



Bolivia 2021

(November 9 – November 24)



's-Gravenpolder, May 5th 2022

This trip report is a follow-up on my other trip report on mammalwatching.com which deals with my trip to Ecuador. For the preamble leading up to this combined trip I refer to my trip report on Ecuador. Of course I used this opportunity to add even a little more in this report, but feel free to skip straight to the species list :). For personal comments or questions reach me at info@shutterednature.com.

Enjoy!

Lennart Verheuve

(shutterednature.com)

Preamble

My trip here was supposed to be the easier half of both trips. No more self-driving and finding places on my own, but just hopping in the car with Nick and off to Jaguarland! The plan was to do one week Jaguarland and the other week going with Nicks guide to various birding places and do some birding on my own around Santa Cruz.

However everything suddenly became very uncertain because the first day I was supposed to arrive a paro started. A paro is basically a strike, but a different one than I know from Europe because not only do people not go to work: they will also prevent other people from doing so by creating makeshift barriers. This makes it very hard if not impossible to drive around by car. So after retrieving my boarding passes from a lady at the counter of Aeropuerto Internacional Mariscal Sucre in Ecuador (who managed to make the passenger before me burst into tears and it took a gentle but tenacious approach to pry the boarding passes out of her tight-fisted hands) I went via Panama to the airport of Santa Cruz, Bolivia. There I took a taxi to my hotel. The taxi driver managed to tick off pretty much all the outskirts of Santa Cruz and creatively managed to avoid the blokkades and delivered me safely at my hotel at 2.00 in the morning (hotel Ikandire). There was going to be no mammal watching that day. On foot I walked a bit in the centre of Santa Cruz which I still remembered well from my stay in 2019. Meanwhile I was in contact with Nick who had a plan to get out to Jaguarland very early the next morning.

So I was ready at 3.00 am, but the driver was not able to get past all the drunk people manning their blokkades. A new attempt was made at 6.30 and then he was able to pass. We took advantage of the temporary lifting of the blokkades to give people the opportunity to do groceries and actually managed to leave Santa Cruz. On the way we passed many blokkades, and with a lot of delay we managed to pass all indeed of them but the last one. That one we circumvented using a dirt road passing some farms. Naturally the farmers each had their own blokkades which they were happy to lift for a few Boliviano's. They could pride themselves in having very attentive children because they were posted right behind their parents each with their own line across the road down to a little girl of about 6.

After that we were in the clear and after a long dirt road we arrived at the spot: Jaguarland! We stayed at Jaguarland for a day longer than we had planned because the paro did not stop. When we went back the day after we ran into bad luck. We left very early, but our first blockade forced us to use the dirt roads again which the rain had turned super slippery. I never knew clay could be so slippery and despite careful driving we slid off the road and got stranded. After a while we went and got a farmer with a tractor to pull us out. The road was so slippery the car was pulled about 150 meters next to the

road before being able to drive back up on the track. The pulling messed with the power steering which made manoeuvring the various blokkades all the more a challenge. It was not possible to reach the centre of Santa Cruz because of the blokkades and I agreed to stay in a different hotel. Nick actually had to walk all the way back to his house which took about 4 hours on flipflops! In the hotel I expected to sit out my days till my flight back home. I had actually contacted KLM to get an earlier flight, but this was so expensive that it made more sense to stay. However, in Bolivia expect the unexpected because after another day of paro, the next day it suddenly had been lifted! Nick was able to quickly sent me on my way to Samaipata where my birding guide Saúl was waiting for me. I went with Saúl for a few days and had great views of my target species Red-fronted Macaw as well as over 40 other bird lifers. In the end I had a great time in Boliva despite the paro. I was especially happy getting my three hoped for cat lifers in Boliva: Jaguar, Jaguarundi and Ocelot. I will describe each sighting in the tripreport but for more context go to my website. [This](#) is a piece about the jaguarundi sighting and [this](#) is about an awesome day with many cool mammals (ocelots, jaguar, tapir, neotropical otter)

