

## Colombia, January 2026

### Tomer Ben-Yehuda



*From left to right: Karen Czekalski, Daniel Dahan, Ivan Lau, Jason Woolgar, Robin Smith, Tomer Ben-Yehuda*

#### **Preface:**

Although the trip took place in January, I already I made the MammalWatching discovery of the year, courtesy of, and thanks to, Rob Smith of Wild About Colombia.

And that discovery is: Ivan Lau.

Ivan is not yet known in the Mammalwatching community, but he's going to be. He's well-known in the Colombian bird watching community as one of the top bird guides. But with that young guide's tireless enthusiasm, spotting and identification skills, and thirst for more mammals, Ivan is basically a young Mike Gordon, back when he had all his teeth! (JK Mike 🤪 You know you set the bar – hence the comparison 😊)

Out-of-the-box flexible thinking, understanding of logistics from 'top-level' planning all the way down to 'how to hold the flashlight' so that everyone gets a photo, are some of Ivan's main characteristics, in addition to all the 'regular' traits that make a great guide. He always has cookies or biscuits in case you need a quick snack to keep going at 1am. He's the last one going to sleep, then you wake up only to find another bat ID in the group WhatsApp, with pictures we took compared to ones from the field guide. And that's just the professional side... Of all the guides I've ever had, I think Ivan was the quickest to call out what "pulling a Tomer" means. And while being on-par with my own dark sense of humor, he can be P.C. and sensitive as needed per client – but our group didn't need that.

Let me back up though, and start from the beginning:

In January of 2023, Venkat's Colombia report came out. Not yet having seen Andean Bear or Mountain tapir, I started contemplating whether I would go to Ecuador, a country I'd been to with my parents, or to Colombia – a totally new country for me, with now 'gettable'

bear and tapir duo, thanks to Rob Smith of Wild about Colombia. A 2024 post of a seemingly reliable oncilla totally tipped the scale, and I reached out to Rob to start planning a trip. My 2 requests were:

1. To have Rob himself guide the tour, and
2. To be advised of the absolute best season for the animals I'm after.

To meet both criteria, we scheduled way in advance for Jan 2026 – the 'driest' season in the Andes, on a tour led by Rob.

Fast-forward, and I think we had the rainiest January ever recorded in the history of Colombia... then a few months before the trip Rob had to inform me that due to severe hip problems, he would have to replace himself with another guide. When Rob told me he couldn't do it but promised me he hooked us up with the BEST replacement, I had a strong feeling I could trust him, and obviously I was right.

In addition to Ivan, we also had the pleasure of having Rob himself for a few days, as his health is thankfully improving, and he was able to join Chicaque and Chingaza. So, we got to witness – not only the equally-enthusiastic, hard-working, infinite knowledge, and great vibes that Rob brings with him, but how together, Rob and Ivan turn into an unstoppable, Mammalwatching Megazord power (yes, this is a Power Rangers reference, look it up, Post-Millennials!)

Also, in addition to being a great guy and an incredible guide, major props should be given to Rob and Claudia for opening up Colombia to serious mammal watching – by finding and identifying relevant places, arranging logistics that make it possible for short-term tourists to access these places, keeping the client safe and providing them with top-class service and flawless operations – this is not to be taken for granted in a place like Colombia! So, thank you, Mr. Rob!!! And also, Claudia, and the entire operation at Wild About Colombia!!! Of course, they're working on more sites to increase the portfolio of mammals that can be found reliably throughout the country!

For this trip, I was joined by an old friend, Jason Woolgar, as well as two new friends: Karen Czekalski and Daniel Dahan. I can thankfully say that the group worked out great! Everyone brought so much to the table, both in terms of finding mammals and the vibes, humor and awesomeness! We can confidently say that we had just as much fun on our down times as we did MammalWatching. Thanks again guys – Team: "Tapir Patrol" for the win!

I also want to thank Venkat Sankar and Fiona Reid for helping identify some of these rodents and bats!

Before the trip, I thought that out of the "must three" (Bear, Tapir and Oncilla), the oncilla is the least predictable: I've been following it for the past year or so on social media, and it seems like it's been coming once or twice a week. That had me worried, especially when

my good friend Uri Wolkowski (who was with me in Bolivia) spent a couple nights in Mirador El Roble and missed it.

Luckily, Daniel Dahan, who had unfruitful previous attempts, came to Colombia a few days early and spent 2 nights in Mirador El Roble before meeting up with the group in Medellin. When he was there, the cat seemed reliable, visiting every day more than once. That increased my optimism. Furthermore, in his 2 nights Daniel also found 4 olinguitos at the roadside at night (1 on the first night and 3 on the second), so that was a great sign as well!

I hadn't realized that mountain tapirs in Otun weren't guaranteed, and even the bears can be challenging, but definitely doable.

This trip was pre-planned with Rob around animals I had been wanting to see for years. The mammal focus was the "must three", plus the supporting cast of Andean mammals that I wanted to see, including: olinguito, Stump-tailed porcupine, Andean white-eared opossum, Lemurine night mokeys and mountain coati. I also tried to build an itinerary in an attempt to try to maximize our chances at Pacarana and mountain paca.

Note that due to time constraints and prioritization, I knew mountain coati would be more of a chance bycatch for this itinerary, rather than a top target.

Having planned this trip before my Bolivia trip, I also really wanted to see the Amazon pink river dolphins, and any species of Uakari. And additionally, I had never seen a kinkajou or a tayra despite all my former travels to Central and South America, so I wanted those. I would end up seeing tayra in Bolivia before Colombia, but I still wanted my own picture of one.

Finally, Jon Hall's report and a few others' really got me interested in El Paujil for the super-cool-looking variegated spider monkeys. Talking to Rob, he threw in a bunch of other potential primates, all which would be lifers for me, and got me hyped about also potentially seeing a yapok.

In addition to my main targets, I was hoping to catch some different opossums, as well as 1 or 2 extra porcupines. So, following is the resultant itinerary.

### **Itinerary:**

Day 1 (3-Jan-2026): Medellin to El Paujil

Day 2: El Paujil

Day 3: El Paujil to Rio Claro

Day 4: Rio Claro to Mirador El Roble

Day 5: Mirador El Roble and vicinity

Day 6: Mirador El Roble to Montezuma Rainforest Lodge

Day 7: Montezuma to Otun Quimbaya

Day 8: Otun Quimbaya

Day 9: Originally scheduled at Otun, spontaneously changed to Cortaderal / Santa Rosa de Cabal

Day 10: Fly to Bogota then to Chicaque

Day 11: Chicaque to Chingaza

Day 12: Chingaza

Day 13: Chingaza to Bogota and fly to Villavicencio / Restrepo

Day 14: Restrepo to San Jose del Guaviare (Cerro Azul area)

Day 15: San Jose del Guaviare (Cerro Azul area)

Day 16: San Jose del Guaviare area (but sleep in town due to potential sudden flight changes)

Day 17: Fly to Bogota (then just me: fly to Cali)

Appendix - Day 18: Cali to Dona Dora Birding Lodge for 1 night

### **Day-to-day Account:**

#### **Day 1:**

After arriving late evening in Medellin and catching a nice rest in the highly recommended Hotel Movich la Lomas, we were met at 5am by Ivan and our two drivers. Even though we were only 4 participants, we split into 2 cars for very comfortable transfers to sometimes very remote areas, along bad roads, and with plenty of equipment and supplies.

As soon as it became light enough to see, it was evident how beautiful Colombia is! Driving through the mountains and valleys, everything was so green, mountainous and picturesque. But I was surprised that the eternal sunshine I was expecting for this “driest” time of the year was instead cloudy and rainy. I thought maybe it was just a fast-passing system, since we’re in the tropical Andes after all. Little did I know...

We drove for a few hours until we reached our first coffee stop, where I realized that all of Colombia is highly oriented to birding and nature watching. Every roadside restaurant has feeders and awe-inspiring views. We saw some tanagers in the early morning as well as our first mammal of the trip: the **red-tailed squirrel**. After a quick coffee and bathroom

stop, we continued down the Magdalena Valley toward Reserva Natural Margay, a private conservation project, for breakfast.

But we didn't have to make it far from the coffee stop before the front car stopped. I was in the second vehicle at this time, but I quickly learned that while driving with the windows open, Ivan heard the **white-footed tamarins**. Yes, you read that right – while driving in a vehicle with 2 additional chatting participants, Ivan managed to hear and identify a monkey: our first target of the trip.

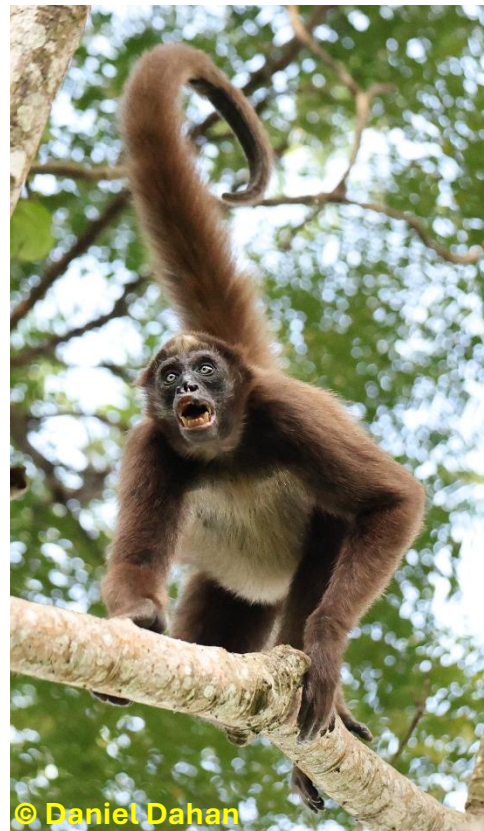
It took under 2 minutes, and we saw our first tamarins at eye level across a mini-valley, at the edge of the forest. We got excellent views of a group of probably 12-15 individuals. Bam, first trip target and lifer, and a good-looking monkey!

We arrived at Reserva Natural Margay for a delicious breakfast with some nice birds, more **tamarins**, and the first full group hangout.



This is a place to be explored: it's owned by Ivan's and Rob's friend, Juan Ramirez, nestled in a piece of natural paradise, with white-footed tamarins coming regularly to the bird feeders, and Juan has many camera trap footage videos of cats, several of which we concluded are indeed margays.

From there we played musical chairs as we continued to lunch and then to Reserva ProAves El Paujil, our home for the next 2 nights. Our main target for El Paujil was the generally hard-to-find Variegated, or, Brown Spider monkey. They can be quite tricky to see and are generally shy, sometimes seen only far away from the birding observation tower. We started by hiking up along the ridge, where the monkeys are sometimes seen close if you're lucky. We didn't luck out on the monkeys, but birds came in fast, with *Citron-throated* and *Yellow-throated toucans*, *collared aracaris*, *white tailed and violaceous trogons*, *laughing falcons* and the critically-endangered *Blue-billed curassow*, which is the species this reserve is built to conserve. We then started the descent towards the heart of the reserve and the lodge, which is a semi-steep walk downhill. It's hot and humid as expected, but less than half an hour later, Ivan recognized the loud screams of the **variegated spider monkeys**. We rushed down to where we saw some visitors taking phone pictures of monkeys that were hanging just beside the trail, in the canopy. These guys move fast through the thick canopy, and so naturally, my photos came out the shittiest with my Nikon P1000, despite the great views we had. At one point they crossed the trail, right over our heads. We highly enjoyed watching them, as they're probably the best looking of the genus, with their crazy blue eyes and the contrasting black, white and brown fur colors.



On the way down, we also stopped at the birding tower, which is mostly out-of-commission due to lack of maintenance. But if you walk up carefully, you get amazing views of the valley, and *white-necked jacobins* are omnipresent at the feeders at the base.

We reached the lodge and enjoyed another coffee on the platform overlooking the river, watching *blue and yellow macaws* and other birds flying overhead. As it got dark, I really tried to photograph flying bats over the river, and I almost got a recognizable picture. After dinner



we set out on our first night hike, where we slowly hiked back up the valley and up the ridge. Before the ascend we saw at least two **Robinson's mouse opossums** and a **mouse** that

we never identified. Walking up the slope we found a **Chucha (Madgalena) slender opossum** and a sleeping family of **Varied capuchins**: another lifer. By the time we got to the top and hiked along the ridge again, everyone was jet-lagged and fighting their closing eyes... So we quickly came down and hit the sac.



## **Day 2:**

I brushed my teeth and made my way down pre-breakfast. On the little bridge towards the dining area, I was intercepted by an adult male, *Blue-billed curassow* that had no fear coming walking past me on a narrow bridge. A magical moment, even though it's not a mammal.



During breakfast, I noticed a mammal dashing across the trail. I quietly circled around through the platform over the forest and found a **Central American agouti** eating the food left out for the curassows. We were hoping the Varied capuchins would show up during breakfast, but they didn't.

After breakfast, Jason and I went to the observation tower to try to spot more monkeys or anything else,

while Karen and Daniel stayed back to look for animals around the research station. There was reception from the tower area, since it's on a hill, and wifi at the lodge, so we could keep each other updated on sightings. These two places were also under 10 minutes walking distance, if necessary.

Taking turns going half-way up the tower, and even all the way to the top (even though it's not recommended in the current state), we saw no mammals, but saw *collared aracaris*, *citron-throated* and *chestnut mandibled toucans*, *blue dacnis*, *orange-chinned parakeets*, *mealy parrots* and others.

We spent pre-lunch time between the lodge's platform that overlooks the river, and our own balcony, which was shared between our room and Karen's and Daniel's. From our balcony, I saw a beautiful *Yellow-tufted dacnis*. I didn't manage a picture, though I got good looks of this beautiful bird. Jason also found a few **Greater sac-winged bats** roosting under the roof just outside our rooms.





Daniel took a longer hike on the riverside trail to look for otters, but with no luck. During lunch, I noticed a moving shape out of the corner of my eye, and we quickly realized the **varied capuchins** were making their way from across the river on the electric cables, towards the fruiting trees near the lodge restaurant. We had a long encounter with a large



troop of these cool-looking monkeys, through diverse behaviors and interactions, including banging fruit against the branches of the tree to open them. It was great!

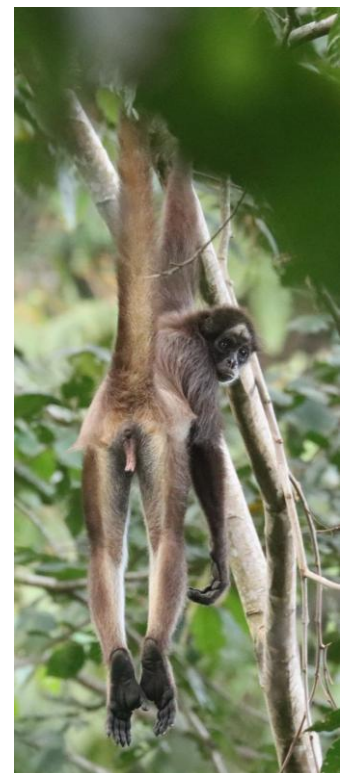
In the later afternoon, we hiked back up the hill, seeing the **capuchins** again before the tower, and later the **Spider monkeys** around the same place as yesterday.

We had even better views, and everyone

got great pictures, except me, with my Nikon P1000...

We then took some side trails in the 'lowlands', including a trail that leads to a tree where gray-handed night monkeys used to nest, but saw no other diurnal mammals on that day. Only interesting sighting was of a cool-looking *western basilisk* near the pond at the entrance to the lodge.

After dinner, we decided to hit up the 'lowlands' trails instead of walking uphill again. We started out with a **Seba's short-tailed**



**bat** that posed nicely by the trail, followed by two separate **Brown-eared woolly opossums** – my first ever woolly opossum, and a cute one!

The rest of the night walk yielded mostly sleeping birds and frogs including *whooping motmot*, *shining-green hummingbird*, *common potoo* and *great tinamou*.



### Day 3:

After another rainy night, we woke up for early coffee. Jason walked up to the tower again, and I wandered the forest near the lodge, where I saw a **red-tailed squirrel**.

After breakfast, while parting ways from the welcoming staff of El Paujil, I purchased one of the hand-made

bracelets they were selling, as a gesture of gratitude. This bracelet, with a blue-billed curassow made out of beads, became our ‘Good Luck’ amulet, and I wouldn’t take it off my wrist for the rest of the trip. But we developed a daily ritual wherein Karen helps me re-adjust it in the morning, to maintain our good luck streak.



