



# Wild Globe Travel Consultancy

*Tailored Wildlife, Wilderness and Adventure Travel Across the Globe.*

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## CHILE, BOLIVIA AND BRAZIL

**Date - April 2011**

**Duration - 45 Days**

### **Destinations**

Santiago - Punta Arenas - Strait of Magellan - Torres Del Paine National Park - El Calafate - Los Glaciares National Park - Perito Moreno Glacier - Lake Argentino - Puerto Montt - Chiloe Island - Calama - San Pedro De Atacama - Los Flamencos National Reserve - Arica - Putre - Lauca National Park - Sajama National Park - Amboro National Park - Santa Cruz - San Jose De Chiquitos - Kaa-Iya Del Gran Chaco National Park - Otuquis National Park - Corumba - Estrada Parque - Miranda - Noel Kempff National Park - Concepcion - La Paz - Salar de Uyuni - Copacabana - Lake Titicaca - Puno



## Trip Overview

This was to be a long trip, primarily designed to develop tours in both Chile and Bolivia and assess a number of guides, including one main Brazilian female guide who I had arranged to travel with for the majority of the tour. Despite some major problems, particularly in terms of the weather in Bolivia and the local guide that I used in that country, the trip was a highly successful one and I established a number of reliable contacts. Sadly, the tour did not end well, as I had a camera stolen when I made a detour for a meeting in Peru at the very end of my stay and I lost the majority of my photographs, including all of the wildlife shots taken with my telephoto lens. Consequently, a number of the photographs that appear here were taken by my main guide and, although I am extremely grateful to



her for kindly providing them, they were taken with a small compact camera and do not do full justice to many of the magnificent animals encountered, particularly the pumas at Torres Del Paine and Kaa-Iya del Gran Chaco. The various problems experienced during the trip highlight exactly why I personally assess every guide that I use and do not send guests to areas that I have not visited and researched thoroughly. The local guide that I used in Bolivia was one of the most knowledgeable men that I have ever travelled with, but he had absolutely no idea how to behave around wildlife that did not have feathers or how to interact with clients who did not entirely share his passion for birds. On one occasion, after accidentally treading on and killing a snake, he shrugged his shoulders and remarked 'it's just a snake'. Not exactly the right attitude for guests interested in wildlife and there were so

many casual examples of this behaviour, as well as a few far more serious incidents, that I eventually had to make it clear that this would be my first and last trip in his company. Despite the odd complication, our time in Chile was far smoother and, after one night at Punta Arenas following the flight from Santiago, we began the trip at Torres Del Paine National Park, one of my favourite destinations in South America and the best place to see puma in all the Americas. Given that we arrived on the 29th of April, we were actually visiting Paine out of season and I had to arrange for a small hotel to remain open for an extra week to accommodate us. The ravishing autumnal colours aside, the great advantage of arriving so late was that Paine was almost deserted and we had the entire area more or less to ourselves for four days. The two of us were joined by an exceptional local guide who has lived in the park for over twenty years and is famous for being able to find pumas almost at will. Tragically, not for us, but for the poor creature involved, his expertise was severely tested during our stay, as a young female puma was killed by the owner of an estancia just beyond the border of the park the day before we arrived and this was one of two animals that our guide had been spending a great deal of time with and was expecting us to see. Given that he watches these amazing cats grow up, our guide was understandably very angry and he explained that the second puma he had planned to show us was the brother of the female that had been shot. As the siblings had shared part of the same territory and still spent time together, we knew that the brother was likely to be extremely cautious for at least the next few days and that we would have to be fortunate to see him. Although the witless farmer had therefore made our task a great deal more difficult, we barely even considered the implications at the time and were just disheartened that one of the animals we had come to see had been so needlessly killed. It was certainly not a good way to begin the tour and whilst the mood picked up as we savoured the enchanting scenery and enjoyed plenty of success with other wildlife, it was difficult to shake off the fact that these beautiful animals were still being persecuted within a couple of kilometres of the national park that partly owes its eminence to them. Fortunately, Torres Del Paine is a magical place, particularly when explored in almost complete isolation, and over the first three days

our spirits were raised by a number of superb sightings amid some of the most enthralling landscapes imaginable. Guanaco, a member of the llama family and the puma's favourite prey, were seen in large numbers and chilla, or South American grey fox, were also common. Culpeo, the more elusive of the two fox species in the area, proved to be predictably difficult and we only saw one at Paine and then only briefly. Humboldt's hog-nosed skunk were far more obliging and we encountered several during the course of our stay, including one very relaxed individual which we approached quietly to within a metre of. European hares were even more plentiful and we were very happy to discover a pichi, a small and totally endearing armadillo that resembles a remote controlled car as it scurries across the ground at speed without apparently moving its legs. One of the most rewarding sightings was of Andean



condors, as we had watched several of these impressive birds flying overhead, but had not seen one at close quarters until we hiked up a steep hill and, completely by chance, came across a large group of juvenile condors perched at various outcrops on the edge of a sheer cliff. We quickly realised that we had stumbled upon a form of condor flying school, as the young birds took turns to launch



themselves into the valley below for short flights with the adults birds that had been repeatedly flying past, encouraging their young to take to the air. It was a real privilege to observe such intimate behaviour and we spent a couple of hours watching the inexperienced condors pluck up the courage to abandon the security of the cliff. Whilst we were having a good time and seeing a great deal, by day



four I could tell that our guide was becoming slightly concerned by the absence of pumas, as I do not believe that, in recent years at least, he has ever failed to show a guest a puma if they have committed a reasonable amount of time to the process. I was still fairly relaxed at this stage, as the death of the young female had already placed our search in perspective and I had also allowed a possible fifth day in the programme in case we were unlucky. As it was, there was no need to panic, as day four was to produce one of the most memorable wildlife events that I have experienced.

