

Trip Report

Costa Rica 14 July – 4 August 2015

Trip Overview

This July I have finally made my way to Central America and spent three weeks in Costa Rica, attending a friend's wedding for the first week and looking for mammals and other wildlife for the following two weeks. This was my first time travelling with a group of friends, so it wasn't a strictly wildlife watching trip, but we managed to see quite a few species in the end. A more complete report including birds, reptiles and amphibians will be uploaded on www.thewildlifediaries.com shortly.

Week 1 - Riu Guanacaste Resort

Riu Guanacaste Resort provided limited wildlife watching opportunities especially as far as mammals were concerned. **Variiegated squirrels** and **Howler monkeys** were quite easy to see, but that was about it. The only surprise Riu turned up was a **Striped hog-nosed skunk** nonchalantly walking across the lawn one night when I was nowhere near my camera.

To see some wildlife in Guanacaste we took a half day cruise on Rio Tempisque in Palo Verde National Park. The park is primarily known as a birding destination, but we did spot a few mammals: **White-nosed coati** on the drive to the jetty, some very tame **White-throated capuchins** in the mangroves along the river and a colony of **Brazilian long-nosed bats**. These little bats are quite interesting in that they roost out in the open well camouflaged against the bark of a tree. They arrange themselves in a line and if they feel threatened they start to sway from side to side making the line appear as if it is a moving snake. Quite a neat trick.

Week 2 – Road trip (Monteverde NP, Manuel Antonio NP, Drake Bay, Corcovado NP, Tirimbina Reserve and La Selva Station)

Monteverde

Once the wedding week was over we swapped the high heels for flip flops and hiking boots, picked up our rental car in Liberia and headed to Monteverde. On the way we stopped at Las Pumas Rescue Centre near Cañas to have a look at Costa Rican wildcats, as we were unlikely to see many of them in the wild. The centre houses five of Costa Rica's six felines: Jaguar, Puma, Ocelot, Jaguarundi and Margay.

In Monteverde we visited the Hummingbird Gallery in hopes of spotting an Olingo, which didn't show, but the humming birds themselves were absolutely worth the visit. For the spotlighting walk we picked "Kinkajou night walk", which turned out to be the most disappointing experience of the entire trip. If at all possible, stay away from this outfit. Their night walk has the feel of a badly organized zoo excursion. The obvious frustration aside, we saw a **Mexican hairy dwarf porcupine** snoozing very high up a tree and two **Two-toed sloths**, one of which was quite low in the canopy.

Manuel Antonio & Damas Island

As we drove from Monteverde to Manuel Antonio we stopped for lunch and a swim at Playa Hermosa and spotted our first Scarlet macaws. The only mammals around the beach were **Variegated squirrels**.

In Manuel Antonio we rented a house on top of a hill at the edge of town and on the first night we were visited by a **Kinkajou**. It came to feed on mangos that were hanging on a tree no further than 3 meters away from our balcony. It was quite an unusual experience to watch a tree-dwelling mammal from an eye level perspective.



The following morning we headed on a mangrove tour with Ave Natura to look for the **Silky anteater**. Without any difficulty Milenlli found us two. And as a bonus she brought us to a tree stump rising out of the water, with a female **Four-eyed opossum** and a young snoozing in its hollow.

In the afternoon we went to check out Manuel Antonio National Park. Despite the crowds we managed to find a **Brown-throated three-toed sloth** reasonably low in the canopy and a group of **Red-backed squirrel monkeys**. On the main beach we saw a few **Crab-eating raccoons** looking for scraps in the undergrowth.

Drake Bay

Drake Bay was refreshingly quiet. We took a whale watching tour and spent some time with a pod of **Pantropical spotted dolphins** and later a female **Humpback whale** with a young calf.

The main reason we came to Drake Bay was to visit Corcovado National Park. The numbers of visitors in the park are strictly regulated and a permit and a guide are necessary for visiting the park. We had a pre-departure meeting scheduled with our guide just after the whale watching tour. This

meant that we would be missing the frog night walk but a guide that takes the trouble to meet with his group before heading into the jungle inspires a certain amount of respect, and Bolivar Cortes (bolocortes@hotmail.com) was indeed the most excellent guide.



Corcovado National Park

We spent 3.5 days at Sirena Rangers Station and its environs and saw an impressive array of wildlife. Our days started at 4am with a walk to Rio Sirena in hopes of spotting Tapirs swimming in the ocean, then back to camp for breakfast, followed by another trek until lunch time and another one after lunch. Night walks are unfortunately not permitted around Sirena. Over the 3.5 days we have seen all four species of primates including the **Spider monkey**, which was first for this trip, **Bairds tapirs**, **Collared peccaries**, **White-nosed coatis**, **Northern tamandua**, **Agouti**, **Red Brocket deer**, **Tent-making bats**, **Red-tailed squirrel** and **Pumas!**

Pumas were the highlight of the entire trip. On our second day in the park Bolivar took us to puma valley, where he and other guides have occasionally spotted pumas. The valley lies along La Leona trail and getting there involves wading thigh-deep across a river with crocodiles snoozing in the shallows just meters away.