Preparation

I did not do much to prepare. I was already familiar with the country because of my visit in 2019 (tripreport [here](#)). Furthermore I had Nick to sort out my trip so I did not do much additional exploring on my own. I usually try to sort out my own trip because I am not exactly wealthy and stay poor by an effective combination of buying new gear and going on trips :). However Bolivia is one of those countries where a guide like Nick can make all the difference. I do not recommend this country for self-drive and public transport will only get you so far which can make mammalwatching difficult. Furthermore Nick knows a lot of good places and the people who are in charge of their access. I can recommend Nick to anyone wanting to travel to Boliva in order to see wildlife. He will be able to put together a trip according to your wishes and target species, I don't think you will find a better company for planning a mammaltrip in Bolivia. Also Nicks flexibility is something you will appreciate in a country like Bolivia. It certainly saved my trip! So a full endorsement from me! You can contact him through his website nicksadventuresbolivia.com. Also the cooking while camping in Jaguarland was better than I have experienced in most lodges and food is always an important consideration :).

Apart from contacting Nick the other thing you might want to do to prepare if you are interested in birds is installing the Bolivia package(s) on the Merlin app. This package was not available in 2019, but fortunately I was now able to use it. If you want to bring a book it should probably be the recently published Birds of Boliva which used to be hard to get outside of Bolivia, but I think it is not so hard these days. I did not bring this book because I wanted to travel light. In any case both Nick and my birding guide Saúl had this book.

For other practical tips I recommend my 2019 trip report. I am not aware of a good mammal guiding book specifically for Bolivia.

Schedule

The schedule went through some unexpected changes because of the paro, but in the end I was able to do pretty much all that I had planned.

November 8	Departure from Quito Airport towards Santa Cruz Bolivia via Panama
-------------------	--

November 9	Arrival at 2.00 pm at Santa Cruz Airport, stayed around my hotel because of the paro
November 10	Departure around 6.30 for Jaguarland, went mammalwatching in the afternoon and the evening in Jaguarland
November 11	Jaguarland
November 12	Jaguarland
November 13	Jaguarland
November 14	Jaguarland
November 15	Early morning (night) departure from Jaguarland
November 16	Staying in Santa Cruz
November 17	Departure from Santa Cruz around 9.00 am. Birding from about 15.00 around Samaipata
November 18	Started birding in Amboro National Park and made our way towards a village close to the Red-fronted Macaw reserve
November 19	Early morning start at Red-fronted Macaw reserve and birded our way back towards Samaipata
November 20	Morning departure to Refugio los Volcanes in Amboro National Park, spending the afternoon there
November 21	Refugio los Volcanes
November 22	Morning birding at Refugio los Volcanes, afternoon back to Santa Cruz
November 23	Departure from Santa Cruz via Panama to Amsterdam
November 24	Arrival in Amsterdam (where I discovered my checked baggage was missing and my car had broken down, vacation was over :))

Area's

I usually try to describe some of the main area's I have been to. In this case I spent the majority of my time in Jaguarland with also a few days at Refugio Los Volcanos. Other days were spent in different parts of the Santa Cruz region of Bolivia with not really one area to single out.