The day actually started slowly and, despite another very early start, we had still not seen a puma when we took a short break around 9am. As our guide was enjoying a warming coffee, the early mornings are very cold at Paine at that time of year, he suddenly noticed a herd of about twenty guanaco running uphill. Very little forces a herbivore to run at full speed uphill and we instantly knew that a puma was in the area. The only problem was, that despite us all scanning the area, we could not actually see a cat and our guide therefore made the decision that we would follow the alarmed guanaco, which were fast disappearing into the distance. Sadly for me that meant running up a series of steep hills attempting to follow a guide that had suddenly taken on the appearance of a fleet footed gazelle and was now disappearing almost as quickly as the guanaco. Thankfully he stopped now and then to scan the area and as I caught up with him at the top of a particularly sheer climb, I noticed an animal peering down from a rocky outcrop in the distance. I quickly fired off a shot with my camera and as I enlarged it on the small digital screen I showed it to my guide smiling, it was a puma! We waited for my main guide to reach us and then made directly for the rocks, which were still some way in the distance. As we reached them the local guide saw the puma walking away to our left and I took another two pictures as it stopped to watch us before slowly walking away. We were now very high and if the puma decided to run down the other side of the hill we knew that we would certainly lose it within a matter of seconds and that would be the end of the sighting. The local guide decided to cut left onto higher ground in an attempt to cut the puma off and, as my other guide went with him, I gambled and went right, dropping down below the rocks that the puma had been walking along in case it decided to double back. It was a massive risk on my part and generally I would always stay with such a knowledgeable guide, however, the puma had three possible exit routes and I was aware that by taking the lower option I was blocking a second of the three. It looked as if I had blown it completely when I came face to face with several huge boulders obstructing my path, but, as I stood and



rapidly contemplated what to do next, the puma silently emerged towards the edge of the largest boulder and looked down at me from no more than four metres. Without even thinking, I immediately took two steps back in order to obtain a better view and raised my camera to take three photographs of the magnificent animal staring directly at me. My heart was racing at this point, and not only from the physical exertion of running a few kilometres uphill, however pumas very rarely attack people and whilst I was on my own and fairly exhausted, the cat behaved to type and simply turned around and walked calmly back across the boulder and out of sight. The entire episode had lasted maybe ten seconds, but it was one of the most exhilarating experiences of my life



and there are very few events that can equal such a close encounter with a large predator whilst on foot and entirely alone. With the adrenalin still pumping, I rushed to tell the other guides where I had last seen the cat and as we approached the same spot, this time from above, the puma broke cover and ran past us, again within a few metres. You could tell that it viewed us more as an



inconvenience than a threat, as it was not sprinting and stopped to watch us for a few seconds before walking away into the distance. We immediately decided that we would not follow and disturb it further, which I was all the more pleased about when the guide informed us that this was the brother of the female that had been shot a few days before. I was so happy that we had found this particular animal and although the anger and frustration did not diminish greatly regarding the death of his sister, seeing this puma alive and well did provide a great deal of relief for us all. While I had the option of a fifth day at Paine, I was so thrilled with our one puma encounter, and so happy with the photographs that I had taken, that I decided I would use the fifth day to make a short detour into neighbouring Argentina to photograph one of the natural wonders of the world, the Perito Moreno glacier. It is very unusual for me to turn down the opportunity to look for wildlife, particularly as pumas are one of my favourite animals, but I knew that I had only one day spare to photograph Perito Moreno and I did not want to somehow spoil that last encounter by finishing with something less satisfying. Ironically, after forsaking the chance to look for other pumas in order to photograph such an amazing natural phenomenon, I ended up returning home with my own pictures of neither. Our views of Perito Moreno, both from the boat that takes you alongside the towering wall of ice and the extensive boardwalks that overlook the immense glacier, were spectacular at least and after enjoying a great evening meal in the little Argentinian town of El Calafate, we took the long drive back to Punta Arenas to overnight.



We had a few hours to kill before the flight to Puerto Montt, during which my guide and I decided to search along the shores of the Strait of Magellan, the legendary channel that links the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, first navigated by the renowned Portuguese explorer Ferdinand Magellan in 1520. We were soon rewarded with prolonged views of a small pod of peale's dolphins, as well as our first South American sea lions of the trip. Unfortunately our flight to Puerto Montt was delayed and by the time that I had collected the hire car and driven to Pargua to catch the ferry to Chiloe Island, it was fairly late and we had to make the ferry crossing in the dark. Given the number of locations that we were due to visit over two main countries, we only had four nights on Chiloe and the intention was to try the services of a few local operators and to photograph both southern river and marine otter, darwin's fox, southern pudu and coypu, with the outside possibility of finding a kodkod, the smallest cat in the Americas, only found in central Chile and just across the border in Argentina. Our first day on Chiloe was highly productive, as we discovered a pair of pudu, the smallest deer species in the world, within ten minutes of searching the extensive and wild grounds of our accommodation in the northwest of the island. Our log cabin actually overlooked the bay where the marine otters were likely to be found and again it only took a few minutes to find the first of about ten otters observed on a boat trip along a small section of coast. We spent an enjoyable couple of hours watching these endangered otters catching crabs and in the afternoon went looking for the freshwater version, which are also endangered, on the Chepu River. We only had one very brief sighting of the southern river otter, but we had good views of several coypus and the next day we were more successful with the otters, spending prolonged periods with a further three individuals on both the Chepu and Puntra rivers. Having found four of our five main target species within the first two days, we now changed accommodation and switched our attention to darwin's fox, a critically endangered canid that is only found on Chiloe and in one tiny area of mainland Chile. I was worried that two full days may not be sufficient to find such a rare animal and sadly my concerns





