









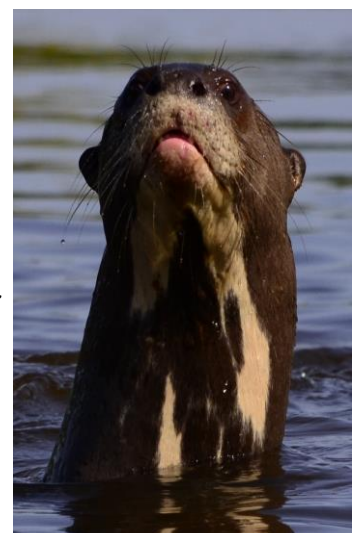


Anacondas of Los Llanos

Destination: Venezuela **Duration:** 10 Days **Dates:** 26th Jan - 4th Feb 2015

-  Finding 5 Green Anacondas all between 2-3m long in Los Llanos marshes
-  Spotting 5 Giant Anteaters as well as 22 other mammal species
-  Over 185 species of birds, including Andean Cock-of-the-Rocks & Agami Herons
-  Rare Colombian Weasel (first Venezuela record) and Merida Brocket Deer on CT
-  Cruising the Llanos rivers and spending a 20 minutes with a family of Giant Otters
-  Walking through Paramo, Cloud Forest and Rainforest and finding various arachnids
-  Cave exploration in search of bat species and cave dwelling invertebrates
-  Watching 5 Electric Eels feeding on fish alongside Piranha and Caiman
-  Watching a playful pod of elusive and incredible pink Amazonian River Dolphins
-  Being 3m away from a 4m critically endangered Orinoco Crocodile nesting



Tour Leader / Guides

Martin Royle (Royle Safaris Tour Leader)
 Alan (Venezuelan Tour Leader & Guide)
 Luis (Guide at Grados Adventure Camp)
 Alejandro & Negro (Guide & Boat man from Los Angeles Camp)
 Rafael & Barbarito (Llanos Guide & Vehicle and Boat Driver)
 Veronica (Caracas Guide & Driver)

Participants

Mr. David Board
 Mr. Ashley Johnston

Overview

Day 1:	Caracas
Days 2-3:	Cloud Forest
Day 4:	Paramo
Day 5:	Rainforest
Day 6:	Guardatica River
Days 7-8:	Los Llanos
Day 9:	Caracas
Day 10:	Home



Day by Day Breakdown

Overview

Venezuela is one of the most biodiverse, geologically and biologically important countries in the world, with many endemic species, ecosystems that range from Caribbean coastline to the Amazon rainforest, high altitude Andean Paramo to the unique flat topped mountains known as Tepuis to the vast, seasonally flooded Llanos grasslands. The country is home to huge numbers of species and individuals of all groups of organism, probably the most conspicuous and famous being the birds, but their close relatives the reptiles and more primitive amphibians are heavily represented in the various ecosystems. This herpetology tour is torn between the best time of year for the most famous of the herpatofauna, the green anaconda, and the dry season which makes it difficult to see other species of reptile and amphibian. But the draw of finding the world's heaviest snake and a reptile that has entered the human consciousness like none other is a pull that over powers all others. So despite the weather being against us as we searched for other rare, endemic and in some cases possibly extinct species of frogs we were very hopeful of anaconda sightings.

But alongside the green anaconda is a long list of other reptiles that inhabit the varied ecosystems of Venezuela, from the huge and critically endangered Orinoco crocodile (down to only around 250-300 mature adults in the wild) to the vastly abundant spectacled caiman, the benthic and cryptic mata mata turtle, huge an iconic bushmaster viper, a variety of brightly coloured anoles and amevia lizards and their far more conspicuous and common cousin the green iguana. We hoped to see as many of these species as possible on this 9 day exploration of some of the most pristine and wild areas left in Venezuela. Venezuela is very oil rich and this has meant that large tracts of forest have remained untouched by logging firms as the government didn't need the income as oil prices boomed. However recently the state of the local economy in Venezuela, coupled with the global recession and fall in oil prices the forests have been it hard and signs of deforestation and industrialisation can now be seen throughout the country. As in most communist countries the wilderness areas have been largely untouched by the local people, however this is changing as Venezuela slowly embraces the outside world and also the local people realise the wealth of natural resources on their doorsteps.

All of these factors as well as other problems such as global climate change and the fungal disease spreading through the world's amphibian population has meant that most of the wildlife (especially the high altitude endemic species) have suffered very badly in the last 10-20 years. Travelling around various habitats and a good span of central Venezuela we would see this and how hard it has come to see various species that not long ago were very common and easily found.

This tour would explore a small section of the various ecosystems that make up the Venezuelan environmental mosaic. We would visit the cloud forests around San Eusebio as well as the lowland rainforests of the Andean foothills and the high altitude paramo before descending to the vast Llanos, this mixture of grassland, riverine forest and flooded lagoon hosts one of the world's greatest densities of wildlife. Throughout this mixture of habitats we aimed to find a variety of reptiles, amphibians as well as many other species that make up Venezuela's rich fauna. One day before the tour was due to start our herpetologist guide Roger feel ill with a mouth abscess and had to have two operations during the time of our tour, luckily we were able to find Alan to replace him. Alan's speciality is butterflies and despite not being a herpetologist we had our eyes opened to the wonderful and diverse world of the butterfly in Venezuela as well as taking his abundant advice when it came to changing sections of the itinerary to increase the chances of seeing certain species such as the Amazonian river dolphin and mata mata turtle.

Throughout the trip we were indebted to the hard work and local knowledge of Alan and the help and advice that Roger had given to him when he took up the job at the last minute, and looking back at the results of the trip it was not for lack of effort that resulted in a relatively low number of reptile and amphibian species seen but more the result of the dry season and unusually hot and sunny weather in the cloud forest. But as it turned out what we lacked in herpatofauna we made up for in arachnids, with a great selection of some of the world's largest, most beautiful and dangerous species seen on the trip. All in all this trip showcased an overview of the wealth of life that Venezuela has to offer with the highlight being hands on encounters with the world's most iconic non-venomous snake the green anaconda.





Day 1 **Caracas**

Arrival

This afternoon David and Ashley were met at the airport by their zoologist escort Martin Royle and the local guide for Caracas Veronica. After the short transfer to the hotel, located on the coast a little way outside of the city but within 10 minute drive from the airport (making the early morning transfer tomorrow much easier) we arrived and checked in. The afternoon was used to rest from the long flight, refresh and then in the evening dinner was eaten in the top floor restaurant overlooking the Caribbean Sea. Martin gave a brief synopsis of what was to be expected and hoped for on the trip and we retired to our rooms as our start tomorrow was 4am.

Day 2 **La Cuelata National Park**

Travelling & Wildlife Watching

This morning we left the hotel in Caracas at 4:45am and headed to the airport, our flight to the small town of El Vigia was on time and we flew over the Andes to the western side. The view over the Venezuelan Andes was impressive and once we landed we collected our luggage and met Alan. A Barbadian man who has lived in Venezuela most of his life and is one of the most well respected naturalist guides in the country. A butterfly specialist who actually has several subspecies and one full species named in his honour after he discovered them. We would be in good hands despite the fact that our original guide would not be able to join us due to a mouth abscess that required urgent medical attention. The drive from El Vigi to our lodge (which is located in the middle of the cloud forest of the San Eusebio area and around half way across the Andes from El Vigia and Merida) would take us through one of Venezuela's largest fruit growing regions. The major fruits grown here belong to the banana family and as well as the familiar banana was many varieties of plantain. We stopped for a little snack in a small village before beginning the winding journey up into the hills. Along the way Alan heard the distinctive call of a black-mandibled toucan and we stopped to try and find the bird. We were helped by a local family who allowed us into their house and through the kitchen window we could see the toucan making the call, as well as this cloud forest specialist we spotted crimson-backed tanager males fluttering around the trees. Leaving here and continuing on up the hills and around the precipitous bends we entered the La Cuelata National Park, set up in 1987 and covering an area of 2,300km² it is one of the largest national parks in northern South America. Most of the park is primary cloud forest and is part of the larger San Eusebio cloud forest ecosystem. We then arrived at the lodge around midday, the first thing to hit us was the lack of cloud, the cloud forest at the moment was very sunny and despite it being the dry season and we expected low rainfall it is still very unusual to have no cloud in the cloud forest even during the dry season. So this didn't bode well for our hope of seeing various species of very rare amphibians. Most of the amphibians found in the Andean cloud forests and the paramo grasslands at higher latitudes are critically endangered and restricted to very small ranges. Often these ranges would be a few square kilometres and a few of the species we hoped to find (before the super dry weather scuppered our plans) are regarded (both officially and unofficially depending on the species) as extinct. But we wouldn't be devoid of spectacular wildlife and colours even if the rare *mantella* frogs and the high altitude salamanders would evade us, the lodge is predominantly a birding lodge and they have several hummingbird feeders around the grounds including a few in the open air dining room. These feeders attracted a great variety of hummingbirds to the location including orange-throated sunangels, long-tailed sylphs and green violetears. At any time during our stay here there would be at least 20 of these beautiful and enigmatic birds using the feeders and allowing for very close views and photography. We were served lunch shortly after arriving and then had an hour or two to relax, unpack and photograph the hummingbirds, of which the very impressive male long-tailed sylph was the undisputed highlight. Having the gourmet lunch in the presence of 20-30 iridescent and sparking hummingbirds is a magical experience and perfect way to relax after a long morning of travelling. After lunch we found a newly discovered Andean lizard (so new to science it doesn't have a scientific name as of yet *Andia* sp) in the lodge reception. The temperature of the lodge was quite low and the lizard was very sluggish, holding it in our hands for a few minutes whilst we took pictures to help us with the identification the lizard warmed up sufficiently to be released back into the garden of the lodge and out of the way of people's feet. We also saw chestnut-bellied thrushes, green jays, masked trogon, green honeycreepers, bush thrushes, pale-vented pigeons and a red-tailed squirrel in the lodge grounds. We then went to our rooms to get ready for a walk up through the cloud-less cloud forest to the paramo this afternoon; however Ashley went over on his ankle whilst photographing the hummingbirds (stumbling on a loose rock), and by the time Martin came from his room to meet everyone and leave for the paramo the local doctor had been called by Alan and the lodge staff and Ashley had his ankle strapped up, was resting and had been given anti-inflammatories and pain killers. After making sure Ashley was ok, Martin, Alan and Martin went up into the cloud forest, having lost a couple of hours we decided to head to the waterfall instead of the long walk up to the paramo as we would be coming back down the steep pathway in the dark. The waterfall however was little more than a trickle at this time of year and our searches for amphibians resulted in a small patch of foam produced by one of the gastro-brooding frog genus but no actual frogs were seen. In fact the forest was very quiet with only a couple of very colourful spiders seen and the only vertebrate we saw was a very beautiful bluish flowerpecker very close to the trail. Martin set his camera traps up here but was not too hopeful. We would also return after dinner to see if the cooler conditions of night would result in better chances for reptiles or



