

Panama

December 19-21, 2025 + January 4-5, 2026

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I visited South America for the holiday season - Ecuador for wildlife (trip report will come soon) and Rio de Janeiro for New Years celebrations. On the way to South America and back I had long layovers in Panama City. The layovers were mostly meant to cut the outrageous cost of airfare from New York to South America on the holiday season. However, I managed to turn those layovers into a very successful wildlife watching trip in Gamboa area which is less than an hour drive from Panama City airport.



Panamanian Night Monkeys

Part 1

19/12

I landed in Panama City on the night of December 19th, picked up my rental car and made it to *Gamboa Rainforest Reserve (GRR)* around 23:00. It was late, but I still wanted to try my luck with some spotlighting. Having my own car meant that I could easily move around between the different hotspots mentioned in previous reports.

First stop was Semaphore Hill road - the access road to the Canopy Tower. I walked the road, but it was relatively uneventful, with only a **Western Andean Long-nosed Armadillo**, some bats flying around, and a small rodent that was hopping on the road like a bouncy ball - most likely a **Spiny Pocket Mouse** species. After Semaphore Hill I started my way back to Gamboa Rainforest Reserve, stopping to use the Thermal scope every few minutes which only resulted in poor views of a likely **Kinkajou**.

Back at GRR I asked the night guard about **Lesser Capybaras**. He said that they usually appear near the gate, crossing between Gatun lake and the small lagoon at the entrance to GRR, but only very late at night - past midnight. It was past 2am at this point, so I figured it would be a good time to see them. The guard agreed and then said "they are right behind you". Indeed, two Lesser Capybaras with a youngster were crossing the road towards the lagoon and gave great prolonged views.



Lesser Capybara

20/12

The next morning I met *Alex Guevara (WhatsApp +50761121643)* who would be my guide for the day. He arrived at my hotel at 07:00 and we started the day after breakfast. We started by looking for wildlife on GRR grounds. I was hoping for Geoffroy's Tamarins to arrive at the feeders by the lobby but they never came on any of the 3 days I stayed there. Instead, we saw a troop of **White-faced Capuchins** at the parking lot and the omnipresent **Central American Agoutis**.



White-faced Capuchin



Central American Agouti

Our next stop was the famous Pipeline road where we would spend the entire morning. On our way there we saw a family of **White-nosed Coatis** crossing the road, and we also stopped to get poor daytime views of a sleeping Kinkajou in a hole in a tree. An inquisitive White-nosed Coati came to greet us asking for handouts as we parked the car at the entrance to the Pipeline road. The walk itself was lovely, though not very mammal-rich with only **Mantled Howlers**, White-faced Capuchins and **Red-tailed Squirrels** seen. Birdlife was teeming, and Alex is very good at finding and identifying birds. I especially enjoyed seeing the diversity of birds following the swarms of army ants we came across - Puffbirds, Antbirds, Antshrikes, Antwrens, Antthrushes, Woodcreepers, Motmots and many more were having a feeding frenzy.



White-nosed Coati



Mantled Howler

We went back to GRR for lunch (which was remarkably bad) and Alex found a couple of **Common / Pacific Tent-making Bats** in a Palm Tree by the rooms. Other lunchtime highlights included **Collared Aracari**, **Yellow-throated Toucan** and of course more Agoutis. I asked Alex if he knew of any more bat roosts, and he showed me a few **Greater Sac-winged Bats** on the walls and windows of a couple of deserted houses in Gamboa.



Common / Pacific Tent-making Bats



Greater Sac-winged Bat

Next we went to look for a **Panamanian Night Monkeys** roost Alex knew on GRR grounds by the lake. Alex easily found the roost which had 3 monkeys curiously peeking at us. Afterwards, we went looking for more bat roosts and found a large roost of **Seba's Short-tailed Bats** in a large culvert at GRR exhibition grounds. Note that the exhibition grounds have a hefty admissions tag (\$60 per person), but Alex talked to some of the employees and they allowed us to check out the culvert without paying for admission. We also saw a **Hoffman's Two-toed Sloth** next to the exhibition grounds. It was getting close to sunset and our plan for the rest of the night was to get dinner at *Summit Golf Resort (SGR)*, then spotlight along the main road back to GRR where Alex knew of some flowering trees, then search Semaphore Hill road for Porcupines, and then if not too late - walk Laguna trail at GRR to look for Pacas. There is another Panamanian Night Monkey roost at the entrance to SGR (the tree closest to the main road ; on the right hand side when looking at the gate) and they started peeking out about an hour after sunset.