proved to be well founded, as our visit to the private Tantauco reserve in the south of the island was not successful, despite the fact that a fox had been visiting the ranger station for the previous few days. On our final day we tried Tepuhueico, another private reserve on the west coast, just south of Chiloe National Park. I was aware that the lodge at Tepuhueico was not in operation before I travelled, but I was hoping that it would still be accessible by road, as the area around the lodge has always been one of the best in terms of finding these elusive foxes and was the site of my only previous encounter with this animal. Unfortunately, I had not been able to contact the manager of the lodge within the park for a few weeks and when we arrived, the entrance was chained and we had to leave



the car and proceed on foot. This was far from ideal and I knew could well wreck our chance of finding the fox, as the walk to the lodge is about 13km and we had to allow time to walk the same distance back later that evening. Our time actively searching was therefore going to be extremely limited and, although we reached the lodge and traipsed well over 30km during the course of the day, our efforts were in vain and we had to finally abandon the search late at night. Whilst this was immensely frustrating, particularly as I had seen the fox within about twenty minutes on my previous visit, I was aware that I had not allowed sufficient time at several locations throughout the trip and that this type of incident was certainly possible as a result. The balance between the number of areas visited and ensuring you see every animal is always tricky on any research trip and, on this occasion at least, I had decided that it was more important to visit as many destinations as possible, and consequently meet as many local guides as I could, than it was to find every animal that I was hoping to see. It was still a disappointment though and, needless to say, I would arrange a longer and more focused stay on Chiloe Island if I was taking a guest expressly to see the fox. They are certainly a precious animal worth spending time looking for, as there are now believed to be less than 250 remaining in the wild and the more people who express an interest in seeing them, and, more importantly, paying to see them, the more chance they have of long-term survival. From Chiloe my guide and I took the ferry back to Pargua and drove to Puerto Montt to catch the connecting flight to Calama, the gateway to San Pedro De Atacama and the Atacama Desert. Again due to the busy schedule, we had only two full days in the Atacama and I had not originally included this destination on the itinerary. However, the haunting landscapes of the Atacama are so extraordinarily beautiful that I



added these extra days to enable me to plan a longer trip at a later date. I particularly wanted to return to the Salar de Tara, an almost unknown destination that very few travellers ever make the effort to reach, but those that do, certainly never forget. Despite the arid conditions, the Atacama is said to be the driest desert on earth, the area supports a fascinating array of wildlife and during our stay we saw numerous herds of vicuna, another member of the llama family, a lone culpeo and several tawny tuco-tucos, engaging burrowing rodents that provided the usual combination of amusement and frustration, as we attempted, cameras poised, to guess which of the myriad burrows each animal would suddenly appear at. Domesticated llamas and alpacas were surprisingly common in even the most



isolated areas and Andean and Chilean flamingos were pretty additions to the austere Chaxa Lagoon, one of seven sections of the Los Flamencos National Reserve. Both puma and Andean cat were also possibilities and although we spent time searching in a few promising areas, in reality you would have to be incredibly fortunate to encounter either animal in such an immense and remote region. Our local guide, who was not young, had only seen one Andean cat in his entire life, but I knew that I had a better chance later in the trip and that this section of the tour was about more than just the animals we would find. Long periods of each day were spent simply marvelling at one enthralling spectacle after another and all three of us took time to wander off on our own and immerse ourselves in the vastness of the landscape and the wonderful solitude it could be experienced in. In addition to the Salar de Tara, we visited the stunning Miscanti and Miniques lagoons, the incredible, weathered rock formations of Valle de la Luna, or Valley of the Moon, as well as the desolate but equally impressive Salar de Atacama, the second largest saltpan in the world after the Salar de Uyuni in neighbouring Bolivia. I was actually within a relatively short 4x4 drive of the Salar de Uyuni at one stage and although I would visit that famous destination later in the trip, I would be going the long way round and travelling almost another 4,000kms. For now we had to turn our attention further north towards Lauca National Park in the



Chilean Altiplano, a journey that was not assisted by our flight from Calama to Arica being cancelled without notice, leaving me to drive the 600kms to meet our next local guide and make the short transfer to the charming little town of Putre, our base for the next four nights. The main purpose for visiting the area was to assess the possibility of running longer tours to search for the rarely observed Andean cat, as I was aware that this highly secretive animal had been seen at a couple of locations around Putre and the national park. I did not actually expect to see the cat on this initial foray, although there was of course a chance, but I more wanted to look for definite signs of the animal and to speak to locals regarding the logistics involved in running dedicated expeditions with the





