



**There are friends and readers** who did not recognize that we changed our plans to visit the Cape Horn region. Due to problems of Ankes back we decided to sail there one year later. This decision was not easy for us but on the other hand we found new possibilities how to use this time. Possibilities we did not dream of because we did not know them.

Today some time has passed and we started to discover Río Paraná and Río Paraguay. We have a lot to tell about but - slow down please – this SOM contents an other theme. It focusses a small side step. Counting from Buenos Aires we travelled some 1.200 kilometer up Río Paraná looking for swimming capivaras, snapping caymans,

biting piranhas and strangling anacondas. But no water pig except some hairy common pigs and even worse no other expected animal showed up. Even courageous dipping our bums in the rivers water caused nothing. No! Things can't go on like this. We had to do something, to change our methods of exploring.

We tied JUST DO IT at a safe place, entered a *colectivo*, a public bus, and started heading east. Two hours later we hopped off the bus founding ourselves at a crossing in the middle of nowhere. Feeling like idiots because nobody was waiting there to pick us up. After all there was a fuel station and this meant help. Thirty minutes later we found ourselves in an odd Peugeot pickup and a friendly driver took us to Estancia San Juan Poriahú. (See above)

Though this story began with some desperate moments it changed like all good stories in Argentine to a happy end: we just came in the right moment for lunch. And more:

„Welcome in my little home!“ Carlos welcomed us with an emphazing gesture. And he didn't exaggerate except the little fact that he was not the owner of this place. Well, we know him and his humor since Rosario where he filmed on the quiet our little slide lecture of our sailing trip. And we don't know how epic but this film found it's way in the TV. Well again, Carlos is a TV-man and acts like a TV-man. Of course. And of course again we had a big hallo.

**Short time later gaucho Carlos** invites himself and invited us to an excursion. Two benches are tied on a pickup and here we go. Only a few minutes after the start we meet the first *capivaras* here commonly called *Carpinchos*. Water-pigs (Who nows the correct translation?). This easy encounter irritated us. In *Yacutinga* they did such a big circus to show us these cute rodents and here we found them in a dozen next to the track. Whole families, young and old, even youngsters trotting in own gangs. And they don't seem to be shy. Our impression is opposite, they are leisurely and thick-skinned. Fantastic chances to watch them in all their behaviours. Later Marcos, the owner of this *estancia* explains that there are two subspecies. The animals at *Yacutinga* (Iguazu) are much more shy and live more hidden as these animals here. And they live in smaller groups. You can distinguish the form of their heads. Young animals are hunted by anacondas but caymans do not harm caipivaras. They were good friends. Wounds we saw at some of this rodents are caused by internal fights.





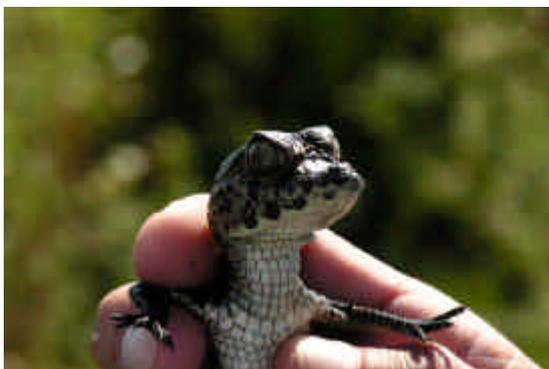
The next highlight is the first sighting of caymans. We discover them next to the dirt track. They're lying in the sun at the embankment and flee into the water when we come too close. They mainly feed on palometas, relatives of the piranhas, and of carrion. They never attack living mammals. We are enthusiastic about this caymans and take lots of fotos. But this is not enough. Carlos guides us to a little wood. We jump off the pickup, enter the wood. Here we face the most bloody wild animals you can meet in Argentine: mosquitos. Where are the repellents? In the truck, whereelse? Shit! No repellent