Seba's Short-tailed Bat



Panamanian Night Monkeys waking up

After dinner we went on two hours of an unbelievably productive spotlighting session along the main road (Carretera Gamboa from Semaphore hill / Plantation rd. junction towards Gamboa - up until 1km before the bridge. Note that you can't spotlight much further than that towards Gamboa since there is a prison by the side of the road). We focused on four clusters of trees that were in bloom at the time.

We saw a total of 6 Kinkajous, 5 **Western Lowland Olingos**, 3 Panamanian Night Monkeys, 2 **Northern Black-eared Opossums**, one **Derby's Woolly Opossum**, one **White-tailed Deer**, one Hoffman's Two-toed Sloth, clouds of bats (I've never regretted more not owning a bat detector) and best of all - 2 **Rothschild's Porcupines**. Just imagine seeing a Kinkajou, Olingo, Opossum and a Porcupine all on the same tree at the same time. I was in heaven. This productive spotlighting session was possible due to Alex's knowledge of specific trees, great timing of peak flowering and heavy use of a thermal scope.

It was almost 22:00 at this point, and we decided to skip Semaphore Hill as we had already seen the Porcupines which were my main target for the visit. Instead, we went directly to Laguna trail to look for Pacas. Note that you have to stay at GRR to access Laguna trail at night.

A one-hour walk of Laguna trail produced 2 Western Andean Long-nosed Armadillos, a **Tomes's Spiny Rat** (that thing is huge!) and a **Lowland Paca** hiding in the bushes. It was also cool to see Spectacled Caimans swimming in the lagoon at night. On our way back to the car we saw a **Central American Tapeti**, **False Fer-de-lance** and then another probable Lowland Paca darting into the bushes as we got to the car. Alex and I parted ways at around 23:00 and I went to bed before leaving for the airport early the next morning.



