

Panama, 23rd - 31st Dec 2013

As an addendum to our Costa Rica trip, we went to Bocas del Toro to unwind for a few days and then spent a final three nights in Panama city. Bocas del Toro are lovely mangrove- and reef-fringed rainforest islands just off the Caribbean Coast of Panama, still reasonably undiscovered by mass tourism.

We stayed in a house tucked into the forest on Bastimento island, and just watching from our deck during day and night we saw: two **brown-throated three-toed sloths**, both much smaller than mainland specimens (I mean almost half the size), **white-faced capuchins**, some dark rat-sized rodents with shortish tails that we're identifying as **common cane rat** on the basis of nocturnal habit and fruit/seed diet, and an armadillo. This was small, had indistinct banding, and appeared to have a shorter tail and a flatter shape than a typical nine-banded (so that at first glance I thought "wow, odd looking rat") and so I'm going to say **northern naked-tailed armadillo**. Can't ignore the possibility that it's an odd-shaped island dwarf nine-banded, but even the IUCN specialist group doesn't have any info on what armadillos are found on Bastimento! We also heard **night monkeys**, but didn't see them. And we saw **common bottlenose dolphins** on a boat trip.



So there's 5 mammals without even trying, and oddly cryptic. When does island dwarfism become a new species? A few miles further offshore is the tiny island speck that is home to the pygmy three-toed sloth. If we had stayed elsewhere on Bastimento walks might have been possible, but our house was totally surrounded by mangrove channels (look up Garden of Eden resort, Rainforest House, but as I say there's nowhere to walk except a circle around the house so it's probably better to find somewhere else on Bastimento).



In Panama we stopped at the Gamboa Rainforest Resort in the afternoon - the **lesser capybaras** came out onto the lawn on cue at around 3:30pm, look for them near the sunken ponds choked with vegetation. We also took a walk down the Pipeline Road, two hours in daylight and two hours spotlighting back. On the way out we saw **white-nosed coatis** twice, **Central American agoutis** aplenty, also **mantled howler monkeys** and **white-faced capuchins**. Alas for ratty, we saw large insects going in and out of the rufous tree rat hole that Jon reported a month previously. On the way back we had a good view of a **common opossum** and eye shine from two other mammals too lost in the vegetation to identify.



Oh, and if you want to have a good chance of **Geoffroy's tamarin**, stay at La Estancia on Cerro Ancon. It's a nice enough little hotel near the city and a group of tamarins from the forested hill behind come down for bananas every day (around lunch when we stayed). **Agoutis** are plentiful on the hill and we spotted **white-tailed deer** at night on a lawn.



So that's **12 mammals** in Panama but only one day of dedicated mammal watching. We'd have liked to spot night monkeys or tayra on the Pipeline Road, and should have tried to do some night driving too.