On the way out, we saw more *orange-chinned parakeets*, *blue-billed curassows* and a few *Citron-throated toucans* and **Central American agoutis**. Before reaching the car, we found the **spider monkeys** one last time, though they were a little further away and we didn’t spend time trying to get good looks.

The 4-ish hour drive to Cañon del Rio Claro Nature reserve was uneventful except a couple of roadkill Northern Tamanduas on the road, and a tasty lunch. Along the way, I pointed out to Ivan some Limpinks in a roadside pond. But Ivan immediately corrected me: “No, Tomer. These are ibises”. This started a trip-long tradition, wherein I would confidently call out some bird, and Ivan would remind me that, as always, I’m wrong and it’s actually something different.

We arrived at Rio Claro around 13:30 and had a little down time. Our only diurnal target here would have been the white-footed tamarin. Before arriving to our rooms, on the drive in, I made us stop for a beautiful *white-tailed trogon* that was hanging out on a roadside cabin balcony. After settling in, we checked out the area where the endemic, gray-handed night monkeys usually hang out at night, and where spectacled owls are often seen. This

would be the final place to see the gray-handed night monkeys on this trip, so they were a big target for tonight. While I was getting ready in the room, I got word that Daniel, Karen and Jason found the spectacled owl, but apparently Daniel got just a little too excited and scared it away, and it flew across the river. I think Daniel was so traumatized by the event, because he was very careful about that for the rest of the trip 😊. It's too bad, because it would have been a highly-desired lifer for me.

I joined them for a few minutes, seeing *cinnamon woodpecker* and a *straight-billed woodcreeper*. Before taking a nap, I noticed that the building where Karen's and Daniel's room was had a rooftop observation deck, so I went upstairs to check it out. I saw nothing from up there, but this would turn out to be an important find... stay tuned.

We took a nap and then worked out the plan for this afternoon and evening: before dinner, we would hike into the reserve to an area where Ivan often sees the endemic Boyaca Spiny Rat. Then have dinner, walk directly to the creek that's 10 minutes from the cabins, where he has seen yapok, a.k.a. water opossum several times. Finally, continue to search for the night monkeys, hopefully a kinkajou and other surprises.

We did just that: around 16:30 we headed up the river and got a chance to observe, in the last light, that this place is truly amazing! Not only is it aptly called Rio Claro for the clear-watered river, there are also limestone cliffs and beautiful riverside caves! As it got dark, we saw a cave across the river where *oilbirds* kept flying around noisily. Apparently, that's a good bird to see... I almost wanted to take a photo.

Finally, a bit further than Ivan expected, we found a single **Boyaca Spiny rat**, which is pretty big, as Ivan promised. After everyone got good views and satisfactory photos we headed back to the restaurant. This place is popular: unlike El Paujil, here we saw hikers, swimmers, rafters and bikers up and down the main road as well as the riverside trail that had some cool-looking lodging options along it.



After dinner we got our gear and made the short hike towards the creek. On the way, we saw

another **Brown-eared woolly opossum** and another **Robinson's mouse opossum**, but no night monkeys. From about 20:30ish until just before 23:00 we staked out the yapok using thermal scopes, but to no avail. While we were sitting with our scopes, Ivan ventured a few meters up the road and found a **Tawny Oecomys (arboreal rice rat)** hanging out under a metal roof in a roadside



horse stall. By 23:00 it looked like it was about to rain, and we decided to forego the yapok and try for the other targets. We quickly found a **common opossum (a.k.a. Northern black-eared opossum)**, and then another one. A little further up, we thermal-scoped a



trio of **Little Big-eared Bats**. It then started drizzling, and I thermal-scoped what I initially thought was another opossum but spotlit to be my first-ever **kinkajou!** After having missed it so many times, this was exciting! I uncharacteristically yelled “woohoo!” but luckily it didn’t care.



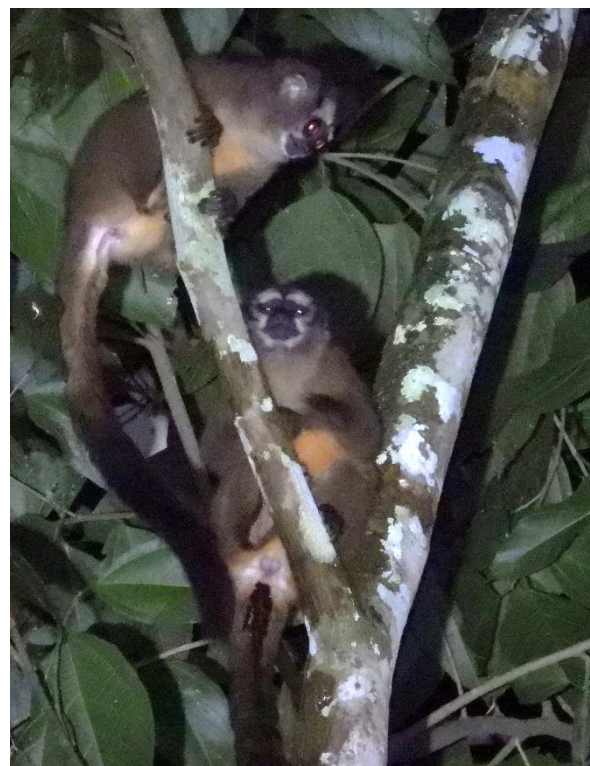
It then started raining. Daniel started to feel sick and walked back to the room. We walked up almost to the entrance of the reserve, but saw nothing new. On the way back, we saw the **kinkajou** again with even better views once we walked into the bush.



We made a concentrated effort in the usual night monkeys hangout but didn’t see them. We were ready to call it a night, as it was almost 1am. But I recalled the observation deck I found earlier and convinced everyone to come check it out with me before going to sleep, as it started to rain again. Jason even made fun of me, saying that

the monkeys would have to be “right in front of you” to be able to see them from there. But lo and behold, I spent 30 seconds thermal scoping from the deck and found the **gray-handed night monkeys!!!** What!?!?!?! BOOM!

We were in such high that this last-minute “Hail Mary” strategy worked out! Instead of heading to bed as planned, we came back downstairs and walked to where we saw the monkeys and got decent views! Another endemic monkey down, Boom! In a rush of excitement and adrenaline, we hit up Yapok stream for 5 more minutes, but we didn’t see it. But we went to sleep happy.



#### Day 4:

Having already seen the tamarins, we left Rio Claro before dawn to get to Mirador El Roble as early as possible to maximize our chances of seeing the Clouded tiger cat. After a 4.5 hours night's sleep, most of us slept in the car or at least tried to.

Around 6:30 we stopped at a random gas station along the way for coffee and croissants. Drinking our coffee, we saw a bunch of cool-looking *scissor-tailed flycatchers* frolicking about the electrical cables along the road. The weather seemed gloomy, but I was hopeful that climbing out of the Magdalena valley and into the Western Andes, we would get out of it, since January was supposed to be the driest month in the region. The next several hours of driving brought waves of optimism and agony, as the road through the mountains twisted and turned through sun-filled valleys and dreary mountainsides. Regardless, driving through Colombia is gorgeously scenic, and the roadside signs warning drivers to watch for of specific species such as: pacarana, mountain paca, stump-tailed porcupine, (supposed Andean white-eared) opossums, armadillos and others, build up excitement. It's as if Mammalwatchers placed these signs! No joke.

When we neared Mirador El Roble, it was evident that between the contrasting weather conditions: dreary wins.

Clouded tiger cat aside, it's impossible not to acknowledge, dare I mention enjoy, the birds. Tons of colorful hummingbirds including the *long-tailed sylph*, *Lesser* and *Sparkling violetears*, *Collared inca*, *White-bellied woodstar*, and others are always around the feeders. *Acorn woodpeckers* are omnipresent, and *blue-capped*, *grass-green* and *beryl-spangled tanagers*, *green jays* and *sickle-billed guans* visit often. Ivan came after organizing everything and immediately pointed out a *Green-and-black Fruiteater*: first cotinga of the trip and my first-ever fruiteater. **Red-tailed squirrels** here seemed smaller and darker than the lowlands. It was foggy and cloudy, but the rain stopped after around 16:00. It became cold, and the rooms at the new building have no heat. Welcome to the Andes.



This place has hot showers in theory, but my personal experience was along a thin line between pure torture with a hint of comfort, due to low water pressure. In all honesty, all this place needs is a space heater in the room, and it would be amazing. But I shouldn't complain too much, as Lucia, Martin, and the rest of the crew truly make this a magical place. I'd go back there in a second!

The way I imagined it was like a farm cleared in the middle of the cloud forest, where occasionally an oncilla strays out of the forest and crosses the clearing to snatch a chicken. But this place is just a small lodge on top of a steep hill (hence "Mirador" – the

views are super amazing, especially during sunrise!). The forest that starts just behind the lodge's restaurant, where the hummingbirds, oncilla, squirrels, opossums and others come from, extending continuously all the way down the valley and mountains beyond. An olinguito used to visit the banana feeders regularly but has disappeared recently. Daniel saw a few olinguitos during his pre-trip stay here, and therefore it became 2<sup>nd</sup> highest target. Food was great, and Lucia is always happy to make you tea or coffee upon request.

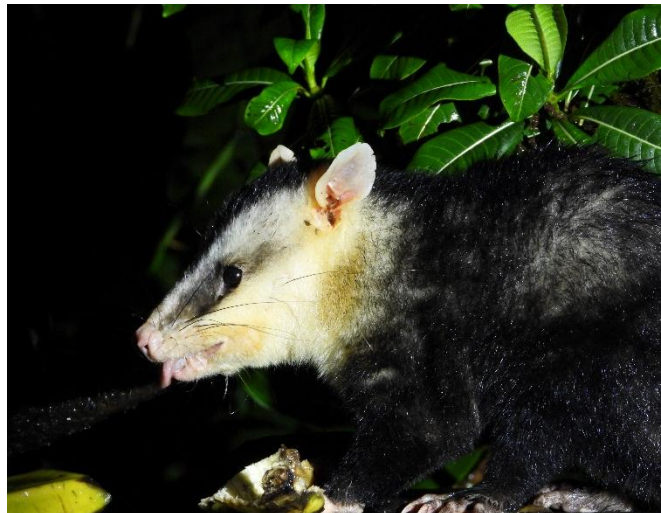
The cat didn't show up in the afternoon, and I was worried that the rain may have deterred it. Given the recent fickle history of this cat over the past few months, we were a little worried.

Towards the end of dinner, Karen and I were having coffee as Jason said "here, Tomer, can you hold my torch so that I can get better pictures of this **Andean white-eared opossum**?"

Huh?

Shit, there's an **Andean white-eared opossum** at the feeder! We were chit-chatting and didn't notice this lifer right behind us!

Daniel was feeling worse than yesterday, and decided to stay in. All things considered, this was probably the 'least-bad' timing for him to get sick on this trip, as he already saw the cat and the olinguito. He wished us luck and went to bed, as we climbed the vehicle and started our night drive. The first hour and a half consisted of mixed walking and driving. Between



Ivan, Jason and I, we found another 4-5 additional **Andean white-eared opossums**, and I found our first *white-throated screech owl*.

We then drove further out toward Jardin, seeing another **white-eared opossum**. I yelled "Tapir!" when a big thermal image proved to be a horse in a field... Being in such cold mountainous climate, even the horse's fresh shit looked like a decent-sized mammal in



the thermal scope. But the real excitement came when an animal Jason picked up in the scope materialized as a **Stump-tailed porcupine**. This was Ivan's first, and we had clear and prolonged, close views of it. Definitely the mammal of the night.

We drove further, towards ProAves' Yellow-eared parrot reserve, but saw nothing other than the butt of a *Southern emerald toucanet* I found in the thermal. Overall, we had a very decent night but were still missing the olinguito.



### **Day 5:**

Hearing that the cat could come around dawn, 4 of us were up at the dining table by 5:30am, waiting quietly with coffee. We were almost naïve to be sitting in silence, as one would, when staking out a rare, wild cat.

Around 6:20am, a beautiful sunrise made us get up to take photos. Holy shit, what a place! Even while waiting for a cat, you have to get up and gander at this magic.

By 6:45 it was full daylight, with the sun shining on the surrounding mountains. In-between sips of a second coffee, I noticed a tiny **cat** head sneaking quietly behind the



wooden logs. “The **cat!**”, I whispered. Within seconds, everyone saw it as it sneaked around and made its way to the area between a little 3-piece wooden platform and the back wall of the kitchen. Once it got comfortable, the **Clouded tiger cat** climbed up on the wooden platform and sat with its tail curled around it, looking at the birds, glimpsing at us, and most importantly, intently staring through the kitchen window with its piercing eyes, trying to capture Lucia’s attention. This once completely wild cat, who was caught snatching chickens from their coop, is a lucky cat: elsewhere, he could have been shot on sight. Fortunately, this is a birding lodge, and they appreciate wildlife and especially rare species. So, to keep him around, they decided to designate a little bit of chicken or fish every time he comes, while hiding their live chickens. So, he’s quite tame when he comes. He stayed for long minutes, and when it seemed like he was about to leave empty-handed, Lucia came out with a piece of chicken and yelled “Manchas! Manchas!”. He responded and came back, then received a hefty piece of chicken, which he took into the forest and disappeared. Sure, this isn’t the wildest ‘feel’ for an



encounter with such otherwise-elusive species. But he is totally wild-born and still cares for himself when he doesn’t show up. Although our theory is that, as Manchas gets older, he will start depending more and more on the food provided by Lucia, until he starts hanging around the lodge like a house cat, before ultimately passing away. So, this is still a good time to see him, as he’s reliable and habituated, but still not domesticated. (So, hurry up and



buy tickets! Have you done that yet? What are you waiting for?! .. JK 😊)

I also just wanted to note that this is such a beautiful cat, with its aptly named cloud-like pattern, thick, furry tail and cute, small head. His ears have seen better days, and he's clearly been in fights, and at least on that day when we saw him, it looked like he had a slight irritation in his right eye. But the adrenaline was high, and this is arguably the mammal of the trip for me!



During breakfast, with the sun out for once, we enjoyed shinier views of most of the birds and also caught glimpses of the endemic *yellow-eared parrots* flying high overhead. We then went to the antpitta site because it seemed like a decent place for mountain coati. After trying the antpitta place, we continued up the mountain towards Jardin, on a road through the ProAves Yellow-eared parrot reserve. This road travels through elevations of 2,800-2,900 meters above sea level (masl), and many cool species can be seen there. But we saw no mammals.

After lunch, most people took a couple hour nap, as the weather shifted again. But instead of sleeping, I tried my luck playing back black-billed mountain toucan calls, as I really wanted to see either species of mountain toucan. I heard it call back a few times but never saw it. What I did see was Manchas, the **Clouded tiger cat**, who came around 14:30 during a short burst of sunshine. Jason and I were sitting much closer to it, on the opposite side. When it seemed like it was sticking around, we texted the crew, but by the time Karen came from the room it had just gone. As soon as Karen retired back to her room, Manchas came back. But by the time I texted the group, it disappeared for the rest of the day. On that final encounter, I made a point not to photograph but just enjoy this beautiful cat and savor the moment.

After the cat left, I gave mountain toucan another chance, until it started pouring down. This was good motivation to nap before a long, concentrated night outing.

At dinner, it was still raining. Daniel came back from the dead, feeling and looking much better. It was also Lucia's birthday, and we had a nice festive dinner with champagne and a cake. During dinner, I noticed the **Andean white-eared opossum** at the fruit feeders again and took selfie with it.



Tonight we headed straight towards the higher altitudes near ProAves Loro Orejiamarillo (yellow-eared parrot) Reserve, with Olinguito being a main target, and the obvious pacarana and mountain paca in mind. We drove to a bridge a couple kilometers from reserve's information center,

after which the ecosystem is mostly forested. I thermal-scoped an animal in the trees that Jason and Daniel then located in the light and announced it was our **Olinguito!** This

guy did not stay still, and we had a little bit of confusion trying to get Ivan to keep his light on it, when Jason and I each thought we saw the animal going in different directions. There may have even been two animals, who knows. Finally, we re-located it with the thermal scope just at the edge of the



canopy of the tree we saw it on, earlier. It was clearly getting ready to leap across an open gap against the sky to a nearby tree. I got a record shot, which was exciting, as Olinguito was my 4<sup>th</sup> most highly desired trip target. We then saw it leaping across as expected, and I wondered if anyone got the magic shot: full body against pitch-black sky. Daniel would usually be the one, but alas nobody got it. To our dismay, we realized Karen missed the animal, as she was fiddling with a functional error in her camera. This became a nerve-wrecking situation, since we couldn't find it again, but I assured Karen that tomorrow at Motezuma we should get another one. In fact, the reason for insisting on Montezuma was Olinguito. I hadn't realized before the trip that it was a feasible target for El Roble area.

