

**Andean bear trip
Cayambe Coca National Park, Ecuador:
2-5 November, 2017**



A work trip to Quito resulted in the opportunity to look for the elusive Andean bear. This was my first opportunity to try and given I only had a few days I contacted Armando Castellanos as recommended by previous trip reports. This was definitely the right choice.

The terrain was steep and we were hiking at around 4000m so even a small incline induced heavy breathing. That said, the 4000 sq km Cayambe Coca National Park is stunning and at this time of year it was very quiet. During our time there, I don't recall seeing anyone else up in the mountains, we literally had the park to ourselves.

Armando used radio-telemetry to try and locate a couple of bears that he collared for his research project. Getting a signal proved to be tough in the steep valleys and high peaks and although he didn't give up, it wasn't ultimately successful. Fortunately, luck was on our side, and his incredibly fit field assistant Melchor, spotted a bear on one of his forays over a distant ridge. Suddenly the altitude didn't seem to be a problem and we climbed up to a small knoll overlooking a meadow adjacent to a large patch of scrub. Approximately 100-150 meters away was a very impressive looking male bear. He either didn't know we were near or he wasn't concerned but after about 10-15 minutes of taking photos and filming (see film link below), Armando started to worry that this could be the same bear that had chased him a few days earlier. We slowly backed down the slope and high-fived out of the sight of what proved to be the only bear sighting of the trip. We had also hoped to see the Mountain tapir, which Armando claims to have a 50/50 chance of spotting, but the following day was bright and sunny, and this was apparently not good tapir weather.

This turned out to be my sixth bear species on my quest to see all eight species in the wild. So if Andean bear is on your bucket list, then Armando can help you. He was responsive to emails, offered very good rates and as a bear/tapir researcher, he knows everything there is to know about the park, conservation and the wildlife. Armando's contact details are below:

Armando Castellanos iznachi@gmail.com

Itinerary

2 November Armando arranged the pick-up from our hotel in Quito for the short drive to Papallacta about 40 km from Quito. Check-in at the basic but functional Hostal Coturpa.

3 November Full day hiking in bear country in Cayambe Coca. Night drive after dinner

4 November Full day hiking in the park.

5 November Morning visit to a hydro-power station near Papallacta to look for bats in the access tunnel. Tip - look in the bore holes in the tunnel ceiling. We missed them on the way up!

MAMMALS SEEN

1	Andean bear <i>Tremarctos ornatus</i>	One male observed for approx. 10-15 minutes in mid-morning. As we were on foot we left our vantage point about 100m away as this bear had been aggressive during a previous encounter.
2	Culpeo (Andean fox) <i>Lycalopex culpaeus</i>	Two animals seen during the day. One on the road, the other in a car park near a park ranger station.
3	White tailed deer	

	<i>Odocoileus virginianus</i>	One animal seen on the first day in the grasslands
4	Tapeti (Brazilian cottontail) <i>Sylvilagus brasiliensis</i>	One animal seen whilst walking during the day.
5	Montane myotis <i>Myotis oxyotus</i>	Several seen in the bore holes in the hydropower access tunnel

Check out this short clip of the Andean bear:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IJizmXHH8VQ>

A culpeo near the ranger station.