Puma valley is incredibly picturesque. The walking trail runs along the boundary between a deserted beach and dense jungle. Minutes after we entered the valley Bolivar grabbed my arm and pulled me down to a crouching position. The others followed suit. I looked where Bolivar was pointing and met a level stare of feline eyes. **A puma!** Less than 10 meters away. On closer inspection of the undergrowth I noticed that she had a young with her. Quite a large cub, probably 6 - 7 months old. Bolivar told us to stay where we were. Apparently behind the pumas there was a large swamp and

the only way they could walk was by following the path they were on. Just before the pumas walked behind a thick tree we realized that there were not one but two cubs. As Bolivar predicted the family re-emerged from behind huge buttress roots of a giant fig tree and continued to walk parallel to our trail. We watched them for probably 10 minutes as they stopped and started along their trail, until they disappeared into thick undergrowth.



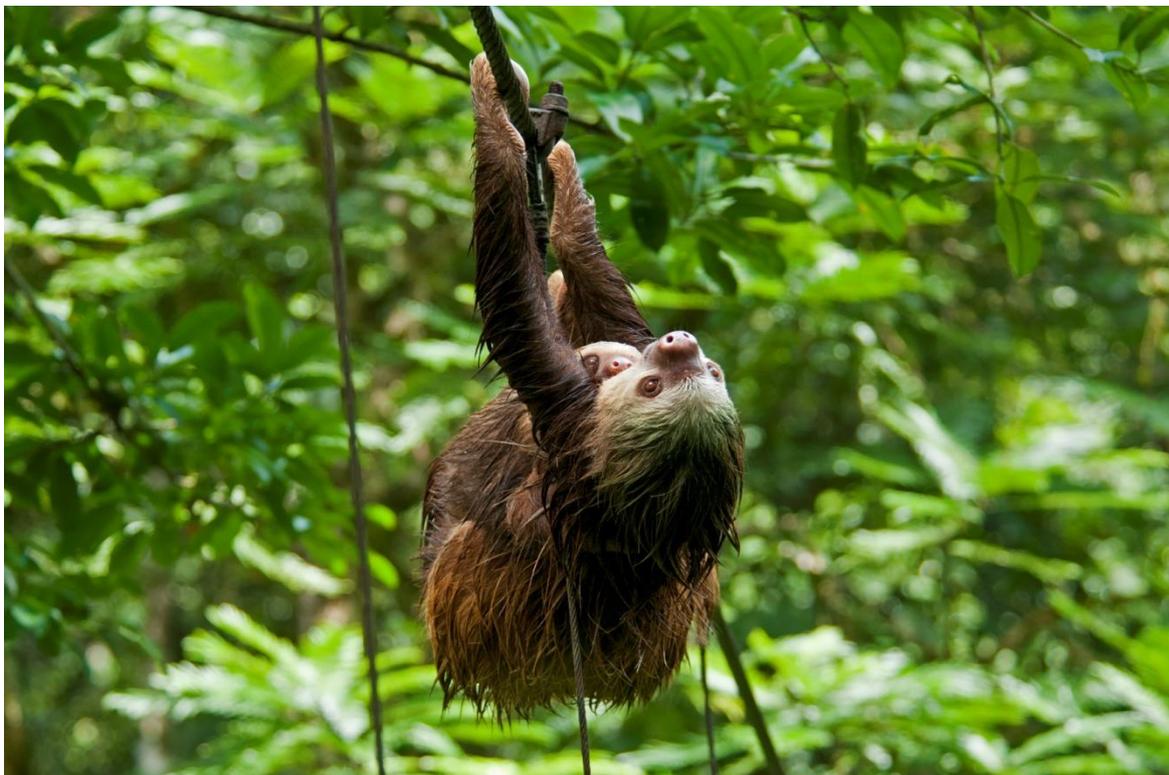
True to its name, puma valley appears to be a good place to look for pumas. Many of the guides have seen this family before and have photos (taken through a scope) on their phones. Bolivar has seen them twice before: the female alone when she was pregnant with her current litter and one of the cubs resting in a tree, probably while mum was hunting. There are also reports of a male, but he is not often seen.

Another amazing thing about Corcovado, apart from pumas is how unafraid the animals are of people. The park has been protected for 60 years and the animals have no memory of being shot. The peccaries and coatis would come up so close we could almost touch them. The tapirs probably wouldn't have minded if we joined them for a snooze in the muddy puddle – they let us stay 4 or 5 meters away from them. Ironically it is the predators that are most cautious.

