



Wild Globe Travel Consultancy

Tailored Wildlife, Wilderness and Adventure Travel Across the Globe.

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BRAZIL

Date - June 2012

Duration - 24 Days

Destinations

Rio de Janeiro - Tijuca Forest National Park - Poco das Antas Biological Reserve - Campo Grande - Southern Pantanal - Emas National Park

Trip Overview

A multipurpose trip, as I wanted to research the Golden Lion Tamarin Conservation Project at the Poco das Antas Biological Reserve and to visit two of my favourite fazendas in the southern Pantanal, one of which was playing host to a team of giant armadillo researchers. I was due to join them for a few days to learn more about their work and hopefully see the elusive creature that they are studying. Finally, I would be going to Emas National Park, as I have not visited since the devastating fires and wanted to see how well it was recovering for future tours. I started the trip with a couple of days in Rio, as Poco das Antas is easy to reach from there and I also wanted to walk the Pico da Tijuca trail in the Tijuca Forest National Park and to photograph the white-tufted-ear marmoset in the botanical gardens. As it was, I actually saw the marmosets at a variety of destinations, including at the summit of Sugarloaf, where they are regularly photographed by the tourists. I left Rio and stayed overnight in the local area before visiting the tamarin project, as I wanted to be at Poco das Antas early to give myself the best possible chance of seeing the colourful primates and also to spend time learning about this important conservation initiative, which has helped bring the golden lion tamarin back from the verge of extinction. There are still only around 1000 remaining in the wild and all of these



live in small, fragmented sections of lowland Atlantic forest between Rio and Macae, about 180km to the northeast. With the help of the project researchers, the tamarins are fairly easy to locate in the forest and I spent over an hour photographing a small group of about 30 animals, as well as the omnipresent white-tufted-ear marmoset, which made another impromptu appearance. The entire experience was a rewarding one, as I learnt a great deal about the vital work undertaken here and thoroughly enjoyed observing such rare and beautiful creatures. After returning to Rio, I took a short flight to Campo Grande, the gateway to the southern Pantanal, an outstanding wildlife area, far less visited than the north. It was my original intention to spend more than a week at each of two destinations here, but, due to a miscommunication regarding the dates that the armadillo researchers would arrive, I had to drive to Emas in between and then return. This wasted a fair amount of time travelling, but the effort was worthwhile, as the trip was a remarkable success, with one spectacular encounter following another. Both fazendas are working cattle ranches and I reached the first by road from Campo Grande, which included stopping to open 50 gates and also for a great deal of wildlife. As always, capybara and caiman were spotted first and these were quickly followed by pampas deer, several yellow armadillos and a herd of at least forty



white-lipped peccaries. Apart from a small group of greater rhea and a burrowing owl on a fence post, I did not even stop for the magnificent birds, as I would never have made it to the fazenda if I had dallied for every amazing animal on a four-hour drive that eventually lasted six hours. When I finally arrived, I was greeted not only by the owners of the ranch, but by a pair of crab-eating foxes, which live around the main house and are seen throughout the day. That is what life is like in the Pantanal, people and animals share the land and the more enlightened ranch owners understand that they are merely custodians of one of the most important and richest ecosystems on earth. On my first drive that afternoon I encountered giant anteater, lowland tapir, South American coati, red and grey brocket deer, tapeti and several groups of

collared peccary. This was not unusual or even particularly impressive, as every day is the same in terms of wildlife viewing in this extraordinary area, although of course, no two days are ever alike. It is not just that you see a lot of animals in the Pantanal, it is how you see them, as almost every backdrop is gorgeous and it is possible, certainly with a little patience and care, to get within a few metres of many of them. Apart from the large cats in some areas, which have been persecuted for generations by ranchers, and still are in some cases, most of the wildlife is fairly relaxed around people and on this trip I experienced a few of my greatest ever sightings at extremely close quarters. The first was with a giant anteater, a species that I have always been able to get fairly close to, due to their poor eyesight and almost complete reliance on an acute sense of smell, which is easy to negate if approaching from downwind. On

