

## Costa Rica, 15 Dec – 23 Dec 2013

We spent 9 nights in Costa Rica and saw **26 species** of mammal, plus a lot of nice birds. We took in La Selva and Tirimbina in the north, then Manuel Antonio and Corcovado in the south. We also saw a handful of mammals during our week-long unwind in Panama (see Panama report).

Generally Costa Rica is not too difficult to drive around, though a 4x4 is probably best as some locations are on rutted dirt roads. I've read about bad car hire experiences in Costa Rica, and can totally recommend Wild Rider for honesty and great service. The rainforest itself is very accessible in Costa Rica; both La Selva and Tirimbina are literally just off main roads and a minute or two from small towns. You can be rained on throughout the year but it never seems to get too cold for T-shirts. You need bug repellent, but at least there are no leeches in American rainforests!

La Selva and Tirimbina both lie in the Caribbean lowlands beyond the mountains that divide Costa Rica down the middle. At La Selva we found **collared peccaries** easily, they're all over the research station especially after dark. We also picked up **mantled howler monkeys** several times near the research station and **Central American spider monkeys** once. We took a guided walk, and our guide also showed us **lesser white-lined bats** roosting on a tree, though the other mammals we'd have seen ourselves unguided. One final spot in the forest by day: a **red-tailed squirrel**.



Spotlighting by ourselves after dark, which you're welcome to do on the trails at La Selva, we picked up a nice **Central American woolly opossum** right by the river bridge and a **forest rabbit** on the visitor side of the river. We also got an excellent view of a **Mexican porcupine** on a tree branch on the trail back to our distant accommodation block (1km from the dining room), and one other mystery mammal that was probably an opossum but we couldn't get a good look.



Near La Selva is a place to stay called Heliconia Island. Much nicer accommodation for a similar price, although of course you wouldn't have free use of La Selva's trails. However, we stopped for an hour and had a lovely view of a **Hoffmann's two-toed sloth** and baby in the rain. The Dutch owner said other mammal life is common after dark, and that they see otters "several times a week" in the river. If you like your mammal watching more comfy, a stay here and guided walks at La Selva might be good.



At Tirimbina we took a walk in the rain, but our guide (a bat specialist) still found us three species of tent-making bats roosting; the **common tent-making bat**, the **pygmy fruit-eating bat** and the fantastic tiny **Honduran white bats**. Current policy at Tirimbina is: no unguided night walks. But the guides allowed us to wander back and forth along the epic 200m long suspension bridge that crosses the river and incidentally gives you a mid-canopy view through secondary forest (while all the staff went off for their Christmas party). We picked up three mammals, but sadly only one close enough to identify - a **kinkajou**. This could be a very good spot for nocturnal mammals. In the morning there was a **variegated squirrel** in the trees outside our room.



Next day we stopped in Quepos to take a trip out with Avenaturas to look for **silky anteater**. It took some searching, but they found one for us. Other mammals are occasionally possible but didn't show up today, so this was a fairly expensive single-minded search for one little sleeping ball of fur.



The following morning we checked Manuel Antonio NP. It's quiet at 7 but thronged by 9. We found **Central American agouti** very easily at the beach, and **brown-throated three-toed sloths** are common enough on the main trail that all the guides we overheard at the entrance "guaranteed" sloth and monkey sightings to tourists. **Mantled howler** groups were also plentiful, but the white-faced capuchins obviously don't hit the beach until there are plenty of picnics to prey on, as we saw none.



The big destination was two nights at Sirena station in Corcovado NP. We drove all the way to Bahia Drake. The road passes through mixed agriculture and rainforest, and we did see a **white-faced coati** briefly, but the boat trip from Sierpe might be a better bet for wildlife. Finca Maresia is a superb place to stay in Bahia Drake, especially after the deprivations of Sirena. The ranger station is hot, basic and you spend the time surrounded by backpackers having their one night in the rainforest. So much snoring it can be hard to get to sleep. Luckily our guide walked us for 25 hours over 2.5 days, so we were knackered.



The guides knew where a **Baird's tapir** was sleeping conveniently near the beach, so that was a very easy spot, the big creature habituated enough that it slept through people filing one by one into the thicket to see it at less than 2 metres distance. Over two days we saw groups of **mantled howler**, **Central American spider monkey**, **red-backed squirrel monkeys** and **white-faced capuchins** several times. We saw **collared peccary** again but in contrast to other reports, white-lipped peccary proved impossible, not even any tracks, and our guide said they weren't in the area this season. Just goes to show, animals have seasonal movements and if one report says an animal is easily seen doesn't mean it

always will be.



We also saw **white-faced coati** (just one individual, in a back-beach environment), two other tapir crossing the Sirena river, one **red brocket deer** near the river, a **red-tailed squirrel** and we also picked up a **neotropical river otter** in a creek and tracked him down to the river where we got a great view. Just missed another sighting the next day. We also had a great look at a **northern tamandua** and baby play-fighting high in the trees.





Our guide took us out to a shoreline bat cave (a 3 hour hike, not a nature walk, so only for the determined) where we picked up three species, and a couple of others at roosts he knew elsewhere in the park. So if anyone can help id the photos at the bottom of this report we'd be really grateful! Discus-winged bats are apparently found in curled Heliconia leaves in the park, but we didn't find one. We spotted **Tomes spiny rat** (tailless variety!) under the kitchen block around 9pm.

Night walks are not allowed at Sirena. However, apparently departing at 3am for a "morning" walk is okay, so we had two chances to spotlight for a couple of hours each. May have been the curse of the full moon, but bizarrely and to the frustration of our guide we saw absolutely nothing.

Of course, on the final morning around 10am an **ocelot** strolled calmly across the grassy field in front of the ranger station and back into the forest, provoking a frenzy of shouts and activity. I was naturally nowhere near my camera. So that was 12 identified mammals and 3 unknown bats in a 2 day trip to Sirena – pretty nifty for rainforest.

Costa Rica is definitely good for mammals, and at Sirena in particular the accommodation is fairly horrible but the likelihood of seeing really interesting stuff is quite high. We got **26 mammal species** (plus 3-4 unidentified bat species), of which I think 23 are lifers! Well, first trip to Central America. I think we actually saw everything we could have seriously expected to, and a **tayra** was the only real target we'd have loved to see but didn't.

**Bats from sea cave roost in Sirena**



First species - leaf-nose and indistinct white face lines, no back line



Second species - leaf-nose, no face lines, no back lines I can see



Third species – leaf nose, no face or back lines, distinctly pale brown



Species from rock overhang in forest – obviously not a leaf nose