

## **La Selva Biological Station – Mammal Watching**

Submitted by [Matt Miller](#)

In April 2018, I had a work meeting at La Selva Biological Station in Costa Rica – certainly one of the better meeting locations I've ever experienced. It was work, not a vacation, so for much of the day I was unable to spend in the forest. Due to a variety of factors, I also didn't have much extra time to explore, although I did take one day to explore two nearby reserves.

Despite all this, I was very happy with my mammal sightings, with 18 species spotted of which 17 were lifers. I had the best times of the day (early morning and night) to search.

I loved La Selva, which has served as a biological research station for 60+ years. It has an excellent network of trails and the biodiversity is just astonishing. In addition to the mammals, I saw many great birds, reptiles, amphibians, insects, etc.

I stayed in one of the bunks in the cabanas near the dining area.

### **La Selva Biological Station**

Our meeting included three guided outings: an early morning birding walk, a general natural history walk and a night walk. It was also easy to explore on your own. The areas around the buildings on both sides of the river, and the area around the suspension bridge that connects the two sides, offer some of the best wildlife viewing due to unobstructed views.

On our first morning, the birding trip yielded **mantled howler monkey**, **variegated squirrel** and **Central American agouti** (as well as many birds). I also saw all of these species on my own. The howler monkeys in particular were abundant.

**Collared peccaries** were ubiquitous and constantly grazing around the meeting rooms and lodges on the opposite side of the bridge from the dining area.

A **brown-throated three-toed sloth** female and baby were in a tree near the meeting rooms for much of the week.

I spent a fair amount of time walking the trails in the primary forest. The mammal watching was extremely tough due to the dense cover, and during the day I didn't see much aside from collared peccaries, a couple of agoutis and howler monkeys. It was still well worth the time, as I had some great sightings, including spectacled owl, greater curassow, a manakin lek, a variety of colorful frogs, basilisk lizards and much more.

### **Night Walks**

I took one organized night walk and explored on my own on the other evenings. On the organized walk, we quickly saw a **woolly opossum** near the lodging. When we stopped to look at

a bioluminescent beetle, I shined my light up the trail and spotted a **paca**, which posed nicely for everyone (and is apparently a fairly unusual sighting here).

On the way back, we had a brief view of a **four-eyed opossum** in vegetation along the suspension bridge. I returned after the organized walk was finished, and found the four-eyed opossum again, and had a much longer and more satisfactory sighting.

After this, I ran into an enthusiastic college student who had just found a large fer-de-lance. He offered to show it to me, so we headed off down the trail parallel to the river on the dining room side. Soon after we started out, a small mammal jumped into the trail a short distance ahead of us. It stopped and allowed us to approach, and revealed itself to be a **Mexican mouse opossum**. Even better, it was carrying two furred but tiny babies. We then continued on and found the unnervingly large fer-de-lance. This was the second fer-de-lance during my stay at La Selva. Watch your step – especially at night!

I saw a **tapiti** on a couple of evenings near my cabana, on the trail from the dining room.

On another evening night walk, I had great views of a **striped hog-nosed skunk**. It was foraging in ant mounds on the lawns near the meeting rooms and staff housing.

On my final evening, I had great views of a **kinkajou** crossing the suspension bridge.

### **Pierella Gardens**

I had a free day, but no vehicle, so I arranged a trip to the nearby Pierella Gardens. William and Crystal, the owners, picked me up and showed me around. They are incredibly friendly and enthusiastic, and justifiably proud of their little farm's reforestation project.

William found me my main target, **Honduran white bats**. He grows plants specifically to attract them, and this is a reliable sight for this species. We also saw brown-throated three-toed sloth and **Hoffman's two-toed sloth**. I also spotted bats on the house that William identified as long-nosed bats; a bat biologist later told me that that wall was always occupied by nectar-eating bats, but I have no idea what species.

Birding was excellent with American pygmy kingfisher, squirrel cuckoo, lekking white-collared manakins, cinnamon woodpecker and many others. There were a variety of colorful frogs around, and William showed me his butterfly farming facilities. We ended the morning with a huge and tasty lunch on the farm. It is really an excellent place that I can't recommend highly enough.

### **Tirimbina Reserve**

For the afternoon and evening, I went to Tirimbina Reserve. While they don't usually offer bat mist netting as a day trip option, they agreed to take me and a colleague out to look for bats. We

went out with environmental educator Mariela and field biologist Emmanuel Rojas. Both were very friendly and eager to help.

We began by taking a walk and found Honduran white bats and a **shaggy bat** resting on a leaf. We also saw howler monkeys and a three-toed sloth.

At night, Emmanuel set out bat nets. He said it was a slow night but we still picked up three species: **chestnut short-tailed bat**, **pygmy fruit-eating bat** and **great fruit-eating bat**.

We also had great views of two kinkajous crossing Tirimbina's suspension bridge.

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