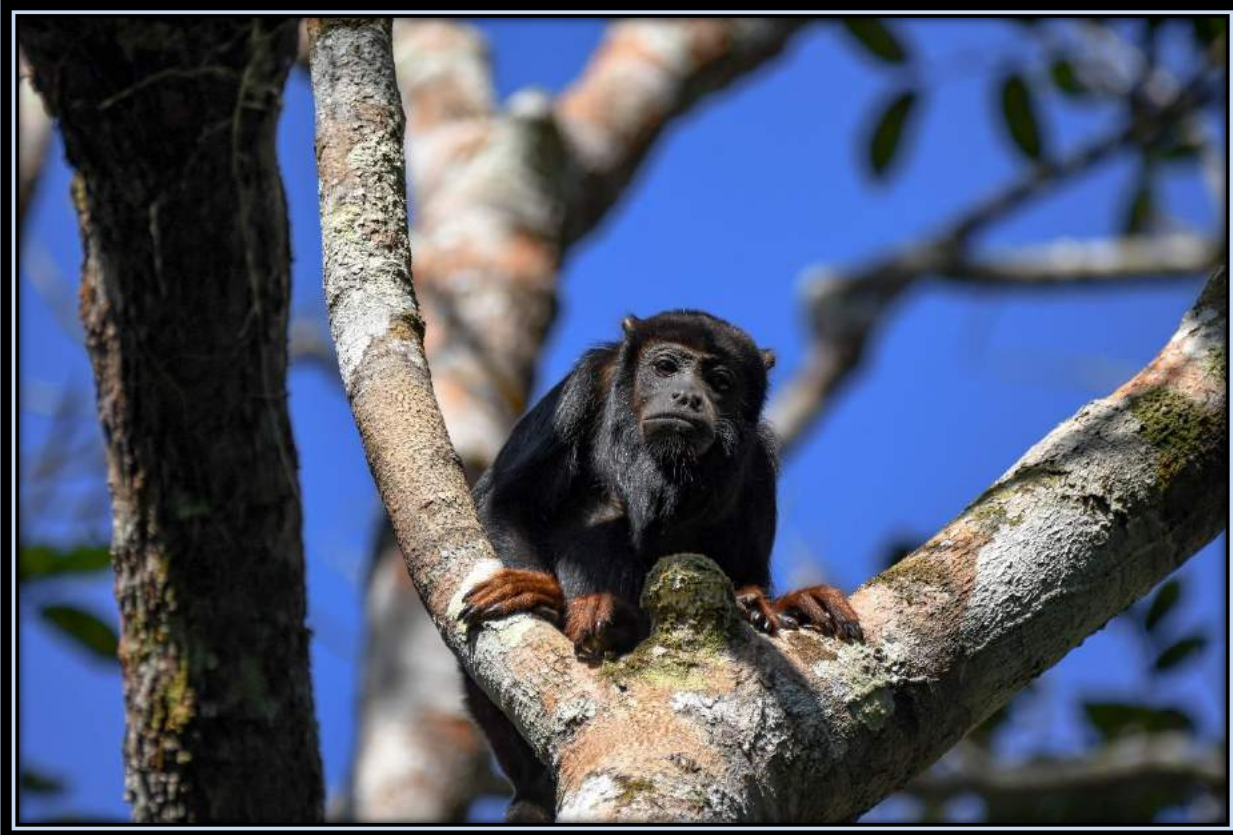
On the other side of the river Teles Pires at Cristalino you find this species. We were lucky to find them as they can be hard to find sometimes. Even harder to get a proper look and photo of, but we did find some cooperative individuals.



