

# Turtle Diaries

## With a Skunk and other mammals. In Costa Rica.

For reasons unknown, 600,000 (+/-) endangered Olive Ridley sea turtles converge to nest on just two beaches, on only a few days each month, between September and November. Combine this Arribada ('arrival') with hatchlings emerging from previous nests and attempting to depart and the result is bedlam!

Beach 1.

Nancite.. <https://www.tourismincostarica.org/p/laya-nancite-beach> (Mammalwatching tip. Nancite is noted for its turtle predating jaguars, <https://www.seeturtles.org/turtle-blog/nancite-jaguars>).

Beach 2. Ostional, has a much larger 'bale' (Pub quiz tip; 'bale' is a collective noun for turtles). Ostional is just two and a half hours drive from Liberia Intl airport. (Travel tip: In rainy/Arribada season rent a big 4x4. Same price as a sedan if booked well in advance and useful to ford just a few temporarily flooded rivers).

We arrived on time. The Arribada hadn't.

The [Asociacion de Guias Locales de Ostional](#) (AGLO) (Guide tip; you must hire a guide) located by one of Ostional village's 'sodas' (a jolly pub/local grub combo) said, what a look at



the completely deserted beach fifty meters away, confirmed.

'They are not here...yet.' Our guide, a police officer and sea turtle enthusiast, added a bit defensively, " These are wild animals."

We had planned a quick 'hit and run' three night visit but decided to skip a return to NYC and instead opted for office work 'virtually'. For nearly two years of Covid it had been actually more productive than commuting. Why not do it from the elevated verandah of the <https://puntaindia.com/> air b&b ? We settled in to out-wait the tardy Arribada. It took two delightful weeks!

We were, from the first, the mammalwatched. Howler monkeys (the largest and most vocal primate in the New World) are



very numerous along the [UNESCO dry forest Guanacaste coast](#). They kept an eye on us but without any interest (probably ticked 'another inoffensive ecotourist - boring!' on their life list). A dignified coatimundi had us as a routine pit stop on its daily patrols hoovering up any fallen papaya skins we had set up on the balcony for super abundant butterflies and hummingbirds by day and equally entrancing bats by night.

A female raccoon teaching her four offspring life skills, mammalwatched us with especially keen interest. Meticulous observation of our routine and behaviour facilitated their education and application re the finer arts of housebreaking and fridge raiding. The 'coon gang' was good! But while I admired its ingenuity, being woken by howler alarm clocks to be confronted by a pre-chewed breakfast and a kitchen in chaos three days in a row gets tiresome! Juan, the genial caretaker replaced the door bolts (the old ones could be loosened by jiggling) and secured the catches, forced open by brute effort, on the wooden shutters. The raccoons attempted (unsuccessfully) to gnaw through the thick planking but failed. I sensed furtive observation but further assaults stopped.



Then 'our' southern spotted skunk took this mammalwatching interactive thing one stage further. We first met it in the morning when Juan alerted us to it trapped and scrabbling to escape from a dustbin put out 100 meters up the road. After its release (Juan clearly knew how to do it sensitively) it provided evidence of arboreal tendencies by scurrying up and out of sight into the forest canopy. It (if it was the same southern spotted skunk ) must have slipped in by day then taken refuge under our fridge for a siesta. We noticed that something had taken up residence when a pointed rather delicate nose poked out late as we were congratulating ourselves on the prospect a skunk-free nights sleep. It then retreated.



Two glittering eyes clearly mammalwatching us reflected light. It then made preliminary excursions then bolder ventures. As it couldn't open the fridge or 'coon gang' style up-end the



bed in the guestroom upstairs we left quietly. It spent the following day there, I assume, and rejoined us at about 11 pm from its fridge. Efforts to lure it outside with food were unsuccessful. But they revitalized raccoon interest. The last thing I wanted was a demonstration of raccoons/skunk interaction in our kitchen with lingering aromas. It spent a second night as our guest. Very busy. Enchanting. But it showed every inclination of remaining a permanent resident. If we lived there permanently why not? But we didn't. And I didn't want to raise unrealistic skunkish expectations of hospitality. With caution we manhandled the fridge to expel our guest before breakfast and were both glad and sad to see it leave at a dainty pace - pause, change direction, give another suspicious stare in the

direction of my wife's parasol and a very anthropomorphically interpreted 'reproachful look' at me, brief tail lift (Eek, it's going to ...) then flit off in an instant. I miss it! We miss it! But I have it on good authority that Ostional is populated by watchable skunks.

Rolf, a Swiss zoologist who operates the <https://www.hotellunaazul.com/>) a few minutes walk down the road described them as often seen and 'not news'. I must give Rolf's hotel a plug for its dinners! Superb food! Rolf has seen lots of mammals but stressed to me that while he sees them daily he can't guarantee you will see them. So don't come demanding to see large groups of coatimundis, the armadillos digging up his shrubberies, agoutis, howler monkeys, 'jaguarundi are day

active but I have only seen them on the road'.  
Etc.

In concluding my Turtle Diaries I must state that it would be irresponsible for me to guarantee any sightings. We waited happily for two weeks for the Arribada to arrive and it was utterly knock your socks off when it did! But if you go and it doesn't turn up it really isn't down to me. These things are wild! Good luck and good hunting, mammalwatchers!

