

THE MAMMALS OF PANAMA

- *A Two Week Tour of Western and Central Panama*



The Canopy Tower in Soberania National Park.

Steve Morgan (steve43morgan@aol.com)

December 2017

THE MAMMALS OF PANAMA

1 Introduction

Panama was a country I had been thinking about visiting for some while. There were still quite a few good target species in Central America that I wanted to see and Panama offered as good a chance as any to get a fair few of them. I discovered that “Wild About Travel” were offering a reasonable deal on a nine day trip and signed up. I also added on two days at Los Quetzales in Western Panama, principally in order to get Cacomistle which, at the time, looked pretty much nailed on at that location. My other key targets were Jaguarundi, Water Opossum, Rothschild’s Porcupine, Western Lowland Olingo, Panamanian Night Monkey and Geoffroy’s Tamarin.

The trip ran from November 29th to December 11th and, apart Los Quetzales, the other main locations were Soberania National Park, El Valle, the Chagres River and San Lorenzo.

2 Logistics

The tour was organised by Jo Thomas at Wild About Travel. Jo was assiduous in satisfying my idiosyncratic requirements over and above the standard tour package and can be contacted at Jo@Wildabouttravel.co.uk. Unless you speak fluent Spanish you will find it much easier booking this sort of trip through Jo rather than attempting to do it independently. Moreover, if you try to deal with Los Quetzales directly you will need the patience of a saint. (Their inability to respond to phone calls or emails is I’m told legendary!

Los Quetzales was actually a superb lodge, the cabin I used (Cabin number 8) being set in beautiful montane forest. The main problem there is the complete and utter disorganisation that seems to envelop all they do. The scheduled pick up at David Airport failed to materialise and I had to get my own taxi transfer. (Fortunately the driver knew where the lodge was). When I arrived the office was shut and they appeared surprised to see me. It was only by chance that I happened to find someone to attend to me. My booking seemed to have gone astray though, with no-one speaking English, it was hard to tell exactly what was going on. Eventually an English speaker at some other location was found and I checked in using someone’s mobile phone. It all worked out OK in the end but that was probably more by luck than judgement! Cabin 8, the cabin which is regularly visited at night by Cacomistles, is remote and you need to be driven there in a 4x4 vehicle along a rocky and extremely steep and difficult track. Food is brought up to the cabin twice daily and there is a short wave radio in the cabin to communicate with the office – always assuming someone is there to answer!

At El Valle I stayed two nights at Canopy Lodge, a fairly up-market sort of place that offers good food and accommodation. The focus was heavily on birds rather than mammals and the guides were not especially mammal-literate. My guide there, Danilo Rodriguez, was a willing trier however and did get me a Western Pygmy Squirrel. A tree next to the dining area has a roost for Rothschild’s Porcupine, Orange Nectar Bats come to the Hummingbird feeders in the evening and Red-tailed Squirrels and Central American Agoutis are common in the gardens. There was also a Rufous Tree Rat in the children’s tree house, which was a nice bonus. The lodge was a pleasant place to stay and worth a night or two. But if you hired your own car and ploughed your own furrow I think you’d do just as well as going on the organised bird walks.

I spent seven nights at Canopy Tower in Soberania National Park to the north-west of Panama City. (The lodge and tower are run by the same company). The tower is set in the forest which has the great advantage that wildlife is on your doorstep. On several occasions I looked out on Sloths and Tamarins while taking a shower! The tower is a little less luxurious than the lodge but still very

comfortable. In fact I preferred it. My guide, Alex Sanchez, was very good both on birds and mammals and tried hard to get the key species. Everything there seemed very efficient and the manager, the irrepressible Tatiana, was obviously running it all on a tight rein. One last thing which I particularly liked was that the staff there had no objection to my wandering around after dark by myself. One of my pet hates is being tripped up by pettifogging rules and restrictions but it seems that at Canopy Tower you can pretty much do as you wish. Fantastic!

3 Summary of Results

I scored 36 species of mammal, the only major dip being Water Opossum (which in any case was a bit of a long shot). I would liked to have got Greater Grison and/or Silky Anteater but sightings of both are rare and unlikely. The highlights were Jaguarundi, Cacomistle, Western Lowland Olingo, Panamanian Night Monkey and Rothschild's Porcupine. It was also nice to get Armoured Rat and Lesser Capybara, the latter turning out not to be the easy meat I expected. (They are a lot shyer than the Greater Capybara which of course really is a walkover). I was also pleased to see some old friends again, notably Nine-banded Armadillo, Woolly Opossum and Giant False Vampire Bat.

I more or less ignored birds but some of the Trogons and Toucans were worth looking at. And I had a sighting of the rare Slaty-backed Forest Falcon, (which will probably have serious birders gnashing their teeth in frustration that it was wasted on me!).

The butterflies were spectacular – even though I could identify virtually none of them! And I was particularly pleased to see the huge Black Witch moth.

I also had some nice views of Spectacled Caiman and American Crocodile and some of the Green Iguanas were really splendid.

All in all, the trip was very successful. I failed to contract malaria, dysentery or salmonella. And no-one died, which is always a bonus.