Jaguarland/La Moneda

This area has been covered by a few tripreports now both by Nick himself and also by other mammalwatchers. In earlier tripreports it's called La Moneda in the more recent it's called Jaguarland. I will keep to the latter. This whole area is private property, I think it's owned by a large agricultural company. You stay in tents when you are there. A large part of the area consists out of soy fields with another big part consisting out of forest, parts in between have tall grass and there are also swampy areas. There are several unpaved roads running through the area which are of various quality. When it rains it becomes impossible to drive these roads even with a 4x4. The roads can get really slippery which makes it a realistic danger to just slide off (many of them are also on top of dikes and it would be very hard to get the car out then). So it sucks when it rains. I was pretty unlucky with rain on (I think) 3 days with also an afternoon lost to a flattened tire, but I think it speaks for the quality of the area that I saw so much good mammals despite that. If I remember correctly we just beat Nicks previous mammalrecord for this place. I really liked this area and I think it should be right at the top on the wish list of anyone wanting to see South-American cats. I was also amazed by all the big 'forest chickens' that were all foraging in the open like guans and chachalacas. I knew them previously only as pretty shy birds that stayed deep in the forest. However be warned: this area might very well not be there in a few years' time. The forest is getting cleared. Even when I was there I witnessed a big burn and also I saw a big chain lying ready to chop down the trees... It's very sad that this area will probably disappear however that seems to be the reality. In general for people wanting to enjoy

Bolivian nature it might be a good idea to visit sooner than later because the government does not care whether nature disappears and seems in fact to strongly favour it. I think I would recommend visiting Jaguarland a little earlier in the year than I did, perhaps in September or October when there is less chance of rain and the grass will be lower.

Refugio Los Volcanos

The scenery will make any aspiring Instagram star mouth water and the area has indeed been discovered by some of them. When walking across the lawn I kept a careful eye out not to stumble across a fer de lance or an Instagrammer, mostly sitting with their back towards another making the picture no doubt already thinking about an inspiring quote to go with the picture (the instagrammer, not the snake). I found it to be a quiet place with a comfortable lodge with good food. I was mainly there for birds and saw very few mammals. Still it's located right in Amboro Park so I think exploring the trails should get you good jungle stuff. The trails are nice and there are quite a few to explore. The usual guests don't seem very interested in getting very far into the jungle so it's up to you to explore. It was very dry when I was there. Janco van Gelderen covers in his 2019 trip report that he saw a Margay at night here. I was not so lucky. For me the highlight was Military Macaw which was a lifer for me and a macaw I really wanted to see. For birders Bolivian Recurvebill would probably be the main attraction, however I could not find it despite specifically looking for it. Nick warned me about the number of Fer de Lances there, however I did not encounter any snakes. This might again be due to the area being dry. Also I am not good at finding snakes. The lodge is located on a big lawn right and surrounded by forest and mountains. A steep road of about 4km takes you about 400m higher to the entrance gate. I walked this road for 2 nights with the thermal and torch, but did not see any mammals. I also walked the trails and saw some nice birds, but no good mammals.

The mammal list

1. Nine-banded Armadillo (*Dasypus novemcinctus*)

We had one individual running across the road on one night in Jaguarland.



2. Giant Anteater (*Myrmecophaga tridactyla*)

One observation on my first afternoon in Jaguarland



3. Southern Tamandua (*Tamandua tetradactyla*)

One individual visiting the camp on a rainy morning. Brilliant observation.



