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SHORT COMMUNICATION

Diet of the ocelot, *Leopardus pardalis* (Carnivora: Felidae), in the Neotropical region: a review analysis and new data from central Brazil

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ABSTRACT. This study reports new data on the diet of the ocelot, *Leopardus pardalis*, in the Brazilian Cerrado, and reviews the literature data on the diet of the species in the Neotropical region, based on 22 studies. One hundred and twenty-one vertebrate species, in addition to arthropods and plants, are consumed. The highest diversity of prey items, mainly small mammals, was revealed by scat analysis, the most common method used. Analysis of road killed specimens also revealed new dietary records. The wide prey selection, influenced by availability and habitat, enables the ocelot to thrive despite environmental disturbances. This dietary flexibility underscores the importance of diverse sampling methods to fully understand ocelot feeding behavior and habitat needs.

KEYWORDS. Feeding behavior, rodents, scat, small prey, stomach.

Felids are top predators and play an important role in regulating vertebrate prey populations within ecosystems (Eisenberg 1989). The ocelot, *Leopardus pardalis* (Linnaeus, 1758), is one of the 15 felid species that occur in the Neotropics (Nagy-Reis et al. 2020, Nascimento et al. 2021). The ocelot, a medium-sized spotted cat, weighing from 7 to 16 kg (Emmons and Feer 1997), is widely distributed throughout the Neotropics, from southern Texas, USA, to northern Argentina (Paviolo et al. 2015). Due to its wide distribution and ecological importance, the ocelot is one of the most studied felids in the Neotropical region.

The ocelot's diet includes prey with wide variation in size, from small animals (< 100 g), such as mice, to relatively large prey (> 25 kg), such as the Pampas deer (Abreu et al. 2008, Bianchi et al. 2010, 2013). However, studies on the diet of the ocelot are primarily based on scat analysis (Emmons 1987, Tirelli et al. 2019), with limited information derived from the examination of stomach content. Additionally, most studies have been conducted in tropical and subtropical regions (Bisbal 1986, Bianchi et al. 2013, Tirelli et al. 2019). In this study, we review the literature on ocelot diet and present new information on the composition of the diet of *L. pardalis* in the Cerrado of central Brazil, based on digestive tract analysis.

We searched for publications on ocelot diet using the keywords "ocelot" OR "Leopardus" AND "diet" OR "feeding behavior" OR "prey" in major scientific databases: SciELO, Scopus, and Web of Science, with no predefined timeline. Additionally, we examined the digestive tracts of two road-killed ocelots collected on highways in central Brazil. They

were collected under the permit of Instituto Chico Mendes de Conservação da Biodiversidade (ICMBio 82643-1) and were deposited in the Coleção de Mamíferos of the Universidade Estadual de Goiás (CMUEG). Specimens collected included one adult female (CMUEG 272) collected on highway GO-206, in the municipality of Quirinópolis (-18,507778°, -50,807222°, WGS 84 datum); and one adult male (CMUEG 271) collected on highway GO-341, in the municipality of Mineiros (-17,918028°, -53,004639°, WGS 84 datum), both in southern Goiás state.

Based on the scientific literature and data from the road-killed specimens collected, we list the items in the ocelot's diet, including records of prey species across different biomes in the neotropics. The taxonomic nomenclature followed Abreu et al. (2024) and Mammal Diversity Database (2024) for mammals, Frost (2024) for amphibians, and Uetz et al. (2024) for reptile species. Additionally, we present the number of prey species (hereafter 'prey richness') according to sample type (behavior, scat, and stomach), prey groups (plant, crab, insect, fish, amphibian, bird, reptile, and mammal), and mammalian orders. We constructed a bipartite graph where rectangles represent the number of articles reporting each prey group associated with each sample type, with the width proportional to the number of interactions. The graphs were created through the 'bipartite' package (Dormann et al. 2009) in the R environment (R Core Team 2022).