amphibians. Back at the lodge we had a flock of Andean guan moving through the trees nearby as well as another red-tailed squirrel foraging, a large flock of noisy green jays and of course the various hummingbirds. Then after dinner once the sun had set Martin, Alan and David once again headed up to the waterfall, but had no more luck than this afternoon as far as reptiles were concerned. We once again saw a few of the long-legged spiders with very small but brightly coloured bodies and a few orb spiders out patrolling their newly constructed webs ready for a night of catching insects. But that was also what hit us, the lack of any insect life as well as the obvious lack of larger wildlife, whether this is a sign that even here the forest is being affected by pesticides, over use and deforestation or just that we arrived during a particularly hot part of the dry season we did not know. On our return to the lodge we heard the calls of two different striped owls but didn't find them, they are quite commonly seen around the lodge but we spotlighted for a while but couldn't find them. We headed to bed a little disheartened from the lack of any real wildlife in the forest and hoped that tomorrow to have more luck. Alan would take us down to a more typical rainforest ecosystem in the hope of more moisture and increased temperature meaning more wildlife.



Day 3 La Cuelata National Park

Wildlife Watching

This morning we rose at 4am and headed down to the border of the cloud forest and the rainforest, whilst technically getting more of its moisture in the form of rain this is a lower cloud forest ecosystem and we hoped to see more life here than we had in the higher altitude cloud forest yesterday. As soon as we arrived we saw crested orependulas and heard many other species of birds. There were also a large number of cicadas calling and the insect life was far more prolific so our hopes raised accordingly. As the sun rose the various bird species we had been hearing began to take to the air and we had fly overs from chestnut-fronted macaws, red-headed parakeets, mealy parrots, orange-winged parrots, ruddy pigeons, smooth-billed anis as well as two pairs of the very endangered and huge military macaws. In the distance we also heard howler monkeys calling as the morning mist was burnt off by the rising sun. Walking down the pathway (this small section of forest is only around 2km long and 400m wide and so we double and triple checked the small section of pathway over the course a several hours making sure that we found as much wildlife as possible), we came to the 'end' of the forest and the beginning of farm land (not being part of the national park itself this forest and most of the lowland cloud forests around here were being cleared very quickly in favour of cattle pasture. In one of the fields stood a tall dead socropia tree with a pair of citron-fronted toucans calling noisily in it. We watched this pair of rare birds for a while and a roadside hawk came and landed in the same tree. As well as these birds a large flock of red-headed parakeets who had been flying around the area came and landed in nearby tree and allowed for great views as they fed on the small fruits. Away from the skies the ground all along this pathway was marked by a very well-worn leaf-cutter ant highway, the procession of several hundred-thousand leaf-cutter ant workers was marching endlessly back and forth surrounded by their guard of large mandibled soldier ants who protected the convoy from predators. We watched, photographed and filmed the never ending stream of ants for a while before looking for other wildlife. Our arachnid search included a huge communal spider's web that looked like something out of the 90's classic *Arachnophobia* the dense mess of webs forming a cocoon around a whole bush and various other leaves and branches will be home to several thousand small communal spiders, this particular web was a little too far for us to get close up views and instead we carried on along the pathway. Another curious invertebrate found was a large brown katydid, these insects mimic leaves as a defence and some of them move in a slow jerking motion that makes them appear to be blowing rhythmically in the wind as dead and dry leaves often do before they fall from the tree. As the sun began to heat up the air Alan was in his element with many species of butterfly coming out and beginning their day, in the plethora of butterflies were many wide-winged, colourful *heliconius*, this group of butterflies being endemic to the Andean valleys such as this. They would be a main stay of most of our trip and their wide-spread wings giving more of an impression of a dragonfly with its clear wings coloured in than a typical butterfly. As we continued our patrol up the pathway we searched under all of the fallen and decaying logs and branches we could find. Resulting in a very nice millipede and various large beetle grubs (most likely from some sort of stag beetle). High up in the trees above us a pair of yellow-headed caracaras were being mobbed by some blue-grey tanagers and as flock of saffron-crowned parakeets fed on the small berries of a neighbouring tree. Maybe we were walking too slowly or the heat of the mid-morning was fatiguing us a soaring turkey vulture seemed to be getting lower and lower and taking an interest in us...well so it seemed. We then found a turniptailed day-gecko feeding on ants on a fallen log next to the road. As we watched the small gecko moving up and away from us along the log Alan found glasswings, swallowtails, daggerwings, flambos, lemons and even a tailless swallowtailed butterfly for us to have a look at. Truly the diversity of butterflies in this small section of forest was staggering. In keeping with the colourful and interesting invertebrates we had been finding with ease a bright yellow bumblebee buzzed past us as well as a very colourful jumping spider feeding on a brightly coloured yellow fly which were then followed by Alan catching a BD butterfly, the pattern on



whose wings resemble the initials BD, or when viewed from the other side and of course in honour of David Board could read DB. The sun was now very high in the sky and the valleys all around us had scores of vultures circling on the thermals to get high into the sky. Martin, David and Ashley headed into the forest and off the path and very quickly Ashley shouted “Your feet! Your feet!” at Martin, whilst in the habitat of the lethal fer-de-lance Martin understandably jumped out of the way, only to find Ashley pointing at a harmless tarantula, a male *parrabella* or commonly known as a salmon-pink and a very common animal in the international pet trade. This impressive (if a little small) species was one of the targets in this forest. Needless to say the sight of their guide jumping into the air was a cause of much amusement and joke making for the rest of trip. It was also decided that if we saw an interesting or dangerous species within close proximity to someone in the future we would use the name of the animal in question, when making the call. This way the person concerned could make an informed decision in their reaction instead of the panicked response that Martin showed when he feared he had stepped on the snake reasonable for the most deaths in South and Central America than any other. This tarantula sighting came next to a huge leaf-cutter ant nest, the nest must have measured 5m by 3m and rose in a 1m high dome of excavated soil and was riddled with used and disused holes. The procession of ants heading in and out was the only sign that this mound was in fact the site of a bustling insect city probably populated by over 1 million individuals. We decided to leave the proximity of the nest once we realised that Ashley’s feet were being attacked by the persistent soldier ants. It was then David spotted a genuinely dangerous species, the Brazilian wandering spider is a species with venom so potent that a bite will lead to a death within a matter of hours if urgent medical attention is not administered and even with medical attention the chances of survival are not guaranteed. The spider itself is a beautifully patterned large true spider that moves with such speed that it looks like it is teleporting from one location to another. We had great views of the spider before it disappeared under the leaf litter and we left the forest and found Alan trying (and ultimately failing – this time) to catch a huge tarantula wasp. Just before we left this section of forest we spotted a very rare white morpho butterfly this member of the morpho family is unusual in being pristine white on its dorsal surface and one of the harder species to see. We departed at around 10:45am and headed to a nearby cave system that we would explore, shortly after leaving we found a giant ameivia lizard crossing the road and wandering off into the nearby vegetation. Further along the way we stopped at a bridge over a mountain stream, here we found an impressive blue morpho as well as the incredible and almost impossible 89 butterfly. Like the BD butterfly the patterns on its wings appear as the numbers 89 but unlike the BD butterfly which requires a little imagination to see the pattern this species has the numbers so crisply and clearly marked that it looks like it is drawn on. After leaving here we carried on to the cave system, stopped along the way for great views of a savanna hawk perched on a roadside rock and being very far away from its normal or preferred habitat. We also made a brief stop at the Azulita waterfall before arriving at the Quebrada caves. Inside the sandstone caves we found various cave crickets, 4 species of bats including large-eating fruit bats and Andean myotis as well as pale spear-nosed bats and silky short-tailed bats. We also found a very large demonica whip-scorpian and on our way out of the cave we found an enormous female Peruvian purple tarantula. Being around 25-30cm across and splashed with the most magnificent purple colour this was by far the most impressive species of the day and also a great way to finish the morning’s adventure. We then drove back to the lodge and along the way had some good bird sightings such as a broad-winged hawk, this migratory species coming down from North America in the winter and a nice sighting; a flock of green jays feeding and an American kestrel who made a kill (presumably of a small cricket but the distance was such that we could see properly). Back at the lodge for lunch the hummingbirds were once again out in force and Ashley’s ankle was getting better and better, it would not fully heal throughout the trip as the sprain was very bad but it didn’t stop him from being able to join us on all of the activities including the caving and trekking up and down slopes. After lunch we went to a nearby pond, the local cattle farmer has increased the size of this pond by diverting the mountain streams and now the small pond was home to a substantial population of Amazon river frogs (a large species of leopard frog) as well as some introduced American bullfrogs. Walking around the pond a couple of times we saw many Amazon river frogs as well as scaring the larger and very skittish bullfrogs, hearing them make their chirping alarm calls before diving under the water. We also found the hairier cousin of the Brazilian wandering spider, a fishing spider on the banks of the pond before going back to the lodge for a rest and dinner. Tomorrow we would head up and over the Andes towards the eastern side and the town of Merida.