sole intention of finding it. Whilst searching for the cat, I was also hoping to encounter taruca, a large deer endemic to the Andes highlands, culpeo, molina's hog-nosed skunk and Andean hairy armadillo, in addition to the more prevalent vicuna and southern mountain viscacha, massive rodents usually found sunning themselves happily on rocks. As anticipated, the last two species were routinely observed and we were also lucky with several small herds of taruca, two pairs of culpeo foxes and also a few guanaco, which I had not really expected to see this far north. In terms of the Andean cat, we tried all of the sites the cats had been known to visit, including a few along the road between Putre and Lauca National Park and none looked overly promising until we reached the remarkable salt flats and lakes of the Salar de Surire Natural Monument, just south of the national park. Whereas finding the cat at the other locations would clearly have been a matter of supreme good fortune, at Surire we found unmistakable evidence of the animal, including fresh tracks that could only have been made between us leaving the area the previous evening and arriving the next morning. Although we did attempt some spotlighting around the salar, our main problem was that our base in Putre was just too far away to enable us to stay very late or arrive early enough the next morning. We really needed to base ourselves at Surire and I therefore determined, after discussing the practical details with the local guide, the naturalist owner of our hotel and a park ranger, that the best chance of finding the cat would be to camp at Salar de Surire for at least a week. I intend to test the theory as soon as I get the opportunity, but I believe that a week to ten days in this one specific area would give you a reasonable chance of finding this highly elusive feline. The area is also a good one for Andean hairy armadillo and we discovered the carcass of one that, judging by the shattered armour, had almost certainly been killed by a puma. A carcass was as close as we got to the armadillo, as we spent much of our time searching for the Andean cat and also exploring Lauca, which has some

stunning scenery and would be almost perfect were it not for the incessant convoy of trucks that travel along the main highway between Chile and Bolivia. If you can overlook these, which I must admit is difficult at times, then Lauca is another very special destination and some of the vistas, particularly in the Chungara Lake and Cotacotani Lagoons area, are simply staggering. With plans



to return at some stage to look for Andean cat, my guide and I left Putre and travelled through Lauca for the final time to cross the border into Bolivia. We met our new guide, who would be with us for the majority of our time in Bolivia, at the border town of Tambo Quemado and began the long drive east to Villa Tunari, a small town within a few kilometres of Isiboro and Carrasco national parks, both of which protect large areas of Yungas forest. The entire drive was one of the most scenic I have ever taken, particularly the initial stretch through Sajama National Park, although unfortunately, as we had around 1,000kms to cover that day, opportunities to stop were limited. We did take one early break whilst still at the higher elevations of the Altiplano, when I finally spotted a molina's hog-nosed skunk at the side of the road. Sadly, the animal had been killed, probably by a car, and again, as per the Andean hairy armadillo, the closest we came to seeing this species was a carcass. We were using Villa Tunari just to overnight, as the Bolivian guide had not packed everything in time for our arrival and told us that he needed a few hours in Santa Cruz before we continued



the programme as arranged. This was obviously not ideal, but Santa Cruz is not far from Villa Tunari and I therefore took the opportunity to visit a lodge that I had wanted to try in Amboro National Park, which is contiguous with Carrasco National Park and forms a massive and incredibly diverse reserve. We ended up spending most of the day in Amboro and although we did not find any large mammals, the day was a highly interesting one and we encountered a great deal of general wildlife on several rewarding forest trails. Along the rivers and streams we found fresh puma and tapir tracks, as well as two different poison frogs and a lesser bulldog bat swooping low over the water. A pretty green snake was seen on one of the trails and the dazzling array of colourful butterflies was only matched by the equally vibrant birds, including mealy and blue-headed parrots and a red-necked woodpecker. We arrived at Santa Cruz in time for dinner and while our guide was belatedly preparing the equipment we would need the next morning, my main guide and I decided to visit the botanical garden to look for sloth and other animals. Whilst part of the impressive gardens were cultivated, the majority of the park incorporated areas of forest that had simply been fenced and the gardens had therefore remained wonderfully wild and full of life. In just under three hours we saw several red brocket deer, two groups of bearded capuchin, the first primates of the tour, both Bolivian and southern Amazon red squirrels, azara's agouti and two unidentified snakes. The birdlife was even more varied and included hummingbirds, trogons and flycatchers, as well as an exceedingly tame greater rhea, which continually followed me along one of the paths as if I was its parent. From Santa Cruz the three



of us drove directly east to San Jose De Chiquitos for lunch, before proceeding south to Kaa-Iya Del Gran Chaco National Park, the largest national park in Bolivia and one of the biggest in South America. I was always very excited about this leg of the tour, as the Gran Chaco, a vast arid area of mainly deciduous forest that stretches across large parts of Bolivia, Argentina, Paraguay and a small section of Brazil, is home to some of the most charismatic mammals on the continent, including jaguar, puma, ocelot, jaguarundi, tapir, maned wolf and giant armadillo. Because I also wanted to spend a reasonable amount of time in the Bolivian Pantanal and then at Noel Kempff National Park, we only had four days in the Gran Chaco on this occasion, which I was aware was hardly sufficient. Had I known how things were going to develop over the next couple of weeks, I would certainly have stayed longer, as the Gran Chaco is a superb environment for mammal watching and I intend to organise much longer trips to explore further sections in both Bolivia and Paraguay. As it was, our short stay was still productive, with a couple of major highlights and at least one near miss. Our only real problem was accessibility, as there are very few roads in Kaa-Iya and we had to conduct most of our game drives and walks



along the service road used to maintain the Bolivia-Brazil gas pipeline, certain parts of which have restricted access. The nearby airstrip and a couple of minor trails aside, we only had the option of driving left or right from our campsite at one of the ranger stations each day and this did become a little monotonous at times. I made some notes for future trips regarding accessing different areas and it should be possible to organise a tour of between ten and fifteen days without relying solely on the pipeline road. Given the parks reputation for big cat sightings, I was hopeful that we may be fortunate and encounter either a jaguar or a puma, but our luck appeared to be out when we met a ranger on the road and he informed us that we had just missed a jaguar crossing a wooden bridge. We staked the bridge out for a while and I went down to have a look underneath, but of course the jaguar had gone and all I discovered were its fresh tracks. Later the same day we saw an animal moving along the road that had to be, judging from the size, either a

