

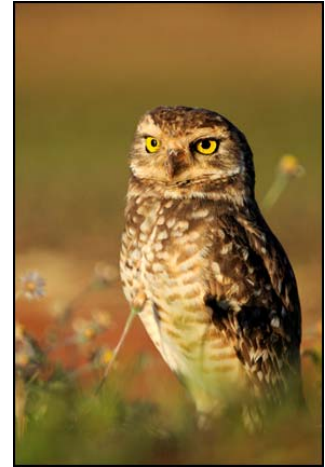
A Trip to the Cerrado

by Bob Owsley



Motoring quickly down a two-lane highway, headed for the most biologically diverse savanna in the entire world, the excitement could be felt throughout our van. The ten of us, four mentors and six students had just flown halfway around the world on a mission to assist a group of dedicated Brazilian biologists and veterinarians in their efforts to ensure the

sustainability of the Brazilian cerrado and the continued survival of its indigenous carnivores. The cerrado is currently being converted into farm and ranch land at a rate of approximately one percent of its original area every year. This is actually twice the rate of loss experiences in the Amazon region of Brazil.



Our arrival at Dr. Leandro Silveira's compound, just outside Emas National Park, led to many interesting introductions. We met Dr. Silveira the lead investigator and president of the Jaguar Conservation Fund, his wife, Dr. Anah Tereza de Almeida Jocomo, Mairana Furtado DVM, Natalia Torres and Rahel Sollmann, as well as several visiting scientists.

We were also introduced to a dozen *Myotis* bats, a tarantula, a tree frog, and several geckos that shared our accommodations with us. We were all just one happy "family"!

It was a good thing we all appreciate wildlife so much. At least the bats kept the insect population to a minimum inside our house. Too bad they don't also like to eat tarantulas! Outside our house a pair of burrowing owls stood watch over our activities, and a wayward seriema woke us one morning by pecking on our window.



We spent the next several days (and some nights) in Emas National Park, setting and inspecting traps, processing blood, urine, hair and scat samples (yuck) from captured animals, preparing camera traps, using radio telemetry to locate animals, x-raying the teeth of various carnivore skulls from the cerrado, doing data



entry, assisting in an ongoing fauna census, and performing various chores around the compound. This included walking the hound dogs, cleaning their kennel, building a new dog run, and planting native trees on the property to restore it to a more natural state.

In all, we worked very hard in Brazil and played equally hard on our day off. We canoed 25km down the Araguaia River, earning sunburns, insect bites, blisters, and a near disaster as a frightened capybara nearly jumped on one of the students in her canoe. We also had an experience of a lifetime. The river was warm, clear, and birds were singing everywhere. We negotiated both rapids and serene stretches of the river. At one point, I felt as if I were paddling in a giant aquarium full of the tropical fish I collected as a boy.



Of all the activities, I think we found the most pleasure in discovering new animals in our traps every day. With each capture we found ourselves involved in real hands-on biology, measuring, weighing, inspecting, and removing external parasites from the maned wolves, and the hoary and crab-eating foxes that we trapped. This allowed us to get close to the animals and gave us a greater sense of contributing to the goals of our hosts and the greater mission of habitat conservation.

I am sure that we will all remember this trip fondly for the rest of our lives, and speaking for myself as well as the rest of the group, we are most appreciative of Linda Dutton for providing this incredible opportunity by way of her generous gift to the Los Angeles Zoo. We probably made a small contribution to a sustainable environment, but she has made a significant contribution that will enrich all of our individual lives.