Our review identified 22 research articles documenting 121 vertebrate species in the diet of ocelot throughout the Neotropical region. Most species consumed (103 out of 121) were mammals, followed by birds and reptiles (eight species each), and amphibians (two species). Additionally, two studies reported the ingestion of decapod arthropods, five studies noted insect ingestion (orders Coleoptera and Orthoptera), and eight studies included plant items (Appendix 1). Most studies were conducted in tropical and subtropical forests (82%, n = 18). Ocelots were recorded consuming between 1 and 38 different species, per study (Fig. 1). In the digestive tract of the road-killed male from central Brazil,

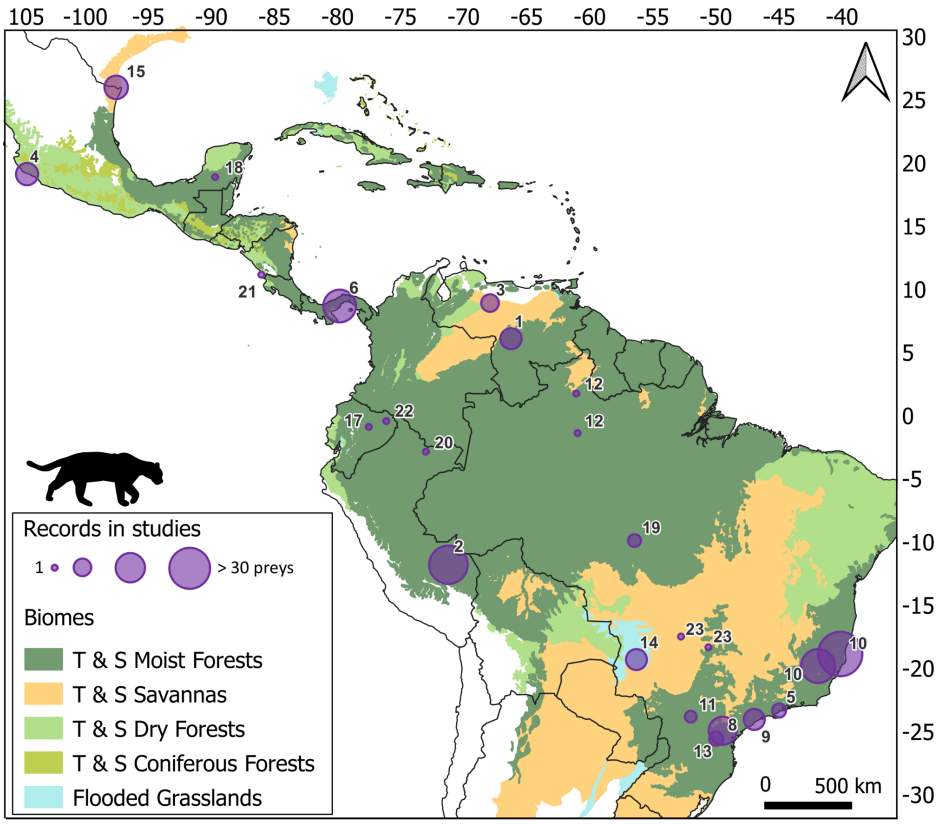

Figure 1. Distribution of studies on the diet and feeding habits of the ocelot, *Leopardus pardalis*, in the Neotropical region. The size of the circles represents the number of species in the ocelot's diet. The numbers correspond to the references in Appendix 1 and Supplementary Table S1.

we identified parts of naked-tailed armadillos *Cabassous* sp.; giant ameiva, *Ameiva ameiva* (Linnaeus, 1758); and the snake *Apostolepis* sp. In the digestive track of a female ocelot we examined parts of a white-eared opossum, *Didelphis albiventris* Lund, 1840. *Ameiva ameiva* is common in the diet of ocelots (Bianchi and Mendes 2007, Bianchi et al. 2010). In contrast, *Apostolepis* sp. and *Cabassous* sp. had not been previously reported as part of the ocelot's diet.