4 Day-by-Day Log

Wednesday November 29th

A painfully early start, (02.30 am!), saw me on the road from Burton on Trent to Heathrow. There was frost on the car and the thermometer read minus three degrees. It was the same story at Heathrow where the cars in Long Term were encrusted with a thick white coating of frost. Panama would surely be warmer!

The long haul took me via Newark, New Jersey where I connected comfortably with a medium haul leg to Panama City. I arrived in mid-evening, after some 25 hours on the move, and checked into the Riande Airport hotel. I was totally banjaxed but found time for a couple of cold beers before conking out for ten hours.

Thursday November 30th

I awoke to find it cool and overcast outside. After a leisurely breakfast I took the shuttle bus to the airport and checked in for the short hop to David in Western Panama. A taxi was supposed to be meeting me at the airport but it failed to show and so I had to go and find one at the rank willing to take me the two hour drive to Cerro Punta and Los Quetzales Ecological.

Los Quetzales is quite a strange place. The main office and restaurant is in the town but the cabins, all nine of them, are located at various spots up the side of a nearby mountain in the forest. Cabins 8 and 9, the furthest, are about a kilometre away at the end of an extremely rough track, negotiable

(just!) by a very stout 4x4 vehicle. I particularly wanted Cabin 8, the hot spot for Cacomistles and other nocturnal visitors according to previous trip reports. Once settled in, meals are brought to the cabin twice daily by the staff and you are on your own in the wilderness! A short wave radio, tuned to the office, is your only lifeline with the outside world - unless, of course, you are prepared to trek downhill on foot.



The Cacomistle, "El Caco", at Los Quetzales.

I wasted no time in preparing for nocturnal visitors. About two dozen bananas, four or five apples and three or four passion fruits were chopped up and positioned outside the cabin in what I hoped would be a good spot. I also crumbled up half a packet of digestive biscuits in the hope of rodents. From the first floor balcony of the cabin I had a grandstand view of the banquet laid out below. I set out my gear and lights and made myself a cup of tea while I waited for it to get dark.

By six o'clock it was quite gloomy and by six thirty it was more or less dark. It was then that I noticed something scampering about on the ground below the balcony. Something was being tempted by the biscuits! When it re-appeared a few minutes later I was ready and got the torch beam on it. I found a large rat with a long, thick, bi-coloured tail. There were only two species it could be: Armoured Rat or Tomes' Spiny Rat. The coat was grey on top but white below. The feet were completely white. The dorsal fur was coarse and, towards the rear, shaggy with black spines. So, **Armoured Rat** it was. A lifer within minutes of starting!

While I was engrossed looking at the rat I noticed something moving to my right and switched the beam across to get a better look. And there, barely ten metres away, was my **Cacomistle**! Mission accomplished in the first ten minutes! He was obviously very used to coming to Cabin 8 for food but nevertheless he was still very shy. For the next two hours he sat in various perches in nearby trees staring at the food but only every so often daring to venture down and grab a piece before rapidly retreating to safety.

About eight o'clock I had another visitor, a **Common Opossum** which briefly had sniff around before going on his way. The Cacomistle didn't much like its arrival and greeted it with its characteristic loud, shrieking alarm calls - *way-ook, way-ook*. It shot off into some distant trees and only re-appeared once the Opossum had been long gone.



Cabin 8 at Los Quetzales.

I had expected Kinkajous but none appeared. In fact, I had been advised to bring lots of bait if I wanted to see Cacomistle because the Kinkajous, being bolder and greedier, would otherwise quickly clean me out. So it was a surprise not to get a single one. Then, at around nine o'clock, it started raining again. This seemed to inhibit all activity and both the Rat and the Cacomistle disappeared. It took that as the cue to get an early night. I got up in the night and found that all the remaining bait had gone, leaving me to speculate what else might have called.

Friday December 1st

At dawn it was still raining and the temperature had dropped well into single figures. Conditions looked far from promising but my guide was coming at eight o'clock and we would be going out come what may. It turned out, unsurprisingly, to be a gruelling and unproductive walk through the forest. The trail we took, a circular route of about five kilometres, consisted of steep, muddy slopes and slippery boulders. Four times we had to cross a stream using underwater stepping stones. Needless to say I quickly got a double bootful and, at the third crossing, managed to fall in and get a complete drenching. The target Squirrels didn't appear, (no great surprise given the continuous rain), and even the birds were quiet. We got **Spangle-cheeked Tanager**, **Black-cheeked Warbler** and **Collared Redstart** but little else. The highlight was probably finding very fresh Jaguar tracks on the path leading up to the cabin. These could only have been a couple of hours old and the animal must have walked along the path at dawn.

Back at the cabin I put out the hummingbird feeders and was later rewarded with **Variable Mountain Gem**, which perched obligingly close by to pose for photographs. But, after lunch, it was still raining and so I took a siesta.

I awoke at around four o'clock to find the sun shining. Time for a stroll! This didn't produce much except for a **Tiger Heron** (Fasciated I think) which I disturbed along the stream. However, returning to the cabin I found a **Red-tailed Squirrel** eating the last of some cereal bait I had put out the day before. It paid no attention to me and I surmised that it was used to visiting the cabin for food.