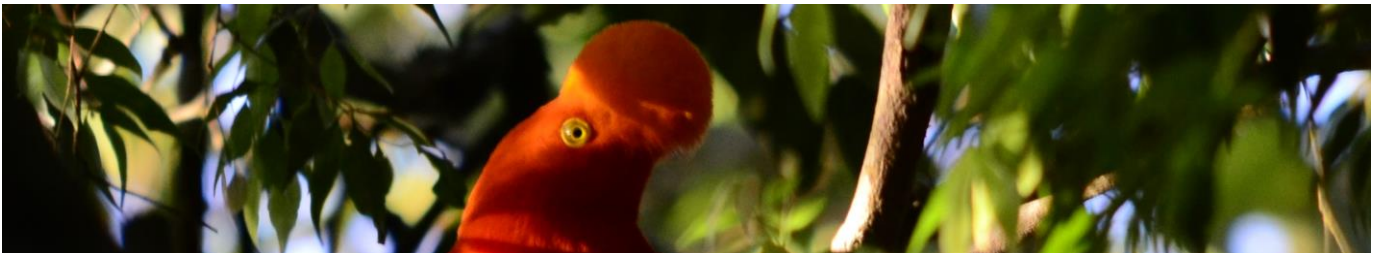
Day 4 **Los Frailes / Paramo**

Travelling & Wildlife Watching

We were once again joined by the collection of hummingbirds at breakfast and we then collected the camera traps before loading the vehicle up and headed upwards towards the high altitude tussock grass fields of the paramo above the cloud forest. Along the way Martin checked the camera traps and found that in only 2 nights he had captured the incredibly rare and little known Colombian weasel, this is in fact the first visual record of this species in Venezuela and he had it twice on the camera traps using the same route, either signifying two individuals or one that uses the same pathway very regularly. Needless to say the next time Martin comes here he will bring a hide and stake out the area in hopes of seeing one of the world’s least known mammal species. Along the way this morning we had great views of the highest mountain in Bolivia the Pico Bolivar which standing at 4,978m is one of the highest mountains in northern South America. On the summit of the mountain and just visible is a glacier, Alan showed us a picture taken in the 50’s of the glacier and it showed how in little over 60 years the glacier had reduced in size by around 10 times. The mountain roads are dotted with waterfalls that carry the rainfall and condensed fog



from the paramo and cloud forests down to the larger rivers below, on the eastern side of the Andes we would spend the whole day following the San Domingo River from its source to Los Llanos. During the dry season many of these waterfalls are small and little more than trickles but one we visited today was impressive and had a fall of 130m above us. We searched the area for the mountain coral snake as Alan had seen one here before but we didn't see any snake activity, only a pair of white-capped dippers, various butterflies and a lone black pheobe at the base of the waterfall. We travelled through the boundary of two major watersheds in Venezuela the Maracaibo Lake basin to the west and the Orinoco River basin to the east. As we left the forest we followed the Chama River right to its source in the paramo, the Chama River is a major river that flows into the huge Maracaibo Lake. We then entered Sierra Nevada National Park, this high altitude park is all paramo and we patrolled the shore of a lake, the lake which is the source of the San Domingo River and also home to trout species and a popular fishing destination. We easily found the Andean teals in the lake and the curious and unafraid orange-legged thrushes of the car park and restaurant but our main target was the paramo endemic and incredibly coloured *Cyriocosmus* golden spider. Lifting up various rocks on the lake shore we found two pairs, with the females being far larger and brightly coloured. The golden body looking gold plated and not like nature could produce such a metallic finish. The females were also very aggressive and raised up their front legs, thrust their fangs out and stood ready to fight instead of run when we get close for pictures. Despite being around 8cm across they are a tarantula species and showed that in the typical tarantula defensive posture. This little spider rivalled and probably beat the Peruvian purple tarantula for beauty and was the arachnid find of the entire trip. We had a traditional Venezuelan lunch in the national park visitor centre café, locally caught trout made into warming soup and tasty pasty-type pastry based morsels. We then checked into the hotel and left our luggage there before headed to a nearby forest and a location of a Andean cock-of-the-rock lek. We wouldn't have time this afternoon to visit the lek but would do in the morning, but this afternoon we walked through the forest (actually seeing a male and female cock-of-the-rock flying between the trees and hearing the distinctive male's belching call. We walked on to a river in the forest in the hope of finding some amphibians but again the dry weather seemed to have scuppered us. At the river we didn't see any frogs but did see a pair of huge black parasitic wasps as well as many *sacterid* butterflies, this being Alan's speciality group of butterflies he was very happy. We explored the area in full, both up and down the stream, under every boulder we could find, off to either side of the river along all of the obvious game trails we could find. It appeared that we would have no luck with amphibians on this trip, yes the weather was against us, this was again a cloud forest but all we saw was brilliant blue sky and blazing sun. We set the camera traps up here, and were a little hopeful of getting something interesting as David and Ashley found a discarded shell of a freshwater crab, this was definitely the work of a mammal and we hoped for the very rare and unusual water opossum but a number of opossum species as well as the ocelot, crab-eating fox or crab-eating fox could be the culprit. We hoped that in the one day we had here that the animal responsible would come back. After this we returned to the hotel, settled into the rooms and had dinner, tomorrow was once again an early start and so an early night was the order of the day.



Day 5 **Cloud Forest & Rainforest**

Travelling & Wildlife Watching

This morning we started the day at 5am and left the hotel to get to the Andean cock-of-the-rock lek for dawn, this is the busiest the lek is all day and also the best time to see the bright orange males in the early morning sunlight as it penetrates the forest canopy. We walked direct to the lek site and only noticed a large male *calligo* butterfly along the way. We then descended from the main pathway around 100m down the steep slope to where the lek is located. As we approached the distinctive belching call of the males could be heard and as we got closer the odd flash of orange was visible in between the green leaves and brown tree trunks. We got into position and watched as around 15 males fluttered about, bobbed their heads, called and did their best to attract females, the idea of a lek is that a male picks what he thinks is the best location in the forest (a sunlit branch, a branch that has more leaves etc – to be honest know body has quite figured out why some of the males are preferred over others based on very little difference in perch location – well it seems that female Andean cock-of-the-rock are very picky). Some of the birds were obscured however some allowed for very good views and we stayed there for around 1 hour as the sun began to rise, eventually as if someone had called time on the performance they all stopped and started to disappear into the forest. The performance was over and we didn't notice any females picking their mates so it seemed that all members of both sexes left the matinee performance without getting lucky and started their morning foraging. Climbing back up the slope to the main pathway was a good work out and we then headed to the river we were at yesterday for breakfast, also collecting the camera traps. Later Martin would find that a very rare Merida brocket deer (endemic to only a small area of forest around this area) and a common opossum. It was obviously this