Fecal analysis (scat) was the most common method for studying ocelot diet and yielded the greatest number of identified species (min = 10, max = 38, median = 18.5 species per study), followed by stomach content analysis (min = 1, max = 18, median = 2.5 species per study; Fig. 2A). Mammals were the most taxonomically diverse group in the diet of ocelots (Fig. 2B), with studies reporting up to 24 species (min = 1, max = 24, median = 7 species per study). An association between prey groups and sample types indicated that scat samples were linked with all prey groups, whereas behavioral observations were specifically associated with the ingestion of plants and mammals (Fig. 2C). Rodents were the most common order in the diet of the ocelot, with 50 species, followed by Didelphimorphia, with 16 species (Fig. 2D).

The diversity of dietary items across the Neotropical region underscores the dietary plasticity and opportunis-

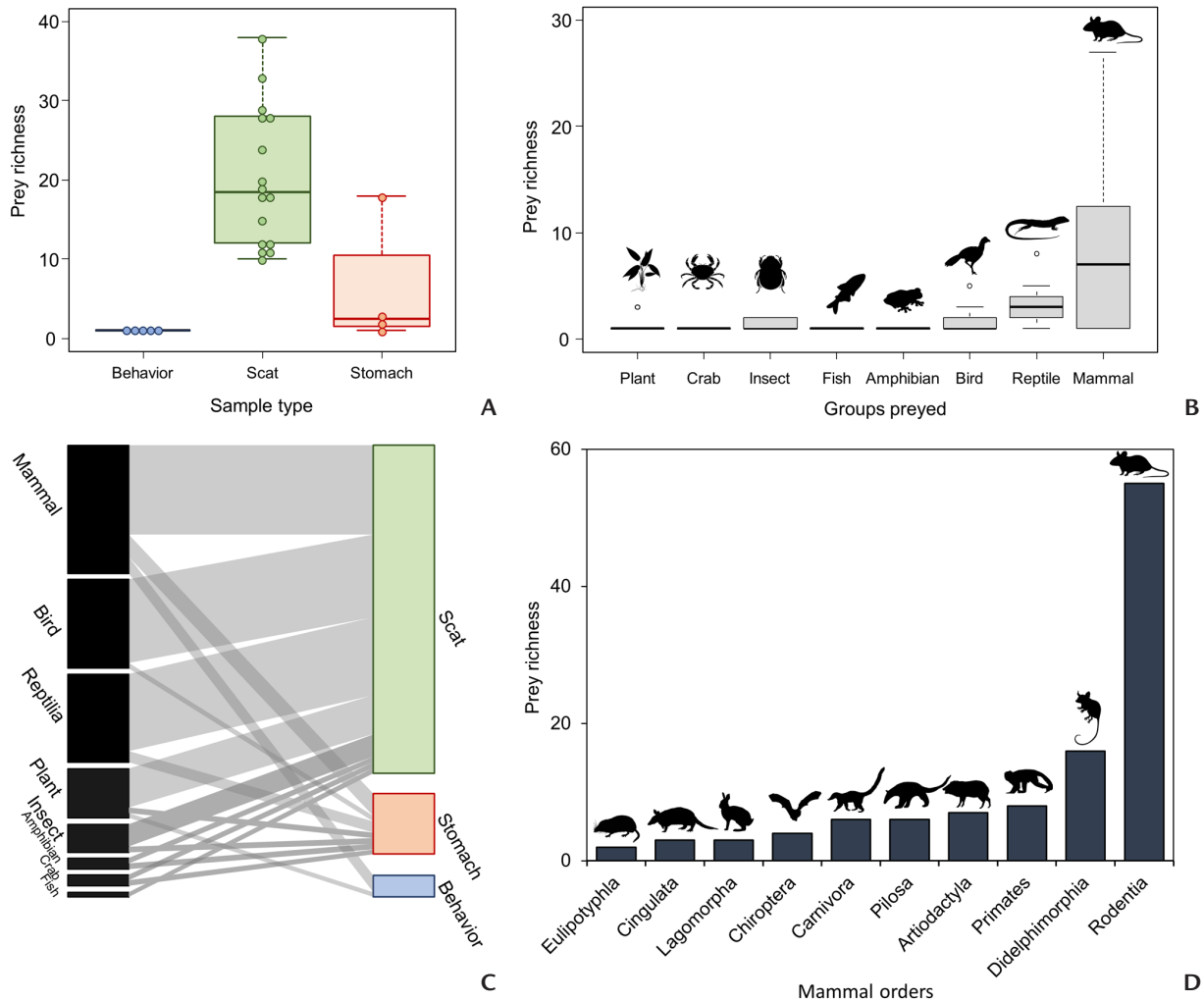

Figure 2. Number of species in the diet of ocelots, *Leopardus pardalis*, in the Neotropical region: (A) Median and quantiles of prey richness by sample type; (B) prey richness across different prey groups; (C) interaction between prey groups and sample types; and (D) prey richness across mammalian orders. Silhouette according PhyloPic – free silhouette images of organisms, version 2.0 (https://www.phylopic.org/).

tic hunting behavior of the ocelot (Bisbal 1986, Emmons 1987, Silva-Pereira et al. 2011, Macas-Pogo et al. 2023). This adaptability and the abundance of prey species allow ocelots to persist across various habitats despite anthropogenic disturbances within their range. Mammals represent the primary prey group, accounting for over 96% of the samples, followed by reptiles and birds (Abreu et al. 2008, Meza et al. 2002, Wang 2002, Bianchi et al. 2013). Arthropods and plants have also been documented in the ocelot's diet (Bisbal 1986, Emmons 1987, Farrel et al. 2000, Meza et al. 2002, Moreno et al. 2006, Bianchi and Mendes 2007, Bianchi et al. 2010), consistent with their opportunistic feeding habits. Moreover, three feline species, including the ocelot, have been observed consuming wild rice (*Oryza latifolia* Desv.), which may provide both fiber and pharmacological benefits. This grass species shows promise for enrichment programs in captivity, as wild felids may utilize it as a form of self-medication (Montalvo et al. 2020).