I put out more fruit and biscuits as bait for the evening but had to wait until after seven o'clock for some action. At about 19.15 the Cacomistle was back and was joined at eight o'clock by the Common Opossum. As before, "El Caco" was displeased to see him and voiced his displeasure with more "way-ook" alarm calls. The Armoured Rats didn't appear until quite late but then came in numbers, at least three individuals scampering about picking off the digestive biscuits I'd crumbled up for them on the ground.



Red-tailed Squirrel at Los Quetzales. (The Western morph has a greyish tail).

The Kinkajous once again failed to appear and I began to put some credence into the rumour I'd heard that a disease had reduced their numbers. It seemed that the single Cacomistle was the last Procyonid survivor. With this gloomy prospect in mind I left him to it at around ten o'clock.

Saturday December 2nd

I woke at four thirty to find all the fruit gone and El Caco sitting in a nearby tree. I had an early start and at five forty my transport arrived to take me to the office where my taxi was waiting to drive me to David. This and the one hour internal flight from David to Panama City passed uneventfully.

Canopy Lodge was a three hour drive from Tocumen Airport in Panama City and we didn't arrive until around 14.15. **Central American Agoutis** and **Red-tailed Squirrels** were at the feeding stations

(which are regularly replenished with fruit). Not surprisingly these animals are completely habituated to human presence.

It soon began raining again and the prospects for an afternoon walk didn't look good. But we set off anyway with our guide Danilo Senior. Our first stop was in Chorro el Macho where Danilo knew of a Porcupine hole in a tree. Unfortunately, no Porcupine was visible. However, we were told that another Porcupine hole existed in a tree at the lodge and so I remained hopeful of a sighting at some point. More on this later!

We drove out of El Valle into some pleasant countryside on the edge of some good looking forest. The focus seemed to be on birding but we did find a **Brown-throated Three-toed Sloth** and a **Variegated Squirrel**. The rain had stopped and conditions seemed to be improving. As the afternoon wore on I got increasingly bored with the apparently ceaseless bird taping – is there anything more tedious than standing around while the guide plays bird calls on his i-phone? – and wandered off up the road to see what I could find. I came to a T-junction where I had good visibility in both directions. It was the time of day I figured, around five o'clock, when something interesting might walk across the road. And it did! Suddenly, about a hundred yards up the road to my right, a rather long, slender black animal materialised. It stood for a second in the middle of the road giving me a very good view. It had a long thin tail, short but delicate legs and a small head. I knew straight away what it was – a **Jaguarundi**! Before I could summon anyone else to come and see it the animal leapt into the roadside vegetation and was gone. I turned round to see Danilo who had arrived on the scene just in time to get a very brief glimpse. "Tayra" he said. But I knew it wasn't. And, eventually, after some discussion he conceded that I was right. Apart from anything else Tayras don't have long slender tails.

Later, after dinner, I went for a wander along the stream which runs alongside the lodge. Occasionally, I had been told, Water Opossum was seen here and so I was keen to try my luck. But, after an hour or so of trying I had found only a **Common Opossum** and so I retired for the night. However, the action hadn't quite ended. About half an hour after having gone to bed I heard a knock on the door and a voice called out "sir, porcupine!". It was the night watchman who'd been resourceful enough to come and wake me. I threw on some clothes and came running. Sure enough, at the tree hole which I'd been told about earlier a mass of quills was visible in the torch beam. And with a bit of effort I could finally make out the face of a **Rothschild's Porcupine** staring down at me. A perfect end to a very good day!

Sunday December 3rd

The morning dawned grey and cool with drizzle in the air. We started with a quick visit to the tree house where our guide said that a **Rufous Tree Rat** was roosting. He was right and we had extremely close views of this splendid rodent.

We then drove up to Cerro Gaital which was shrouded in mist, conditions which seemed most unpromising for both birds and mammals. We did find a **Red-tailed Squirrel** and a **Brown-throated Three-toed Sloth** but the morning was mainly unproductive. We found a **Double-toothed Kite** perched in a Cercropia tree but little else of note. At about eleven o'clock the drizzle turned into proper rain and we beat a hasty retreat.

