

## Costa Rica, from January 31<sup>st</sup> – February 15<sup>th</sup> 2014

No solo trip this time, but another one with my girlfriend. As usual, the focus was on birds and mammals, with one cultural stop (which was rather disappointing).

### Friday January 31<sup>st</sup> 2014

Since we decided to do this trip rather late, we had to fly from Brussels to London, from London to Dallas, and from Dallas to San José. A long day, we arrived at our final destination after dark and were very happy to go to bed. As expected, no mammals were seen.

### Saturday February 1<sup>st</sup> 2014

Our first day in Costa Rica, and of course we were up at sunrise. A walk to the central park in Alajuela resulted in our first birds, but also the first mammals of the trip: a few **Variegated squirrels**. We picked up our hire car after breakfast and drove west towards the Pacific coast. After a short drive we arrived in Tarcoles, and soon we were walking on the beach under a sunny sky. We walked towards the river mouth, and scanned the sea from time to time in the hope of seeing dolphins, but without any luck. At the hotel (Hotel Carara) we saw another **Variegated squirrel**. The final hours of the day were spent at the famous crocodile-bridge. At dusk several **bats** of at least two species were flying around. One of these (the most common species) looked completely dark (black), even in good light (see the bad picture below), if anyone has suggestions regarding the identification, please let me know ☺.



**Unidentified bat**, Tarcoles.

Sunday February 2<sup>nd</sup> 2014

Today we visited Carara National Park, and on the short drive from Tarcoles to the entrance, we saw our first two **White-faced capuchins** of the trip. A little further along the busy road, a dead **Striped hog-nosed skunk** was a sad sight (and would be the only skunk we would see).



Roadkill **Striped hog-nosed skunk**, Carara N.P.

In the national park itself we were more lucky. We started with the Lagoon Trail, where we saw two **Central American agoutis**, and a flying bat that landed on a nearby tree turned out to be a **Greater white-lined bat**. Also tracks of Red brocket were seen on this trail.



**Central American agouti**, Carara N.P.

In the afternoon we walked the loop trails close to the entrance. We didn't see much at first, but a few hundred meters before the exit, just as I said how nice it would be to finish with something really good, we heard something coming in from the left, making a lot of noise. My first reaction was "that must be a peccary", but just seconds later two **Tayra's** emerged from the vegetation, crossing the path within two meters of us! I even didn't have time to get my camera, it all went too fast! The first animal seemed to have a wound in its neck, and was chased by the other one. We were both thrilled to see this species, and knew this was going to be one of the highlights of the trip. It got even better, as a few hundred meters later one of them (or maybe even another, since it didn't came from the direction they went, and it wasn't wounded) again crossed our path, stood still for a few seconds, looked at us and walked away. This was a species that was high on my wishlist 😊. Near the hotel, some **Variegated squirrels** were seen in the evening, and at dusk the bats again flew around the bridge. After dark we tried to do some spotlighting, but without any success (although we saw our only scorpion there).



**Variegated squirrel**, Tarcoles.



**Mexican porcupine**, Monteverde.

#### Monday February 3<sup>rd</sup> 2014

Today we left the Pacific, and drove to the mountains, with Monteverde as our destination. A short stop at Chomes resulted in some waders and the tracks of a Northern raccoon, but nothing else was seen. In Monteverde we first looked for a hotel, and decided to stay at La Colina Lodge. A short visit to the hummingbird feeders in the afternoon didn't result in any mammals. At night we ate something in town, and as we arrived back at the hotel, Stefanie saw something moving at the edge of the road. I quickly stopped the car, took my torch, and soon we were watching a **Mexican porcupine**. We watched it as it disappeared in some vegetation. Another example of being at the right place at the right time! After this we drove up to the reserve hoping for something else, but we had already used our luck for today.