species of opossum (maybe even this individual) who was responsible for the discarded crab shell. And once again, despite our searching for wildlife in the forest being hard and largely fruitless in just one night we capture two rare mammals on the camera traps. Adding this to the Colombian weasel sighting the camera traps are showcasing some of the very seldom ever seen species in the whole of South America. After breakfast we explored the area around the waterfall once again, finding a fishing spider, this one being different from the previous one as this one builds its web over the water and dives down into the water, using hairs around its body to trap and small layer of air that it uses to breath when submerged – unlike the previous fishing spider who uses the water's surface tension to walk along the surface of the water to chase down and capture prey. Looking under some of the rocks we found a pair of harvestman type arachnids and high above us a pair of female cock-of-the-rocks and some golden tanagers feed. We then decided to visit a manmade cave that was used as maintenance of a dam that is located on the other side of the ridge we are on. Along the way we found many *helicornis* and peritt butterflies and Alan caught a very beautiful black cloud-forest glasswing, we also found some fresh Spectacled bear faeces on the pathway, a reminder that the forests here are pristine and still home to some of the continent's largest and most endangered species. Also along the way we found some very large stag beetle grubs in decaying wood scattered along the pathway, once we arrived at the caves the ground was very muddy owing to the sloping cave floor making the drainage awful and collection of smelly mud a fact we would have to face to explore the cave and find the bat species that live here. Inside the cave there were two species of bats greater spear-nosed bat and the larger and more numerous large fruit-eating bat, it was very interesting that the large fruit-eating bats obviously fed heavily on the coffee fruit as the coffee seeds were scattered in piles beneath the roosting sites and many had started to germinate. In the complete absence of the sun they would not be able to grow sufficiently but by just utilising the energy stored in their seeds some of them reached around 1.6m tall. It was a little strange walking through a stunted and sparse coffee plantation in the middle of a dark, muddy, stinking cave. We walked quite a way into the cave and the sound of the hundreds of bats flying in the tight tunnel created such an echo that it sounded as if a wall of bats was flying out of the gloom to engulf us. Once we were satisfied that we hadn't missed a species of bat we left and headed back to the river. At the river Martin and Ashley (arriving ahead of David and Alan) found a small greyish-brown species of frog, later identified as nanny frog. We had great views of this little species, a second (of the same species was later found by David) and Alan also caught a huge tarantula wasp for us to have a close up view of when we got back to the car and into the open. We then loaded up into the vehicle and started the descent further down the Andes towards the foothills and where the cloud forest gives way to true rainforest, here we would spend the night before carrying onto the Llanos and where we hoped to see some more reptiles and amphibians as the climate was a little more suited to them, particularly in winter where the temperatures and rainfall remain more consistent year around. On arrival we quickly saw a pair of red-tailed squirrels running around the tall trees in the middle of the camp and after checking in we went to a nearby café and had lunch. After lunch Ashley and David went with Luis (a guide at the camp) down to a nearby waterfall and pool in search of animals. They came back with reports and pictures of many water spiders, a Johnston's whistling frog and mourning gecko. We went back to the location in the evening after an unsuccessful trip to the small village square, often a good habitat for ameivas and skinks but we were definitely finding reptiles hard to come by on this trip. In the evening trip to the waterfall we found many more of the Johnston's whistling frogs and a very large and brightly coloured spider, not a tarantula species but large and impressive all the same. Back at the main lodge and around we found many *Rhinella humboldti* toads and heard their repetitive calls long into the night, a *Gonatodes* gecko, large rusty tree-frog hanging around Martin's room number sign as well as cicadas, tarantulas when spotlighting and also eye-shine from a pair of opossums however they were too distant for identifying. Tomorrow we definitely hoped for more reptile life as we would be heading to the anaconda capital of the world and also an ecosystem dominated by the spectacled caiman; this is of course the wonderful Los Llanos that stretches from central Venezuela south-west into Colombia. So after a brief spotlighting walk around the lodge ground David and Ashley hit the hay.

Day 6 **Los Llanos (Guardatica River)**

Travelling & Wildlife Watching

On the recommendation of Alan we changed the first night of our stay in Los Llanos to visit the Guardatica River, this river is unique in the Llanos as it is very easy to see the unusual mata mata turtle as well as the charismatic pink coloured Amazon river dolphin. The sunrise over the vast expanse of seasonally flooded savanna was beautiful this morning as we headed towards and then through the town of Barinas. We stopped for breakfast and carried on into the heart of the Llanos. Crossing over the Apure River we started to see the wildlife that is so typical of the Llanos including the impossibly coloured scarlet ibis. The bird life in the Llanos is absolutely prolific and possibly even surpassing the abundance and diversity of the Brazilian Pantanal wetland. Easily seen were hundreds and sometimes thousands of great egrets, snowy egrets, cattle egrets, black-bellied whistling ducks, white-headed whistling ducks, neotropical cormorants, jabiru storks, wood storks, rufescent tiger herons, wattled jacanas, scarlet ibis, bare-faced ibis, green ibis, buff-necked ibis, endemic Orinoco geese and dozens more species. We also started to see some spectacled caiman in the small roadside pools and some of the more common species of freshwater turtles here including savanna side-necked turtles and yellow-bellied sliders. We drove for around 1 hour into the Llanos, traveling past huge fields, some of which are flooded and some filled with black water buffalo or white Brahma cattle, before reaching the ranch-cum-camp we would be staying at today. We had some lunch quickly after arriving and wanted to head straight out onto the river as to not miss any wildlife watching time, joining us at lunch was a very noisy rescued scarlet macaw. As we started the short drive to the river we noticed the clouds beginning to accumulate in the skies around and rain was definitely on the cards. This is not unheard of during this time of year, but it was certainly unusual. We were taken out on the river by Alejandro who ran the camp and his boat driver Negro. Shortly after starting we drove the boat in a tight circle, this is the traditional way of fishing for the very unusual mata mata turtle and low and behold within a couple of minutes the elongated snout of one broke the surface and Negro dived in and caught one for us to have a close look at. This turtle lives the vast majority of its life on the bottom of the river, they are superbly camouflaged and even have fringed and ragged



skin folds along their head, neck and legs which break up the outline of the turtle. They sit motionlessly for hours at a time with their large mouth open. They have a small paler (often pink) appendage on the base of their mouth that acts as a lure when wiggled to attract fish close enough to the mouth. The turtle then expands its mouth even wider and this creates a vacuum that literally sucks the fish into the mouth. All of this is done in a fraction of a second and some scientists claim that the mata mata turtle is the only predatory species that boasts a 100% success rate in hunting due to this technique. But I have to doubt this claim as I would suspect that sometimes a fish that is too large to be sucked in whole may be attempted and this fish could possibly make an escape, however no one can doubt that it is not an extremely effective technique. Apparently this stretch of the Guardatica River is full of mata mata turtles which shows the productivity of the river, as they are only one small part of the fish eating predator guild in the region, also all along the banks of the river are basking spectacled caiman ranging in size from babies only around 30cm long to very large males around 2m in length. In the trees lined fish eating birds of prey such as the black-collared hawk and great-black hawk and under the murky water were pods of river dolphins, shoals of red-bellied piranha and the very strange electric eel amongst other aquatic predators. After seeing the amazing mata mata turtle up close we released it back to the river and carried on. Alongside the spectacled caiman the green iguana is the most common reptile and it is not uncommon to see dozens of them as we did all along the river banks, climbing the trees and bushes and dashing across the roads throughout the Llanos. We also had a brief view of an Amazon river dolphin travelling along the river as we moored on a sandy beach. This section of the river had been the haunt of a large anaconda in the past and we looked for it, whilst looking Alan found a small caiman who had begun to bury itself into the mud. Some of the caiman escape the worst of the dry season by aestivating in the mud, foregoing food and water for weeks at a time as they cake themselves in mud and then with the first rains of the wet season emerge once again. He caught the caiman and showed us some of its special features including the formation of its teeth and the third eye lid that slides across the eye and is transparent and allows the animal to see underwater whilst protecting the eye from particles and sediment in the water as well as from flying fins and scales when attacking and catching fish. We stayed here and enjoyed some piranha fishing for our dinner. The red-bellied piranha numbers throughout the Llanos as in the Amazon, Orinoco, Negro and Maracaibo basins and the huge Pantanal south of the Amazon rainforest are immense and they are the most common mid-sized fish and small scale fishing of the species is the most sustainable form of local fishing. We caught around 10 of the piranha including a few that ended up being taken by caiman, other piranha and black-collared hawks. Throughout the afternoon we were accompanied by river dolphins, a pod of at least 6 animals patrolled up and down this section of river and interacted with the boat. Jumping up and down, slapping the surface with their pectoral fins as well as snapping their elongated jaws together on the surface. We watched as they played with each other and swam up to and around the boat, we also spotted a very young calf, still complete with the natal fold of skin where the animal was curled up in the womb. This fold is lost at around 3 months old and the calf stayed in the natal position just behind its mothers dorsal fin and tucked up next to her every time they rose to breath. As we cruised up and down the river we spotted a golden tegu, this group of lizards are related to the quicker ameivas and in Latin America have evolved to take over the niches occupied by the *Varanus* (monitor) lizards of the Old World, a great example of convergent evolution of two distantly related, or sometimes unrelated animals, evolving to be similar in appearance and behaviour in order to solve the same environmental problems. It then started to pour down, the rain that had been threatening all day came down in torrents for around 20 minutes, despite being unseasonal the water would be welcomed by the majority of the animals and the caiman, dolphins and bizarre hoatzins all seemed to be enjoying themselves. The hoatzin is found here in large numbers along the river banks and is thought to be one of the most primitive of bird species, due to the claws that the fledging's have on their wings. These claws are used to climb out of the dangerous water and up to the nest in the tangle of roots and branches when the young fall out when learning to fly and just leaving the nest for the first time. They are thought to be relicts from a time when birds were evolving from dinosaurs, however more recent genetic evidence suggests that the hoatzin is not a particularly ancient species and that the claws re-evolved recently as purely as an adaptation to help the young birds climbing in the particular habitat they nest in. Also seen in large numbers along the banks and in the river are the world's largest rodent, the sheep sized capybara, there are a couple of million in the Llanos and they are by far the most numerous conspicuous mammal. Maybe there are some species of bats or rodents that outnumber them, but sometimes when you see the 'plague' like proportions of capybara it is hard to believe that any species could be more numerous. Other birds that we found on this river safari including the exquisitely patterned sunbittern as well as the brightly coloured oriole blackbird, limpkins, wood storks and the ambulance bird (sharp-tailed ibis), so called for the ah-ha duet call made by the male and female when flying and sounding like a siren. We also had brief views of a top birders bird the incredibly coloured and elusive agami heron as it sulked about in the undergrowth of the dark river bank. At around 16:30 the hoatzins came out of the dense vegetation and we also witnessed rare hoatzin mating. When leaving the river and heading back to the camp we found a *Callingo meanea* butterfly, it is unusual to see this light sensitive species out in the bright sun. We also found an Aplomado falcon nest close to the road and a burrowing owl standing proud next to his hole. When we returned to the camp it was dark and we had our freshly caught piranha with dinner and the last sighting before dinner was a *scolopendra* centipede in David and Ashleys' room.



