



WETLANDS MAGIC



Many people automatically think of the Amazon as the place to view wildlife in South America. However, whilst the Amazon is fantastic for experiencing life in the rainforest, the actual density of the foliage provides its fauna with excellent cover making them difficult to observe. If you are a wildlife fan then the wetlands of South America are without doubt the most rewarding to visit and there's no better place than Los Llanos in Venezuela.



The vast Llanos region lies at the heart of Venezuela, covering an area of 300,000 square kilometres. It is an area of wide skies, slow rivers and plains stretching to every horizon. This is also Venezuela's Wild West - a land of hardy *llanero* cowboys driving massive herds of cattle across huge ranches. The Llanos are an incredible place to view wildlife and for anyone remotely interested in seeing animals in their natural habitats it is an absolute must. During the wet season from May to September/October, the rivers flood creating massive wetlands that explode with plant life.

If you are an avid birder then this is a great time to see a huge variety of birdlife. There are over 300 species to be found, although the rain, intense heat and flooding make the wet season a more difficult time to travel. It is mostly only the dedicated few that make the effort but they are all the more rewarded by the paradise they find. Travelling the flooded waterways by motorised canoe, you navigate with your guide cutting your engine to get closer to the birds perched in the branches of the trees poking out of the water. The scenery is spectacular at any time of year but in the wet the reflections of the sun on the water at sunset are even more amazing.

As the dry season begins the waters recede, making the months of November to April the best time to come here to see a vast diversity of animal life close up. Due to the wide open landscapes, mammals and birds can easily be spotted perched in trees, sunbathing on riverbanks, drinking from watering holes, running across the open plain, nesting or grazing. Huge flocks of birds such as scarlet ibises and egrets can be seen wading through the marshes, troops of howler monkeys bark in the trees above your head and caiman and Orinoco crocodiles lurk in the murky river waters. At this time of the year you can walk, take safari vehicle excursions or boat trips to view the wildlife. As always with life in the wild, nothing is ever certain but you have very real chances of getting incredibly close to a huge variety of species. It is a true natural paradise and simply the best location to view the spectacular range of animals and birds found in South America.

Staying and travelling to Los Llanos is an experience in itself. Easily accessed by a one hour flight from Caracas you fly to the main town in the area, Barinas, and then undertake a three hour bumpy ride into the Llanos. Accommodation is on working cattle farms, which are

called *hatos*. One of our favourites is Hato El Cedral which has been protecting its wildlife for over 25 years and not only offers you fantastic wildlife viewing but also gives you an insight into the lives of the *llaneros*. Accommodation is in comfortable air-conditioned en-suite cabins although it is not luxurious. There is a swimming pool and the kitchen produces hearty traditional llanos dishes - you may even get to try capybara! This is not only a haven for South American wildlife; if you are looking for a taste of adventure and something a little bit different Los Llanos will certainly not disappoint.

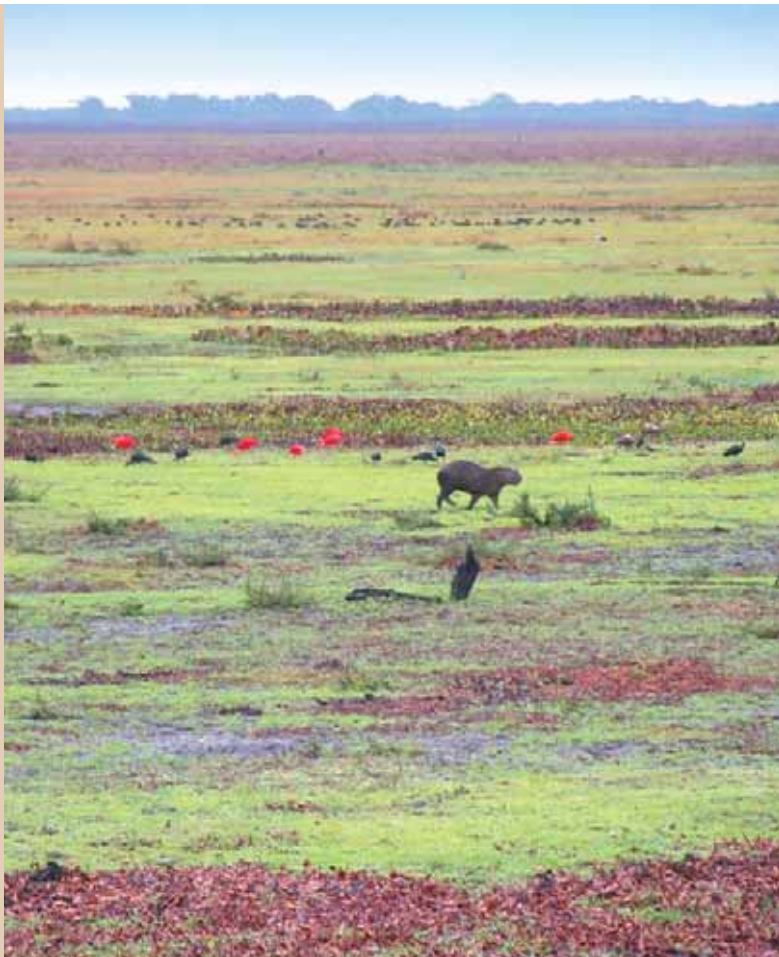
Mark Garrett & Anthony Lynch
Venezuela Specialists

FACT FILE

A two week trip to Venezuela costs from £2,900 per person including international flights, a visit to Angel Falls, and a relaxing beach stay in Los Roques. For details please contact Mark or Anthony on 01993 838 625.



Howler monkey



Bird Encounters

Some of the bird types you may expect to encounter in Los Llanos

Parrots, egrets, grebes, teal, kites, cormorants, raptors, plovers, sandpipers, macaws, terns, flycatchers, warblers, cuckoos, owls, herons, kingfishers, hummingbirds, tanagers, cardinals, finches, Jabiru storks, spoonbills, woodpeckers, eagles, ibis, ducks, hawks and much more...



Animal Encounters

Some of the animals you may expect to encounter in Los Llanos

Capybara, caiman, howler monkeys, snakes (including anacondas), giant anteaters, armadillos, deer, burrowing owls, foxes, iguanas, turtles, piranhas, bush dogs, racoons, coati, tapir, opossum, ocelots, jaguars, margays, pumas and river dolphins.