jaguar or a puma. Frustratingly, it was too far away to tell for sure and it quickly disappeared into the dense forest before we could get any closer and make a positive identification. We returned to camp late that afternoon cursing our luck and the fact that we may have just missed both a jaguar and a puma on the same day. Over dinner we made plans to visit the same sites the next morning and then set out for a night drive. We had already seen two southern three-banded armadillos, they are very common here, and a few tapetis or Brazilian rabbits, when we noticed a crab-eating fox in the headlights. The fox was very interested in something at the edge of the road and as we approached we could see that it was about to kill another three-banded armadillo. I generally do not intervene when it comes to wildlife and try to act as a neutral observer in most instances, as I am aware that the balance between life and death is a fine one in these harsh environments and that any interference on my part could tip the scales between predator and prey. However, this



was clearly not a starving fox and I could not bring myself to watch the endearing little armadillo being killed. Instead I jumped out of the vehicle and picked the terrified creature up as the fox fled. After a few quick pictures I placed the armadillo in the relative safety of the thick undergrowth and we continued for another couple of kilometres until we came across two common pauraques, a type of nightjar, sleeping in the dust at the side of the road. In order not to disturb these nocturnal birds, I swept the spotlight round and illuminated part of the road, as well as a pampas cat that was sitting coiled, about to pounce at the birds. In one movement I handed the spotlight to my guide and raised my camera to take a photograph of this extremely elusive cat, but it was far too quick and disappeared into the night before I could even focus. Although the sighting was brief, it was very clear and the disappointments of earlier in the day were instantly forgotten. That is the way wildlife viewing can be sometimes, particularly when searching for a specific rare mammal, a series of near misses and hours of frustration are all immediately overlooked as soon as you catch even a glimpse of your target, or something unexpected and just as exciting. In addition to the armadillo, we had inadvertently saved the life of a second animal that night and we returned to camp in exceptionally good spirits. The mood got even better the next morning and we smiled to each other when we reached the jaguar bridge and the area that the second probable cat had been seen in. We were not expecting to see either again, but the smiles soon disappeared when we saw an identical shape walking along the road far in the distance. This time I took a chance and told our Bolivian guide to put his foot down and try to cut the gap between us and the cat as quickly as possible. Thank the gods it worked and within about 30 seconds we were watching a rangy young puma lope along the road. Although it stopped and looked back at us on a few occasions, it was not a nervous animal and we followed it slowly for several minutes as I took pictures from the roof of our vehicle. Sadly the photographs were lost to an opportunist thief in Peru, but my guide also took some shots and, in any case, I will never forget finding a second puma in a second country on the same trip. Although the puma was the last cat seen in Bolivia, our good



fortune did not stop there, as a pampas fox ran across the road directly in front of us on a night drive and we also encountered two small groups of Chacoan titi monkeys, which I had never seen before. Grey brocket deer and crab-eating fox were regular visitors around camp, the deer probably for protection and I suspect that the foxes were fed the odd morsel by the park rangers, and on the road we encountered two large groups of white-lipped peccaries, as well as several azara's agoutis. In one of the few swampy areas we found tapir tracks and whilst we were waiting for the tapir to appear, it never did, two red-footed tortoises came and went,



independently of each other, which shows just how long we waited for the tapir as a million mosquitos feasted upon us. One of the nicest moments occurred just as we were leaving, when we saw a large boa constrictor and were able to approach to within a metre or so as it crossed the road and moved slowly along the forest floor. I knew as I left that I was doing so too soon, but I was also excited about moving on to Otuquis National Park, as the Pantanal is one of my favourite destinations in the world and I had not previously visited the Bolivian section of it. We spent a night at San Jose De Chiquitos before moving on and that evening drove to some local cliffs to watch a magnificent sunset. We stopped for several tarantulas on the way back and enjoyed a lovely meal in the pretty main plaza, which are a feature of most Bolivian towns. On the morning of our departure we made a brief visit to a local forest and saw a lone bearded capuchin and we also stopped at the Sanctuary Mariano de la Torre, a couple of kilometres north of the village of El Chochis, to admire the intricately carved wooden doors and columns. The village is bordered by some imposing escarpments and the sanctuary itself sits directly in front of a particularly inspiring granite monolith named either La Torre de David or the Devil's Thumb, depending on your preference. Due to the stops, we did not arrive at Otuquis until almost dusk and we immediately knew that we had a major problem, as the water levels in the Pantanal were far higher than had been expected at this time of year and even parts of the road were still flooded. The park ranger did not want us to access the reserve due to the conditions, but we argued that we would just see how far we could get and turn back if necessary. Although our Bolivian guide was obviously not to blame for the high water levels, he had been in contact with the local rangers a few days before to confirm our entry permits and it would have been very easy for him to ask what the current conditions were like, particularly as we had previously discussed the possibility that certain low lying areas within the park might not be accessible. Sadly, when authorising our permits, the ranger had neglected to mention that the park he was allowing us to enter was barely visible or that every possible campsite was under several metres of water. We made the best of it that night, driving as far into the park as we could safely in the dark and camping in the middle of the road. We even made the effort to take a night drive and our persistence was rewarded with nice sightings of several crab-eating foxes and nine-banded armadillos, as well as a pit viper and a large number of frogs and tarantulas. The next morning we attempted to drive further into the park to assess the conditions and hopefully move to some higher ground. However, it soon became clear that the situation was hopeless, as even the road was flooded a few kilometres beyond our campsite and we had no choice but to turn back. Although disappointed, we decided that we would head to Corumba and try the Estrada Parque area in the Brazilian Pantanal. We saw a large male marsh deer as we drove out, as well as jabiru storks, southern screamers and the usual host of waterbirds that you would expect to find in the Pantanal. After a quick stop for lunch at Puerto Suarez on the border, we drove to Corumba in Brazil and towards Estrada Parque, where it immediately became apparent the water levels were also extremely high. As we searched for somewhere to stay, a giant anteater crossed the flooded road directly ahead of our vehicle and then swam away into





