

Jaguars & Wildlife of Brazil's Pantanal



The Brazilian lowlands known as the Pantanal form an enormous wilderness in the heart of South America. This flat rain-fed region, laced with waterways and submerged beneath silvery sheets of floodwater for half the year, is one of the most photographically productive wildlife habitats on the entire continent.

Few places offer so many animals of such variety, so spectacularly visible, as the Pantanal. One reason for the incredible exuberance of animal life is the sparse human settlement of the region. Because of the damp land and annual flooding, large-scale cultivation is impractical and access remains difficult—except by boat. Giant cattle ranches lay claim to the land, but they are stocked at low density, and ranching has done little to change the essential character of the landscape. These days, more and more of these *fazendas* are being converted into ecolodges.

Jaguars, the third largest "big cat" on earth dwells deep within the Pantanal's tangled floodplain forests. Here, they have remained one of the planet's most photographically elusive large predators—until now! Along several Pantanal rivers, jaguars have become habituated to the growing activity of commercial and sport fishing boats over the past few years. Because of their growing familiarity with this increasing river traffic, jaguars have learned to relax on the banks in the shade of riverside trees. From exposed vantage points and camouflaged lairs, they monitor these rivers and wait for prey along their sandy banks. Being enthusiastic swimmers, they often cool down with a refreshing dip

as the day heats up. The amazing Pantanal jaguars are the world's largest jaguar subspecies and big, photogenic males can weigh over 300 pounds. It is not unlikely to see these largest American cats stalk capybaras and caiman during the coolest hours of the day.



On this Pantanal photo tour we shoot a fantastic variety of wildlife while exploring the Transpantaneira Highway by air-conditioned mini bus and by cruising numerous waterways in small boats. By building the "highway" through the wetland, the mounding of soil for the roadbed has created the adjacent "borrow pit" as a by-product that extends for countless miles. Here, our cameras capture jabiru, the world's largest stork—an iconic symbol of the Pantanal. Families of capybaras are often seen wallowing and feeding right alongside the voracious

caiman. Capybaras resemble giant guinea pigs—this conspicuous rodent attains weights exceeding 130 pounds! Noisy groups of endangered giant otters patrol these same waterways and we should have good opportunities to photograph them at close range.

The abundance and diversity of large mammals can be seen on all sides, yet many of the region's big mammals have not been photographed extensively. Marsh deer, coatimundi, giant anteaters, tapirs and giant river otters are all potential targets for our lenses. And now—during the dry season in the Pantanal—rarely-seen jaguars are a welcome new addition to Pantanal's photographic repertoire!

Along with breathtaking jaguars, the Pantanal's other truly great spectacle is provided by the amazing variety of water birds that utilize these wetlands to probe, sift and stab for prey. They include huge numbers of egrets, herons, ibis and wood storks, as well as spoonbills and jabiru. Bird photography is exceptional here, reminiscent of Florida's Everglades in the 1800s before its degradation. Other interesting species to photograph at close range, such as toco toucans, hyacinth macaws, snail kites and buff-necked ibis, add spice to this exceptional photographic adventure.

If you're a serious nature traveler and never been to the Pantanal, you've really missed one of Planet Earth's greatest wildlife habitats and photography destinations! Elusive jaguars and a throng of other charismatic wildlife provide undreamed of photographic opportunities.

Compelling Reasons To Travel With Us

With amazing accessibility to jaguars and a host of other wildlife, Brazil's Pantanal has enthusiastically been added to many nature photographers' "must do" lists. In recent years, numerous new trips have cropped up offering photographers the chance to photograph in Pantanal. What sets our **Jaguars & Wildlife of Brazil's Pantanal** photo shoot apart from the rest? Plenty!

Unparalleled Experience

Joseph Van Os Photo Safaris has 20 years of experience offering Pantanal photography tours—far more than virtually any other photographer/tour company leading trips to the area. Our local guide has worked in the Pantanal for more than 35 years and is considered a pioneer in nature and photography tours to the region. Experience

matters when you are photographing in an area as vast as Brazil's Pantanal. We waste no time getting you exactly where you need to be for the very best photography—each and every day of your trip.

