

Ecuador 26 January 2013-3 February 2013

I had a week in the end of this January that was able to get away from the cold and head down to Ecuador and do some mammal watching. After reading the information about the Sacha Lodge on this website and seeing online that they were running a special that included two days in Quito, I booked the trip with my friend Sarah from Austin, Texas. I won't include the two days in Quito as they mainly consisted of non animal activities except for a short visit to the zoo north of the city.

The journey to Sacha Lodge is pretty much as previously described. A quick 30 minute flight to Coca, followed by a cab ride to the Coca headquarters to wait for the boat that would take us on the two hour journey along the Napo River . I agree with previous comments about getting a private guide if you really want to focus on mammal watching. The vast majority of the people staying at the lodge were either doing it as a 2-3 day jungle “experience” before heading to the Galapagos, or were there to strictly see birds. Daniel from the UK was our main guide and Wilson was our local guide, both of whom went the extra mile to try to find us as many animals as possible. After the boat ride you have to walk about 20-30 minutes along a path that has boardwalk over about half of it. This is the only way to access the lodge from Napo river while you are there so depending on what you are trying to see you may walk it daily. At the of this you are paddled by guides across an oxbow lake to the lodge itself. Once getting to the lodge I went over the with our guides the primates I really wanted to try to see. I was immediately told that all were a possibility except for the pygmy marmoset. At first I thought maybe I didn't hear him correctly. I had even booked cabin number five where they were supposed to be outside daily. Turns out the marmosets over time with chewing holes into the trees weaken them. The tree that was outside cabin number five had crashed into the boardwalk I think a few weeks after Jon Hall was there. The previous described “marmoset tree” had also come down and taken out one of the radio towers. The marmosets were something they use to guarantee to tourists, but now could not. I even talked to some of the guides from the Napo Wildlife Center and multiple guides told me they had not seen a pygmy marmoset for five months. So a species I had dipped on in Peru would be dipped again. The rest of the afternoon was spent

in the flooded forest along small creeks that came out of the lake. The only mammal sighting we had was a small troop (8-10) of white-fronted capuchins. I did get to witness a new behavior as one of the juveniles was using a termite mound as a trampoline then punching into it to get termites to eat.



The second day we were there we went across the river for two reasons. The first was to see the parrot clay licks and the second was to try one to see an equatorial saki monkey. Our guide knew of one trail where he had recently seen them across the river. One piece of advice, there are two days that all or most of the boats are used for all the tourists at the lodge to cross the river to see the clay licks. The only additional trails you would be able to use are the ones close to this as the boats ferry tourists throughout the morning to afternoon. If you want to go to additional places across the river far from the clay licks make sure you pick a different day and tell them you want this in advance so they can have boat secured for you. I don't have a name for the trail we used as our guide did not know it. It is right by a guard station for the Napo wildlife center and most tourists do not use it. This was pretty obvious by the condition of the trail. After about five minutes we came across a family of collared peccaries that only stayed around for about ten seconds before running off. Within five minutes of that it started to rain. Full on hit you in the face, seeming like it is coming from every direction rain. This made what was already a steep muddy trail even worse. There was a lot of slipping, sliding and maybe bringing people down with me as I grabbed onto the closest object nearby. The actual trail itself took about an hour. No sakis but did see one red brocket deer briefly and a large troop of common squirrel

monkeys. After getting back to the Sacha side of the river the walk back in was more eventful. About half way down the trail where the dirt portion turns into the actual wooden boardwalk a lone woolly monkey was sitting high in the canopy.



My picture is crappy but I would imagine this is a silvery woolly monkey based on the location. This was the most excited I saw our guide as only one other person had seen this monkey near the canopy towers a few weeks before. This side of the

river I was told use to have good populations of both the white bellied spider monkey and the woolly monkey, but with the locals thinking of them as haute cuisine they had been hunted out. Since woolly monkeys are usually in family groups the thought was this one was an escaped pet (as the locals would sometimes keep babies after the mothers are eaten). Hmmmm to count or not to count. A lone male Venezuelan howler monkey and a brown throated three toed sloth were also in trees by this trail on the way in.