4. Brown-throated Three-toed Sloth (*Bradypus variegatus*)

A few sightings of sloths hanging in the trees in Jaguarland



5. Bolivia Squirrel Monkey (*Saimiri boliviensis*)

Several sightings in Jaguarland

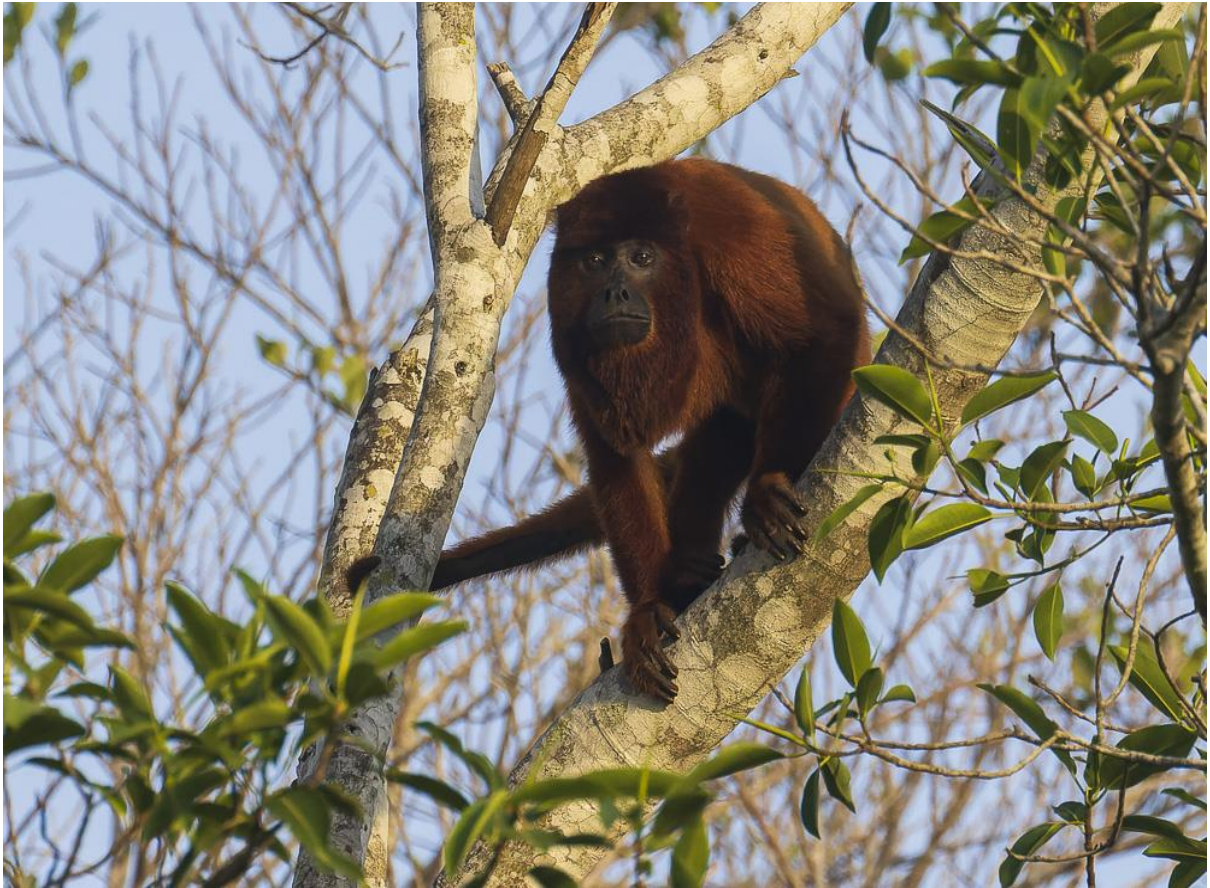
6. Brown Capuchin (*Sapajus apella*)

Several sightings in Jaguarland



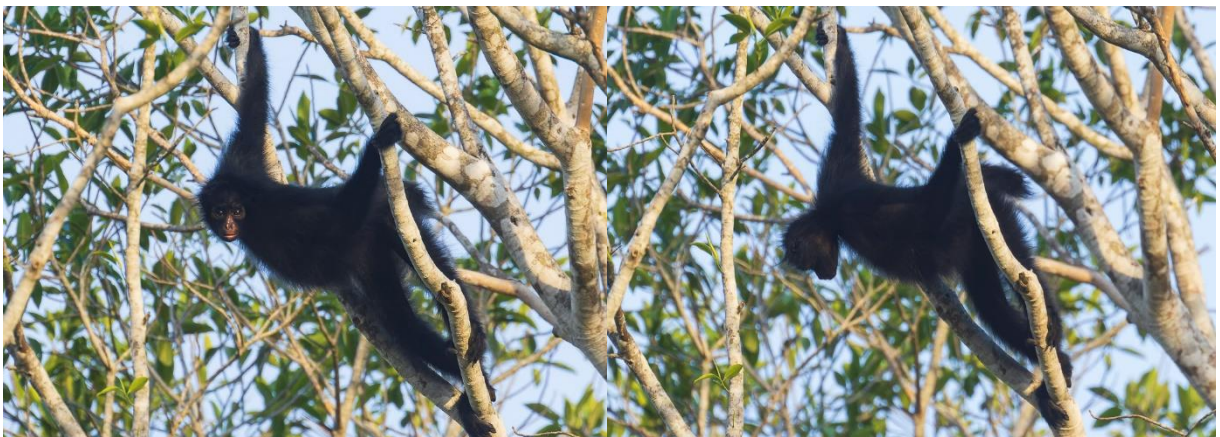
7. Amazon Black Howler (*Aolouatta nigerrima*)

