

Costa Rica - 10th to 25th May 2012

Sarah & Andy Young

Our aim on this trip was to see as much interesting wildlife as possible, with a particular focus on mammals. We were especially keen to see tapir, and one of our initial reasons for coming to Costa Rica was Corcovado's exceptional record of sightings. We were also looking forward to seeing some unusual herps, and any exciting birds that might fly our way (although we wouldn't call ourselves birders). Neither of us had been to Central America before, so most species would be new.

We arranged the trip ourselves, and planned our itinerary largely using trip reports from mammalwatching.com (John Hall's, Stefi Lahaye's and Sjef Ollers were particularly useful). We took Fiona Reid's "Mammals of Central America and Southeast Mexico" which is an excellent book and includes lots of useful information specific to Costa Rica in the 'Comment' section. We also took "Birds of Costa Rica" which we found easy to use and accurate. We photocopied the relevant pages from "Where to watch birds in Costa Rica" by Barrett Lawson which is a really fantastic book with lots of useful directions and tips about travelling in the country, so not just of use to birders.

We hired a car (Sixt) and drove ourselves with no problems. We found the roads in Costa Rica pretty good and, other than an unpaved stretch near Santa Elena, we didn't encounter too many potholes. The roads are very narrow in places though, with no hard shoulder, which can be unnerving when faced with oncoming open-minded lane use. Our hire car had a GPS which was an absolute lifesaver. Without this, we wouldn't have had a clue where we were, ever.

We mostly guided ourselves, but we did have a guided walk in La Selva (which you get automatically when you stay there), a guided night walk in Tirimbina (which was amazing!) and a guided walk in Monteverde. We also did an evening frog walk in Drake Bay which we would highly recommend. We would have liked a guided walk at Sirena station (Corcovado) to start us off, but as we didn't want someone with us for the whole three nights, we were hoping we could arrange this there. This turned out not to be possible, and in retrospect, we should have booked a guide through one of the hotels in Drake Bay for our first morning at Sirena – we could then have remained there without a guide for the rest of the time.

We had an absolutely fantastic trip and would highly recommend Costa Rica to mammal watchers anywhere. For a day by day account of our trip, see below. A full list of species, and some final thoughts about the trip are also included at the end of this report.

Itinerary

Date	AM	PM	Sleep
10/05/2012	Fly to San Jose	Fly to San Jose	Trapp Family Inn, Alajuela
11/05/2012	Drive to La Selva	La Selva	La Selva
12/05/2012	La Selva	La Selva	La Selva
13/05/2012	La Selva	Tirimbina	Tirimbina Rainforest Lodge
14/05/2012	Drive to Monteverde	Monteverde	Hotel el Bosque
15/05/2012	Monteverde	Monteverde	Hotel el Bosque
16/05/2012	Monteverde	Drive to Manuel Antonio	Jungle Beach Hotel
17/05/2012	Manuel Antonio	Manuel Antonio	Jungle Beach Hotel
18/05/2012	Mangrove tour	Drive to San Jose	Trapp Family Inn, Alajuela
19/05/2012	Travel to Sirena	Sirena	Sirena Station
20/05/2012	Sirena	Sirena	Sirena Station
21/05/2012	Sirena	Sirena	Sirena Station
22/05/2012	Sirena & Boat to Drake Bay	Drake Bay	Las Cotingas
23/05/2012	Diving – Isla del Canos	Drake Bay	Las Cotingas
24/05/2012	Diving – Isla del Canos	Drake Bay	Las Cotingas
25/05/2012	Travel to San Jose	Travel to San Jose	Trapp Family Inn
26/05/2012	Fly to UK	Fly to UK	

10th May 2012 – Getting to San Jose

All of our holidays seem to begin with a mad frantic rush to get things finished in time, and this was no exception. However, after three days of very little sleep, we made it to Truro station just in time to get the overnight sleeper train to London. We had a slight scare at Heathrow when we were told that we needed an ESTA visa to transit the USA (we were flying via Atlanta). We'd managed to miss this in the small print of our flight booking, but fortunately still had an active one from the year before. Phew.

We arrived in San Jose early evening and were met at the airport by Alan from the Trapp Family Inn (after being helped by a very short Porter that we were amused to find was called 'Nano'). The hotel is in Alajuela, just 5 minutes from the airport, so it's very convenient, if a bit overpriced. Andy had a quick swim in the pool and we went to bed at 8.30pm, knackered.

11th May 2012 – La Selva

We had pre-arranged for someone from Sixt car rental to meet us back at the airport at 6.15 as we wanted to get out of San Jose early to avoid the traffic. We'd heard bad things about car hire companies in Costa Rica, but we had no problems at all – we'd highly recommend Sixt. Our car was ready, along with the GPS we'd booked, and they were flexible about drop off points and times etc. We grabbed some food at a little soda near the car hire place (our first Gallo pinto got the thumbs up) and then set off for La Selva.

Getting out of town was a little hairy but the drive to La Selva wasn't too bad. Andy got me to read sections of the Lonely Planet out loud on the way, which I suspect was to stop me panicking and grabbing hold of the roof every time we overtook a lorry. It seemed to work, and I remained relatively calm. We weren't sure what time we would arrive, so we hadn't booked lunch at La Selva. As it turned out we made it in less than 2 hours, so headed to Puerto Viejo de Sarapiquí to find a bank to pay for our stay at Sirena station in Corcovado (fees have to be paid in advance, and as they don't accept international bank transfers, it has to be done in country). This step proved to be remarkably easy - money was certainly transferred somewhere anyway. Completing the process did prove a bit of a palava though, as it turned out we had to fax Corcovado the proof of payment slips

and wait for an email reply confirming our accommodation, which we then had to print and take to Sirena station. These instructions were in Spanish, so it took us a while to work it all out!

We arrived at **La Selva** at around lunchtime and before we got out of the car saw our first **collared peccaries** foraging near reception, along with a green iguana, a keel-billed toucan and a flock of orange-chinned parakeets. La Selva is an extremely well-equipped research station set in an area of forest contiguous with Braulio Carrillo Reserve. It has a nice canteen, a small shop, laboratories, a library and houses for researchers and visitors. It's justifiably popular with birders, but is also very good for mammals and amphibians. Our cabin was 1km from reception so we drove there immediately, dropped our bags, and then walked back through the forest. We decided to walk the STR trail as we were in the mood for a longish walk, and were hoping to see green and black poison dart frogs.

We saw our first group of **mantled howler monkeys** almost immediately in a tree next to the main suspension bridge, and had a great walk: no poison dart frogs, but plenty of new birds, including rufous-crowned and broad-billed motmots, great curassow, crested guan and two species of oropendula. We also saw three more groups each of **collared peccary** and **mantled howlers**, all very tame.