We ended up seeing the sloth the next day as well in the same location. Our third day there involved a walk to the canopy towers. Greater white-lined bats were easy to see at the base of the trail in a large kapok tree. We stayed in the tower for about 2 hours but saw nothing but birds. After this we went looking for red titi monkeys. I was told the majority of them are super shy and rarely seen by tourists. Our guide said the “forest trail” is one that only the guides or lodge workers use and was the only place that he had ever seen titis stop and look at him. I was warned that there would be a lot of logs to cross over deep bodies of water and the trail was unkept. At one point I did ask the guide if quicksand was real by looking at the places we had to cross. Our guides had some titi calls he had recorded and we used to lure them in. He knew of three places to look, all in heavy vegetation. The first place they responded well with vocalizations, however Sarah was the only one that saw one. The second place the titi was high in the tree and back lit (hence the crappy picture) but stopped and stared at us for 2-3 minutes before going on its way.



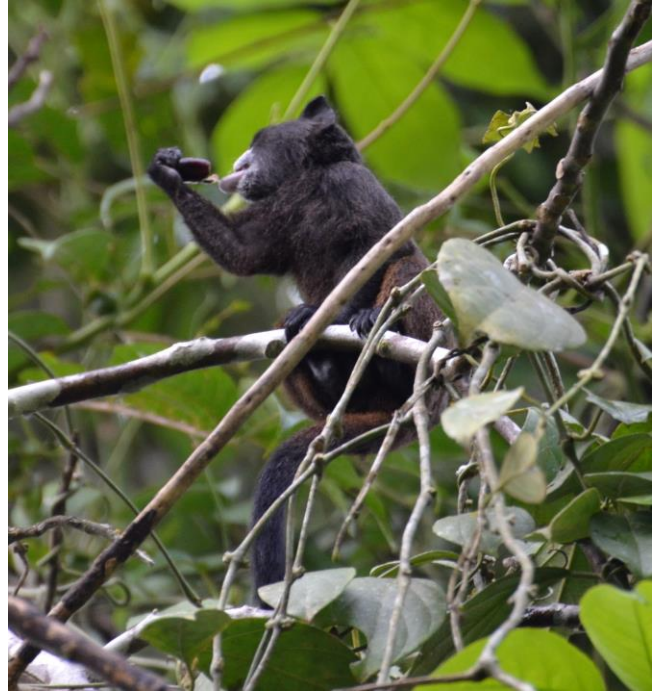
We did not walk to the third destination for them. Our next task at hand was trying to find a Noisy (spix's) night monkey. As previously described the guides know of

a few trees where they like to roost during the day. All the trees we looked in were around the main canopy tower and by the fourth tree we found them.





We also had a brief view of graells tamarins. During the down time at the lodge while trying to look for a pygmy marmoset in any tree possible, another group of graells tamarins hung out in the trees right outside the restaurant for over an hour.



I also went to find black agoutis which were easy to see below the walkways leading from the restaurant to the office.



On the afternoon canoe ride through the streams leading from the right side of the lake (away from the lodge) we found a large mixed group of white-



fronted capuchins and common squirrel monkeys as well as two southern tamanduas that were clumsily climbing small branches.



Howlers were seen from a distance along the trees on the opposite side of the lake.



Our final day we decided to cross the river to an area known as Yaku Kawsay. You have to pay ten dollars to use the trails around it as it is owned by some of the locals that work at the Napo Wildlife Center. They have a small “museum” of wooden carved animals that live in the river as well as

information boards that talk about the ecosystem. There are two ways to get there- first be dropped on at the vantage point along the river itself near the end of the trail or go down a small tributary to the front part of the trail head. Take the second option if the water is high enough. Along this tributary we saw a tayra sunning itself as well as a large group of golden-mantled tamarins (though they were very shy and only a few member stopped for seconds to look at us).