the Pantanal. It was an incredible sight, although it also indicated just how high the water was even here and that we would not be able to take the vehicle much further. We therefore decided to try a local ranch on foot and as we waded through the water above our knees, we came across the first of many capybaras. There was no one at the ranch when we arrived, but I was pleased that we took the walk, as the main ranch houses are always on much higher ground and we encountered several marsh deer and another giant anteater, which we were able to walk with at close quarters for around fifteen minutes. As we headed back in the vehicle to try another location, a group of about 20 collared peccaries crossed the road and we eventually spent the night at a small lodge on the banks of the



Miranda River. We learnt the next morning that most of the area was underwater and that the only way we could look for wildlife was to drive along the main Estrada Parque road. I was not keen to do this, given that the road was always busy, and suggested that we drive to one of the fazendas at Miranda, but our Bolivian guide asked that we spend another day in the area and try one more lodge that he knew. I agreed on the understanding that we move on the next day if the conditions were no better at the next lodge and we spent the rest of the day searching for wildlife along the main road and on a boat trip organised at the new accommodation. As initially feared, I quickly realised that the road was too busy during the day to have any realistic chance of finding any of the more cautious animals, including all of the cats, and our only success was a small group of howler monkeys,

which were also seen on the boat safari. The evening drive was slightly better, as the traffic diminished considerably, but the fact that we saw red brocket deer, nine-banded armadillo and crab-eating fox, could not persuade me to stay any longer and I informed both guides that we would be leaving the next morning for a fazenda near Miranda, which I had asked my main guide to check was available. This was actually a tough call, as we had now more or less wasted three nights and I knew that if we moved to another lodge in the Pantanal, we would have very little time remaining to visit the last major destination, Noel Kempff National Park. However, I decided that as we had come this far, and were very close to a great wildlife area, it would be senseless to move on and that we should concentrate our efforts on the Pantanal. This appeared to be fine until the Bolivian guide suddenly informed us that he was not insured to be driving in Brazil and would not be continuing any further the next day, despite his earlier promise to do so.

After several previous incidents, I was happy enough to leave him at this point and returned to Corumba to hire a car that I drove to the fazenda with my remaining guide. It was probably the best decision I made of the trip, as we spent four wonderful days exploring a highly productive part of the Pantanal and enjoying some superb sightings. This fazenda is famous for ocelot encounters and over the course of our stay we saw thirteen of these beautiful cats, eleven on night drives and a mother and cub in excellent light early one morning. Ocelots are not often seen during the day and to spend time with a mother and young was a real highlight of the trip. I was particularly happy with this sighting when I returned home, as I filmed the entire event instead of taking photographs and did not therefore lose the pictures when my camera was stolen. We also very nearly saw



a jaguar, but the fates were not with us on this occasion and we missed what is always a special moment by probably less than two minutes. We would never have known, but we noticed jaguar prints crossing the tyre tracks of the vehicle that we were following one morning and knew that the clever cat had waited for the first vehicle to pass before crossing just before we arrived. It did not overly matter, as I have seen a lot of jaguars and there was always something special to spend time with, including another seven giant





per almost every destination within the Pantanal, caiman were abundant and I finally found one that had lost patience with a heron fishing directly beside it. I have always marvelled at the way herons and many other waterbirds get so close to these enigmatic reptiles, but on this occasion the careless heron must have ventured just slightly too close and was now hanging out of the caimans mouth. This unfortunate creature aside, the Pantanal is a sanctuary to an astonishing variety of birds and we saw large numbers of different storks, herons, egrets, kingfishers, toucans, macaws, parakeets and hawks, as well as roseate spoonbills, greater rhea, barn owls and striped owls. The macaws are a particular favourite of mine, as they are intelligent, highly social birds and can be great fun to watch interact for prolonged periods. At one stage, as a flock of the blue-and-yellow variety squabbled boisterously at one of the many bird feeders, a yellow armadillo scurried around the ground beneath the attractive birds. It was that type of place and, as always in the Pantanal, I did not want to leave. Sadly we had to return to Corumba where the Bolivian guide was waiting with our main vehicle to take us to Noel Kempff. As I had so little



anteaters, one of which walked right past me in the long grass, and a huge yellow anaconda, that was certainly over four metres and is probably the largest I have seen. Capybara, bearded capuchin, marsh deer, red and grey brocket deer, crab-eating fox and collared peccary were all commonly observed and other new animals for the trip included yellow armadillo, South American coati and Brazilian guinea pig, which I have loved watching in their natural habitat, since I had the domesticated version as a pet when I was a child. The ocelots aside, the highlight of our stay was probably a pair of playful, semi-tame coaties, which we christened Bonnie and Clyde, due to the fact that they would climb up onto your lap or shoulders and then rob you of any tasty morsels they could get their nimble paws on. They always made an appearance around mealtimes and we spent many entertaining periods playing with two of the cutest and naughtiest animals I have had the pleasure of being affectionately mauled by. As

and no way of leaving. The original plan had been to drive to Los Fierros within the park and to camp for a few days, as the simple

time remaining with both guides, I almost decided to remain in the Pantanal and to miss Kempff, but I ultimately decided it made sense to check the journey for future reference, as well as the roads within the park. The drive was too long to make in a single day, so we stayed overnight in the small town of San Rafael before continuing the next morning to San Ignacio de Velasco to collect supplies. Unfortunately that was not all we collected, as our guide offered to give a member of the community that we were driving to just outside the national park a lift. This would not have been a problem, had he not also decided to leave our spare fuel behind for a member of the same community to bring with them the next day. Needless to say they finally turned up with our fuel almost three days later and we arrived at one of the most pristine and diverse habitats on the planet with insufficient fuel to explore



lodge that used to provide the only accommodation in the area has not been maintained and is now derelict. As we soon discovered when we decided to look for animals on foot, the roads within this southern section of the park have also not been maintained and I would need to return and assess the situation before I could even consider taking guests to this area of the reserve. Considering that

