

## Introducing myself.

Hello everyone, it's my first time posting here so a little about me.

Mexican (Yucatán) biologist, self-considered zoologist, reptiles were my first love but i try not to be obnoxious about it and I really like **taxonomy!**

## The trip. February 3-11

My Swiss friend Christel (Who I met in Honduras last year) really wanted to see Monarch Butterflies (*Danaus plexippus*) for her birthday, thus asked me to lead a personal trip to see them as well as other mexican **wildlife**, thus I roughly sketched a route (that would change a lot!). In the end we visited 4 states: CDMX, Michoacán, Chiapas and Quintana Roo.

## Arrival

Chris arrived to Cancún, the usual landing place for a lot of tourists, since I live in Mérida, a ~11 hour drive back and forth to the airport was the first leg of the trip. Thankfully I wasn't alone, I had the company of my girlfriend Ana (aspiring mastozoologist) who would be the other member of our 3-person party for this expedition.

Both of us departed from Mérida around noon, our first sighting would only be seen by Ana. As we drove near **Cancun's Hotel Zone** at around 10 pm, she spotted a **White-Tailed Deer** (*Odocoileus virginianus*) calmly grazing next to the highway, and since I was trying to avoid crashing my dad's car, it was impossible for me to see it.



White-tailed deer (from another trip lol)

## Mexico City

Now with a complete party we drove back to Progreso, a coastal town near Mérida, to sleep for a while, the next day we jumped on a bus that would drop us in Mexico City 24 hours later (yay). Once in the country's capital city we rented a car, which by the way was much more expensive than what we had budgeted for (They charged us extra for being 24 y/o) and crossed the city headed to **Ciudad Universitaria**, the campus of the largest university in the country, in order to deposit some **herpetological specimens** in the zoological collection.

Inside the campus there's a natural protected area "El Pedregal de San Angel" characterized by rocky outcrops of volcanic origin and vegetation that mixes pine forest with **xerophile shrublands**, while I was doing curatorial work Ana and Chris managed to spot two very interesting **squirrels**:



**Rock Squirrel**

*Otospermophilus variegatus*



**Red-Bellied Squirrel**

*Sciurus (Echinosciurus) aureogaster*

As the name implies, Rock Squirrels can be found on the ground, specifically near rock formations, which are common around the campus, its red-bellied counterpart can also be found running around, but mostly near forested areas climbing trees and stealing student's food.

## Michoacán

After finishing my curatorial tasks, we continued our adventure toward Angangueo, our base for the next 2 days while we explored the different butterfly sanctuaries.

As we drove at night though very curvy roads, we ended up flashing a pair of **coyotes** (*Canis latrans*) that were crossing the road in the middle of a tall pine forest, they were lifers for Ana and me, but sadly Chris was asleep. This was the only mammal we saw in Michoacán, but on the bird side of things we got tons of lifers! Including some highland species such as the Red Warbler (*Cardelina rubra*) Golden-browed Warbler (*Basileuterus belli*) and the Mexican Chickadee (*Poecile sclateri*), and of course, millions of Monarchs.



The view from the visitor's center of Sierra Chincua Monarch Sanctuary, and some of them.

We ended up visiting two sanctuaries Sierra Chincua and El Rosario, both offer different experiences, the first one a more intimate, natural view of them, getting deep into the forest after climbing and walking narrow pathways.

On the other hand El Rosario is the most touristy site on the area, lots of people, stairs, and monarchs. Since they were quite literally all around the road, as sun started to heat up they flew among the hundreds of humans that would sometimes step on them, you could say it was a more “magical” experience and a closer encounter with them.



Ana moving a **hooded skunk** (*Mephitis macroura*) found DOR somewhere in EDOMEX on our way back to return ur rental, we like to record this types of encounters as we think citizen science can provide very relevant information.

## Chiapas

After returning our rental in CDMX, we took another long bus towards Palenque, Chiapas. Here we would stay at a hotel near the Mayan Archeological Site and National Park, Palenque. This hotel had nice, forested areas, a river flowing though it and some orchards, among which a couple of **agoutis** would wander around carelessly.