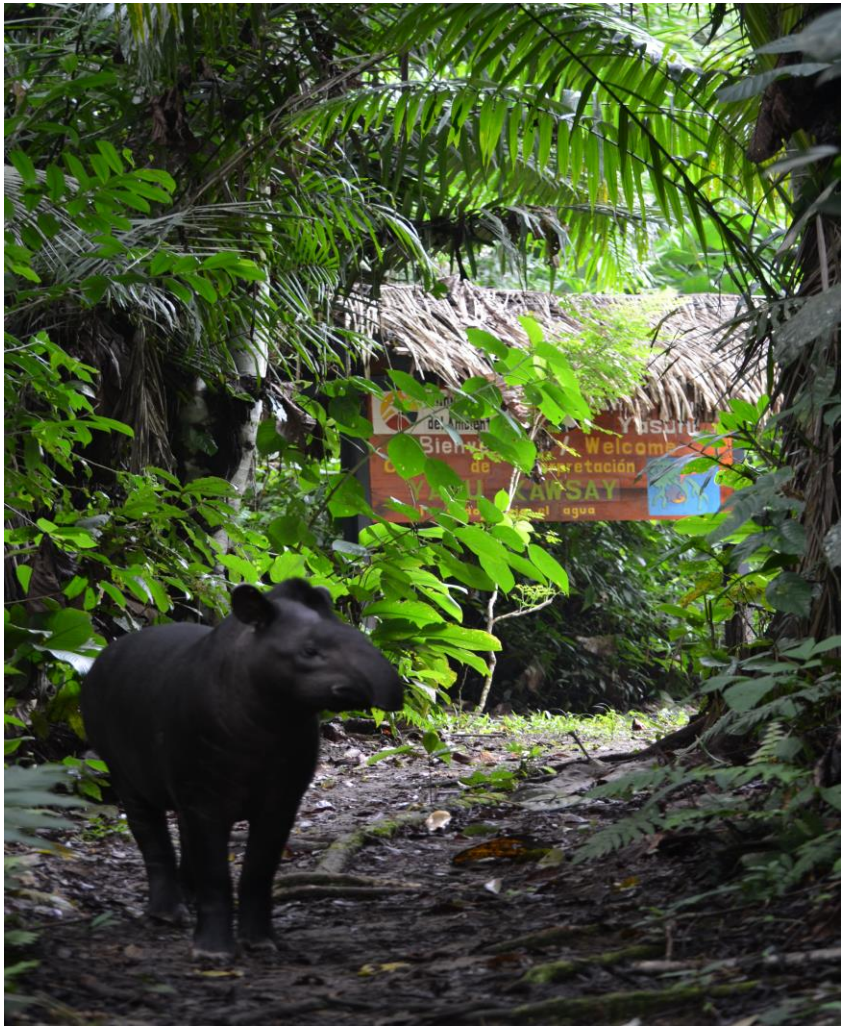






The trail itself is easy. I wanted to do it to try for a saki again, but no saki. However the tamarins sort of made up for it. After looking at the museum we were getting ready to do the end of the trail (about 30 minutes) to pick up the boat on the river. At this point a lone male lowland tapir walked up to us. I figured some one had raised him (I saw a similar tapir at Manu in Peru) and he stayed in this area. After taking some photos and starting back on the trail I turned around only to see the tapir had followed us. He continued to hike with us the whole way to the river and I learned at this point tapirs can jump pretty high over logs. I think hiking in the rain forest will never be the same without having a tapir by my side.







At the river base one of the locals did come to get him. That night we did some spotlighting from a canoe. Bats were emerging from underneath the deck where people could swim. I was told they were lesser long nosed bats. We were also taken to the creek that leads towards the kapok tree with a stand. About half way down the creek we stopped and watched greater bulldog bats fly very close to the edge of the boat.

All in all it was a great trip and I would recommend the lodge to anyone. I agree that going to both sides of the river make the mammal watching experience better. I was sad about the pygmy marmoset situation but did love cabin number 5 as it is one of the nicer cabins. Hopefully the marmosets will come back to the area soon for tourists to be able to see them.

Trip list- I did not add scientific names but could at a later date

1. White-fronted capuchin
2. Collared peccary
3. Red brocket deer
4. Common squirrel monkey
5. Silvery Woolly monkey (possible escaped pet)
6. Venezuelan Red Howler monkey
7. Brown throated three toed sloth
8. Greater white lined bat
9. Red titi monkey



10. Noisy (spix's) night monkey
11. Graells black mantled tamarin
12. Black agouti
13. Southern tamandua
14. Tayra
15. Golden-mantled tamarins
16. Lowland tapir (habituated/pet)
17. Lesser long nosed bats
18. Greater bull dog bat