We arrived back at reception at around 5.30, pretty knackered and in need of stimulants - fortunately La Selva provides free tea and coffee throughout the day. They also have an ice machine, which was very welcome. We had dinner at 6pm and then headed over the bridge for a bit of spotlighting. Guests staying the night at La Selva can spotlight anywhere in the reserve without a guide, so we were planning to head to the arboretum which Steffi Lahaye's trip report had mentioned was good for common opossums. This plan was scuppered by us not finding the arboretum in the dark (it turns out we lost faith a little early, turning back just short of it), but we did see a lovely **nine-banded armadillo** foraging through the leaves on the SUR trail, just a few metres from the path.

We spotlighted back to our cabin, but didn't see much, although we did get tantalising glimpses of what we thought was orange eye shine in front of us. We eventually worked out that this was headlamp beetles in flight (which have two bright spots of green glow on their heads when on the ground, but an orange glow in flight - how cool is that?). We chilled a couple of beers that we'd bought from the supermarket in Puerto Viejo (La Selva is dry) with a bag of ice that we'd brought back from the canteen, and sat on our balcony reflecting on a great first day.

12th May 2012 – La Selva

We awoke to the sound of **howlers** calling in the forest, and walked over to the canteen at around 5.30am, spotting a great tinamou on the way. We had a guided walk booked for 8am (the complementary introductory walk), and were planning to wander down to the arboretum after breakfast. Torrential rain around 7am drove us back to the terrace for more coffee and a chance to get our heads round the bird book. Alongside some nice views of bananaquit and blue dacnis we also ID'd a dull thrush-like bird which we were surprised to find (in the face of presumably stiff competition) was Costa Rica's national bird, the clay-coloured robin.

The rain stopped just in time for our 8am walk. Our guide Christian was excellent and really took the time to ask what we were interested in seeing. We began by birding up the entrance road, seeing some very cool birds, including blue ground dove and a snowy cotinga in a dead tree by the gate. We also looked for Hoffman's two-toed sloth, as Christian had seen one in the area the day before. We

didn't see the sloth, but we did see a couple of **variegated squirrels** and, to our great excitement, our first strawberry poison dart frog (which elicited much fiddling with Macro kit and crouching in the grass from Andy). They are tiny (about the size of my thumbnail) and are just spectacular. We then headed back across the bridge and into the forest (CCC and SOR trails), where we saw more strawberry poison dart frogs, some bullet ants and some nice birds including great green macaw and collared aracari.



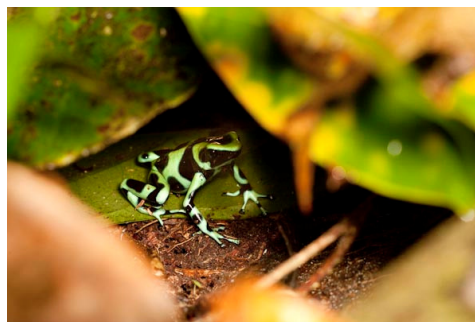
Christian told us about a good spot for white collared manakin on the SAZ trail, so we had a look on the way back to our cabin after lunch. We found them pretty much exactly where he said they would be, around the 650m marker (we heard their clicking call before we saw them). After a quick siesta, we headed back out to locate the arboretum. On the way back along the SAZ trail Andy stopped to photograph a mot mot near the manakin spot, and foraging just to the right, silently on the ground, was our first **Central American agouti**.

We found the arboretum with no problem in the daytime. It's a bit of an eerie place – I'm not sure why, but neither of us particularly liked it. We did see our first group of **white-faced capuchins** at the top of a large tree just as we were leaving though. We returned via the CCC and SOR trails, but other than a cool stripe-throated hermit foraging through the reeds, we didn't see much of interest.

While we were eating dinner in the canteen we heard a commotion outside and went to have a look at what was going on. Sitting on a post just off the terrace was a greater potoo, giving fantastic views. After dinner we went spotlighting around the arboretum, but the hoped for opossums didn't materialise and we saw little else other than a crab, an unidentified snake and an enormous smoky jungle frog on the way back to our cabin. The rain had brought the leafcutters out in full force though – trails as wide as my hand full of ants stretching as far as the eye could see.

13th May 2012 – La Selva & Tirimbina

We had breakfast at 6am and then wandered out along the entrance road just in case the sloth had materialised by the gate. No sloth, but we did see another **agouti** out in the open. We then hit the CES trail where we saw more **collared peccaries**, **howlers** and another **agouti**, plus lots of 'blue jeans' (strawberry poison dart) frogs, giving Andy plenty of fun with his macro gear. Just as we were starting to head back, around 150m before the start of the STR trail, we finally saw a beautiful **green and black frog** sitting on a log. A stunning little creature, with a knack for hiding in spots that required unnerving leaning-on-rotten-logs-that-might-harbour-nasty-beasts photography. A great end to our last morning at La Selva.



After our walk we packed up, had lunch, and drove the 20 minutes to **Tirimbina Rainforest Lodge**. Tirimbina is also a research/education centre and so offers some interesting opportunities that aren't available elsewhere. Our main reason for coming here was to see **Honduran white bats**, so we had e-mailed in advance to book a walk with a bat expert who might know where the tents were. There

was some confusion when we arrived, as they had booked us onto the evening bat programme (a talk about bats with a presentation of any that they had caught that evening) which wasn't what we were looking for. When they realised what we were interested in though, they suggested that we join their researcher for the evening mist-netting session on the island, so we jumped at the chance.

We met Manuel, one of the bat researchers, at 5.30 by reception. He spoke no English and we spoke no Spanish (which was pretty embarrassing), but he was a really lovely guy, and with some comedy animal acting and broken Spanish we had a really great evening. We were asking Manuel about other animals that use the bridge e.g. Kinkajou, Mexican porcupine etc. and were just checking the nets for the first time when Manuel said 'Kinkayou!' – a **Kinkajou** was in the trees right above the nets! This was one of the animals we were really hoping to see on the trip, and a first for both of us, so we were over the moon.

We came back to the nets after the watching the kinkajou, and sitting in it was a beautiful **Honduran white bat**. Wow! We never imagined we'd catch one so quickly. There was also a **grey short-tailed bat**. While waiting to check the nets the second time, Manuel told us that researchers trapped for other mammals at Tirimbina as well as bats, and took us to see one of the kinkajou traps high up in the trees at the far end of the main suspension bridge. Apparently they catch kinkajou and common opossum pretty regularly, and I suspect they would allow tourists to join these sessions if booked in advance.



At around this point we told Manuel that we hadn't seen a sloth yet. Manuel laughed (at us not with us!) and said there were three in camp and started pointing at his eyes and pointing upwards, as if to say 'Oh, you want to see a sloth...then you need to look in the *trees*'. Yeah, thanks. We checked the nets again and then went up to the bridge for a quick spotlight, seeing a **Northern racoon** wandering along the path in front of us. We started heading back towards the restaurant, so Andy and I thought we were done for the night. However, Manuel looked back at us over his shoulder and said 'checking sloth' then marched on. We stopped under a tree about 50m from the start of the bridge, and there above us was our first **Hoffman's two-toed sloth**. Could this evening get any better?