#### Tuesday February 4<sup>th</sup> 2014

We were up early, and went straight to the Reserva Biológica Bosque Nuboso Monteverde. The whole day was spent walking the trails, resulting in several **White-nosed coatis** (common near the entrance), a **Central American agouti** and one **Alfaro's pygmy squirrel**. At 4.30 p.m. we went to the hummingbird feeders, in the hope of seeing an olingo. Several people came to watch the hummers and to take pictures, and we were quite worried the animal wouldn't come out because of all the noise. While we were waiting, an **Alston's singing mouse** walked by. Then suddenly, at 5.40 p.m., with several people still standing close to the feeders, a **Bushy-tailed olingo** showed up! It was a female, and she went from feeder to feeder, trying to drink the sugared water. She was rather clumsy, and couldn't reach them all. A very nice sighting, and she was totally not frightened by the people watching and photographing her. After she left, all other people did too,. We were hoping for

some bats and decided to stay a little bit longer. No bats showed up, but at 5.55 p.m. another **Bushy-tailed olingo** appeared. This time it was a male, and he had another technique for drinking, hauling up the feeders by the ropes they were hanging on with his front paws. This looked a lot more efficient, and soon most of the feeders were empty, and we could leave the place with a big smile on our face.



Immature **White-nosed coati**, Monteverde.

Wednesday February 5<sup>th</sup> 2014

Our last full day in the area, and we decided to go to the Reserva Biológica Bosque Nuboso Santa Elena. Unfortunately it lived up to its name and dense fog made viewing wildlife very difficult. An **Alfaro's pygmy squirrel** was seen crossing the track, but after this we didn't see any mammals for several hours. Our persistence paid off however, with a nice family of **Central American spider monkeys**, looking miserable in the fog. At first there was a pair with a playful young, and after about half an hour two other adults (one with a small baby) came to join them, and they all cuddled up together, forming a big ball of fur. In total we spent more than an hour watching them, monkeys are always great to see!



**Central American spider monkeys**, Reserva Biológica Bosque Nuboso Santa Elena.

In the evening we again went to the hummingbird feeders at the Monteverde reserve, and upon arriving a group of eight **White-nosed coatis** (including two young ones) was raiding the feeders, jumping on them and making a big mess.



**White-nosed coati**, Monteverde.

At about 5 p.m. they left, and fifteen minutes later a **Bushy-tailed olingo** already showed up, giving better photo opportunities because there was more light than yesterday. Since we had booked a nighttour for later that evening we didn't stay until it was dark. At 7.30 p.m. we picked up our guide (Johnny Villegas C.) for the tour (his own car broke down that afternoon), and we headed for the Monteverde Wildlife Refuge. We had told him we hadn't seen a sloth yet, and a few minutes later he told me to stop the car just outside the village. He took his torch and just moments later we were watching a **Hoffmann's two-toed sloth**. It was very active and quickly moved out of sight. Off to the Refuge itself, and Johnny proved to be a very good guide. Soon after arriving we saw two **Common opossums**, and after talking to some other guides we headed to a certain place where he quickly found two **Kinkajous** high up in a tree. None of the other guides had seen them that evening, despite most of them starting their tour at 5.30 p.m. We had great views of them, but they were too high up for pictures. After this Johnny showed us some other night creatures, with two Green palm pit vipers and a tarantula as highlights.



**Bushy-tailed olingo, Monteverde.**

Thursday February 6<sup>th</sup> 2014

I woke up very early to spend another two hours near the entrance of the Monteverde reserve, where I saw five **White-nosed coatis** and a **Red-tailed squirrel**.