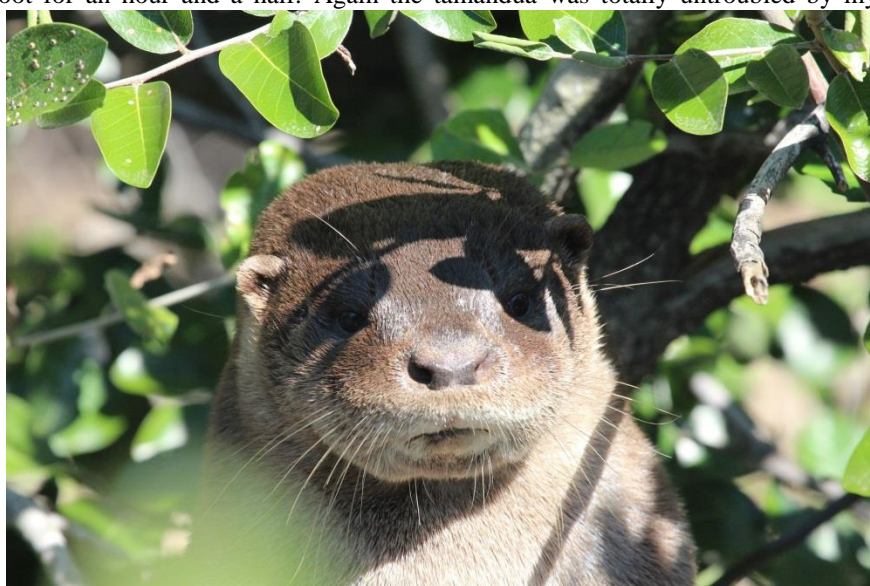
this memorable occasion I positioned myself in the direction that I believed the anteater would take and sat down quietly to watch it feeding. This itself was wonderful, as it was the middle of the afternoon and the rich, radiant colours of the anteater blazed in the



bright sunshine. As anticipated, the totally oblivious creature got closer and closer to me until I eventually had to put my camera aside and just savour the privilege of being so close to such a stunning and gentle animal. By about this stage I expected the anteater to realise its situation and move away, but instead it continued towards me until its snout was investigating my boots and then my legs. I was wearing shorts and could feel its nostrils against my bare skin, before it slowly walked off and trod on and then over my outstretched legs. It continued on its way without a care in the world, leaving a silvery trail across my skin where it had investigated me. I am not entirely sure how much of an honour it is to have a giant anteater wipe its nose on you, but it certainly felt like one to me. Although they never got quite this close again, I repeated much of this episode with a further six anteaters over the

course of the trip, taking photographs within five metres of each, one of which had a very special package on its back. Another magical encounter also involved an anteater, but this time it was the smaller southern tamandua variety, which I came across on an early morning walk and proceeded to follow on foot for an hour and a half. Again the tamandua was totally untroubled by my

presence and began to search for the ant and termite nests that it would rip open with its long front claw in order to feed. I have seen tamanduas feeding in daylight before, but it was still a special treat to spend so long with this creature and I stayed with it until it disappeared into a hole in a dead tree and did not re-emerge. Part of my time was spent on the Rio Negro, either in a motorboat cruising up and down the channels looking for giant river otter and neotropical otter or in a canoe, simply paddling gently along the attractive river and photographing massive caimans, sweet capybaras and the usual host of vibrant birds. When it got too hot I would just swim from the side of the boat, laying out in the sun to dry on the sandy riverbank. Both otter species were seen on several occasions, but the best views were of one particular neotropical otter, which appeared intrigued by our boat and actually followed us down the river. At one stage we had the boat up against the riverbank and the inquisitive otter was staring through the vegetation directly at us. On my final night I went for a drive with the fazenda owners, who are heavily involved in the conservation of the area and are excellent company. It was a wonderful night, as we quickly found two pumas walking along the edge of the forest and were



able to stay with them as they disappeared into the trees, only to re-emerge further along the road. We eventually lost them of course, but I was very happy to see pumas at my first destination in the Pantanal, as they are easier to see in the south and I am always on the lookout for them. That said, this particular fazenda also has a fairly decent reputation for jaguar and, if you stayed for a week or more, you would have a reasonable chance of seeing both animals. My chance had gone, however, as it was time for me to drive further into the Pantanal to the second fazenda of the trip, where I would eventually meet the giant armadillo researchers. That exciting prospect had been delayed for a few days by the confusion regarding dates, but when I returned from Emas they would be here and, meanwhile, I had plenty to occupy my time. If anything, the animals at this location were even more abundant than the first, as I routinely encountered giant anteaters and

