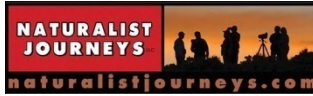


Brazil's Pantanal: Jaguars and More! | Sept. 5-15 2025 | Trip Report | by Wes Larson



Guided by: Wes Larson and Adolfo Downs

Participants: Karen Geiser, Jill Wroten, Pat Trzcinski, Vince Sherwin, Dick and Tracy Voelker, Ed and Diane Gresham, Jenny and Andrew Lisignoli

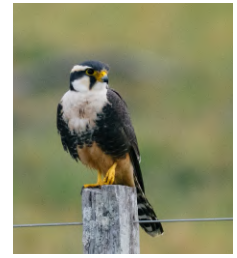


September 5: Meetings and Greetings in Campo Grande

Today we met at the hotel in Campo Grande and enjoyed a first meal and caipirinha together! It was immediately apparent that we were going to have a very fun and funny group as we all traded stories and laughs over dinner at the hotel.

September 6: Driving to Aguapé and the Southern Pantanal

We left Campo Grande after a great breakfast at the hotel and started on our way toward Aguapé lodge and the start of our adventure in the southern Pantanal. On the drive we were able to spot a number of wonderful birds including Greater Rhea, Red-legged Seriema and even Red-and-green Macaws. Our luckiest moment was when we had an amazing sighting of a beautiful Giant Anteater not far from the road and it was very tolerant of our group watching it and taking photos while it searched for termites. One of our biggest targets on the trip and we



saw it within a few hours of starting! It's already easy to see this is going to be a very lucky group when it comes to sightings.

Aguapé lodge is always such a wonderful place to pull up to, as the feeders are full of both Hyacinth and Blue-and-yellow Macaws and there is so much bird life it is almost unbelievable. A true birders paradise. After eating a delicious lunch next to the 6 or 7 habituated Six-banded Armadillos running around the dining area, we settled into our rooms and then headed out on an afternoon safari where we saw three more Giant Anteaters! A truly amazing start and the bird-life was also incredible on our drive with amazing looks at Toco Toucans, Blue-crowned Parakeets, Guira Cuckoos, a Lineated Woodpecker, and dozens of other amazing birds. A stunning sunset and beautiful rising full moon were the cherry on top of a wonderful first day. We took a quick night safari after dinner and managed to see Common Potoo, Caiman, Common Parakeet and some other great birds.

September 7: A Full Day at Aguapé With Multiple Anteater Sightings

A full day at Aguapé is hard to beat. We woke up early and after some amazing breakfast and beautiful birds at the feeders, we headed out into the ranch to look for different birds and mammals and reptiles and we sure found a lot of different species. Campo Flickers, Toco Toucans, parakeets, Scarlet-headed Blackbirds and our first Jabirus were some of the highlights, but the best moment of the morning had to be an extended and up-close look at the Southern Tamandua, the smaller and more secretive anteater species in the area, and one of the more charismatic mammals in this part of the world. It was truly such a highlight for all of our group and we talked about how lucky we had been so far with anteaters as we headed back to the lodge.

After lunch we enjoyed a presentation from the Tamandua Institute, which is the conservation non-profit working to protect and rehabilitate giant anteaters in the region, and then we headed out for an afternoon safari. We started on the edge of the Aquidua river where we picked up some new birds including Red Scythe-bills, Great Rufous Woodcreepers, Squirrel Cuckoo, Blue-crowned Trogon and many others. Then we headed deeper into the ranch where we had some nice looks at peccaries and crab-eating foxes before enjoying another beautiful sunset together. On the way back to the pousada we once again got incredibly lucky with another brief sighting of the Southern Tamandua as well as a Giant Anteater with a baby on her back! Truly an incredible evening that was made that much better by the incredible food we ate for dinner. Following dinner, we did another quick night safari and saw another Giant Anteater (!) as well as an elusive Black-banded Owl.



