

Belize Trip Report: May 2018

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Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary

Night walk – 1 May

From our base at Placencia, we arranged a guided night walk with Doyle Gardiner's DTours. I don't know if there is anyone else that does night walks in Cockscomb.

Collected at 6 pm, we arrived at Jaguar Reserve Nature Centre about an hour later. After a nice dinner we walked a circular trail for roughly two hours.

Our first mammal was a glimpse of a **Woolly Opossum** (according to our guide – I didn't manage to see it).

Later a **Kinkajou** in the trees above.

Near the end of the trail, we found fresh dung on a wooden bridge over a stream, which our guide told us was from one of the big cats (jaguar or puma, presumably).



Chunk-headed snake

Additional interesting creatures:

A Chunk-headed snake (My ID, guide thought it was something else).

Two Redback coffee snakes.

A group of about three or four burrows of Red rump tarantulas guarding egg sacs.

Several scorpions and whip scorpions.

I was hoping to see more wildlife but suspect our group was not as quiet as it should have been.

Macaw Bank Jungle Lodge

2 to 5 May



Common or Virginia Opossum

There are many riverside lodges in this area outside San Ignacio town in the Cayo district. Macaw Bank is nice in that it is smaller than the others (only 6 cabins) and the managers Leticia and her bird guide and chef husband Raul are great hosts. Best of all, you are allowed to freely wander the approximately five miles of trails, on your own, day or night.

During the day, several times I found squirrels. Twice a pair, once a group of about eight, every time three to eight metres above ground. I'm guessing these were **Yucatan squirrels** (I understand that Deppe's squirrel tends to be solitary and more terrestrially inclined).

Nocturnal wanderings with a headlight, yielded a **Kinkajou** on the first night, and a **Nine-banded armadillo** on the second. The third night I encountered another three armadillos, as well as twice a **Common** or **Virginia Opossum**, I'm not sure which. The first one appeared to be confused by my headlight and walked straight towards me while emitting alarm calls. Startled, I stepped back when it was about a metre away, but got a reasonable photograph before it turned. Very nice sighting. Odd creature.

There was good bat activity along the forest paths at night, and some were feeding over the river, none I could identify.

A point of interest is that according to Leticia there was a Tapir visiting the vegetable patch not too long ago at night, causing her dogs to bark.

Xunantunich Ruins & a new tourist cave

4 May

While at Macaw Bank my wife and I did a day trip to the Xunantunich Mayan ruins. On a tree, right next to the hand cranked ferry used to cross the river, there was a colony of about thirty **Proboscis bats**.

We were hoping to see Black Howler monkeys but they were nowhere to be seen on that day. However in one of the chambers of the largest structure of the ruins we found a colony of about twenty **sheath-tailed bats** (one of the *Saccopteryx* species I'm guessing – a dorsal white line is vaguely visible in the photo).

Our guide was impressed with how pleased we were to see bats (we are total bat fiends). He mentioned that they were busy developing a new tourist cave site nearby, where there was a colony of a different kind of bat. What really intrigued us is that he claimed that these bats fed on birds, as indicated by the feathers on the floor of the cave. Thus we asked if it was possible for him to take us there, excited by the possibility of seeing the impressive False Vampire bat.

He negotiated a fee for his service and arranged permission for us to visit.



Sheath-tailed bats in Xunantunich ruins



Sheath-tailed bat in cave

The cave site was about twenty minutes drive from Xunantunich, along a newly cleared road through the surrounding forest. Around the parking area, builders were digging holes and various other things, installing the infrastructure for this new tourist site.

Although enthused about seeing some scarce and interesting bats, I wondered about their future with noisy tourists invading their home regularly...

There were three caves if I can recall, all near to each other and about twenty minutes walk from the parking area. We were unable to properly explore since we had no light source but our cell phones, and only found bats in the first cave. The easily seen ones were **sheath-tailed bats** once again. These were small and had no dorsal stripe, but beyond that I can only guess their identity (*Balantiopteryx*?).

High above in the ceiling of the cave we could vaguely see a cluster of some **phyllostomids**, but which were too small to be False Vampires. Nearby we found another cluster of larger bats roosting high above, bird feathers strewn below. With some rock climbing and zoomed photographs, we managed a few reasonable photos of three **False Vampire** bats.



False Vampire bats

Lamanai Outpost Lodge

9 & 10 May

Lamanai has a nice remote and wild feel to it: The usual route getting there is by an hour long boat ride along a river where some nice waterbirds can be spotted. And the riverside vegetation gives the impression of wilderness, although beyond that it may not be unspoilt.

The lodge itself is in an area of secondary forest next to a lagoon into which the river flows. **Black Howler monkeys** immediately made their presence felt when we arrived and it was easy to get good views of them feeding on the lodge grounds.

Our guide Eduardo was knowledgeable and we made extensive use of him.

The first night walk yielded a Barn owl, a Red rump tarantula, then a **Mexican porcupine**, an unidentified snake sleeping in a tree, a sleeping flycatcher of some sort, another snake (a Faded Black-striped Snake, my guess), a Mexican tree frog, and various other small creatures of interest. Virtually all the sightings were within a hundred metres from the lodge.

Later that night, I walked on my own on the road to the airstrip and saw a **Kinkajou**.

The following morning, departing on an early walk, two or three **Agoutis** crossed the path next to the lodge.

Later we took a boat to the Lamanai ruins which are nearby, and hiked the trails for about two hours. Here the forest seems to have had a bit longer to recover and there was some nice birdlife.

At one of the temples ruins a **Gray fox** sat staring at us and then trotted away as we came closer. Not far away, inspection of a hollow tree found a colony of **sheath-tailed bats** and some other **phyllostomid**, neither of which I could identify.

Within the forest we came across a **White nosed coati** and another two hollow trees. One of these also held bats which looked very much like the unidentified phyllostomids we saw in the first tree. I managed to get a decent photo this time.



Unidentified bat in hollow tree

When we returned to the ruins we spent some time watching a group of **Black howler monkeys**. And later at the lodge when we disembarked from the boat we realised there was a colony of **Proboscis bats** roosting underneath the pier.



Kinkajou

In the afternoon we returned to the forest around the ruins and had an excellent sighting of two male **Kinkajous** in the trees above. They seemed to not notice us, the one appeared to chase the other, but not with much urgency. At the old sugar mill we saw another **White nosed coati** and I found a colony of bats inside a hole in the ground where the roots of a large tree had been hollowed out, perhaps by termites. I couldn't get a clear view of the bats though.

Back at the lodge, while walking in gardens towards the dining area we surprised a **Common/Virginia Opossum** about two meters away, who ran off and disappeared in a clump of bushes.

That night we went spotlighting from the boat on the lagoon and down one of the small rivers feeding it. **Proboscis bats** were foraging over the water, sometimes very close to the boat. And more than once we drifted past one hanging on a branch or reed, literally about a metre away.

We found a decent sized Morelet's crocodile (about two metres long) easily viewed next to the boat, submerged in a few feet of clear water.

Our spotter Abdul has either done many many spotlighting trips or has super eyes. He pointed out numerous sleeping birds, as well as wide awake Northern potoo. A highlight was when our guide Rueben spotted a **Fishing bat** flying ahead of us. It was reddish brown and distinctly larger than the all the Proboscis bats flying around. Unfortunately the sighting was only a matter of seconds before it disappeared.

Afterwards I walked on my own to the airstrip again and saw another **Kinkajou**.