Down the road, Ivan found 2 more **stump-tailed porcupines**, none compared to the views of previous night. But good enough for Daniel, who wasn't with us last night.

Further up the road, we reached an area that had semi-open terrain, probably due to local farming. In that area we found a few rabbits that I thought were Andean tapetis, but based on location and altitude, and thanks to Venkat Sankar's knowledge, turn out to be

**Fluorescent tapeti**, a recently split species from the former. We saw a few of them, but thick fog was coming in and getting worse by the minute. Of course, Daniel still managed a picture. Throughout the night it also drizzled on-and-off and was very cold.

After turning around, we saw more **tapetis** in the same place as before, and a couple of interesting thermal shapes near the reserve headquarters, but we will never know what they were.



### **Day 6:**

Having seen the cat, I woke up just in time for a coffee and a quick snack, getting ready to leave. Karen and Daniel told us that Manchas showed up again just 15 minutes earlier, which was great news, since they both missed last afternoon's visits. So, as in every morning, Karen helped me re-situate my lucky-charm Curassow bracelet from El Paujil.

I spent the first couple of hours sleeping until breakfast somewhere in sunny Cauca valley. We thought the bad weather was behind us... Naïve were we.

The drive to Montezuma requires "more resilient" (preferably 4x4) vehicles, and so we switched vehicles in the nearby small town, before making the final ascend to Montezuma Rainforest Lodge. Just before pulling up to the lodge, Ivan noticed an *Andean cock-of-the-rock* flying just by our vehicle and landing on a branch where we could see it nicely for a split-second. But being a mammalwatching trip, Ivan didn't even think to stop for it, despite being a lifelong birder. He took on the task very seriously!

We arrived at Montezuma in time for lunch. This is primarily a birding lodge in an interesting area where the Choco region meets the Western Andean slopes, creating a nice mixture of avian and mammalian species. I had insisted on a night in Montezuma because it's notoriously good for Olinguito, but I had a secret mission of getting a good tayra sighting. When I planned Colombia, I hadn't yet seen a tayra, and now I have in Bolivia, but early morning in thick vegetation and with no photo.

This is a classic Latin American rainforest lodge with hot water showers, decent beds, comfortable public areas with bird feeders, sofas, a library, and a constant supply of coffee, tea and hot chocolate.

As soon as we arrived, we asked about the tayras, and we were told by Fernando, our local guide for Montezuma, that they come to the feeders daily. We had a quick lunch by the smaller feeders (by the kitchen) and then proceeded to wait by the other, larger feeders, which had **Central American agoutis** omnipresent, and **Red-tailed squirrels** frequently. Note that iNaturalist shows black agoutis here, but these IDs are all wrong, as black

agoutis don't occur in this region. Thus, despite looking a little darker, all agoutis here are **Central American**.



Fernando quickly pointed us a **Chocó Dwarf Squirrel** in a tree right by the lodge, which we enjoyed for a few minutes. Again, it's hard to ignore the pretty birds, with species of hummingbirds including *White-booted racket-tail*, *Violet-tailed sylph*, *Velvet-purple*

*Coronet*, *White-necked Jacobin*, *Rufous-gaped Hillstar*, *Crowned woodnymph* and others. Also, *Andean motmots*, *Flame-rumped* and *crimson-backed tanagers*, *Russet backed Oropendolas* and *Red-headed barbet* come to the feeders. The last of which I long wanted to see. But all of that ceased to matter when Fernando said "Oh, the tayras!". He said they were on their way to the feeders for bananas. We waited for a few minutes, but they never came. "Tayras? Like, more than one?" I asked him. "Yes, it looks like a mother with 2 pups". "Cool!".



Seeing birds... waiting for Tayras

I then decided to stand on the road, in the place where Fernando saw them: maybe they'd cross the street again. Jason joined too. Within a couple of minutes, a **Tayra** crossed the road and then 2 more! I just pulled my camera up in time for a quick 5-second video of



the mother running off the road, with 1 pup following her, and then the second one. YES! A sighting long enough for me to have my own video! I was thrilled. We called Daniel and Karen, who came quickly. But the tayras didn't show up again. Karen was now down a tayra and an Olinguito! She has

seen tayras before, but wanted an improved sighting, like me. Long minutes with no tayras in sight were concerning, but I told Karen confidently: "Before the end of the evening, you will have seen both Tayra and Olinguito!". No doubt in my mind. I was wearing my lucky curassow bracelet, after all.

We stayed near the larger feeder for over an hour before I decided to take the opportunity and have a proper hot shower. On the walk to the cabins, I saw a *Choco toucan* flying high above. When I returned, everyone was still waiting for tayras, but a birding couple that just came back told us they usually show up a little later. Long-story-short, what started as a short fly-by of the mother with the two pups behind the feeder turned into a **tayra**

frenzy, with at least 5 individuals (the mom, 2 pups, a big lone male and a much smaller lone animal) coming and going from the feeder to the road, for the next hour or so.



Sometimes, they walked by the lodge's entrance, came to the second feeder, hung out on the road, or ate bananas from the larger feeders. This was Tayra Heaven, except for the shitty light that once again turned from sun to clouds to heavy rain that lasted all throughout the afternoon and through dinner. Luckily, before the rain started, and in between the tayra visits, Ivan pointed out a **Dusky rice rat** at the small feeder.

We only had 1 night in Montezuma, and it could have been a hit or miss, with this crappy, steady rain. But miraculously, just as we were leaving for the night excursion, the rain stopped, and the sky became clear and starry, though I can't say "dry" as everything was very wet. We didn't drive all the way up to the army base, we must have stopped a few hundred meters lower, in elevation. But



within a couple of minutes of walking, I thermal-scoped a pair of **olinguitos** in a tree right above the trail, and we all got great looks. Phew! Karen has now gotten both Olinguito and



Tayra as I promised. Karen also held a constantly optimistic approach, which proved itself!

Further down, just a couple minutes away we found a pair of what we thought were olinguitos again, but now I think it was a pair of **kinkajous**, looking at the pictures. We



hiked downhill for kilometers, seeing mostly sleeping birds and hiding rodents, one of which is most likely an **Alfaro's Rice Rat**. Venkat wasn't 100% sure

because its feet aren't visible through the soil, but in the end I'm convinced it's this species. We also saw *masked trogon*, a beautiful *purplish-mantled tanager*, a female *orange-throated fruiteater*, and a couple of *rufescent screech owls*.



Fernando decided to be original and walk up to lookout points with visible views of forest way off the trail. This yielded a

couple more **Andean stump-tailed porcupines**. Ivan found one as well, plus a **mouse** hiding in an overhanging branch over the trail, which we will never identify despite some semi-descent photos.



The final cool mammal to note on the hike was an **Isthmian** or **Panamanian mouse opossom**, when it was getting late and we were about ready to call it a night.



After a 25-minute ride back, that felt like 50 minutes, we got back to the lodge. Karen and Daniel went to sleep, but Jason wanted to try a little longer around the lodge. Of course I had to join for a little bit, and Ivan was already up ahead, finding stuff. Jason spotted a **crab-eating fox** at a pond near the main trail to the cabins, catching fish, which was cool.



We also found a **Common (black-eared) opossum** on top of the roof of the main building, which Jason tried to photograph, but it wouldn't oblige.

I was so tired, but after 'hiking' to my room I realized I didn't have Jason and I's room key. I must have dropped it on the trail. But it was 2am, and there was no way to try to find my key along the trail. Trying would take hours! Plus, we were leaving in the morning. I felt terrible because they have these individually hand-

carved key holders in the shape of native animals. What a Tomer move... 😞 We had to wake Fernando back up to let me and Jason into our room.

### **Day 7:**

We woke up, had a 7:30 breakfast, then made our way to Otun Quimbaya. During breakfast, Fernando pointed out the **Choco dwarf squirrel** again.

As usual, I took a nap in the car for the first couple of hours. We switched cars again in the same place as the day before, and continued to La Florida, where we had lunch before venturing up SFF. Otun Quimbaya. The drive up was super scenic but otherwise uneventful. With Mountain Tapir being the top target here, I was imagining more paramo scenery, but this was proper cloud forest, which spans a great range of elevations. Because of that, Otun is like the 'wild card' of a park, boasting species ranging from Pacaranas and Mountain pacas to jaguarundis and pumas, and everything in-between, including some of our targets: mountain tapir, Derby's woolly opossum, Lemurine night monkeys and Colombian red howlers in the lower altitudes of the park. Yapok is occasionally seen in the stream along the main road, and as Venkat mentioned in his report – the birds here (and in Colombia, in general) are hard to ignore, too!

We arrived at the Cabaña el Cedral in the late afternoon, with the weather turning gloomy again. This place had a different kind of magic: on one hand, it was absolutely pristine rain forest, and on the other hand, there was music playing in the little snack booth and restaurant of Cabaña el Cedral, with hikers and bicyclers coming in-and-out of the road or the trail that goes to the maintain. I did like the vibe but had hoped for less human disturbance. Jason, specifically, was worried about the main road being the only road in the park, meaning that we mammal watch along it as hikers, bikers and "the mail man"

use it. I didn't think this would be a huge deal because it was a pretty remote location, but it would turn into a bigger deal when we realized this was a holiday weekend and specifically on Sunday (our 3rd day and night in the park), there was a bike-a-thon event scheduled, with hundreds of bicyclers. Spoiler: we ended up moving to another area for that 3rd night. But I'm getting ahead of myself...

The road from La Florida ends at Cabaña el Cedral, which is at ~2100masl, and a hiking trail continues up the mountain for another 8km. According to Venkat and Rob, the cabins are at a great altitude for pacaranas and mountain pacas, as well as mountain tapirs and other high-elevation cloud forest species.

A mountain tapir used to come reliably to the back yard of the Cabaña to rummage through the compost. But more recently, the animal hasn't been seen since November. This was bad news, as we thought this was a guaranteed 'tick'. However, when we arrived, one of the staff members said she heard noises last night in the back yard, which she was pretty sure was a tapir. How reliable was she? Should we try staking it out in the back yard? We left this dilemma for later.

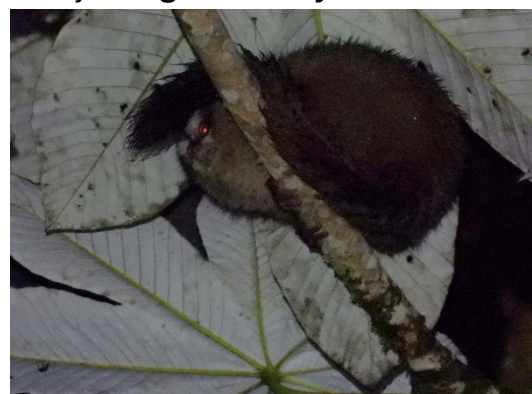
Before dinner, Daniel rested while Jason, Karen and I walked uphill to the bridge over the Otun river, to see if we could find anything. We split to different vantage points to maximize efficiency. I then spotted a pair of *torrent ducks* on my side, so I called them over. But that was it. Dinner was great, as temperatures were plummeting.

We left for our night drive. This vehicle had room for 1 in the passenger seat, and then up to 6 in the open back part. 2 long benches facing each other were used mostly to stand on, while grabbing the metal rails as we scanned the sides and trees above.

The first animal I thermal-scoped turned out to be an **olinguito**... again! But because of the angle at which our driver stopped, only Karen and Daniel got pictures, while Jason

and I had obstructed views. *Sickle-winged* and *Cauca guans* became an annoyance as they are here in hundreds, lighting up the thermal scopes in excitement that turn to disappointment. Finally, after many guans, we thermal scoped a group of **Lemurine**, or **Colombian Night monkeys**, another great target for this park! They did not like the light, which was frustrating. Luckily, we saw another family of **night monkeys** further down by the visitor center.

From there, we took a side road that crosses the river and goes to some kind of sewage treatment plant. On the way there we saw a



**Tschudi's Slender Opossum.** Of course, while I was struggling to have my stupid camera focus on it, Daniel snapped 4 pictures of it. Back on the main road up, I thermal scoped



© Daniel Dahan



© Daniel Dahan

another animal that turned out to be the cool-looking **Derby's woolly opossum** we had hoped to see. Up the road we saw a *rufescent screech owl*, and closer to the cabins we found a **common opossum**. That was the final mammal for the night. Or so we thought...

Our driver went to sleep, and we were left with a conundrum: what do we do about mountain tapir? The lady 'supposedly' heard one last night, but Ivan was skeptical. We could take shifts staying up in the backyard with thermal scopes, then call



the others via group WhatsApp phone if one arrives. But the fear of people getting up and moving about, scaring the tapir was concerning. Another option was that all of us sleep outside and take shifts being awake, without going to our respective rooms. But Ivan suggested we try one more patrol drive, *\*only\** scanning the roadsides and the road itself for tapirs, no trees. We all agreed but were hesitant to wake up the driver. Ivan had no such hesitation – he woke up our driver, and off we were. Ivan thermal-scoped the front and sides, while I scanned straight behind us – just in case. After 10 minutes, Ivan yelled to the driver: “Stop!” He quickly pointed his light and shouted “**Tapir!**” Shit, that was fast!

We were by the clearing that had horses. Ivan previously mentioned this is a good place for Tapirs, and if I'm not mistaken, this is exactly where Rob and Romi Jansen saw their tapir. We all got into position, and Ivan shined the light on a beautiful **Mountain tapir** that was hanging out just a few meters away from the road. We saw it well for a few seconds, but it quickly moved into thick vegetation. Ivan said we could try to circle around the clearing. But despite looking like an open, flat grassy field, Ivan warned us that the recent rains would make it a muddy walk. We



happily took on the challenge. We lifted a section of the barbed wire fence and started hiking. What seemed slightly muddy at first, turned quickly into ankle-to-knee-high unforgiving mud. We tried to remain quiet to not scare the tapir. We found it again in the thermal scope, and tried to sneak around, while tripping in the mud and holding each other's arms to pull ourselves from this quicksand-like scenario.

This paid off: the **mountain tapir** was eating happily in the bushes near the clearing. Still

a little weary of the light but giving decently clear views of its head and upper body. Until it decided it didn't like the lights and walked further into the vegetation. Trying to circle around to see it clearly again, this



turned into a 45-minute adventure battling thick mud, trying to look for signs of firm ground so that we could walk quietly, all while trying to re-locate the tapir. We did see it again a couple of times, but not as close, long or clear as we had at our first "stop". Regardless, we were all happy, as our Tapir Patrol mission was a success! It was past 1am, but at least we could now go to sleep and not worry about taking turns staying awake or sleeping outside in the wet, cold backyard.

Everyone took off their completely muddy and soaked boots and went to sleep. But of course, Ivan decided to stay up, clean everyone's boots with a hose he found in the back, then let them dry through the next day. This is Ivan... always taking initiative, always making sure people are comfortable, and that's only in addition to the spotting and identification skills.



*Team Tapir Patrol: Soaked, Dirty, Tired and Happy*

### **Day 8:**

This morning I made the horrible mistake fixing my own curassow bracelet, instead of having Karen help. This breaking of the ritual obviously brought bad luck.

It started when our driver was supposed to show up at 5:30 after bringing

hikers from La Florida but showed up very late. With no reception, we just started hiking until he drove past, full of hikers. He then came and picked us up. We were going to try to find the Colombian red howler monkeys that are usually found only in the lowlands, closer to the headquarters. But the morning was quiet, with no howls heard. It was also a Saturday, and that of a long, holiday weekend. Hikers and bikers started arriving early, making their way up the only road. Jason's concerns from yesterday started to materialize...

We didn't see any mammals, but found the iconic *red-ruffed fruitcrow*, once in dense



vegetation on the side of the road, and another time on the side of a concrete bridge over the river towards the sewage treatment plant. The second was a great sighting, as Ivan assertively stopped a group of runners from passing us up and scaring the bird. They then took interest in the bird, too.

On our way back up to the lodge, light drizzle turned to rain again.