means vivid struggle with our arms while struggling forward in the wood. Here and there someone stumble because of the numerous holes – entrance to the cave of armadillos. Where the hell is gaucho Carlos? Finally the group joins together again. The first are staring to the top of the trees. Look there! A dark guy. A long grip-tail, four long limbs: Howler Monkeys. These are the guys who irritated us every night while anchoring near the coast. One of this monkeys we can see very well and to us sailors it seems to resemble Gregory Peck alias captain Ahab in the movie "Moby Dick". Back in the *estancia* all people start to add clothes. Why do we have such cold? It should be 30 or 40° C but the thermometer only shows horrible 10° C. I – Martin - wa sitting in t-shirt, shirt, fleeejacket, socks and warm shoes at the table waiting for dinner. There is no heating. What for? (In normal times.) But nevertheless we spent this evening in vivid friendship, talking and joking and are astonished about the high level of cooking which the three indian cooks offer.



**Next morning Marcos** joins us. We enter two pickups and drive to *Laguna Carambola*. The water is crystal-clear, extremely shallow and is impressing with its intensiv blue colour. The sun is shining bright but the air remains chilly. The sky shows cirrus-clouds which seems to be a prophecy of changing wheather. But the animals remain tourist-friendly and don't stop their activities. Once more we watch countless families of water-pigs and *yacarés* (caymans). Moving in little boats the animals do not reckonize that we are humans and we can encounter very close. Marcos catches a young cayman and we are very impressed of this little dragon. It seems to be fearless and grunts indignant about our impudence to catch it. After some shots we set him free again.

Birdlife is amazing too. Especially I am deeply fascinated of the Southern Screamer. When this birds rise their huge bodies in the air it is allways a deep impression to me. Terns are hunting for small or young fishes. The biggest specie we see is the Large-Billed Tern which we could already watch fishing at Río Paraná. In the lagoons you can find relatives to the aquarists Guppy but also a lot of other



species and some *Palometas* and *Piranhas*. Marcos explains that in the swamps are living five different species of Piranhas, four of them you can see at his *estancia*. If it is cold, the fish are not hungry and when they are not upset they are not dangerous. But if water temperature rises above 30° C he recommends not to hold one finger in this waters. Palometas and Piranhas are the most important pray of the *yacarés*. Two kinds of caymans are living in the swamps: the *Caiman latirostris* and somewhat smaller the *Caiman yacare*, the Black Cayman. We are roaming through the lagoon passing camalotes flowering in light blue and *aguapés* flowering darker with a touch of purple.

Encounting carpets of water-grasses we look for new bays and hidden places. The cameras are running and shooting. From time to time the little boat is struggling with its restless cargo but finally all amateur and professional photographers stay aboard.

Lunch is followed by a horseriding tour. After all Anke can sit on horseback again. My horse is somewhat thick-skinned. I like calm horses because of my little experience but if I cannot direct nor accelerate the horse I'm not very happy on horseback. The ride leads to meadows, through mans-high grown graslands, we are crossing ditches and watercourses, following the banks of swamps finally reaching another lagoon. On the *estancia* 32 lagoons and swamps are located. In normal conditions this is a water-surface of 4.000 ha. But today the conditions are very dry, a lot of the freshly green areas are a unusual impression of this landscape. Normally there are huge waters and lagoons everywhere. Starting to ride back I am – a big exception - riding in the front of the group. This means big luck because I catch a short view of an armadillo which is hurrying to reach the shelter of the nearby wood where it disappears in one of the countless holes.

**And again another day begins.**

Bad wheather reduces the possibility to see animals, so we have time for individual morning walks. We are lucky to discover that water-pigs can bark! It is a short bark and obviously they bark if they want to express some protest, but the sound is loud and clear. The rest of



the time we spent to admire the *estancias* bird-life: vivid loris and a breeding barn owl. And we have time to look over the shoulders of the *gaucho* who is preparing the *asado* for lunchtime. We get fried sausage, black pudding and various cuts of the classic *asado* with and without (!) bones. TV-Carlos makes the most of his time and films an interview. It's getting worse, now Anke will be seen on the TV-Screen as "tourism expert". And can you imagine – all this in spanish.