tapirs, as well as majestic marsh deer, crab-eating raccoons and some sensational birds, including red and green, blue and yellow and hyacinth macaws. Black-and-gold howler monkeys were common and this is also a great destination for tayra, although I was not fortunate on this occasion. I do not believe that I have ever seen so many peccaries, as both white-lipped and collared were

widespread and at one stage I found myself in the middle of a herd of at least 80 collared peccaries, none of which paid me any attention as I sat down and watched them quietly. Feral pigs were also prevalent, although these are not indigenous animals and are the only species that can be legally hunted in the Pantanal. When I was not driving or riding, and there is no better way to view these idyllic floodplains than from the back of a horse, I went for long solitary walks, pleasing myself when I rested and what I stopped for. There are no real rules or regulations on these ranches and you have the absolute freedom to explore the stunning landscapes completely unhindered. Leaving this time was not so difficult, as I had Emas to visit and knew that I would be back in the Pantanal within a matter of days. I chartered a plane to fly to Campo Grande, as I had already lost time having to travel back and forth and the



marvellously scenic flight is also something of a trip highlight. Emas National Park protects the largest remaining intact section of true cerrado in the country, but much of the surrounding area has been cleared for agricultural use and Emas now stands as a lone island in a shrinking habitat for many species. Devastating fires have undermined the park further in recent years and before I visited on this occasion, I was warned that I could expect to see more animals in the tiny fragmented wild areas beyond the park, than in the park itself. This did prove to be the case on this trip, although I am aware that other recent visitors have enjoyed more success in the actual park. Of the three maned wolves and single tapir and giant anteater that I encountered, all were beyond the boundaries of the



reserve, albeit by only a few metres for two of the three wolves. Nevertheless, the region in general did provide several memorable experiences and Emas certainly remains worth visiting, as it is likely that a lot of the animals reside within the park and regularly move between it and the neighbouring areas. Whilst I was lucky to find a wide variety of animals during my four-day stay, I was less successful in terms of photographing them, as many of the sightings were either at night or were very brief. In some particularly unfortunate instances, they were a combination of the two and I eventually switched to video when I thought that I was unlikely to be able to take a decent picture, reasoning that it was better to at least get some average film than one terrible photograph. Alas, this was too late for my first ever view of a water opossum, which dived into a channel beside the road before I could even

raise my camera and was never seen again, at least not by me and of course I returned several times to search. I should have taken at least a reasonable maned wolf shot, for although two of my views of this beautiful canine were at night and distant, the third was in excellent light in the middle of the day. Sadly, after I had spotted the wolf standing between rows of tall maize, my guide panicked and threw the vehicle into reverse, at which point the wolf, not surprisingly, promptly disappeared into the sea of crops. It was that type of stay in many ways and whilst I did manage to get a distant picture of one of two hoary foxes seen within the actual park, as well as film of the tapir and giant anteater, my only really great encounter was with a molina's hog-nosed skunk, which I found on foot and was able to sit silently with until the skunk got used to me and was soon running around as if I did not exist. I also enjoyed some good fortune with marsh deer, pampas deer and white-lipped peccary, but it was a mixed stay in many respects. I certainly could not complain about either the amount or variety of wildlife seen, and photographing them is not everything as far as I am concerned, but I would have liked longer with some of the animals and to have had slightly better views of a few of the others. Having said that, I could probably say the same on every trip I have ever taken and on this one I had the consolation of returning to the Pantanal for my appointment with the giant armadillo researchers and hopefully a giant armadillo. The last leg of my trip disappeared far too quickly, as the researchers were always extremely busy and we spent long hours in the field, which is exactly where I love to be. They were also incredibly friendly people and more generous with their time and knowledge than I had any right to expect. The atmosphere at this ranch was already one of the nicest I have known, as you sit and eat with the family who have lived here for generations and are

treated as one of them for the duration of your stay. The armadillo team only enhance the experience further and it was a great pleasure to spend time with dedicated people, who care so much about a largely overlooked species and about the conservation of the Pantanal in general. On my very first day I was able to participate in the release of a giant armadillo that had been captured and tagged