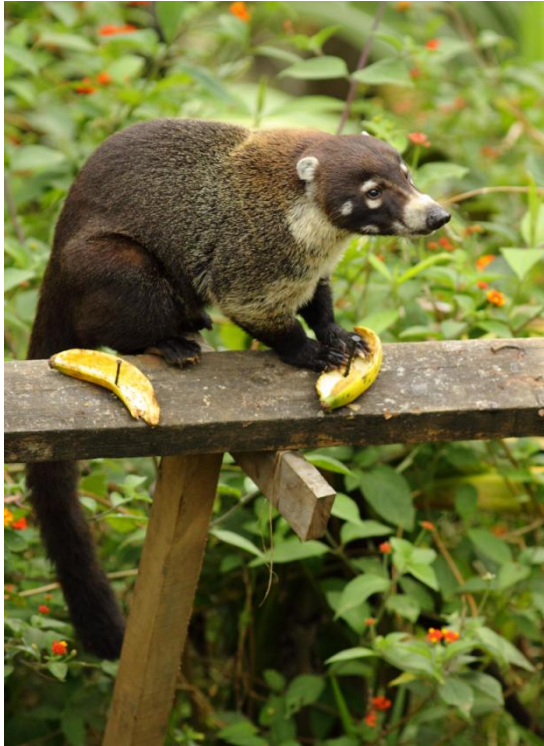
**Red-tailed squirrel**, Monteverde.

After breakfast we left and headed in the direction of Tirimbina. A group of four **White-nosed coatis** was seen on our descent, but the best was our first group of **Mantled howler monkeys** allowing very good views somewhere down the mountains. Unfortunately moist got inside the lens of my camera, and by the time it was evaporated the best photographic opportunities were already gone.



**Mantled howler monkey**, on the road from Monteverde to Tirimbina.

During the long drive nothing noteworthy was seen. We stopped to have a drink at Cinchona's Restaurant Mirador (I wanted to see some other hummingbird species there), where a **Red-tailed squirrel** and a **White-nosed coati** were present. We arrived in Tirimbina late in the afternoon, and had only time to visit the gardens and walk up to the bridge crossing the river. From the bridge we saw three **Mantled howler monkeys**. After dinner (we went to town to eat), we found out a nighttour had just started, and by staying close to the group we were able to see our first **Brown-throated three-toed sloth**, and also a **Central American woolly opossum** high up in a tree. We walked around the garden for some time, and had nice views of a **Nine-banded armadillo** too. A great start to our stay here!