It promptly did, as while we were walking back along the bridge to check the nets for the last time, we met a **Mexican porcupine** walking on one of the bridge wires. This was another animal high on our wish list (and a bonkers looking beast at that – looking like it has been assaulted with a gold spray can), so we were totally stoked. On return to the nets we found another **Honduran white bat** and three **short-tailed bats** (species unknown unfortunately). What an incredible evening! After much 'muchos gracias' to Manuel, we headed to dinner, which they had very kindly saved for us. Tirimbina rocks.



4th May 2012 Tirimbina to Santa Elena/Monteverde

Unfortunately, in joining the mist-netting last night, we failed to book a guided walk to look for bat tents this morning. Instead we went for a walk on our own around the island stooping to inspect every bent leaf, but although we found used bat tents, we didn't find any occupied ones. This was a bit disappointing, and in retrospect, we should have booked a standard nature walk for that morning.

We were still buoyed up by our amazing evening though, so although we missed bats in tents, we'd had an awesome stay.

We left Tirimbina at 10am and drove to Santa Elena (for Monteverde) via Arenal, arriving at around 3pm. We didn't bother to stop in Arenal as it had been several months since the volcano was last active. The drive wasn't too bad (the GPS worked a treat, as there were some poorly signed turns), and only the last 30km was on dirt road. Santa Elena is very different to La Selva and Tirimbina. It's very mountainous and much cooler, so it feels a bit like a Swiss mountain town and, oddly enough, there are also lots of tuk tuks. They're clearly no strangers to baked goods too, which added to the appeal.

We stayed at **Hotel el Bosque**, a small guest house close to the Bajo del Tigre reserve. We'd highly recommend it; the rooms are reasonably priced, clean and comfortable (if not beautifully decorated), but the best bit is the large garden and close proximity to the reserve. We could hear bellbirds from our room, and there are lots of trails leading directly from the garden, making it good for pre-breakfast walks. It's also nice and close to the Monteverde reserve and next door to a pizzeria and a bakery. What more could you want?

We dropped our bags in our room, and headed straight to the Hummingbird Garden by the entrance to the **Monteverde reserve**, in the hope of seeing the **bushy-tailed olingo** that according to other trips reports sometimes comes to the hummingbird feeders in the evenings. The hummingbirds were amazing, really tame and zipping around all over the place. We sat outside the hummingbird gallery patiently for a couple of hours while the light faded, the shop closed and all went dark and silent. However, the olingo didn't show. It did rain the entire time, though, and at around 6.30 we decided to call it a night. We spotlighted back to our hotel, but didn't see anything, which was unsurprising given the torrential rain. We rounded off the day with some great pizza where some other guests looked strangely at Andy (the reasons for this only became clear a few days later).

15th May 2012 – Santa Elena/Monteverde

Andy went for a walk around the gardens before breakfast, and saw several **variegated squirrels**, an **agouti** and some nice birds including blue-crowned mot mot. A cool little dog wearing a bright pink harness joined us for breakfast, and refused to budge when the waitress tried to move her away. She ended up having to walk the dog out by its front paws, much to everyone's amusement.

We thought the **Monteverde reserve** opened at 8am, so we arrived just after 7am in the hope of doing a bit of birding along the road before all the buses arrived. Unfortunately, the reserve had opened at 7 and the hoards had already gathered. We went to the office to arrange a guide, but were told that no guides were available. However, they were very helpful and arranged for one to join us in an hour. This proved a blessing in disguise, as it meant we got a guide to ourselves.

Our guide Jairo was great, and seemed to know his bird calls. About five minutes into the forest he heard resplendent quetzels and was able to call them in, giving us excellent views of a male (albeit with a short tail) and female. We spent about three hours with Jairo, and saw a couple of **agoutis**, an orange-kneed tarantula and lots of cool birds including grey-breasted wood wren, black-faced solitaire and emerald toucanets. We also got great views of three wattled bellbirds displaying, which was probably the highlight of the walk for us. On the way back we saw a squirrel in the forest which Jairo said was a Deppes squirrel. However, we're pretty convinced it was a **red-tailed squirrel** and comments in our mammal guide suggest that Deppes squirrels are unlikely to be found in Monteverde.

The clouds descended at lunchtime, so we spent the afternoon hanging out in Stella's bakery, eating cake and drinking vast quantities of coffee. Andy and I have started speaking in a weird faux

Spanish, which basically involves putting 'os' on the end of every word. As in 'its muchos hottos today' or 'Woah...look at that bigos frogs'. This has become worryingly normal.

At around 3.30pm we went back to the **Monteverde forest** in the hope of seeing Alfaro's pygmy squirrel which our guide had told us were common. We didn't see any, but we did see a black guan



in the trees, looking tantalisingly mammal like. Just before 4pm we headed back to the hummingbird feeders for an olingo stake out. Andy spoke to the guy who maintains the feeders, and he said the olingo comes most days to the feeders closest to the trees (next to the wider covered area at the end of the building that is furthest from the reserve entrance), usually after 6pm. However, as we were sitting there, another guy from the café told us that he usually sees the olingo at around 5.15. Either way, we were there at 4pm, and well prepared for several hours of waiting, with leftover pizza from yesterday and cold

beers. I also imposed silence and a ban on photography for fear that enthusiastic paparazzi action on Andy's part last night might have scared it off. If we didn't see this Goddamn olingo, it certainly wouldn't be through want of trying.

At around 4pm it started to rain (again), but we waited patiently until it got dark at around 6pm. It was around about this point, as we sat there in silence in the dark, looking out at the rain, that I began to suspect that our holidays aren't quite like other peoples. At 6.15 though, the bats started coming to the feeders in full force, and we spent a happy hour or so watching the bats. By this time we had pretty much given up on the olingo and were moving around, using flash to take photos of bats and not bothering to be quiet. At around 7.20 most of the feeders were empty, so we decided to call it a night. Andy was just taking a few last photos when I shone the torch at the feeders, more out of habit than anything. There in the trees above the right hand feeder was a beautiful **bushy-tailed olingo!** He ran through the trees to the feeder nearest the café, went down the wire head first, realised the feeder was empty, and disappeared back into the forest. Literally disappeared – no eyeshine, no branches moving, nothing. The whole encounter must have lasted less than a minute. Wow! We'd completely given up on seeing it. We headed back to the restaurant near our hotel to celebrate with some Cuba libres. Awesome.



16th May 2012 - Santa Elena to Manuel Antonio

We went for a walk around **Bajo del Tigre reserve** after breakfast. The reserve is really nice, with well maintained and clearly-marked trails. We had great views of three wattled bellbirds (on the bellbird trail, where else?), and were also really chuffed to see a couple of long-tailed manakins (one of them ringed) on the monkey trail just between the 21 and 22 markers. We hung out with the



manakins for a while in the hope they would start displaying and, while we were there, a group of **white-nosed coatis** crashed through the undergrowth with at least five very small pups. This made us very happy.