After breakfast, we caught up on sleep, but unfortunately it kept raining fairly steadily throughout the day, preventing us from venturing out, but giving us time to contemplate next couple of days. So, on one hand, Otun Quimbaya is a beautiful park, and I can imagine that during the week, or at least not on a bike-a-thon holiday weekend, it's fairly quiet with relatively few visitors. This should enable quality mammalwatching on the main road.

But this was indeed a bike-a-thon holiday weekend, and we saw the hikers and bikers starting to pile up. And Ivan told us this was only a preview for how it would be on Sunday. Also, note that public bus takes visitors up and down twice a day (6am and 12pm). After some contemplation, by lunch we decided that since we saw the tapir, woolly opossum, and the night monkeys, we should try to go somewhere else tomorrow, instead of having a 3rd night there. Ivan called Rob, and they suggested we try Santa Rosa de Cabal, where Venkat saw the Olalla rat and the probable pacarana or mountain paca that fled unidentified. Ivan also noted there were chances for mountain coati as well, and so we all chipped-in some money and changed the plan for tomorrow.



The rest of the day was uneventful, with constant rain cancelling our afternoon plans. In the late afternoon, after a coffee while watching drenched hikers come down from the mountain trail, I decided to venture out to the bridge just above the lodge. The rain was more of a drizzle at that point, and I was eager to get out. But all I found was *Cauca guans* and a single *Collared trogon*. In the late afternoon, there was a break from the

rain, and we walked to the place where we saw the tapir to try to see if we can find another one during daylight hours. We didn't.

Finally, at night the rain stopped, and we were about to get going. Jason was already out of the lodge's gates, and we could see him through the fence, thermal spotting down the main road while waiting for us. Daniel, Karen and I were caught chit-chatting when suddenly Jason called "**Pacarana!**".

In a state of Panic, we all rushed around the fence and out the gate, to try to get to where Jason was standing. When we got there, we asked him if he was sure, and he said yes.

"Where is it??"

"It wobbled over that way."

"Shit!"

We all stayed in silence and thermal scopes for a long time, but the animal never came back.

Now, let me explain the situation:

Jason was out on his own, outside the lodge but just at the end of the parking lot, thermal scoping and spotlighting. He saw a **pacarana**, while we all missed it. First of all, he felt terrible about everyone missing it, as this was at the top of the wish list of the rare and unlikely possible species we all hoped would miraculously show up during the trip. Second of all, his first reaction was: "You know NOBODY is going to believe me that I actually saw it, because I could barely get my light on it in time, let alone take a picture". He knew this was a "tough position" to be in. However, he was very confident and convinced that this is what he saw. We had been looking at Rob Jansen's video of a pacarana, and so we were all familiar with the slowish, wobbly movements that doesn't



resemble that of the similarly patterned mountain paca, which moves more agouti-like, or, well... like a paca.

Jason really wanted all of us to see it, and equally so, he wanted to see it again and take a picture. We ended up waiting, as I said above, with the thermal scopes in silence at that spot for over half an hour, as drizzle came back and left. But all we saw in the drizzle were small, mouse-sized rodents in the grass patches at the roadside.

Finally, we decided to get on the road, and try a combination of walking and driving. As we walked by the place where Jason saw the pacarana crossing, we realized there's a micro-corridor there from the forest on one side to the stream on the other. This is also where yapok is sometimes seen. The drizzle came and went, but we didn't see many animals other than small, mouse-sized rodents through our thermal scopes.

At one point we managed to take a picture of a mouse that was sitting still on a thin branch, just below eye-level at the side of the road. Based on a cross-reference investigation using mine and Daniel's pictures, based on location, elevation and situation, between ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude and Perplexity, it turned out to be most likely a **Mexican harvest mouse**. The second most likely option, by a margin, was Mount Pirri (or Broad-footed) climbing mouse. But this was smaller, specifically compared to what is most likely the Mount Pirri climbing mouse we actually saw the following night..! (stay tuned).

Other than that, we had a relatively quiet night, seeing mostly unidentified rodents, and *sleeping guans* and *crimson-rumped toucanets*. Just as we were pulling into the parking lot, I thermal-spotted a pacarana-sized animal walking in the back of the parking lot. I almost got too excited when I shined on it, only to see it was a **common opossum** disappearing behind the lodge.



It was well past midnight, but Jason was determined: he pulled in 2 chairs from the back yard of the lodge, and set them in the same place from where he saw the pacarana, facing toward the spot. Karen and Daniel went to sleep, but we were going to stay up longer and wait. Ivan noticed us sitting there and wouldn't miss out. He quickly grabbed us some biscuits and cookies, then pulled up a 3rd chair and sat with us. And in retrospect, Karen also said that if she had known, she would have stayed up too. We promised to make sure and invite everyone subsequently.

While sitting there, we saw at least 3-4 fox-sized animals through the scope, crossing at that same place where Jason saw his pacarana. But each time, by the time we communicated among ourselves to ensure everyone is paying attention, we shined the

light, but the animal was finished crossing. If we had stayed longer, we would have improved that system, to shine sooner, than get everyone's attention. But around 1:30, after an animal crossed, one of the lodge's dogs ran up and started barking at it. Jason, who was already best friends with the dog since we arrived, tried to convince it to go back into the lodge's gates, but then a motorcyclist pulled up and started chit-chatting with us, nailing the coffin of this unsuccessful night... ironically unsuccessful for all of us except for Jason, who saw a freaking pacarana! But he, too, would have been much happier if we all saw it.

### **Day 9:**

The only plan for today was to make it to Santa Rosa de Cabal for an afternoon drive in search of Mountain coatis around Cortaderal, then search for the Olalla rat, pacaranas, mountain pacas, etc at night.

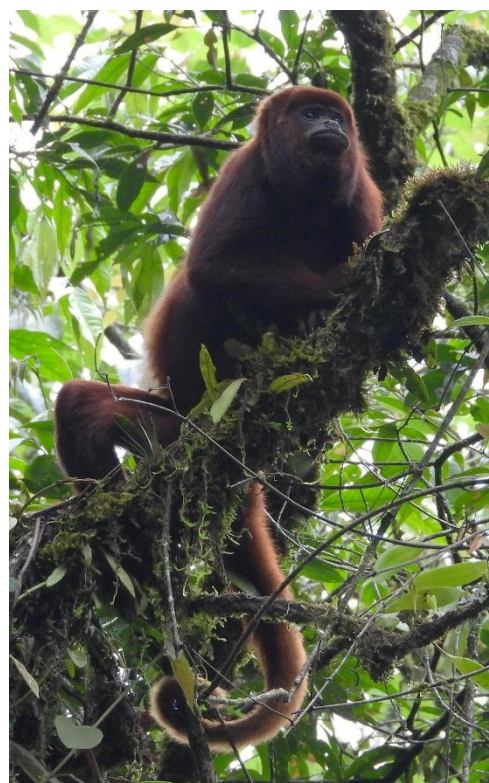
We still hoped for Colombian red howlers on the way out, so I had Karen fix my lucky charm curassow bracelet.

Bicyclers drove past us on our way out, making us content with our decision to leave. With no monkeys in sight, I found a beautiful *Andean cock-of-the rock*, which we stopped to photograph this time.



After we passed the park headquarters, Ivan, who was as determined as us to find the howlers, told us there is one last patch of forest before town, and we can say our "Hail Marry". Sure enough, a few minutes later Ivan yelled "stop!", as he found the **Colombian Red howlers!** We spent several minutes observing a family while hikers and bicyclers that came past, stopped to check them out. Many also ended up taking pictures of the monkeys using their phones or pocket cameras.

We changed cars again, and continued to Santa Rosa de Cabal, where we had a nice lunch with a live Mariachi band. From there, we continued to Thermals, where we stayed at a super nice little resort (with proper hot showers!!!). We put our stuff in the rooms and drove into the mountains. It started pouring rain again and wouldn't let off for



hours. It was getting depressing at this stage, fearing rain would ruin our one afternoon and night in this bonus location. And it did.

Before leaving town, Jason spotted a rabbit, but we quickly realized it's someone's pet in their back yard...

While looking for mammals, I was also on the lookout for mountain toucans, too. In this place we were in 2 separate cars, and I was in the front one. Rain persisted, but I suddenly noticed a toucan sitting far away on a tree, so I asked to stop the car. It turned out to be just another *Southern emerald toucanet*; a pair of them. It was our first daylight sighting and out in the open, so I took a minute to photograph. Just as we were about to leave, I saw a pair of seemingly different toucans landing on the same tree as the emerald toucanets. I yelled "Mountain toucans!" but Ivan in the second car, corrected me, as always: "*Crimson-rumped toucanets*".

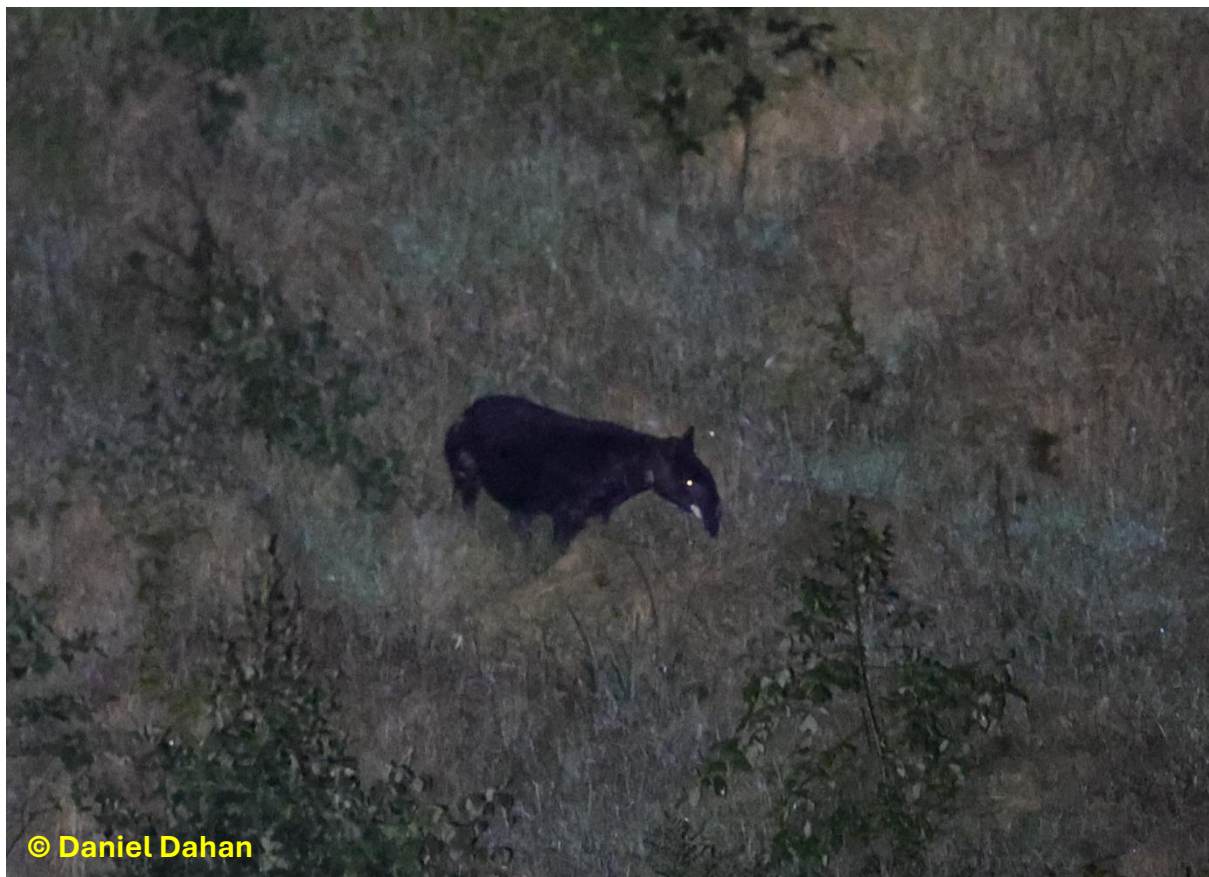
As always, I call out the wrong bird species and Ivan corrects me 🤦. But I actually also wanted to see *crimson-rumped toucanets*, so I still took a couple of pictures. In general, Jason, Karen and Daniel all made fun of me for being a 'birdist': like a racist, but for birds – really liking the flashy and pretty ones, e.g. toucans and barbets, cotingas, parrots, trogons, manakins, etc., while 'Booing' for the dull ones, without regard to how rare or special they are.

To make a long story short, this place has tons of potential, and we had a firm plan. Ivan even had a recording of the Olalla rat's scream. But the rain just prevented us from doing anything other than driving up and down with very little visibility. At night, we resorted to driving in 2 cars, rotating between who's in the front car with Ivan and the back one. The leading car stopped to photograph a rodent in the rain, that is most likely to be a **Broad-footed climbing mouse** (*Rhipidomys latimanus*). This was another identification by cross-referencing A.I. agents: ChatGPT, Gemini, Calude.ai and Perplexity, asking them to look at our 2 photos, giving exact coordinates, and asking them to reference IUCN and other sources for distribution ranges. I then challenged them to the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> best contenders, but this species was almost unanimous, given the location, elevation, time of the day seen, visible features, the fact that it's on a branch, etc. I promised I would circle back to the Mexican harvest mouse from before: based on location and abundance, this species (*Rhipidomys latimanus*) was a 2<sup>nd</sup> place contender for Otun as well. But looking at both animals and comparing their size



based on the branches they're each sitting on, it's clear that this rodent is larger and slightly different than the mouse from the day before, giving a relatively high degree of confidence that the former is the Mexican harvest mouse, and the latter is the Broad-footed (a.k.a. Mount Pirri) climbing mouse. But I'm happy to hear any other opinions.

Later, sitting in the second car, I saw a large, solitary thermal signature across the valley that I was pretty sure was a mountain tapir. I tried to get the front car's attention, but they were too far ahead. Karen's and my lights together weren't strong enough to fully see it, but I'm still pretty sure that's what it was. Once we got to the top, switched cars and turned around, Karen and I were in the vehicle with Ivan, and we re-located the animal I found, which indeed turned out to be a **mountain tapir** across the valley! This time, Daniel got some decent pictures. While much further than the one in Otun, this one was totally in the open, which was cool. Less than 20 minutes down the road, I thermal scoped yet another **mountain tapir**, this time even further, but of course Daniel managed a couple of pictures!



© Daniel Dahan

The rest of the night was uneventful. It got extremely cold and everyone was tired. But when we got to the hotel, I took the longest hot shower I could, until literally all the hot water ran out. This was highly needed, after 3 days in Otun that only had a thin stream of warm showers and no heating in the rooms.

## **Day 10:**

We woke up for a very early take-away breakfast and drove to Pereira's airport. We flew to Bogota and met the legendary Rob Smith, who joined us in a very comfortable bus-like van with reclining seats, that would be our vehicle for the next 3 days. As soon as we landed, we started driving to Parque Chicaque, and after chatting with Rob for a while, I took a well-needed nap in the car.

It started raining again as we left Bogota. When we arrived at the top of Chicaque, it was still rainy and cloudy with mist, so you couldn't see much. We had lunch at the super cute Arboloco restaurant at the entrance to the reserve, where they had a great selection of dishes, including my favorite Mexican soup with avocado (yes!) and a giant nacho.

The rain ceased through lunch, and as the clouds slowly started to dissipate, an incredible view started to unfold. We took a smaller 4X4 down to the main building, "Refugio de Montaña" through the pristine forest, where we would settle in our respective huts. The scene at Refugio de Montaña is like out of an adventure movie: There's a huge wooden lodge built on top of a rocky hill, somewhat reminiscent of grandiose African lodges, but with nobody else there. Yet, there's a cozy restaurant and a huge back balcony overlooking the valley. With a large grassy clearing at the bottom of the stairs, and a dramatic backdrop of sheer rocky cliffs on the opposite side of the clearing, looking like a remote and wild, forgotten corner of the amazon, rather than only a few hours from Bogota.





Add a nice afternoon coffee in the back porch of the grand restaurant, overlooking the downhill sloping forests that descend into the Cauca valley, with some mountain peaks and towns peeking out from the sea of clouds, and you got yourself one beautiful view.

In the afternoon, darker-than-usual **Central American agoutis** hang out in the clearing



and in the forest. Like Montezuma Rainforest Lodge, there are several iNaturalist observations labeled as Black agouti from here that, to my understanding, are all wrong – as Black agouti only occurs East of the Andes, 100s of kilometers East of this place. But in their defense, the animals here do look blackish as opposed to the typical brownish coloration of C.A. agouti.