Several sightings in Jaguarland



8. Black Spider Monkey (*Ateles chamek*)

Only one observation of one individual hanging out with a group of howlers. I found this a very interesting sighting as I previously associated spider monkeys with vast undisturbed rainforest. This forest is very isolated so I wonder how and when it got here. Nick had seen one single individual before (I think only one sighting), so it's probably the same one. This sighting is right at the edge of the reported distribution area of this species. I was very happy with this sighting as I have wanted to see spider monkeys for a while and this was the first representative of this family I ever saw.





9. Bolivian Squirrel (*Sciurus ignites*)

Seen in Amboro National Park while looking for birds. This is the location: (-18.112, -63.794). This is not at Refugio Los Volcanos, just to be clear.



10. Capybara (*Hydrochoerus hydrochaeris*)

Very common at Jaguarland.

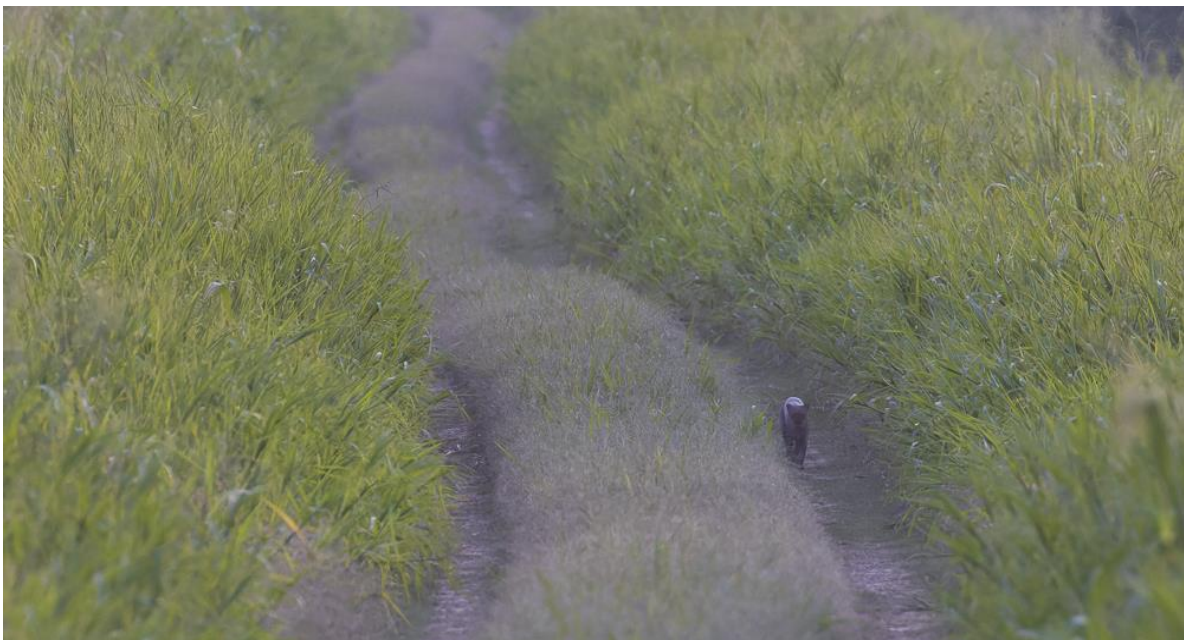
11. Brown Agouti (*Dasyprocta variegata*)