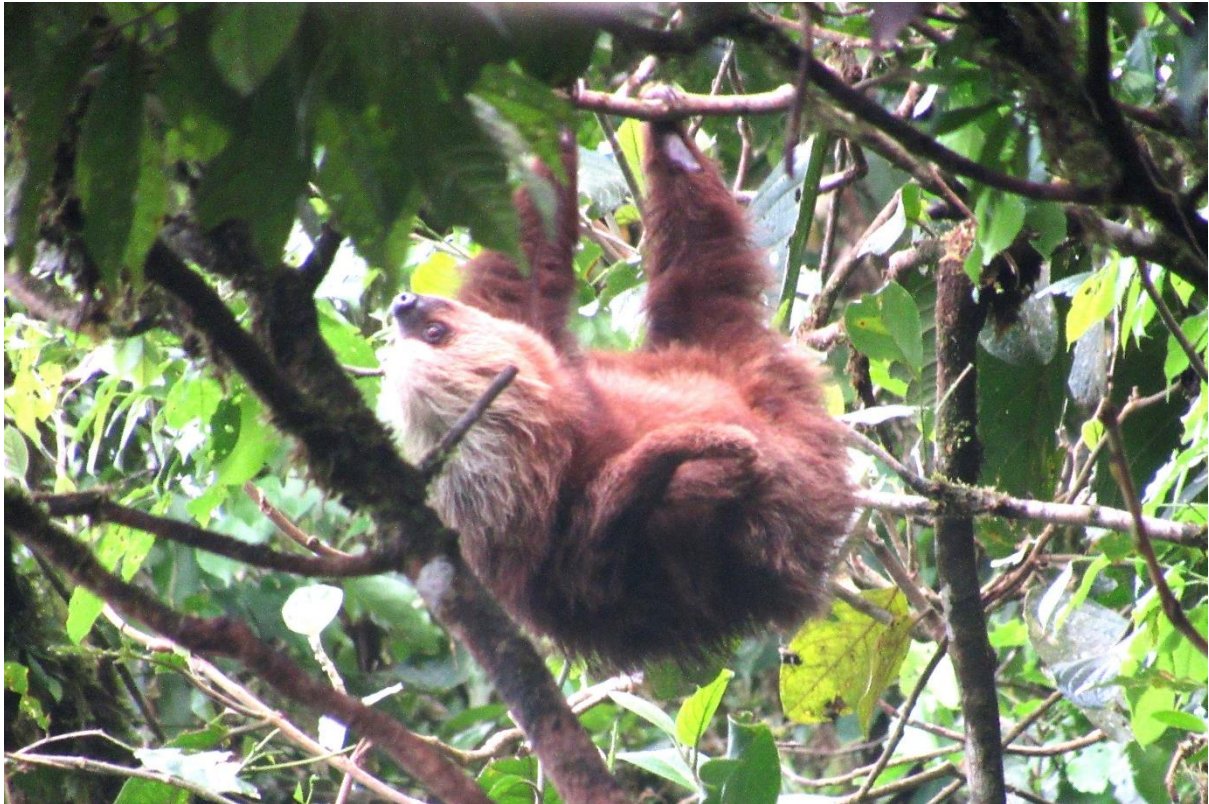
The mission after lunch was to drive up to Altos del Maria, at much higher altitude, for **Western Pygmy Squirrel**. The weather had improved markedly – the sun was shining! – and we duly scored. We also had superb views of a Hoffman's Two-toed Sloth. On the bird front we found an **Orange-**

bellied Trogon, a **Barred Hawk** and a **Wedge-tailed Woodcreeper**. We tried for White-tailed Deer on the way back but without success. And before long it started to rain again!

I tried again for Water Opossum along the river after dinner but found nothing except a few bats I couldn't identify. Back at the lodge I checked out the Porcupine roost but that too was quiet. But there were some quite large, pale-coloured bats at the Hummingbird feeders which I had been told were **Orange Nectar Bats**.

Monday December 4th

It was a slow start the next morning with a transfer to Canopy Tower arranged for ten o'clock. This took about two hours and we arrived at the Tower in time for lunch. The Tower is an old military structure originally built in the 1960s by the Americans as part of the effort to protect the Panama Canal. It fell into disuse and was refurbished in the late 1990s as an eco-lodge. It sits in the middle of superb forest in Soberania National Park and has an observation deck on the top floor from which the surrounding forest canopy can be viewed.



Hoffmann's Two-toed Sloth at Altos del Maria.

On arrival, a **White-nosed Coati** brushed past us and hastened up the stairs, obviously on a mission to raid the kitchen. It was cut short by a group of guests who blocked its path and sent it scurrying back towards us and then out the door. Apparently such raids were commonplace! Outside, on the branches of a dead tree, sat a group of **Geoffroy's Tamarins**, indulging in a bit of mutual grooming.

The afternoon saw a group of three of us, with our new guide Alex, walking up Plantation Road, a very interesting trail about a mile from the Tower. There was drizzle in the air (as usual!) but we pressed on regardless. We soon found **Central American Agouti** and, a bit later, some **White-fronted Capuchins**. A couple of times we disturbed animals we couldn't identify – the first a small, compact creature which shot up a steep earth bank and into the undergrowth before we could tell what it

was, (possibly a Paca?); the second a small animal with a white rear end and virtually no tail (almost certainly a Forest Rabbit). As dusk fell a number of small, very dark bats began to emerge. We couldn't identify them but I suspect they were **Little Mastiff Bats** which are common around the Tower.

In the early evening the staff at the Tower put out a banana on the "Tamarin tree" to lure in the near-resident **Central American Woolly Opossum**. Sure enough, he was soon on the scene, joined minutes later by a **Western Lowland Olingo**. The two animals faced off against each, the Opossum eventually giving way. But the Olingo was shy and, despite having blinked last, wouldn't come close enough to his audience to claim his banana.



Central American Woolly Opossum on his banana bait at Canopy Tower.

After dinner, by arrangement with the night staff at the gate, I went for a stroll down Semaphore Hill. It was cool and a mist had descended which inhibited visibility. But I pressed on for a bit. Nothing was showing though I did hear some quite heavy movements in the forest. Some were obviously monkeys but others, apparently coming from the ground, might have been Peccaries (whose workings we had seen on Plantation Road earlier).

Tuesday December 5th

After a fairly early breakfast a group of half a dozen of us went for a guided walk down Semaphore Hill. The steep earth banks on the right hand side were pitted with Armadillo holes and I wondered how I hadn't seen one the previous evening!