Noel Kempff is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and should also be one of the best wildlife destinations imaginable, it remains inconceivable to me that the Bolivian authorities cannot manage to service what should be one of the flagship national parks in South America. When you consider who the park is named after, the full name is Noel Kempff Mercado, and exactly how that unfortunate conservationist died, it was worrying to hear small planes flying overhead late at night, as very few pilots will ever fly in the dark, certainly not those engaged in any legal activities. As it was, with little time as a result of the delays in the Pantanal and even less fuel, we were able to explore only a tiny area in and around the park and even then we still enjoyed some success. Botos or pink river dolphins had been seen the day before we arrived and although we were not lucky enough to find them when we took canoes out to search, we did come across a family of giant river otters and we saw four more of these inquisitive creatures from the riverbank on our final day. A few black caiman were also observed from the water and on one of the short night drives that our meagre fuel allowed, we discovered a rainbow boa, which looked spectacular in the spotlight. Other sightings included, crab-eating fox, capybara, red brocket deer, southern Amazon red squirrel and Central American agouti, the final new mammal of the trip. Despite our relative success in such difficult conditions, it is fair to say that we departed Noel Kempff feeling immensely frustrated, as my main guide and I were acutely aware that we had been on the very edge of a remarkable ecosystem and had not been able to do it justice. After a night in nearby Concepcion, we drove back to Santa Cruz, where I said a fond farewell to my Brazilian guide and a less fond farewell to her Bolivian counterpart. From Santa Cruz I flew to La Paz and took a night bus to the Salar de Uyuni, as I had not visited



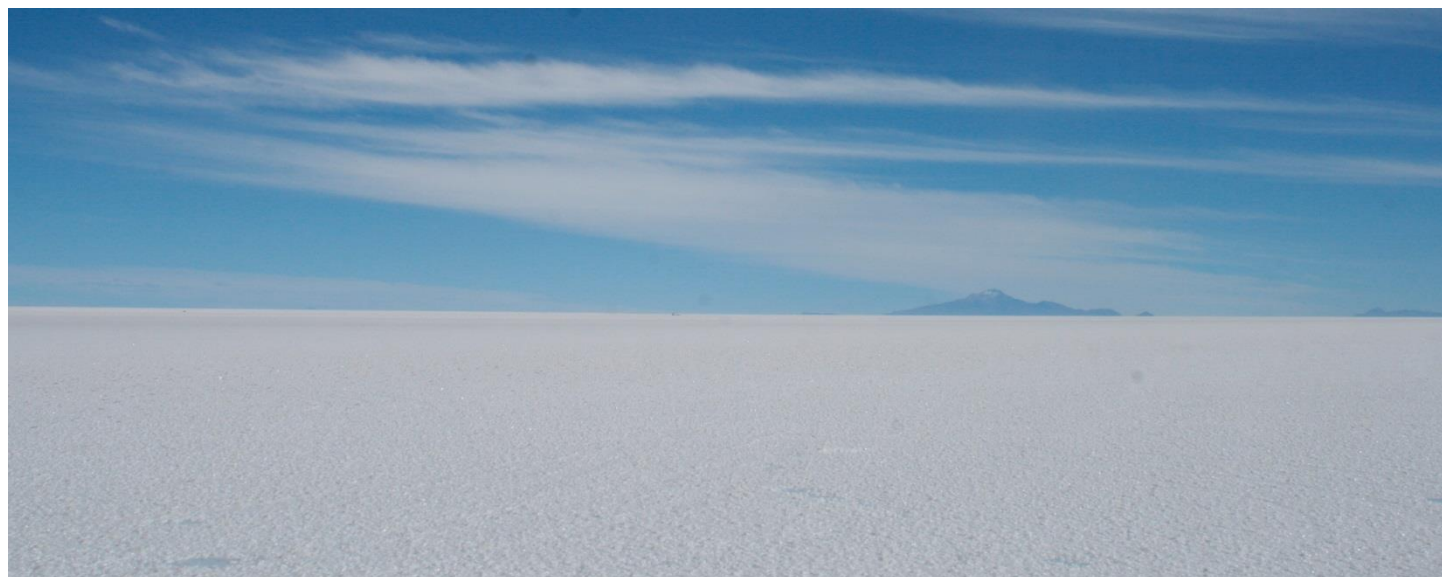
the dramatic salt flats for a number of years and, again rather ironically considering what happened in Peru, wanted to photograph the astonishing landscapes for this website. From the Salar I moved on to Lake Titicaca and then to Puno in Peru to spend a couple of



days with a local agent that I was hoping to arrange future tours with. It was at Puno that I had my camera stolen and, although it was devastating to lose almost all of my wildlife pictures, including the stunning shots of the puma looking down at me at Torres Del Paine, it was the first time in 25 years travelling that I have had anything stolen, so I guess I was probably well overdue. The trip itself was amazing despite the various difficulties encountered and I always feel that it is far better that I experience any problems than guests, which is the main reason that I undertake these research trips and check everything personally. Whilst I will certainly need to find a far more reliable guide in Bolivia, and will also need to revisit certain destinations in that

country, both Chile and Bolivia are perfect for adventurous travellers with a keen interest in wildlife and I will never forget several highlights of what proved to be such a memorable tour.





