

Hot this month James Spader, coffee art, reggae Pilates, talking statues, rooftop circus

American Airlines 

American Way

JANUARY 2018



**SAVING
BRAZIL'S
JAGUARS**

**BEHIND THE
SCENES OF
SUNDAY NIGHT
FOOTBALL**

**EN VOGUE IN
AUCKLAND**

**HONEY, I
SHRUNK TIMES
SQUARE***

**and the
Eiffel Tower
and the Roman
Colosseum, too*

**“I HAD
DREAMS
OF GOING
TO THE
OLYMPICS”**

**MOM ACTRESS
ALLISON JANNEY
ON HER FIRST
PASSION**

ONE-MAN BAND

*Nick Jonas is
building a solo career
on his own terms*

JAGUAR



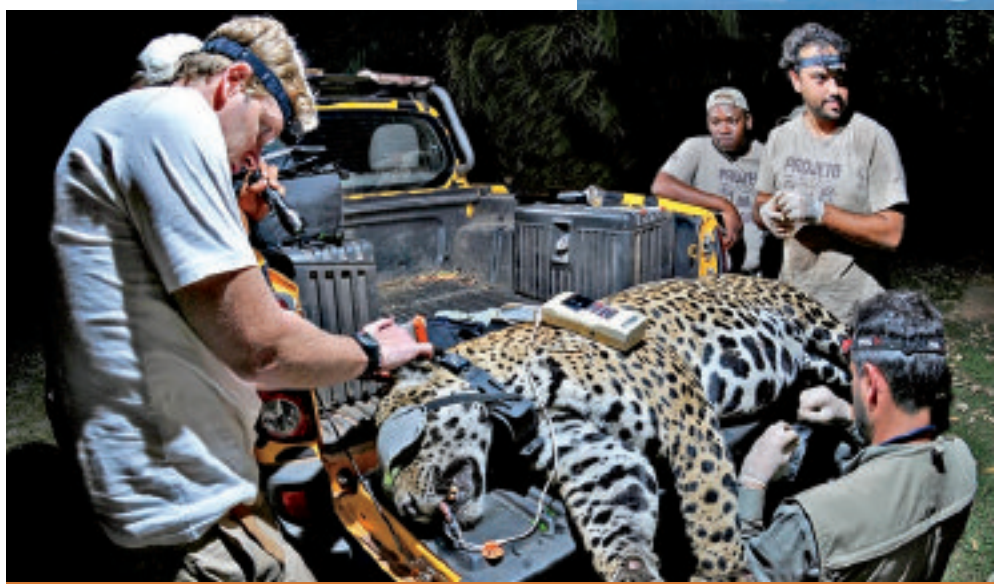
Mário Haberfeld in the marshy grasslands of Brazil's Pantanal. Right: A jaguar stalks a pond's shoreline at night for prey such as caiman and capybara

DREAMS

HOW RACE CAR
DRIVER MÁRIO
HABERFELD
IS TURNING
ECOTOURISM ON
ITS HEAD TO
PROTECT BRAZIL'S
JAGUARS

Words **BILL KEARNEY**
Photography **ADRIANO GAMBARINI**





THE SHADOW OF THE JEEP STRETCHES across arid grassland as we speed down a dirt cattle road. Mário Haberfeld, a 41-year-old former Formula 3 race car driver, is at the wheel—not that he’s taking any risks with a cargo of seven ecotourists in the open-topped vehicle—but he’s pressing the gas pedal with more urgency after receiving a radio call a few minutes back.

The land we’re rumbling across is part of the 130,965-acre Caiman Ecological Refuge, a luxury ecotourism property in Brazil’s Pantanal, the world’s largest tropical wetland, a vast land of savanna and brush slightly larger than England that floods every spring with seasonal rains, and boasts a robust free-range cattle industry during the dry season. It’s also brim-



“PEOPLE THOUGHT WE WERE CRAZY, IT’S IMPOSSIBLE, THEY’LL EAT YOU ALIVE.”

ming with wildlife. If you didn’t know any better, you might confuse it for Africa’s Serengeti.

We pull up 20 yards in front of a large cement pipe. To the west, 50 or so wild pig-like peccary mince across a field. Cattle loiter to the east. Haberfeld kills the engine. “In the pipe,” he says. We all peer in. At first I see nothing, but then the jaguar turns its head, the low sun catching the jawline, teeth the size of my thumb. Hundreds of birds in the surrounding scrub continue with their banter. Life goes on

as if the cat is not there, a heavyweight ghost.