Most studies on the ocelot diet have relied on fecal analysis, making scat the primary method for assessing dietary composition and feeding frequency in carnivores (Klare et al. 2011). Millions of animals, however, are lost to roadkill annually (Grilo et al. 2018), and these may be a valuable source of specimens in educational and scientific collections (Alvarez and Loretto 2021). As demonstrated here, stomach contents of roadkill can provide additional insights into dietary patterns. Direct observations (behavior-based studies) typically reveal occasional predation events, but can also provide rare records, such as an ocelot preying on a Linnaeus's two-toed sloth *Choloepus didactylus* (Delibes et al. 2011) or instances of ingesting plant items like wild rice. Conversely, predators can sometimes become prey, as demonstrated by a jaguar, *Panthera onca* (Linnaeus, 1758), killing an ocelot (Perera-Romero et al. 2021). Moreover, these observations offer valuable insights into predation timing and feeding behavior.

Small rodents and marsupials are the most diverse group of mammalian prey, reflecting both their availability and the ocelot's opportunistic strategy (Bisbal 1986, Emmons 1987, Meza et al. 2002, Bianchi et al. 2013). In southeastern Brazil, ocelots frequently prey on black capuchin monkeys, *Sapajus nigritus* (Goldfuss, 1809), likely because it is abundant locally (Santos et al. 2014). Other medium and large-sized mammals, including agoutis, armadillos, deer, primates, and sloths, have also been documented in the diet of this animal (Moreno et al. 2006, Abreu et al. 2008, Tirelli et al. 2019). Additionally, ocelots tend to target smaller prey when larger felids, such as pumas (Tirelli et al. 2019) and jaguars (Moreno et al. 2006), which occur in sympatry, thus reflecting niche partitioning among those species.