Kinkajous



Rothschild's Porcupines



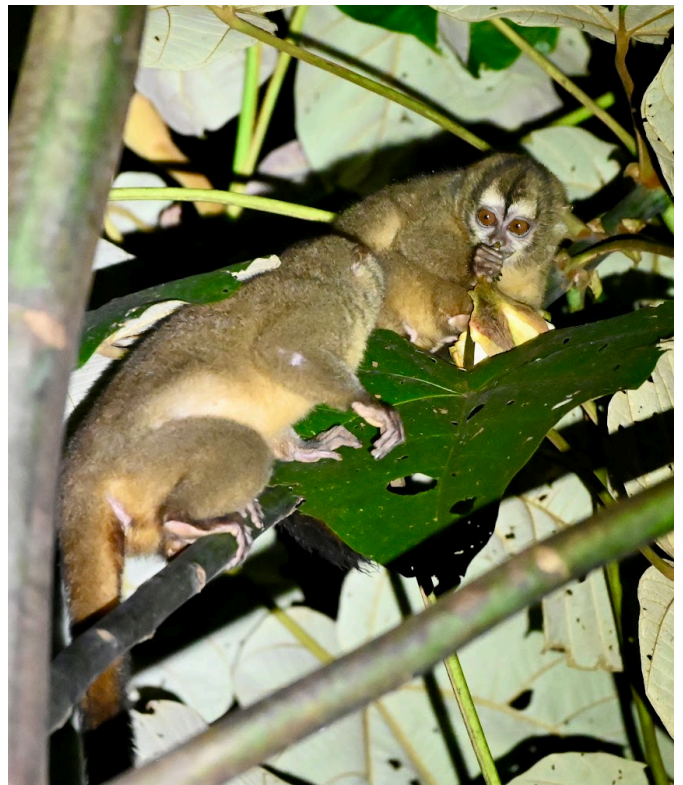
Derby's Woolly Opossum



Northern Black-eared Opossum



Western Lowland Olingo



Panamanian Night Monkeys



Lowland Paca



Western Andean Long-nosed Armadillo

Part 2

04/01

Having seen most of my targets for the Gamboa area, my second layover was much more relaxed. I landed in the morning and picked up a rental car. This time I headed first to Ancon Hill park in Panama City as it is supposedly a good place to look for **Geoffroy's Tamarins** that I missed on my first visit. I arrived late on Sunday morning, and the park was very busy with locals and tourists alike, as well as many people with dogs, which wasn't very promising. I hiked to the top and was rewarded with beautiful views of Panama City as well as a single Tamarin and a Central American Agouti at the top.

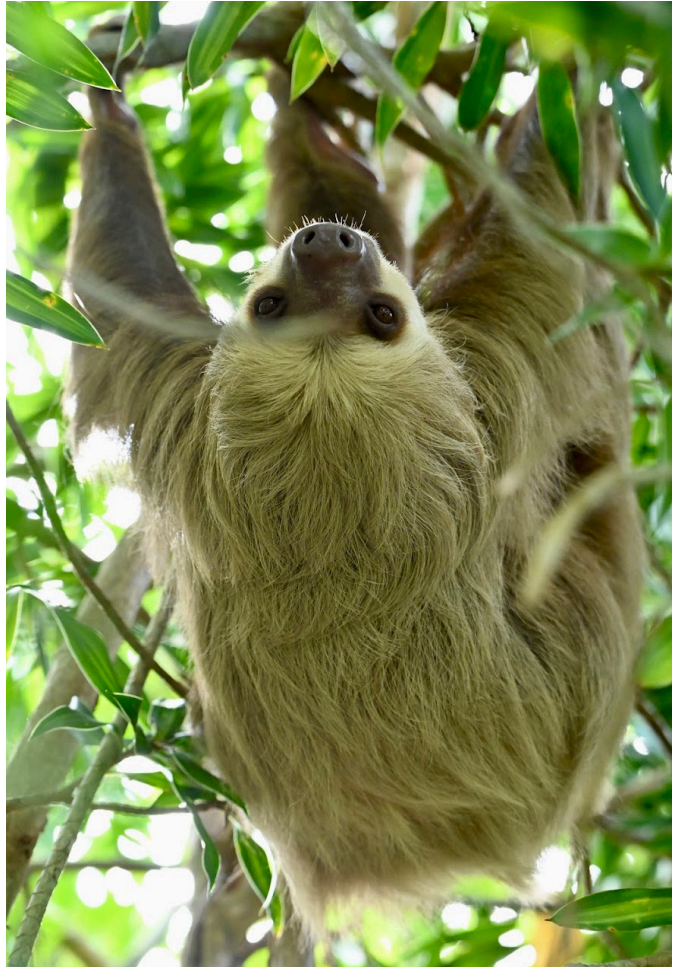
Next stop on the itinerary was the Casco Viejo neighborhood in Panama City where I had a lovely lunch and walked around the colonial buildings and shoreline for a bit, seeing a few nice shore birds.

Afterwards I continued to Punta Culebra for a quick photoshoot of the resident Hoffman's Two-toed Sloths. The stop wasn't very quick as the area was very busy on Sunday afternoon and parking was a bit of a challenge. At Punta Culebra nature center, I was able to see four sloths as well as a few **Common Raccoons** and some very large **Green Iguanas**. But IMO, unless seeing a sloth at close range is very important to you, Punta culebra is very skippable - especially on a weekend.

After Punta Culebra I left Panama City and headed to Gamboa Rainforest Reserve again. I was greeted by a Hoffman's two-toed Sloth at the tree above the guard's station. After check-in and some charging (both my equipment and myself) I went for dinner at SGR and then some spotlighting along the main road (Carretera Gamboa) trying to recreate the success from the last visit. Findings were much more modest this time with only 1-2 Northern Black-eared Opossums and one Western Lowland Olingo - not only because I was spotlighting by myself this time, but also because the peak flowering of the trees seemed to have passed as evident by the much lower number of bats flying around. After that I continued to spotlight the lower half of Semaphore Hill, finding a Western Andean Long-nosed Armadillo and a Kinkajou. The final stop for the night was the Pipeline rd. I was hoping to recreate [Alex Meyer's bat photoshoot](#) there, but didn't see any bats feeding - only a handful of bats flying around. I did come across a flock **Black-bellied Whistling Ducks** that decided to block my car, as well as 3 **Collared Peccaries**.