We packed up our stuff and left Monteverde at 10.30, arriving in Manuel Antonio at around 14.30.

We stayed at the **Jungle Beach Hotel**, which was nice enough, reasonably priced and in a good location; near the beach and about 10 mins walk from the park entrance. It's right on the main road (which is par for the course in Manuel Antonio) but far enough from the bars and restaurants not to be too noisy. The breakfast was basic, but after a mountain of seafood each night this wasn't a problem.

We were a bit apprehensive about Manuel Antonio given its touristy reputation, but the beach really is stunning, and although it was far more commercial than anywhere else we had been in Costa Rica, it was much less busy than we expected. We were the only guests in our hotel and the bars were mostly empty; the advantage of coming midweek in the off season presumably. We went for a walk along the beach and up to the park entrance after we checked into our hotel, to look for sloths, and then decided to take advantage of the two for one cocktail deals run by most of the bars in town, and spent the evening sitting on the beach front drinking passion fruit daiquiris and eating fantastic calamari.



17th May 2012 – Manuel Antonio



Andy got up early to photograph ghost crabs on the beach and I woke to the sound of little feet thundering on the ceiling. I looked outside to find a group of **white-faced capuchins** on top of our cabin, one of whom had a big rock and was banging it repeatedly on the roof! We headed in to the park at around 7am, spotting our first **red backed squirrel monkeys** on the road to the entrance. We'd been in the park for five minutes, when Andy spotted a **Hoffman's Two-toed sloth** through a jumble of vines high up in the

trees just off the main trail and another group of **squirrel monkeys**. A few minutes later we spotted two more **Hoffman's sloths** in a tree. As we were walking along the trail searching for sloths we turned around and following about 10m behind us was a very tame **white-tailed deer**. It must have been walking behind us for while – so much for our crack spotting skills.

We headed down to the main beach where large brown basilisks were scrabbling around in the dried leaves and then walked the trails around the point. An American guy stopped to chat and said he had seen us in the pizzeria in Monteverde – apparently his friends were convinced that Andy was Richard Branson (he has got a holiday beard and is in desperate need of a haircut, so the error is forgivable). He didn't seem overly disappointed, and took a photo of Andy for his wife anyway!

Walking back up to the main track we spotted some people looking up into a tree on the right hand side. There above us was our first **brown throated three toed sloth**. After this we decided to walk some of the smaller trails, and turned a corner to find a scope on a tripod on its own in the middle of the path, with no owner to be seen. It was pointing at a tree, so we had a look through it, and there above us was another **three toed sloth**. This was now getting ridiculous. I can't imagine sloth spotting gets much easier than in Manuel Antonio!

It was getting pretty hot by this time, so we headed back, spotting another group of **squirrel monkeys** on the way. We didn't see many birds in the reserve, but this was just as well, as an unfortunate incident with a large wave put our bird book out of action for most of the morning.

It rained heavily all afternoon, so we stayed at our hotel reading, finally venturing out at around 5pm. The rain had cleared everyone out of Manuel Antonio, so we were the only people in the restaurant. We ate more calamari and fish tacos (and made the most of their two for one cocktail provision) and then spotlighted our way back along the beach in the hope of finding some northern raccoons. No raccoons, but we had fun taking photos of ghost crabs scampering through the waves.

18th May 2012 – Manuel Antonio, Mangroves and back to San Jose

We headed to the park at around 7am, spotting a **Hoffman's two-toed sloth** in a tree right on the main road outside our hotel. We also saw more **howlers** and an **agouti** crossing the path. We arrived at Manuel Antonio playa (inside the park) at around 8am and had the whole beach to ourselves. We spent an hour or so on the beach swimming and watching the hermit crabs and just as we were packing up we saw a **northern raccoon** foraging on the beach near the visitor's info. We went to get a closer look as neither of us had had a good look at a raccoon before. He really was a very cool animal, long legged and cat-like. We watched him digging for crabs from around 15m away, and then he started walking towards me. I sat still thinking he'd go by, but he came right up and stood up on his hind-legs begging for food. This is clearly an animal that has been fed by tourists.



We headed back to our hotel, stopping for some awesome strawberry pancakes on the way. Milenlly from **Avenatura** then picked us up from our hotel at 11am for a pre-arranged boat tour of the nearby mangroves. The timing of the mangrove tour depends on the tides, but luckily for us the day was cloudy, so an 11am departure wasn't quite as baking hot as it would have been the day before.

We drove about 30 minutes to the dock where the boat was moored, spotting **howler monkeys** and a few cool birds on the way (including roseate spoonbill and northern jacana). Our goal on this trip was **silky anteater** (as recommended by other trip reports) and we immediately felt reassured that we were in good hands. Walter, the boat driver, and Milenlly know all the good spots and were constantly looking. If we didn't manage to see the anteater, both of us were in no doubt that we were with the right people and had given it our best shot.

After looking for about an hour we'd seen little (a few water birds and a couple of capuchins), and none of the boats that we passed had seen any anteaters either. However, at around 1pm we bumped into a group of kayakers who said they had seen an anteater deep in the mangroves. Our boat was too large to access the spot, so we had to get out and climb through the tangle of mangrove roots for around 30m. This was more of a mission than it sounds; Milenlly scampered across, but for Andy and I (mostly me) it was a real obstacle course. At one point we had to cross a wideish creek with no roots to climb on, but fortunately the kayak guide gave us a lift across on the front of his boat (much to the terror of the girl who was sharing his kayak). We got across, looked up, and there above us



was a very cute, beautiful little **silky anteater**. So tiny, and worth all the effort to get to it! Meanwhile the kayakers moved off...

Our only option to get back to the boat then was to swim back across the creek in our clothes as it was too deep to walk through. While this would normally have been fine, as our binoculars were (supposedly) waterproof, Andy had a small fortune in camera gear in his rucksack, which wasn't. The bag was too heavy to swim with, so he decided to throw it across to me and Milenlly. He zipped it all up, threw it into our waiting arms... and it dropped with a splat some way short of the mark – fortunately rain cover down, so we quickly reeled it in and, remarkably, nothing got wet. Phew. Andy remained remarkably calm throughout this whole incident.

We got back into the boat and headed to the dock, totally stoked about the anteater and the adventure we had had to get to it. The mangrove tour was expensive (\$69 each) but as they see anteaters on 5 of every 7 trips and work extremely hard to find them for you, I think it is well worth doing, especially if like Andy and I you haven't yet seen mangroves or much in the way of water birds.