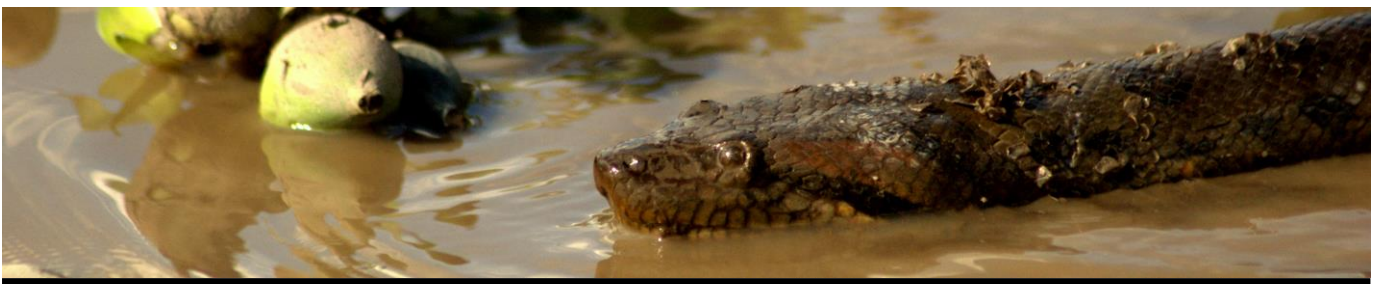
Day 7 **Los Llanos**

Travelling & Wildlife Watching

At 5am we left the first camp and travelled through the Llanos to our second accommodation here the very famous and huge ranch of Hato el Cedral, this is arguably the best place in the world to see the green anaconda and is also one of the largest ranches in the country. Now government owned (as most successful private businesses are now in Venezuela) the ranch has fallen a little into disrepair but in general is still regarded as the best wildlife watching destination in the whole of the country. It is around 2 hour drive from our previous camp and we aimed to get there whilst they still had the breakfast ready. It was raining a little as we drove along the dirt roads, we spotted a couple of nightjars as well as a pair of crab-eating foxes crossing the road and when we arrived at the ranch a large cane toad crossed the road. As soon as we reached the ranch we noticed the huge number of capybara, there is an estimated 20,000 on the ranch alone but driving along any of the roads it is easy to assume that there are 20,000 or even 2,000,000 here. They are culled in the Llanos once a year, in the build up to Easter. This is due to a papal decree around 200 years ago that stated that as the capybara lives in the water that it was a fish and therefore exempt from the 40 days of Lent. Since then the local people of Llanos and now throughout the country eat capybara at Easter. To date the cull has not had any detrimental effect on the numbers, but with around 200,000 being killed per year, this practise is surely not sustainable with an increasing human population. We arrived at around sunrise and as we unloaded the vehicle we spied a couple of the huge resident Orinoco crocodiles that inhabit the water holes just over the road from the ranch. It is the nesting season and it is not uncommon to see the female moving across the road and very close to the rooms in the ranch to make her nest, this is discouraged by the ranch workers in fear of someone being attacked by a defensive mother, however she ultimately makes her nest where she wants and at this point a small fence is erected around the mound and all guests are warned to avoid the area. This species once reached huge measurements of 6-7m long, however after decades of persecution in the 60's, 70's and 80's the large ones were mostly eradicated and now it is uncommon to see individuals over 4m long. The male in this stretch of water is around 4m long and a mightily impressive specimen. It was the size as well as the very pretty colourations of the skin that made them to desirable in the leather industry globally, another effect of their decline was that the smaller spectacled caiman numbers boomed. The caiman's skin is tougher and not a pretty and so they were never hunted to the same extent and once their main competitor for space and fish was removed they boomed to the several million that now inhabit the Llanos. Walking into the lodge we were told that breakfast was being served and we went straight there, but the as we entered the grounds of the ranch the first thing to hit was the wealth of bird life. With the sun rising the birds were all waking up and the hundreds of noisy Orinoco geese, buff-necked ibis and chestnut-fronted macaws was a natural alarm clock. Also perched on every branch were turkey, lesser yellow-headed and black vultures as well as a few yellow-headed caracaras and their large cousins the northern crested caracaras. Around the bushes, telegraph wires, fence posts and on the ground were saffron finches, red-crested cardinals, lesser kiskadees, tropical kingbirds, pied-marsh tyrants, orange-headed yellow-finches and Carib grackles. After breakfast we moved our bags into the room and just outside of our room block Martin noticed liquid dropping down from the large mango trees, when inspecting its source a pair of Venezuela red howler monkeys could be seen peering down at us as they woke up and warmed up in the morning sun. Alan took us out in our vehicle in the morning and we went driving down one of the capybara filled roads, either side of the road in every oxygen-starved pool were dying fish being captured by hordes of hungry birds, the various herons, egrets, storks, ibises, kingfishers and hawks all lining the pools. At this time of year the many fish that cannot survive by creating a cocoon and aestivating in the mud (like many catfish and eels) or were not lucky enough to make it to the rivers and larger lagoons, form the basis of the feast that results in the huge numbers of birds and caimans we see here. We walked on a small bridge and underneath the run off from a large lagoon was spilling into a small pool on the other side of the bridge. In this small pool were many large caiman waiting to snap up the fish as they come in from the larger lagoon, also with the caiman were a large number of red-bellied piranha, many Oscar cichlids, Orinoco peacock bass, black bass, wolf-fish, striped rapheal catfish, *Curimata cerasina* and *Orinocodoras eigenmanni* all looking to get either the fresh fish from the spill over or gulps of the oxygen rich water. But most surprising and impressive of all were 5 electric eels, one of which was nearly 2m long, these bizarre fish were creating an eel shaped hole in the dark shoals of small bait fish as no fish wanted to get very close to them. We also watched as the fish spasmed and the water danced when the eel gave a shock, their huge blunt heads coming out of the water as they breathed the air and took that into their lung. As well as gills many eel species have lungs that allows them to move around on land for a while as well as take advantage of oxygen deficient water such as this overcrowded pool. It was amazing to watch caiman, piranha, electric eels and various species of birds all feeding on this fish banquet from above; we all decided we would much rather be up here watching than a poor fish



getting caught in the middle of these hungry predators. Further on and at around 9am we noticed that the turtles started to come out and bask on the banks of the pools, there are various species of freshwater turtle in the Llanos and we mostly saw savanna side-necked turtles and some yellow-bellied sliders throughout our stay here. As we continued on we came across many green iguanas on the roads, some of which were very obliging in their posing for pictures and we found a brilliant male vermilion flycatcher, rivalling the scarlet ibis for intensity of colour. As well as the iguanas we saw a few golden tegu crossing the roads, these were less obliging and tended to run for cover when they saw us approach. Other interesting sightings we had before returning for lunch was a northern crested caracara digging into the ground, presumably raiding a nest of a lizard or snake as well as some very young caiman hatchlings basking in a large crèche, their mother probably watching and guarding just under the water. In the afternoon we went out with Rafael in the ranch's large open safari vehicle, we were joined by a Canadian couple as well and we went in search of the star of our tour the green anaconda. As we left the ranch we had great views of the Orinoco crocodiles once again before we arrived at a marshy field where Barbarita and Rafael quickly found an anaconda, the snake lying underneath the film of mud and vegetation and when he heard us approach the vegetation began to move and the head of the snake was located. At this point (because of his vast experience and lifetime work with snakes and other reptiles (actually making him more qualified than the local guides) David skilfully and carefully grabbed the anaconda and got it under control and brought it out into the open. This snake was around 2m long and quite relaxed, in fact all of the 4 anacondas that were handled today were relaxed and testament to the experience of David and the local guides the snakes were handled correctly without the weight of the snake being held on the head and neck and the grip being secure but not tight. As with all of the reptiles and amphibians that we handled on this trip they were not handled for very long and once we had seen the animal well we released them back into the same location. A good indicator of the stress you have imposed on the animal is the speed and reaction when released and all of these snakes stayed around the area in the open afterwards and allowed us some great views of them in the water and vegetation as well as watching how they move through their muddy habitat. In the next hour or so we caught another 3 anacondas from the same area, it appeared that when you know where to look the snakes are everywhere in the Llanos, they stay submerged in this mud and vegetation throughout the dry season and in around 2 months time they will form the large mating aggregations where several males will ball up around the much larger females in a mad frenzy to mate. The snakes we saw today measured, 2m, 2.3m, 2.5m and 3m in length and the three smaller ones were most likely males and the larger one (with a proportionally larger, squarer head) being a female. However sexing a snake is difficult without being intrusive and so we didn't confirm their sexes. Leaving the anacondas and feeling incredible about the experience and seeing one of the world's most iconic and awesome predators we carried on to look for other wildlife. We then found a southern tamandua sleeping in a tree next to the road, the small anteater not even noticing us as we took pictures and watched the animal curled up around a tree trunk. Their poor diet of ants and termites means that they spend large parts of their lives sleeping and resting as they have evolved a very slow metabolism to deal with the nutrient poor diet they have. Driving along the dusty roads we found some eastern meadowlarks (rare for the Llanos) as well as the stunning red-chested blackbird and close to sunset we stopped underneath the flight path of many birds including huge numbers of neotropical cormorants who come in to roost. Another interesting sighting today was the little known fiery squirrel, which is only found in the Venezuelan Llanos. David and Ashley found a red-footed tortoise on the road and got great pictures before he trundled off the road and into the vegetation. The tortoises are very difficult to see in the Llanos and this was a great find. We then returned to the ranch as the sun was setting fast now and around 100m down from the ranch entrance was the female Orinoco crocodile, her tracks showing that she had been over the road and presumably looking for a nest site, when we found her she had started to dig the next cavity and was about to start laying her eggs. We didn't want to disturb her in this operation so drove on, this critically endangered species needs all of the help it can get in increasing their numbers and the ranch also has a hatchery where they incubate and raised clutches of the crocodiles for reintroductions once they reach a size where they are no longer prey for many species and have a far higher survival rate.