Smaller Group Size

We limit our groups to 8 participants with 2 leaders—far fewer participants than other groups which typically take 12–15 photographers, plus the leaders. With fewer participants we are able to move more nimbly and with less impact on both wildlife and habitat. Fewer people photographing is almost always desirable, but especially so when traveling in small boats, as we do when photographing jaguars.

Jaguars—And A Whole Lot More

With us you get 5 full days of jaguar photography plus additional days at two ecolodges. Because these lodges are in distinctly different habitats, you photograph a much wider diversity of the many species found in the Pantanal.

Accommodations Matter (A Lot!)

When we're out in the field shooting we "play hard" getting the most out of available light and photographic opportunities. When we're not shooting, we want to retreat to accommodations that offer comfort and a chance to rejuvenate for the coming day. Our chosen accommodations do just that!



While photographing jaguars we stay in a **wonderful hotel complex** on the bank of the Cuiabá River, in the very heart of jaguar country. The **bedrooms**, in spacious duplex cottages, are quiet and comfortable. The food is outstanding. There is a refreshing pool, and the expansive manicured grounds allow plenty of acreage for walking or jogging, if desired. During lunch breaks there are opportunities to photograph resident (and tame) hyacinth macaws, as well as toucans, parrots and numerous waterbirds. Adjacent to the hotel is a spectacular and photogenic flotilla of *Victoria amazonica* water lilies—with the world's largest lily pads—on an oxbow lagoon that is accessible only from the hotel. Jaguars occasionally hunt capybara along the shore of this lagoon and, staying in prime jaguar territory, we often photograph our first jaguar of the day within 15 to 30 minutes, by boat, from our hotel!

Compare our lodging to the four "floating hotels" where most photography groups stay. Rooms on these "**flotels**"—originally built for use by local sport fishermen with little need for space, comfort and amenities—typically measure about 10x10 feet (some are smaller) and pack the shower, toilet and twin beds all into a space about the size of a walk-in closet. Add two photographers to each room and guests are "up to their necks" in luggage and photo gear. Generators thrum throughout the night and the walls are thin enough to hear snoring in adjacent rooms. Deck space is very limited and there is little room to walk around—and nothing to photograph while on board. Once aboard these flotels, you rarely touch land for the duration of your stay. We have never had a trip member say they wished they had stayed on one of these boats instead of our hotel!

Better Boats, Fewer Passengers

We use **small, nimble speedboats** to get us to the jaguar action quickly. Their size allows us to get deep into narrow photogenic backwaters—prime jaguar habitat that larger boats carrying 6–8 photographers can't access.

Best of all, we limit our boats to just 3 photographers in each, so you have ample space for gear and room to get great shots. Some tour groups may put **as many as 20 people into a long cramped boat!** Each of our boats has a retracting sun shade (not a luxury, but a necessity!) for those times when we are anchored mid-river during a long jaguar photo encounter. Our boatmen are incredible jaguar spotters—they have a "sixth sense" for finding these cryptically camouflaged big cats along the river. Because our hotel has more "jaguar boats," combined with numerous sports fishing boats, we have the largest and most efficient radio-linked network of jaguar spotters on the river.

Air-conditioned Vans

Finally, while traveling over the dusty Transpantaneira Highway from lodge to lodge we use **comfortable air-conditioned buses**. Compare our vehicles to the open, hot, **military-style trucks** used by many tours—whose passengers need bandanas and masks to cover their faces against the thick dust kicked up by cars and passing cattle trucks.

When you consider all the essential details that we've combined to make your trip comfortable, safe and very photographically productive—we know you'll choose our **Jaguars & Wildlife of Brazil's Pantanal!**

For more information, check out these trip reports from our 2017 and 2018 Jaguars photo tours:

[Mark Thomas, 2017](#)

[Mark Thomas, 2018](#)

Tour Itinerary

Day 1

Depart from home on overnight flights.