Milenlly dropped us back at our hotel, where we found a group of **squirrel monkeys** in the tree above our car, offering one last photo opportunity before we left Manuel Antonio. We took a few photos and then left for San Jose at around 3pm, arriving back at the **Trapp Family Inn** just before 6pm. Sixt picked up the hire car from our hotel and were as fantastic as they were when we dropped the car off, no hidden extras at all. We would recommend them highly. We spent the rest of the evening repacking our bags and excitedly charging batteries for cameras, spotlights and trail cameras (!) for our early morning flight to Osa peninsula.

NB. We drove all the way back to San Jose, despite Manuel Antonio not being that far from Osa Peninsula, just to get rid of our hire car. We've since found out that we could have dropped our Sixt car off in Quepos and used public transport from there, but hey – you live and learn.

19th May 2012 – San Jose to Sirena Station, Corcovado



We left a bag of non-essential kit at the Trapp family inn as there is a fairly tight weight limit on the internal flight we took to Drake bay. Our plan was to go straight to Sirena Station, spend three nights there, and then go back to a hotel in Drake Bay (Las Cotingas) for the rest of our stay in Costa Rica. As the flight from San Jose arrived too late for us to share one of the normal morning boats to Sirena Station (which would have been much cheaper), Felix from Las Cotingas chartered a boat for us for \$180 dollars (we arranged this through him in advance by email; he was very

helpful). This was certainly pricy, but well worth it to get straight in to Sirena station. The boat trip itself wasn't much fun, as the sea was pretty rough, and it poured down so we arrived completely soaked. Drake bay already feels like a pretty wild location, surrounded by rainforest, and the boat ride then takes you 1.5 hours further along a coastline of unbroken wilderness to what then feels like a genuinely remote spot. We arrived at 11.15, just in time for lunch.

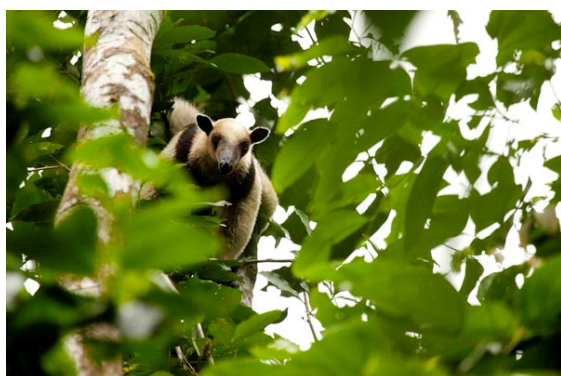
Sirena station is in a fantastic location, set in a clearing in the forest at the end of an airstrip, around 1km from the beach. It's raised off the ground, and has a really nice wide veranda that catches the breeze, with comfortable wooden chairs to relax in. We stayed in a bunk room which we had pre-booked in advance (the money we paid in Puerto Viejo had gone to the right place), but it's also possible to pitch tents, either on the grass or on a covered deck. The bunk rooms each have four beds, but as far as I could see different groups weren't asked to share – we had the whole room to ourselves anyway.

The station was pretty empty when we arrived, with only a couple of other groups. However, a group of American college students landed on the beach shortly after us (who coincidentally were at Tirimbina when we were there too) which filled it up a bit. This peace is apparently due to the time of year, as we heard that the place tends to be packed full in the peak season. The students were planning to go to the Sirena River after lunch to look for bull sharks, so we decided to go in the other direction, towards the Rio Claro. In our first hour at the station we saw quite a lot of wildlife though;



scarlet macaws, mealy parrots and black vultures were hanging around the cabins and before we left we saw our first **Central-American spider monkeys** passing the station and a lone **white-nosed coati** foraging near the rubbish dump at the back of the 2nd bunk room.

The first part of the Rio Claro trail wasn't that great; full of mosquitos and little wildlife. However, once we got to the river it opened out a bit and we started to see more (two more groups of **Central American spider monkeys**, a group of **mantled howlers**, and a **red-tailed squirrel**). The mossies detracted from our will to look for birds, but we got nice view of a white-bellied puffbird and a black throated trogon.



Just before the beach we encountered a group of **white-faced capuchins**. We walked on a few metres and heard something moving in the branches above us. Thinking it was the capuchins again we looked up, and there above us, was a **Northern tamandua**! We watched it moving around the tree for about five minutes until it disappeared from view – such a fantastic animal. We walked back along the Sendero Naranjo trail, seeing a **Central American agouti** and lots of signs of peccary on the way. It started raining heavily after dinner, so other than a quick spotlight,

around the veranda, we didn't go looking for any animals and went to bed early

20th May 2012 – Sirena station, Corcovado

We got up at 4.30am, and went out along the airstrip to the beach, looking for Baird's tapirs, as apparently they are often seen on the beach first thing. Even if we hadn't planned to go out at first light we would have woken anyway, as the students were having an inconsiderate-noisy-twat contest next door – the rooms have thin walls and wire screens, so you can hear every word.

We saw a lone **white-nosed coati** at the end of the airstrip, but no tapir or tapir prints. We had spoken to Carlos, one the local guides from Drake bay after dinner the night before, and he said that tapirs can often be found during the day in the wallows behind the first line of dunes at the back of the beach. A good tactic is to head to the beach, look for prints and then follow them in to the forest wherever they go in, hoping to find them in a wallow. In the absence of tracks, we checked a few wallows, without any luck, then walked back along the



Naranjo trail and across to the Sirena trail.

After breakfast Andy sat on the porch chatting to a guy who arrived yesterday from la Leona. He had walked in alone, and had somehow missed the station the evening before and ended up wandering around the jungle for *nine hours* in the dark, finally arriving at 2.30am! It had rained heavily all night, so it must have been horrendous, but he was in amazingly good spirits. As he and Andy were talking, another guy walked up from the airstrip, looking completely battered and croaked 'where's the water'. It turned out he had left La Leona even later yesterday, and ended up sleeping under a tarpaulin on the beach. We spoke to quite a few people who had walked in with guides from La Leona and they had had great experiences, while those without guides had often found it pretty stressful as mis-timing a river crossing can leave you stranded for hours. It sounds like a guide is a *really* good idea if you plan to hike in!

We had brought a new trail camera with us on this trip, and had put it at the start of the Sirena trail before dinner last night. However, we were a bit disappointed to find that it had recorded nothing other than Dan, the guy who had spent the night wandering the forest in the rain! At least we know it works.

We went out for another walk along the Rio Claro trail late morning, and saw more **agouti, red tailed squirrel monkeys, white faced capuchins** and **howler monkeys**. We also saw some cool birds, including riverside wren, and a chestnut-billed antbird. We had a rest after lunch, and then went out again at 1.30 in the hope of seeing bull sharks in the Sirena river at high tide. We didn't see any bull sharks, but had a nice walk along the Guanacaste and Pavo trails.

Just before dark, we put the trail cam at the crossroads between the Sirena and Guanacaste trail, hoping we might have more luck than yesterday. Carlos, the guide, also told us of a good spot here for blue-headed manakin (where a small path branches off the Sirena trail on the left hand, south, side). We stopped there, looked up, and there was the manakin, exactly where he said it would be!