Tirimbina Reserve and La Selva Biological Station

We arrived in Tirimbina just in time for the night walk on the property. Thankfully it was a small group this time and we were the only people on the grounds. We saw a **Northern racoon** walking towards us on the suspension bridge and a **Two-toed sloth** hanging in the canopy by the side of the bridge.

Tirimbina is typically a good place to see Honduran white bats, but the heavy rains and consequent floods have destroyed the island that contained the best *Heliconia* habitat and no guides knew where they find the bats any more. We decided to try our luck at La Selva. We booked a day walk and within minutes of walking down the trail we were looking at a young **Mexican hairy dwarf porcupine** snoozing on a relatively low branch above the trail. Next we spotted an **Agouti** that was considerably less shy than any of its conspecifics that we have seen in Costa Rica. And at our quite insistent request the guide took us to a known roosting sight of the **Honduran white bats**.



Back at the Welcome to La Selva poster the guide showed us some bats that were roosting inside the wooden beam supporting the display board. He identified them as **Gray sack-wing bats**.

Later we returned to La Selva for a night walk and were rewarded with a **Woolly opossum** and an unidentified rodent.

The following morning we were birdwatching on the suspension bridge in Tirimbina after the morning rain, when a wet and disheveled-looking **Two-toed sloth** female with a young clinging to her belly approached us along the high railing of the bridge. We moved backwards to give her way, though she clearly wasn't concerned with our presence.



Palo Verde National Park

As I was flying home out of Liberia, we returned to Guanacaste for the last day of the road trip and spent some time at Palo Verde National Park. Guanacaste is the driest part of Costa Rica and Palo Verde was incredibly dry. We saw some interesting birds outside of the park, but once we drove through the park's gate wildlife sightings dropped to zero. We drove around, climbed to a view point and just as we were about to leave the park, we spotted a **White-tailed deer** and shortly another one. The parting gift from Costa Rica – a new mammal on the very last day.

Mammal Species List

1	Puma	<i>Puma concolor</i>	Corcovado NP
2	White-throated capuchin	<i>Cebus capucinus</i>	Palo Verde, Manuel Antonio, Corcovado
3	Red-backed squirrel monkey	<i>Saimiri oerstedii</i>	Manuel Antonio, Corcovado
4	Mantled howler monkey	<i>Alouatta palliata</i>	Throughout
5	Black-handed spider monkey	<i>Ateles geoffroyi</i>	Corcovado
6	Red-Tailed squirrel	<i>Sciurus granatensis</i>	Tirimbina
7	Variegated squirrel	<i>Sciurus variegatoides</i>	Throughout
8	Brown-throated three-toed sloth	<i>Bradypus variegatus</i>	Manuel Antonio
9	Hoffmann's two-toed sloth	<i>Choloepus hoffmanni</i>	Monteverde, Tirimbina
10	Kinkajou	<i>Potos flavus</i>	Manuel Antonio
11	Northern raccoon	<i>Procyon lotor</i>	Tirimbina
12	Crab-eating raccoon	<i>Procyon cancrivorus</i>	Manuel Antonio
13	Gray four-eyed opossum	<i>Philander opossum</i>	Damas Island
14	Central American woolly opossum	<i>Caluromys derbianus</i>	La Selva
15	Silky anteater	<i>Cyclopes didactylus</i>	Damas Island
16	Northern tamandua	<i>Tamandua Mexicana</i>	Corcovado
17	Mexican hairy dwarf porcupine	<i>Sphiggurus mexicanus</i>	Monteverde, La Selva
18	Agouti	<i>Dasyprocta punctata</i>	Corcovado, La Selva
19	Sac-winged bat	<i>Saccopteryx bilineata</i>	La Selva
20	Brazilian long-nosed bat	<i>Rhynchonycteris naso</i>	Palo Verde, Damas Island
21	Tent-making bat	<i>Uroderma bilobatum</i>	Corcovado
22	Honduran white bat	<i>Ectophylla alba</i>	La Selva
23	White-nosed coati	<i>Nasua narica</i>	Throughout
24	Baird's tapir	<i>Tapirus bairdii</i>	Corcovado
25	Collared peccary	<i>Pecari tajacu</i>	Corcovado
26	Red Brocket deer	<i>Mazama temama</i>	Corcovado
27	White-tailed deer	<i>Odocoileus virginianus</i>	Palo Verde
28	Striped hog-nosed skunk	<i>Conepatus semistriatus</i>	Riu Guanacaste Resort
29	Pantropical spotted dolphin	<i>Stenella attenuate</i>	Drake Bay
30	Humpback whale	<i>Megaptera novaeangliae</i>	Drake Bay