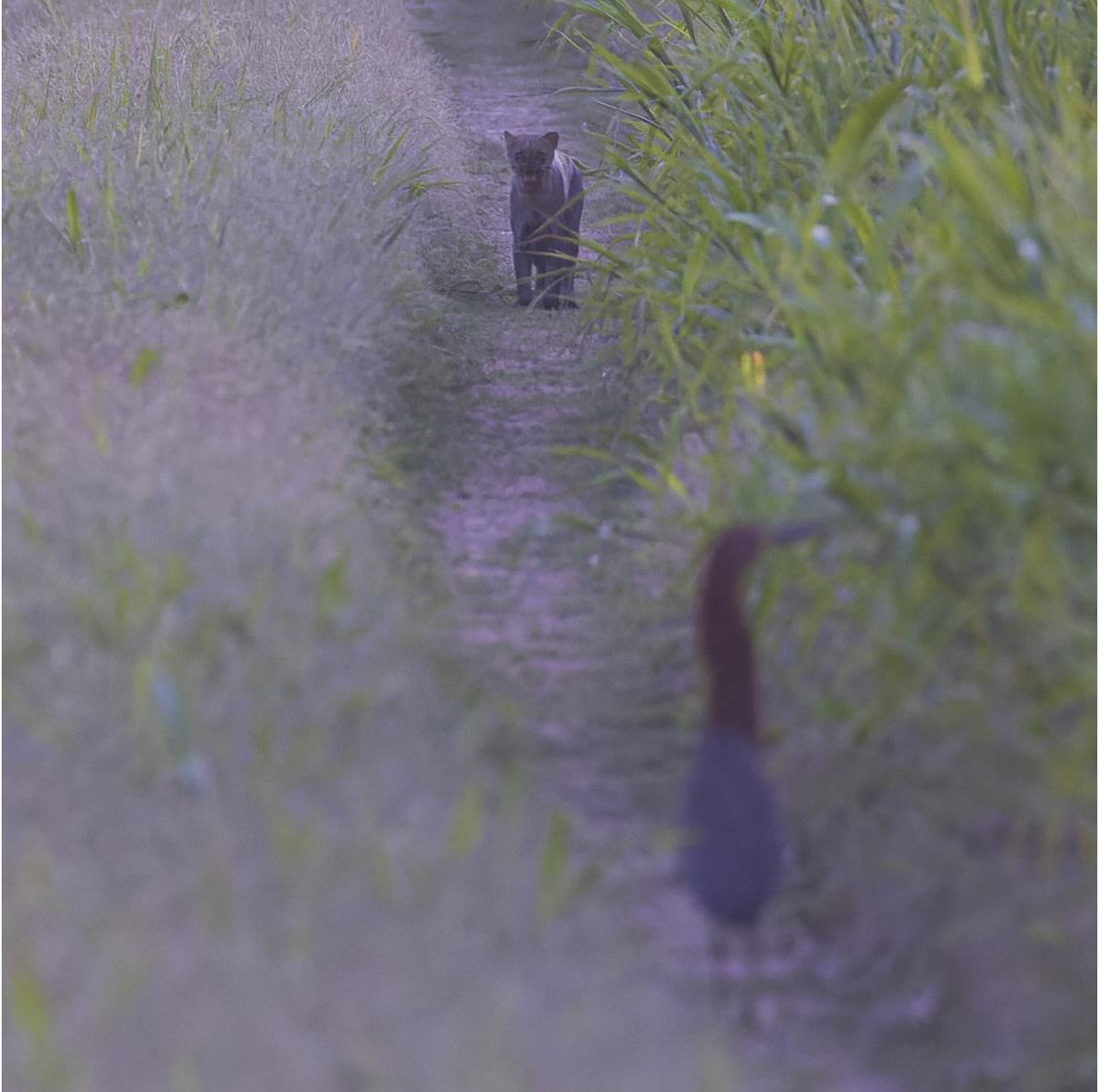
Seen a few here (-18.172, -63.842), in a hummingbird garden. Also several individuals seen at Jaguarland.



