

EXPEDITION HUAPO NEGRO - PERU 7 -14 APRIL 2025

In my quest to see most if not all the Neotropical primates sometimes I do internet searches on ways to do this. So when I got to the Saki monkey list and I searched “Isabel’s Saki Monkey” Ikam Expeditions (info@ikamexpeditions.com) immediately popped up. The monkey is endemic to Peru and Ikam offered a “Primate -watching Tour in Northern Peru” on there website which included 2 days in the Areas Inundables del Baja Huallaga Conservation Concession one of the places the saki lives. I contacted the company and the owner, Julio C. Tello, was quick to respond. We modified the trip slightly from what was on the internet, then planned for an April departure. The majority of the mammals on this trip were not lifers for me, but I was very keen to see the saki so was excited for the trip. I was joined my good friend Julie Krajewski who works for the wildlife department of the Denver Zoological Society.

Day 1 - We both flew into Lima and overnigheted at the Wyndham Costa Del Sol hotel which literally takes 1 minute to walk to from the airport.

Day 2 - I wanted to get into the conservation concession as quickly as possible to optimize my monkey watching time. So I booked a LATAM flight that left Lima at 5:25 am and landed in Tarapoto (where we would meet Julio to start the trip) at 6:50 am. The flight should have taken an hour..... but after about 45 minutes the captain came over the speaker and mumbled something about fuel, then we started to circle and

circle. It turned out that the entire airport was covered in a fog cloud and we could not land. So after an hour of circling I noticed that we were speeding up and departing. We were then told that we could not land and we were headed back to Lima. The flight attendants told us there were four other flights to Tarapoto that day and LATAM would have to rebook us despite the fact that our flight was completely full. So after landing in Lima we were told we were going to taxi to a spot in the airport, re-fuel and take off again and fly back to Tarapoto. So after sitting on the ground for 45 minutes we took off again and luckily was able to land. Julio was waiting for us as we departed the airport. He had warned me prior to the trip that his English was not fluent, but we had no problems communicating. None of the local guides on the trip spoke English either but this was also not a problem. Julio also always had a smile on his face, was very accommodating to changes, was a great spotter and overall a fun person to be around. One of those guides that you feel like you are traveling with a friend. Julio had worked with the Proyecto Mono Tocon for years, an NGO that works with the San Martin Titi Monkey. So primates were half of his passion. But he also loved birds, so set up Ikam for bird and primate watching trips. Julio told us we had about a 2.5-3 hour drive to get to the town of Pelejo close to the concession. We were joined by our driver Jorge.

The drive did go through some very windy roads, so if you are prone to motion sickness I would recommend taking medications prior to getting into the car. We drove into Pelejo town. It is one of the local towns that helped patrol and protect the concession. They were in the infancy of tourism (as in we were the first tourists this year and the first to come

for the saki) but were very keen to bring more tourists to the area. I had originally thought that we would be camping in the town, but a small hotel above a shop called Hotel Paquisha had been created with private en suite rooms with cold water. Despite being above a road in the town it was mainly quiet at night and the room was comfortable. We ended up going to a person's house where two women cooked all of our meals. We met our main guide Rodolfo Calamba and our second guide Juan Jose Salas who would take us into the concession proper. At this time of year the entire forest is flooded so everything was done by boats. The concession is across and east of the River Huallaga, so we boarded a motor boat and were taken to the edge of one of the forests.





Rodolfo knew the location of ten Saki families. The locals called the sakis “Huapo Negro”. So I asked Julio to tell Rodolfo that we could look at anything he wanted as long as it was a Huapo Negro. He decided to bring us to an area of forest that three families lived, one of which he had seen two

days before our visit. After “parking” the motor boat, we were all loaded into a small wooden canoe, complete with a bucket to scoop out water that leaked in. We then rowed across a flooded area to the forest edge. Now I had made the comment about the concession being in the infancy of tourism. The canoe we were placed in was definitely part of that. We basically all were cramped on the floor of the canoe with small uncomfortable wooden planks to sit it. Seeing the looks on our faces while sitting, Rodolfo planned for us to be in two canoes the next day so we could spread out. The first primates we came across was a large troop of Common (Ecuadorian) squirrel monkeys that were feeding in some trees along the entrance to a small waterway.

The second primates we came across were a small troop of Illiger’s Saddleback Tamarins that were in trees right after the entrance of the waterway we took. In typical tamarin fashion they alarm called at us and hung around for brief but decent views. We then saw in rapid succession Brown (Large-headed) Capuchins, multiple troops of Colombian Howler Monkeys, and a single Marañon White-Fronted Capuchin. About an hour after being in the forest we came to the area that Rodolfo often sees one of the Saki families. But despite searching all over this region we could not find them. At this time it was close to dusk and Rodolfo recommended we get out of the boat and wait on a large tree that had fallen into the water for nightfall so we could spotlight for Nancy Ma’s Night monkey. This gave us a short break to stretch our legs after the cramped canoe.