In conclusion, the breadth and variability of the ocelot's diet highlight its plasticity to a wide range of prey species and environmental conditions, even in areas with human disturbance. This dietary flexibility, coupled with opportunistic foraging, places the ocelot as a resilient species across the Neotropics. However, future studies integrating road-killed specimens and behavior-based observations could further enrich our understanding of the nuances in ocelot dietary ecology.

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WH: Conceptualization, Formal Analysis, Resource, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. JSPO: Data curation, Taxidermy, Writing – original draft. VVF: Taxidermy, Writing – original draft. RGCF: Carcass collect, Taxidermy, Writing – original draft. LOS: Taxidermy, Writing – original draft. KGO: Taxidermy, Writing – original draft. HWPC: Taxidermy, Stomach Analysis, Writing – original draft.

Competing Interests

The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

Data Availability

Datasets related to this article will be available upon request to the corresponding author.

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Supplementary material 1

Supplementary Table S1. Overview of ocelot diet studies: geographic variation, prey categories, and sampling methods.

Authors: José S.P. de Oliveira, Wellington Hannibal.

Data type: Database.

Link: https://doi.org/10.1590/S1984-4689.v42.e24072

Appendix 1. Prey composition in the diet of the ocelot, *Leopardus pardalis*, in the Neotropical region. References represent articles reporting ocelot diet or feeding behavior.

