

I didn't spend as much time in the Peruvian Amazon as I did in Ecuador, about four months in all, but I was in one of the most biodiverse spots on Earth - the Tambopata/Manu region. As a result I managed to clean up on most of the stuff that I missed in Ecuador in a short time. That being said, there wasn't a great deal of overlap between the two regions in terms of regular sightings. Reading my notes on Ecuador you'll notice that I mentioned a lower frequency of sightings of the larger terrestrial mammals. Well that's not the case in this region of Peru and it complimented nicely with all the regular sightings of small to mid-sized mammals in Ecuador. As was the case with my time in Ecuador, I could have paid much more attention to small mammals and bats.

For my four months working as a guide there, I worked at the Wasai Tambopata Lodge. They have a lot to learn from other, more established lodges and it was a sharp contrast to what I had experienced at Sacha in Ecuador. Having said that, what it lacks in various services and professionalism, it more than makes up for in terms of location. It's situated just down river from the Tambopata-Candamo reserve and is the closest of all the lodges along the Tambopata river to the reserve, unless you stay at the research center in the reserve's core. Getting there is straightforward and all arrangements can be made when booking your stay. From the town of Puerto Maldonado it's a two to four hour ride by motorized canoe, up the Tambopata river, depending on water conditions - it can get pretty shallow in the drier season.

The Mammals.

Keep in mind that apart from camping trips to the reserve, most of the lodges offer the same species and opportunities to see them so much of the following applies to the entire region as it does to Wasai Lodge.

The trips up river from town to any of the lodges should get you multiple views of **Capybara**, though their number are higher as you get further from town and closer to the reserve. Most of them are very habituated and allow very close approach in canoes. You'll notice a fair amount of boat traffic and a number of communities/farms along the river but I'm told that locals aren't as fond of Capybara meat as in other regions of South America. While rarely seen from a noisy boat, the river has a decent population of **Giant River Otter** and it's worth keeping an eye out. Monkeys too are reasonably common but given the speed most boats travel and the high canopy you'll have to be sharp-eyed. Unfortunately the guides often use these trips as more of a down-time and are often pressured to point out less, so as to save time on the journeys to or from the lodge grounds. The species you can expect to see are **Red Howler Monkey, Black-capped Squirrel Monkey, Brown Capuchin** and occasional **Saddle-backed (Brown-mantled) Tamarin**. The best sighting I ever had along the sections of river below the park was of a **Bush Dog** so it pays to scan the shores at all times, even in more populated areas.

Once at the lodge grounds there is system of trails, though most lodges will not let you venture out on your own. In any case, a number of species can be seen right around the lodge. A **Tayra** visits the patch of bananas next to the small soccer field every morning and often wanders right by the restaurant. Actually, as long as there is little or no movement, it can be seen at any time of day in a number of spots around camp - just sitting patiently is the best strategy and they have a number of hammocks to facilitate this. Squirrel Monkeys and Tamarins also frequent the forest edge and you can usually detect their presence when they crash through the trees around camp. **Central American Agoutis** come out to feed on the forest edge behind the kitchen and dining area. The small canopy tower is pretty useless but could give you close views of something if it happens to swing by that area.

On the trails themselves there's a lot of potential. If you're keen on mammals, tell your guide to cut down on the explanations/talks when in the forest, instead focusing on walking as quietly as possible or sitting in one area. No particular species put in regular appearances but I had a number of encounters with **Collared Peccary, Coatis** and the various monkey species. **Tapir** and **Deer** tracks abound, and those of **Jaguar, Puma** and **Ocelot** can be found in wet areas quite easily. Seeing these animals is another story though and only once during my four months did another

guide encounter a Jaguar on these trails. **Giant Anteater** sightings on the trails are even less regular but it's worth a try. All the smaller nocturnal mammals seemed very low in numbers (confirmed by the scarcity of tracks) or were very wary, and I saw almost no mammals on night excursions. As far as the species present, I suspect that all the expected lowland species of the area must be present as the extensive forest is in very good shape.

A few of the cabins have a clearer view of the river and I saw **Giant River Otter** a few times from some of these cabins. You'll usually be alerted to their presence by their almost incessant squealing.

During your stay you'll do at least one night excursion on the river and besides the usual Capybaras, and Caiman (Spectacled and two Dwarf species) you can luck out on just about anything.

