

Trip Teport: Armadillos of the Reserva La Engañososa



A journey into La Engañososa wilderness: our search for the rare, mysterious, and occasionally shy armadillo species

Location: Reserva La Engañososa

Trip duration: 5 days of feverish optimism followed by several days of frustrated reflection

Species seen: *Calyptophractus retusus*, *Holmesina occidentalis*, *Lepocabassous auritus*, *Peltephilus giganteus*

We missed however a few species, e.g., the Nine-banded Armadillo, that seem to exist only in the pages of obscure mammal books.

Participants: Andrey and Karina

Everything started one rainy evening, when we sat in front of a computer screen, wide-eyed and hungry for adventure, feeling a calling deep within us. We weren't looking for just any ordinary animal. No. We wanted something special—something elusive. That's when we came across the magical, armored creatures that are *armadillos*. They're not just mammals; they're like the tanks of the animal kingdom, the unsung heroes of the mammal world, clad in their natural medieval suits of armor. A challenge, we thought. A quest for the rarest of armadillos. So, with the naive optimism of a child, we packed our bags, and prepared for the adventure of a lifetime. We headed to the Reserva La Engañososa known for its armadillos.

We met our local guide, Alejandro, who surprisingly didn't share our enthusiasm. He had the weary eyes of someone who had seen way too many tourists wandering the wilderness in search of mythical creatures. He handed us bottles of water, a map that looked like it had been designed by someone who'd never seen a real map, and said, "We'll find your armadillos... if they want to be found." We couldn't tell if that was encouragement or a thinly veiled warning.

We arrived in the dry forests of Reserva La Engañososa, home to the legendary Nine-banded Armadillo. A creature so rare, that it's practically a myth. In fact, it might as well be a unicorn.

We tried to prepare ourselves mentally: “*This is a long shot. But we are mammalwatchers. We’ve seen mammals before. This is our moment!*”

Alejandro took us to a scrubby, desolate field that looked suspiciously like the set of a Mad Max movie. This, he explained, was the preferred habitat for the armadillos in the Reserva. Unfortunately, all we found were rocks, dust, and more rocks. A few armadillo burrows, yes. Just a lot of staring at the ground, squinting into the harsh sun, and wondering if perhaps the armadillos had all gone on vacation.

The next day, in a rare moment of low heat, we decided to go to a nearby site that seemed to be home to *Calyptophractus retusus*, the Greater Fairy Armadillo. There really were a lot of them in this part of the Reserva, they were everywhere. There was a swarm of pink animals digging under every bush. After watching and feeding them with crumbled bread, we continued on our way. At night the Greater Fairy Armadillos became even more numerous and we even had to chase them away from the tent and throw them off the tent canvas.



A swarm of Greater Fairy Armadillos (*Calyptophractus retusus*).

Aside from the annoying fairy armadillos, we encountered what can only be described as "mammalian runners." You know, the kind of animals that scurry so fast that you can only glimpse them as blurs. Attempts to photograph these elusive creatures resulted in several pictures of nothing but a rock wall and the back of Karina’s head.

The other day we ventured into a dry woodland area, which Alejandro said was perfect for spotting *Lepocabassous auritus*, the Long-eared Armadillo. This one seemed a little more approachable, although we’d read that they tend to be nocturnal, solitary, and not at all impressed by human curiosity.

As expected, the search involved a lot of walking, a lot of squinting, and a lot of pretending. At one point, we found a burrow and footprints. We got excited, thinking this was it — an armadillo would finally show up. After half an hour of waiting, the animal appeared, spread its ears, squeaked and disappeared into the bushes. But one of us managed to get a photo before dark! Alejandro said there are usually more of them here, especially in April.



Lepocabassous auritus, the Long-eared Armadillo

With new species in hand, the next day Alejandro took us to another prime location—the edge of a sandy scrubland where *Peltephilus giganteus*, a Horned Armadillo, was supposed to be foraging at dusk. Of course, dusk came, and with it a sunset that made us wonder why we were here at all. The sun dipped below the horizon and the sound of nothingness filled the air. During the day we saw more nasty Fairy Armadillos, but nothing else. After an unsuccessful spotlight, we tried again in the morning and - oh miracle - a Horned armadillo appeared in a bright sunlight! After peacefully finishing some leftovers, he hid in the network of burrows.



Peltephilus giganteus, the Horned Armadillo

After that Alejandro drove us to a remote, scrubby field where Pampathere armadillos, *Holmesina occidentalis*, have been previously seen. This area looked like it hadn't seen a human in decades. We spent hours walking in circles, staring at holes in the ground, each one a potential home for an armadillo. We squinted at the horizon, hoping to catch a glimpse of an armored creature. On our way back, we suddenly saw our target species on the side of the road. As if it was the first time we saw a human (maybe!), the animal ran away behind the ravine with a stomp. Andrey crawled there and managed to take a photo.



Holmesina occidentalis, the Pampathere armadillo

Final Thoughts:

Despite the species found, we have mixed feelings about the trip. We missed the animal we wanted to see the most – the gorgeous Nine-banded Armadillo. Well, that's the way it is. And that is the beauty of mammalwatching. Or maybe it's just the madness. Anyway, we are already planning our next trip there. Maybe to look for some primates. In fact, Alejandro even had a photo of one of the species taken by his father many years ago in La Engañoso. This would be a nice addition to our primate list.



Photo of the La Engañoso primate by Alejandro's father

P.S. Thanks for reading! And have a happy and fun April Fool's Day! All photos and text are made by AI with a little help from us. If you have any questions about visiting the Reserva please contact us or Alejandro directly (guyaenganosa@gmail.com).

Andrey and Karina

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