Geoffroy's Tamarin



Hoffman's Two-toed Sloth



Common Raccoon



Collared Peccary

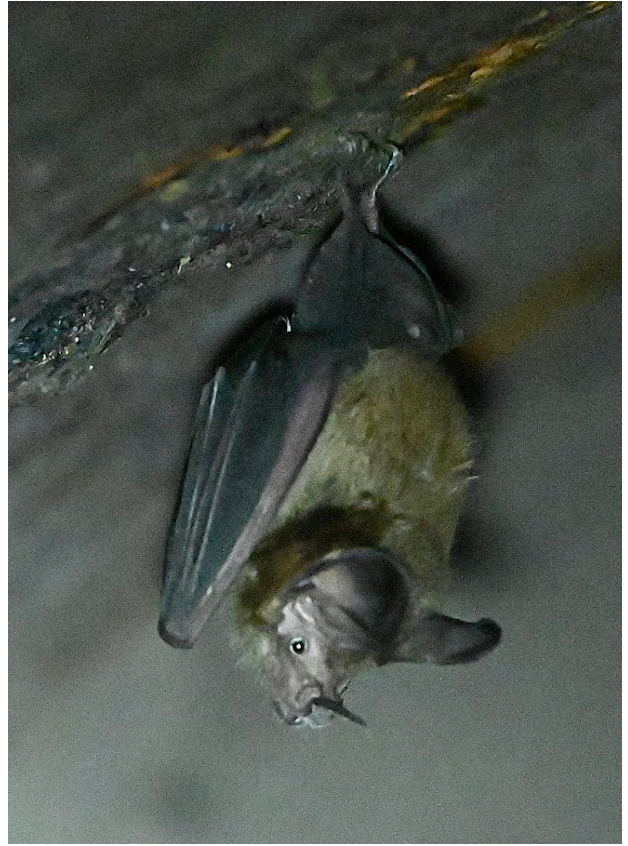
05/01

I started the morning a bit late, and headed to the Pipeline road again. I saw the usual suspects - White-nosed Coatis, Central American Agoutis, Mantled Howlers and White-faced Capuchins as well as some really nice birds following swarms of army ants. This time I also checked the culverts under the pipeline road and found roosts of Seba's Short-tailed Bats and **Common Big-eared Bats**.

After that walk I checked out from GRR and found the sloth again at the same tree above the guard's booth. I turned out to be a mama sloth with a baby!



Mama Hoffman's Two-toed Sloth



Common Big-eared Bat

Afterwards I headed to Semaphore Hill, where I saw the same two species of bats under culverts as well as Agoutis and Howlers. Birdlife was far quieter there. I continued for lunch at SGR and walked the trails on the property for a bit without seeing any mammals.

After my visit to SGR, I headed to Pipeline road one last time, and was greeted by a group of Collared Peccaries at the entrance to the road. Most of the walk afterwards was uneventful with only a few Agoutis and White-faced Capuchins. I told myself that at 16:50 I would need to turn around and head to the airport. At 16:46 I heard a rustle at the side of the road, which turned out to be a **Northern Tamandua**. I spent fantastic 10 minutes with this great creature as it moved on the forest floor, climbed a tree all the way to the canopy, crossed through the canopy to the other side of the road, found a termite nest on a tree and started tearing it apart. Eventually I had to leave it to catch my flight, but that anteater provided the perfect ending to a wonderful trip.



