



My Big Cat Year – Visit to Colombia for the Northern Tiger Cat at Mirador el Roble – 05/09/26 to 09/09/26

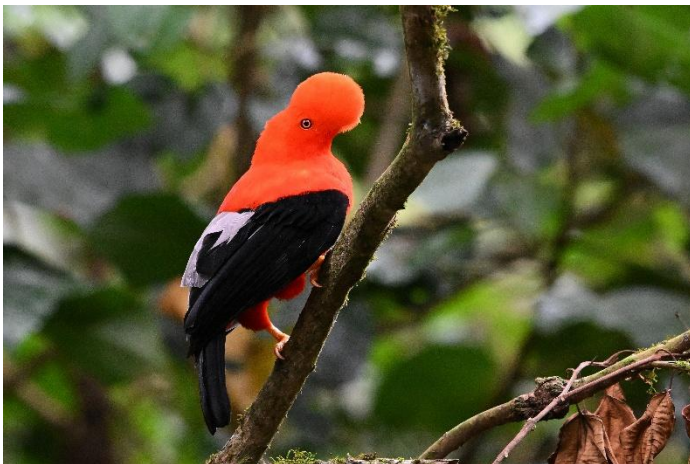
A few stressfull days in Colombia but with a big reward!

One of the smaller South American wildcat species is the **Northern Tiger Cat** (or Northern Oncilla). Normally, these small cats are extremely difficult to observe in the wild but for a few years, one individual has been showing itself regularly at **Mirador el Roble in Colombia**. It is a striking wildcat and on the [IUCN Website](#) you will find more info on this unique species.

Last month, when I was in Bolivia, I checked with some people and also found a good trip report on Mammalwatching.com (essential website to get good information on where to see mammals). So I checked with [Manakin Nature Tours Colombia](#) and they came back to me very quickly with a good program for 4 days, which I booked.

So, at 1 AM I took the flight from Santa Cruz, Bolivia, arriving at 5 AM in Panama City and boarded again at 7 AM to arrive at 08:30 AM in Medellín, Colombia. Luis waited for me and together we started the drive of 5 hours to Mirador el Roble. We had a nice coffee break at the village of Hispania, famous for its square with the majestic Saman Trees. After the coffee, we drove on to **Jardín, a beautiful small town** in the department of Antioquia famous for its authentic atmosphere and its central square.

In 2022, our son Daan went to study for half a year in Bogota and we combined it with our family holiday. During those two weeks, we also visited Jardín and it felt good to be back there. Driver Luis went to visit his mother who lives in Jardín and I had a nice lunch and a stroll in town.



Around 14:30 Luis picked me up and we went together to **Reserva Natural Jardín de Rocas**, a small area on the edge of the town, which is famous for its lek of the **Andean Cock-of-the-rock**. It is a natural place where one of the most iconic birds in the world gathers and performs their mating rituals. You can see the birds up close and it is a real spectacle to observe them. Half an hour later we left and

we made our way through the mountains to Mirador el Roble.





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Only when we came further and we were very near, I realized we had been here also in 2022. At the time, we had a guide **Guillermo** ([Aramacao Tours Colombia](#)) who guided us as a family for three days. During that trip, we also made a short visit to Mirador el Roble. We all loved it then and it was great to be back!!!

Mirador El Roble is basically a small family-run nature reserve and birdwatching destination located in the Andes mountains near the border of Caldas and Antioquia, between the towns of Riosucio and Jardín, Colombia. It is run by **mother Lucia** and her **son Martien**.



The place is full of hummingbird feeders which attract many hummingbirds and other species. If you are lucky, which I was, you can see the threatened and once almost extinct **Yellow-eared Parrot**. Back in 2022, Martien also brought us to a location where we observed the **Chestnut-naped Antpitta** which was lured in by calls and worms. Back then, the **Northern Tiger Cat (or Northern Oncilla)** was not frequenting the area.

The **story about this Cat** as I read it in a **post by Tomer Ben Yehuda**: it's a totally wild cat that they caught snatching their live chicken. So instead of killing it, which is something that would commonly happen in South America during these kinds of circumstances, they decided to throw him a piece of chicken or fish every time he showed up!

And that has been happening since 2023! There are periods when the Cat comes almost daily but it may also disappear for weeks. So, it is definitely **not guaranteed** but you do have a **good chance** of seeing it when you are there for three days. At least, that is what I have been told. But nature is nature, so fingers crossed!





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Late afternoon we arrived and I had a great time at the feeders seeing all those hummingbirds. The magic of the place as we experienced it back in 2022, is still there. But they have progressed, and they even built a small accommodation with three rooms, located 50 meters from the farm in the forest on the hill. Nice and clean rooms and even hot water! More than I expected!! There was still more than an hour of daylight so there was a chance the cat could pop up. So I waited near the feeders for close to two hours and had a relaxing time.

Later, Lucia prepared a nice meal that evening with trout and I was done for the day. Still exhausted from the overnight flight and the long drive. I had an early sleep and got up the following morning at 5 AM, in time to be at the feeders before sunrise. The feeders at the edge of the farmhouse are the place where the Northern Tiger Cat may pop up



Basically, I waited the whole day around that area. Afraid to be away too long as the cat may pop up and I would miss it. I only walked around the house getting to see some good birds like **Black-and-gold Fruiteater, Mountain Cacique, Blue-capped Tanager, Masked Flowerpiercer, Sickie-winged Guan, Green Jay, Acorn Woodpecker**, to name a few. **Hummingbirds** were plentiful like the **Long-tailed Sylph, Collared Inca, Sparkling Violetear, Buff-tailed Coronet, Lesser Violetear, Tourmaline Sunangel, White-bellied Woodstar** and the **Speckled Hummingbird**. With regard to the mammals, during daytime only the **Red-tailed Squirrels** showed themselves.





