



EXPEDITION DIARY Brazil 2007

By David Moore

24 October

Here is the first diary entry for our 2008 puma and jaguar expedition to Brazil.

I'm David, your expedition leader, and have just arrived today at Biosphere's office where staff and I are getting the equipment ready and going over the details ready for my flight out to Sao Paulo tomorrow.

There I shall meet up with Daniel from Biosfera Brasil, our local partner, as well as Erin from our USA office, who is also flying in to participate in the expedition. We'll spend a couple of days in Sao Paulo whilst we pick up the Land Rover from their office and will then head down to Matinhos to meet up with Marcelo, our field scientist, to start getting the camp set up.

Hope your preparations are going well too – looking forward to seeing you soon!

David Moore
Expedition leader

28 October

Things went well in Sao Paulo. Land Rover had the vehicle ready for us (it's one of their bright orange G4 Challenge defenders) and after sorting out the insurance and other bits and pieces, Erin and I drove down to the small coastal town of Matinhos. It took about 6 hours. We made it here by early Thursday evening and met up with Marcelo who had also arrived to prepare for arrival of the expedition team and get everything in place.

We spent Friday in the town, picking up the wood and supplies for constructing the tent platforms and signing all the official paperwork to be allowed to carry out research on the land. We then made our first trip out to base camp, about a one-and-a-half hour drive off the main road, to drop off the first batch of supplies. The road is pretty smooth at the start, but gets more challenging as we get further in to the forest. We went back down the next day to pick up the rest of the wood and supplies, and have now set ourselves up here at base, getting things in to shape. Our first task is cleaning the place from head to toe to eliminate as many of the spiders as possible – we're also trying to discourage the frogs from living in the toilet!

Marcelo has been down in the village recruiting some helpers to construct the tent platforms and this evening we'll drive down again to pick up our cook who will be with us for the duration of the expedition. Preparations are going well, but we're glad we still have a week before everybody gets here!

30 October

Even with plenty of set-up time, you're never sure if you'll have everything well ready in time, but you'll be pleased to hear that everything has been going well, so we're now really looking forward to meeting the team on Sunday and getting the programme under way.

You'll also be pleased to hear that the tent platforms are up and the wooden cabin no longer resembles a chicken coop (Erin's words)! The workers from the nearby village really helped us knock it in to place and the carpenter was a whizz. Tomorrow Erin and I will be down in Matinhos picking up the last supplies, printing, copying etc, but we'll be back up here late afternoon. Marcelo is really enthused, familiarising himself with the surrounding terrain and keen to maximise this intense period of data collection.

He already has a couple of cameras in the field, hoping we may have some photos before the team's arrival. Today he came back with great shots of a lizard and a red horned frog. Lots of tapir tracks and the local speak positively of jaguar and puma presence.

If you're doing your last minute shopping, try to pick up a pair of Wellington boots, as the location of our new camp means we no longer go past the Wellington boot shop like last year. We'll have a few spare pairs here, but you'll definitely be glad for them and might like them well-fitting in your size. We'll still be able to make a last-minute stop for any last-minute snacks or treats.

We've bought a special lime crusher for caipirinha production and designated a 'jungle bar' area so slipping an extra bottle of cachaça could be a good idea....oh, and don't forget the insect repellent...

5 November

After our set-up period we were glad to meet up with our team on Saturday night and share with them the last moments of luxury in the Holiday Inn Express in Curitiba. Fortunately the diary entries hadn't put anybody off, though Helge was relieved to hear of our transformations of the chicken coop. He was particularly impressed by the flamingo paint in our recently renovated bathroom suite. Bob had read last year's diary entries and considered ducking out at the last minute, but we bundled him in to the Land Rover and got him up to camp before he could make a run for it.