We searched for, but didn't find Andean squirrels around the clearing, and from the restaurant balcony. After a delicious dinner, Rob and Ivan did a little bit of combined scanning from the balcony and found the first **kinkajou** of the night, on a tree that was just above the trail we were about to hike. And so, with that boost of motivation, we set off on our night walk, with Hairy brown dwarf porcupine being the top target.



We started on the trail that goes towards the right from the lodge (as you go down the stairs and the building is behind you).

Almost immediately we found a **kinkajou**, potentially the same one from earlier. And within a few minutes we found another **kinkajou**. A few minutes later, we found a **Brown-eared woolly opossum**. Rob really wanted to maximize



our chances of finding the porcupine, so he went solo in another direction, while we continued the same trail.

We took a left turn at a junction point and started ascending upwards towards the escarpment. I found a couple of shapes moving in the thermal scope, and these turned out to be **Lemurine night monkeys**, which posed nicely. Further up, I thermal-scoped a baby *tropical screech owl*, and another group (or the same) of the **night monkeys**.

We then traced our steps and went down the hill back to the junction point. Right at that junction, we thermal-found the **brown, hairy dwarf porcupine**! In fact, there were two of



them, separately, on rather unobstructed main branches. We took our time zooming in and out, trying to get both porcupines in the same frame.



We then continued up the main trail and found another **kinkajou**, before turning around to go back to the lodge and head in Rob's direction. We took about 10 minutes to walk back to the lodge, not finding anything else of note except some sleeping birds. In the clearing in front of the main building, we saw Rob coming back from the other side. He found a probable porcupine, but very high up the canopy and obscured. He was relieved to see our photos of the porcupines.

He was starting to feel his hip again and retired to bed. Ivan suggested we have a quick coffee and cookies before venturing onto the trail on the other side, where Rob just came from. This trail goes towards the left from the main building. We hiked for another hour and a half or so, finding at least 1 additional family of **Lemurine night monkeys**, another **kinkajou**, and an animal far up the canopy, obscured by the foliage, that was most likely the 'probable' **porcupine** Rob was referring to. Before going back to the lodge, Ivan took



us on a slight detour that goes through another clearing. Approaching the clearing, we saw a **rabbit** at the edge. We tried to approach carefully, but it hopped into the forest. This could very well be the recently split **Bogota tapeti**, which at the time I didn't realize was different from a "regular" tapeti. Luckily, we would see this species more easily in Chingaza (spoiler!).

After spending some time in the clearing, photographing another *Tropical screech owl*, and trying to sneak onto some thermal shapes that all disappeared before we could ID them, we went back to the main building. It was past midnight, but Jason, Karen and I decided to try one last tactic and sit on top of the main stairs quietly with thermal scopes, hoping something would cross the clearing in front. We gave this about 40 minutes and then called it a night.



It should be mentioned that our rooms were not in the main building, and we had a 6–8-minute hike down a steep slope (with ropes to hold onto) to our rooms. All 3 of us saw another *tropical screech owl* before reaching Karen’s cabin, and then Jason and I saw yet another one just by our own cabin. The cabin itself is another story... It’s cute with a hot water shower in theory, but ours didn’t work that day.

### **Day 11:**

We woke up for a 7am breakfast. We were still hoping for Andean squirrel. We may have seen one briefly from the restaurant’s balcony, but not well enough to be positively identified. I did take pictures of some birds, including *beryl-spangled*, *Blue-capped*, *summer* and a few other *tanagers*, *Streak-throated bush-tyrant*, *Lesser goldfinch* and other birds. By 8:30 we had to leave, squirrel-less. We were taken by the 4X4 back to the restaurant, and I tried to search for mammals but all I saw was the usual *Emerald toucanet* posing on a branch.

Back at the restaurant, we changed back to the ultra-comfortable bus and drove to Chingaza National Park, stopping for coffee on the way. Apparently, bureaucracy used to be a huge pain for Chingaza, and you’d have to stop in Bogota to fill some paperwork, show your passports and watch a video. But as of recent, this is now possible at the entrance to the park. This is what enabled us to squeeze-in Parque Chicaque and still arrive to Chingaza at a reasonable hour. I should also mention that, since Chingaza is an official National park, it has a lot of rules: if you want to leave the vehicle and/or go hiking, you are required to be accompanied by a park ranger. In addition, night drives are strictly prohibited, and there are also no gas stations in the park. All-in-all, it’s recommended to just go with Rob and his team.. they’ll take care of you 😊 .

Anyway, Chingaza is a beautiful park. We arrived early afternoon and stopped at a first vantage scanning point for a few minutes. It gets both extremely scenic and cold up there. It was cloudy, which is an advantage for finding bears, as they tend to head back into the forest when it gets too sunny. But the one thing you don’t want is thick fog that reduces your field of view to a mere few meters. Unfortunately, over the next hour, thick fog came in and stayed for much of the next couple of days.

Right before the fog got too thick, we all looked out our windows and Daniel shouted: **“Bear!”**.

We stopped the bus, got a quick glance from Daniels’ window, then quickly got out to take a few pathetically foggy pictures and videos of a **Spectacled bear**, less than 20 meters away from us initially, walking away and disappearing into an impossible abyss of thick fog. He was a big guy, but it was so foggy and becoming even foggier during the 1-minute encounter, until the bear just disappeared.



What made it even worse was that after the bear disappeared, Karen mentioned that she didn’t see it at all. Oh shit!

She usually was quick to spot things, but she wasn’t looking in right direction, and the fog wasn’t making things easy. I was determined to find her (and myself!) another one, and I was sure we would!

Trying to scan for more bears, I inadvertently doze off for almost an hour, trying to keep my eyes open while staring at white fog, with the blurry silhouette of trees just at the side of the road. When we got closer to the lodge, we descended below the clouds. I think it’s situated in kind of a valley. Suddenly, we could see again! We had 2 encounters with **Andean White-tailed deer**.



We dropped our bags off and had to walk up the 'driveway' from the main road to the lodge due to construction expanding the entire headquarters' campus area. We also found out that we only had 3 rooms, which meant that for the next 2 nights, Rob, Ivan, Daniel and I would be sharing a 2-bunk-bed room, while Karen and Jason each got their own room.

Without wasting any more time, we continued driving south towards Laguna Chingaza. This was frustrating, as each time we drove out of the clouds or

fog, we got out to scan an area, and the fog would catch up with us within a couple of minutes. It seemed like we couldn't get out of it. Finally, around 17:00 with 1 hour left of light, we descended below the clouds towards Laguna Chingaza, staying high enough in the valley, still, to scan downhill and see most of the surrounding area. While scanning, we saw a nice *Great sapphirewing hummingbird* hovering around the scenic red flowers, and a *black-chested buzzard-eagle* flying overhead, but no bears.

Although we can't officially do any night activities, and Rob wants to maintain his good terms with the park director, we could "steal" the first hour of darkness or so, before returning to the lodge. We were hoping for mountain coati, and Ivan and Rob were intently glued to their respective thermal scopes, leaning out the windows in the rapidly declining temperatures. Rob says he doesn't mind the cold and actually prefers it to the hot and sweaty lowlands. I'm jealous of that...

We didn't find any mountain coatis, but as it got dark we started seeing **Bogota tapetis** on the road.



© Daniel Dahan

The lodge is located on a small campus with a visitor center, some offices and accommodations that, at least as of January 2026, were being built. We tried to gauge the situation here, and not do anything that would get Ramón, our park ranger, nor Rob nor Ivan in trouble. I've heard of people being straight-up kicked out of the park by the authorities

when breaking the rules. Either way, we were tired and wanted to save energy for tomorrow's bear search, since mornings are their peak activity. While walking up the driveway, I thermal scoped and then shined on another **white-tailed deer**.

I jokingly asked Rob if we could have a space heater for the room, since it was below freezing at night. But to my surprise, Rob came back with a space heater for our 4-person room. He also got one for Karen, as there were 2 available. Jason didn't receive one, but he did get a single room, so he wasn't complaining.

Either way – with proper hot showers and a space heater in the room – this immediately became one of my favorite lodges in Colombia! What a difference a space heater makes!!! Compared to Otun or even El Roble, where you freeze your ass off trying to change clothes in the room, especially after a shower, this place was super cozy, and I slept without my thermal socks for a change!

### **Day 12:**

We had a quick coffee, and we were out the door by 4:30. This is another hour and a half or so of darkness that Rob is allowed to “steal” without getting in trouble. But we didn't see much, and when it became light enough to see, we realized it was foggy, again.

We drove all the way down the valley to Laguna Chingaza. Rob has special access to a generally off-limits area. Rob, Ivan and Jason each found **white-tailed deer** en route. We were also after North Andean Dwarf Brocket, which recently received its own genus.

By 7am we reached an area where Ramón, Rob and Ivan thought we should scan. Fog was chasing us everywhere we went. Initially, a viewpoint would be partially clear, and within a few minutes it would be all foggy. At one point, we spread out between grassy hills overlooking the laguna and tried to scan for bears. I happened to be near all 3 guides, when Ramón shouted “**Bears!**”. How he found them will forever remain a mystery: in a super far-away valley, high up in the mountains, at least a kilometer and a half away if not more. A mother and cub **Spectacled bears** could be seen moving about, through the binoculars. The rest of the group ascended the hill to come see the bears, but thick fog came in and covered everything to the point where the mountains couldn't be seen, not even their silhouette.

We remained on the hill and scanned the immediate, closer meadows that were still visible. Wondering off, I found a clear thermal signature of an animal, but it wasn't moving. With the bad lighting, a general dark coloration, and behind some foliage, I saw through my binoculars a **brocket deer**. Zooming-in on this completely stationary animal

yielded a **North Andean dwarf brocket deer**. After some initial difficulties due to distance, position and weather conditions, Ramón had it in his spotting scope, so everyone got to see it well.



We were all excited about the deer, but Karen was still missing the bears, and the fog was coming in thick. We were supposed to hike to where Brazilian cavies are supposedly near-guaranteed but quickly gave it up in favor of searching for more, closer bears, as it was coming up 8:30am. Plus everyone except Daniel has seen them before, and surely Daniel would see them on his mammal big year. When we left the special access area, it turned out we only had a one-time access, strangely.

It then became so foggy for the rest of the day, even the trees immediately to the side of the road were mere silhouettes of themselves. Additionally, we had fuel for the park, but not enough to drive back-and-forth between the far ends of the park multiple times. So, we had to come up with some sort of strategy.

Rob suggested we drive back to the lodge itself, as they sometimes see bears right there – behind the kitchen. We tried, but it didn't bear fruit (pun intended). After a short break, we drove back towards the entrance of the park, to where we saw our first bear. But fog kept chasing us, even when it seemed we were escaping it for a few minutes.

People understandably started getting a little anxious, as spectacled bear was the top target of the trip. But I tried to remain positive. Hours of staring into a dull, gray abyss with no mammals (or even birds!) really makes you angry at the gods of weather and mammalwatching, especially considering I literally picked the “driest bit of the dry season”, and all we've had was the opposite. But I didn't let demotivation get to me. I decided to try even harder instead of letting my eyes zone out and beat this fucking streak of bad weather. We still had moments of laughter with Rob and Ivan, and the four of us, while we had lunch, coffee and even hot chocolate that the guides brought along. But the actual mammal searching needed an extra kick of motivation.

Around 16:50, after driving out and back once, we were back at top of the valley that overlooks Laguna Chingaza, and the fog and cloud cover started to lift. We got out and walked until almost dark. Aside from out-of-this-world scenic views and freshly eaten

bromeliads, we didn't see any mammals. Not all hope was lost – morning time is the best anyway, and tomorrow we would give it literally everything we got!



*Views most of the day (This isn't even the worst – I didn't take pictures when there was nothing visible)*



*Amazing views unveil when the fog lifts off and even the sun peeked*

Back at the lodge, there was a **Bogota Tapeti** hanging in a tiny clearing on the way in. Tonight, after dinner and after today's almost mammal-less day, Jason, Karen and I decided to take a discrete walk down the short hiking trail that starts just opposite of the entrance to the lodge campus. It's like a 100-meter circular trail. For some reason it says 30 minutes on the sign, but they must mean 3, because that's literally how long it takes to hike it... if you get lost in the middle. Otherwise, it's 2.

Anyway, without telling anyone, we “sneaked” out with our thermal scopes, and walked the short loop. Almost immediately, I found a tiny thermal image that materialized as a **Butcher Oldfield Mouse**. While endemic to Colombia, it seems to be locally common. Ivan thinks he saw the same one as in my photo near the entrance.

After the Oldfield mouse, we saw yet another **rat**. This one was far up a tree, but at eye level to the trail, that’s raised far above the ground at this point. This one was pretty, and although I didn’t get a picture of it, I just remember it having more of a contrast between the upper parts and lower parts, with a distinct parting line between the two. But it quickly climbed down the bushy tree it was in. When I turned off the flashlight and searched for it with the thermal scope, it came back up towards eye-level, but a little more hidden this time behind branches. Upon shining the light on it, it ran down, never to come back up again.



Back on the walkway to the lodge, we saw a noticeably larger rat on the ground and tried to sneak closer. It got away, and after searching through the scope, we thought we had found it, and Jason took a picture with me holding the light, but looking at the picture, what we got was another **Butcher Oldfield Mouse**.

With that, we called it a night.

### **Day 13:**

We woke up early for breakfast, then packed and left at 6am to maximize bear time on the way out. We had just entered the vehicle, and Karen fixed my curassow bracelet, when she remembered she forgot her metal water bottle in the room. Rob said he’d get it for her, since running back up the hill could cause us to lose precious time.

Well... Karen forgetting her bottle was a blessing, because Rob came back telling us there’s a young bear at the dumpster of the visitor center. Walking quickly and quietly, sure enough, a sub-adult **Spectacled bear** appeared from around the corner and walked

over to the dumpster and started rummaging. It was a grown cub that was probably recently pushed away to independence by its mother. I was enthralled: a totally wild **Spectacled bear** hanging out only meters away, and despite initial weariness, it went on about its business as we took pictures and we kept a safe distance of 10 meters or so.



We were laughing about the fact that this park has such strict rules, supposedly to protect wildlife... and yet here's a bear rummaging through a dumpster, which, making dumpsters inaccessible to bears is the A-B-C of national park management in bear country! Go figure.



We stayed with the bear for 10 minutes or so, then left it. At last, Karen got her bear, and we all had clear pictures! But in a grand finale, on the way out and less than an hour later, Ivan suddenly yelled "Bears! On the ridge!". We all jumped out and saw a mother and young cub looking at us less than 50 meters away, then having a moment with each other, before

disappearing over the ridgeline. It was again foggy, but not as bad as yesterday, so we enjoyed looking at them for a minute or so. We were now ecstatic! We tried hiking up that ridge, but they were nowhere to be found. Instead, we took a happy group selfie.





After a quick stop for a delicious empanada, courtesy of Rob, we dropped him off at his place, and parted ways. We were extremely thankful to have had Rob for 3 full days despite his recent hip issues and see for ourselves why he has such great reputation!

Our flight to Villavicencio was about an hour late, which was a little late for the otherwise-easy giant anteater drive-by sighting. Jason, Ivan and I simultaneously spotted a **giant anteater** from the main road, on a farm, and were about to step outside and take pictures. But Ivan's local contact, Elvis, said he found a closer one about a mile down the street. Sure enough, we pulled up to Elvis, our local guide for this evening and tomorrow morning, introduced ourselves, and we couldn't miss the **giant anteater**, foraging just 3



meters away. Such strange contrast with a busy main road to our one side, and a quiet ranch surrounded by rain forest, on the other, with a giant anteater munching on termite nests just meters away, and *red-bellied macaws* flying overhead. With the East-Andean slopes making a beautiful background to the whole scene. We also noted that seeing **Andean (spectacled) bear** and a **giant anteater** on the same day in the wild – two of South America's most iconic and charismatic

mammals, is something special, that deserves its own mini-celebration!

After the anteater, we had a little time to kill, and Ivan took us to a pond where hundreds of *scarlet ibises* came to roost for the night. This was also an amazing scene with the mountains in the background. But we



were just passing time for the next main event: beer accompanied by an **Amazon bamboo rat!**

We then went to the restaurant, owned by Elvis's friend, cracked open a cold beer and waited only a few minutes before the **bamboo rat** showed up and put on show for as long as we wanted.

