

Behaviour



An observation of water-bathing in Chaco Peccary

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Three species of peccary (Tayassuidae) are sympatric in the Paraguayan Dry Chaco: Collared peccary *Pecari tajacu*, White-lipped peccary *Tayassu pecari* and the endangered Chaco endemic Chaco peccary *Parachoerus wagneri* (Taber 1991). The latter was known only from fossil remains until its remarkable rediscovery alive in the Paraguayan Chaco (Wetzel et al. 1975) and it also occurs marginally into the Chaco of Bolivia and Argentina (Mayer & Wetzel 1986, Maffei et al. 2008, Torres et al. 2016). The species was initially classified in the genus *Catagonus* Ameghino, 1904 until it was recently reassigned to *Parachoerus* Rusconi, 1930 (Dutra et al. 2017).

Observations of individuals are very rare in the wild. Here I provide details of a wild individual bathing under natural conditions.

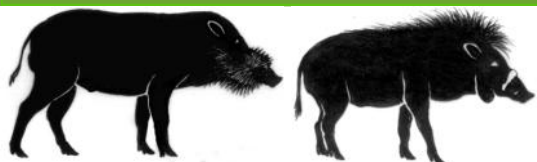
At around 9 am on 3 December 2018 a Chacoan peccary *Catagonus wagneri* was seen bathing in a puddle on the Transchaco Road at km 670 close to the entrance to Parque Nacional Teniente Enciso, Boquerón department, Paraguay. The habitat here is the typical xeric, low thorn forest of this region of the Paraguayan Chaco. The weather was warm and sunny, and the area had experienced heavy rain in the days previous. Though this is usually a social species, only one

individual was observed. The puddle was in the road, but close to the roadside and a couple of metres from forest cover. The animal was seen emerging from the forest close to the puddle. It then subsequently lay on its side, piloerecting, and moving the body rapidly in a squirming motion to cover itself with mud and water, pausing occasionally but without changing



Chaco peccaries (*Catagonus wagneri*). Photo: P. Smith





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sides. Throughout the observation drops of water could be seen being cast up into the air by the motion. Unfortunately the animal was disturbed after fifteen seconds by a passing motorbike and returned to the forest.

Much of the natural history information we have for the Chaco Peccary is based on captive studies (Mayer & Wetzel 1986, Benirschke 1993), so wild behavioural observations are worthy of note. Water bathing in this species is apparently rare, with dust-bathing more frequent (Mayer & Wetzel 1986, Taber et al. 1993) and probably opportunistic.

With accelerating habitat destruction in the Chaco now reaching emergency levels (Caballero et al. 2014), additional information on the biology of this species is essential in order to adequately understand its conservation requirements (Altrichter et al. 2016b). A plan for the conservation of the species is in place (Altrichter et al. 2016a), but is complicated by the fact that only 46% of the entire Gran Chaco is suitable for habitation of the species, and of this suitable area just 12% is protected. The long term conservation of the species is still far from secure.

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