Now we're all here and are felling pretty much settled in by this stage (even if the tents are only moderately waterproof, we've at least survived the first night. Sharon and Mark don't seem too ruffled by their tent being on an ant trail and find that DEET around the tent legs is a good deterrent). Arrival day yesterday went really well. All our contingency plans concerning bad weather proved unnecessary as we spent the day basking in glorious sunshine with rocketing temperatures. The tent platforms down by the river proved to be the most popular spots. After lunch and the usual risk assessment, Marcello lead us out for our first jungle experience. Conditions were good for spotting tracks and we saw really clear ocelot tracks as well as tapir and agouti tracks. With a strong journalist presence here and keen photographers, the first delicate river crossings felt like a photo shoot and Erin made the most of the opportunity to strike a pose (I'll get my hands on the evidence).

Today Marcello has given us a lot more detail on his project here and we've been through the equipment training and data sheet procedures etc. We were all itching to get back out under the canopy, so we headed out this afternoon to practise our new skills, setting the first of the analog cameras in the field. This site being new terrain for us all here, the trail we chose did not lead us west as we had hoped, but we located a good spot by a side animal trail to practise setting a trap. Loads of good bird sightings too.

7 November

Our first full day in the field yesterday. The journalists headed down to the village about an hour away to interview the locals regarding jaguar and puma presence in the area. Meanwhile we all headed out to lay two camera traps in virgin territory up along Old Police Station track. Steady progress in the morning, hampered a little when we struck the wasp nest (Bob came off worst, but luckily Helge was there to fight them off). Nevertheless we got beyond Banana Hut to lay the camera and navigated back well. Simon and Elodie are pretty hot with the GPS. Back at base camp Erin made herself useful photographing everybody's worst bite or sting. Luckily Marcello and Erin act as effective tick magnets (10 each), so the rest of us can walk easy. Fox, peccary and tapir tracks, but after about 15 km we were glad to arrive back and decided to pass a raucous evening. After a few caipirinha, we even started singing Lisa Stansfield.

Today we all went down to the village as Marcello gave three presentations to different classes at the local schools. It was a really worthwhile interaction and we hope to return next week for a community meeting.

8 November

A really hot day with blue skies and hardly a cloud in the sky. Two teams today with lots of tapir, ocelot and fox tracks. One group set new traps while the other retrieved two cameras we set last week. There are a pair of eyes glaring out of the darkness on one of the cameras which we are about to download to try to distinguish what it is. Tapir, fire flies or big cat, we're not sure yet....

11 November

Today is our rest day, so a chance to relax, catch up on jobs and repair the bamboo bridge to the far tents which was washed away by the rising river in last night's rains. We're also finishing the details for our plan of action for phase two of our expedition.

The journalists left on Friday and here at camp we reviewed all the data collected so far to be sure which quadrats we need to revisit. We also investigated further up the tent trail, set track traps and started hacking a new transect trail heading west. It was fairly easy-going to begin with, though we soon hit hilly tougher terrain.

Helge came within inches of our first snake, the jararaca. Yesterday we were back in groups out on our missions in the field. Elodie, Simon and Erin lay new cameras on the Old Police Station trail while I went with Bob and Helge along the donkey trail to set two more analog cameras and retrieve two of the digital cameras (one of them evaded us, though we got within 180 metres). D1 had really great photos of tapir with their young feeding on fruit by the camera. We also saw a coral snake and Aline caught a fleeting glimpse of a squirrel! Mark and Carol ventured up the tent trail with Marcelo to continue the machete work. They say there's a good trail now, so this may be our choice for tonight's planned night walk....hopefully Naosa, our cook, will be arriving back from the village any minute now...

13 November

Yesterday saw Elodie, Bob and Helge depart on a reconnaissance mission to find a linking corridor between this area and the St. Hilaire national park. Although they got four kilometres in, we'll have to get some local help to find the complete track through. Meanwhile Simon, Mark, Sharon and Erin set a digital camera up on the newly cut tent trail. Then it was down to the village for a committee meeting in the agro-industrial centre concerning the marketing of local artisanal food products. Marcello will be helping them out. Also a literary class for adults where Marcello gave a talk before the show was stolen by the lady we interviewed in the bar last week who recounted her lizard tales. Good food, they prayed for us and sent us on our way.