Day 8 **Los Llanos**

Wildlife Watching

After breakfast we went with Rafael and the Canadian couple on a boat safari, we started in one of the huge flooded fields and the abundance of bird life was just staggering. Some white-tailed deer were out on the far bank of the lagoon and many capybara were around as well as caiman and a whole host of birds including thousands of black-bellied whistling ducks, white-headed whistling ducks, great egrets, snowy egrets, cattle egrets, cooi herons and hundreds of scarlet ibis, wood storks, neotropical cormorants, wattled jacanas, rufescent tiger herons, Amazon



kingfishers and Orinoco geese. We stopped at a yellow-headed caracara perched on the back of a capybara, as well as scavenging from carcasses the yellow-headed caracara remove ticks and other parasites from the capybara and cattle. Some of the rarer birds to see which we had nice views of were the pineated bittern, whistling heron and capped heron. We then came to the Matiouri River and left the open expanses of the lagoon and entered the riverine forest, here the caimans were larger and we had close up views of a feeding caiman, launching itself out of the water about 1m using its powerful tail to take some meat that Rafael offered on a stick. Also feeding around us was a great-black hawk, seeing the powerful bird taking meat off the surface of the water was great to see so close. As we cruised down the river we watched a neotropical cormorant feeding on fish that it catches by swimming underwater, the oil less feathers meaning the bird can submerge itself for a long amount of time and swim, however this means that it needs to stand in the sun with wings outstretched to dry itself off before the bird can take off and fly away. A species of bird has taken this approach to hunting even further and the anhinga (sometimes called snake bird – because of its elongated head and neck, which is often all that is seen above the water – gives the impression of a snake swimming and not a bird) and many aningas were seen today along this stretch of river. We also saw many black-crowned night herons perched in the trees, these nocturnal birds take over from the huge variation of diurnal birds and patrol the water's edges at night. We also had very poor and brief views of another agami heron before arriving at a huge mixed egret colony. Thousands of egrets took to the air from their roosts in the trees and flew over us and along down the river. We then came to a known part of the river where a giant otter holt was located and as we arrived the noise of the engine and some calls produced by Alan, Rafael and Martin resulted in the 5 giant otters coming out from their holt along the bank a little way and then sliding into the river. The family unit of giant otters consists of a breeding male and female and their offspring of various years. They tend to have a litter every year and the pups can stay with their parents and help raise the other young for 4-5 years, with the females remaining with the family longer and also not dispersing as far away as the males. The vocal repertoire of giant otters is extensive with 16 distinct calls being recorded. We watched as they came out and away from the river bank into the open, but kept their distance. They were obviously quite nervous and issued various warning snorts and kept their distance. For around 20 minutes we had the 5 giant otters coming a little closer to the boat, then backing off hissing and snorting as well as every now and again the adult male giving us a gruff like bark. This was his way of maintaining contact with the group whilst still making sure that we knew they were not too happy about the intrusion. After a while they started to relax a little and moved away from us, at this point we turned the boat around and started to head back the way we had come. During this time of year the dense mat of water hyacinth that collects in the sections of river with a slag current were in flower and the pretty purple flowers sparkled as they floated along the river. We also found another large communal spiders web as well as various ospreys flying high above the river. One of the ospreys was carrying a fish, these are migratory birds from North America during the winter however some of the ospreys do not migrate and it is only the breeding adults who migrate. This will be to reduce competition for food in the northern lakes and rivers when the adults have chicks to feed. This way the sub-adults and non-breeding population remain out of the way in South America during the busy breeding season. Travelling back through the lagoon we didn't see any new species and in fact as the sun had risen very high there were less birds around, however the turtles were basking more and near to where we departed the boat a young (1.5m) long Orinoco crocodile lay basking in the open and brilliant sunshine. Seeing this critically endangered species out and away from the known individuals near the ranch was a great surprise and by no means a common sighting. Back at the ranch we were shown a great-horned owl nest, one of the adults and the two large chick were present and keeping cool in the shade. This is the largest owl in the America's and also the most common from Canada down through to the Pantanal and beyond. Alan also took David and Ashley to the hatchery at the ranch this afternoon and then after lunch we had another afternoon game drive. This drive resulted in some great mammals including 5 giant anteaters, just like their smaller arboreal cousin they have a very slow metabolism and actually have the coolest body temperature of any mammal with an average internal temperature of around 34°C. During the cooler evenings they come out and start their foraging, they use their very powerful claws to break into the basked solid nests and their elongated and sticky tongue is darted in and out of the nest collecting up to 20,000 ants in a single sitting. In fact over the course of a day a single giant anteater is capable of eating around 300,000 ants or termites. One of the giant anteaters that was seen today was a female carrying her offspring on her back, The youngsters use their strong claws to grip onto the dense and shaggy hair of the back and are carried around by the mother for protection. Another great sighting was a male anaconda in the open, this anaconda was being mobbed by a one-eyed burrowing owl. The owl making sure that the snake moves away from his nest and judging by the speed the anaconda was moving through the grass with good success. The bird numbers were once again incredible but another highlight of this afternoon were the many pairs of crab-eating foxes. These animals are usually found in pairs and there were 5 pairs seen foraging along the sides of the roads this afternoon. They are the most common canid in South America and are very successful at finding food anywhere, they are almost the South American equivalent of the adaptable Northern Hemisphere's red fox.

Today we also went out after dinner for a spotlighting drive, this is where we saw the female Orinoco crocodile clearly making her nest on the side of the road as well as another pair of crab-eating foxes, many white-tailed deer a giant anteater moving quickly through a nearby field as well as many caiman. Their red eye shine reflecting back at us like many small fireflies all over the place. The roads were also full of capybara, the sheer numbers of the capybaras on the road after dark was incredible and also a serious problem as we had to go at a snails pace at times to make sure that they had all cleared the way. Some of the capybara seemed very indifferent to our huge



vehicle and nearly refused to move at all. We also saw several boat-billed herons and black-crowned night herons which are the two principal birds around the water's edges during the night and of course the abundant nightjars, both common and short-tailed nightjars were seen in good numbers as we drove the various routes. Once we returned to the ranch and just about to enter his room Martin spotted a Llanos long-nosed armadillo moving quickly away across the lawn, we tried to catch up with it but it had disappeared, along with the fiery squirrel and a couple of species of bats the Llanos long-nosed armadillo are the only endemic mammal species to the Llanos region.

Day 9 Caracas

Travelling

This morning we left Hato el Cedral at 5:45am and headed to the town of Barinas. Along the way we had some great bird life as was becoming very normal in the Llanos. Once we arrived at the Barinas airport we checked in and Alan joined us for breakfast at the airport before he left for Merida and we boarded the flight back to Caracas. The flight was uneventful and we met Veronica back in Caracas and were taken to our hotel. The rest of the afternoon we relaxed and rested by the pool. Tomorrow we would begin the long journey home, so we arranged the time with Veronica when we would be picked up.

Day 10 Home

Travelling

Today we had the entire morning at the hotel, before Veronica collected us and took us to the airport, we checked in and began our journey home via Frankfurt.

Species List

Anacondas of Los Llanos / January & February 2015

Mammals (* = heard or signs only / CT = Camera Traps)

	Common Name	Binominal Name
1	Ursine howler monkey	<i>Alouatta arctoidea</i>
2	Venezuelan red howler monkey	<i>Alouatta seniculus</i>
3	Large fruit-eating bat	<i>Artibeus amplus</i>
4	Fringed fruit-eating bat	<i>Artibeus fimbriatus</i>
5	Silky short-tailed bat	<i>Carollia brevicauda</i>
6	Weeper capuchin	<i>Cebus olivaceus</i>
7	Crab-eating fox	<i>Cerdocyon thous</i>
8	Llanos long-nosed armadillo	<i>Dasypus sabanicola</i>
9	Common opossum	<i>Didelphis marsupialis</i>
10	Little black serotine	<i>Eptesicus andinus</i>
11	Andean white-eared opossum	<i>Didelphis pernigra</i>
12	Capibara	<i>Hydrochoerus hydrochaeris</i>
13	Amazon river dolphin	<i>Inia geoffrensis</i>
14	Merida brocket deer	<i>Mazama bricenii</i>
15	Colombian weasel	<i>Mustela felipei</i>
16	Andean myotis	<i>Myotis andinus</i>
17	Riparian myotis	<i>Myotis riparius</i>
18	Giant anteater	<i>Myrmecophaga tridactyla</i>
19	Greater bulldog bat	<i>Noctilio leporinus</i>
20	White-tailed deer	<i>Odocoileus virginianus</i>
21	Pale spear-nosed bat	<i>Phyllostomus discolor</i>
22	Greater spear-nosed bat	<i>Phyllostomus hastatus</i>
23	Giant otter	<i>Pteronura brasiliensis</i>
24	Fiery squirrel	<i>Sciurus flammifer</i>
25	Red-tailed squirrel	<i>Sciurus granatensis</i>
26	Southern tamandua	<i>Tamandua tetradactyla</i>
27	Andean bear	<i>Tremarctos ornatus</i>

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Birds (* = heard or signs only / CT = Camera Traps)