About half way down the hill one of the group noticed something moving in trees to our left about fifty metres away. A **Northern Tamandua**! For about five minutes we watched as it progressed along various branches in the mid-canopy before eventually it disappeared into thick foliage. Then, twenty minutes later, Alex showed us the roost of the resident **Panamanian Night Monkeys**. Three

little heads peered out at us from the fork of a tall tree about fifteen metres above our heads. Two good hits one after another! Finally, under the bridge at the foot of the hill, Alex showed us the small colony of roosting **Lesser White-lined Bats**.

I was dreading the long slog back up the hill and wondering how we were going to get back in time for lunch – but Alex surprised us by telling us that a vehicle was on its way to pick us up. That's my kind of hill walk – downhill only!

In the afternoon we visited the Ammo Ponds in the hope of seeing Lesser Capybara. Sadly they weren't around – or at least if they were they weren't visible. There were plenty of **Wattled Jacana**, **Rufescent Tiger Herons** and a **Great White Egret**. But, despite searching every nook and cranny, no Capybaras. Late in the day we encountered the birding group (also staying at the Tower) who told us they'd seen two Jaguarundis and a Northern Tamandua on the Pipeline Road. Situation normal then: Jaguarundis are usually seen accidentally by people who weren't looking for them or, worse, didn't know what they were! The heavens then opened and we endured a torrential rain storm on our return to the Tower. Of course, being sat in the back of an open vehicle we got absolutely drenched.

We fared better on the night drive after dinner. Semaphore Hill was quiet but the Gamboa Road produced A **Spectacled Owl** and a **Spectacled Caiman** and, driving up to Summit, we got a **Common Opossum** in a tree. We turned round at Summit and the return along Gamboa Road produced two **Central American Woolly Opossums** and a probable **Western Lowland Olingo**. The latter eluded our spotlight beam though we got glimpses of a very agile medium-sized animal moving very quickly between branches. Back on Semaphore Hill we made up for this frustration by getting another **Olingo** in plain sight in the branches of a tree above our heads.

Wednesday December 6th

We set off very early to walk the famous Pipeline road. Passing the Ammo Ponds on the way we noted that the Lesser Capybara were still not visible. Perhaps the Jaguarundis and Silky Anteaters, for which Pipeline Road is famous, would be more accommodating?

It turned out that we were to walk the first two kilometres of the Pipeline, as far as the Discovery Centre, and possibly the next half kilometre beyond. This section was fairly disturbed and a number of vehicles passed us throughout the course of the morning as well as several other walkers. I was disappointed to discover also that yesterday's Jaguarundi had been encountered on the quieter vehicle-free section beyond the Discovery Centre. I soon realised that we weren't on the best mammal part of the road.

However, we did stumble across another **Northern Tamandua** – possibly the same one the birders had seen the day before? And there were **Mantled Howlers** and **White-fronted Capuchins**. I studied every small horizontal branch and vine thicket in the hope of seeing an "orange tennis ball" (Silky Anteater) but unsurprisingly (Alex said they see them perhaps once or twice a year) I didn't.

By late morning I was hot, weary and footsore. It was getting very humid and, amazingly, the sun was blazing down. Perhaps the long overdue "dry season" was arriving?

The afternoon saw us take a leisurely stroll around Summit Botanical Park. Although it is a public park it has Coatis and Agoutis wandering about and, as we soon found, **Common Tent-making Bats** roosting under the fronds of palm trees. We found two groups, the first comprising eight bats, the second quite a lot more, many of which we inadvertently disturbed. As someone put it: "not so much an emergence as an evacuation". Still, at that point we didn't know the roost was there so we weren't to know.

There were a number of cages displaying various birds and animals. Particularly distasteful was the sight of a Harpy Eagle in an aviary – though the Jaguar in its pen was scarcely much more edifying. Along with many wildlife enthusiasts I have a particular aversion to birds of prey and cats being held in captivity and the Canopy Tower might consider removing this part of its itinerary.



Common Tent-making Bats in Summit Botanical Park.

Thursday December 7th

We set off much earlier than hitherto for an all-day visit to San Lorenzo National Park near Colon on the Caribbean coast, about two hours drive to the north of the Tower. The park used to be an American military base and the derelict remains of what used to be the soldiers' quarters stand eerily in the area immediately beyond the entrance. Nature had already begun reclaiming these old buildings and I wondered whether there were bats roosting within.

A few **White-nosed Coatis** wandered across the road as we drove into the park. I kept a sharp eye on the road ahead – Jaguarundis and Grisons have been regularly seen here, though we were probably more likely to encounter White-tailed Deer or Collared Peccary. In the event nothing at all, apart from the ubiquitous Coatis, crossed our path.

Our first foray into the forest took us up a trail once used by American Marines as part of their jungle training. This produced nothing at all. So we tried a second trail, which led to a lookout tower. There were **Mantled Howlers** but nothing else of note.

The morning was thus a bit a damp squib but we were to take a picnic lunch at San Lorenzo Fort where I knew there were bats roosting, so I was pretty sure we'd have at least some mammals to look at! Arriving at the old fort there was restoration work in progress and it took special pleading to be allowed onto the site and to get access to the ancient rooms below the fort where the bats were thought to be. Finally, we found them; mainly **Greater White-lined Bats** but also some **Common Big-**

eared Bats. Outside were **Amoeba Lizards** and a huge **Black Witch** moth, almost as big as the legendary White Witch, which I had seen previously in Nicaragua.