**White-nosed coati**, Cinchona.

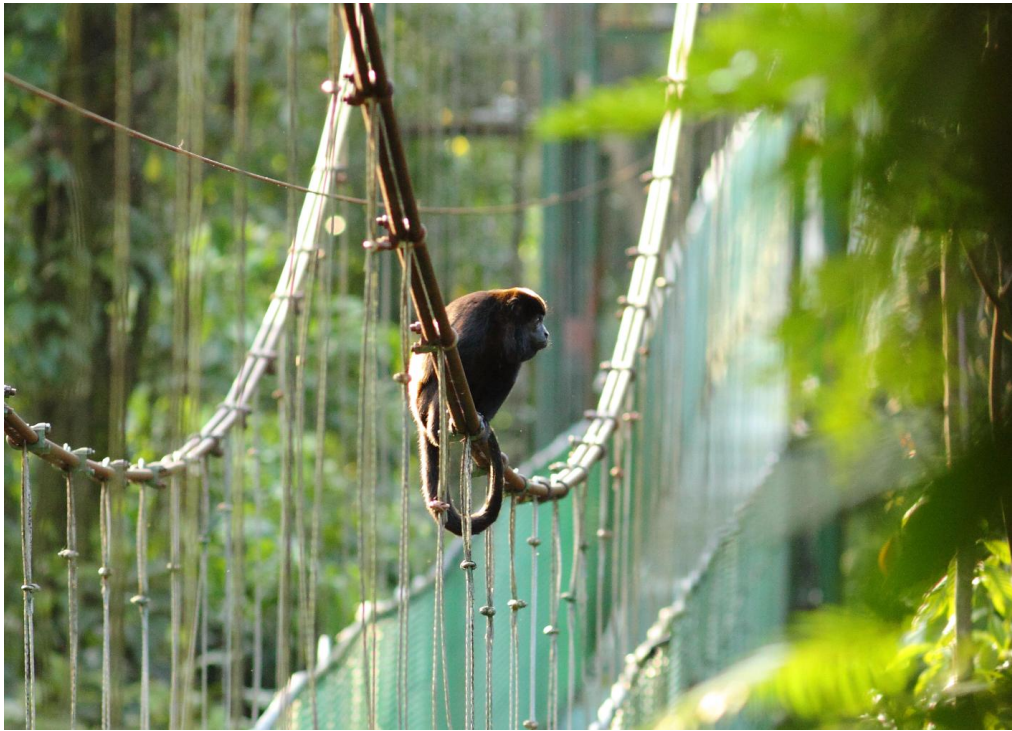
Friday February 7<sup>th</sup> 2014

Of course we were up early, but since the trails open only at 7 a.m. the first hour was spent in the gardens of the biological centre and the adjacent lodge (the gardens are connected). The **Brown-throated three-toed sloth** was still in the same tree as last night.



**Brown-throated three-toed sloth**, Tirimbina.

As soon as we could we headed for the forest, and we walked the trails all day in search of animals. Nothing new was seen (mammalwise that is, I had several new bird species), but we saw some **Mantled howler monkeys**, one **White-faced capuchin**, a **Red-tailed** and two **Variegated squirrels**.



**Mantled howler monkey**, Tirimbina.

When making our reservation I had told that I wanted to see the white bats, but upon arriving we were told the guy who knows where to look for them hadn't been present for some days. He was to arrive that afternoon, to catch some bats with us in the evening. So at first we only got some general directions ('look for them on the northern side of the island in the river'), and as I expected, we didn't find them... However, just as we were leaving the island Emanuel (the 'bat-guy') appeared and explained (in Spanish and some basic English, I answered in English and basic Spanish ☺) he wanted to try to find them for us. So within minutes we were following him (it felt like running rather than walking), checking all known locations. He couldn't find them where he expected them to be, but after half an hour, at what was the last location he was going to check, a nice group of 10 **Honduran white bats** was hanging under a bananaleaf only 1m above the ground!



**Honduran white bats**, Tirimbina.



**Brazilian brown bat**, Tirimbina.

Amazing little creatures, and another target species for me. Now expectations were high for the bat-trapping later that evening. This turned out to be a little bit disappointing, since we only caught two animals (probably due to the full moon), a **Brazilian brown bat** and a **Dark long-tongued bat**.

Emanuel was a great guy, trying to explain as much as possible, and since the trapping was very quiet he showed us some of his pictures of bats, and from the camera traps in the forest (the Baird's tapir and a day-time Ocelot seen by himself looked pretty good!). More than 60 species of bats apparently have already been observed at Tirimbina, and on a normal night 5-7 species and 10-15 individuals are easily caught, so I might go back there when I return to Costa Rica! After the nets were put away, we heard a **Northern raccoon** was caught at the bridge, in a trap set up to catch a woolly opossum (for a radio-telemetry study by a student). We were invited to join Emanuel and Melissa (the student) to see the release of the animal. They also told us we could go with them the following morning, since they had set up 10 traps in the forest (the day before a Kinkajou was caught).



**Dark long-tongued bat**, Tirimbina.



**Northern raccoon**, Tirimbina.

Saturday February 8<sup>th</sup> 2014

We started early, and joined Emanuel and Melissa to check the traps. It turned out the same **Northern raccoon** was in the same trap again, but all the others were empty. We saw two **Central American agoutis** on the Cacao Trail. After this we visited the garden of the hotel next door to have a look at the archaeological site, but this was very small, and in half an hour we had seen it all. In the entrance of the hotel however, 24 **Proboscis bats** were hanging under the roof.