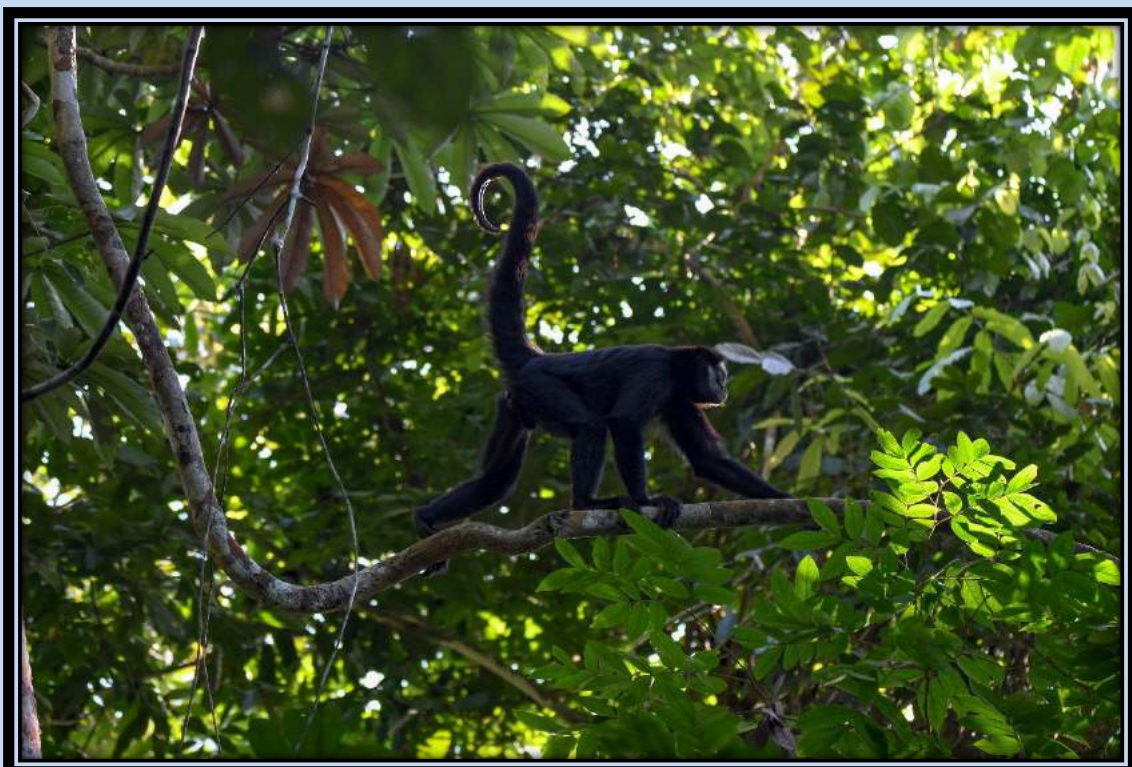
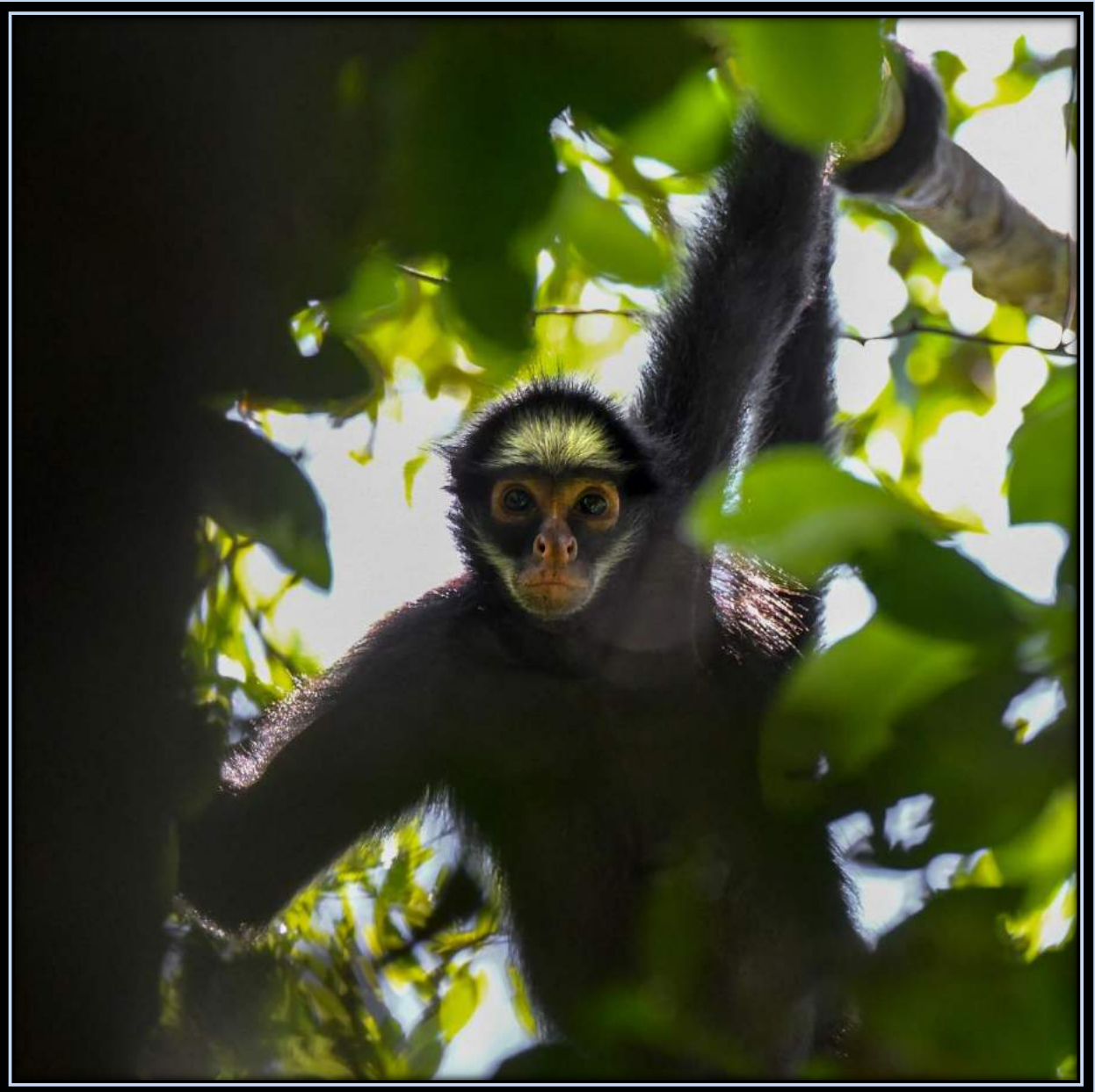
19. Goeldi's spiny rat --- (Lifer) (*proechimys goeldii*) Seen at Cristalino when spotlighting along the river. This is the only proechimys species that occur in the area according to the distribution map. The Brown/orange color with almost a sharp line to the white underneath together with it's preferred habitat - overflooded forests, makes it a perfect match.