“It’s Fera—that’s ‘Beast’ in Portuguese,” Haberfeld whispers. “She’s almost four now, 145 pounds.” A few years ago, the notion of a jeep full of humans gawking at a relaxed wild jaguar from mere yards away was unthinkable; The largest cats of the Americas, jaguars are among the most elusive animals on the planet. But Haberfeld’s Onçafari Project, a bold initiative that aims to save jaguars in Brazil by making them the superstars of safari-style ecotourism, has started to change all that. Now, six years after they launched the initiative, they just need to change the minds of the men who have long been hell-bent on killing these animals.

The last red pinch of sun disappears below the horizon and Fera slinks out of the pipe. She surveys her surroundings, glancing our way, then sniffs the breeze and makes her way under a wire fence. Farther on, she rolls over like a house cat, then walks an S-pattern through the brush to some place she’d rather be. Odds are she’ll kill something tonight. “Maybe one of the peccary,” says Haberfeld.

Top: Haberfeld (left) and Onçafari Project biologists attach a GPS collar to a jaguar and conduct bloodwork. Above: The Pantanal, in western Brazil, is slightly larger than England

PREVIOUS PAGE PHOTO: MARIO HABERFELD; SIDEBAR: SHELLIE FRAI



AMERICA'S LOST CATS

In the U.S., jaguars are all but non-existent, but they could make a comeback if given the chance

Though jaguars once ranged well into America's Southwest, the last known female cat in the U.S. was killed in Arizona's White Mountains in 1963, ending any hope of a sustainable population. Now protected under the Endangered Species Act, a total of six male jaguars have roamed north from Mexico since 1996. Researchers think they travel along mountain chains known as "sky islands," which rise from the desert to create high-altitude forests containing prey such as deer and peccary. In an effort to understand these migrations, the Northern Jaguar Project has installed cameras along the 120-mile route and pays ranchers \$270 for photos of cats taken on their property. The response has been mixed—Corazon, a female, was poisoned on a private ranch just north of a reserve in Mexico. The most famous jaguar to make the trek is a El Jefe (The Boss), a large male who hunted the Santa Rita Mountains south of Tucson from 2011 to 2016. Though no one knows why he disappeared, or if he's still alive, El Jefe's story exemplifies the complexity of a jaguar comeback in the U.S., where a proposed border wall would halt wildlife migrations. As Rob Peters, senior Southwest representative of Defenders of Wildlife, says, "It would be the end of any hope that jaguars can naturally re-establish themselves in the U.S."

It's dark now. Haberfeld starts the jeep. "Put these on," he says and hands me goggles. I soon find out why—as we cruise the dirt road our faces pass through mists of bugs (you quickly learn to keep your mouth shut). Lilian Rampim, an Onçafari Project biologist, sweeps a spotlight out into the fields, searching for the eyes of crab-eating foxes, giant anteaters, wild pigs or even another jaguar. We stop to watch an ocelot, diminutive compared to Fera, crouched near a creek. "She catches fish here," says Haberfeld. "She comes here almost every night."

As we drive on, Haberfeld explains that the jaguars of the Pantanal are bigger than those in the Amazon (males here can reach 308 pounds, versus 143 in the jungle), in part because there is so much food—in addition to peccary they take down wild pigs, deer, armadillo and even plunge underwater to kill six-foot alligator-like caiman. Jaguars today occupy about half their natural range, which once extended from the Grand Canyon in Arizona to northern Argentina. Strongholds include the Amazon basin and

the Pantanal, but with the Amazon deforestation rate increasing 24 percent since last year, the Pantanal is a crucial bastion for the big cats. Here at Caiman Refuge, the Onçafari Project has put radio collars on 10 cats while another 90 or so use the property as part of their range, crossing paths with 30,000 head of cattle. That's where Haberfeld's real challenges lie.

Though hunting jaguars has been outlawed in Brazil since 1997, it's not uncommon for cowboys and landowners to shoot these predators on sight. "People associate jaguars with losing money," says Rampim. "They are seen as the villain." Rampim learned how deep such feelings ran when, a few years ago, she gave a conservation presentation to local ranchers: "If they had had eggs in their hands, they would have thrown them in my face."

