



# EXPEDITION DIARY Brazil 2008

By Ronald Seipold

15 October

The start of this year's Brazil expedition is looming and I, Ronald (your expedition leader), would like to tell you about my first steps to get the show on the road.

Having prepared the long to-do-list, I have left for Sao Paulo, where I will meet Daniel from Biosfera Brasil (our local partner). During the next few days we will pick up our Land Rovers, get all the equipment together and organise some additional supplies, finally to meet Dr. Marcelo Mazzolli (your expedition scientist). Together we will then set up our base camp, get everything in place, check all the technical equipment and prepare the paperwork.

I'll keep you updated on our progress and look forward to meeting you soon.

Ronald Seipold  
Expedition Leader

23 October

I'm sending you this diary from Matinhos where we are picking up some supplies and food.

My experience over the last few days is that Brazil can beat even the Germans regarding procedures and formal paperwork. You need to be very patient and all the planning up front does not really help you in the end. So, the delivery of our cars had to be postponed until today. In the meantime I travelled by bus to Matinhos where I met our scientist Marcelo. Marcelo had already organized a pickup truck and so we made our way into the research area where we started setting up base camp. Besides a breakdown of our car in the middle of nowhere that caused us some trouble, we managed to get things started and should be all ready for you by the time you arrive (I hope!). Most of the platforms for our tents are done and, very importantly, a cook has also been hired, so you don't need to starve :). Step by step the house is getting into shape. There are two days left to get everything ready and I have to admit that we are glad about it. Our expedition is on its way!

You might also be interested in the weather. Describing it in one word: wet! It has been raining here for several days without a break. The terrain is muddy and the rivers running high are a challenge in themselves (we had to cross some of them with our Land Rovers). Two days ago it stopped raining and yesterday we have even seen some sun in Matinhos! Note also that because of all this water and mud, we will bring for you some pairs of rubber boots to the assembly point.

Not having internet access (or even a signal for mobiles) there is no chance of sending you more information before you will arrive. So, hopefully you will be getting ready too, bracing yourself for things to come! We are looking forward to meeting you all at the assembly point Curitiba Holiday Inn, 07.00 on Sunday 26. Safe travels.

28 October

The team arrived, but Marianne's luggage did not. But it doesn't seem to be a big problem for her. All team members are willing to help: some socks here, a T-shirt from somebody else, a hammock with a cover and a view to the sky – what else do you need in a rain forest :)

The weather changed at the right moment: it was sunny and warm for the first two days, giving us the chance to do our training sessions outside on the veranda of our cabin (with this awesome view over the rainforest towards a mountain range). After a pleasant first night we continued our training and we were out for our first walks around base camp.

Today the \*rain\*forest made a comeback with heavy rain. Braving the weather, we practiced making a track trap and we learned to install a camera trap as we found a very promising place with peccary tracks. In the afternoon we split into two groups, studying trails in the area.

Tomorrow some team members will drive to Morretes to pick up the missing luggage, we hope, buy some rubber boots and send this diary to you. The others are looking forward to staying a full day in the field: one group is going on a reconnaissance mission to explore one trail west of base camp leading up to a mountain range and a second team will head for the Limeira road trail of last year's expedition.

Besides all the work we have done so far it's good to see that the team is gelling well, with a great team spirit. So nothing short of a great start for the expedition.

3 November

After some more training on data sheets and data entry we split in two groups. One of them left in the afternoon for a reconnaissance trip west of our camp site. The rain had washed out all tracks (except a tapir one) and crossing a river had become impossible. After preparing a track trap, we had to return earlier than we had hoped. The other group explored the range behind our site, setting another camera trap. Back at the camp and sitting on our veranda, I had a glimpse of a fox passing the road at the end of our front yard – was it really a fox?

Wednesday turned out to be a good day even though we had heavy rain all day long. Those without rubber boots went to Morretes to buy some (Alistair having UK size 44 was successful as well!) and Marianne finally got her luggage back. In the afternoon this group went out on another trail, setting two more camera traps. A second group continued the trail walked the day before to finally cross the river. But they had to return after it was not possible to find any access point to the promising mountain range. On their way back, Sandra spotted a deer.

Katharina, Reinhold and I stayed out a whole day on the so-called Limeira Road Trail, a trail that had been worked on already last year. Very muddy terrain limited the distance we could do. Besides one a track, possibly of an armadillo, we had to return without any clear sightings. Although everybody's clothes are now wet (and it's difficult to get them dry in this humidity) the mood is still upbeat. All team members are enjoying the cabin, the food and this awesome location.

The following day was unexpectedly dry and from time to time the sun got a chance of shining through the roof of trees. One group headed towards a new trail located about 15 minutes by car north of our site. It didn't take long to find several tapir and other tracks that we couldn't identify. So we installed a camera and a track trap at this promising spot. Shortly afterwards a coral snake crossed our path. Further west on this rarely used trail we were surprised to find an old banana plantation, located in the middle of nowhere. Some cartridges, a fire place and some other signs of human disturbance were found. As we returned in the evening, the second group was back already but without the second Land Rover. They had been heading up Celso's Trail when the car got stuck on one of the very rarely used bridges. Not being able to get the Land Rover out they decided to continue walking. During the day they explored several trails close to one of the peaks and found a puma track! This finding gave everybody the extra lift they needed for a long walk back to the house – even though the Land Rover could be manoeuvred from the bridge, the car got stuck again on the next bridge and had to be left behind over night.

Left with just one car, we had to face a new logistics issue. But despite this one group got a ride close to Donkey Trail south-west of the camp, whilst the second group prepared an overnighter at Celso's.

