



EXPEDITION DIARY Brazil 2011

By Malika Fettak

3 May

Hello everyone and welcome to the first diary entry for Biosphere Expeditions' Brazil 2011 expedition. I am Malika Fettak, Operations Manager of Biosphere Expeditions, and I will also be your expedition leader for this project. Working with me will be Valeska Buchemi de Oliveira, our scientists on the expedition as well as some more local helpers I will introduce you to in due course.

I am writing this from Sao Paulo, where I am at the moment. We've just had a great press conference with Land Rover here, telling the press about our project and taking delivery of three very new and very shiny Defenders. It's a shame that these shiny new cars will never look the same again, not just because we have put Biosphere Expeditions stickers on them (see www.facebook.com/biosphere.expeditions1), but especially after they've been put through their paces on this expedition, in terrain they were after all made for ;)

This kind of press work is important for us and not to be underestimated in our efforts for jaguar, puma and the Atlantic Rainforest as a whole. The more people know, the more likely they are to want to do something to conserve it. So it's great that Land Rover has thrown its PR weight behind this and is supporting us with the vehicles.

Our plan for the next few days is to do some last minute shopping as well as retrieving & reviewing all our equipment stored in Sao Paulo. With me to do this is Daniel, who is kindly guiding me through this incredibly big city. I'd be lost without him - he will be my eyes, my ears and my mouth for the next couple of days, patiently driving me from shop to shop as well as translating my English into Portuguese. Please be prepared that only very few Brazilian will speak English.

One of my stops will be to get a Brazilian SIM card and once I have this, I will all let you have my number.

My next diary entry should be from the Atlantic Rainforest with news of base camp.

Hope everyone's preparations are going well and I look forward to meeting you all soon!

Malika Fettak
Expedition leader

P.S. Excerpts of the diary are also on www.facebook.com/biosphere.expeditions1 and you don't need a Facebook account to see this – just click on the link and then on "Wall" on the left and you should be able to see it.

4 May

We are ready & packed up here in Sao Paulo. Today will be spent driving down to Guaratuba and then up into the mountains of Serra do Mar, our study site and base for the next couple of weeks.

My Brazilian mobile number is +55 11 99220779, but please note that this number is for emergency only (i.e. being late for assembly). There is very little mobile phone reception around base camp and certainly no internet, so won't hear from me for a week or so until I get back to "civilisation" with tales of getting the base and our research tasks ready.

8 May

We have come back to Curitiba today to pick up a bunch of press people for a two days visit to base. This short press trip was organised in collaboration with Land Rover Brazil and should have some good effect for the project and our efforts of educating the public. Back in the digital world for one night, here are some updates from the field:

Base camp is ready for your arrival and will be put through its paces by the press. Over the last few days, we cleaned up the wooden cabin, built new platforms, set up the tents on them, etc.. Aparecido, our housekeeper and neighbour down the road was a great help, as always, as was his wife Lucia.

Not only does he know the cabin's water system, he also knows how to remove a wasps nest from our veranda using banana leaves ;).

The whole area around Morretes has seen serious flooding during the last couple of months and the road up to base has suffered a lot as a result.

Let's call it Land Rover terrain - it will certainly be an adventure to use it! The acai palms have decided to take a break - this year they have no fruits, so unfortunately we won't be able to include the planned acai activities into the expedition this year. The good news is that we have not seen any rain since our arrival, so keep your fingers crossed that the dry period is holding on!

12 May

Back in Curitiba we've dropped ten tired but happy Brazilian journalists at their hotel. For most of them it was their first wilderness experience including a night in a tent. The outcome of these two days of PR work will include a TV trailer and articles in various magazines, all talking about jaguar conservation, which is a great result for our public education efforts.

On our first survey walk yesterday we found different tracks pretty close to the cabin including ocelot, tapir & raccoon and we can't wait to go out in the field with our first expeditioners due in a few days. We're now heading back to basecamp. Safe travels & see you soon!

16 May

Rain, rain, rain. Wet conditions in the Brazilian Atlantic forest since Valeska and I left for Curitiba to meet the team. Fully packed on return, including ten expeditioners, both Land Rovers struggled hard on the muddy road up to base camp, but finally made it. The team did well during the training session but had to cope with pouring rain on the first survey walk.

Thanks to Irmtraud who brought an umbrella, (is that in our kit list?) the datasheets stayed relatively dry while everything else taken today got wet, wet, wet.

21 May

We're in Matinhos on our day off today. Time for everyone to do some shopping, to enjoy the beach, the bars & restaurants. We had a great first week in basecamp and everyone was working hard to cover the survey trails & set up camera traps. Unfortunately none of the electric showers are able to be used anymore due to heavy rainfall a couple of days ago. Since then, Neoza our great cook, has been heating up large amounts of water in the afternoon for everyone's "bath". I remember it was Tamara asking everyone during dinner what the first thing to do would be when back in civilisation. You'll guess everyone's answer: A hot shower!

Unfortunately Sudheer & Sridhar have decided to leave the expedition today because of family duties. We have to say goodbye as they will be making their own way back to Curitiba from here. Thanks to both, it's been a great pleasure to meet you not only because you brought two alive & free range chickens from the neighbour, for Neoza to cook!

24 May

We were blessed with dry & sunny weather since back at base from the day off in Matinhos. Two teams each day covered many kilometers on their survey walks. Tracks of all study animals including puma were found except from the elusive jaguar.

Nevertheless the study site habitat seems to be improving. More or less all jaguar prey is present in the area and the level of human interference is decreasing. Along the main road up to camp we recognized quite a lot of abundant houses and signs saying "vende se" (for sale). Similar to other urban areas young people are moving away into the cities.

The GPSs have become our best friends, but they cannot replace our local field guide, Aparecido. Nicola, Irmtraut & Miriam followed him on the pretty much unexplored South Trail. He led the group on a 11 km walk including five "dry feet" river crossings! With his help Valeska, Shridar, Sudheer, Tamara & Nicola also track-logged the Housekeeper's Trail onto our GPSs - the most adventurous trail this year where the team had to climb banks of mud and showed great team spirit by helping each other out. Proud & happy faces during the daily review in the evening; Sudheer even stated this to be his lifetime adventure ;)

25 May

Visitors in basecamp yesterday evening. Aparecido and Lucia brought freshly cut palmheart and showed us how to peel & prepare it for eating. Cut in small pieces and dressed with fresh lemon juice (a lemon tree grows behind the cabin) - delicious!

27 May

Goodbye Brazil expeditioners, Goodbye Irmtraut, Nicola, Nicole, Miriam & Rod! Valeska and I are back at basecamp (The Land Rovers made it up & through the muddy with the 2nd attempt ;)). Hope you all have a safe journey to your next destinations or back home.

30 May

My time in Brazil has come to an end. Back in Sao Paulo after a long drive yesterday, our equipment is now safely stored and the Land Rovers are handed back. Tamara, Valeska & I will make our way to the airport in the afternoon, each of us departing in different directions back home.

Thank you everyone for being a great research team, coping with pouring rain, mosquito bites, blisters, mud & burning showers. The expedition has been a great success and I want to thank everyone for their efforts and contribution. More than 80 kilometers have been walked, 90 recordings of 18 different species were made. We camera-trapped a group of seven white-lipped peccaries, another species classified as critically endangered. I hope we have shown you that your input is essential in this little-researched and important area. The report will go into much more detail but for now, I think we can all be proud of what we have achieved.

All the best and we hope to see you again some day on one of our expeditions.

Malika