Prey	Commom name	Source
Mammalia		
Didelphimorphia		
Didelphidae		
Caluromys derbianus	Central American Woolly Opossum	6
Didelphis albiventris	White-eared Opossum	23a
Didelphis aurita	Brazilian Common Opossum	7, 10a, 10b, 11
Didelphis marsupialis	Common Opossum	1, 2, 3, 6
Gracilinanus microtarsus	Brazilian Gracile Opossum	8
Gracilinanus sp.		7, 10b
Lutreolina crassicaudata	Little Water Opossum	9
Marmosa demerarae [A,B]	Woolly Mouse Opossum	2, 9
Marmosa murina	Linnaeus's Mouse Opossum	10a
Marmosa spp.		2, 3
Marmosops noctivagus [C]	White-bellied Slender Mouse Opossum	2
Marmosops sp.		5
Metachirus nudicaudatus	Brown Four-eyed Opossum	2, 9, 10a, 19
Monodelphis americana	Northern Three-striped Opossum	7, 10b
Monodelphis domestica	Grey Short-tailed Opossum	10a
Monodelphis scalops	Long-nosed Short-tailed Opossum	9
Monodelphis sp.		5, 8, 11, 13
Philander quica [D]	Southeastern Four-eyed Opossum	9
Philander opossum	Gray Four-eyed Opossum	6
Tlacuatzin canescens [E]	Grayish Mouse Opossum	4
Cingulata		
Chlamyphoridae		
Cabassous sp.		23b
Euphractus sexcinctus	Yellow Armadillo	9
Dasypodidae		
Dasypus novemcinctus	Nine-banded Armadillo	1, 5, 6, 8, 9
Dasypus sp.		7, 10a, 10b, 19
Pilosa		
Bradypodidae		
Bradypus variegatus	Brown-throated Sloth	5, 6
Bradypus sp.		1
Choloepodidae		
Choloepus didactylus	Linné's Two-toed Sloth	12
Choloepus hoffmanni	Hoffmann's Two-toed Sloth	6
Cyclopedidae		
Cyclopes didactylus	Silky Anteater	6
Myrmecophagidae		
Tamandua mexicana	Northern Tamandua	6
Tamandua tetradactyla	Southern Tamandua	9, 14, 19
Primates		
Atelidae		
Alouatta guariba [F]	Southern Brown Howler Monkey	8, 7, 10b
Brachyteles hypoxanthus	Northern Muriqui	7, 10b
Pitheciidae		
Callicebus personatus	Atlantic Titi	10a
Cebidae		
Cebus capucinus	Colombian White-throated Capuchin	6
Saguinus fuscicollis	Saddleback Tamarin	2
Saimiri sciureus	Guianan Squirrel Monkey	2
Sapajus apella [G]	Black-capped Capuchin	7, 10a, 10b
Sapajus nigritus	Black-horned Capuchin	16
Lagomorpha		
Leporidae		
Lepus californicus	Black-tailed Jackrabbit	15
Sylvilagus brasiliensis	Tapeti	2, 6, 7, 10a, 10b, 11
Sylvilagus floridanus	Eastern Cottontail	15
Rodentia		
Caviidae		
Cavia sp.		7, 10a, 10b
Cricetidae		
Akodon cursor	Cursor Grass Mouse	16
Akodon sp.		5, 7, 8, 10b, 11, 13, 16
Baiomys musculus	Southern Pygmy Mouse	4
Brucepattersonius iheringi	Ihering's Hocicudo	8, 13
Calomys sp.		7, 10a, 10b, 16
Euryoryzomys cf. *emmonsae*	Emmons's Rice Rat	19
Euryoryzomys russatus [H]	Russet Rice Rat	5, 13
Handleyomys melanotis [I]	Black-eared Rice Rat	4
Holochilus brasiliensis	Southern Amazon red squirrel	8, 11
Necromys lasiurus	Hairy-tailed Bolo Mouse	8, 19
Necromys sp. [J]		7, 10b
Nectomys squamipes	Common Water Rat	8, 13
Neotoma micropus	Southern Plains woodrat	15
Nyctomys sumichrasti	Sumichrast's vesper rat	4
Oligoryzomys flavescens	Yellow Pygmy Rice Rat	13
Oligoryzomys nigripes	Black-footed Pygmy Rice Rat	8, 13
Oligoryzomys spp.		2, 5, 7, 8, 10b, 13
Onychomys leucogaster	Northern grasshopper mouse	15
Oryzomys spp.		1, 2, 3, 9
Oxymycterus cf. *amazonicus*	Amazonian hocicudo	19
Oxymycterus spp.		9, 16
Reithrodontomys fulvescens	Fulvous harvest mouse	4, 15
Rhagomys sp.		19
Sigmodon hispidus	Hispid Cotton Rat	1, 15
Sigmodon mascotensis	Jaliscan cotton rat or Mexican cotton rat	4
Sooretamys angouya	Rat-headed rice rat	13
Thaptomys nigrita	Blackish grass mouse	8, 13
Xenomys nelsoni	Magdelena Wood Rat	4
Zygodontomys brevicauda	Short-tailed cane mouse	3
Cuniculidae		
Cuniculus paca [K]	Paca	2, 6, 7, 10a, 10b
Dasyproctidae		
Dasyprocta azarae	Azara's agouti	8, 14, 19
Dasyprocta leporina [L]	Brazilian agouti	1, 10a
Dasyprocta punctata	Central American Agouti	6
Dasyprocta variegata	Brown agouti	2
Myoprocta pratti	Green Acouchi	2
Echimyidae		
Clyomys laticeps	Broad-headed Spiny Rat	14
Phyllomys sp.		10a
Mesomys hispidus	Ferreira's spiny tree-rat	2

