

In November 2010 we went for 4 weeks to the rainforest around Iquitos and to Chaparri Ecological Reserve in the northern arid region, close to the town of Chiclayo.

To get used to the rainforest and the harsh condition for our camping later on, we first went for 6 days to a nice comfortable eco-lodge, Muyuna lodge (www.muyunalodge.com), 140km up the Amazon River from Iquitos, some 3 hours by speed boat. Until you hit the small river, Yanuyacu de Yacapama, where the lodge is situated, there is not much to be seen. If you are lucky you may spot **Grey River Dolphins**, which we did. The Muyuna area is teeming with wildlife and today it is better than three years ago due to cooperation with a local village. Work against environmental protection. It seems to work. We had a good start. Only a few minutes in on Yanuyacu river, a **3-toed Sloth** crossed the river swimming.

The two species we really wanted to see was the **Night monkey**, the world's only truly night active monkey, and the adorable **Pygmy marmoset**, the smallest monkey in the world. With a mane like lion the locals call him very suitable for leoncito (small lion). Already on the first afternoon walk some 10 minutes from the lodge we saw a family of 5 Pygmy Marmosets licking sap of a tree. On every occasion we looked for them we found them and particularly late afternoon seems to be good. At dusk a family of Night Monkeys came to eat some red fruits around the lodge. After a while they looked like they had put on lipstick.

During the many walks and boat trips we did, before breakfast, after breakfast, afternoon and night walks, we were rewarded with large groups of **Common Squirrel Monkey**, **Brown Cappuccin**, **White-Fronted Cappuccin** and **Dusky Titi Monkey** as well as Boa constrictor and birds like displaying Wire-tailed Mannakins, Toucans, Parrots, Hummingbirds, Tarantulas, Amazon Pygmy Owl and many many mosquitoes.

With Pacaya Samiria Reserve, our second stop around Iquitos, the biggest protected rainforest area in Peru, the time of creatures comfort had come to an end. We went on a self-organised 14 day tour with a guide and a boatsman. Before leaving we spent 2 days shopping food and equipment such as spare parts for the motor, cooking utensils and food. If you need a comfortable bed, a daily shower and clean clothes this is not the place to go. The choice of accommodation is either to build your own camp and sleep under a mosquito net or staying in the few rustic park ranger huts available. The choice of food to bring from Iquitos is not great either. We had a diet of canned tuna and sardines and the memories of it are still very vivid today a few months later.

We went by car from Iquitos to Nauta. There our boat waited for us for the 4 hours by boat to the park entrance. We had two motors, each with 5.5 horsepower. So if you find someone with a bigger motor (which cost much much more) you can go faster. We followed Yanuyacu de Pacaya to its source at Coche EL Dorado, a big lake. With our motors it takes about 3 full days going there. The trip is quite off the beaten track and we did not see any tourist apart for the first day. We spent most of the time in the boat as the reserve is undeveloped with almost no paths to walk. Our behinds suffered accordingly sitting on a wooden plank, but with fantastic rewards. Already at the entrance we were greeted by a committee of **Pink-river dolphins**. We would see many every day, as well as the second species of river dolphins existing in the reserve, the Grey-river dolphin. It is very exciting sitting in a small boat slowly gliding past the trees never knowing what could be behind next bend. On a five occasions families of 3 - 4 **Giant-river otters** delighted us with their presence, looking at us curiously from a safe distance with half of their bodies above water. The forest was teeming with wildlife, such as **Monk Saki Monkey** sitting high up in the trees starring at us, some of them with

babies, **Red howler monkeys** which usually escaped from view when we got closer, Dusky Titi Monkeys, Common Squirrel monkeys, Night monkeys, **Saddle-back tamarinds**, White-fronted cappuccin, Brown cappuccin, 3-toed Sloths, 2 species of **Squirrels** (no identification), **Capybara**, **Amazon Bamboo Rat** and again many many mosquitoes sucking us dry when going on land following gangs of monkeys. We saw so many troops of monk saki, red howlers, squirrel monkeys and saddle-backed tamarinds that we often did not bother to stop to have a look.

One evening, just after sunset before leaving our camp for another night ride Carmen, my wife, sighted as she felt rain on her face. Eduardo, our guide, looked up and saw that it was no rain but a **Bicolor-spined Porcupine** peeing on her face from the canopy above. It was a very good start on a nice night ride that also produced 2 species of **Opossums**, which we could not identify. The days were very hot and humid and a swim would have been wonderful in the milky water. The heads of many 3-4 meter Black Caymans convinced us otherwise. As November is still low water season trunks and sticks hindered us to go too fast. Under the sticks sat many groups of **Sharp-nosed Bats** and on them sat many species of shy turtles sunning. Usually when we came close enough to take a photo they glided swiftly into the water.

