

NORTHERN ECUADOR

3 – 20 NOVEMBER 2019



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This was a pre-tour on our own before an organized birding trip to central Peru. Since we had both been birding in Ecuador before, we wanted to focus on mammals and a selection of birds we had not seen or photographed before. Roger Ahlman, a Swedish birdguide living in Quito, helped us to form a plan for birdwatching and with logistic and some bookings. For info about mammals we used mammalwatching.com, birdtrip reports and received some good advice from friends.

Our main mammal targets were Spectacled Bear, Mountain Tapir, Olinguito, Stump-tailed Porcupine and Silky Shrew-Opossum and we managed to get all except the last one.

There were three main areas where we saw virtually all mammals.

Napo Province: Papallacta, Antisana, Cayambe-Coca and San Isidro.

Pichincha Province: Bellavista and San Jorge de Milpe.

El Oro Province: Las Peñas and Playa de Oro.

We rented a car from Alamo, which worked very well. Most sites were close to each other so there were no longer distances except for Playa de Oro in the northwest corner of the country.

The report consists of three parts: visited sites, pictures and a species list.

SITES VISITED

RESERVA ECOLÓGICA ANTISANA

The first morning we started scanning for bears at Tambo Condor Mirador between Pintag and Antisana. After an hour Lars decided to walk to the restaurant a few hundred meters downhill to ask Vladimir, the owner of Restaurante Tambo Condor, about recent bear observations. Well there he immediately discovered a bear on the slope on the other side of the river. The bear stayed for hours and gave excellent views.

We drove the road to Laguna de Mica inside the reserve. At least 75 "Andean" White-tailed Deer, most of them far away, and five "Andean Rabbit".

PAPALLACTA

Road E20 from Pifo to Papallacta is a good place to see bears on the slopes. We made some short stops but saw none. Since we had already seen one, we did not stay for long.

Termas de Papallacta is the place to see Stump-tailed Porcupine. We did not stay there but asked in the reception if we could walk around and look for it in the evening and that was fine. The thermal scope was very useful and we found one sleeping near the parking lot. Two days later we wanted to do the same thing but this time the guard did not let us in. Finally, we went with him to the reception and after promising not to enter the entrance to Reserva Ecológica Cayambe-Coca we were allowed to search for the porcupine. But the guard was not happy. This time the porcupine was climbing in a tree next to the gate. In the area we also had an "Andean" Rabbit and some unidentified bats.

According to one of the trip reports there would be an access tunnel with Montane Myotis in Papallacta. We tried but could not find any tunnel.

RESERVA ECOLÓGICA CAYAMBE-COCA

A couple of times we took the road from the entrance signed from E20 up to the masts in search for some birds. Both times it was bad weather and very cold, windy and misty at the top and the only mammal was an "Andean" White-tailed Deer.

There is even an entrance from inside Termas de Papallacta but it closes at 3 pm! It was our intention to walk inside and look for Silky Shrew-Opossum the second visit to Termas de Papallacta but because of the angry guard and our promise to stay in the area we let go. Later we realized that it was four km to the park itself.

We were not lucky with this park but other people see both bear, tapir and a lot of other animals there.

CABAÑAS SAN ISIDRO

Cabañas San Isidro is situated near the small town Cosanga along E45. It's famous for good birding and some have seen Mountain Tapir there. In the latest reports, many seem to have failed so we had no greater hope. And it was not greater after asking the staff. There are some trails and we heard about a salt lick. We just walked Tapir Trail but it was in very bad condition so we returned after a while. After dinner when it calmed down, we scanned the area from the veranda and around 9 pm there was a tapir at the pond a few hundred meters away.

Next day when we talked to a bird guide, he mentioned that his group had seen a tapir on the road the day before.

The place is good for Black Agouti and we saw two of them.

Inside the Cabañas we walked the enlightened entry road in search for bats. The Echometer Touch 2 insisted that the high-flying bats should be Southern Yellow Bat but they are not known to exist east of the Andes. If anyone has any idea what it might be, I would be more than happy to know.

The second night we did not stay at the Cabañas but spotlighted on the small road outside. Two night monkeys were briefly seen not far from the entrance to the Cabañas.

BELLAVISTA CLOUD FOREST RESERVE & LODGE

Among mammalwatchers Bellavista is best known for the Olinguito, a small carnivore described as late as 2013. We missed it in January 2014 when we did not stay at Bellavista so this time we had booked one night there. And if we, God forbid, would fail again we had

more chances to spend some evenings there.

They put out bananas every evening so it is only to sit and watch and hope for the best. Even Kinkajou visit the bananas sometimes but we only saw Olinguito.

Red-tailed Squirrels are very common and we had two Tayras in the morning.

There were a lot of bats around but we were not able to identify any.

SAN JORGE DE MILPE

The reason to stay at very expensive Cliff Lodge, a "satellite" lodge to San Jorge Eco-Lodge Milpe not far from Tandayapa, is a good chance to see the elusive Banded Ground-Cuckoo. When we arrived to San Jorge Eco-Lodge we stopped and asked a man who seemed to be some sort of guard about the road to Cliff Lodge. He said it was closed because there was no electricity and we would stay at San Jorge Eco-Lodge instead. We did not believe him and continued but could not find the lodge. When we returned, we met the man again and this time he said it was ok and showed us the way. He took all our luggage and carried it a km or so through the forest to the lodge where we were the only guests. No problem with electricity. In the evening some people came and cooked dinner for us.

At the lodge we had Central American Agouti both morning and afternoon, a very curious Central American Woolly Opossum, an Alfaro's Rice Rat and a lot of bats. But no Ground-Cuckoo.