As soon as darkness was eminent, we loaded back into the canoe and started spot lighting. We looked in several areas that he knew the monkeys frequented (they did not currently

know of a roost spot) but we could not find them. After about 1.5 hours I noticed that it did not look like we were really going in any certain direction. We then came to a stop and I whispered to Julie “I am pretty sure we are lost”. Julie had also been thinking this. Luckily Julio brought a GPS with him and slowly we were able to find our way out of the forest. Along the way we saw a female Brown-throated three-toed sloth with a baby sleeping in a tree.

Day 2 - after a quick breakfast, we loaded back into the motorboat now with a third local Deyber Valles who would row Julie and I in one canoe with Juan, while Julio was with Rodolfo. We went back to the same forest fragment as the night before and again squirrel monkeys were on the trees along the entrance into the forest. After about 30 minutes I heard tamarins calling but another noise I was not familiar with. I turned back to Julie and Deyber was excitably pointing in the direction of the sound. Julie then told me, Cheryl, look the sakis. As I was in the front of the boat and was blocked I could only see trees, so I frantically looked at Deyber and made backward rowing motions with my arms. I am sure I was a sight to see as he in response frantically got me into a better position. The sakis, a pair with an older juvenile, was at first being coy and hiding behind trees. They then would intermittently go into the open, run off, then run back to vocalize at us.

The saddle back tamarins were also vocalizing and running around them. This went on for about 20 minutes. The reactions they had to us and the booming noise of the





vocalizations they were making (if only I could include my video here for the sound) made this my favorite experience on the trip. Photography wise the family was very back lit so excuse my record shots of the occasion.

After the relief (well for me) of seeing the sakis, we decided to more leisurely try for the other two families in the area, but also just to see what we could find. We ended up seeing more Brown Capuchins and troop after troop after troop of Howler Monkeys. We stopped for lunch at a small raised cabin at the edge of an oxbow lake for lunch. On the way to the cabin we saw a male Brown-throated three-toed sloth

that was walking up a palm tree from the water's edge after



obviously defecating.

One of the rooms in the cabin had three Greater Sac winged bats roosting on a wall. We then went into the lake to a small bird rookery (herons and egrets) then went back into the flooded forest where we again saw more Howler monkeys. The plan was then to go Pelejo and have dinner, then go into another boat in another area to spot light. After dinner I was

tired and sore from sitting in a canoe all day. After about 45 minutes in the boat I decided I would just lay down on a pillow and look up at the canopy. Along the way we saw at least five sloths along the river's edge. We finally came to a small turn out and Juan told us that it was a good area for Nancy Ma's Night Monkey. After about ten minutes my "resting" position was useful as I saw a night monkey who was looking over a branch right above me watching our boat. Once the light was on it, it slowly walked off. I was able to get Julio on the monkey as he was behind me, but Julie was unable to see it. We tried for another hour or so, even at one point hearing one vocalizing in a tree. I did see a large reddish brown rat in a tree, but it was too quick for photos. But exhaustion got the better of us and we went back to sleep for the night.

Day 3 -

Rodolfo had business this morning dealing with the concession so he did not join us. We ended up going to a different area that we could use one of the motor boats in. This was also an area that Julio had seen the saki's in before. Once again squirrel monkeys were waiting for us at the edge. The first half of the area was pretty open secondary forest. It was also an excellent area for White - browed titi monkey. Despite hearing the vocalization of multiple families, I only had brief running views of one individual. We then went into the forest for a few hours, then at mid day started to head back. We heard a few troops of Illiger's Saddleback Tamarins and were finally rewarded with an obliging family that stopped to look at us.



Going through the section of forest the motor on the boat kept stopping until it finally stopped and gave out all together. Luckily Julio had phone signal and he was able to call Rodolfo to come and rescue us.

After lunch we then drove five hours to the city of Moyobamba. We stayed at the lovely Puerto Mirador Hotel, a place I defiantly would go back to just for some relax time (wait what is that...)

