



## NICARAGUA

I was in Nicaragua three weeks in Oct-Sep 2007 and 'discovered' that country as marvelous places to observe wildlife in general and mammals in particular. Nicaragua is still relatively unknown among 'gringos' and far more interesting than overcrowded and overpriced Costa Rica. You are almost guaranteed to have any national park/wildlife reserve for yourself and receive all help from very knowledgeable park officials.

It seems that Nicaragua's Ministry of Environment (MARENA) responsible for supervising parks and reserves is doing good job and protected areas are full of wildlife.



Nicaragua is easy to travel even without basic Spanish (as was my case).

I was traveling independently without any prior arrangements.

I started my journey in Granada, beautiful colonial town on the lake Nicaragua's southern shore (and under the Volcano too). There are several interesting places for wildlife lover (especially birder) around Granada like lake (laguna) Apoyo, archipelago de las isletas and Parque Nacional Archipelago Zapatera.

But above all Granada is a place for relaxing and preparing for more serious adventure.

### **Mombacho Volcano**



My next stop was Mombacho Volcano (*Reserva Natural Volcan Mombacho*). The reserve, administrated by private Cocibolca Foundation, is situated 20 km from Granada on the top of the Mombacho volcano (lower slopes are occupied by coffee plantations). It is covered with lush cloud forest. The biodiversity of the place is

stunning (760 species of plants, 160 species of birds and 50 species of mammals), but the main reason to be there are terrific views of the extinct craters, lake Nicaragua, lake Apoyo and Granada.



The trails are well maintained and guides very professional. The longest trail of the reserve is very steep (5 hours of climbing up and down) 'sendero el Puma'. Although cuguars (pumas) are almost certainly extinct from the park, jaguars are there, but very shy not often seen. Howlers (mantled) are quite common as well as two toed sloths. I have also spotted gray four eyed opossum (philander opossum) at night. For all reptile-and-frogs afficiandos night walk is a must with a chance to see famous and endemic mombacho salamander (*Bolitoglossa mombachoensis*) and red eyed tree frogs (*agalychnis callidryas*).

## Los Guatusos



My second stop in Nikaragua was Los Guatusos Reserve (*Refugio de la vida silvestre los guatusos*) situated on the southern shore of the lake Nicaragua. The place is relatively easy accessible from San Carlos. To get there you need to catch a ferry from Granada to San Carlos and than early in the Morning collective

boat (lancha) to Rio Papaturre. It takes few hours to get to Rio Papaturre from San Cearlos.

I would not hesitate to call Los Guatusos best place for nature viewing I'v ever seen in my life. The terrain is very difficult for exploring (wetland and flooded rain forest) but extremely rewarding for all types of nature observations: birder, mammals, spiders, snakes and mosquito are plentiful. Rubber boots (made in Guatemala, available in san Carlos) is a must there as well as mosquito repellent.

The best place to stay in Los Guatusos is Centro Ecologico de Los Guatuzos situated in Rio Papaturre. It is a combination of eco-loge and research station, wonderfully situated on the river bank (full of caimans) and well equipped (boats available). My room there was basic, but full of friendly creatures (frogs in a toilet, huge spiders on the wall, bats under plank bed etc).



During my stay in Papaturre I was guided by Mr. Armando Gonzales- one of the best naturalists I have ever met in my life. We were exploring the river and wetland by canoe



and foot. The results were as follow: gray four-eyed opossum (at night on the river bank), brown throated three toed sloth, hoffman's two toed sloth, group of central american spider monkey, hundreds of mantled howlers, kinkajou (potos flavus), neotropical river otter and lot of bats (from which I was able to recognize only common long-tongued bat and proboscis bat). Footprints of jaguar are relatively common around the lodge as well as those of aguti and small rodents. Hundred of fishing bats fly over the river.

On the road back to Costa Rica (tow weeks later) I have also visited second ecological station of Los Guatusos Reserve- Esperanza Verde, which is situated on the banks of Rio Frio (along the route to los Chilles in Costa Rica). Although the forest there is more dry there and more degraded almost same species occur there as in Papaturo. Howlers are guaranteed, as well as spider monkeys. Jaguars are presents too (unfortunately in a form of footprins) as well as peccaries and baird's tapirs (tracks).

### **Solentiname**

My third destination in Nicaragua was archipelago Solentiname on the lake Nicaragua. There is no large mammals on the islands, bud serene atmosphere (no cars, no electricity) and hundreds of birds are enough to keep any traveler busy for few days on the islands.



### **Rio san Juan**



Rio san Juan, the only connection of the lake Nicaragua with Atlantic is full of legends. The place is known for pirates, Lord Nelson, Miskito Indians, Interoceanic stem route Castle in el Castillo. Costa Rica's banks of San Juan are badly deforested, but Nicaragua keeps its rain forest intact in Indio-Maiz Biosphere Reserve (Reserva Biologica Indi Maiz). Definitely it is not the place for one day visit, but rather for a dream like wilderness experience.