20. **Spix's red-handed howler --- (Lifer)** (*Alouatta discolor*) Fairly easy found in Cristalino. Earlier considered as a subspecies of Red-handed howler but now threatened as it's own species since 2006.



21. **White cheeked spider monkey --- (Lifer)** (*Ateles marginatus*) The most common primate in Cristalino and we saw them all three days I was there. Endangered and beautiful primate!



22. **Proboscis bat --- (Lifer)** (*Rhynchonycteris naso*) Easy seen along Cristalino river when they line up day roosting like this.



23. Lesser sac-winged bat --- (Lifer) (Lesser white-lined bat, *saccopteryx leptura*) Day roosting at one of the buildings at Cristalino Lodge.



24. Seba's short tailed bat --- (Lifer) (*Carollia perspicillata*) Found this *Carollia* species under the floating pontoon at Cristalino Lodge. It's either *C. Perspicillata* or *C. brevicauda* with most likely the former.



25. Azara's agouti --- Some skittish individuals seen at Fazenda Anaca. They are common around the Lodge.

26. Brazilian squirrel --- (Lifer) (Guianan squirrel) One brief sighting at Fazenda Anaca.

27. Azara's grass mouse --- (Lifer) (Akodon azarae) At least some of many rodents who crossed the road in Candiota area was this species.

28. Paca --- (Lifer) One of my targets in Cristalino and during one nights spotlighting along the river we found 2 individuals who had more important things to do than stop for photo...