No.	Species	Scientific Name	Notes
1	Puma	<i>Puma concolor</i>	One at Torres Del Paine and one at Kaa-Iya.
2	Ocelot	<i>Leopardus pardalis</i>	Thirteen in one lodge in Brazil.
3	Pampas Cat	<i>Leopardus colocolo</i>	Brief sighting of one hunting at Kaa-Iya.
4	Crab-eating Fox	<i>Cerdocyon thous</i>	Several at Kaa-Iya and in the Pantanal.
5	South American Grey Fox	<i>Pseudalopex griseus</i>	At least ten at Torres del Paine.
6	Culpeo	<i>Pseudalopex culpaeus</i>	One at Torres del Paine, one in the Atacama and two pairs in the Altiplano.
7	Pampas Fox	<i>Lycalopex gymnocerus</i>	One seen briefly whilst driving at Kaa-Iya.
8	Giant River Otter	<i>Pteronura brasiliensis</i>	Two sightings at Noel Kempff.
9	Marine Otter	<i>Lontra felina</i>	Around twelve on a boat trip at Puniuil on Chiloe.
10	Southern River Otter	<i>Lontra provocax</i>	Four seen on the Chepu and Puntra rivers on Chiloe.
11	Humboldt's Hog-nosed Skunk	<i>Conepatus humboldtii</i>	Six individuals at Torres Del Paine.
12	South American Coati	<i>Nasua nasua</i>	One main sighting of ten, plus two tame in the Pantanal.
13	Giant Anteater	<i>Myrmecophaga tridactyla</i>	Nine sightings at different locations in the Pantanal.
14	Grey Brocket Deer	<i>Mazama gouazoubira</i>	Around eight at Kaa-Iya and in the Pantanal.
15	Red Brocket Deer	<i>Mazama americana</i>	Seen at Santa Cruz, the Pantanal and Noel Kempff.
16	Marsh Deer	<i>Blastocerus dichotomus</i>	Abundant in the Pantanal.
17	Southern Pudu	<i>Pudu puda</i>	Two pairs on Chiloe Island, including one at night.
18	Taruca	<i>Hippocamelus antisensis</i>	Several small herds around Putre.
19	Guanaco	<i>Lama guanicoe</i>	Widespread at Torres Del Paine.
20	Vicuna	<i>Vicugna vicugna</i>	Common in the Atacama and at Lauca.
21	Collared Peccary	<i>Pecari tajacu</i>	Observed at various locations in the Pantanal.
22	White-lipped Peccary	<i>Tayassu pecari</i>	Large groups at Kaa-Iya and around ten in the Pantanal.
23	Black-and-Gold Howler Monkey	<i>Alouatta caraya</i>	Several in the Pantanal.
24	Bearded Capuchin	<i>Cebus libidinosus</i>	Common in the Botanical Garden at Santa Cruz.
25	Chacoan Titi Monkey	<i>Callicebus pallescens</i>	Small groups at Kaa-Iya.
26	Yellow Armadillo	<i>Euphractus sexcinctus</i>	Three at the final fazenda in the Pantanal.
27	Nine-banded Armadillo	<i>Dasypus novemcinctus</i>	Six across the Bolivian and Brazilian Pantanal.
28	Southern Three-banded Armadillo	<i>Tolypeutes matacus</i>	Seven different individuals at Kaa-Iya.
29	Pichi	<i>Zaedyus pichiy</i>	One for an extended period at Torres Del Paine.



30	European Hare	<i>Lepus europaeus</i>	Common at Torres Del Paine and the Perito Moreno area in Argentina.
31	Tapeti or Brazilian Rabbit	<i>Sylvilagus brasiliensis</i>	Several at Kaa-Iya and in the Pantanal.
32	Southern Mountain Viscacha	<i>Lagidium viscacia</i>	Widespread at Lauca and the Salar de Uyuni.
33	Coypu	<i>Myocastor coypus</i>	At least ten on the Chepu and Puntra rivers on Chiloe.
34	Bolivian Squirrel	<i>Sciurus ignitus</i>	Several in the Botanical Garden at Santa Cruz.
35	Southern Amazon Red Squirrel	<i>Sciurus spadiceus</i>	One at Santa Cruz and one at Noel Kempff.
36	Capybara	<i>Hydrochoerus hydrochaeris</i>	Widespread in the Pantanal.
37	Brazilian Guinea Pig	<i>Cavia aperea</i>	Six to eight at the final fazenda in the Pantanal.
38	Tawny Tuco-tuco	<i>Ctenomys fulvus</i>	Three near Los Flamencos National Reserve.
39	Azara's Agouti	<i>Dasyprocta azarae</i>	Seen at Santa Cruz, Kaa-Iya and the Pantanal.
40	Central American Agouti	<i>Dasyprocta punctata</i>	Two in the Noel Kempff area.
41	White-bellied Grass Mouse	<i>Akodon albiventer</i>	Over ten at Lauca National Park.
42	Bolivian Big-eared Mouse	<i>Auliscomys boliviensis</i>	Over ten at Lauca National Park.
43	Olive Grass Mouse	<i>Abrothrix olivaceus</i>	Several seen in the Atacama.
44	South American Sea Lion	<i>Otaria flavescens</i>	Multiple sightings around Chiloe Island.
45	Peale's Dolphin	<i>Lagenorhynchus australis</i>	A small pod of around eight in the Strait of Magellan.











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