We checked the wallows again by the beach for tapir on the way back – still nothing. The possibility of missing tapir was very stressful, given that they were our main reason for choosing Costa Rica in the first place. We expected them to be more common as we had read reports of people seeing several per day. However, other than a tapir seen by Carlos and his group that morning, no-one else we spoke to at Sirena had seen one. Thankfully we had decided to book three nights rather than two....



We spent the evening sitting on the veranda, shining the spotlight out every now and then, and chatting to Carlos. He was planning to head out first thing in the morning to look for tapir, and asked us to come along – we jumped at the chance, as our time so far at Sirena had been unguided, and we hoped we might be able to soak up some tapir-spotting tips.

21st May 2012

We got up at 4.30 and went out with Carlos and two guides who we had also met at Tirimbina (small world). We checked for tracks on the beach, but it didn't yield anything, although we did see a fer de lance in the middle of the path, which Carlos narrowly avoided stepping on in bare feet. While still feeling the lack of tapir, we were somewhat reassured that we were at least doing the right things!



We went back for breakfast to find that the people staying in the room next to us had looked out of their window at 1.30am and seen a tapir foraging around the buildings. Aargh! We went for a walk after breakfast and picked up our camera from the Sirena trail. We didn't get any animals, but were amused to find that we had filmed the people from the cabin next to us out spotlighting with their guide at 2.30 in the morning. Saw a tapir out of the window indeed! Illegal spotlighting though, what a great idea.

We walked the Rio Claro trail again, seeing a **red-tailed squirrel** and more **agouti** but little else. We checked out one of the good tapir wallows (about 20m along the beach towards the airstrip from the boat launching point, next to some dead trees). Didn't see a tapir, but we did see a huge basilisk doing the classic Jesus Christ lizard run, across the top of the water. We headed back towards the airstrip, looking into the forest bordering the beach on the way. Around 20m from the start of the airstrip, we saw another **northern tamandua** walking on the forest floor. We held our breath as it walked within a couple of metres of us, swaggering like John Wayne, and headed off into the forest. So cool!

We were sitting on the veranda after lunch, trying not to think about the prospect of leaving the next day without seeing a tapir, when a couple of American back-packers walked in saying they had seen a big group of pigs making clicking noises in one of the creeks near the Sirena river. They had to be white-lipped peccaries so we headed out to find them. To no avail, but we did see lots of evidence that they had been around. After our peccary mission we walked back towards the Rio Claro trail and saw another **northern tamandua** in a tree by the beach where the boats launch (probably the same one that we saw this morning). We walked along a bit further and bumped into a big group of **white-nosed coatis**; at least 30 foraging through the forest with lots of little pups. They weren't bothered by us at all, so we had really good views of them rooting around with their tails waving in the air.

Shortly after the coatis, a guy stopped us and said he had just seen a tapir foraging a little way along the trail. We rushed off along the trail doing that weird welly-walk that you do to avoid slipping over on wet met. Maybe we would get to see our tapir after all! We raced on for about a kilometre, turned a corner, and there in front of us was a huge male **Baird's tapir**! Woo hoo! After two days of hard searching, we'd finally seen one. He wasn't bothered by us at all, and let us follow him and then watch from around 5m while he ate fruits from the floor. What an amazing animal.



We went back to dinner very happy. Over dinner we chatted with a guide called Steven who hiked in the day before with a group from La Leona. He said they saw an ocelot walk across the airstrip at around 5am this morning, and also saw a tayra on the hike yesterday. We told him that we had a trail camera with us, although in the excitement of seeing our tapir we'd left it too late to put it out that evening. He spoke to the ranger, and got permission for us to go with him after dinner and put it out on the Naranjo trail, as he knew a spot the BBC film crews had used when filming last year. He seemed to be a really excellent guide, very knowledgeable and genuinely enthusiastic with lots of stories about cool animals he had seen. Unfortunately I didn't get his last name, but he's based near La Leona and would be well worth looking up.

22nd May 2012 – Sirena Station, Corcovado

We got up at 4.30am and went out to collect our trail cam. The first video showed two glowing eyes – what could it be? We played the video with some excitement but it turned out to be the eyes of a **collared peccary** walking along the path. Not quite the puma it might have been but at least it wasn't another errant human! If only we had another night in Sirena to put it out again...

We walked the Naranjo and Rio Claro trails, and saw a couple of **collared peccaries**. At one point they were walking along on the trail just a few metres in front of us, where they promptly stopped to inspect some rootings from the night before which elicited much excited clicking and bristlings of their hair before they rushed off together in to the undergrowth. Not far from the start of the Rio Claro trail on the right hand side, we heard a clicking noise coming from a dense thicket of bushes. We looked for a while, before spotting an orange-collared manakin displaying on the ground, jumping from side to side like a lunatic - fantastic.



As we were walking back up the Naranjo trail at around 5.30am on our way back to breakfast, we stumbled across a guy looking in the bushes. He said he had just seen a large dark animal eating something on a log next to the path, and that it had run in the forest when he approached. He looked at our guide book and pointed to...a jaguarundi! We had literally missed it by seconds! We looked into the forest in the direction where the guy said it had ran and didn't see any sign of it, although we did see a **red brocket deer**, our first in Costa Rica.

We had to get a boat back to Drake Bay at around 1pm, so we decided to spend our last morning walking the Guanacaste and Sirena trails in the hope that we might run into the white lipped peccaries that we missed yesterday. We didn't see the peccaries, but we did see the tracks of a **neotropical river otter** in addition to the usual **howlers**, **agoutis** and **spider monkeys**.

As we were carrying our bags along the Naranjo trail to the boat launch at around 1pm, we met a group of Americans that we had met on the plane to Drake bay, who had come to Sirena for a day trip. He asked what we had seen, and I said we had seen some peccaries that morning. He said "Yeah, we saw some woodpeckers too... and a kingfisher and some pigs... and this big black weasel thing walking on a log". Goddammit! They had been in the forest for three hours and seen a tayra! We checked with their guide, and they had seen it on the Guanacaste trail, the trail that we had walked that morning. Next time...

Just before we got in the boat, we checked out the nearby wallow as one of the guides said there was a tapir there. Right at the back, with just his head showing, was another **Baird's tapir** – a great end to our Corcovado trip.

So, all in all, we had an amazing time in Corcovado and saw all the mammals we were hoping to see, with the exception of white lipped peccaries. Three days worked well for us (we certainly wouldn't have wanted any less) and we could easily have stayed longer, as the place feels alive with possibility.

Visiting Corcovado in May definitely has advantages, namely fewer tourists (around 15 or so per night while we were there) and *far* fewer ticks (apparently it's normal to pick up 15 or so ticks per

walk in the dry season, but we didn't encounter any). The disadvantage of the wet season is that the tapir are less easily seen as they spend less time in the wallows and more time foraging in the forest.