Continues

Prey	Commom name	Source
Proechimys guairae	Guaira Spiny Rat	3
Proechimys semispinosus	Tome's spiny rat	6
Proechimys spp.		1, 2, 19
Thrichomys pachyurus	Paraguayan punaré	14
Trinomys sp.		7, 10a, 10b
Erethizontidae		
Coendou longicaudatus	Long-tailed Porcupine	2, 20
Coendou quichua [M]	Andean porcupine	6
Coendou sp. [N]		8, 7, 10a, 10b
Geomyidae		
Geomys personatus	Texas pocket gopher	15
Heteromyidae		
Chaetodipus hispidus	Hispid Pocket Mouse	15
Heteromys anomalus	Caribbean Spiny Pocket Mouse	1
Heteromys irroratus [O]	Mexican spiny pocket mouse	15
Heteromys pictus [P]	Painted spiny pocket mouse	4
Perognathus merriami	Great Basin Pocket Mouse	15
Peromyscus leucopus	White-footed mouse	15
Peromyscus perfulvus	Tawny Deer Mouse	4
Muridae		
Mus musculus	House mouse	10a
Rattus rattus	House rat	10a
Sciuridae		
Guerlinguetus aestuans	Brazilian squirrel	7
Guerlinguetus brasiliensis [Q]	Brazilian squirrel	10a, 10b
Hadrosciurus spadiceus		2
Sciurus granatensis	Red-tailed squirrel	6
Sciurus sp.		5
Eulipotyphla		
Cryptotis parvus [R]	North American least shrew	15
Notiosorex crawfordi	Crawford's gray shrew	15
Chiroptera		
Emballonuridae		
Saccopteryx bilineata	Greater Sac-winged Bat	17
Phyllostomidae		
Artibeus obscurus [S]	Dark fruit-eating bat	2
Micronycteris megalotis	Little big-eared bat	17
Micronycteris sp.		2
Sturnira sp.		1
Carnivora		
Mustelidae		
Eira barbara	Tayra	10a
Procyonidae		
Bassaricyon alleni	Eastern Lowland Olingo	2
Nasua narica	White-nosed Coati	6
Nasua nasua	South American Coati	11, 14
Potos flavus	Kinkajou	10a
Procyon cancrivorus	Crab-eating Raccoon	10a
Procyon sp.		6
Artiodactyla		
Cervidae		
Mazama temama	Central American Red Brocket	6
Mazama sp.		10a, 14
Odocoileus virginianus	White-tailed Deer	4, 15
Ozotoceros bezoarticus	Pampas Deer	14
Subulo gouazoubira [T]	Gray Brocket	8
Tayassuidae		
Dicotyles tajacu [U]	Collared Peccary	6, 10a
Sus scrofa	Wild boar	14
Tayassu pecari	White-lipped Peccary	19
Unidentified Mammals		
Mammalia		7, 10a, 10b
Small mammals		6
Bats		2, 6, 18, 22
Dasypodidae		8
Didelphimorphia		9, 11
Didelphidae		7, 10a, 10b, 14, 16
Primates		2
Rodentia		1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 8, 10a, 10b, 11, 16, 19
Cricetidae		13
Muridae		3, 8, 9, 14, 16
Oryzomyinae		7, 10a, 10b
Birds		
Galiformes		
Cracidae		
Penelope superciliaris	Rusty-margined Guan	9
Passeriformes		
Corvidae		
Cyanocorax yncas	Green Jay	15
Icteridae		
Icteria virens	Yellow-breasted Chat	15
Mimidae		
Mimus polyglottos	Northern Mockingbird	15
Passeridae		
Passer sp.		15
Turdidae		
Sialia currucoides	Mountain Bluebird	15
Piciformes		
Picidae		
Dryocopus sp.		1
Picumnus cirratus	White-barred Piculet	11
Tinamiformes		
Tinamidae		
Nothura maculosa	Spotted Nothura	8
Tinamus solitarius	Solitary Tinamou	9
Unidentified Birds		
Birds		2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10a, 10b, 11, 13, 14, 16
Passeriformes		5
Accipitridae		5
Cracidae		5
Amphibia		
Anura		
Hylidae		
Trachycephalus "vermiculatus" [V]	Milky Treefrog	1
Leptodactylidae		
Leptodactylus bolivianus	Bolivian White-lipped Frog	1
Unidentified Amphibia		
Amphibia		14