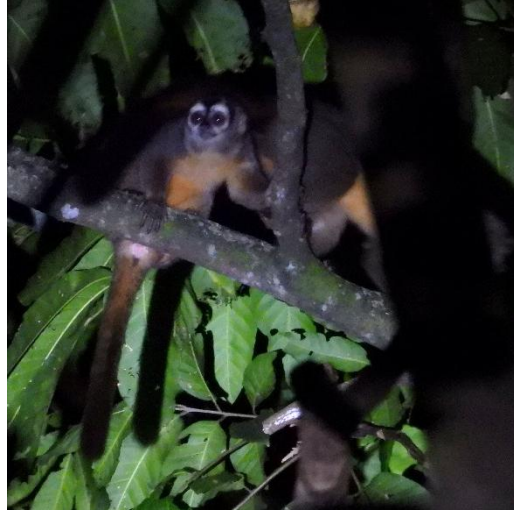
Satisfied, we finished our beer and headed over to Reserva Natural Rancho Camaná. This gem of a family-run eco-lodge is a heartwarming success story in conservation and restoration, and totally deserves the support of any mammal watcher or birder in the area. This was also to be the last accommodation on our trip with hot water. The



daughter of the owner, and wife of Elvis, painted beautiful murals on the walls, depicting local fauna, including the endemic Brumback's night monkeys and many birds. We stopped for a brief introduction and headed to our rooms. In a very Tomer-esque fashion, while rolling my suitcase and carrying my backpack, I fell off the... get this: I fell off the fucking wheelchair access ramp, about 2 inches onto the flat half of the trail that has stairs instead. So, I literally fell from a handicapped ramp and sprained my ankle. It took me all of 7-8 minutes to lay on the ground in pain and assure everyone I wasn't going to die 🤡. I just had to take a couple of minutes, since the initial spraining hurt like hell. But this was well-handled by my group mates and of course Ivan. By dinner time, and after a nice warm shower, I only had a slight limp, but I was back to normal.

After dinner, we explored the property, which is pretty much an isolated, rehabilitated secondary forest patch. It's a great refuge for many rodents and bats. Throughout the next couple of hours we found several **common opossums**, the local, endemic **Brumback's night monkeys** which is one of the flagship species of this ranch, a few bat species including **Great Fruit-eating bat** and **White-bellied bat**, and a few rodents including one





which we managed to identify as a **White-bellied arboreal rice rat**. Thanks again to Fiona Reid for some of the bats and rodents' identifications!

### **Day 14:**

We had an early breakfast and headed to the **Brumback's night monkeys'** day roost by 6:40. We then headed out to a



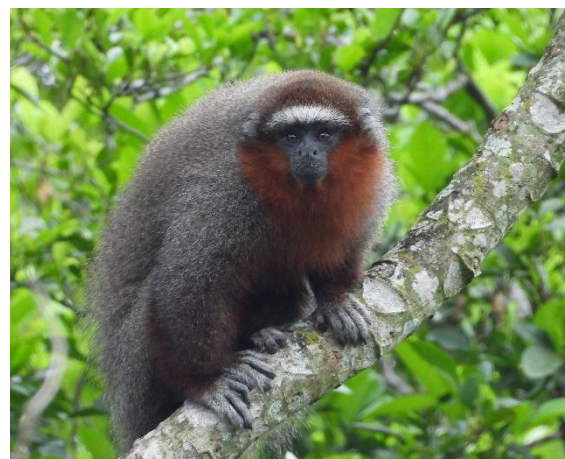
nearby reserve where Elvis easily found us a huge troop of **Humboldt's squirrel monkeys**, of a population that will potentially be split into a new species: **Colombian squirrel monkeys**. Elvis, with his motorcycle, arrived first to find the monkeys, and by the time we arrived, we didn't have



to search for them. Elvis was already gone and called Ivan after finding the next species: **Ornate titi**. Why can't every place have an Elvis?



Elvis and Ivan noted that our titi sighting was atypically out in the open. We then met the owner of this private reserve, a nice lady who also does a great job with ecosystem rehabilitation and conservation. She took us on a short walk to try to find another family of Brumback's night monkeys but didn't find them. She also pointed out where they saw a Southern tamandua the previous day. Some birds we saw this morning in-between the different monkey encounters on this walk were:



*chestnut-eared aracaris, spectacled parrotlets, yellow-crowned amazon, oriole blackbirds, saffron finches, hoatzin, yellow-headed caracara and scarlet ibis.*

We then made the drive to San Jose del Guaviare, our final mammalwatching destination of the trip. Despite some forest along the way, we didn't see anything of note. We had lunch at a typical, local place joined by Ivan's friend Juan, owner of the Margay Nature Reserve, where we had breakfast on the very first day of the trip.

After a rather torturous 5-ish hour drive (because I was sitting in the back, which wasn't the most comfortable), we switched vehicles to a 4x4, and met up with the power duo for the last section of our trip, that is our driver Martha, and our wildlife spotter Santiago, who was also a very cool guy.

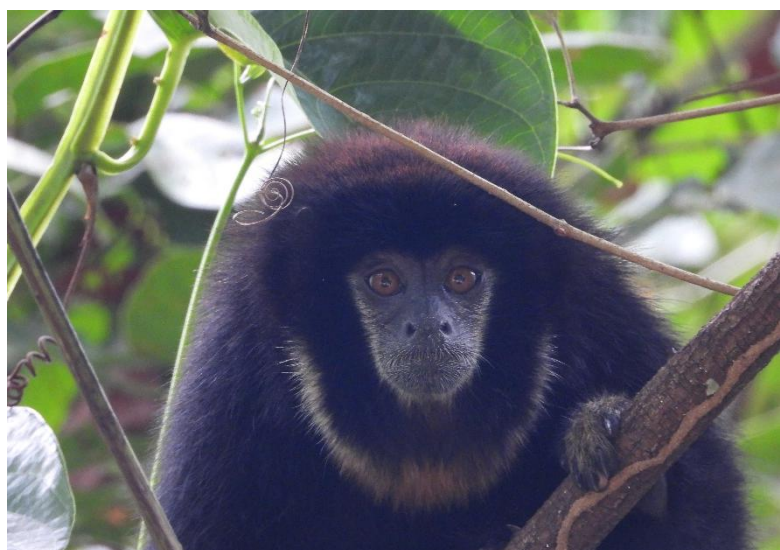
When we stopped to change vehicles, I also took a picture of a *white-eared jacamar*. Daniel, Jason and Karen all hopped inside the vehicle, while Santiago, Ivan and I were in the back. The thing is, the back is covered and has no windows, so to maximize our field



of view, Ivan and I stood on the back of the truck, as soon as we got on the unpaved road that goes to our accommodation. But as soon as we left the paved road, Jason found a family of **Black titi monkeys** just at the roadside! This is one of the coolest-looking of the titis, and the 3<sup>rd</sup> most wanted primate for me in this region, just behind the golden-backed uakaris and the mottled-faced tamarins.

We had a good encounter with them before continuing up the road.

I have been saying this about every place in Colombia, but Cerro Azul is also such a beautiful and magical place, with a totally different vibe and scene than the previous locations we visited. Ivan and I were on the back, as clouds turned to slight drizzle, to rain.



But I stayed up there except when the rain was torrential, because I didn't want to miss out. Despite how wet I got, this was a great decision. First of all, the road to Cerro Azul is

a bird-fest, and specifically, a Jacamar fest. With *brown jacamars* every few meters on the electrical wires. I didn't stop to photograph any birds, especially in the rain, but Ivan and I saw my first-ever *lettered aracari*, which I was excited to see. Parrots were all around, with *chestnut-fronted macaws*, *orange-cheeked parakeets*, *brown-throated parakeets* and others, plus *green-backed trogon*, *yellow-billed nunbird*, *swallow-winged puffbirds* etc. Later, I found a large troop of **Humboldt's squirrel monkeys**. Ivan told us that unlike the 'Colombian' ones at Villavicencio, these ones are proper Humboldt's. We photographed them for a while before the person who's driveway we were blocking came in (what terrible timing!).

I was glad I stuck it out through the rain, because at one point a **black agouti** ran across the road, and only Daniel and I got good views, while Jason and Karen only caught the last second of it. Unlike false records from Chicaque and Montezuma, this is, in fact, the agouti species that occurs here. Further down, I found some more **Black titi monkeys**, far off the road in the forest behind a farm. Finally, being soaking wet, yet being continuously awe-inspired by the scenery, the rain stopped and the sun came out. We reached our accommodation, Casa Piedra where we settled in and played with the puppies until dinner.



After dinner we were led by the lodge's owner and his 8-ish year old son on a night hike. There is currently a curfew in rural areas in the Guaviare department because of drug trafficking and armed groups. So, while this area is perhaps the most biodiverse on our itinerary, the nighttime activities had to be well-coordinated. Of course, Ivan took care of everything: tonight we would be hiking in a large forest patch a walking distance away, while tomorrow night we would drive to the core area where we search for primates, and do a night hike there.

I liked the fact that the 8-year-old son joined, because he's the future of the conservation in this area, and I'm happy he was intrigued by the wildlife! He also knew to keep quiet. The trail was muddy due to the recent rains. I have to admit that this forest is very promising, and we saw many more thermal signatures than we successfully identified. We had a system for thermal scoping and spotlighting, whistling (or "woo-ing") for communication, making sure everyone is ready and then shining on an animal. But in this thick forest, the coordination and preparation frequently cost us the actual sighting.

The first mammal of the night was a fast-moving **Little rufous mouse opossum**, that only Daniel got a picture of.. of course! Upon examining the pictures, it seems that it was also carrying young in its pouch, as marsupials do! We then thermal-scoped a **Pygmy fruit-eating bat** that was carrying too much fruit. We had an unfortunate



missed sighting with a large thermal signature I thought could be a large cat while Jason thought



it was even bigger: tapir sized. We got eyeshine, but it was too obscured in the dense vegetation and kept walking further from the trail and into thicker vegetation. Another similar occurrence was with an animal that could have

been paca-sized or even a small brocket. The night was redeemed when I found a **Streaked dwarf porcupine** that was clearly visible on the Y of a tree. Ivan then found a **Fringe-lipped Bat** munching on an insect. We also



found, using the thermal scopes, sleeping **Woolly monkeys** and **Colombian red howlers**. We took a small side trail, where all we found was a large **Napo spiny rat**. Once we got back on the main trail, Daniel was tired and was escorted back to the lodge by the father-son duo, but not before thermal scoping his own **Amazonian**



**long-tailed porcupine**, which was also a lifer for him!

During that time, we found another **Streaked dwarf porcupine** and had another near-miss with something that looked like a potential four-eyed opossum.

On the way back to the lodge, I saw some thermal signature in a tree a little far off the trail, behind a fence. I shined my light on it, and Santiago shouted **Tamandua!** Unfortunately, he didn't have a light, and it took me several





seconds to realize that he was looking less than 10 meters from us on the ground, and not where I was pointing my light. Luckily, he speaks English, and pointed our attention towards a fallen log, where we saw the back end of a **Southern tamandua** and its tail climbing over, down and away. By the time we all saw it, it was too late for photos.

Everyone was disappointed we missed the photo opportunity, but I immediately recalled: “guys, this is a slow-moving animal! Let’s just run over there and climb on that log, we’ll find it!”

Well, I was right, except for one unfortunate detail: just behind the fallen log was a super thick and dense soy field. What a shit situation: we saw perfectly, almost comically, the movement and location of the tamandua, but without any ability to see the actual animal. Luckily, we’ve all seen this species before.

### **Day 15:**

We woke up before dawn, had a short coffee and a quick bite before making the 20-minute drive to Refugio de Jagui, a patch of forest managed by Rob’s and Ivan’s contact. Before we even entered the forest, I spotted some **squirrel monkeys** far from the trail. We walked over to them, and Ivan noted there are some groups in the area that seem to have an orange “sleeve” on their arms and legs, vs. some other troops that only have orange on their actual feet and hands. According to Ivan, this could potentially indicate that some troops are of the **Ecuadorian squirrel monkeys**, which seem to have a slight overlap with the **Humboldt’s squirrel monkeys** around this region. They’re also a subspecies that may be split.

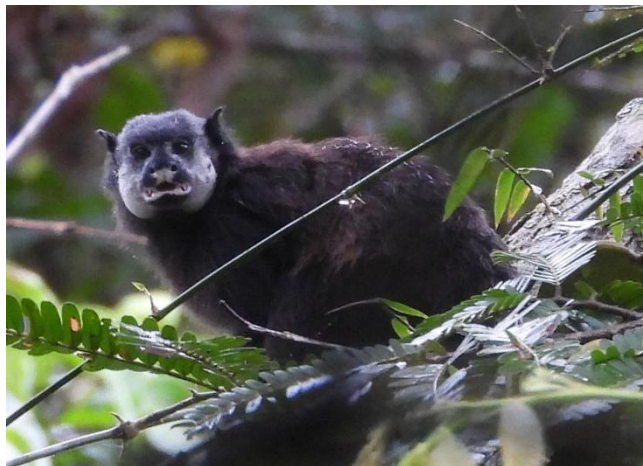
This forest descends into kind of a swamp area that is bounded by a stream (Caño los Salados), which has continuous forest all the way up to the Guayabero river. Looking at it on Google Maps, I only now realize there is a lot more continuous forest than the “patch” I was imagining it to be when we were there. This area is where Santiago often finds the Golden-backed Uakaris and the Mottled-faced tamarins. Before the trip, I hadn’t realized that finding



the Uakaris and the tamarins is so difficult. But upon departure, Rob warned me that these two species are hard to find. I've never seen any species of uakaris, so I was keen to try hard.

As we descended into the forest, Ivan and Santiago each found some **Black titi monkeys**, and later I found one as well. At one point we reached the end of the trail, which circles all the way around to the road, to the bottom of a bridge we drove over, earlier. After a short break, we did the same trail backwards, but about half-way, right around 8:00am, Ivan pulled his trick again and said "I hear tamarins!".

We hurried towards the noises which came from across the stream. After some fears that we lost them, we got our first glimpses of the **Mottle-faced tamarins!** These guys are notoriously shy, and initial glimpses were unsatisfactory. But patience and persistence paid off, and we ended up seeing several individuals. At one point they even crossed the stream towards us and were right over our heads. Ivan was also playing the recorded sounds of the white-footed tamarins, which may have helped get them closer. But then he made a recording of these ones, for future use.



Satisfied with our first big target, we headed to another spot by the stream for a quick break with cookies and snacks. We did the swamp trail again and saw some more **squirrel monkeys** but nothing else, as it got unbearably hot and animal activity ceased. When we reached the end of the trail, under the bridge, we decided to climb along its side back to the road, then walk the road back to the farmhouse. While waiting for Martha to pick us up, Daniel called me over to see another *green-backed trogon*.

We headed for lunch at the lodge and a quick nap, before heading out for the afternoon boat ride. We reached the Guayabero river around 15:30. We saw our first **Amazon pink river dolphins** breaking the surface from the dock. Until last year, I'd never seen any river dolphins. Recently I saw Bolivian Pink River dolphin, which split from the Amazon River dolphin species back in 2012. So, I still "needed" the ones here. This population may be split yet again and become "Orinoco dolphins". Then, I will again have to find the 'original' Amazon Pink dolphins...



We got on the boat, but the driver was... let's say – not somebody I think Ivan wants to work with, again. To Ivan's credit (as always!) he did his absolute best to communicate with the boat driver, explain to him what we were interested in doing, and motivate him despite much resistance. In the boat driver's defense, the river flows much faster here than in more relaxed rivers in the Amazon basin I'd visited, and it's not easy to keep the boat steady for prolonged photography of the dolphins or monkeys in the riverside trees.

At Ivan's request, we drove in circles for 10 minutes around the dolphin "hot spot" and got a couple of record shots and videos of the **pink river dolphins**. Once we started to drive upstream through the beautiful canyon, we also saw **Colombian red howlers** and **Tufted (Brown) capuchins**. Later, we also found **Common woolly monkeys**. But stopping for photography was particularly challenging-to-impossible in the narrow, fast-flowing parts of the canyon.

Once we passed the canyon part, we reached a more Amazonian-like, slowly winding portion of the river that reminded me of the Manu River, with sandbank around the outer part of each turn, and a forested cliffside on the inner. We didn't make it far, as our boat driver told Ivan we don't have enough



fuel to continue upstream. But this was also the mouth of the Caño los Salados – the same stream that we hiked along to find Uakaris. So, we hung out on the sandbank across the river from the mouth of the Caño los Salados and tried to spot monkeys. It wasn't ideal because we were on the other side of the wide main river, but we tried.