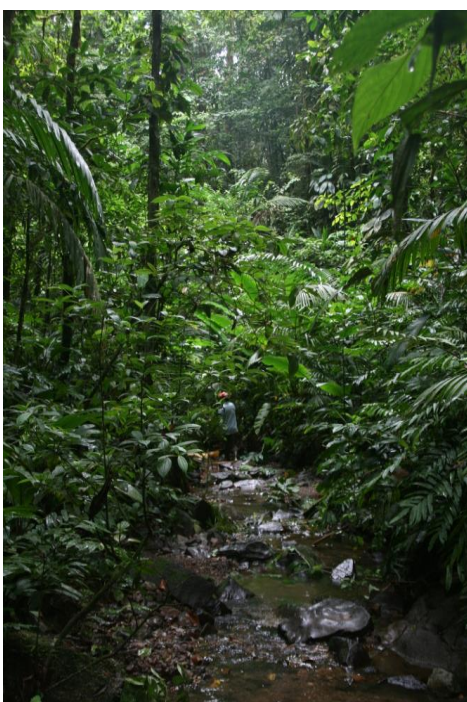
Although Indio-Maiz reserve is limited to 4500 square kilometers, it is the second largest nature reserve in Central America and probably most pristine, with trees reaching 50 m in high, wetlands, wild rivers, mountain ridges and volcanoes covered with untouched selva. In contrary to Bosawas Biosphere Reserve situated on the north of the country, Indio Maiz is safe for visitor and guerilla- free.



Even without dangerous guerilla, Indio Maiz is not an easy spot to visit. Access to the park is limited to few entry points guarded by MARENA. Travelling inside the reserve is possible by boat. In my opinion the best place to get in is a village called San Juan del Norte (former Greytown) situated down San Juan river on the banks of

freshwater canal (lagoon) separated by sandbank from the Atlantic. The canal is a place to see manatees if you are lucky (I wasn't) and also a starting point for a trip up to Rio Indio river.

I have organized a trip to Rio Indio territory with a help of a certain 'don Enrique', his shark hunting son and friend- very experienced poacher, officially campesino (farmer) who lives on the banks of Rio Indio.







We went up the river for approximately 20-30 km and stayed for two nights in Indian style elevated house (don't try to look on the walls-it's moving!). My mosquito-proof hammock proved to be also vampire bat proof there. The forest in the neighborhood was stunning. Mammals were plentiful although shy and difficult to spot. I was lucky to see tyra (Eira Barbara), howlers and spider monkeys as well as unidentified squirrels. Jaguar tracks are common there as those of tapirs, peccaries and agutis. Unfortunately during my stay weather was very rainy and visibility limited.

My guide proved to be very knowledgeable about the forest, plants, animal tracks and in Jaguars. He also claimed that jaguar spotting (with the help of the band of his thin, yellow dogs) was almost guaranteed in a week. Unfortunately I had not enough time to verify his claims and also judged the method of tracking too disturbing for animal.



I have finished my three weeks trip to Nicaragua with a total of 10 confirmed mammal species. I'm sure that someone more knowledgeable about netropical fauna (especially bats) could identify much more. See my list is below:

*Species list*

	English name	Latin name	Place
1	Gray four-eyed opossum	Philander opossum	Mombacho, Guatusos (Papaturre)
2	Brown throated three-toed sloth	 Bradypus variegates	Guatusos (Papaturre)
3	Hoffmann's two-toed sloth	Choloepus hoffmani	Mombacho, Guatusos (Papaturre)

4	Central American Spider Monkey	 <p data-bbox="432 595 655 629"><i>Ateles geoffroyi</i></p>	Guatusos (Papaturre, Esperanza Verde), Ingio-Maiz (Greytown, Rio Indio)
5	Mantled Howler	 <p data-bbox="804 647 1027 680"><i>Alouatta palliata</i></p>	Mombacho, Guatusos (Papaturre, Esperanza Verde), Indio Maiz
6	Kinkajou	 <p data-bbox="783 1200 948 1234"><i>Potos flavus</i></p>	Guatusos (Papaturre)
7	Neotropical River Otter	<p data-bbox="432 1706 675 1740"><i>Lutra longicaudis</i></p> <p data-bbox="1082 1706 1378 1740">Guatusos (Papaturre)</p>	



8	Proboscis Bat	 <p data-bbox="440 562 738 595">Rhynchonycteris naso</p>	Guatusos (Papaturre), Indio Maiz	
9	Common long- tongued bat		Glassopha ga soricina	Guatusos (Papaturre)
10	Tayra	Eira Barbara	Indio Maiz	