	Common Name	Binominal Name
1	Spotted sandpiper	<i>Actitis macularia</i>
2	Agami heron	<i>Agamia agami</i>
3	Long-tailed sylph	<i>Agelaiocercus kingi</i>
4	Orange-winged parrot	<i>Amazona amazonica</i>
5	Yellow-shouldered amazon	<i>Amazona barbadensis</i>
6	Scaly-naped parrot	<i>Amazona mercenaria</i>
7	Yellow-crowned parrot	<i>Amazona ochrocephala</i>
8	Brazilian teal	<i>Amazonetta brasiliensis</i>
9	Andean teal	<i>Anas andium</i>
10	Blue-winged teal	<i>Anas discors</i>
11	Anhinga	<i>Anhinga anginga</i>
12	Scarlet macaw	<i>Ara macao</i>
13	Military macaw	<i>Ara militaris</i>
14	Chestnut-fronted macaw	<i>Ara severa</i>
15	Grey-necked woodrail	<i>Aramides cahanea</i>
16	Limpkin	<i>Aramus guarauna</i>
17	Brown-throated parakeet	<i>Aratinga pertinax</i>
18	Scarlet-fronted parakeet	<i>Aratinga wagleri</i>
19	Great egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>
20	Cocoi heron	<i>Ardea cocoi</i>
21	White-headed marsh tyrant	<i>Arundinicola leucocephala</i>
22	Burrowing owl	<i>Athene cunicularia</i>
23	Buff-tailed coronet	<i>Boissonneaua flavescens</i>
24	Pinnated bittern	<i>Botaurus pinnatus</i>
25	Chestnut-capped brush finch	<i>Buarremon brunneinuchus</i>
26	Cattle egret	<i>Bubalcus ibis</i>
27	Great-horned owl	<i>Bubo virginianus</i>
28	Black-collared hawk	<i>Busarellus nigricollis</i>
29	White-rumped hawk	<i>Buteo leucorrhous</i>
30	Roadside hawk	<i>Buteo magnirostris</i>
31	Broad-winged hawk	<i>Buteo platypterus</i>
32	Savanna hawk	<i>Buteogallus meridionalis</i>
33	Great black hawk	<i>Buteogallus urubitinga</i>

January						February			
26	27	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	4
					3	3	32		
					2		1		
	5	2	2						
		3							
1									
		2							
				12					
						~130	73		
			~20						
						2	~60		
					45	9	~75		
					4	2	4		
		4							
		3			3	9	2	5	
					4	2	1		
					4		1		
						8			
		41							
					~125	~1,000	1,000's	26	
					~150	100's	178	6	
					1	2			
					1		4		
	2	1							
							2		
	3								
					100's	~50	~1,000	171	
							3		
					8	2	2		
						2	1		
		2		1	3			2	
		2	1						
		1			4	1	1	1	
					3		2		

34	Striated heron	<i>Butorides striata</i>
35	Yellow-rumped cacique	<i>Cacicus cela</i>
36	White-rumped sandpiper	<i>Calidris fuscicollis</i>
37	Stilt sandpiper	<i>Calidris himantopus</i>
38	Crested bobwhite	<i>Calinus cristatus</i>
39	Amethyst woodstar	<i>Calliphlox amethystina</i>
40	Northern crested caracara	<i>Caracara cheriway</i>
41	Turkey Vulture	<i>Cathartes aura</i>
42	Lesser yellow-headed vulture	<i>Cathartes burrovianus</i>
43	Sharp-tailed ibis	<i>Cercibis oxycerca</i>
44	Amazon kingfisher	<i>Chloroceryle amazona</i>
45	Green kingfisher	<i>Chloroceryle americana</i>
46	Green honeycreeper	<i>Chlorophanes spiza</i>
47	Blue-tailed emerald	<i>Chlorostilbon mellisugus</i>
48	Common nightjar	<i>Chordeiles minor</i>
49	Spot-breasted woodpecker	<i>Chrysoptilus punctigula</i>
50	Magurie stork	<i>Ciconia maguari</i>
51	White-capped dipper	<i>Cinclus leucocephalus</i>
52	Magpie tanager	<i>Cissopis leveriana</i>
53	Boat-billed heron	<i>Cochlearius cochlearius</i>
54	Bronzy inca	<i>Coeligena coeligena</i>
55	Collared inca	<i>Coeligena torquata</i>
56	Bananaquit	<i>Coereba flaveola</i>
57	Green violetear	<i>Colibri thalassinus</i>
58	Pale-vented pigeon	<i>Columba cayennensis</i>
59	Feral pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>
60	Ruddy pigeon	<i>Columba subvinacea</i>
61	Plain-breasted ground-dove	<i>Columbina minuta</i>
62	Maroon-chested ground-dove	<i>Columbina mondetoura</i>
63	Ruddy ground dove	<i>Columbina talpacoti</i>
64	Smoke-coloured pewee	<i>Contopus fumigatus</i>
65	Black Vulture	<i>Coragyps atratus</i>
66	Yellow-knobbed curassow	<i>Crax daubentoni</i>
67	Smooth-billed ani	<i>Crotophaga ani</i>
68	Greater ani	<i>Crotophaga major</i>
69	Black-chested jay	<i>Cyanocorax affinis</i>
70	Inca jay	<i>Cyanocorax yncas</i>
71	Blue dacnis	<i>Dacnis cayana</i>
72	Black-bellied whistling duck	<i>Dendrocygna autumnalis</i>

					2	7	18		
			1						
							1		
					~50				
							1		
			1						
		1			9	~40	6		
~10	~15	11	2		~95	24	~75	~10	6
					8	8	~25		
					2	2			
					14	8	4		
					1	1			
	1								
						1			
							9		
						1			
					6	4	1		
			6						
					1				
						3	4		
			1						
	4	6	~10						
	4	4	7						
	2	5	5		11	8	3		
~15	~50	~25	~50		~35			~10	~40
		1					1		
	1								
			~10			4			
						1			
	2								
~100	100's	~125	~100	13	100's	~200	100's	~100	~100
					4				
		8			16	32	21	6	
		1			1		2	3	
		*							
	7	1							
				1					
					1,000's	1,000's	1,000's		

73	White-headed whistling duck	<i>Dendrocygna viduata</i>
74	Bluish flowerpeircer	<i>Diglossopsis caerulescens</i>
75	Black-capped donacobia	<i>Donacobius atricapillus</i>
76	Little blue heron	<i>Egretta caerulea</i>
77	Snowy egret	<i>Egretta thula</i>
78	White-tailed kite	<i>Elanus leucurus</i>
79	American white ibis	<i>Eudocimus albus</i>
80	Scarlet ibis	<i>Eudocimus ruber</i>
81	Trinidad euphobia	<i>Euphonia trinitatis</i>
82	Sunbittern	<i>Eurypyga helias</i>
83	Aplomado falcon	<i>Falco femoralis</i>
84	American kestrel	<i>Falco sparverius</i>
85	Pied water tyrant	<i>Fluvicola pica</i>
86	Northern white-fringed antwren	<i>Formicivora intermedia</i>
87	Green-rumped parakeet	<i>Forpus passerinus</i>
88	Magnificent frigatebird	<i>Fregata magnificens</i>
89	Rufous-tailed jacamar	<i>Galbula ruficauda</i>
90	Crane hawk	<i>Geranospiza caerulescens</i>
91	Orange-throated sunangel	<i>Heliangelus mavors</i>
92	Black-necked stilt	<i>Himantopus mexicanus</i>
93	Cliff flycatcher	<i>Hirundinea ferruginea</i>
94	Pied lapwing	<i>Hoploxypterus cayanus</i>
95	Yellow-backed oriole	<i>Icterus chrysater</i>
96	Venezuelan troupial	<i>Icterus icterus</i>
97	Oriole blackbird	<i>Icterus mexicanus</i>
98	Jabiru	<i>Jabiru mycteria</i>
99	Wattled jacana	<i>Jacana jacana</i>
100	Mountain velvetbreast	<i>Lafresnaya lafresnayi</i>
101	Velvet-fronted grackle	<i>Lamprosar tanagrinus</i>
102	Laughing gull	<i>Larus atricilla</i>
103	White-tipped dove	<i>Leptotila verreauxi</i>
104	Short-tailed nightjar	<i>Lurocalis semitorquatus</i>
105	Striped manakin	<i>Machaeropterus regulus</i>
106	Ringed kingfisher	<i>Megaceryle torquatus</i>
107	Boat-billed flycatcher	<i>Megarynchus pitangua</i>
108	Green ibis	<i>Mesembrinibis cayennensis</i>
109	Yellow-headed caracara	<i>Milvago chimachima</i>
110	Tropical mockingbird	<i>Mimus gilvus</i>
111	Shiny cowbird	<i>Molothurus bonariensis</i>
112	Giant cowbird	<i>Molothurus cryzivora</i>

					1,000's	1,000's	1,000's		
	1								
					4				
					47	7	~105		
					100's	100's	1,000's	1	
					1				
						3	7		
					~145	~120	~350	2	
	1								
					5		2		
					2				
		1							
					2	11	4		
						1			
						3			
7									
						1	1		
					1				
	~15	~15	~12						
					14	22	~250		
			*	1					
					14	1	2		
					1	4			
					2	2			
					1	1	3		
					16	~155			
					12	100's	~300		
	1								
12								~50	~30
8									
	4		8		58	16	13		
				1					
		1							
					5	4	6		
		1							
					2		2		
		2			12	9	22	23	
					5	12	3	1	
					~20	~25	32		
					~15	~30	17		