The accommodation at Sirena is basic but certainly adequate. You need to bring sheets for the sticky plastic mattresses that are otherwise pretty adhesive in the heat. Other than that it was fine: cold showers, drinkable water (we drank it anyway and didn't get sick, although it did have brown bits floating in it) and truly immense portions of food if you book in advance. It can get a bit noisy at night, so ear plugs might be a good idea, particularly in the high season.

One of the things that we found surprising about Sirena was that, other than the guides, very few people were there for the wildlife or had any real idea about what they might see; most were there for the hike and the adventure of seeing or staying in the forest. While everyone was very nice, this did yield some gutting moments, when people who had just arrived came back with stories of the 'little spotted cat' or 'big black thing with a long tail' they'd just been watching, as we sloped back after a hard morning in the forest, bristling with heavy optics. This captures what is so wonderful about the place though – it is alive with possibility, more so than any place we've ever been. In the three days we were there, an ocelot, a tayra and a jaguarundi were seen. Steven (the guide) also said that he saw a puma three days earlier. These stories made walking the trails really exciting, as you never knew what you might see next. It's definitely somewhere that both of us would like to go back to.

We arrived at Drake bay at around 2.30pm, and spent the afternoon at Las Cotingas relaxing on our balcony and reading. The shower, comfortable bed and fan were very welcome after three nights in Sirena.

23rd May 2012 – Isla del Cano diving from Drake bay

Felix from our hotel (Las Cotingas) helped us organise a diving trip to Isla del Caño this morning with Osa divers. We had allowed time for a couple of days diving here as in the right conditions the bommies on the outer side of the island can attract big pelagics, with a good record of manta rays. The dive company were great – really friendly and with good quality equipment. The conditions weren't right to head out to the outer part of the island so we dived in a more sheltered bay. Both dives were really good, with great visibility and plenty to see. We saw lots of good sized white tipped reef sharks, an eagle ray and a couple of sting rays, plus loads of cool fish - at one point a school of jacks came swimming right through us. On the boat on the way to the island we also saw a group of **pantropical spotted dolphins** feeding, giving really good views in the clear water.



After the dives we spent the afternoon reading and lounging around on our balcony in hammocks. We finally ventured out at around 5pm to look for Esteban (a frog expert that Carlos in Sirena had recommended). He runs the café next to the supermarket in Drake Bay. We found Esteban very easily, and arranged a frog walk for 6.50pm.

The walk was excellent. Esteban really knew his stuff, and was hugely enthusiastic about herps and spoke excellent English. We saw granulated poison dart frogs, two species of glass frog and several others (see list at the end) including the tiny pygmy rain frog which is about the size of a little fingernail. If you have an interest in frogs and find yourself with an evening to kill in Drake Bay, I would highly

recommend a walk with Esteban. We didn't see any mammals, but as we were spotlighting along a river next to a forest, I'm sure we had a reasonably good chance of seeing racoons and opossums – possibly even a yakop (in our dreams).

24th May 2012 – Isla del Cano diving from Drake bay

We wanted to dive again today, but as Osa Divers weren't going out, we arranged a trip with Caño Divers instead. It was raining when we set out, and the sea was quite choppy, so neither of us had particularly high hopes for the dive. We were over the moon though when they said that conditions were right to dive Bajo del Diablo, the offshore bommies on the outer side of the island. On the boat on the way out we saw **pantropical spotted dolphins** again (very distant), flying fish and a lesser devil ray breaching – it shot straight up out of the water right next to us - fantastic.

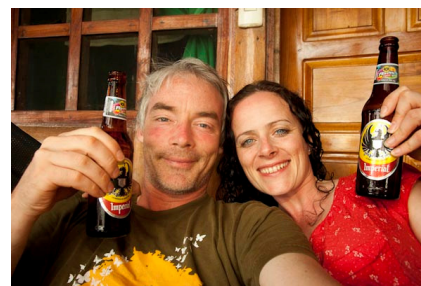


The guys on the boat told us that whale sharks and oceanic manta rays were sometimes seen here, but we managed not get our hopes up too high. Just as we were kitted up though, and were about to drop in, immense oceanic manta rays appeared close to the surface and our hearts leapt. Once in the water the currents were quite strong so we dropped down to the bommie tops and moved around in figures of eight hoping that the mantas would return. And then they did; cruising out of the blue, stunning and immense - 4.5m across with beautiful black and white markings. We couldn't have been happier – what a spectacular end to the trip. Over the course of the next 45 minutes four mantas swam past fairly regularly, giving really close up views. There was plenty of other activity too (though it didn't get the attention it deserved), including more white-tipped reef sharks, turquoise spotted jacks, Moorish idols, parrotfish, a zebra moray and a beautiful shoal of barracuda. The visibility was excellent, and I can't imagine diving gets much better. As we were surfacing at the end of the second dive, we saw a fully inflated puffer fish bobbing around looking quite out of place, until the divemaster pushed him down and he deflated and swam off.

Felix had booked us a place on the boat to Sierpe the next morning and arranged for someone to pick us up from the dock and give us pre-booked tickets for the bus back to San Jose. We were slightly dreading settling the bill with Felix, as we had never really discussed money with him and were worried we would get ripped off. It turned out to be the exact opposite – Felix would have forgotten to charge us for the boat from Sirena and yesterday's diving if we hadn't reminded him. Overall our stay at Los Cotingas was great and we can't recommend them highly enough. Our cabin had fantastic views, the food was great, the price was reasonable. Felix himself couldn't have been more helpful.

25th May 2012

We packed up and caught the 7.15 boat to Sierpe for \$15 each. The boat took about an hour, taking us along the river mouth and through some mangroves. We saw an unidentified snake swimming across the river, but little else from the boat. We did chat to a lady who had been in Costa Rica for five weeks teaching yoga. We asked her what wildlife she had seen on her trip, half expecting one of those casual reports of a close encounter with rare mega-fauna, but to our relief she just reported seeing 'some piggeries'. Then she thought a little longer ... 'and when I was in the forest a puma walked just a few metres in front of me on the trail'. Sigh... Her mega-fauna ying was not without its yang, however, as she also told us that a howler monkey had shat on her face. This was comforting.



Felix arranged for a taxi driver to pick us up in Sierpe and drive us to Palma Norte to catch the bus to San Jose. This all went very smoothly. Palma Norte has little to recommend it other than some strange granite spherical stones that are everywhere – no one knows where they came from, who made them or how they got there, but they are very old.

The bus to San Jose took around 5 hours and we arrived at the Trapp family Inn at around 4pm. We took the opportunity to check our e-mail, found nothing too awful, and spent the rest of the evening packing for our flight home the next day, looking at photos and discussing what an amazing trip we'd had. Costa Rica is fantastic!