12. Jaguarundi (*Hepailurus yagouaroundi*)

Two sighting in Jaguarland. One on my first afternoon there and the other one the following morning. The pictures were taken during the first sighting. During the second sighting the animal was closer than the first one, but I could only look at it through the car windshield as the animal was in a position that made it impossible for me to take pictures through the window. I recommend to be on the top of the car as much as you can! However I did like that I got a very good view through my binoculars the second time. This was my most wanted mammal here and I was very glad I got it. This area seems to offer the best odds on seeing this mammal compared to any other area I know of in the world.







13. Ocelot (*Leopardus pardalis*)

Three sightings in Jaguarland. One on the first night running in front of the car and then two other sightings on a morning. Without the rain I think we would have gotten even more.





14. Jaguar (*Panthera onca*)

Two sightings in Jaguarland. The first sighting was pretty close, but not good as it was basically a tail and a back running through tall grass. The second sighting was a big male in the soy fields at the end of the day (same day as tapir, ocelots and otter). We saw that one well although it was a bit far for good pictures. Nick often gets much better quality of sightings of Jaguar on other trips, but it was not in it for me although we tried our best. Ah well, I can't really complain. I am glad I saw it.



15. Crab-eating Fox (*Cerdocyon thous*)

Several sightings in Jaguarland.



16. South-American Coati (*Nasua nasua*)

Common on the soy fields in Jaguarland. Nick has seen really large groups (30+), but we did not see them in such large numbers.



17. Tayra (Eira Barbara)

In Jaguarland: a South-American mammal that I had missed so far. We had one sighting of two individuals together (one of which was leucistic) and then two other sightings of a single individual.



18. Neotropical Otter (Lontra longicaudis)

One sighting in Jaguarland, a nice lifer for me. Nick had seen this mammal only once before here.



19. Lowland Tapir (*Tapirus terrestris*)

One sighting of two individuals in Jaguarland, not together, but also not very far apart. First sighting was close by. I was very happy I finally got this mammal. I have encountered this species before in Peru (on foot, actually at about 3 meters, but did not count it because I only saw it in the thermal).