September 8: Manakins on the Aquiduaana River and Driving Back to Campo Grande

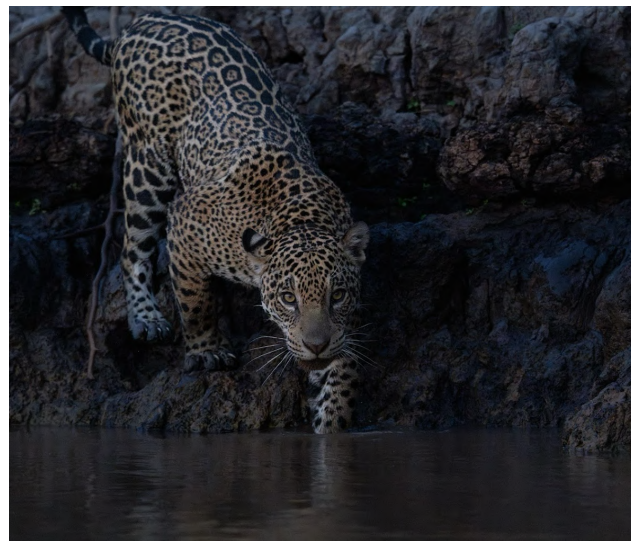
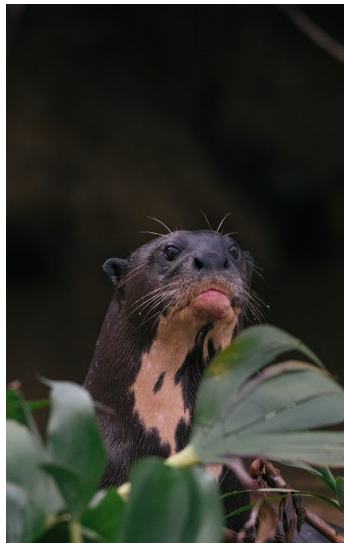
After some early morning time at the always incredible Aguapé feeders (toucans, Plush-crested Jays, Blue-and-yellow Macaws etc.) we walked a short distance to the Aquiduaana River and our first boat ride of the trip. We had a specific goal in mind, but along the way we saw some wonderful birds and mammals including Ringed Kingfisher, Silver-beaked Tanagers, Hyacinth Macaws and Neotropical River Otters! But the biggest draw of the river trip was a visit to a band-tailed manakin lek, and we were lucky enough to watch three of the beautifully-colored males as they called and bounced among the vines and branches. For many of our group, this would be one of the best birds of the trip.

We returned back to Aguapé on the boats and after enjoying a wonderful lunch and some more time around the lodge to bird, we got back in the van and drove back down the dirt road and then the highway toward Campo Grande once again. It is always hard to leave Aguapé both due to the wonderful wildlife that is found there as well as the beautiful lodge and warm and friendly staff. After we arrived back in Campo Grande, we settled into our hotel and prepared for a very early trip to the airport and the beginning of the second part of our Brazilian adventure.

September 9: Travel to the Northern Pantanal and Rio Claro Lodge

There are very few flights between Campo Grande and Cuiabá and unfortunately that makes for a VERY early morning for our group in order to catch a multi-leg flight to the Northern Pantanal. But the flights were on-time and easy enough and before long we found ourselves in sunny and hot Cuiabá in the state of Mato Grosso. After a quick stop at a local grocery store, we continued on to the smaller city of Poconé, which is the last little bit of civilization before entering the Pantanal. We enjoyed a very delicious and authentic churrasco for lunch, and a bit of food in our stomachs was exactly what we needed after a long morning of travel. We then started the dirt road portion of the journey and started onto the Transpantaneira, the “highway” connecting Poconé with Porto Jofre. Along the road it is easy to see iconic birds like Jabiru, Wood Storks, Roseate Spoonbills, Cocoi Herons, Amazon Kingfishers and dozens of other species, and each wetland we pass is full of Caiman and Capybara.

We arrived at Pousada Rio Claro not long after and settled into our rooms and got ready for our first excursion which was a boat ride on the Rio Claro. We had amazing local guides on each boat and they helped us see a lot of new birds including Green Kingfishers, Anhingas, Black-collared Hawks, Chestnut-bellied Guans and many



more. However, the two showstoppers had to be a quick but exciting view of some Giant River Otters as well as an absolutely jaw-dropping sunset. The species list, dinner and some caipirinhas was the perfect end to a very productive day.

September 10: Full Day at Rio Claro

Before breakfast we did a bit of birding around the Rio Claro lodge and visited the local jabiru nest at sunrise and we saw a number of new birds down by the river including Chestnut-eared Aracaris, Helmeted Manakins and Short-crested Flycatchers.