Mammal List

Mammal Species	Notes
Collared peccary (<i>Dicotyles tajacu</i>)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Many groups seen in La Selva, both around the research station and in the forest Two animals seen on the Rio Claro trail at Sirena, and one on caught on the trail camera on the Naranjo trail..
Central American agouti (<i>Dasyprocta punctata</i>)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Four seen in La Selva (on the SAZ trail, CCC, CSS and main road) Two seen in Monteverde reserve One seen in Manuel Antonio reserve on the main trail Seen on most trails around Sirena station
Mantled howler monkey (<i>Alouatta palliata</i>)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Seen on most walks in La Selva Seen on most walks in Sirena Several groups seen in Manuel Antonio reserve and Manuel Antonio village
Variegated squirrel (<i>Sciurus variegatoides</i>)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> One seen at La Selva near the main gate Several seen in Monteverde in grounds of Hotel el Bosque One seen in the Bajo del Tigre reserve
Red-tailed squirrel (<i>Sciurus granatensis</i>)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> One seen in Monteverde reserve Several seen around Sirena station
White-faced capuchin (<i>Cebus capucinus</i>)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> One group seen in La Selva in the arboretum Seen daily in Manuel Antonio reserve and village One group seen from the boat on the mangrove tour Two groups seen at Sirena (Rio Claro trail)
Nine-banded armadillo (<i>Dasypus novemcinctus</i>)	Seen at La Selva at night on the trail to the arboretum
Forest rabbit (<i>Sylvilagus gabii</i>)	One seen running across the grass outside the restaurant at La Selva
Honduran white bat (<i>Ectophylla alba</i>)	Two seen while mistnetting in Tirimbina
Grey short-tailed bat (<i>Carollia subrufa</i>)	One caught while mistnetting in Tirimbina
Kinkajou (<i>Potos flavus</i>)	One seen at night on the island in Tirimbina
Northern racoon (<i>Procyon lotor</i>)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> One seen at night on the island in Tirimbina One seen on Manuel Antonio beach
Hoffman's two-toed sloth (<i>Choloepus hoffmanni</i>)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> One seen in Tirimbina, near the restaurant Three seen in Manuel Antonio reserve One seen in Manuel Antonio village (on main road opposite Jungle Beach Hotel)
Brown throated three-toed sloth (<i>Bradypus variegatus</i>)	Four seen in Manuel Antonio reserve
Mexican hairy dwarf porcupine (<i>Coendou mexicanus</i>)	One seen at night on the bridge at Tirimbina
Bushy-tailed olingo (<i>Bassaricyon gabii</i>)	One seen in Monteverde Reserve on feeders in the Hummingbird Garden
White-tailed deer (<i>Odocoileus virginianus</i>)	One seen In Manuel Antonio reserve on main trail
Silky anteater (<i>Cyclopes</i>)	One seen on mangrove tour near Manuel Antonio

didactylus)	
Red backed squirrel monkey (Saimiri oerstedii)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Four groups seen in Manuel Antonio Reserve • One group seen by hotel in Manuel Antonio • Many groups seen around Sirena station
Central American spider monkey (Ateles geoffroyi)	Seen on most walks around Sirena station
White-nosed coati (Nasua narica)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One group seen in Bajo del Tigre reserve • Two lone individuals seen at Sirena (one by the buildings, one on beach) • One large group (30+) seen on Rio Claro trail at Sirena
Northern tamandua (Tamandua Mexicana)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One seen at Sirena on Rio Claro trail • One seen on beach near airstrip at Sirena • One seen (probably the same one) on beach at start of Sendero Naranjo in Sirena
Baird's tapir (Tapirus bairdii)	One seen at Sirena on Rio Claro trail One seen at Sirena in wallow at start of Naranjo trail
Pantropical spotted dolphin (Stenella attenuate)	Two groups seen on boat between Drake bay and Isla del Caño
Red brocket deer (Mazama temama)	One seen at Sirena on the Naranjo Trail
Underwood's long-tongued bat (Hylonycteris underwoodi)	Seen on the hummingbird feeders at Monteverde (Identified from photos)
Orange nectar bat (Anoura geoffroyi)	Seen on the hummingbird feeders at Monteverde (Identified from photos)

Herp Species	Notes
Strawberry poison dart frog ('blue jeans' frog)	Many seen at La Selva, mostly on the CCC and SOR trail. Several also seen on the island at Tirimbina. They are very small, but are easy to see once you get your eye in. They can also be located by their call, which sounds like a cricket chirping.
Green and black poison dart frog	One seen in La Selva on the CES trail, close to where it joins the STR trail.
Granular poison dart frog ('green jeans' frog)	One seen in Drake Bay on guided night walk
Reticulated glass frog	Seen in Drake Bay on guided frog walk
Emerald glass frog	Seen in Drake Bay on guided frog walk
Common rain frog	Seen in Drake Bay on guided frog walk
Smoky jungle frog	A couple seen in La Selva, and one seen in Drake Bay on guided night walk
Pygmy rain frog	Seen in Drake Bay on guided frog walk
Green Iguana	Many seen in La Selva sitting in the top of the trees near the bridge
Fer de lance	One seen at Sirena station on Rio Claro trail
Common snail eating snake	One seen in drake bay on guided night walk

What we missed

We saw pretty much all of our target species on this trip (all four primates, both species of sloth, Baird's tapir, Northern tamandua, Honduran white bat, olingo and silky anteater) along with some target non-mammals (resplendent quetzal, three-wattled bell-bird, various poison dart frogs, glass frogs etc). We were also lucky enough to see kinkajou, Mexican porcupine and oceanic manta rays, species that we knew were around but weren't really expecting to see. We had to work harder than we expected to see tapir, but this made the experience more rewarding in retrospect. We didn't see white-lipped peccaries, but others did while we were in Sirena. We would have loved to see tayra, ocelot, jaguarundi or puma, and there is a genuine chance of seeing each of these at Sirena (all of them had been seen by people we met during or within three days of our time there). Nothing wrong with having a good reason to go back though ...

Would we do anything differently?

Not really, the trip was great. We're both very happy we saved Sirena until the end as I think we would have enjoyed the rest of the trip less if we'd started in Corcovado. We certainly would have got less out of Manuel Antonio, as much of what made Manuel Antonio interesting for us (i.e. jungle opening onto white sandy beaches, hermit crabs, squirrel monkeys) would have been seen ten times over in Corcovado. Another day at Tirimbina would have been good to try to find bat tents, and another night's spotlighting there would have been fun. In most cases though, we stayed the right amount of time in each place, and felt that we were ready to move on when we did. The exception was Sirena Station. It's hot and hard to sleep, but I can't imagine ever feeling 'done' with it – there is so much potential for great mammals that you have no idea what the next day will bring. We would both love to go back to Sirena one day. Overall, an amazing trip – we recommend Costa Rica very highly.

For more photos from this trip, and others, see Andy's photo website www.wildimages.org