Day 4 -

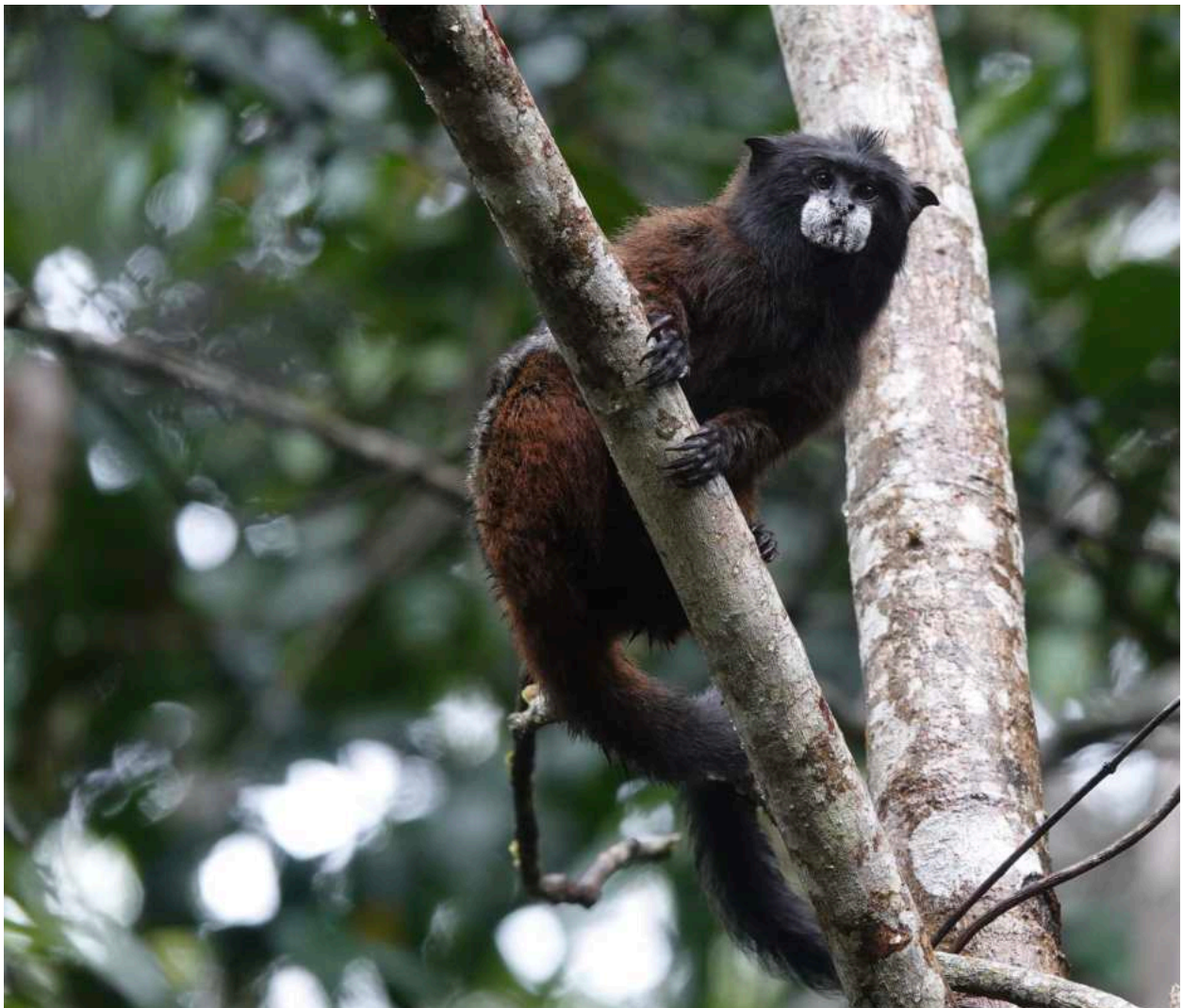
Just prior to Covid, Julio had purchased a plot of forest on the outskirts of Moyobamba mainly for the birding possibilities. He plans in the future to build a small lodge there.