Haberfeld's plan is not to see existing laws enforced, but to make these ranchers start looking at the big predators as profit drivers. He has made this aim his life's work, transitioning from the raucous world of race car driving to the slow-paced rhythms of the Pantanal. >



GROWING UP IN A PROSPEROUS SUBURB of São Paulo, Haberfeld was obsessed with speed. If he could get his hands on a scooter or dune buggy, he was going to make it go faster than his brothers could. In 1989, when he was 12 years old, his father took the family to one of the wildest places on Earth: Ngorongoro Crater in Tanzania's Serengeti National Park, a 12-mile-wide volcanic bowl filled with lions, zebras, elephants, hippos and gazelles. "That trip is where it all started," he says.

Even so, the boy's passion for racing endured. He would attend family friend Nelson Piquet's Formula 1 races and marvel at the power and pace of the cars. His father gave him a go-kart, and he became a national champion, turning pro at age 13. When he was 18, he abandoned his studies in mechanical engineering to chase racing dreams in England. Things went well. He won the British Formula 3 Championship in 1998. He went on to race Indy cars all over the world, but always carved out time to escape to

Africa each year for safaris.

Now, as Haberfeld slows the jeep to check out another pair of eyes, it's hard to imagine two more disparate pursuits than tearing around international racing circuits and sitting here under the stars, staring silently at a 350-pound tapir nipping fruit from a tree.

"It was difficult when I first tried to stop," he says of his decision to quit racing. "For three or four years, I missed it really bad. It got to the point that I wouldn't even watch anymore, because it made me want to race. I knew I had to turn the page." His last race was Monza, Italy, in 2008.

ON OUR SECOND DAY IN THE PANTANAL, we pull up alongside a marsh and find Isa, Fera's sister, lounging 30 yards off the road, snapping at mosquitos. She picks up a caiman carcass and yanks a strip of muscle from the tail. "They like the tail of the caiman," says Rampim. "They have tastes, just like us. There is so much food, they can

Fera, shortly after emerging from the pipe where she'd been having a catnap. In the distance, off-camera, a pack of peccary root through a field



actually choose what they want to eat.”

Which brings us back to the 30,000 meaty and not particularly nimble head of free-range cattle in the area. “When you have jaguars, you have some problems with cattle,” admits Haberfeld. “But from all our studies, we found that jaguars kill between 1 and 1.5 percent of the stock in a year.” Rampim jumps in. “If the owner of a place loses 300 cattle in a year, it’s just one percent, so for him, it’s nothing.” Haberfeld and his team have been working to bolster this argument—to convince ranchers that a jaguar is worth more alive than dead. By adding high-end jaguar-focused ecotourism lodges to their vast ranches, the idea goes, landowners make money on both cattle and cats, and the jaguars survive.

Before he could put these theories into practice, Haberfeld had to gain the cooperation of the cats. To do this, he turned to a process known as habituation—incremental familiarization between humans and animals. He had seen it firsthand in Africa, often with friend and guide Simon Bellingham, as safari jeeps approached prides of lions without spooking them. After retiring from racing, Haberfeld set out to study ecotourism operations around the world. When he and Bellingham first visited the Caiman Refuge to make observations, they found that guests would rave about the diversity of wildlife here, but express disappointment in not seeing an apex predator. “The jaguar was the missing link,” he says. He and Bellingham hatched the idea to habituate them. “People thought we were crazy, that it’s impossible, they’ll eat you alive.”

All the same, they gave it a shot. Caiman Refuge agreed to be a case study, and the two men spent a straight month there in search of the cats. “We would sleep two hours a day and spend the rest of the time driving, tracking, hoping to see a glimpse,” says Haberfeld. They got a break when local cowboys tipped them off about a cow kill in an open field. They staked it out from a distance, using binoculars to spy a mature female move in to feed at dusk. “When she started eating, we’d move five feet forward in the car. She would stand. We would stop. Luckily, she came back to that carcass three days in a row. By the third day, we were much closer.” They tracked her to another kill and repeated the process. By the time the cat was done they had the jeep within 16 yards, and named her Esperança, or “Hope.”