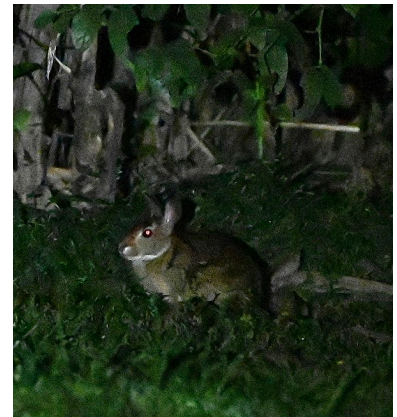
Northern Tamandua

A few observations / closing remarks:

- Alex is one of the best wildlife guides I had the pleasure to work with. He is super knowledgeable about mammals, birds and herps, and he will work very hard to make sure that you see your targets. I would 100% recommend using his services.
- Gamboa Rainforest Reserve is very far from being a wildlife lodge, and seems to cater mostly to families. However, the rooms are nice and staying there gives you access to some nice trails (for example, I would not have been able to see Lowland Pacas there had I not been a guest). It is a bit pricey at around \$170/night, so I would recommend staying here only a couple of nights and staying at a cheaper alternative (Summit Golf Resort or a few B&Bs around Gamboa) if you stay longer than that.
- Geoffroy's Tamarins are a flagship species of the Gamboa area, and were a top target for me. However, they are not very easy to see if you're not staying at the extremely expensive Canopy Tower. They are rarely seen along the trails, and rarely come to the feeders at GRR or SGR these days. The best way to see them is probably to take a boat ride at Gatun lake as the monkeys learned to associate boats with food. These cruises are offered by several companies (including GRR), but seem to be geared towards more casual tourists and families and overall don't seem like my cup of tea. So I'm happy I lucked out and saw a Tamarin at Ancon Hill and didn't need to take a cruise the next morning.
- On the first Sunday of every month, the Smithsonian Research Institute at Gamboa runs a bat misting night open to the public. Considering how many bats I saw there, such an event has a lot of potential. Unfortunately they didn't run one in January as most of the staff was on vacation, but I would have loved to participate in such an event and hopefully could participate in the future.

Mammal List

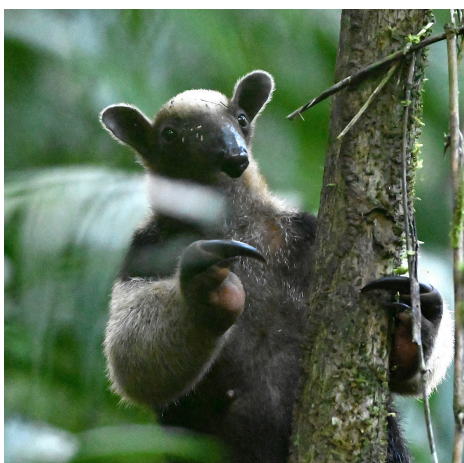
1. Western Andean Long-nosed Armadillo (*Dasypus fenestratus*)
2. Spiny Pocket Mouse species (*Heteromys* sp.) - probable
3. Tomes's Spiny Rat (*Proechimys semispinosus*)
4. Lesser Capybara (*Hydrochoerus isthmus*)
5. Central American Agouti (*Dasyprocta punctata*)
6. Lowland Paca (*Cuniculus paca*)
7. Red-tailed Squirrel (*Sciurus granatensis*)
8. Rothschild's Porcupine (*Coendou rothschildi*)
9. Kinkajou (*Potos flavus*)
10. Western Lowland Olingo (*Bassaricyon medius*)
11. White-nosed Coati (*Nasua narica*)
12. Common Raccoon (*Procyon lotor*)
13. White-faced Capuchin (*Cebus capucinus*)
14. Mantled Howler (*Alouatta palliata*)
15. Panamanian Night Monkey (*Aotus zonalis*)
16. Geoffroy's Tamarin (*Saguinus geoffroyi*)
17. Seba's Short-tailed Bat (*Carollia perspicillata*)
18. Common Big-eared Bat (*Micronycteris microtis*)
19. Pacific / Common Tent-making Bat (*Uroderma convexum* / *bilobatum*)
20. Greater Sac-winged Bat (*Saccopteryx bilineata*)
21. Hoffman's Two-toed Sloth (*Choloepus hoffmanni*)
22. Northern Tamandua (*Tamandua mexicana*)
23. White-tailed Deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*)
24. Collared Peccary (*Dicotyles tajacu*)
25. Central American Tapeti (*Sylvilagus gabbi*)
26. Derby's Woolly Opossum (*Caluromys derbianus*)
27. Northern Black-eared Opossum (*Didelphis marsupialis*)