Then we start again to visit another lagoon. Short distance shots of caymans are planned! I am grumbling: I would prefer short distance shots of *Nandus* for example. On the bank Marcos grabs his fishing rod. He fixes a small piece of meat at the hook and with a short throw he starts fishing 20 meters off the bank. A short time later the first *Palometa* is hooked. It is a nice guy with a golden-yellowish disk-shaped body. But now his fate is sealed. He will serve as bait and is thrown near to a caymans mouth. First the *yacaré* hesitates but Marcos is drilling the line and such a nice yellow and goldish blinking movement no cayman can resist. Skilfully Marcos lures the animal next to the lens of Carlos' camera. After some lures Marcos looses the fish from the hook and the cayman gets its reward. But the shots are not finished. Again and again Marcos throws the bait, and again and again a *palometa* bites the hook. The *yacares* become more vivid and finally two of them participate in this play. They are very fast and vehement and we wonder why they do not try to hit Carlos' naked legs. Later Marcos explains that the temperature is too less and makes the caymans sluggish. But you have to beware of too much luring them. From time to time you have to give some reward or they become too aggressiv. The behaviour of the *piranhas* and *palometas* is similar. The problem of the classic *piranha* is its size. With one bite it can cause a severe wound or cut two fingers together.



But let this biting animals behind. Our excursion allows us to face some more friendly species. Again we see the omnipresent Screamer but also the Maguari stork. And the Southamerican Cormorant. Not far away we startle a Long-winged Harrier (*Circus buffoni*) off ist dry brunch which with a little sound of



anger rises to fly to another place and who on his way startles another bigger dark bird which settles promptly at the harriers brunch. It is rising and turning its neck and the wind is shaking the feathers at his throat what makes him a scurril non-natural appearance. We need some time to reckognize that this guy is a Tiger-Heron.

In breaknecking speed we change to another lagoon. We poor four people who sit on the pickups back are bouncing up and down and need all arms to fix ourselves. Then we are stalking near a very different lagoon. The water seems to be much more shallow and is spotted with many more than head-high and mostly oval-shaped reed-islands. Only a few

minutes passed by and Marcos discovers the first Marsh Deer while I - Martin - didn't see anything. Later when he announces the fourth deer I could find it too, a very potent male with big horns. Simultaneously with the disappearing deer the last daylight disappears too and we return to drink tea at the *estancias* guest-house.

But Marcos don't knows what's a nice calm evening. As soon as we have drunken the tea (or the beer) he offers a further trip. We hope to find an *anaconda* but we aren't succesfull. We only see lots of cayman eyes glowing just above waterlevel and a fox (*Zorro montana*) which instantly starts to hide away. Next to the houses door we nearly stumble over a giant toad. Its body shows a length of some 20 cm. Rosia one of the guests is deeply impressed that Anke takes this animal on her arms. The toad obviously don't like this and despite of several kisses from Anke it refuses to change to a prince (perhaps this only does work with frogs).



**The day after the other guests are leaving.** Marcos and his *gauchos* now have more time to spent with us. We hear a lot of interesting things. With its 13.000 ha the *estancia* „San Juan Poriahú“ is one of the bigger ones in province Corrientes. The roots lead back to a Jesuits foundation. In the 18th century the monks were driven off South America, economically they seemed to be too succesful and politically too independent and the land went to the crown, the state and was neglected. Later the land was divided and sold to the ancestors of the present *estancieros*. The building in which our guestrooms are located is a former Jesuits church. The walls are made from adobe built by the *Guaraní*-Indians, protegés of the Jesuits. All other buildings are younger but of similar size and shape which leads to the harmonic ensemble of the *estancia*.