Black Witch moth at Fort San Lorenzo.

Later in the afternoon we tried a third trail which wound its way downhill to the sea. This produced, predictably, more **Mantled Howlers** and some **White-fronted Capuchins** but nothing new, apart from several spectacular butterflies including the stunning **Spotted Cracker**.

It had been hot and sunny for almost the whole morning but, as the skies gradually clouded over and the humidity rose, we could sense that another storm was coming. And, as we drove back to the Tower, it duly arrived amid much thunder and lightning.

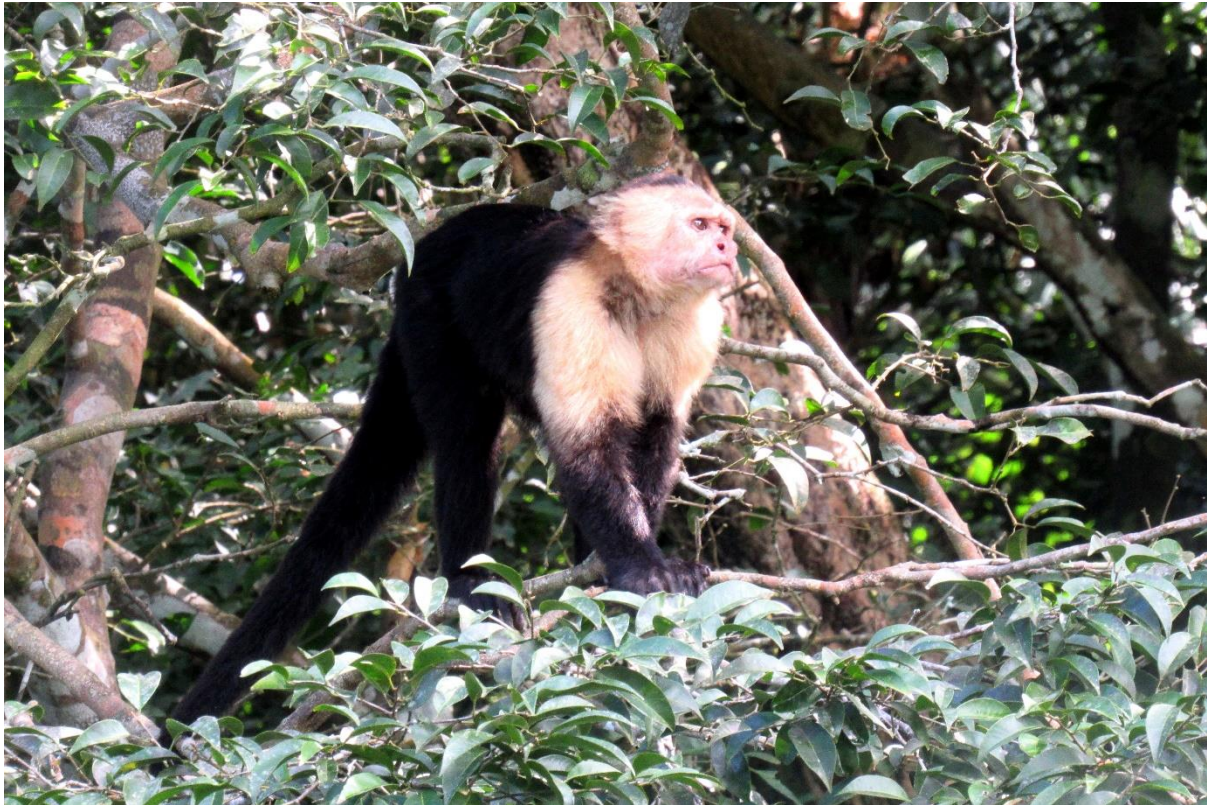
Friday December 8th

The morning dawned bright and clear, which was just as well because we had a boat trip booked, our intention being to explore the Chagres River confluence with the Canal and Lake Gatun. Our targets were Neotropical River Otter and West Indian Manatee, in addition of course to anything else we could find.

The Chagres was choked with huge rafts of water hyacinth but we found clear channels to work our way through and in one of the clear areas we soon found a very distant **Neotropical River Otter**, its head rising and submerging every twenty metres or so as it progressed along one of the channels. We found various other suspicious movements in the water but these turned out to be either crocodiles or caiman. We searched in vain for a Manatee which are quite often seen in the area apparently.

Having done with the Chagres we ventured out onto the Canal proper and sped along the Culebra Cut up to Lake Gatun. Here, the skipper headed the boat towards the bank and a large overhanging tree trunk. I guessed why straight away and, sure enough, glued to the underside of the trunk were

eight roosting **Proboscis Bats**. I'm not sure of the reason but they so often seem to like to roost above water. Soon after we found a lone **White-faced Capuchin** sitting in a tree at the water's edge.



White-faced Capuchin at Lake Gatun.

We failed to find any more otters though there were **Snail Kites** aplenty, an **Osprey** and one or two small **American Crocodiles**. Soon enough it was late morning and time to head back to the harbour at Gamboa.