Central American Tapeti



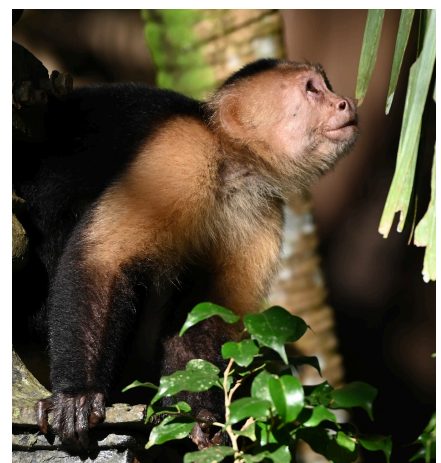
White-nosed Coati



Northern Tamandua



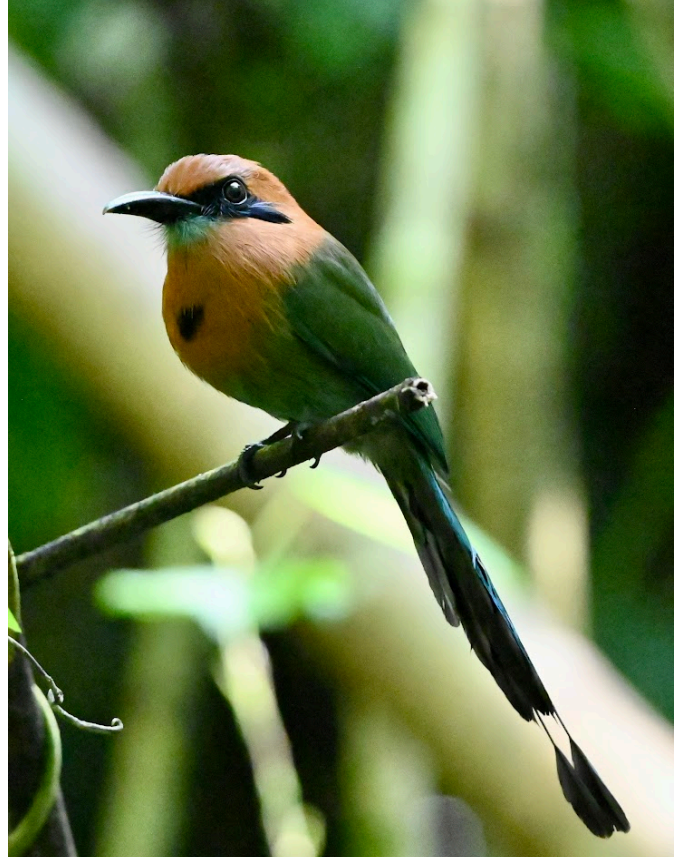
Rothschild's Porcupine



White-faced Capuchin

Bird List

1. Yellow-headed Caracara
2. Crested Caracara
3. Palm Tanager
4. Grey-headed Tanager
5. Crimson-backed Tanager
6. Flame-rumped Tanager
7. White-shouldered Tanager
8. Blue-Grey Tanager
9. Tropical Kingbird
10. Yellow-crowned Tyrannulet
11. Yellow-bellied Elania
12. Bright-rumped Attila
13. Great Kiskadee
14. Social Flycatcher
15. Boat-billed Flycatcher
16. Southern House Wren
17. Song Wren
18. Velvety Manakin
19. Golden-colored Manakin
20. Bay-breasted Warbler
21. Bicolored Antbird
22. Ocellated Antbird
23. Chestnut-backed Antbird
24. Spotted Antbird
25. Checker-throated Antwren
26. Dot-winged Antwren
27. Black-crowned Antshrike
28. Fasciated Antshrike
29. Barred Antshrike
30. Northern Barred Woodcreeper
31. Plain Brown Woodcreeper
32. Cocoa Woodcreeper
33. Black-striped Woodcreeper
34. Scarlet Cacique
35. Great-tailed Grackle
36. Black-faced Antthrush
37. Green Shrike-Vireo
38. Red-throated Ant-Tanager
39. Clay-colored Thrush
40. Tropical Mockingbird
41. Mangrove Swallow
42. White-tipped Dove
43. Ruddy Quail-Dove



