

## **Pacarana quest in Colombia**

My wife, Aram Calhoun, requested a trip to Colombia with two main features: 1) being settled into a couple places for enough days that she could immerse herself in Spanish and 2) good opportunities for exploring the local fauna. I immediately thought about **pacaranas**, that elusive creature that torments anyone who is trying to tick mammal families. With advice from Rob Smith of *Wild about Colombia*, I selected Otun Quimbaya, best known for approachable mountain tapirs, as one of our sites, especially because there was an attractive AirBnb option less than a kilometer away the Reserve that we were able to book for five nights at a very reasonable price.

To cut to the chase, we did not see a pacarana despite a reasonable effort, somewhat constrained by rain and health issues, and significantly constrained by Alamo Car Rentals. They canceled our 4x4 car reservation at the last minute, forcing us to switch to another company and a vehicle that could not pass a very rough patch of road about 2/3rds of the way up to El Cedral. We walked all the way there twice and we were out every night for 1-3 hours, totalling about 10 hours, with thermalscope and spotlight. We spoke to half a dozen people, learned the local name “guagua loa,” and most folks said some versions of, “Yes, they are here but hard to see.” One person who seemed particularly confident directed us to a place where we subsequently had multiple **Central American agouti** encounters, so we are not certain that all our informants understood our attempt to describe in Spanish a “fat agouti with a long tail.” Although we dipped on our main target we did have some worthwhile sightings—**mountain tapir, olinguito, crab-eating fox, Colombian howler**— as well as fly-by bats and run-by mice and creatures that are unmentionable in MW circles: birds, frogs, and lizards. In hindsight I wish I had brought some camera traps as having five nights in one place could make them quite effective. Any hit would rapidly narrow the area of search and perhaps the time of night.

*Malcolm “Mac” Hunter*

PS I will also mention that near our second location, in the Santa Marta Mountains, we had a morning in Tayrona National Park where we enjoyed excellent sightings of **cottontop tamarins, Santa Marta white-fronted capuchins**, and **Colombian howlers**. At El Dorado Lodge we had **gray-handed night monkeys** and a road-killed **Robinson’s mouse opossum**. Note that El Dorado Lodge has evolved into a world-class ecolodge with out-of-this-world views.