The sunshine, predictably, didn't last long and over lunch there was yet another rainstorm. This settled into a steady light drizzle which persisted all afternoon. Alex, we discovered, had to go the Canopy Lodge and for the time being we were assigned another guide, Domi. In the afternoon we visited the Discovery Centre near Gamboa. Once again we passed by the Ammo Ponds and once again there were no Lesser Capybara present. At the Centre we climbed the observation tower and surveyed the surrounding canopy. There were two groups of **Mantled Howlers** but little else of note. The Hummingbird feeders at the main buildings were abuzz with hummers, which I didn't bother with, but in the drizzle and the gloom nothing else was stirring.

I had feared that the rain might affect the planned night drive that evening but mercifully it eased off just in time. In fact we had quite a good evening. First, not far down Semaphore Hill, we had a **Nine-banded Armadillo** cross the road behind us. About time! On the Gamboa Road I found a **Common Opossum** and a **Forest Rabbit**, the latter shooting off before anyone else could see it. Domi found a **Common Pottoo**. We turned round before Gamboa and, on the return, I found two more **Forest Rabbits** which, this time, everyone got to see. On Semaphore Hill I then found a medium sized rodent scurrying away from the roadside. I suspected it might have been a Tomes' Spiny Rat but the sighting was too brief to confirm that and no one else saw it anyway. Nevertheless, further up the hill we got a second chance. This time the rat cut across the road in front of us and obliged us by then remaining in view at the roadside. It had a long, rather stiff bicoloured tail and very white legs

and underparts. It was clearly a **Tomes' Spiny Rat**, a species which (according to other reports I've read) is common along Semaphore Hill. As we finally arrived back at the Tower the rain began to fall once again. We had been lucky in having a break in the weather just at the right time!

Saturday December 9th

Our plan for the morning was to visit the Metropolitan Park in Panama City itself. This didn't sound particularly promising from a mammal point of view but I tagged along anyway. With Domi leading us I suspected it might be a very birdy sort of morning but you never know – birders often stumble across good mammals!

We soon found both species of Sloth and a few Agoutis as well as various Trogons and Woodpeckers. The highlights were two **White-tailed Deer** crossing the track ahead of us and a **Variegated Squirrel** high in the canopy. Otherwise there was nothing particularly special around. I would have preferred to spend the time in Soberania where we might have found something more exciting.

In the late morning we drove out over the Amador Causeway to the Punta Culebra Nature Centre, our target being Crab-eating Raccoon. I was a little perplexed as to why we were seeking a nocturnal mammal in the middle of the day but reckoned that they were probably semi-habituated to humans given that the place was a popular tourist spot. We spent an hour not finding the Raccoons though one of the staff did say that a group had been out about an hour before our arrival. He also said that they were mainly seen very early and very late – at times before and after the Centre was open. I surmised that you would have to be pretty fortunate to see them.



Lesser Caybara at Miraflores. (Not in a cage – the mesh is the car park perimeter fence!)

The afternoon comprised a trip to the Miraflores Lock on the Panama Canal, mainly to see the museum and the locks in operation. This was actually a very interesting experience and it was fascinating to see huge container ships working their way slowly through the lock system. And there

was mammalian bonus too. About five hundred metres away, in the middle of an industrial area, was a small pond. And there, improbably, were three **Lesser Capybara**. Not exactly a “wilderness experience” but I was pleased to see them at last! Later, as we returned to the car park, two more were visible at very close range in scrub behind a fence.

Sunday December 10th

After a fairly early breakfast we returned to Pipeline Road, though this time we drove the first couple of kilometres to the Discovery Centre and parked at the end of the driveable road. Our walk thus took us along a more undisturbed section, the area indeed where the birders had seen their Jaguarundi a few days previously. I thought that this might give us a much better chance of something really tasty – like a Silky Anteater or a Grison. For this outing our former guide Alex was back in harness.



Geoffroy's Tamarin at Canopy Tower.

We soon had a minor success, a **Collared Peccary** crossing the road ahead of us. This was followed by an apparently very rare bird, a **Slaty-backed Forest Falcon**, a species much coveted by birders we were told. Of course the irony wasn't lost on us that the birders had found Jaguarundi while the mammalists had found the Forest Falcon!

We encountered a couple of **Red-tailed Squirrels**, one or two **Central American Agoutis** and, of course, **Mantled Howlers**. But the find of the morning, (which I missed!), was a **Neotropical River Otter** seen by only Peter and Alex as it swam off upstream while we were crossing a bridge over a small river.

By late morning it was getting very hot and humid and the walk back from the turnaround point was a bit of a slog. We did find a rather nice **American Crocodile** sunning itself on a sandbank next to another small stream. But otherwise things were quiet.

The walk did actually turn up one rather sinister encounter. Next to the Rio Frijolito, a small stream two kilometres from the Discovery Centre, we found a large Tomohawk trap baited with a live chicken, presumably for Ocelot. Unless it had been set by researchers, (something I found pretty unlikely), it could only be the work of poachers. I shut the trap to stop it catching anything in the immediate future and took photographs. The trap is currently under investigation as I write.