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I found it hard just to wait and sit. Although I got some work done on my laptop, just sitting is not my thing. I rather walk and search. However, it is what it is and I had to be patient. However, at the end of the day the Cat had not shown himself. Also, Lucia showed me a book with a record of the sightings. The two days prior to my arrival, the cat had shown itself once every day. However, **the 7 days prior to that, the Cat did not show up ... it made me nervous. Would I miss it?** I only booked those 4 days and the flight for this Cat ... I went to sleep that night not with a good feeling. I tried to pep myself up and said every day is a new day with new chances. Let's see what tomorrow will bring!!

Next morning, I sat in the same place again, in the dark at 05:30, seeing the sunrise which is magic. At around 06:30 Lucia brought me a coffee and **the waiting started again**. I sat at a table with a good view at the hummingbird feeders and the place where the cat could show up.

Meanwhile, I picked up my laptop again and did some work again. Two days ago I got a **very nice message** from [Max van Waasdiijk](#) **an experienced guide and birdwatcher**. He also guides a lot in South Africa, his company is named [Sugarbirdsafaris](#), and he explained to me he follows My Big Cat Year. He knows very well what a Big Year is, as he travelled a few months with Arjan Dwarshuis's Big Year in 2016. Max knew I missed the **Black-footed Cat** in South Africa in January and offered me his help as he has seen it this year already a couple of times in one area in the Northern Cape district.

Long story short, Max is going the three days in October to the area again and I asked him if I could join him. As Max was guiding two clients, he obviously had to check with them first if they were okay for me to join. And they were totally fine with it, how nice!! **Many, many thanks!** Not only to Max but also to his two clients. So, as I also missed the **Cheetah** in January in Kruger due to the flooding, I could do some checking to see if I could combine the visit to the Northern Cape with a reserve close to Johannesburg. At around 10 AM we had a call through WhatsApp and discussed a few things. We need to sort and confirm a few things, but it seems all okay.

Really grateful if people like Max reach out to me and help. I have experienced it now quite a few times already this year and every time I am thrilled and extremely thankful to all those who offer their help!! **Many thanks to you all, again!!!**





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I was still working on my laptop when I heard one of the birds making a loud and different sound, looking like an alarm call. I looked again over my laptop but no cat in sight ... two minutes later, Lucia came outside and pointed in the direction of the Hummingbird Feeders. **And there it was, the Northern Tiger Cat ...** I was overwhelmed again ... what a cat ... and so relaxed!





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It just sat on the log quietly and I took some [photos and made a few videos](#). Amazing to observe a cat so closely that is nearly impossible to encounter in the wild. I felt very privileged. After 10 minutes or so, Lucia came with a piece of chicken. As soon as she had it, it disappeared into the bushes.



That day, the cat came another two times and this time I spotted it directly. You notice the change in bird calls and also the **Red-tailed Squirrels** make their alarm calls so you know there is something going on. Quite exciting to see the cat coming up the log.

I felt really happy as there are enough people visiting this place and missing out on it. I realized I had been very fortunate!

That afternoon I went out walking again on the road and enjoyed the beautiful landscape. I felt so relieved. After dinner that evening I went for a stroll with a thermal and may have had a **Porcupine** but I could not clearly identify it.





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Next morning I sat near the feeders from 6 AM onwards and did some work on my laptop again while enjoying the sounds of nature all around me. Lucia prepared a good coffee again and a great breakfast. And again it showed up!!! What a great way to enjoy your breakfast while looking at a **Northern Tiger Cat** a few meters away!



After Breakfast I went with Martien to an area where back in 2022, we had the **Chestnut-naped Antpitta**. This time it didn't show up. But we had a nice **Green-and-black Fruiteater**, eating a worm out of my hand. A couple of minutes later, a **Crested Cotinga** briefly showed itself, for me the bird of the trip. When we walked down we had a **Grass-green Tanager** showing itself next to the path. A nice finish!

At 11 AM Luis picked me up again and drove me back to Medellín where I had one night of rest and the following morning at 09:45 AM I boarded the plane to Houston where I transferred to Schiphol.





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Excited to come home again after more than 4 months and lots of adventures. I will stay for 2 1/2 weeks at home and will then continue with the last part of the year which will bring me to South Africa (again, for the dipped Black-footed Cat), Brazil, Chile, Western Sahara (again, for the dipped Sand Cat), Uganda and I will finish off in the USA. [The scheme is shown here.](#)

The Big Cat Year is not just about spotting wild cats. It is also about habitat and wildlife conservation. The aim is to support a project/organization in every country visited. With regard to Colombia, we have made a donation towards [Proaves Colombia](#). Colombia's leading bird conservation organization, dedicated to protecting the country of birds. Fundación ProAves works to conserve a great diversity of endemic, resident and migratory birds, as well as mammals, amphibians, reptiles and the rich flora and fauna of Colombia, through a network of 27 natural reserves located in 14 departments across the country.

Many thanks to all those contributors who have made these donations possible!!

Would you like to contribute to supporting these important projects and/or organizations in the world with regard to conservation and protection of nature and wildlife, please have a look at the [funding page](#). All help is appreciated! Big and small, it all counts. You can already help by [buying the projects a coffee](#).