For working properties Marcos owns 350 horses. The number includes some 50-60 riding horses, stallions, mares, fillies and youngsters which are necessary to educate. The working horses are splitted in three groups. One group is working one week, than it has two weeks off in the pasture to recreate. During wintertime the horses loose a lot of weight. Additional food is impossible because the cost of 1 Peso per horse and day is too expensive. First I am astonished but than I calculate and the result is an amazing amount of about 35.000 EUR a year. Any questions? This explains why the annual wheather conditions are so important for Argentine

*estancieros*. When the gras is growing poor the cattle can't bring a good profit. In the province of Corrientes one calculate one *gaucho* for 1.000 ha pasture or one *gaucho* for 500 cattle. Normally the work is done by 7, actually by 9 *gauchos* who earn more or less 1.000 Pesos a month. This means for 7 *gauchos* 22.700 EUR a year. Each *gaucho* owns some cattle too, usually 10 – 20, but the most hard-working *gaucho* owns nearly 140. This is a kind of bank-account for bad times. Inclusive cooks, housekeepers, *gauchos* and Marcos himself the *estancia* actually employes 13 persons. *Gauchos* work more or less independent and it is not uncommon that they spent some days alone somewhere on the land.



Our todays excursion leads close to the provincial road. Nowadays it is paved and with it's improvement problems started to rise: illegal hunters, poachers. They are mainly attracted by the water-pigs. Sometimes they cause harmless incidents like the story of three young people who came hunting by bikes. Marcos discovered the bicycles and took them. After that he looked for the sinners and let them choose to loose the bicycles or to work for the price of the shooted water-pig. They chosed work and finally they had to work equal to the double price of a *caivibara* because it should not only be for the meat but be a penalty.

A more severe story was of another hunting party. Three people again who were discovered by his youngest sixteen year old *gaucho*. One of this party shot at his boy. It was not clear if they did it intentionally or not. But this didn't matter. The circumstance that somebody had fired at one of his men did not allow any space for discussions. The boy could describe the hunters and Marcos knew their leader.

„My revenge was horrible.“

During the night he and his men went to the house of the poacher, a thirty year old man. Armed with a riot stick he entered the house. This mission runs better than expected. The sleeping man was taken by surprise. Under some hits he was torn out of bed and to the yard. He got quite a right trashing. The poacher and his mother who meanwhile appeared begged for mercy. For Anke and me it was interesting to see how rapid our opinions changed. In Germany this kind of acting would be unthinkable but here – if you are true to yourself – there is no other possibility. Police has rare possibilities to act preventive and police can not do anything if nothing serious happened. But for Marcos it is important to make himself respected by this kind of hunters and finally he has to stand in front of his own men.

Today we can make a second ride. Anke is happy and I am too. Only we two and with good horses we have a lot of fun. The anacondas still hide but we can watch some Ñandus! And during the evening we share some nice hours with Marcos. We watch some video-movies which are partly filmed at his *estancia*. A very impressive BBC-dokumentation of 1993 and an horrible (German) report. We meanwhile know the location and conditions and are surprised that it is possible to change a nothing of contence and information to such a phantastic story. The last tape ends with a nice surprise. First it makes some problems and runs with interruptions, but when the report has finished it works well while we don't dare to trust our eyes: A female dancer (extraordinary ornithologist) and a good friend of Marcos is dancing and starts stripping. When she spent the first days at his estancia she promised *if you show me a mane-wolf I will strip for you tonight*. At the same days evening she had to make her promise true. Somehow we assumed that life in the Argentine countryside would be much more prudish.

**The next day is the day of farewell.** Marcos changes his plans and insists on bringing ourselves to the boat. A 250 km distance drive. But on the way he can visit an exhibition and fairy of water-bufalos (who knows the right expression?) in Resistencia. We join him and after some time it is very hard to refuse buying some of this animals as a basic for our own breeding. After visting our boat Marcos starts extremely rapid and I have to stop him because we still have to pay our stay on his estancia. It seems that we changed from clients to friends and obviously for Marcos it is unpleasent to take money from friends.

So now we are aboard again. How life on a river plays and what happened since we left Rosario we will tell next time. But first of all we have to reach Asunción. Cross fingers.

Hugs and kisses

Martin + Anke

SY JUST DO IT, not far from Asunción on Rio Paraguay

P.S. In a few days you can see more pictures especially of wild animals on our homepage [www.justdoit.de.ki](http://www.justdoit.de.ki) (hopefully).

P.P.S.: I made a mistake with the picture size. Next time the file size will be smaller. I promise.