in order for the researchers to track and study its movements and behaviour as part of their project, as very little is actually known about these elusive creatures and the work being undertaken in this small area of the Pantanal is breaking entirely new ground. It was wonderful to be part of, if only for a few days and what I really appreciated was the way that members of the team stopped for other wildlife, not just for me, but because they were genuinely excited to see these animals too. On one particular night, when we were out looking for a tagged giant armadillo, we came across a southern tamandua, a nine-banded armadillo and an ocelot. On each occasion the researchers took time out to view the animal and, in the case of the first glimpse of the ocelot, quickly stopped the vehicle and spent time looking for the cat with me. This resulted in a superb sighting with us walking along one side of the road and the ocelot calmly walking along the other. I know that I would have been welcome to spend all my time with the team, but I was conscious that they had important work to do and could not afford to spend time searching for tayras and pumas with me. I therefore spent some of the daylight hours driving with the lovely lady who owns the ranch with her husband and who knows every inch of the land, including where to look for many of the animals. It was with her and her daughter that I had a frustratingly brief glimpse of a puma, which saw us and bolted before we could approach, but it was also with the same two ladies, that I spotted a tapir feeding among the water hyacinths, completely out in the open in the middle of the afternoon. We quickly stopped the jeep and I had to decide exactly how to get a decent photograph of a tapir standing at least 300 metres away in water and in broad daylight. To make matters even more challenging, there was absolutely no cover within at least 250 metres of the tapir in any direction. I knew that I had to stay downwind and also that there was no way that I could approach the animal directly, as I would almost certainly only get so far. I therefore decided to go the long way round and spent about fifteen minutes walking through forest away from the

tapir before cutting in and starting to wade through the water. I had managed to close the gap to about 100 metres when the tapir first looked up and we had to begin playing the 'look up and freeze' game, which basically involves walking very slowly whenever an animal has its head down feeding and then freezing the moment it lifts its head to check for predators. This works better with some animals than others, but in this case the results were exceptional and I was soon within twenty metres of the totally oblivious creature. I now had to begin edging round the tapir to put the sun behind me for photographs and, after taking as many shots as I wanted, I eventually found myself standing no more than three metres away from the largest land mammal in South America and almost certainly the most relaxed. I was now on the wrong side of the wind and there was no doubt that the tapir would be able to pick up my scent, but it just continued to feed happily and I could only guess that it knew I was there and just did not care. Whatever the explanation, it was another unforgettable experience and when I returned to the vehicle, my guide and her daughter were almost as excited as I was. Apparently the entire process had taken two hours, but it felt like about twenty minutes.



Throughout my stay I had been seeing more giant anteaters, one of which had been carrying a baby on its back which I had obviously wanted to photograph. Unfortunately, there was a local film crew with us that day and they scared the mother away by approaching too quickly. With this in mind and given that we were now seeing so many, at least four a day on average, I asked my guide to stop pulling over for anteaters unless they were carrying young, as I wanted to take that particular photograph if possible. It was a hard call to make, but I had already been within a few metres of six of these endearing creatures and had seen countless more over the course of my trip. I knew that if I stopped for them all, I would lose most of each day, as it takes a while to get that close to a nervous animal. Of course the team back at the fazenda thought I was crazy and kept laughing as they heard how many giant anteaters I had driven



past on each particular drive. I knew however, that this was the optimum time of year to see a baby being carried and that there was probably no better location in all of Brazil to witness such an incredible natural spectacle. As far as I was concerned, it was just a question of time and fortunately, in terms of my credibility at least, the gamble paid off on my final day and I came across one of nature's great sights, a mother giant anteater carrying her tiny baby along her back. After taking extra care as I approached, I got to within about five metres and decided that was sufficient on this occasion, as this was a mother with young and I did not want to disturb her at all. When I returned to the ranch with the biggest possible grin on my face, everyone told me how lucky I had been and I replied