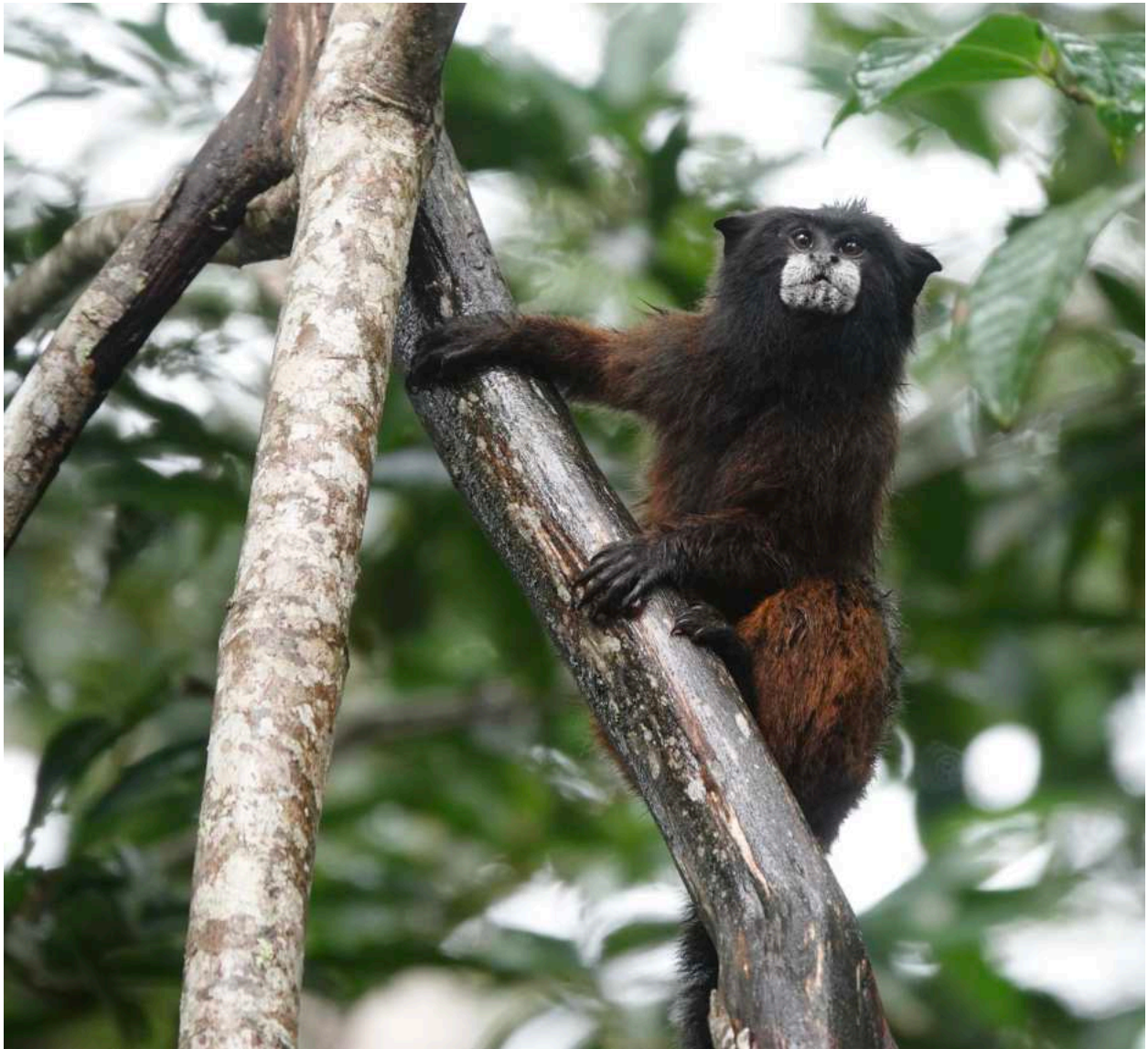




But it also had the bonus of having San Martin Titi Monkeys and saddleback tamarins in it. Julio had these listed as Andean Saddleback tamarins on the website (the only other trip lifer for me) so I was excited to see them. But prior to the trip he sent me an article “Mitochondrial phylogeny of tamarins (*Saguinus Hoffmannsegg* 1807) with taxonomic and biographic implications for the *S. nigricollis* species group” by Christian Matauschek et. The paper is from 2011 but discussed that based on their research the tamarins in San

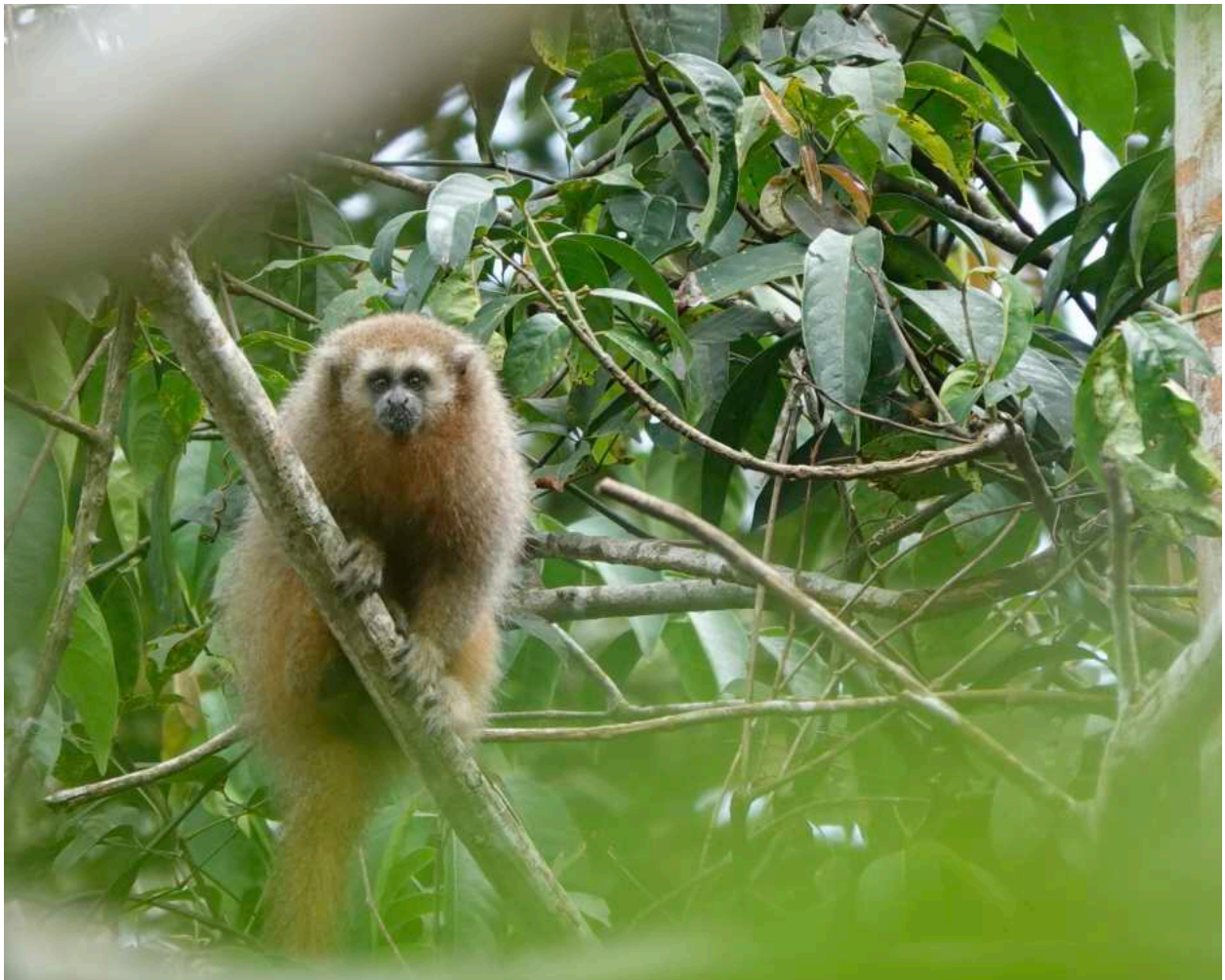
Martin, but especially around Moyobamba, may be in fact Illiger's. After coming home I looked at other people's trip reports that had been in and around Moyobamba and they have them listed as Andean. So I had decided long before that as a primate lister, the list I would follow was the one from the IUCN (that Jon Hall has on the website) and go by the IUCN current thoughts. Jon and I had discussed saddleback tamarins in the past (yes, yes I agree that they are oversplit) and Anthony Rylands (THE Anthony Rylands) had helped me with distributions before. I asked Jon to contact him and he came back with west of the Rio Huallaga is the Andean and east is Illiger's. So for now they are Andean on my life list.