Ivan pointed out an *Amazonian umbrellabird* across the river. But the only other thing we experienced on this sandbank was infinite sand flies. I quickly noticed that each sandfly left a tiny dot of blood on my hands and arms. These would later turn into an impossibly itchy rash. Little did I know...

We drove back down the river, seeing more **common woollies** and **red howlers** even just across from the dock. The **dolphins** were there as well, popping out every few minutes.

We drove back to the lodge, seeing but not stopping for many *nightjars* and *owls*, but no mammals. After dinner, we drove back to the same swamp forest we hiked in the morning. I was thermal-scoping with one hand while hanging onto the back of the truck with the other and called out a clear **Giant anteater** right at the side of the road. Of



© Daniel Dahan

course, Daniel grabbed a couple pictures as the animal gracefully trotted away, and we carried on. We parked at the farmhouse and walked into the forest, and almost immediately saw a **lowland paca** walking by the swamp. I had only seen this species once before, in Monteverde, back in 2003, and never got a picture, so I tried to hurry before it disappears, but in doing that I accidentally scared it off and nobody got a picture. That was my “low moment”, and the mammal encounter for which everyone later gave me shit for. We all saw it clearly, and I was excited about it, but I also ruined the photo opportunities. I jokingly said: “I don’t care, at least I got to see it super well!” but deep inside I was a little disappointed in myself. Lol, shit happens.

During the few hours we were there, we saw and photographed a **white-footed climbing**



© Daniel Dahan

**mouse**, a **long-tailed armored tree rat**, another **brown-eared woolly opossum**, and some **greater spear-nosed bats** underneath the bridge. We also found sleeping monkeys, which Santiago first thought were the uakaris, but quickly turned out to be **woolly monkeys**. I didn’t notice at the time, but I was bitten by ungodly amounts of mosquitoes, despite putting on repellent. Together with the sand flies from earlier, this would turn into a terrible itch-fest from which I still have some faint marks on the side of my body and legs as I’m finishing this report, mid-March.



© Ivan Lau



### **Day 16:**

Today was our last full day as a group! Holy shit! Where did time go?!

We woke up pre-dawn and tried another patch of forest. This one is less good for the tamarins that we have now seen, but potentially just as good if not better for the uakaris. The entrance is not far from the entrance to the swamp trail, but the forest here is taller, and in some regards more “open”, with tall trees and less undergrowth. I feel like this would be a great place for a night hike, but we had no nights left in the area. We also had to cross a tiny stream over a fallen log, which was a little comical: Karen was carried over on Ivan’s back, Jason took off his boots and waded through, Daniel crawled across the log while hugging it in a sloth-like manner, and I just used Ivan’s shoulder as support while crossing over the log, since he was already in the water, carrying Karen. The landowner, who also helped Santiago and Ivan with the wildlife searching, told them in Spanish that he smelled peccaries, but we never saw them. We then heard and saw a juvenile *Harpy eagle* taking off from one of the trees above the trail. This was my first-ever confirmed sighting of a harpy eagle, but when you want to see monkeys, a harpy eagle is not good news. I mean, it’s great that they’re around because it shows the healthy state of the forest, and it surely means monkeys are around, since they’re its food... But they hide.

It also started raining again, of course... We had to take cover as rain came and went. By the end of the hike, all we saw were **Red howlers, Squirrel monkeys, and tufted capuchins**. Bird-wise, I found another *Amazonian umbrellabird*, perhaps this is a hotspot for this species? Ivan also found it, and pointed it out to Daniel and me. I proudly showed him a picture I had already taken of it, a minute earlier.

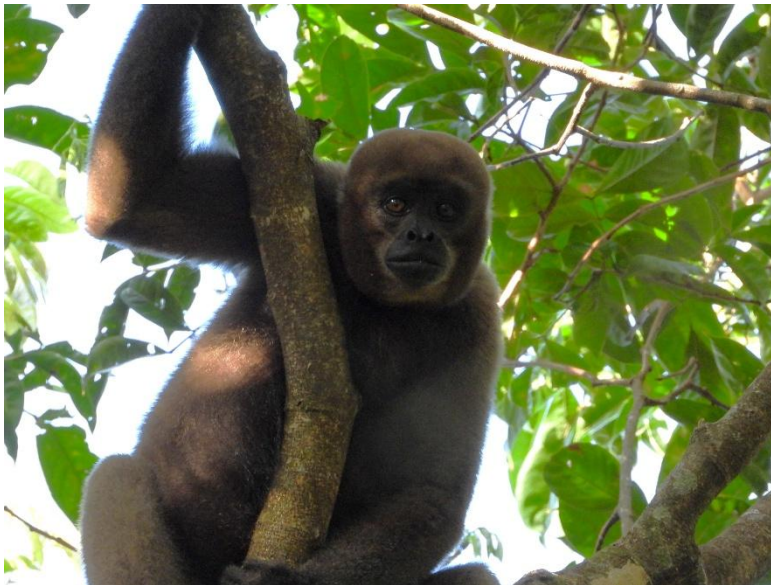


We then moved back to the first, swampy location before it got too hot. We saw the **Black titis** and more **squirrel monkeys**, but no uakaris. The thing is, we were supposed to leave after lunch and go to the city of San Jose del Guaviare after lunch, then explore a small secondary patch near town at night. But tonight was a built-in consolation prize for not being able to spend the final night near Cerro Azul, due to the fear of last-minute flight changes – which frequently move the flight up to early morning with little warning, leaving no time to make the 2 hours drive from Cerro Azul. None of us could afford to take this risk, so despite the original thought to have 3 nights near Cerro Azul, we resorted to having only 2 nights near Cerro Azul and one in the city.

So, we were facing a dilemma: give this place one last shot in the afternoon, drive to town late and forego the final night in the field, or give up the uakaris now, and move on. We asked Santiago 2 questions: 1. How many times he’d seen the uakaris recently, and 2. Is afternoon a good time?

His answers were: 1. In the past year he's been here about 30 times and found the uakaris 28 of them. And 2. Yes. If we had been searching for the tamarins, he would say 'no', but for the uakaris, afternoon is 'fair chance'. That was enough to convince me: these monkeys are probably the highest primate on my wish list from Colombia, maybe tied only with the variegated spider monkeys. So, we decided to vote, but at the end, the vote was unanimous for staying. I take full responsibility here: I told everyone my preference, and they wanted this for me, as much as they wanted it for themselves. That's true friendship right there!

We took a couple hours' worth of break after lunch, and it rained on-and-off during that time, sometimes even torrentially. But despite another concentrated search in both sites, starting around 15:00, we just couldn't find the Uakaris, only more **woollies**, and



therefore this became the only 'big' missed target of the trip. But as I told Rob: we had such a successful trip, having seen about 65 identified mammal species together. We saw so many species I have been dreaming about seeing: the bear, mountain tapir, oncilla, olinguito, 3 cool porcupines, many opossums, 14 primates, of which 12 were lifers to me including some

endemics, the tayra frenzy, my first (and 2<sup>nd</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup>) kinkajou, river dolphins, that rare brocket deer, and the list goes on. And that's without even "counting" things I'd already seen before like giant anteater, southern tamandua, lowland paca and others. In fact, if I went back in time 10 years ago, and told my younger self that I would go to Colombia for less than 3 weeks and see all these species, I wouldn't believe myself.

We headed back to the ranch and then to town, scanning every last tree on the way, until it got too dark, but we saw no mammals on the road. We arrived at San Jose del Guaviare for a quick shower and headed out to dinner. In a symbolic manner, it started downpouring as we were walking towards the restaurant. But I had made a promise that if we got good sightings of the top targets of the trip: Oncilla, Tapir and Bear, then I would buy everyone a round of drinks, and I was happy to do that! We celebrated this amazing, adventurous, funny, and all-around top-notch trip with a great dinner and drinks.



That night I woke up around 3am and I literally couldn't stop scratching myself. I felt like a maniac that should be in a straitjacket – I just couldn't stop. It itched SO BAD!!!!!! I've never experienced anything like it. In the morning, we had time before the flight and I went to the city, bought calamine lotion and put thick layers of it all over my arms, legs and body. It turned out that everyone had similar experiences.

This was **Day 17**, and we parted ways from Ivan at the airport. Ivan went on a road trip with Juan to catch a couple of birds he's still missing in the country (there are not very many of those!). As I mentioned to Rob and the group – I don't remember the last time I was feeling choked up for leaving a place, partly because of the guide! I felt like I truly gained a lifelong friend. On the way to the airport Jason, Karen, Daniel and I were already planning future trips with Ivan in Colombia, nearby regions in Brazil, Venezuela etc. I thanked Rob again for the amazing trip, and for hooking us up with Ivan. What a success!

### **Epilogue – 1 night in Doña Dora:**

After a good night's rest in a very comfortable hotel in Cali, and after ungodly amounts of calamine lotion for the itchy 'skitter bites, I was picked up midday to drive to Doña Dora restaurant and birding lodge. Doña Dora is located on the Western slopes of the Andes, only 26 aerial kilometers, or an hour and a half drive from Cali, blending between low Andes and the Choco ecoregion.

There's a backstory behind this venture: I was supposed to just rest and party up with my friend in Cali for 2 days. But my friend ended up having to ditch me due to passport issues, and he was out of the country. So, I decided to spend 1 night resting in Cali, then 1 night getting a little extra fix of nature. The unthinkable truth is that, since this was 'off the clock', I was going to catch some birds (yes, I know 😞) that I had always wanted to see, including toucan barbet, crimson-rumped toucanet, potentially red-headed barbet, orange-breasted fruiteater and others. Plus, see what mammals the place can surprise me with, as it's not a known mammalwatching destination. But by the time I got there, I had already seen all the avian 'targets' except toucan barbet.

Mammal-wise: I had read and heard that an olinguito comes up to their bird feeders at night. So naturally, I was thinking: if this is olinguito country, then why not mountain coati, pacarana, mountain paca, etc.

Being terrified pre-trip about missing the oncilla, I also asked Elber (son of Doña Dora) if they ever see oncilla or tayra. He said: no oncilla, occasionally tayra. But in Cali I finally had some down time to do more in-depth reading about this place and the species that should occur there, and I realized that none of these Andean specialties are found at such low altitudes, of 1280masl. As I did more reading, it suddenly occurred to me that their supposed “olinguito” would actually be Western Lowland Olingo, a species I hadn’t seen!

So, I arrived for a late lunch and immediately saw the *toucan barbets* that nest there, plus



many other birds (all the popular ones you can find on their site and on iNaturalist if you look at their location: 3.534774019992855, -76.75344987765041).

I also hadn’t realized that this is literally just a restaurant with some rooms on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor. I imagined this would be a property like Montezuma Rainforest lodge. So, I just sat by the feeders.

Birders also walk along the road, but I didn’t have a guide, and I heard that this region has security issues.



Just before dinner, the first **Western Lowland Olingo** came by. No bananas yet, but it came from the valley and walked on the fence and supports of the building itself, then checked out the hummingbird feeders and settled on a ledge just below the roof of the building. Super thick fog came in... of course... and all my photos turned out shitty. I didn’t have my spotlight on me, either. But as seen in the photos, this animal is much larger and has pronounced rings on its tail, making it clear to me that this is indeed a **Western lowland**



**olingo** and not an olinguito. BTW – if you look at the IUCN maps, it looks like this place should fall in the range of olinguito, and not the lowland olingo. But reading about altitude ranges you'd conclude the opposite. Either way – the actual animal most definitely looks like the lowland one.

Before dinner, I requested Elber to place bananas for the olingos. 2 Americans and I stayed up and had our delicious empanada dinner on the top deck, waiting for additional appearances. All-in-all, at least 3 individuals came through, one being smaller than the other two.

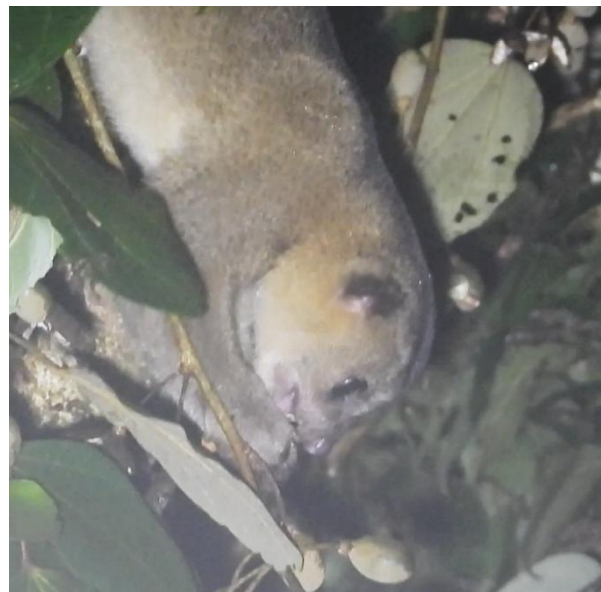
When the American couple went to sleep, I decided to venture down the private trail that starts from behind the lodge, and goes down to the river. I walked slowly, scanning with my thermal scope and sometimes with the flashlight, but didn't see much during the 35-ish minute walk down to the river. The river seemed too large and fast flowing for yapok, but I stayed for about half an hour or so, scanning around for anything that would show up. All I saw was a **rat** high up a tree. Trying to hold my own torch and camera, I managed



a crappy photo, so if anyone wants to take a stab at ID'ing it, feel free.

Back up at the restaurant, I took a short stroll on the road, without straying too far away. I didn't see much, but when I walked back, I saw what I initially thought was one of the olingos. However, I noticed it was eating fruit while hanging upside down using only its tail, meaning this could only be a **kinkajou** and not an olingo. Putting the animal pictures next to each other, you can tell they're different

species. How cool. Kinkajou was a lifer for me earlier on this trip, and although this is now the 8<sup>th</sup> kinkajou I've seen, and the 4<sup>th</sup> place where I've seen them, I was still excited. I think back to my Costa Rica trip of 2012 where I missed kinkajou. If I showed my younger self these side-by-side pictures of olingo and kinkajou and said I'd see them both on the same night, I'd be like: "Dude, I'm so fucking jealous!" So, thank you, Young Tomer, for remaining a part of Current Tomer, and popping up with your youthful enthusiasm at the right moments 😊



The following morning, I skipped going to the Cock-of-the-Rock lek as I saw them on this trip, and at a lek in Peru. After a comfortable night's sleep and a hot shower, I came downstairs at 6:30 for a delicious breakfast with many birds including my wished-for *crimson-rumped toucanet*, *red-headed barbet* and only a female *orange-breasted fruiteater* (same as I saw in Montezuma).

At 9:30am I was picked up and driven back to Cali. All-in-all this was a great experience. If I had another night, I'd spend it at KM18, an area that is, in fact, in the Andes and does have the full cast of Andean mammals. It's worth it for any mammalwatchers who visit Cali to try KM18. There are some nice, luxurious lodges up there.



### **Final thoughts and what we missed:**

First of all, this was a tremendously successful trip! If we also got the uakaris, I would dare to call it perfect. Yes, even despite missing pacaraña 😊

Colombia is not an easy country to navigate through. We had to change vehicles several times to reach logistically difficult locations, all of which occurred seamlessly, with the drivers already waiting for us when we arrived. This is all thanks to the flawless operations of Wild About Colombia. Food was always great, or at least decent when in hole-in-the-walls en route. Tons of props to Rob and Caludia for all the effort. You know a tour operator is successful when there was nothing written about the operation and logistics – it means everything was so smooth we never even had to think about it.

Regarding the **Oncilla (Clouded tiger cat)**: I'm talking to Lennart Verheuvell who is there at the time of me writing this – and we have noticed that rain may actually have a positive correlation to the cats' visits. My friend Uri was there in May, which is supposed to be wet, but it was the driest May in years, and he didn't see the cat. It was visiting once a week or so. We had the rainiest January in years, which ironically may have played in our favor here. Lennart made an observation that the driest day he had at Mirador El Roble was the only day the cat didn't show up.

On the contrary – rain may have been detrimental to our **Golden-backed Uakari** searching – but generally 2-3 days is how many you should need to find them. I will just have to go back some day, then maybe combine it with the Southern parts of Colombia and maybe the Llanos.