that maybe that is the case, but this is my final night and, if I am as lucky as you say, I will finally see a giant armadillo. I was only partly joking of course, for although my time with the researchers had been amazing, the only giant armadillo I had seen was the one we released and I was desperate to find an entirely wild version. The fact that the researchers try to track these animals does not mean that sightings are guaranteed, as these are still wild animals and sometimes they cannot be located for weeks at a time or disappear altogether. Indeed, I had spent several nights out with the team and there was no sign of the armadillo they were hoping to find in one particular area. I now had one night remaining and the head of the researchers informed me that we were going to try a different armadillo at a different location. It was the best of decisions as far as I was concerned, for within about an hour of waiting, this surreal, prehistoric looking creature finally emerged from the forest and ambled across the trail directly in front of us. I only had time for one very ordinary photograph, but it was a thrilling moment and an exceptionally fitting way to end a spectacularly successful trip. I could not have been more grateful to the armadillo team, not only for the time that they devoted so generously, but for switching armadillos on that final night, which I knew they had done specifically for me. Saying goodbye the next day was harder this time, but I knew that it would only be a question of time before I returned.





No.	Species	Scientific Name	Notes
1	Puma	<i>Puma concolor</i>	Two at night at the first Pantanal lodge and one briefly during the day at the second.
2	Ocelot	<i>Leopardus pardalis</i>	One at night at the second Pantanal lodge.
3	Maned Wolf	<i>Chrysocyon brachyurus</i>	Three brief sightings around Emas, but not in the park, one during the day and two at night.
4	Crab-eating Fox	<i>Cerdocyon thous</i>	Regularly observed in the Pantanal.
5	Hoary Fox	<i>Pseudalopex vetulus</i>	Two briefly within Emas National Park.
6	Giant River Otter	<i>Pteronura brasiliensis</i>	Small group on the Rio Negro.
7	Neotropical Otter	<i>Lontra longicaudis</i>	Three individuals on the Rio Negro.
8	Molina's Hog-nosed Skunk	<i>Conepatus chinga</i>	One for a prolonged period at Emas.
9	South American Coati	<i>Nasua nasua</i>	Abundant at both Pantanal locations.
10	Crab-eating Raccoon	<i>Procyon cancrivorus</i>	Several at the second Pantanal destination.
11	Giant Anteater	<i>Myrmecophaga tridactyla</i>	At least thirty in the Pantanal, including carrying young, and one at Emas.
12	Southern Tamandua	<i>Tamandua tetradactyla</i>	One at each ranch in the Pantanal.
13	Lowland Tapir	<i>Tapirus terrestris</i>	Eight over both Pantanal locations and one at Emas.
14	Grey Brocket Deer	<i>Mazama gouazoubira</i>	Common in the Pantanal, but at distance it is difficult to distinguish between the grey and the red species.
15	Red Brocket Deer	<i>Mazama americana</i>	At least two in the Pantanal and possibly more.
16	Marsh Deer	<i>Blastocerus dichotomus</i>	Large numbers in the Pantanal and two at Emas.
17	Pampas Deer	<i>Ozotoceros bezoarticus</i>	Common within both areas visited in the Pantanal.
18	Collared Peccary	<i>Pecari tajacu</i>	Several large groups in the Pantanal, one exceeding 80 animals.
19	White-lipped Peccary	<i>Tayassu pecari</i>	Widespread in the Pantanal and two small herds at Emas.
20	Feral Pig	<i>Sus scrofa scrofa</i> ssp	Regularly seen in the Pantanal.
21	Black-and-Gold Howler Monkey	<i>Alouatta caraya</i>	Seen at both Pantanal locations in small numbers.

22	White-tufted-ear Marmoset	<i>Callithrix jacchus</i>	At various locations in Rio and at Poco das Antas.
23	Golden Lion Tamarin	<i>Leontopithecus rosalia</i>	Group of about 30 at Poco das Antas.
24	Water Opossum	<i>Chironectes minimus</i>	One, just beyond the border of Emas National Park.
25	Giant Armadillo	<i>Priodontes maximus</i>	One on the final night in the Pantanal.
26	Yellow Armadillo	<i>Euphractus sexcinctus</i>	At least twelve at both Pantanal locations.
27	Nine-banded Armadillo	<i>Dasypus novemcinctus</i>	Two at the second Pantanal lodge.
28	Tapeti	<i>Sylvilagus brasiliensis</i>	One, at the first Pantanal destination only.
29	Capybara	<i>Hydrochoerus hydrochaeris</i>	Abundant in the Pantanal.
30	Azara's Agouti	<i>Dasyprocta azarae</i>	Three or four around the second Pantanal lodge.











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