Continues

Prey	Commom name	Source
Reptiles		
Squamata		
Colubridae		
Apostolepis sp.		23b
Chironius sp.		1
Iguanidae		
Ctenosaura pectinata	Guerreran Spiny-tailed Iguana	4
Iguana iguana	Common Green Iguana	6
Iguana sp.		3
Phrynosomatidae		
Sceloporus sp.		15
Polychrotidae		
Polychrus marmoratus	Many-colored Bush Anole	10a
Scincidae		
Brasiliscincus agilis [W]	Atlantic Forest Small-headed Skink	10a
Teiidae		
Ameiva ameiva	Giant Ameiva	7, 10a, 10b, 23b
Salvator merianae [X]	Black-and-white Tegu	7, 9, 10a, 10b
Tropidoutidae		
Tropidurus gr. *torquatus*	Amazon Lava Lizard	10a
Viperidae		
Bothrops mattogrossensis	American lanceheads	14
Unidentified Reptiles		
Reptile		3, 13
Amphisbaenidae		8
Caiman		2
Colubridae		5, 8, 9, 10a, 14
Lacertilia		2, 3, 6, 7, 9, 10a, 10b, 14, 16
Serpentes		2, 6, 7, 9, 10a, 10b
Serpentes/Lacertilia		2
Squamata		8
Teiidae		4, 7, 10b, 14
Testudines		6
Viperidae		16
Fishes		
Unidentified Fish		2
Invertebrate		
Unidentified Invertebrate		7, 10a, 10b
Arthropods		
Crab		3
Decapoda		1
Insects		2, 4
Acrididae		1
Beetle		3
Coleoptera		1, 14
Orthoptera		14
Plants matter		
Plantae		3, 7, 10a, 10b
Cyperaceae		6
Dicotyledon		3
Grass		1, 2, 4
Monocotyledon		3
Oryza latifolia	Broadleaf Rice	21
Plant matter		4
Seeds		4
Unidentified scaly lumps		2
Other materials		
Eggs		8
Plastic		4

Continues

Sources according Supplementary Table S1: 1. Bisbal (1986); 2. Emmons (1987); 3. Farrel et al. (2000); 4. Meza et al. (2002); 5. Wang (2002); 6. Moreno et al. (2006); 7. Bianchi and Mendes (2007); 8. Abreu et al. (2008); 9. Martins et al. (2008); 10a, b. Bianchi et al. (2010); 11. Rocha-Mendes (2010). 12. Delibes (2011); 13. Silva-Pereira et al. (2011); 14. Bianchi et al. (2013); 15. Booth-Binczik et al. (2013); 16. Santos et al. (2014); 17. Tinoco-Lopez et al. (2015); 18. Contreras-Moreno et al. (2019); 19. Tirelli et al. (2019); 20. Griffiths et al. (2020); 21. Montalvo et al. (2020); 22. Macas-Pogo et al. (2023). 23a, b. This study. Old names cited in the studies: [A]*Marmosa cinerea*, [B]*Micoureus demerarae*, [C]*Marmosa noctivaga*, [D]*Philander frenata*, [E]*Marmosa canescens*, [F]*Alouatta clamitans*, [G]*Cebus apella*¸ [H]*Oryzomys intermedius*, [I]*Oryzomys melanotis*, [J]*Bolomys* sp, [K]*Agouti paca*, [L]*Dasyprocta aguti*, [M]*Coendou rothschildi*, [N]*Sphiggurus* sp., [O]*Liomys irroratus*, [P]*Liomys pictus*, [Q]*Guerlinguetus ingrami*, [R]*Cryptotis parva*, [S]*Artibeus fuliginosus*, [T]*Mazama gouazoubira*, [U]*Pecari tajacu*, [V]*Phrynohyas venulose,* [W]*Mabuya* cf. *agilis*, [X]*Tupinambis merianae.*