That morning it was pouring down rain. We waited in the car at the entrance of a trail until it let up, then walked to the entrance of the center in the light rain. The tamarins were waiting for us and it did not take long for them to come down to bird feeding tablets. Julio had also made a small bridge for the tamarins to be able to cross into the opposite side of the forest. We watched the tamarins feed at two separate stations then cross over the bridge. Now it was titi time. I had seen the species before at quite a distance and through a

scope. I wanted to see them better. Julio told us they were shy but also would come down to the bird tables. By the time it was mid day we had not even heard the titis so we decided to walk along some trails away from the center. We were supposed to leave after a few hours, but Julio agreed we should stay until they show. After about 30 minutes of



walking we had distant views of a fast moving troop. We then started hearing the calls of multiple troops in the forest. We decided to walk back to the center and after a quick rest, a shy family, including a male with a baby, was coming down to

the bird tables at the back of the property. After this we drove a little over an hour to pick up a very comfortable boat at the edge of the Alto Mayo Wetlands to take us to the Tingana lodge. We were picked up by our eagle eyed guide Juan. His spotting skills for anything from mammals to amphibians to birds and reptiles was top notch. The lodge itself has two rooms with a shared drop toilet bathroom in a separate building. There is a large kitchen area where I ate the best food of the trip. We initially went to the lodge, dropped off our luggage then took a smaller paddled canoe into a waterway leading away from the lodge. We saw Common Squirrel Monkeys, Brown (Large Headed) Capuchins, Andean Saddle-back tamarins and a large troop of Colombian Howler Monkeys. We also at dusk watched a large Bicolored Porcupine high in a tree. After dinner we did a night walk in a garden/agricultural area behind the lodge. The only mammal we saw a a Hoffmann's Two-toed sloth in a tree.

Day 5 - We woke up early to do another canoe outing along the waterway. We saw more capuchins and howlers, Juan found us three sloths, two of which were snoozing in large bromeliads, and came across a very large troop of relaxed squirrel monkeys that were all around us.



