

Second Locality for Cacomistle in La Fortuna, Panama

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In October 2024, I spent a few days in the Chiriqui highlands, before attending a workshop in Boquete. I combined both birding and mammal-watching, which meant I had to spread my efforts and energy. During this trip I came across a second reliable site to see Cacomistles in the La Fortuna Area. Below I provide a short account of my trip, including further details on the Cacomistles.



Figure 1. Evening Views from lost and Found hostel in La Fortuna (top); female Cacomistle visiting the hummingbird feeders at night (bottom).

9-11 October, Cerro Punta Area:

Upon arrival at the airport at David I picked up my rental car, which allowed me easy access to all sites visited. My main aim was to see the **Cacomistles** at the Las Quetzales Ecolodge. I decided to stay in the nearby village of Cerro Punta, but was kindly granted permission by the owner's niece to take the 30 minute walk through the forest to the cabins, to check out the Cacomistles at night. To my disappointment they never showed up. This might have partly been the result of the limited time invested; I only spent one night around Cabanas 8 and 9. The fact that most hummingbird feeders were empty – October is low season and there was no-one at the lodge – probably did not help either.

During the day I saw many **Red-tailed squirrels** in the area, as well as a **Variegated squirrel** much further down the mountain.

11-12 October, La fortuna

In the afternoon of 11 October I drove to the La Fortuna area further to the east. I decided to make the Lost and Found Hostel¹ my base for the next few days. This hostel, oriented at the backpackers community, is situated at 1250 metres altitude along the road that crosses the continental divide from David to Chanquinola. It can be reached from the main road through a 10-15 minute hike on a steep trail that leads to a mountain top. The hostel is situated right in the middle of the forest and has stunning views on the surrounding mountains. At 15-20 USD per night for a bunk bed, and 50 USD for a two-person cabin this place is an absolute bargain, as long as you enjoy the backpacker vibe!

To my surprise the hostel manager told me that for several years **Cacomistles** have been turning up almost every evening to feast on the hummingbird feeders at the observation deck. Apparently they only stay away on rare occasions during very windy and rainy nights. Indeed, despite bad weather a pair of Cacomistles gave a spectacular show at both nights, less than two metres away. In the 3 hours after sunset they returned to the observation deck on multiple occasions, while spending the rest of the time running around in the canopy.

I set several live traps and caught two **Talamancan Deer mice** at the premises. I brought relatively small Heslinga live traps, which in hindsight were a bit too small for the local rodent population. Most of my traps got looted overnight, and I might have been more successful with my trapping had I brought some larger ones instead.

The area seems to hold a large mammal diversity. The lodge manager reported regular sightings of Armadillo, species of large Opossum and occasional sightings of unidentified Mouse opossums. Tracks of Ocelot and Puma are regularly encountered. However the terrain is rugged and a bit hard to overlook and during nightly walks with spotlight and Thermal imager I saw none of these species. **Panamanian white-faced capuchins** are common during the day.

On the 12th I drove to the Camino de la Divisoria. From Lost and Found it takes about 30 minute in the direction of Caribbean coast to reach this road. It branches off the main road on the left, a few kilometres after crossing the reservoir dam and winds its way down the mountains for several kilometres to a maintenance station (see map 2). The road is well accessible by car, but gets steep

¹ <https://www.thelostandfoundhostel.com/>

towards the end. See figure 3 for direction to the lost and Found Hostel and Camino de la Divisoria.



Figure 2. Talamancan Dee mice at Lost and found Hostel, La fortuna.

While birding along this road I had extended views of **Central American (Alfaro's) pygmy squirrel**. I did not have time left to spotlight along this road at night, but it might well be very productive; the road offers good oversight, the vegetation is not too dense and there are very few people around. Probably this is one of very few roads in the wider area that are accessible for spotlighting by car. In the afternoon I saw a **Northern Tamandua** crawled up in a tree at the Bridge near Willy Mazu, just a few kilometres further down the road.

13-21 October Boquete area:

During the remainder of my time I had limited time for mammal watching. The traps I put out at Valle Escondido Wellness Resort were non-productive. However, I did find a **Northern Black-Eared Opossum** through my thermal and saw a bunch of **Central American agoutis** during the day. I heard **Central American Black Howlers** at the Los Quetzales trail. During a field trip on 16 October I saw five **Common Bottlenose dolphins** near the Isla de Muertos in the mangroves near David.

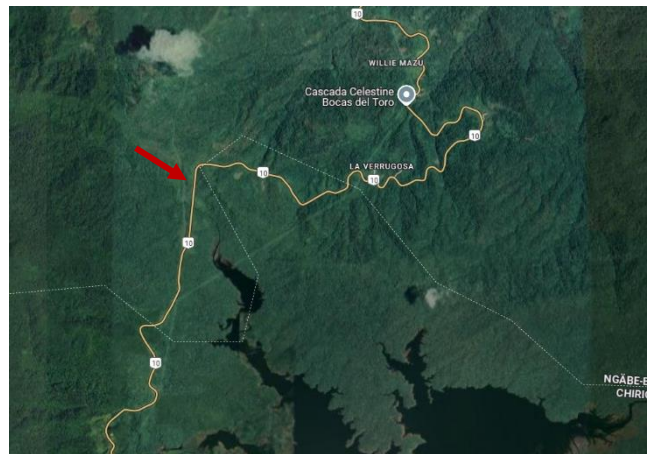
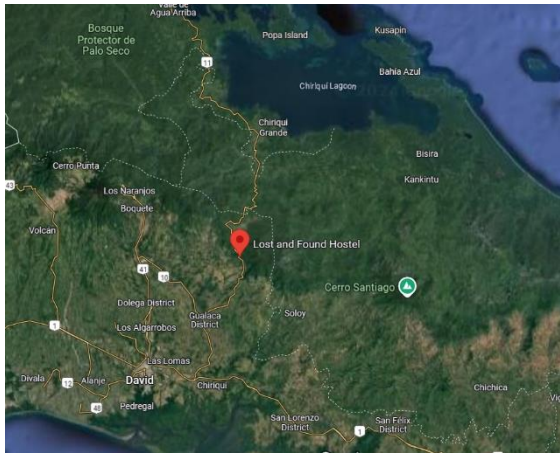


Figure 3. Location of Lost and found Jungle Hostel (left) Entry to Camino la Divisoria from the main road (right, red arrow).