The highlight of any mammal watching however, most likely won't take place in the forest surrounding any of the lodges, but rather on a trip to the National Park/Reserve. The option to visit the park is what sets Wasai apart from all but one of the lodges along the river. I forget the name of the other lodge but both offer a camping trip to the National Park. It's mostly aimed at getting people close to the massive Macaw lick that comes alive in the early hours of the morning, but there's plenty of chance for great mammal encounters. Apart from a trip to the much further research center up river, you have your best chance of **Jaguar** along the river here. **Tapir** sightings are also fairly regular and Capybaras are around most river bends. There seems to be a high density of clay licks in the area which attract good numbers of mammals. Unfortunately, many are hidden away and mammals visit almost exclusively at night. If you can persuade your guide to sit with you at one of the licks then a multitude of different species suddenly become more likely. In my time at licks and with stories I have heard, I can conclude that everything from monkeys to small rats and the predators that hunt them can be seen around clay licks. Naturally, some of the species are not drawn to the clay but rather the insects and other by-products brought in by the larger animals. One such lick is only a 20 minute boat ride from the Wasai Lodge grounds but it's not on any regular itinerary so ask for it if you can. Locally they are called Colpas.

In the section of river by the campsite you can often find a family of **Giant River Otters** along with **Capybaras** and the occasional **Tapir** or **Jaguar**. In the campsite itself, a **Tayra** makes regular appearances to feed on scraps and a **Bolivian Bamboo Rat** can be heard calling on most nights. They are not terribly hard to find in the tangles of Bamboo. The campsite itself sits on a large island in the river and you'll need to cross it in order to get to the Macaw lick (**Puma** have been spotted flushing the birds by walking along the top of the bank here). On the journey through the secondary forest there are occasional patches of dense vine tangles and **Hoffman's Two-toed Sloth** is regular here. There's also a mammal clay lick about 30 minutes walk from the campsite. While these species are all quite exciting, it's the chances of something much rarer that really makes a trip here more worthwhile. Over time, the area has provided sightings of almost all of the species expected of this lowland region of Peru. Some exciting examples are **Grison**, **Margay**, **Giant Armadillo** and **Bush Dog**.

On the itinerary for trips to most of the lodges is a visit to Sandoval Lake. The lake is closer to town and about 30 minutes down the Madre De Dios River, so you can also organize day trips there from town. There is even accommodation on the lake shore at one spot. It holds a family group of Giant River Otter

and they are the star attraction for many. It also attracts a large number of monkey species to its shores and a 2/3 hour boat trip around the lake should get you **Black-capped Squirrel Monkey**, **Brown Capuchin**, **Red Howler Monkey** and **Titi**. There is a long hike in on a very wide, muddy track and this sometimes yields sightings of **Giant Anteater**. Massive Black Caiman inhabit the lake, too.

If you are staying at Wasai, the trip to Sandoval will require a stay at their lodge in town known as Wasai Maldonado which also happens to be about the best place to stay in town anyway. If you are here for that reason or simply want to drop in, the trees in the property along the river almost guarantee **Brown-throated Three-toed Sloth** and fractionally less chance of **Hoffman's Two-toed**. Look in any one of the number of trees and you should find one of two individuals that frequent the area. In fact, the Three-toed Sloth can often be seen climbing the stilts below the cabins or clinging onto the railings that surround the dining area. I had one clinging to the window of my bathroom one morning. For the Two-toed Sloth you'll need to be patient and thorough in your scanning. Concentrate on the dense tangle of vines closer to the staff quarters and look for the dark brown fur. Alternatively, if you exit the main entrance of the lodge, onto the main road and turn left, head to the end of the road and look into the trees in the small gully below, there's a Three-toed Sloth that hangs around here.

Notes on some of the mammals in the surrounding area. I spoke to many locals during my time here and enquired a lot about Manu and the regions closer to the Bolivian and Brazilian Border. More detailed information about Manu should be on the net but it appears that the area holds excellent chances for sighting Jaguar and other large mammals including some different and interesting primates. Most interesting in terms of the latter would be **Goeldi's Monkey** and **Emperor Tamarin**.

I did many other trips around the country and in doing so I saw some other animals not found in the Amazon Lowlands. None of the information is more useful than that currently on the web but it doesn't seem to be well known that the areas of forest outside of Macchu Picchu town (Agua Calientes) hold **Spectacled Bear**.