**Proboscis bats**, Tirimbina.



**Hoffmann's two-toed sloth**, Tirimbina.

Next we crossed the bridge to head for the trails, when someone told us a sloth was hanging near the bridge a few meters further. And indeed, a **Hoffmann's two-toed sloth** was sitting/hanging in a tree at eye-level quite close to us, a great sight! After watching it for some time we walked the trails

all day, with only some **Mantled howler monkeys** and a **Red-tailed squirrel**. In the evening we did some spotlighting in the gardens, which was quite successful. First, Stefanie noticed some eyeshine in a tree in the botanical garden, which turned out to be a **Kinkajou**. We had great views, and probably a second animal was present too, but this was seen and heard too short to be sure. It got even better, since a few minutes later, we saw a **Tapiti** running around in the same area. Finally, a quick walk on the bridge late in the evening produced a remarkable sighting of the **Hofmann's two-toed sloth**, which was now hanging in the middle of the bridge...



**Kinkajou**, Tirimbina.

Sunday February 9<sup>th</sup> 2014

Our last morning in Tirimbina, and we once again helped Melissa with the traps. Unfortunately no woolly opossum was caught, but there was a **Common opossum** in one of the traps. We also found some Northern raccoon-tracks.



**Common opossum** in one of the traps, Tirimbina.

After breakfast we left this great place, and headed in the direction of Guayabo National Monument, the largest archaeological site in Costa Rica. We had a short stop at El Tapir hummingbird garden where we added Snowcap and Black-crested coquette to our growing birdlist. On our way to Guayabo we saw a **Brown-throated three-toed sloth** in a tree, and a dead **Northern tamandua**. Guayabo itself was a major disappointment (especially for Stefanie, who is an archaeologist and had expected a lot of this place), and in about an hour we had seen everything. We immediately decided to visit Peru or Mexico in the near future to see more spectacular ruins than these 😊. The night was spent in Turrialba, a not too pleasant town, but there were not many other places to stay in the area.



Roadkill **Northern tamandua**.

Monday February 10<sup>th</sup> 2014

Up early again, for the last day with our hire car. Our first destination was Volcan Irazú, to see some high-altitude bird species. Two roadkills were seen on our way to the volcano: a **Common opossum** and a **Nine-banded armadillo**. We arrived in dense fog at 8 a.m. (when the gates opened), and were greeted by a guard with the words “there is not much to see, obviously”... The car in front of us headed down the mountain again, but we went in, hoping the clouds would disappear. And indeed, after about 30 minutes the sun was shining and we could enjoy the spectacular views. Not many mammals were present, we only saw some bold **White-nosed coatis**, and lots of Coyote-droppings (unfortunately, despite scanning a lot, we didn’t see the animals themselves). In the afternoon we walked some trails lower down the volcano, in the so-called Prusia-sector. This was a great place, and we would have loved to camp there. We only saw a **Red-tailed squirrel**, but I think a lot more can be seen when staying there for a couple of nights, especially since it is one of the few places in Costa Rica where you can camp in a national park close to a lot of trails. Late in the afternoon we dropped the car near the airport and went to our hotel in San José, from where we would go to Tortuguero the next day.



**White-nosed coati**, Volcan Irazú.

Tuesday February 11<sup>th</sup> 2014

We were picked up pretty early, and headed for the Caribbean coast. To end our holiday in style, we had booked a package in Laguna Lodge, so this part was a bit more “touristy” than the rest of the trip. Our bus stopped for lunch in Guapiles, where we saw our only mammal of the day, a **Variegated squirrel**. After lunch we drove further, and then took a boat to the hotel. I had expected to see some monkeys during this boat ride, but we didn’t see a single mammal. In the afternoon we walked around the hotel gardens and beach, but again without any mammals. The swimming pool was great though 😊.

Wednesday February 12<sup>th</sup> 2014

After breakfast we did a boat trip in search of wildlife, and I was very much hoping to see otters. Most of the other members of the group were happy with every iguana, lizard or toucan they saw, so we didn’t cover too much ground (water in this case). Highlights were good views of both **Central American spider monkeys** and **White-faced capuchins**. Some **Mantled howler monkeys** were seen too.