Broad-billed Motmot



Collared Aracari

44. Ruddy Ground Dove
45. Rock Pigeon
46. Rufous Motmot
47. Broad-billed Motmot
48. Green-and-Rufous Kingfisher
49. Turkey Vulture
50. Black Vulture
51. Northern Black-throated Trogon
52. Slaty-backed Trogon
53. Gartered Trogon
54. Magnificent Frigatebird
55. White-necked Jacobin
56. Long-billed Hermit
57. Grey-necked Wood Rail
58. Black-breasted Puffbird
59. White-whiskered Puffbird
60. Crimson-crested Woodpecker
61. Red-crowned Woodpecker
62. Cinnamon Woodpecker
63. Yellow-breasted Toucan
64. Keel-billed Toucan
65. Collared Aracari
66. Grey-headed Chachalaca
67. Greater Ani
68. Rufouscent Tiger-Heron
69. Great Egret
70. Tricolored Heron
71. Western Cattle Egret
72. Snowy Egret
73. Brown Pelican
74. Common Parakeet
75. Swallow-tailed Kite
76. Grey-headed Kite
77. Osprey
78. Wattled Jacana
79. Spotted Sandpiper
80. Hudsonian Whimbrel
81. Semipalmated Plover
82. Sandwich Tern
83. Franklin's Gull
84. Black-bellied Whistling Duck
85. Orange-chinned Parakeet
86. Red-lored Amazon



Ocellated Antbird



Gartered Trogon



Cinnamon Woodpecker



White-whiskered Puffbird



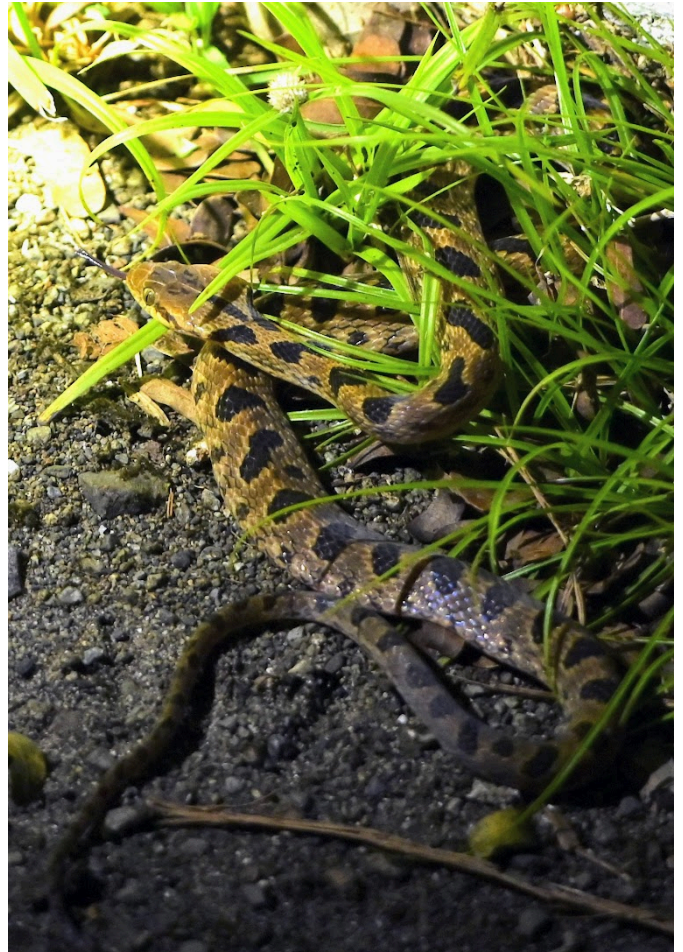
Wattled Jacana



Grey-headed Kite

Herp List

1. Spectacled Caiman
2. False Fer-de-Lance
3. Green Iguana
4. Brown Basilisk
5. Giant Ameiva
6. Tropical House Gecko
7. Yellow-headed Gecko
8. MesoAmerican Slider
9. Forest Toad



False Fer-de-lance



Spectacled Caiman



Green Iguana