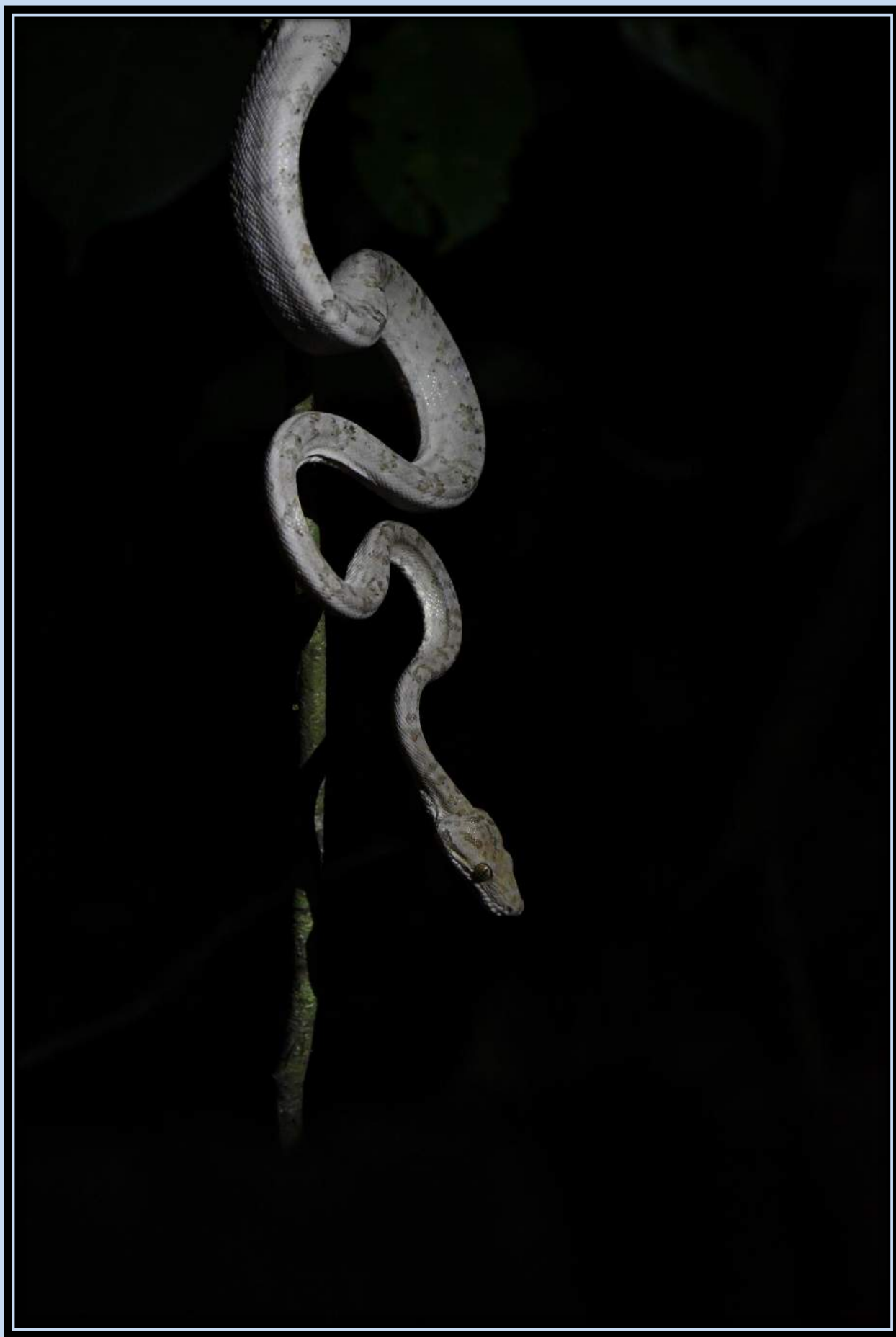
Some other cool creatures



Geoffroy's side-necked turtle (Phrynops geoffroanus) – Cristalino



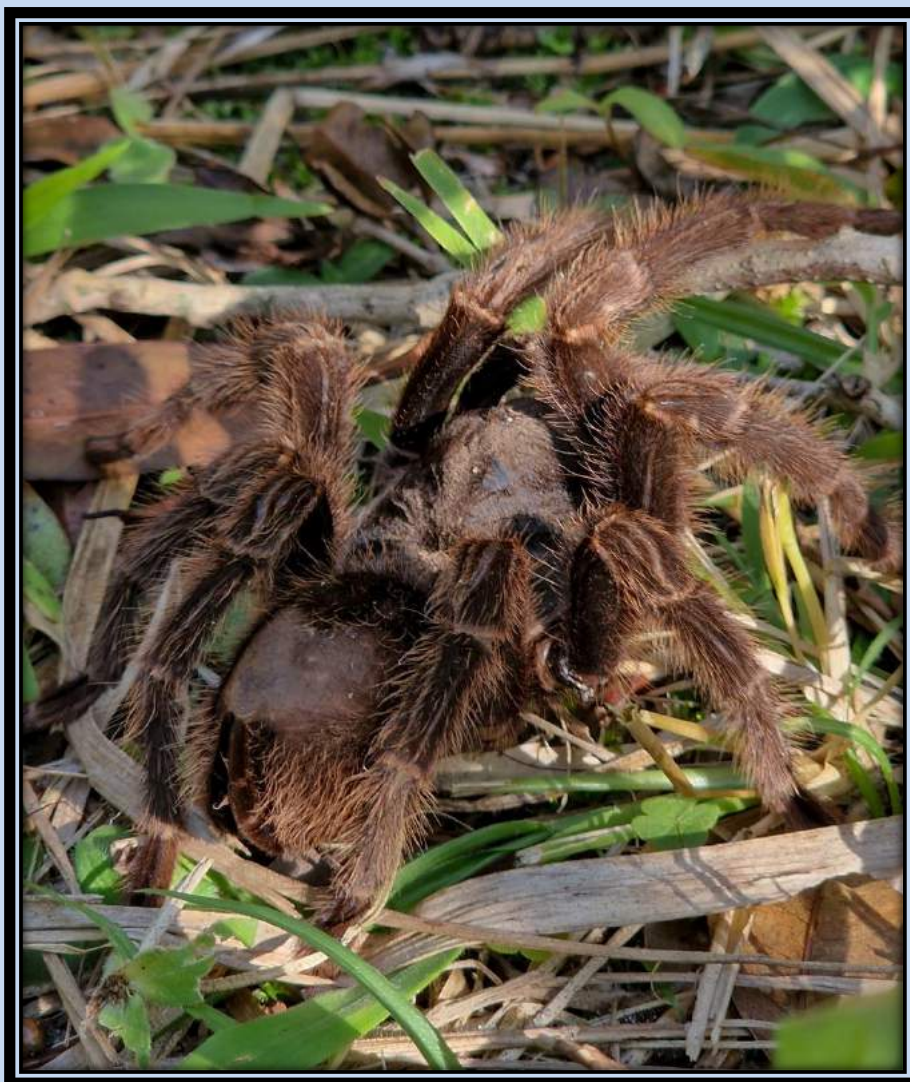
Tityus sp. - Cristalino



Garden tree-boea (Amazon tree-boea, Corallus hortulanus) - Cristalino



Zigzag heron – Cristalino



Tarantula sp. – Itapua state park

Stuff I missed

Missed the Margay in Candiota area despite scanning “one million trees”. I have to continue my search for this cat, now missed two times – Mexico and Brazil.

Two notable misses in Cristalino as well. No sign of White-nosed saki monkey or Azara’s night monkey/Feline night monkey despite searching for them for three days with walking 15-20km per day in the forest. The night monkeys were last seen two weeks before my visit and the White-nosed Saki’s are more easy in the “fruit season” when they come down to the river.



Margay killing grounds was the evidence that they were around...

Near birding experience

So much birds around especially in Fazenda Anaca I found myself transformed to some sort of “birding mode” without even noticing it...