LAS PEÑAS

This is a tourist destination in the northwest corner of Ecuador. There is some good birding in the area and it is not far from Selva Alegre, the starting point for the boat trip to Playa de Oro.

During a night drive on a small road heading north from Las Peñas we got two Central American Woolly Opossum and one Common Opossum.

PLAYA DE ORO

Playa de Oro is an Afro-Ecuadorian community located on Río Santiago in the northwest. They run the Tigrillo Lodge that can only be reached by boat from Selva Alegre. The Playa de

Oro area consists of Chocó lowland forest and is a high-class birding destination. A local guide will accompany you on the forest trails. They know the area well but are not bird guides. We had Ramon.

On the trails behind the lodge we saw one Central American Agouti and a troop of White-faced Capuchin monkeys. We asked about Brown-headed Spider Monkeys and the next day Ramon took us further upstream with the boat to a trail I forgot the name of but that would be good for monkeys. There we found both Spider Monkeys, Mantled Howler Monkeys and a Brown-throated Sloth.

At the lodge there was a Central American Woolly Opossum and a lot of bats.

Pictures

All photos by Lars Peterson

Spectacled Bear



Olinguito



Central American Woolly Opossum



Common Opossum



Brown-throated Sloth



Mantled Howler Monkey



Colombian White-faced Capuchin



Andean Rabbit



Stump-tailed Porcupine



Black Agouti



Central American Agouti



White-tailed Deer



SPECIES LIST

1. **Central American Woolly Opossum (Derby's Woolly Opossum)** *Caluromys derbianus*
Four in total. The first was found in the garden at Cliff Lodge, Milpe, the second in the trees around Tigrillo Lodge, Playa de Oro and the two others during night drive along the road north of Las Peñas.
2. **Common Opossum (Black-eared Opossum)** *Didelphis marsupialis*
One during night drive along the road north of Las Peñas.
3. **Brown-throated Sloth** *Bradypus variegatus*
A nice surprise when looking for monkeys on a trail not far from Playa de Oro.
4. **Colombian White-faced Capuchin** *Cebus capucinus*
(White-throated Capuchin *C. capucinus*). Sometimes lumped with Panamanian White-

throated Capuchin – *C. imitator*.

A small group close to Tigrillo Lodge, Playa de Oro.

5. **Brown-headed Spider Monkey (Black-headed Spider Monkey)** *Ateles fusciceps*

Two of them along a trail not far from Playa de Oro.

6. **Mantled Howler Monkey** *Alouatta palliata*

A couple at the same place as Brown-headed Spider Monkey.

7. **Colombian Night Monkey** *Aotus lemurinus*

When night driving the small road outside Cabañas San Isidro we found this species with our thermal scope. Unluckily no picture as there seems to be some confusion about which species of Night Monkey that really occur there.

A sign inside the lodge advised to look for monkeys around the cabins in the evening.

8. **Andean Rabbit** *Sylvilagus andinus*

(Tapeti *Sylvilagus brasiliensis*) Not a valid species according to IUCN.

Common in Reserva Ecológica Antisana and two seen in Papallacta.

9. **Western Dwarf Squirrel** *Microsciurus mimulus*

This little squirrel was seen when birding in Reserva Amagusa.

10. **Red-tailed Squirrel** *Sciurus granatensis*

Specially common in Bellavista but also seen in Birdwatcher's House, in Cordillera Guacomayo and around Playa de Oro.

11. **Alfaro's Rice Rat** *Handleyomys alfaroi*

At least one during night at a feeding place for Wood Quails close to the restaurant in Cliff Lodge, Milpe.

12. **Stump-tailed Porcupine** *Echinoprocta rufescens*

Seen two nights inside the area of Termas de Papallacta. First time sleeping in a tree near the parking lot. Next time moving around in a tree to the left immediately before the bridge just inside the gate.

13. **Black Agouti** *Dasyprocta fuliginosa*

On a small lawn beside our cabin (nr 4) at Cabañas San Isidro at dusk.

14. **Central American Agouti** *Dasyprocta punctata*

Brief view both late afternoon and early morning at Cliff Lodge, Milpe and a much cooler individual just behind Tigrillo Lodge, Playa de Oro.

15. Spectacled Bear *Tremarctos ornatus*

After just one hour the first day Lars found our target nr one – the bear!! We had a perfect view for some hours from Restaurante Tambo Condor when it was feeding on puyas on the other side of a small river.

16. Olinguito *Bassaricyon neblina*

At around 9 pm we finally (as we missed it 2013) saw this newly described species when it came to feed on bananas at Bellavista.

17. Tayra *Eira barbara*

Two animals were seen briefly when they chased each other in early morning at Bellavista.

18. Mountain Tapir *Tapirus pinchaque*

We had no greater hope of seeing Mountain Tapir after reading some reports before the trip, and it was no bigger after asking the staff at Cabañas San Isidro about our chances. But in the evening, we scanned the area from the veranda and with the thermal scope we found something around a little pond some hundred meters away. With two powerful torches we managed to see the Tapir through our binoculars.

19. White-tailed Deer *Odocoileus virginianus*

Sometimes split as Andean White-tailed Deer. At least 75 seen from the road to Laguna de Mica inside Reserva Ecológica Antisana. One along the road to Papallacta.

20. Black Myotis *Myotis nigricans*

According to Echometer Touch 2 and behaviour this was probably one of the species flying around Tigrillo Lodge, Playa de Oro. Also seen hanging on the wall at Cliff Lodge, Milpe.

21. Greater White-lined Bat *Saccopteryx bilineata*

According to Echometer Touch 2 and behaviour this was probably one of the species flying around Tigrillo Lodge, Playa de Oro.

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