The first challenge on the way to the Donkey Trail is a river. Loaded with our daypacks, carrying boots and pants we balanced our way barefoot to the other side of the stream. The slippery, muddy trail up the hill needed physical and mental strength to conquer, but we were pretty soon rewarded by several types of animal tracks such as tapir and opossum. So we decided to place a track trap and later on a camera trap. Half an hour further up we couldn't believe our eyes: we clearly saw a big cat print. But no further prints could be found anywhere around. The print seemed to be too big for a puma but what else could it be – a jaguar? In the evening we met Marcelo, who picked us up behind the river, showing him our photos. It took him a while to ensure what he himself couldn't believe: this must have been a jaguar.

Meanwhile, our first overnight camp was established by Michael, Alistair, Nathalie and Marianne. It was located next to two huts on the Celso Trail west of base camp close to the mountain range. After having prepared all packs, they were driven in the Land Rover to the trail. After an hours hiking, they arrived at the camp site. In the afternoon they installed two more cameras on a trail leading to a nearby peak. After some warm food and drinks prepared on a fire, they started to call the jaguar from the peak with a special sound device. Each call lasts approx. 3 minutes with calls made at 15 minutes intervals. The rain and coldness prevented them from continuing all night long.

Even after 6 calls and an additional one at 23:00 there was no answer from a "real" jaguar. An animal passed quite close by but the extremely dark night didn't allow them to see the animal. Unexpectedly on the decent the following morning (Saturday) three sets of puma prints were observed within close proximity of one of the camera traps. Let's hope we have a photo of a big cat next week!

Half of our expeditions is already over – time is racing on. Everybody is still ambitious to go and the spirit is amazing. But most important to me is that none of the team members had to face any major problems - besides a competition about who is in the lead regarding mosquito and tick bites. The second week will bring in more results – let's see ...

Sheila, Reinhold, Katharina, Marion and I returned the next day to the Donkey trail to install one camera trap close to the jaguar print. Back from our "mission" we turned south to have a closer look at two trails that have been studied already last year. Unfortunately we couldn't add any interesting sightings to our list.

While the rain returned, we worked Sunday on our data sheets and updated our data entry. Those who felt a bit exhausted from the last day's walks went to Matinhos, whilst others explored one more trail up the hill behind the camp and to set up our last two cameras.

Monday started unexpectedly with almost clear skies and sunshine. No wonder that the first activity of the day was to get all those wet clothes hanged out to dry. Some of us left the camp to walk the Southern Trail as far as possible. We had to cross 6 main streams and several smaller brooks but we were rewarded by an almost uncountable amount of tracks such as deer, tapir, peccaries and two crystal clear puma prints! We saw another coral snake and two capuchin monkeys jumping over our heads from one tree to another!

A second group accompanied Marcelo driving to a region approx. 20 km west of Morretos to interview locals. Several years ago puma and jaguar sightings/tracks were registered there. Recent tracks, a sighting of a black jaguar and a puma attack on horses just two weeks ago might make it worthwhile to integrate this area too into future research plans.

11 November

We decided to have our "day off" on Tuesday. Instead of just relaxing, we went down to Guaratuba Bay. A boat took us out on a trip between the islands which are surrounded by mangroves. Behind the coastline, the hilly landscape completed the beautiful scenery. For a better understanding of this more or less "untouched" nature we added a one hour walk through the jungle on one the islands.

Wednesday and Thursday we split into groups again to get all cameras back. Once more one group spent the night at Celso's. This time it was not as cold, wet and dark as last time and a lot of noises of animals could be heard throughout the night. Katharine, Reinhold, Sheila, Marion and Marcelo took the chance to call the jaguar again but no reply could be heard. Unfortunately one camera had technical problems so no pictures were taken. The other analogue cameras indicated some shots were taken, but we have to be patient until the films get developed. On their way back to camp the group discovered more tracks such as raccoon, tapir, opossum, armadillo and, for the third time in this area, very recent puma tracks. They are around!

The camera trap on donkey trail, next to the jaguar print found last week, didn't take any pictures. Everybody was a bit disappointed, but the chance of getting a picture of a big cat within a few days, in a range of several meters is pretty small in reality. The track traps on our trails were more of a success: plenty of prints of opossum, tapir, deer and peccary could be entered on our data sheets.

On our way back, between camp site and housekeeper's trail, Natalie and I spotted a hawk as it took off the road behind a bend in front of our Land Rover. We could clearly see a snake in its claws.

Thursday turned out to be the best day of our stay. The afternoon was used for data sheets, data entry, photo collection and starting to clear up equipment as well as personal stuff. All our work was rewarded by a very pleasant evening on the veranda, including a stunningly picturesque sunset.

It was dry again on Friday morning and the sun helped us to take down our tents dry. With the assistance of all team members we managed to pack up camp by early lunch time. Nobody could believe that the expedition was already over – hadn't we just made it up the muddy road to our home, sweet home a few days earlier?

Eventually everybody got back to Curitiba. Despite the great time we had in the jungle, I guess some of us were looking forward to having a hot shower and a comfy bed ...

Thanks to everybody to your contribution, great team spirit, patience, effort and flexibility. For Marcelo and me it was a real pleasure working with you and we hope that there will be a lot of good memories that will last for a long time. At least there will come the moment when you might hear a voice from the off yelling: "this is not good for you!!!" or "why???".

Please don't forget to upload and share your pictures via [www.biosphere-expeditions.org/pictureshare](http://www.biosphere-expeditions.org/pictureshare).

Hope to see you again.

Cheers

Ronald