

Campo Iris Reserve, Alto Chaco National Parks, and the Central Chaco



The Chaco, occupying 61% of the surface area of Paraguay, is one of the wildest places left on the planet. The Lower and Central Chaco is characterized by its vast ranches, palm forests, and salt lagoons, the Dry Chaco is characterized by its very dry climate with areas of ever-shifting sand dunes, dense thorny vegetations and innumerable cactus of varying sizes. This area is also important as the last battles of the Chaco War were fought there and remains of the war are still visible.

The Teniente Enciso National Park occupies 40,000 hectares, with a visitors lodge with running hot/cold water and kitchen facilities. Médanos del Chaco National Park contains 550,000 hectares and is located along the Bolivian border. The Defensores del Chaco National Park is located further north and occupies 750,000 hectares, also containing a visitors lodge with running hot/cold water and kitchen facilities. Cerro León, an obscure flat-topped hill in the middle of the plains of the Chaco, is located within Defensores del Chaco National Park. In 2008, Guyra Paraguay signed a co-management agreement to work with the Government to protect some of these northern national parks.

The Chaco is famous for its diversity of birdlife, as it is a popular stopover place for migratory species. During the migration season in September and October, it is easy to observe large congregations of shorebirds, such as yellowlegs, sandpipers, phalaropes, and even the Hudsonian Godwit. Also, the Central Chaco offers the opportunity to observe the Chilean Flamingo, which inhabits the area throughout the year. Although the Chaco is rich in avian life, it is also easy to observe mammals along the side of the road, looking for a clear area to wander. It is not unusual to stumble upon armadillos, Plains Viscachas, Chaco Maras, Gray Brocket Deer, Tucu-tuco, and, with a little luck, pumas and the Chacoan Peccary.



Lodging in the Chaco



In the Central Chaco, Loma Plata and Filadelfia offer comfortable hotels with comfortable beds, running hot/cold water, private bathrooms, and different restaurant options. Although they are not luxurious, these hotels are reputable and offer good service. In the Dry Chaco, Teniente Enciso National Park has a visitors lodge with space available for large groups. The rooms are shared, as are the bathroom

facilities, although there is one suite with private bath. There is running hot/cold water and kitchen facilities, as well as having a 2 km walking trail just meters away. In Madrejón, Defensores del Chaco National Park has a visitors lodge with space available for large groups, as well as a research station suitable for visiting researchers. The rooms are shared, but there is running water, an artificial watering hole close by for viewing wildlife, and several walking trails.

Chaco

The Central Chaco has recorded 370 species of Dry Chaco birdlife, migratory nearctic birds, as well as aquatic birds. Amongst the aquatic species easily viewed are flocks of the Flamingo, White-winged Coot, and the Coscoroba Swan amongst 17 other duck species. During the migration season, it is easy to observe large congregations of shorebirds, such as yellowlegs, sandpipers, phalaropes, even the Hudsonian Godwit!



Terrestrial and bush species are also very common in the Dry Chaco. Among 17 endemic Chaco species are the following:

- Chaco Chachalaca
- Black-legged Seriema
- Cream-backed Woodpecker
- Black-bodied Woodpecker (near-threatened)
- Scimitar-billed Woodcreeper
- Great Rufous Woodcreeper
- Chaco Earthcreeper
- Crested Hornero
- Crested Gallito
- Cinereous Tyrant
- Many-colored Chaco-finch



The Mennonite fields are excellent for spotting some of the seven different species of tinamous recorded in the area, the Brushland Tinamou, the White-bellied Nothura, and the Spotted Tinamou, which some have claimed is its own species: Chaco Nothura.

At night, armed with a spotlight, the visitors will explore the area looking for nightjars, such as the Scissor-tailed Nightjar, and the endemic Chaco Owl. The exploration doesn't stop with

birdwatching, however, as it is possible to observe armadillos, foxes, Geoffroy's Cat, and the Gray Brocket Deer.

Mammals also make their presence known during the daytime, as much on the asphalted roads as on the dirt roads. As well as those already mentioned, there are numerous weasels and peccaries, and, with a little luck, a Tapir or a Giant Anteater. Various reptiles are also found in

the area, such as snakes, lizards, and turtles, although, unfortunately, many are observed as roadkill along the Transchaco Highway.

In the Dry Chaco, the Campo Iris Reserve and the two national parks bordering it have 250 recorded avian species, along with the 17 Chaco endemic species, some of the common birds are the following:

- Ovenbirds
- Woodcreepers
- Band-winged Nightjar
- White-tipped Plantcutter
- Black-crested Finch
- Crowned Eagle

Although this region is rich in avian life, it is also easy to observe mammals along the side of the road, looking for a clear area to wander. It is not unusual to stumble upon armadillos, Plains Viscachas, Chaco Maras hopping along the highway, tapirs, Gray Brocket Deer, Tucu-tuco, and, with a little luck, pumas and the Chacoan Peccary, which was once known only through fossils before being “rediscovered” in 1975.



CAMPO IRIS RESERVE – DRY CHACO

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