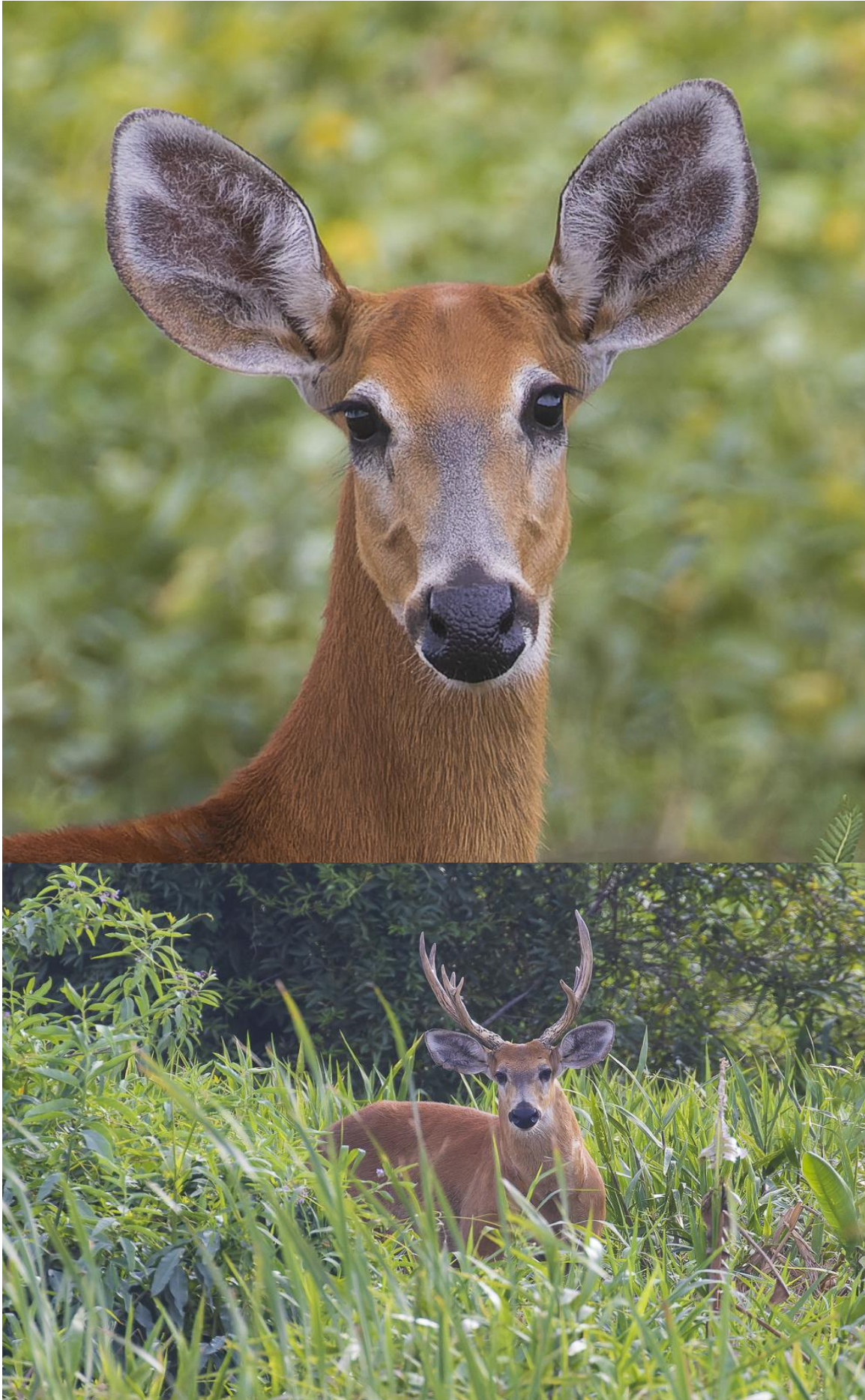
20. Collared Peccary (*Pecari tajacu*)

Several sightings in Jaguarland, mostly on the soy fields.



21. Marsh Deer (*Blastocerus dichotomus*)

Several sightings in Jaguarland.





22. Common Brown Brocket/Grey Brocket (*Mazama gouazoubira*)

Only one sighting in Jaguarland I think. If I remember correctly we also saw Amazonian Brown Brocket, but I did not see it myself.

Mystery mammals

And two yet not conclusively identified mammals:

Rodent 1: seen here (-16.161, -63.751). I posted it previously on the mammalwatching forum where Venkat Sankar and Vladimir Dinets were helpful in thinking about the ID, but it remains a strange mammal. Brazilian Guinea Pig (*Cavia aperea*) and Spix's Yellow-toothed Cavy (*Galea spixii*) should both occur in this area, but the head doesn't seem to fit for these species. However the pictures aren't very good of course. If anyone has any other ideas they are welcome to comment!



Rodent 2: seen here (-18.122, -64.799). This looks like a guinea pig to me. I have put it down as an uncertain Brazilian Guinea Pig (*Cavia aperea*) for now. I put it down as uncertain as I am not very sure what else might occur there. The altitude was about 1550 meters which would be too low for Montane Guinea Pig (*Cavia tschudii*) if the altitude range that is mentioned on Wikipedia is correct. The area was pretty rocky with mountain slopes around. Perhaps it is possible to ID it, sadly I seem to be bad at getting good pictures of small rodents :).



To finish, a picture of my favourite bird of this trip: the beautiful, but sadly critically endangered Red-fronted Macaw!