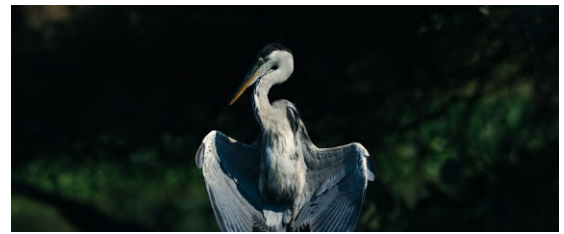
Then we got in our van and did a bit of DIY birding on the Transpantaneira and along the way we saw a lot of wonderful new species like Barred Antshrikes, a Crimson-crested Woodpecker, Black-fronted Nunbirds and some other amazing species. At our final stop we found a particularly large Chaco Tree frog that was also quite inquisitive and it jumped on one of our participants and hung out on his shoulder for a good chunk of time while we all snapped some photos.

We headed back to Rio Claro for lunch and then once again took a boat ride in the afternoon where we had some pretty insane luck with both birds and mammals. We had amazing looks at three aracaris all lined-up on a single branch, a fleeting view of an American Pygmy Kingfisher and once again some quick looks at the local Giant River Otters. But the most surprising sighting was two tapir that quickly left the river and entered the forest when they saw us coming, but stuck around long enough that almost everyone in the group got a quick view. We had another beautiful sunset as we arrived back at the lodge, and then a Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl was a late-night treat that we managed to spot after dinner and the species list.

September 11: Porto Jofre, Floating Hotel and Our First Jaguar Safari

After some birding before breakfast at Rio Claro, we ate and then started our drive once again, stopping at the always wonderful hotel Mato Grosso for a bathroom break and some birding. We managed to find another Pygmy Owl as well as some new birds like Yellow-rumped Caciques and Sayaca Tanagers. We then started on our journey again but stopped multiple times along the Transpantaneira to look at different birds, mammals and reptiles with some highlights including Maguari Storks, Capped Herons and a False Water Cobra Snake.

We arrived in Porto Jofre and immediately loaded our bags and then our guests into two speedboats and took off for our floating houseboat hotel. Along the way we saw a beautiful male marsh deer with gorgeous antlers



browsing in the bushes alongside the Cuiabá river. We arrived at the Panoramic, our beautiful houseboat, and after eating a delicious lunch and getting settled into our rooms we set out on our first Jaguar safari! This is the most anticipated part of the trip for many of our participants so we were anxiously scanning each riverbank and tree for the third largest cat in the world. When we got word that a family of Jaguars had been spending time around a Water Buffalo carcass upriver, we took off and sped up the river hoping to see what would no doubt be an interesting sight. When we got to the area, we knew the Jaguar was nearby but couldn't see it, but as some Black Vultures landed on the Buffalo carcass, the female Jaguar came sprinting out and chased them off. It was an exhilarating first Jaguar sighting and was quickly followed by a much more extended and up-close and personal sighting of another female Jaguar as she walked the side of the river and hunted for Caiman. A truly perfect start to our Jaguar safaris and we were all in very high spirits as we got back to the houseboat and enjoyed the species list, dinner and celebratory caipirinhas.

September 12: A Full Day of Jaguar Safaris in the Northern Pantanal

After an early breakfast at 5:30 we got back into the speedboats and headed out to look for Jaguars in some of the hotspots near where the houseboat is anchored. A quick exploration of the beautiful Corixo Negro turned up one of the more frequent visitors to that part of the state park, a gorgeous female Jaguar that has been named Marcela. We watched for a minute as she unsuccessfully tried to catch a Caiman and then walked to a part of the river that was inaccessible to boats. Next, upriver we found two beautiful Capped Herons and as we were watching them ANOTHER JAGUAR walked out of the forest and started patrolling the river bank! We had this particular Jaguar all to ourselves and we got to follow her and she looked for a meal and then crossed the river.

We then continued onward to the buffalo carcass and were thrilled to find the adult female and two of her cubs at the carcass and watched as she chased off vultures and did their best to protect the huge dead buffalo. On the way back to the houseboat we saw yet another Jaguar, this one a huge male that wears a GPS collar and has been named Ousado. We topped the morning off with some beautiful bird sightings that included Boat-billed Herons, Orange-backed Troupials and the star of the day, a gorgeous Green and Rufous Kingfisher (which was later voted the bird of the trip!)

Following lunch and some resting time back at the houseboat we yet again headed back out for a safari, this time opting to stay a bit closer to the areas directly around the boat. We saw tons of beautiful birds in the Corixo Negro as well as a new sleeping Jaguar in a tree on another smaller river. We once again saw Ousado, the big male we had seen that morning, and then watched some Proboscis Bats on a tree and had some of our first good looks at Black-capped Donacobius as they flitted around some of the long grass on the side of the water.



As we headed back to our floating lodge in the last light of the sunset, we were treated to a beautiful female Jaguar lying on the sand in some beautiful evening light. A perfect end to an insanely productive and wonderful full day of jaguar safaris in the northern Pantanal.