The afternoon was taken up with a visit to Gamboa Lodge to see the wildlife recovery centre. This facility takes in injured and orphaned animals in the hope, (we were told!), of re-introducing them to the wild. On show were an orphaned Ocelot, a Margay with a bone deficiency (caused by incorrect feeding when first rescued), a few Geoffroy's Tamarins (rescued from street sellers in Panama City) and two Hoffmann's Two-toed Sloths. It rained heavily all afternoon so we weren't missing much in terms of further time in the field.

That evening, back at the Tower, the Central **American Woolly Opossum** was back to enjoy his free banana and at least two **Giant False Vampire Bats** were hawking for prey, (possibly Little Mastiff Bats), above the observation deck.

Monday December 11th

I spent the morning relaxing, (and writing this trip report!), at the Tower. A **Three-toed Sloth** was showing well, as were two **White-nosed Coatis** and eight **Geoffroy's Tamasins**. Then, in the early afternoon, I transferred to Tocumen Airport in Panama City for the the long journey home via Frankfurt and London.

5 List of Mammals Recorded

I recorded 36 species of mammal as follows:

Species	Latin Name	Notes
Jaguarundi	<i>Puma yagouaroundi</i>	One near Canopy Lodge
Neotropical River Otter	<i>Lontra longicaudis</i>	Distant view on Chagres River
Cacomistle	<i>Bassariscus sumichrasti</i>	One nightly at Los Quetzales
White-nosed Coati	<i>Nasua narica</i>	Common throughout
Western Lowland Olingo	<i>Bassaricyon medius</i>	Two at Canopy Tower
Kinkajou	<i>Potos flavus</i>	Group of four near Canopy Tower
Brown-throated Three-toed Sloth	<i>Bradypus variegatus</i>	Common throughout
Hoffman's Two-toed Sloth	<i>Choloepus hoffmanni</i>	Common throughout
Red-tailed Squirrel	<i>Sciurus granatensis</i>	Resident at Canopy Lodge
Western Pygmy Squirrel	<i>Microsciurus mimulus</i>	One at Altos de Maria
Variegated Squirrel	<i>Sciurus variegatoides</i>	Two sightings (Lodge and Tower)
Rufous Tree Rat	<i>Diplomys labilis</i>	One in treehouse at Canopy Lodge
Armoured Rat	<i>Hopломys gymnurus</i>	Several at Los Qetzales
Tomes Spiny Rat	<i>Proechimys semispinosus</i>	Two on Semaphore Hill
Central American Agouti	<i>Dasyprocta punctata</i>	Common throughout
Lesser Capybara	<i>Hydrochoerus isthmius</i>	Several at Miraflores Lock
Common Opossum	<i>Didelphis marsupialis</i>	Canopy Lodge and Tower
Central American Woolly Opossum	<i>Caluromys derbianus</i>	Nightly at canopy Tower
Rothschild's Porcupine	<i>Coendou rothschildi</i>	One resident at Canopy Lodge
Orange NectarBat	<i>Lonchophylla robusta</i>	Nightly at feeders at Canopy Lodge
Lesser White-lined Bat	<i>Saccoteryx leptura</i>	Roosting under bridge Semaphore Hill
Greater White-lined Bat	<i>Saccopteryx bilineata</i>	Roosting Fort San Lorenzo

Little Mastiff Bat	<i>Molossus molossus</i>	Nightly at Canopy Tower
Common Big-eared Bat	<i>Micronycteris microtis</i>	Roosting Fort San Lorenzo
Common Tent-making Bat	<i>Uroderma bilobatum</i>	Roosting in palm Summit Park
Proboscis Bat	<i>Rhynchonycteris naso</i>	Group roosting on Lake Gatun
Great False Vampire Bat	<i>Vampyrum spectrum</i>	Several around Tower at dusk
Mantled Howler	<i>Alouatta palliata</i>	Common around Canopy Tower
White-fronted Capuchin	<i>Cebus capucinus</i>	Common around Canopy Tower
Geoffroy's Tamarin	<i>Saguinus geoffroyi</i>	Resident at Canopy Tower
Panamanian Night Monkey	<i>Aotus zonalis</i>	Resident group on Semaphore Hill
Northern Tamandua	<i>Tamandua mexicana</i>	Two sightings near Canopy Tower
Nine-banded Armadillo	<i>Dasypus novemcinctus</i>	One sighting on Semaphore Hill
Forest Rabbit	<i>Sylvilagus gabbi</i>	Several on Gamboa Road
White-tailed Deer	<i>Odocoileus virginianus</i>	One in Metropolitan Park
Collared Peccary	<i>Pecari tajacu</i>	One on Pipeline Road
Total Species Recorded	36	

6 Birds

I didn't keep a checklist of birds but some interesting and/or notable species included: White Hawk, Barred Hawk, Slaty-backed Forest Falcon, Semiplumbeous Hawk, Keel-billed Toucan, Slaty-tailed, Blackthroated and Orange-bellied Trogons, Spangle-cheeked Tanager, Spectacled Owl and Honey-capped Euphonia.

7 Amphibians and Reptiles

These included American Crocodile, Spectacled Caiman, Common Basilisk Lizard, Green Iguana and Ameoba Lizard. Surprisingly, I failed to record a single species of snake.

8 Butterflies and Moths

Highlights included the Black Witch Moth and, for butterflies, Spotted Cracker, Red-washed Satyr, Blue Morpho and various Clearwings. The majority of butterflies observed remained unidentified.