**White-faced capuchin**, Tortuguero.

In the afternoon we had planned to go to the village and walk back along the beach, but thanks to a nice Belgian couple we got the chance to join them for another boat ride in the afternoon. This was a good decision, and since we were only with four people in the boat we were able to decide more what to look for and how long we stayed with each animal encountered. Unfortunately again no otters for us, but we had great views of two sleeping **Brown-throated three-toed sloths**, and a very active (for a sloth that is) **Hoffmann's two-toed sloth**. Despite not seeing any new mammals it was a great day, being on the water looking for animals is always great!



**Brown-throated three-toed sloth**, Tortuguero.



**Hoffmann's two-toed sloth**, Tortuguero.

Thursday February 13<sup>th</sup> 2014

Our last full day in Costa Rica, and it would be a day of travelling. Before breakfast we heard some **Mantled howler monkeys**. After this we took the boat to leave Tortuguero (with our final views of **Central American spider monkeys**), and then we boarded the bus to go to Alajuela. We arrived early in the afternoon, and spent our last hours strolling through this nice little town. The final mammal of the trip was the same as the first: a **Variegated squirrel** in the central park.

Friday February 14<sup>th</sup> 2014

We left early for the airport, and our flight left on time. We first flew to New York, and upon arriving there we struggled getting used to the sight of a snow-covered landscape! Brussels was our next destination, the end of a great (but way too short) trip. Costa Rica truly is a beautiful country to visit, with friendly people, and some great wildlife. I'm sure we'll go back one day, and Corcovado will be the prime destination for that trip 😊.

#### **Mammal list**

1. **Common opossum**: two were seen during the night tour at Monteverde, one was in the traps at Tirimbina, and a roadkill was seen on our way to Volcan Irazú.
2. **Central American woolly opossum**: one high up in a tree in the gardens of Tirimbina.
3. **Northern tamandua**: a roadkill on our way to Turrialba.
4. **Brown-throated three-toed sloth**: the commoner of the two sloth species, mostly seen sleeping high up in trees.

5. **Hoffmann's two-toed sloth:** seen at three locations, the first during a night tour in Monteverde, a very close individual at Tirimbina, and an active one at Tortuguero.



**Hoffmann's two-toed sloth,** Tirimbina.

6. **Nine-banded armadillo:** one animal seen in the gardens of Tirimbina, and a roadkill on our way to Volcan Irazú.
7. **Proboscis bat:** 24 were hanging in the entrance of the hotel next to Tirimbina.
8. **Greater white-lined bat:** One was seen flying around and then landing against a tree in Carara N.P.



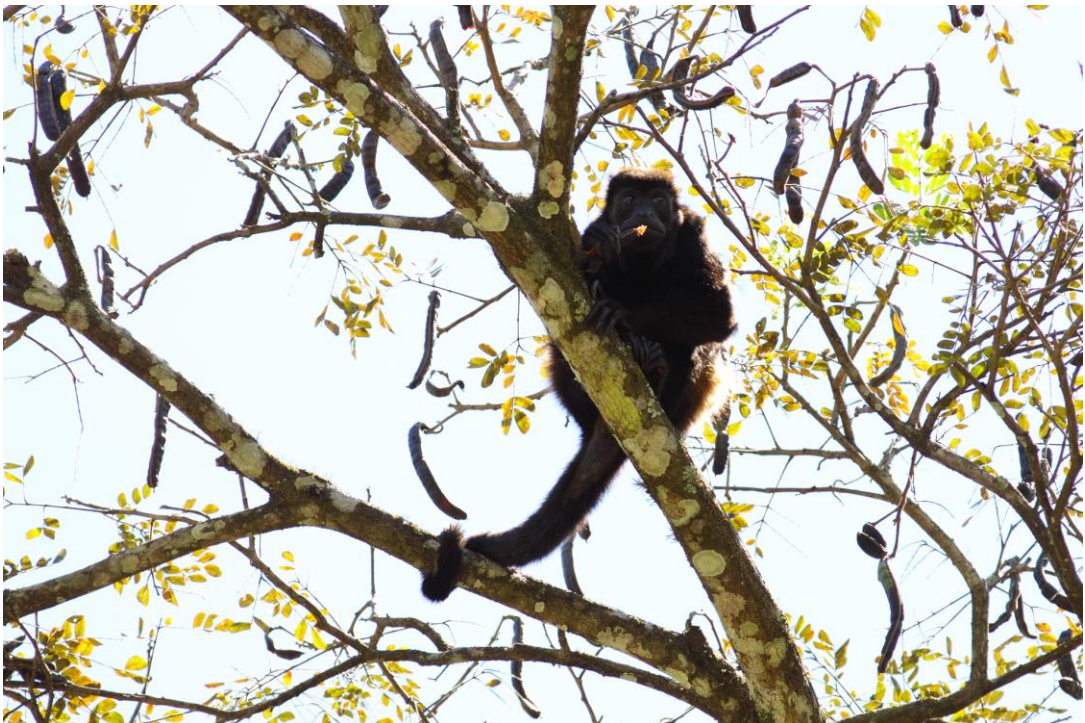
**Greater white-lined bat,** Carara N.P.