September 13: One Last Jaguar Safari and SouthWild Lodge

On our last morning at the floating houseboat, we opted once again to return to the buffalo carcass on the speedboats and hope for a look at the full family of Jaguars that had been spending time there. And we lucked out. We saw the female with all THREE cubs while they chased vultures around the carcass, and not long after we arrived the whole family once again left to spend the hotter part of the day in the shade and out of view. On our way back toward the houseboat we saw two more Jaguars including a pregnant female asleep on a tree and a big male named Bororo that was swimming and hunting in the river. All together we saw 12 individual Jaguars during our four safaris, which was a new record for me (Wes) and not only did we see a lot of jaguars, but we were super lucky to see interesting behaviors as well. As we gathered our things on the houseboat and headed back to Porto Jofre we all talked about just how fortunate we had actually been and we all had full SD cards from all of the Jaguar photos we had been able to take.

We got back in our van and headed toward the Pixaim river, stopping along the way to see a few new birds including a Little Woodpecker. Our last lodge would be SouthWild Pantanal, and we were greeted with fresh juice and lunch as we got to the lodge. Following lunch, some of our group got to see a tapir as it fed on some fallen fruit near the lodge, and then we headed out on a boat trip to see the wildlife on the Pixaim river, but with it being an incredibly hot day, the wildlife was somewhat limited. We did however see our first Great Potoo as well as a brief look at a Sunbittern as it flew away from the group. We got back to the lodge just in time to go try and see the food-conditioned Ocelot that often frequents a viewing area near the lodge, but on night one we were not able to see the elusive cat. Dinner and the species list welcomed us back at the lodge and we fell asleep once more to the bird songs and frog calls of the Pantanal.

September 14: A Full Day at SouthWild and Meeting Their Resident Ocelot

On our last full day in the Northern Pantanal, we woke up and took an early morning boat ride along the Pixaim river once again, and we had some amazing luck with some hard-to-see birds including our first great look at an American Pygmy Kingfisher. This group was able to see all of the kingfisher species found in South America, which is no small feat! We also had our most extended and up-close sighting of giant river otters as well, and we got back to the lodge just as the day was really starting to warm up. With it being so hot, we decided to prioritize the evening and night and spent most of the day just relaxing at the lodge and birding around the grounds.



Around 6pm, we once again went to the ocelot viewing area, and were absolutely thrilled when the ocelot showed up and spent over 30 minutes in the area!

Following dinner we left on a night safari that was very productive and we managed to see another Ocelot in a distant tree as well as some other great sightings of crab-eating foxes, great horned owls, boat-billed herons and other incredible birds and mammals. We also had a nice moment where we stopped the truck and got out to let our eyes adjust to the darkness and see the sprawling milky way above our heads.

September 15: Goodbye to Wes and the Start of a New Adventure

All good things must come to an end, and after enjoying another great Brazilian breakfast at the SouthWild lodge, we got into the van and drove back toward Poconé and Cuiabá, with some stops for birding on a couple of the bridges on our way back. While leaving the Pantanal is always hard, it is always a bit of a relief to get back on the pavement and away from the dusty Transpantaneira, and we enjoyed one last lunch at a churrascaria near the airport as a complete group. I (Wes the Naturalist Journey's Guide) had already spent a month in Brazil and was not able to join the group on the fabulous Amazon extension, so this would be our last meal as a group and as we ate we voted on the mammal and bird of the trip (Jaguar and Green and Rufous Kingfisher).

This had been an incredibly fun and easy group to experience Brazil with, and not only were our days filled with jaw-dropping wildlife encounters, but also lots of laughs and human connection, which made this trip a true joy for me and hopefully everyone else involved. I hope to see all of you on future trips with Naturalist Journeys although this is going to be a nearly-impossible trip to top as far as sightings and good vibes are concerned. Thanks again everyone for a wonderful adventure!

Mammal of the Trip: Jaguar

Bird of the Trip: Green and Rufous Kingfisher

Photos: Jaguar (Wes Larson - WL), Capped Heron (WL), Capybara (WL), Band-tailed Manakin (WL), Giant Anteater (WL), Toco Toucan (WL), Lesser Anteater (WL), Hyacinth Macaw (WL), Black Howler Monkey (WL), Macaws & Parrots (WL), Giant River Otter (WL), Cocoli Heron (WL), Jaguar (WL), Tapir (WL), Sunbittern (WL), Ocelot (WL), Dragonfly (Richard Voelker)