Other jaguars proved to be more difficult, so Haberfeld and Bellingham took to leaving the jeep near a carcass at night. The next night they’d leave the radio on. The night after that, they’d leave the engine running. Eventually the cats relaxed. “Simon gave me this example,”

says Haberfeld. “If you walk out the door and see a UFO, you’re going to run. But if it’s there every day, you’re going to say, ‘So what?’ Your kids are going to be born with that there, so they’re not even going to look up.” Several of the cats have had litters, and today Onçafari has 20 habit-

“WE HAVE A CULTURE IN THE PANTANAL. IF A COWBOY KILLS A JAGUAR, HE’S THE MAN, YOU KNOW?”

uated females. (They don’t work with males because they wander further afield, and habituation would put them in danger.) The experiment has worked: In 2012, only seven percent of Caiman Refuge visitors saw jaguars. By 2016, 72 percent of guests were able to see the big cats, with a 95 percent success rate in the dry season.

SIX YEARS INTO ITS ENDEAVORS, THE Onçafari Project continues to drive home its economic message, but ranchers are still a wild card. There may be compelling financial reasons for landowners to work with the project, but it will take time to overcome attitudes that have been handed down through generations. “We have a culture in the Pantanal—if a cowboy kills a jaguar, he’s the man, you know?” says Onçafari field guide Mario Nelson Cleto. “He’s macho,” adds Brazilian photographer Adriano Gambarini, who’s photographed jaguars here and in the Amazon. “He gets respect.”

Haberfeld, however, insists that the ranchers of the Pantanal are above all businessmen, and that the bottom line will ultimately prevail. “In 10 or 20 years, the dream would be to go to a ranch where nowadays they’re killing jaguars, but by then the guy will understand, ‘Wow, I’m losing money by killing these cats.’ You get some older guy who grew up killing jaguars—it’s going to be hard to change his mind. It’s more likely we change his son’s.”

A case in point is Cleto, a lanky 25 year old with a big smile who comes from a long line of local cowboys. He tells me of the moment he told his grandfather about taking a job with Onçafari. “He cried out in disappointment,” he recalls. “‘Come on, you are working *for* jaguars?! That’s ridiculous.’” >



Cleto saw nothing wrong with killing the cats when he was a cowboy, but when he first encountered Esperança and her cubs, he says, “I saw them as a family, not as monsters.” His father still works cattle, but even his opinions are shifting. “My mother shows him Onçafari pictures that I post on Facebook and he’s proud. He says, ‘Hey, that’s my son!’ That’s what’s changed his mind about the whole process.”

Rampim is happy to note that, after one recent presentation where she offered data on the jaguars’ economic impact (85 percent of Caiman Refuge clients choose the lodge for its high rate of jaguar sightings, and spend

“WHAT WE’RE DOING HERE COULD HAVE AN IMPACT ON GENERATIONS OF CONSERVATION.”

about \$7,000 a head to do so), “I got five, six business cards of farmers who were saying, ‘I want that on my land.’” While no one has committed yet to building an expensive ecolodge, there has been a marked improvement in relationships. “At first, the cowboys hated us,” Rampim says. “They didn’t like the fact that we came from outside. But now we’re friends. Our cowboys who work here at Caiman tell us the places where jaguars are being killed elsewhere.”

WE HEAD OUT AT NIGHT FOR ONE LAST chance at a sighting. As Haberfeld swings the spotlight, I ask him whether he misses the prestige and thrills of his previous career. “Racing is a selfish sport,” he replies. “It’s a selfish thing. I believe what we’re doing here today could have an impact on generations of conservation, which is good for everyone—for animals, for people. So if you said to me, ‘Hey, tomorrow they’re racing Formula 1 in Monza. You can come and race, or be here in Brazil and see a jaguar,’ hands down I’d rather be here. But it took time for me to understand what I really felt.”

Over the next knoll, the light catches a set of eyes, which quickly disappear into a hedge-row. After a minute, an animal emerges—too big to be a fox—and ambles across the field below us, then stops and looks back toward the bushes. We flick the spotlight on and see it’s a big female jaguar. A moment later, a smaller cat, an adolescent cub, sprints her way, catches up and nuzzles into her side. Haberfeld checks the mother’s dot patterns against a website database. “That’s Nusa. She’s relaxed, but you see her cub is still reluctant. Today is the first time I’ve seen her. Her mother called her to come out. It will take a few times for her to understand.” Nusa tests the air with her nose and sets off at an easy trot, her cub at her hip, both moving with grace. “Tonight is a big step,” Haberfeld says, watching as the cats slip from the moonlight into the darkness of the next tree line. **AW**

Left: Haberfeld on one of the Mitsubishi jeeps used to find jaguars. Above: Pandhora and Suricata, daughters of Esperança