Coche El Dorado is famous for the Amazonian Manatee, which is not too easy to spot even on a good day. It doesn't leap out of the water to perform acrobatics like a dolphin and his main activity is doing not much at all. And this he does very slowly. They are very sensitive to sounds so we went by boat to its feeding ground and sat there waiting. For nothing as it turned out. There are several park ranger stations around the lake to protect the wildlife from hunters and they bring their families with them. They are however not paid very well according to themselves (but I have heard this from bankers as well so.....). Therefore they have been given permission by the local government to fish the red-listed giant Paiche (*arapaima gigas*) and sell them on the markets and restaurants in Iquitos. We saw several bigish boats going into the lake just for this purpose and the rangers are keeping hundreds of kilos of salt and big tanks for the purpose.

The rangers are also fishing the baby's of one species of mouthbrooding fish. To make the fish spit out the baby's the fisher hammer on the surface with their paddles which makes a lot of noise and the mouthbroods happens to be where the manatees can be seen. After a few days like this we decided to leave. The rangers are also breeding turtles. The story we got was 50% of the turtle babies are let out in the river and 50% are sold to the Asian markets for profits. At the park entrance we saw a bucket full of them. Repulsive!!!

The ranger station at Coche El Dorado is very dirty and plastic bottles floated in the water. Coche El Dorado is good for the Pink River Dolphin and Giant River Otter though and should be very good for very big examples of Black Caymans. But we failed to see them. They are hunted as well, also by the rangers. With a Guarda Parque like this who need illegal poachers.

All in all, there is no reason, in our view, to go the full way to Coche El Dorado. Our guide said he would not go there again. Stay a few days extra along the river and look for some other wildlife.

To these mammals on this trip we can add the **Red Uakari** and **Common Wolly Monkey**, which we saw in January 2007. They are a bit more difficult to see than the others, but they are around.

To find all these animals you need a good guide. Our was an indian born, Eduardo Pinedo Avila, in the forest, so he knew the place very well and saw the animals mostly well in advance of us despite us

having binoculars. We passed a place a couple of times where he said he could smell **Southern Tamandua**. On two consecutive days he said he could smell one. On the 3rd occasion he spotted one relaxing on a naked branch not too far above of our heads for an excellent photo opportunity. We cannot recommend him hands down though as he got a very big mouth changing his stories as it suits him. He is very easily offended as well so it is better not to contradict him. He will find animals though and bring you back safely and there is not much choice. We will go back with him.

From Lima we took a flight to Chiclayo in northern Peru and were picked up by a private transport from the lodge to take us the 2 hours to the reserve.

In Chaparri ecological reserve (www.chaparri.com), we were back watching wildlife in style. Chaparri is in the arid northern part of the country on the western Andean slopes, with a wildlife not less spectacular than the rainforest. The scenery could have been taken out of a spaghetti western movie. We heard that this was a good place to see spectacled bear, and as this was one of the mammals very high on our list, so we changed our plans to take the small chance to spot one we thought we had. The 6 days in Chaparri began early with. At 6:30 humming birds (Tumbes, Amazilia and Purple-collared Woodstar) came for a dip in a rock pool and stayed until 7.30. We saw them every day at the same place so it seems to be a very good place to see them. We saw in total 3 species there. At breakfast time, or at any meal for that matter, **Sechuran Foxes** came for a visit at the restaurant. At the restaurant the critically endangered White-winged Guan also hangs around. After breakfast we walked around on well marked tracks to search for the illusive bear. A mango tree had fruits and we usually went there for a look as a part of their diet consists of fruits. Already on the second day we were in luck. We not only saw one **Spectacled Bear** but 3 of them within a few minutes. They were all on the way to the Mango tree. One of them even had a bath in a pool. The following 3 days we would see at least one around the Mango tree area. Quite often we found them up in the mango tree munching fruits. This was the perfect non-moving photo object.

After 3 days we had seen so many bears and felt we had time to look for some of the other mammals in the reserve too. In a dried-up riverbed some 2.5km walking on a dusty track the fluffy endemic **Guayaquil Squirrel** can be found. It only took us an hour or so before we located one and following him slowly in the riverbed. He was not very scared and we could follow him jumping back and forth in the canopy feeding. We also on most days saw **White-tailed Deers** along the tracks, quickly escaping in the dry thicket as we came close by. At other times sitting relaxing with a cold beer between walks we also saw a **Collared Peccary**, although not every day.

Other animals we saw were Cat-eyed Snakes, Parrots, Peruvian Pygmy Owls, We were a bit unlucky with our first guide. The first things he said to us was '6 days with you, that will be boring'. We were not sure if he meant it would be boring for us or for him. After a couple of days we knew he meant it was going to be boring for him. When we sat waiting for wildlife after a minute or so he started to whack his knife in a tree trunk. During night walks when we sat with turned off torches it took him a minute or so before he started to play with it by turning it on, off, on off. On a Saturday he told us that the best wildlife viewing was between 13 and 15 in the afternoon! He wanted to go back to the town for the evening..... After a few days we complained and we got a brilliant guide, Ivan Vallejos. If you go, just stay away from Christian and you should be fine.

Carmen and Torbjörn Lundqvist