Started to chase around after birds, spend time on them, do detours after them and so on... I was more than halfway to become a birder!

As in trance I did not think about what I was doing until a Tayra rescued me from this horrible experience. From nowhere a Tayra walked past me and suddenly I was back! The birds were once again turned into second degree of wildlife on earth.

I was back... I could breath again... I could live.

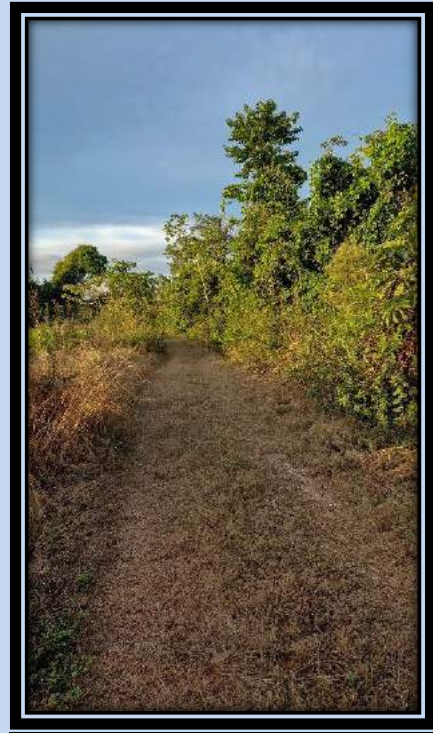


This sign on our car certainly contributed to my experience

Random photos from my time in Brazil



Geoffroy's cat trapped for collaring



Habitat for Emilia's marmoset – Fazenda Anaca



Cristalino Lodge by night

Thanx alot to Regina Ribeiro for putting the trip together!

Thanx also to my guide in the South – Leo for a lot of fun and new exploration and to my driver Roberto.

Big thank you Raphael for all the exercise (with some mammals in between) in Cristalino and to Fernao with his wife for great hospitality in Fazenda Anaca.

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