Today back out in the field in our groups. Mark, Sharon and Simon had quite an adventure retrieving an empty digital, wading half a kilometre down the river and Sharon managing to lose a Wellington.

They had lots of fun, but we have to be really careful of the rivers.

Lots of tracks. Same for our group, which went up along Lucien's trail and we've also brought back scat. There's lots of fur in it and crushed bones and skulls and things, so we have high hopes for it. Marcello will be back soon with Helga and Elodie (they've gone up the donkey trail to retrieve D4), so we'll see what he makes of it!

Elodie, Helge and Marcello had quite a day of it, with Marcello taking them on one of his short cuts so they didn't get back until really late. Good news though – they found a puma track, our first evidence of one of these big cats this year.

18 November

We actually brought all of the cameras in from their locations on the Wednesday, so we had plenty of time on the Thursday to get ourselves organised and enjoy our last day up at base camp. We thought it best to get the cameras in just in case any of the rivers became uncrossable on the last day. Another puma track was discovered on retrieval day, not far from the camp. We managed to pack up camp pretty effectively and had time to prepare for our last night celebrations. The awards ceremony was a dazzling success, though our departure song failed to make the impression we had hoped for, even if Sharon showed a flair for spontaneous dance moves. The Nepalese and Breton dancing went down well.

On the Friday morning we took down our tents and took up the wooden platforms and supports in good time. We were a little sad to leave the chicken coop behind, especially the verandah area which had really been transformed by the hammocks and mattresses in to a top-notch lounge area. Still it was nice to get to the Holiday Inn, do a last de-tick and dry out after the swampy humidity of base camp. We wished Simon and Bob all the best for their onward travels (Bob was a little concerned by reports of mosquitoes in the Pantanal) and Sharon and Mark also left late afternoon. That left Helge, Elodie, Erin and I for a fun evening in a charasscaria by the hotel.

We were lucky to have such a great team for the research this year, so thanks to everybody involved for your contribution. Nobody complained once about all the mosquitoes, wasps, mud and rain, though it does feature a lot in the comments in the journal. I think the guide to the different types of bites will be essential reading for next year's teams. I'm sure lots of us will be keeping in touch and exchanging photos or meeting again on other expeditions to reminisce about our unique time in the jungle. Just in case any of you are trying to forget, here's the copy of our poem (Bob has given us permission to use the lines he has under copyright):

Snag A Jag

(c) Slot 1 Brazil Expedition 2007

I'd like an awful lot to see an ocelot
But I'd be happier to see a tapir
My taste buds would be peppery with a barbequed peccary
Not later but sooner I'd like to see a puma ((c) Bob)

I dream on my pillow of a cuddly oncilla
Or even the cutie that's known as agouti ((c) Bob)

If I can't find a prowler, I'll settle for a howler ((c) Bob)

But to feature in your mag we must snag us a jag.
A margay would be OK, and a possum would be awesome
A fox would be tops, but a bush-dog would be full-hog.
Yet of all the beasties that live in this bush
The ones we like least bite us on the tush.

Mosquitos, wasps'n'ants in your pants
Reduce us to Nepalese dance and Stansfield Chants
The tick is a prick The horsefly a nag
Pass me the DEET and just snag me a jag.

It's always a big to-do when we see the golden tegu
And the swallow-tailed kite is a delightful sight
I would absolutely die to see a Jaguarundi
I'd give the 'dillo a try, but he's awfully shy

To tell you the truth, I think the big cat's a spoof
Should we tell Marcello or just let it mellow?
Well, he is a nice fellow and we don't mean to nag
But to get him in NAT GEO, we need to snag us a jag!

So long

David Moore
Expedition leader.