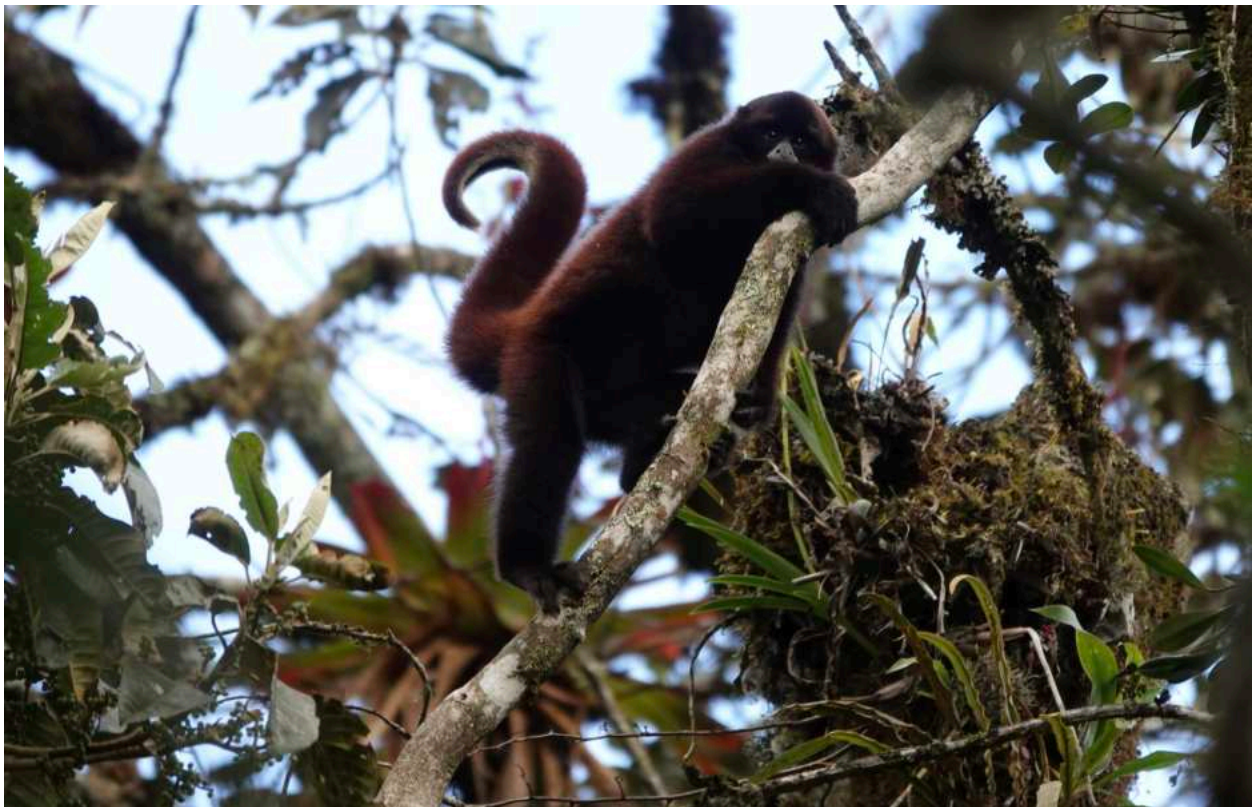
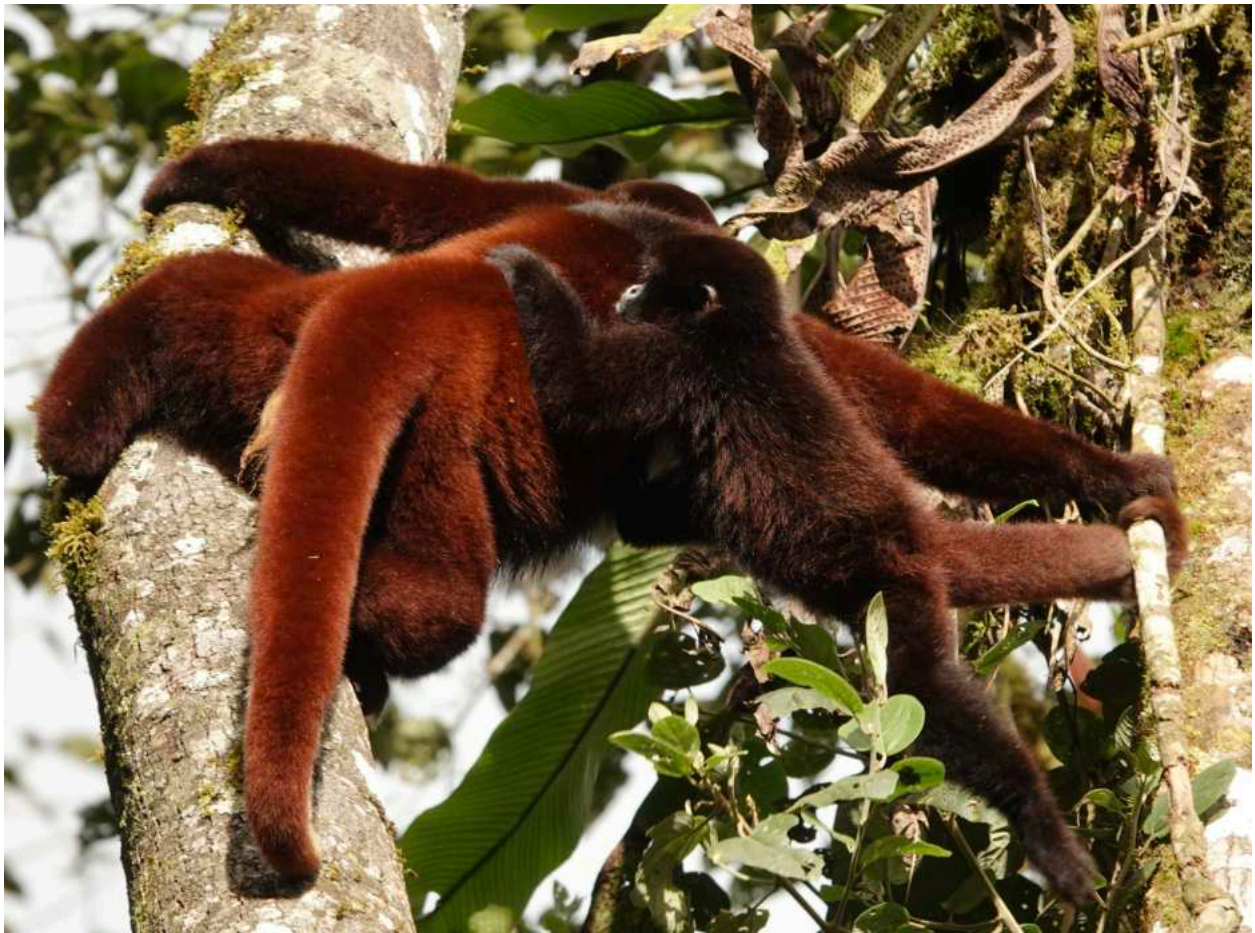
After one of the best breakfasts of my life, Julio then talked to us about what we would be doing over the next 24 hours. We were going to the community of Corosha. The mammal watching there is centered about three species. The Yellow-tailed Woolley monkey, the Andean Night Monkey, and the Andean Bear. We had originally planned to see the monkeys, but since I had seen all three species in the past, Julie wanted to try for the bear. We were told the area to get to the bear was done on horseback and it was something that we could do the following morning. Riding horseback to see mammals was only something I had done once in Colombia. It has never been something I go out of my way for and my experience horseback riding is mainly centered around some nice trail horses on vacations. But this seemed like a good plan. Then however Julio found out we could also get horses to take us to the Woolley monkeys today, but first we had to get to Corosha. We went back through the wetlands, drove back through Moyobamba then drove close to 3 hours to get to the village of Beirut in Corosha. We stopped in a small shop where a family cooked us lunch. I would like to point out first at this spot there was an approximate 3000 meter elevation gain from where we had been. We then drove to a trailhead that would take us to a small house that serves as the base for looking for the monkeys. We were told about ten days each month a group of researchers follow the monkeys from dusk until dawn and allow for tourists to watch them. We were told that the researchers had been with the monkeys all day.

