

FEBRUARY 1- 14, 2022 NATURAL HISTORY NOTES

By Dick Harlow

THE PANTANEL, BRAZIL



Pantanal Mato Grosso, Brazil.

This article is not about what has been seen here at EastView. I thought for the first two weeks of the last month of Winter I would write a note of my past travel to Brazil and the Pantanal in 1988. As a teacher of AP Biology and Introductory Biology at the secondary school level, I was given a two week leave to go to South America on a wildlife junket to the Brazilian wildlife mecca, the Pantanal in Brazil, South America.

“The Pantanal is a natural region encompassing the world's largest tropical wetland area, and the world's largest flooded grasslands. It is located mostly within the Brazilian state of Mato Grosso do Sul, but it extends into Mato Grosso and portions of Bolivia and Paraguay. It sprawls over an area estimated at between 140,000 and 195,000 square kilometers. Various subregional ecosystems exist, each with distinct hydrological, geological, and ecological characteristics” <https://en.wikipedia.org>

As much as I would have liked to, I am not sure I would have gone to Brazil under usual circumstances. Therefore, being given the chance to go on this particular trip was a godsend!

Did we see a Jaguar when we were there? Yes, we saw what is known as the Shadow Cat. Really not a shadow in this pose!

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Jaguar, © Janet Horton, 2019,
pantanal-mato-grosso-brazil.



Black Caiman, *Melanosuchus niger*,
© Ellen Goff/Danita Delmont, gettyimages.

The Black Caiman is very prevalent in the Pantanal. We saw a great many of them.

“The black caiman (*Melanosuchus niger*) is a large crocodylian and, along with the American alligator, is one of the biggest extant members of the family Alligatoridae and order Crocodylia. It is a carnivorous reptile that lives along slow-moving rivers, lakes, seasonally flooded savannas of the Amazon basin, and in other freshwater habitats of South America. It is a quite large species, growing to sizes of at least 5 m and possibly up to 6 m in length, which make it the biggest reptile in the Neotropical ecozone. As their name implies, the black caiman has a dark coloration, as an adult. In some individuals the dark coloration can appear almost black.” <https://en.wikipedia.org>

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Probably the highlight was the family of Giant Otter we saw while on a boat trip as we were traveling through the Pantanal.

How about birds? Did we see many birds on this trip? The answer is yes, but the reader should understand that the Pantanal covers an immense area, and we did see herons, spoonbills, egrets, and other waterbirds. However, bird concentrations in the Pantanal are usually focused in small, localized groups dependent on where the food is found. Therefore, even though many species are found in the Pantanal, we had to be lucky at the end of September into the beginning of October on this trip to be at the right place at the right time.

As an example, we were very lucky to come across the Hyacinth Macaw a beautiful cobalt blue plumaged bird. The yellow ring around the eye and at the base of the lower bill stand out against the cobalt blue of its body. However, this bird's beauty has caused it trouble because the bird is sought after in the pet trade to the point now that it is an endangered species.



Hyacinth Macaw, *Anodorhynchus hyacinthinus*.

©_Naila Lepre, eBird 544152981

The Hyacinth Macaw is found in open woodland or forest borders and savannas where there are palm trees. It feeds on palm fruits whether they are on the ground or in trees. This bird was one of the highlights of the trip.

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Amazon Kingfisher, *Chloroceryle amazona*,
© Carlos Echeverria eBird 533606757

The Amazon Kingfisher is another resident of the tropical lowlands found along ponds, lakes, and rivers.

And we also saw the Capped Heron.



Capped Heron, *Pilherodius pileatus*,
© Wikimedia Commons, free media.

The Capped Heron is not abundant in South America although its range extends from Panama to Southern Brazil. It is probably the least known heron of all the herons that exist in North and South America.

In all, the trip was extremely useful for me as a teacher. Beyond the material I learned, the experience of being in the Brazil bush and Pantanal improved my understanding of South American Wildlife.

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OBSERVATIONS

MAMMALS

Red Fox (before snowstorm)

Eastern Cottontail Rabbit (tracks and droppings)

[All Measurements taken at solar noon \(1230 EST\).](#)

PRECIPITATION

Average February Precipitation for Vermont = 1.78 inches.

Total precipitation for February was 26.5 mm or 1.05 inches. We need 0.72-inch to meet the average.

Overcast Days 1-14: We had 9-days of overcast skies. Of those overcast skies 6 days produced precipitation.