I found quite interesting how dark this population is, since the ones on the Peninsula tend to be more honey-like in coloration, so in my mind this where Mexican Agoutis (*Dasyprocta mexicana*) although after talking with my friend **Juan Cruzado**, turns out these are ***Dasyprocta punctata***, on the darker side of the species coloration.

Visiting the ruins the next morning turned out quite productive on the bird side of things, including species such as the King Vulture, Red-legged Honeycreeper, Green Honeycreeper, etc. We managed to spot the resident **monkeys**, which we would also find the following day in a different spot, Agua Azul waterfalls.



Agua Azul, and a young howler (*Alouatta pigra*) enjoying the blue waters.

Around the city of Palenque they could also be heard quite often, at some point we thought we saw them, but they turned out to be simply **huge, red-bellied** squirrels. In other waterfalls we also walked inside a small cave system behind the water curtain, turns out at least 100 fruit Jamaican fruit-eating bats (*Artibeus jamaicensis*) roosted in there, there was a small waterfall inside the cave as well!



Many bouquets of bats covered the roof of this water filled cave.

Our last night at the hotel was a cool one, after spotting a painted tree frog and some possums (*Didelphis sp.*), Ana came with the sighting of the trip so far, spotting a young **Central American woolly opossum** (*Caluromys derbeianus*) in the canopy of some tall trees, such was an amazing lifer for me since this is one of the rarest species of marsupial around southern México.

## Quintana roo

We took a bus back to Mérida, sleeping on it all night long, the following day we drove my dad's car in direction of **K'u Aayin**, a private reserve owned by some good friends, it is an amazing spot for wildlife encounters as it encompasses 1000 hectares, including a long lake, wetlands, and jungle. Trail camera surveys have revealed amazing diversity, with species such as Jaguars, Monkeys, Brockets, Armadillos and, Tapirs.

While driving we saw a really high of roadkilled possums and coatis, wich as sad as it was, indicated high mammal activity, and sure enough, almost halfway there we encountered a Long-tailed weasel (*Neogale frenata*) a really hard to see species in the region, wich raised the mood quite a lot!.

Not even half an hour later we came across another weasel!, and then a gray fox (*Urocyon cinereoargenteus*), and upon arriving, two species of bats roosting on a thatched roof welcomed us.



*Mycronictoris microtis* and *Carollia sowelli* roosting together. *Ototylomys phyllotis* found later on.

That same night as we did some night walk, we heard some rustling around the edge of the water, but we couldn't see the culprit, later on we found a blunt-headed treesnake, a big-eared climbing rat (*Ototylomys phyllotis*) and yet another **Woolly Opossum!**



*Caluromys derbeianus*, this spot in central Quintana Roo has the biggest population of this species I know of.

On our last day we did some birding, as we walked we stumbled upon Yucatan Squirrel (*Sciurus yucatanensis*) agoutis (*Dasyprocta punctata*) and coatis (*Nasua narica*), and our last ordeal was to do a chill route on the lagoon aiming to spot some crocs and birds.

As planned we saw some kingfisher, tiger herons, and boat billed herons, crocs where nowhere to be found but we had seen some the night before. Coming back to the port we heard some branches breaking and splashes bellow some bushes at the edge of the lagoon, we aproached quietly with low expectations, thinking it might be a heron or a deer tops.

Some seconds passed in silence and then ana whispered enthusiastically “Es el tapir, no mames!” wich translates to “Oh my, it’s the tapir”. And in that moment a huge head came swimming in front of us, and as we held our breath ANOTHER tapir followed her, turns out we where lucky enough to spot a mama with its baby, being this the first humans to see tapirs in the history of K’u A’ayin!



Female Baird's Tapir (*Tapirus bairdii*)



A not-so-small baby tapir.



This trip's party, from left to right: Me (Daniel Durán), Ana Rivas, Manuel Palomo (Owner of K'u A'ayin) and Christel Jossevel.

If you are interested in doing wildlife watching around the Yucatán or anywhere else in México give me a call! I'm more than happy to show you around. 😊