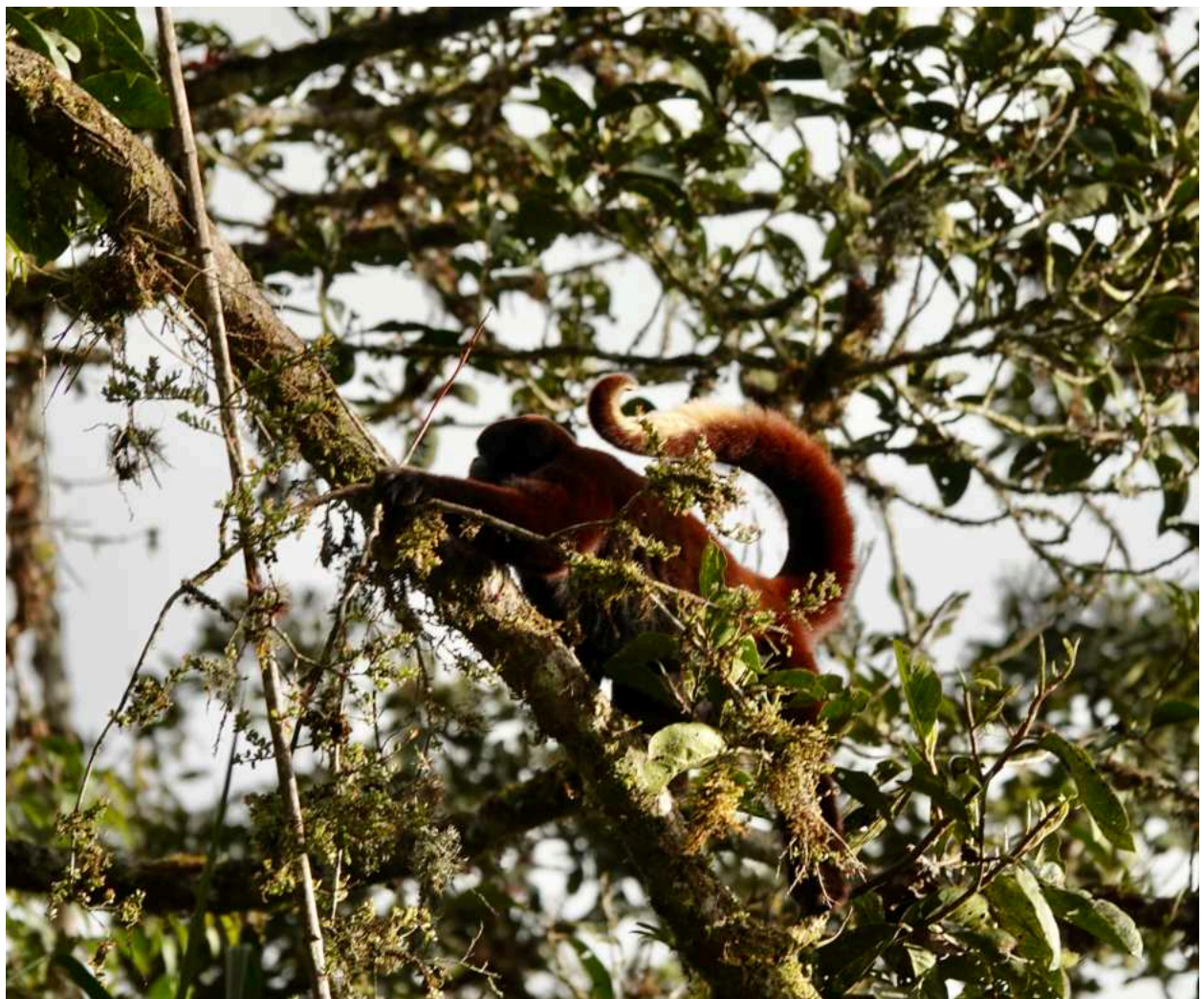
So I would like to talk about and quote some fellow mammal watchers about what they had said about the trail on trip reports. It had also been raining prior to us getting there and was lightly misting.