9. **Dark long-tongued bat:** one was caught during the bat-trapping session at Tirimbina.
10. **Honduran white bat:** a nice group of 10 was found by Emanuel at Tirimbina.
11. **Brazilian brown bat:** one was caught during the bat-trapping session at Tirimbina.
12. **White-faced capuchin:** two animals seen along the road to Carara N.P.; one brief sighting at Tirimbina; a group of three in Tortuguero, we watched these for some time, as they were looking for caterpillars in a tree close to the waters' edge. Less common than I had expected.



**White-faced capuchin**, Tortuguero.

13. **Mantled howler monkey:** quite common, with sightings on five days.



**Mantled howler monkey**, somewhere along the road.

14. **Central American spider monkey:** only seen at Santa Elena's cloud forest reserve (one group), and a few sightings at Tortuguero.



**Central American spider monkeys**, Reserva Biológica Bosque Nuboso Santa Elena.

15. **Variegated squirrel:** the most common squirrel near human habitation, often present in city parks. In Costa Rica there are several colour morphs depending on the area you are in.
16. **Red-tailed squirrel:** seen at Monteverde, Tirimbina and the Prusia-sector of Volcan Irazú.
17. **Alfaro's pygmy squirrel:** seen twice, at Monteverde and Santa Elena's cloud forest reserves.
18. **Alston's singing mouse:** one seen at the hummingbird feeders while waiting for the olingo's.
19. **Mexican porcupine:** one close to our hotel along the road at Monteverde.
20. **Central American agouti:** seen in Carara N.P. (2), Monteverde (1) and Tirimbina (2).



**Central American agouti**, Carara N.P.

21. **Tapiti**: one spotlighted at night in the botanical garden next to Tirimbina.
22. **Northern raccoon**: at Tirimbina two (or twice the same animal) were caught in one of the life-traps.
23. **White-nosed coati**: Common, seen at Monteverde and Volcan Irazú, sometimes also along the road.
24. **Bushy-tailed olingo**: Another highlight of the trip, seen at the hummingbird feeders at Monteverde on two evenings.
25. **Kinkajou**: two were seen high up in a tree during the Monteverde night tour; at least one (but probably two) were in a tree in the garden next to Tirimbina.
26. **Tayra**: One of the highlights of the trip, with two animals chasing each other in Carara N.P., followed by another sighting later that day.
27. **Striped hog-nosed skunk**: one roadkill on the road along Carara N.P.



Roadkill **Striped hog-nosed skunk**, Carara N.P.

Red brocket: tracks at Carara N.P.

Coyote: droppings at Volcan Irazú (both at the summit and the Prusia-sector)