Other than the uakaris, my biggest dip was on the **yapok**. There are plenty of other places to look for it, notably in Central America, so it would have been only a bonus, as much as I wanted to see it. Anecdotally, Jason and Daniel saw it on their extension to Putumayo!

They also saw **Rio Negro silky anteater**, many **primates**, **Eastern Lowland Olingo** and other very cool stuff.

**Mountain Coati** would have been a nice addition, and I will probably go to Ecuador to find one. Alternatively, if I had more time, between Rob and Ivan, there are probably better places to try and target this species. My recommendation is to contact Rob. One of the best places on our itinerary for this one, plus **mountain paca** and **pacarana** would have been at Cortaderal, outside Santa Rosa de Cabal – where we got rained out. In retrospect, even though it wasn't a planned destination on the original itinerary – this ended up being the biggest dip of our trip, considering the potential. Otherwise, any of the **pacarana-mountain paca-mountain agouti** trio could have turned up at most places we visited in the Andes including El Roble, Montezuma, Otun, some parts of Chingaza and potentially Chicaque, though I'm not sure they've been recorded there.

Guaviare department is a wildcard for Northern Amazonian species. I thought we would find a **Linneaus's two-toed sloth**, which would have been a lifer. There was also some chance for **Rio Negro silky anteater**, **White-lipped peccary**, **Spix's night monkey**, and **white-bellied spider monkey**, though the two primates haven't been recorded from the exact locations we visited, but a little further West along the river. One big wish list species that has been recorded from around the river is the **bush dog**. There have been a few sightings in the past couple of years, but that one remains to be seen by all of us. **Short-eared dogs** have also been observed in the area, but rarely. Same with **margays**, **jaguars** and **pumas**. **Jaguarundis** have been seen on the main road, as have **tayras**. If we had another night hike, I would insist we do it in the 2<sup>nd</sup> site for the Uakaris – the more 'terra firma' forest with the taller trees, where we saw the *harpy eagle*, *Amazonian bellbird*, etc. (Ivan and Rob would know).

Other than that, we could have seen **Andean squirrel** at a few locations, notably Chicaque, and we could have easily added **Brazilian guinea pig (cavy)** at Chingaza if we didn't forego doing that hike in the area Rob has 'special access' to. Speaking of Chingaza, I shouldn't publicly encourage discreet wandering at night after the rangers go to sleep, as it's strictly prohibited and could get you kicked out of the park. We did it discreetly, stayed close, and didn't use lights, only scopes, except to take pictures.

At **El Paujil**, it's not uncommon to find the **Santander dwarf squirrel**, which we missed, and **Northern Tamandua** is occasionally seen.

There was always a chance for any of several possible **armadillo** species on our trip, including 3 '**long-nosed**', 2 **naked-tailed** and the **giant**.

Of course, **Colombian weasel** was a possibility in any of the Andean locations, with potentially **Amazon weasel** and **Greater Grison** in Guaviare, but these are extreme rarities. And I'm not even talking about **shrew opossums**, or other fossorial mammals, which we didn't target.

If I had a few more days, I would have probably tried to make it to Parque Tayrona for the famously cute **Cottontop tamarins** and supporting cast members. If I had another week on top of that, I would have gladly joined Jason's extension to Putumayo, where they saw many cool species. In fact, Jason did both of these (with Tayrona being his pre-tour) and ended up with just over 90 species in about 3.5 weeks!

Finally – I know Rob and Ivan are now trying to search for reliable **jaguar** spots in the Llanos, and so far, the places they've searched turned out to be somewhat of a **puma** hotspot, so we'll see how these explorations develop further.

### List of mammals:

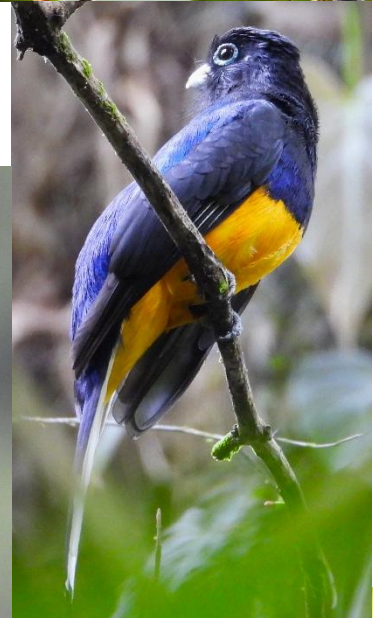
Number	Common Name	Scientific Name	El Paujil	Rio Claro	El Roble	Montezuma	Otun Quimbaya	Cortaderal	Chicaque	Chingaza	Villavicencio / Restrepo	San Jose del Guaviare	Dona Dora
1	Robinson's Mouse Opossum	<i>Marmosa robinsoni</i>	X	X									
2	Little Rufous Mouse Opossum	<i>Marmosa lepida</i>										X	
3	Panamanian Mouse Opossum	<i>Marmosa invicta</i>				X							
4	Chucha Slender Opossum	<i>Marmosops chucha</i>	X										
5	Tschudi's Slender Opossum	<i>Marmosops impavidus</i>					X						
6	Andean White-eared Opossum	<i>Didelphis pernigra</i>			X				X				
7	Common Opossum	<i>Didelphis marsupialis</i>		X		X	X						
8	Brown Woolly Opossum	<i>Caluromys lanatus</i>	X	X					X			X	
9	Derby's Woolly Opossum	<i>Caluromys derbianus</i>					X						
10	Giant Anteater	<i>Myrmecophaga tridactyla</i>									X	X	
11	Southern Tamandua	<i>Tamandua tetradactyla</i>										X	
12	Greater Sac-winged Bat	<i>Saccopteryx bilineata</i>	X										
13	Little Big-eared Bat	<i>Micronycteris megalotis</i>		X									
14	Fringe-lipped Bat	<i>Trachops cirrhosus</i>										X	
15	White-bellied Big-eared Bat	<i>Phyllostomus discolor</i>									X		
16	Greater Spear-nosed Bat	<i>Phyllostomus hastatus</i>										X	
17	Seba's Short-tailed Bat	<i>Carollia perspicillata</i>	X										
18	Great Fruit-eating Bat	<i>Artibeus lituratus</i>									X		
19	Pygmy Fruit-eating bat	<i>Dermanura phaeotis</i>										X	
20	White-footed Tamarin	<i>Saguinus leucopus</i>		X	<---On the way to El Paujil but in Magdalena valley (i.e. geographically closer to Rio Claro)								
21	Mottle-faced Tamarin	<i>Saguinus inustus</i>										X	
22	Varied Capuchin	<i>Cebus versicolor</i>	X										
23	Tufted Capuchin	<i>Sapajus apella</i>										X	
24	Variegated Spider Monkey	<i>Ateles hybridus</i>	X										
25	Common Woolly Monkey	<i>Lagothrix lagothricha</i>										X	
26	Gray-handed Night Monkey	<i>Aotus griseimembra</i>		X									
27	Lemurine Night Monkey	<i>Aotus lemurinus</i>					X		X				
28	Brumback's Night Monkey	<i>Aotus brumbacki</i>									X		
29	Humboldt's Squirrel Monkey	<i>Saimiri cassiquiarensis</i>										X	
Possible Split	Colombian Squirrel Monkey	<i>Saimiri (cassiquiarensis) albigena</i>									X		
Possible split	Ecuadorian squirrel monkey	<i>Saimiri macrodon</i>										X	
30	Ornate Titi	<i>Plecturocebus ornatus</i>									X		
31	Black Titi	<i>Cheracebus lugens</i>										X	
32	Colombian Red Howler	<i>Alouatta seniculus</i>					X					X	
33	Red-tailed Squirrel	<i>Sciurus granatensis</i>	X	X	X	X							
34	Choco Dwarf Squirrel	<i>Microsciurus similis</i>				X							
35	Boyaca Spiny Rat	<i>Proechimys canicollis</i>		X									
36	Napo Spiny Rat	<i>Proechimys quadruplicatus</i>										X	
37	Tawny Oecomys	<i>Oecomys flavicans</i>		X									
38	White-bellied Arboreal Rice Rat	<i>Oecomys bicolor</i>									X		
39	Dusky Rice Rat	<i>Melanomys caliginosus</i>				X							
40	Alfaro's Rice Rat	<i>Handleyomys alfaro</i>				X							
41	Mexican Harvest Mouse	<i>Reithrodontomys mexicanus</i>					X						
42	Broad-footed Climbing Mouse	<i>Rhipidomys latimanus</i>						X					
43	White-footed Climbing Mouse	<i>Rhipidomys leucodactylus</i>										X	
44	Butcher Oldfield Mouse	<i>Thomasomys laniger</i>								X			
45	Amazon Bamboo Rat	<i>Dactylomys dactylinus</i>									X		
46	Long-tailed Armored Tree Rat	<i>Makalata macrura</i>										X	
47	Stump-tailed Porcupine	<i>Coendou rufescens</i>		X	X	X							
48	Brown Hairy-dwarf Porcupine	<i>Coendou vestitus</i>							X				
49	Streaked Dwarf Porcupine	<i>Coendou ichillus</i>										X	
50	Long-tailed Porcupine	<i>Coendou longicaudatus</i>										X	

Daniel only ----->

51	Central American Agouti	Dasyprocta punctata	X			X			X												
52	Black Agouti	Dasyprocta fuliginosa																		X	
53	Pacarana	Dinomys branickii						X													
54	Lowland Paca	Cuniculus paca																		X	
55	Fluvescent Tapeti	Sylvilagus fulvescens			X																
56	Bogota Tapeti	Sylvilagus apollinaris								X	X										
57	Tayra	Eira barbara				X															
58	Crab-eating Fox	Cerdocyon thous				X															
59	Spectacled Bear	Tremarctos ornatus										X									
60	Clouded Tiger Cat	Leopardus pardinoides			X																
61	Olinguito	Bassaricyon neblina			X	X	X														
62	Western Lowland Olingo	Bassaricyon medius																		X	
63	Kinkajou	Potos flavus		X							X									X	
64	Amazon Pink River Dolphin	Inia geoffrensis																		X	
65	Mountain Tapir	Tapirus pinchaque						X	X												
66	Dwarf Red Brocket	Mazama rufina										X									
67	White-tailed Deer	Odocoileus virginianus										X									
54 lifers! (not incl. squirrel monkey splits)					9	11	6	11	9	2	7	5	8	22							2

## Notable Birds:

- Great Tinamou — *Tinamus major*
- Torrent Duck — *Merganetta armata*
- Andean Teal — *Anas andium*
- Sickle-winged Guan — *Chamaepetes goudotii*
- Andean Guan — *Penelope montagnii*
- Scarlet Ibis — *Eudocimus ruber*
- Black Vulture — *Coragyps atratus*
- Harpy Eagle — *Harpia harpyja*
- Black-chested Buzzard-Eagle — *Geranoaetus melanoleucus*
- Tropical Screech-Owl — *Megascops choliba*
- Rufescent Screech-Owl — *Megascops ingens*
- White-throated Screech-Owl — *Megascops albogularis*
- Mottled Owl — *Strix virgata*
- Oilbird — *Steatornis caripensis*
- Common Potoo — *Nyctibius griseus*
- White-necked Jacobin — *Florisuga mellivora*
- Lesser Violetear — *Colibri cyanotus*
- Sparkling Violetear — *Colibri coruscans*
- Green Thorntail — *Discosura conversii*
- Crowned Woodnymph — *Thalurania colombica*
- Rufous-gaped Hillstar — *Urochroa bougueri*
- Long-tailed Sylph — *Aglaiocercus kingii*
- Violet-tailed Sylph — *Aglaiocercus coelestis*
- Puff-tailed Coronet — *Boissonneaua flavicauda*
- Velvet-purple Coronet — *Boissonneaua jardini*
- Tourmaline Sunangel — *Heliangelus exortis*
- Collared Inca — *Coeligena torquata*



Great Sapphire-wing — *Pterophanes cyanopterus*  
 Empress Brilliant — *Heliodoxa imperatrix*  
 Violet-fronted Hummingbird — *Sternoclyta cyanopectus*  
 Purple-bibbed Whitetip — *Urostitte benjamini*  
 White-booted Racket-tail — *Ocreatus underwoodii*  
 White-bellied Woodstar — *Chaetocercus mulsant*  
 Green-backed Trogon — *Trogon viridis*  
 White-tailed Trogon — *Trogon chionurus*  
 Collared Trogon — *Trogon collaris*  
 Masked Trogon — *Trogon personatus*  
 Andean Motmot — *Momotus aequatorialis*  
 Rufous Motmot — *Baryphthengus martii*  
 White-eared Jacamar — *Galbalcyrhynchus leucotis*  
 Brown Jacamar — *Brachygalba lugubris*  
 White-throated Jacamar — *Brachygalba albogularis*  
 Yellow-billed Nunbird — *Monasa flavirostris*  
 Swallow-winged Puffbird — *Chelidoptera tenebrosa*  
 Spot-crowned Barbet — *Capito maculicoronatus*  
 Red-headed Barbet — *Eubucco bourcierii*  
 Toucan Barbet — *Semnornis ramphastinus*  
 Southern Emerald-Toucanet — *Aulacorhynchus albivitta*  
 Crimson-rumped Toucanet — *Aulacorhynchus haematopygus*  
 Lettered Aracari — *Pteroglossus inscriptus*  
 Collared Aracari — *Pteroglossus torquatus*  
 Chestnut-eared Aracari — *Pteroglossus castanotis*  
 Choco Toucan — *Ramphastos brevis*  
 Chestnut-mandibled Toucan — *Ramphastos ambiguus swainsonii*  
 Citron-throated Toucan — *Ramphastos vitellinus citreolaemus*  
 Channel-billed Toucan — *Ramphastos vitellinus*  
 Acorn Woodpecker — *Melanerpes formicivorus*  
 Black-cheeked Woodpecker — *Melanerpes pucherani*  
 Chestnut Woodpecker — *Celeus elegans*  
 Laughing Falcon — *Herpetotheres cachinnans*  
 Yellow-headed Caracara — *Milvago chimachima*  
 Blue-and-yellow Macaw — *Ara ararauna*  
 Red-bellied Macaw — *Orthopsittaca manilatus*  
 Chestnut-fronted Macaw — *Ara severus*  
 Yellow-eared Parrot — *Ognorhynchus icterotis*  
 Blue-headed Parrot — *Pionus menstruus*



Brown-throated Parakeet — *Eupsittula pertinax*  
 Yellow-crowned Parrot — *Amazona ochrocephala*  
 Orange-winged Parrot — *Amazona amazonica*  
 Mealy Parrot — *Amazona farinosa*  
 Scissor-tailed Flycatcher — *Tyrannus forficatus*  
 Andean Cock-of-the-rock — *Rupicola peruvianus*  
 Black-and-green Fruiteater — *Pipreola riefferii*  
 Orange-breasted Fruiteater — *Pipreola jucunda*  
 Red-ruffed Fruitcrow — *Pyroderus scutatus*  
 Amazonian Umbrellabird — *Cephalopterus ornatus*  
 Black-crowned Tityra — *Tityra inquisitor*  
 Green Jay — *Cyanocorax yncas*  
 Band-backed Wren — *Campylorhynchus zonatus*  
 Orange-billed Euphonia — *Euphonia xanthogaster*  
 Chestnut-capped Brushfinch — *Arremon brunneinucha*  
 Chestnut-headed Oropendola — *Psarocolius cassini*  
 Russet-backed Oropendola — *Psarocolius angustifrons*  
 Summer Tanager — *Piranga rubra*  
 Flame-rumped Tanager — *Ramphocelus flammigerus*  
 Crimson-backed Tanager — *Ramphocelus dimidiatus*  
 Yellow-tufted Dacnis — *Dacnis egregia*  
 Green Honeycreeper — *Chlorophanes spiza*  
 Beryl-spangled Tanager — *Tangara nigroviridis*  
 Blue-capped Tanager — *Sporathraupis cyanocephala*  
 Silver-throated Tanager — *Tangara icterocephala*  
 Golden-hooded Tanager — *Stilpnia larvata*  
 Bay-headed Tanager — *Tangara gyrola*  
 Rufous-throated Tanager — *Ixothraupis rufigula*  
 Glistening-green Tanager — *Chlorochrysa phoenicotis*  
 Purplish-mantled Tanager — *Iridosornis porphyrocephalus*  
 Grass-green Tanager — *Chlorornis riefferii*  
 Masked Flowerpiercer — *Diglossa cyanea*