Justin Brown wrote about the trail “steep and very muddy”. Rob and Romy Jansen wrote multiple sentences about their feelings on it including “terrain is pretty tough walking” “terrible hike to and from the cabin” “paths are crappy and hard to walk” and my person favorite “ only go here if you are fit enough and willing to climb steep (and at times) dangerous trails”. Now Justin is the fittest mammal watcher I know and I have heard that the Jansens are also super fit. Then there is me..... at best I always make it, but with difficult walks, including all will steep elevation gains, it take me time. So when the offer of the horse came, I thought, wow this should be great. When we got to the trail there was one horse waiting (a smaller gentle looking black horse). Then a larger grey horse came up snorting and throwing his head back. Lets just call that horse Diablo. I looked at Julio and said, I will take the black one..... You do not actually ride up the horse by yourself, but are led by locals. Julie being a very slight petite lady was designated the black horse who would take the lead, while I got on Diablo. Julio did not get a horse, and walked up along side the local guide. Now back to this trail. I think Justin and the Jansens were being nice about the description. Its starts off ok, but after awhile the vertical incline worsens and worsens. At one point it was almost straight up with rock faces on both sides of us. While Julie was then out of sight Diablo decided he was done and resisted all the sweet talking and leading trying to get him up. He then reared up and my saddle loosened and I was slightly

sideways. I am not sure of the exact vocalization I made, but it quickly got the locals to shush me. Diablo did not seem fazed by the noise as he probably agreed with me. After getting off him for the saddle to be tightened then getting back on, it was a constant back and forth with him not wanting to go up the trail. At this point we were more than half way to the cabin, but still had some serious incline to go up. I thought about Diablo rearing up again and maybe crushing me and I debated on just letting that happen vs me having to climb up the trail. Finally my determination got the best of me and I started to climb. Did I mention the elevation gain...When I finally made it to the cabin, we were told the monkeys were "only" 30 minutes away and there was no time for the break that I had been promised. So I trudged along, lightheaded and nauseous from altitude sickness or wait was that just from the climb I had done..... until after about 20 minutes we found the researchers and we were told to look up. At this point it was close to dusk and except for one female with a baby getting on its back my pictures are dark and record shots.

We spent almost close to darkness falling watching the troop going up to their night time sleeping spot.





When darkness fell we went back to the cabin to where the horses were waiting for us. At this point I was really feeling the altitude and exhaustion and knowing it was straight down I did not trust Diablo to carry me safely. So with the help of his handler we started to walk slowly to an area where they see the night monkeys. We did not see the night monkeys. At this point I was exhausted and knew I was making the group walk slower than they should have. So I decided to get on the black horse and he efficiently carried me down the rest of the trail. That night we went back to the shop for dinner. Julie, Jorge and myself were then placed in a house with three bedrooms on the top and a shared bathroom to spend the night.

Day 6 - In the morning we drove to another area in Corosha and met up with three handlers with horses. Julio had opted to get a horse for the bear climb. I did a look over on the horses, how they were acting and on the handlers. I decided to ask again for a black horse to ride up. This time the answer was yes. We were met again by another local guide. The trail was to another cabin with a lookout over a valley. It was also very steep and longer than the monkey trail. However this time the handler was off and on speaking sweet nothings to the horse and the horse followed all the directions like a pro. He also was more sure footed than Diablo and did not seem to mind the hike. After getting to the cabin area we ate breakfast then started scanning a large valley. Unfortunately it started to rain so we took shelter in the cabin. After the rain a large cloud/fog was covering the entire valley. We waited for awhile then decided the weather

had defeated us. We took the horses back down to the base of trailhead, had lunch, then Julio and Jorge drove us to Tarapoto. We booked a room at the Hotel Cielo for the night which provided an airport shuttle.

Day 7 - we flew back to Lima (this time on one flight) and spent a few hours at the Wyndham before catching close to midnight flights home.

Species seen

1. Ecuadorian (Common) Squirrel Monkey - *Saimiri macrodon*
2. Brown (Large-headed) Capuchin - *Sapajus apella macrocephalus*
3. Illiger's Saddleback Tamarin - *Leontocebus illigeri*
4. Marañon White-fronted capuchin - *Cebus yuracus*
5. Colombian Red Howler Monkey - *Alouatta seniculus*
6. Brown-throated three-toed sloth - *Bradypus variegatus*
7. Isabel's Saki monkey - *Pithecia isabela*
8. Greater Sac-winged bat - *Saccopteryx bilineata*
9. Nancy Ma's Night Monkey - *Lotus nancymae*
10. White Browed Titi Monkey - *Plecturocebus discolor*
11. Andean Saddleback tamarin - *Leontocebus leucogenys*
12. San Martín Titi Monkey - *Plecturocebus oenanthe*
13. Bicolored-spined porcupine - *Coendou bicolor*
14. Hoffmann's Two-toed sloth - *Choloepus hoffmanni*
15. Yellow-tailed Woolley Monkey - *Lagothrix flavicauda*