Day 2 (Jul 27 or Aug 10)

Arrive in Cuiabá and transfer to our hotel. The group meets for dinner tonight. (D)

Day 3

This morning we depart for the Transpantaneira Highway, the main artery through the floodplain, looking for the unusual mammals and some of the more than 360 species of birds found in the Pantanal along the way. The area is especially good for wading bird photos—thousands of jabiru, American wood storks and great egrets congregate in huge flocks. Overnight at our lodge along the Rio Claro. (BLD)

Day 4



We explore nearby private ranches that feature a wonderful mix of photogenic land birds and water birds, including roosting nocturnal great potoos, active jabiru on nests, sunbitterns, parakeets, kingfishers, inquisitive caracaras and other birds of prey. Part of our day is spent searching for photogenic mammals, including tame brown capuchin monkeys that come within close-up range for their favorite bananas, endearing black-

tailed marmosets, rare giant and collared anteaters, marsh deer and tapirs. (BLD)

Day 5

This morning we travel further southward, deeper into the heart of the northern Pantanal. Along our route, the wetlands become increasingly open and we pass through several different marsh and forest habitats en route to Porto Jofre and our comfortable lodge. The afternoon features opportunities to photograph hyacinth macaws and giant *Victoria amazonica* water lilies populated with a resident flock of wattled jacanas that forage across the top of the large circular leaves. (BLD)

Days 6–10

Each morning we travel by speedboat on the Rio Cuiabá and its tributaries—with only three photographers in a boat—into the vast realm of the jaguar. Here, along the banks of the river, we have the best chances of photographing jaguars at this time of the year. Our recent trip participants have seen several of these huge predators during the day—many of them at very close range for extended periods. Scout boats are sent out, in advance, along the river and all of our boats are in radio contact to deliver us to the big cats as quickly as possible. We stay at a comfortable hotel, with spacious rooms, situated along the Cuiabá River in the heart of jaguar country—where it is not unusual to find jaguars within 10 minutes of our hotel! Using comfortable and nimble speedboats we cruise the river looking for the best photo opportunities for cats, endangered giant otters and a wonderful variety of other wildlife. (BLD)



Day 11

We travel northward along the Transpantaneira through broad open savannahs and wetlands punctuated by forest islands, stopping to photograph whenever good opportunities present themselves. Thousands (literally) of yacare caiman can be found in the drying sloughs along the roadway—this area sports one of the largest concentrations of crocodylians in the world! Afternoon photography and overnight accommodations are at a

backcountry lodge situated well off the main road. (BLD)

Day 12

We enjoy a full day of photography at our comfortable, rustic lodge that affords the wonderful hospitality of the "Old Pantanal" of a bygone era! The Rio Bento Gomes crosses our ranch from east to west. It flows only part of the year and in the dry season—during our visit—a series of lakes and ponds of various sizes and surrounding habitats give rise to the photogenic bird-rich area starting just feet from the lodge. Now is our chance to seek out photogenic situations with hyacinth macaws, toco toucans, ferruginous pygmy owls, numerous parrots, and a throng of land and water birds. This location is truly terrific for bird photography. (BLD)

Day 13 (Aug 7 or Aug 21)

An early morning departure brings us back to Cuiabá in time to connect with afternoon flights to São Paulo or Brasília and evening flights home. (B)

Trip Details

Multiple Departure Dates 2020

Fee: **\$8,495 from Cuiabá, Brazil**

Deposit: **\$1,000**

Limit: **8**

Jul 26–Aug 07, 2020

Leaders: Mark Thomas & Paulo Boute

Aug 09–21, 2020

Leaders: John Shaw & Paulo Boute

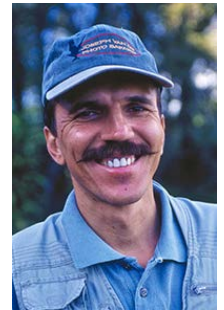
Tour Leaders



JOHN SHAW



MARK THOMAS



PAULO BOUTE

[CONTACT US ABOUT THIS TOUR](#)