113	Wood stork	<i>Mycteria americana</i>
114	Dusky-capped flycatcher	<i>Myiarchus tuberculifer</i>
115	Orinoco goose	<i>Neochen jubata</i>
116	Yellow-crowned night heron	<i>Nyctanassa violacea</i>
117	Black-crowned night heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>
118	Hoatzin	<i>Opisthocomus hoazin</i>
119	Red-vented chachalaca	<i>Ortalis ruficauda</i>
120	White-winged becard	<i>Pachyramphus tristis</i>
121	Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>
122	Red-capped cardinal	<i>Paroaria gularis</i>
123	Brown pelican	<i>Pelecanus occidentalis</i>
124	Andean guan	<i>Penelope montagnii</i>
125	American cliff swallow	<i>Petrochelidon pyrrhonota</i>
126	Pale-bellied hermit	<i>Phaethornis anthophilus</i>
127	Large-billed tern	<i>Phaetusa simplex</i>
128	Neotropical cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax brasilianus</i>
129	Lesser kiskadee	<i>Philohydor lictor</i>
130	Bare-faced ibis	<i>Phimosus infuscatus</i>
131	Capped heron	<i>Pilherodius pileatus</i>
132	Saffron-headed parrot	<i>Pionopsitta pyrilla</i>
133	Summer tanager	<i>Piranga rubra</i>
134	Great kiskadee	<i>Pitangus sulphuratus</i>
135	Roseate spoonbill	<i>Platalea ajaja</i>
136	Yellow-legged thrush	<i>Platycichla flavipes</i>
137	Glossy ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>
138	Nacunda nighthawk	<i>Podager nacunda</i>
139	Tropical gnatcatcher	<i>Polioptila plumbea</i>
140	Grey-breasted martin	<i>Progne chalybea</i>
141	Brown-chested martin	<i>Progne tapera</i>
142	Crested oropendola	<i>Psarocolius decumanus</i>
143	Striped owl	<i>Pseudoscops clamator</i>
144	Vermillion flycatcher	<i>Pyrocephalus rubinus</i>
145	Venezuelan parakeet	<i>Pyrrhura emma</i>
146	Rose-crowned parakeet	<i>Pyrrhura rhodocephala</i>
147	Carib grackle	<i>Quiscalus lugubris</i>
148	Black mandibled toucan	<i>Ramphastos ambiguus</i>
149	Citron-throated toucan	<i>Ramphastos citrolaemus</i>
150	Crimson-backed tanager	<i>Ramphocelus dimidiatus</i>
151	Snail kite	<i>Rostrhamus sociabilis</i>
152	Andean cock-of-the-rock	<i>Rupicola peruvianus</i>

					~40	~120	13		
		1							
						~150	~150		
					1		2		
					2	16	~85		
					21	4	8		
					1		2		
		1							
					1	1	7		
					2	37	~55		
								1	1
	~15			1					
				~10					
				1					
					59	38	~85		
					~350	1,000's	1,000's		
	8	3	2		13	14			
					~95	7	1,000's	2	
						2			
		~20							
				1					
	1			1	2	11	3		
					51	41	1		
		1							
					31	25	2		
							11		
						4			
	2								
	3	3							
		10	1						
	*								
						2	2		
								4	
		~100							
	~15	2	2		~75	76	27	~100	
	1	1	*						
		2							
	1	4							
					5				
			1	24					

153	Black skimmer	<i>Ryhynchops niger</i>
154	Black pheobe	<i>Sayornis nigricans</i>
155	Scaled dove	<i>Scardafella squammata</i>
156	Black-faced tanager	<i>Schistochlamys melanopis</i>
157	Orange-fronted yellowfinch	<i>Sicalis columbiana</i>
158	Saffron finch	<i>Sicalis flaveola</i>
159	Grassland yellow-finch	<i>Sicalis luteola</i>
160	Southern rough-winged swallow	<i>Stelgidopteryx ruficollis</i>
161	Yellow-billed tern	<i>Sterna superciliaris</i>
162	Eastern meadowlark	<i>Sturnella magna</i>
163	Red-breasted blackbird	<i>Sturnella militaris</i>
164	Pale-breasted spinetail	<i>Synallaxis albescens</i>
165	Whistling heron	<i>Syrigma sibilatrix</i>
166	Neotropical palmswift	<i>Tachornis squamata</i>
167	White-winged swallow	<i>Tachycineta albiventer</i>
168	White-lined tanager	<i>Tachyphonus rufus</i>
169	Golden tanager	<i>Tangara arthus</i>
170	Blue-necked tanager	<i>Tangara cyanicollis</i>
171	Barred antshrike	<i>Thamnophilus doliatus</i>
172	Buff-necked ibis	<i>Theristicus caudatus</i>
173	Fulvous-headed tanager	<i>Thlypopsis fulviceps</i>
174	Blue-grey tanager	<i>Thraupis episcopus</i>
175	Rufescent tiger heron	<i>Tigrisoma lineatum</i>
176	Masked tityra	<i>Tityra semifasciata</i>
177	Common tody flycatcher	<i>Todirostrum cinereum</i>
178	Solitary sandpiper	<i>Tringa solitaria</i>
179	Masked trogon	<i>Trogon personatus</i>
180	Chestnut-bellied thrush	<i>Turdus fulviventris</i>
181	Bare-eyed thrush	<i>Turdus nudigenis</i>
182	Glossy-black thrush	<i>Turdus serranus</i>
183	Grey Kingbird	<i>Tyrannus dominicensis</i>
184	Tropical Kingbird	<i>Tyrannus melancholicus</i>
185	Fork-tailed flycatcher	<i>Tyrannus savanna</i>
186	Southern lapwing	<i>Vallenus chilensis</i>
187	Plain xenops	<i>Xenops minutus</i>
188	Eared dove	<i>Zenaida auriculata</i>
189	Rufous-collared sparrow	<i>Zonotrichia capensis</i>

					4	14	8		
		5	7						
						3	2	2	
	6								
						4			
					8	29	2	2	
					1				
	6	1		4					
					6	~10	~15		
						2			
						4			
						2			
							2	4	
					4				
		1			~40	7	~50		
					2				
					2				
		1							
					2				
					14	~220	~280		
		2							
	5	5							
					29	31	~235	1	
		2							
						1			
						2			
	1								
	3								
		1							
	1			1					
	2								
	4	1	1	3	21	13	4	12	
					5	6			
			2		49	46	37	4	
							2		
						4			
		3	3						

Reptiles (* = heard or signs only / CT = Camera Traps)

	Common Name	Binominal Name
1	Giant ameiva	<i>Ameiva ameiva</i>
2	Andean lizard	<i>Anadia sp.</i>
3	Grass anole	<i>Anolis auratus</i>
4	Spectacled caiman	<i>Caiman crocodilus</i>
5	Red-footed tortoise	<i>Chelonoidis carbonarius</i>
6	Mata mata	<i>Chelus fimbriatus</i>
7	Orinoco crocodile	<i>Crocodylus intermedius</i>
8	Green anaconda	<i>Eunectes murinus</i>
9		<i>Gonatodes ligiae</i>
10	Green iguana	<i>Iguana iguana</i>
11	Mourning gecko	<i>Lepidodactylus lugubris</i>
12	Red-headed Amazon side-necked turtle	<i>Podocnemis erythrocephala</i>
13	South American river turtle	<i>Podocnemis expansa</i>
14	Savanna side-necked turtle	<i>Podocnemis vogli</i>
15	Turniptail gecko	<i>Thecadactylus rapicauda</i>
16	Yellow-bellied slider	<i>Trachemys scripta</i>
17	Golden tegu	<i>Tupinambis teguixin</i>

January						February			
26	27	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	4
		1							
	1								
	1								
					~130	200+	1,000+		
						1			
					3				
						5	4		
						4	1		
				1					
					56	96	54		
				1					
						1	2		
						4	2		
					~100	100's	~100		
		1							
					18	61	19		
					1	7			

Amphibians (* = heard or signs only / CT = Camera Traps)

	Common Name	Binominal Name
1	Cane toad	<i>Bufo marinus</i>
2	Johnstone's Whistling Frog	<i>Eleutherodactylus johnstonei</i>
3	Rusty tree frog	<i>Hypsiboas boans</i>
4	Nanny Frog	<i>Mannophryne collaris</i>
5		<i>Paramophrynella ginesi</i>
6	Viened treefrog	<i>Phrynohyas venulosus</i>
7	American bullfrog	<i>Rana catesbeiana</i>
8	Amazon river frog	<i>Rana palmipes</i>
9		<i>Rhinella humboldti</i>

January						February			
26	27	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	4
						1	1		
					1				
					1	1			
					1				
					3				
					11				
		6							
		7							
					3				

Fishes (* = heard or signs only / CT = Camera Traps)

	Common Name	Binominal Name
1	Oscar cichlid	<i>Astronotus ocellatus</i>
2	Orinoco peacock bass	<i>Cichla orinocensis</i>
3		<i>Curimata cerasina</i>
4	Electric Eel	<i>Electrophorus electricus</i>
5	Wolf fish	<i>Hoplias aimara</i>
6	Black bass	<i>Micropterus cahabae</i>
7		<i>Orinocodoras eigenmanni</i>
8	Cardinal tetra	<i>Paracheirodon axelrodi</i>
9	Striped Raphael catfish	<i>Platydoras armatulus</i>
10	Red-bellied piranha	<i>Pygocentrus nattereri</i>

January						February			
26	27	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	4
						8			
						~10			
						~50			
						5			
						~50			
						3			
						~20			
				~100					
	~10								
					~25	~100			