

Costa Rica: Trip report on Mammals (March 2022)

We are a couple based in the UK and we usually travel a lot for general wildlife photography with a specific interest in bird watching. This trip to Costa Rica was one of the first ones where we tried to maximise mammal sightings along with other wildlife sightings.

We decided to put this post together to summarise our mammal sightings on our 11-day trip to Costa Rica but if you are interested in reading about all our wildlife/botanical sightings then we have added links to our blog below. There are several more photos on the blogs as well.

<https://wildtravelsdemystified.wordpress.com/2022/05/17/corcovado-national-park-costa-rica/>

<https://wildtravelsdemystified.wordpress.com/2022/04/09/monteverde-and-santa-elena-costa-rica/>

If you would like to see some of the creatures in motion, then the links to the short wildlife films we made are at the end of the report. Critical feedback on the films is more than welcome as we make them on our own budget, and it is a hobby rather than a commercial project (s).

Day 1 & 2: Alajuela

After landing on the evening of Sunday 6th March we went straight to our hotel in Alajuela. It's called Uruka Lodge and the owners are really helpful and friendly. We were really tired that evening, so we went to sleep straight away. The next morning, we indulged in some bird-watching in and around the lodge and then made our way to the Monteverde Cloud Forest.

Day 2-4: Monteverde Cloud Forest

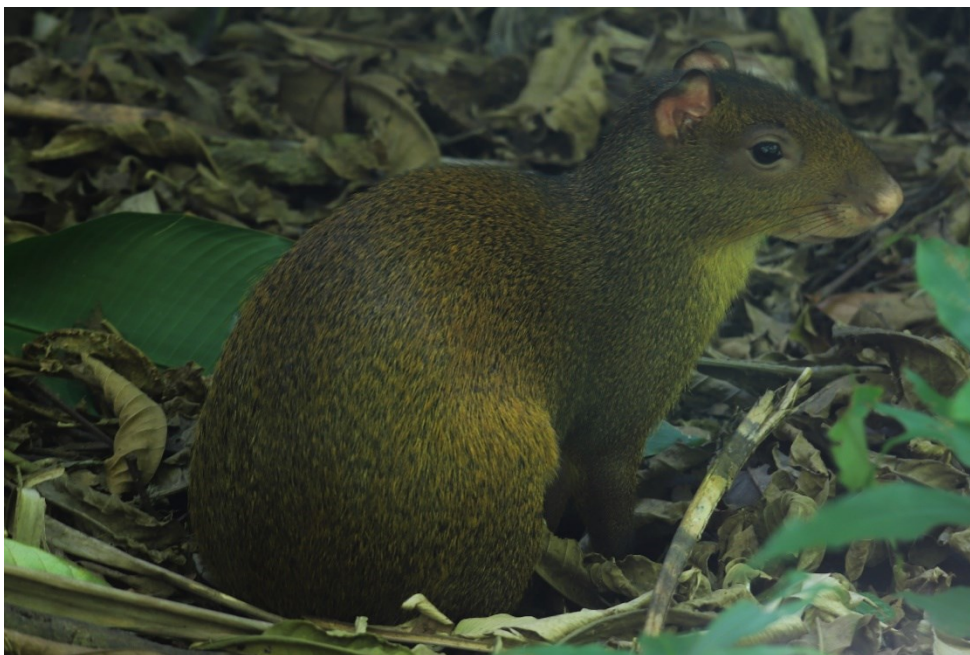
We had booked in to stay at Jagaurandi Lodge for 3 nights which we thought was a sufficient time to spend in the cloud forest. This lodge is a great place with plenty of trails to do some ad-hoc wildlife watching. White-nosed coatis and Variegated squirrels can be seen with ease around the main reception area and in the trails. We saw a Common opossum near the entrance but that was our only Opossum sighting.



Variegated squirrel



Common opossum (above) & Central American Agouti (below)



Mantled howler monkeys are common, and you will definitely be woken up by their roars at around 5:00 am in the morning!

We booked a night walk with Kinkajou Night tours through the reception. They also helped us book all other tours and onward travel to Manuel Antonio.

The Kinkajou night tour did not start until 8:00 pm so we decided to walk the trails within the lodge grounds. We came across a decent number of birds and a very fearless Central American agouti.

The Kinkajou night walk was busy but jam-packed with sightings. The walk must have lasted about 2.5 hours and we saw a Mexican tree porcupine, two Olingoes, a Kinkajou and a Nine banded armadillo. Unfortunately, the Olingoes and Kinkajou were too far and too fast, so we did not succeed

in getting any photos. The Armadillo seemed terrified at the sight of humans, so it ran away from us with surprising speed.



Mexican tree porcupine

The next day we made our way to the Selvaventura park. Our main intention was to do the canopy walk so we could search for some wildlife in the canopy but the hanging bridges there are just too busy to be able to spend any time in peace. The walk itself is breath-taking and the forest is simply spectacular. We did not see much wildlife but a star bird species we came across was the Three wattled bell bird.



Red-Tailed squirrel

On our final day, we had arranged a special bird watching tour with a company called 'Forest Alive'. Our guide, Ian was knowledgeable and very flexible. Although birds were the focus, we did come across another Agouti, a Red-tailed squirrel and Ian also found us a sleeping Hoffman's Two toed sloth at the Curi Cancha reserve. We finished the tour and spent some time at Café Colibri, this is an amazing place to get up close to several hummingbird species. Coatis are common here as well.



Hoffman's two toed sloth hiding well in the cloud forest canopy.

We spent the rest of the day inside the Monteverde Cloud forest reserve. There are nice trails but the wildlife is really difficult to find here. The forest is magical with plenty of magnificent ferns, mossy branches, epiphytes and exotic orchids. Moving creatures on the other hand, are well hidden amongst the leafy foliage here.

Day 5-6: Manuel Antonio

Then we travelled on to Manuel Antonio. The main draw here was the reported ease of seeing sloths in the wild, however we knew that this is the busiest park in Costa Rica and that is why we limited ourselves to staying here for just two nights.

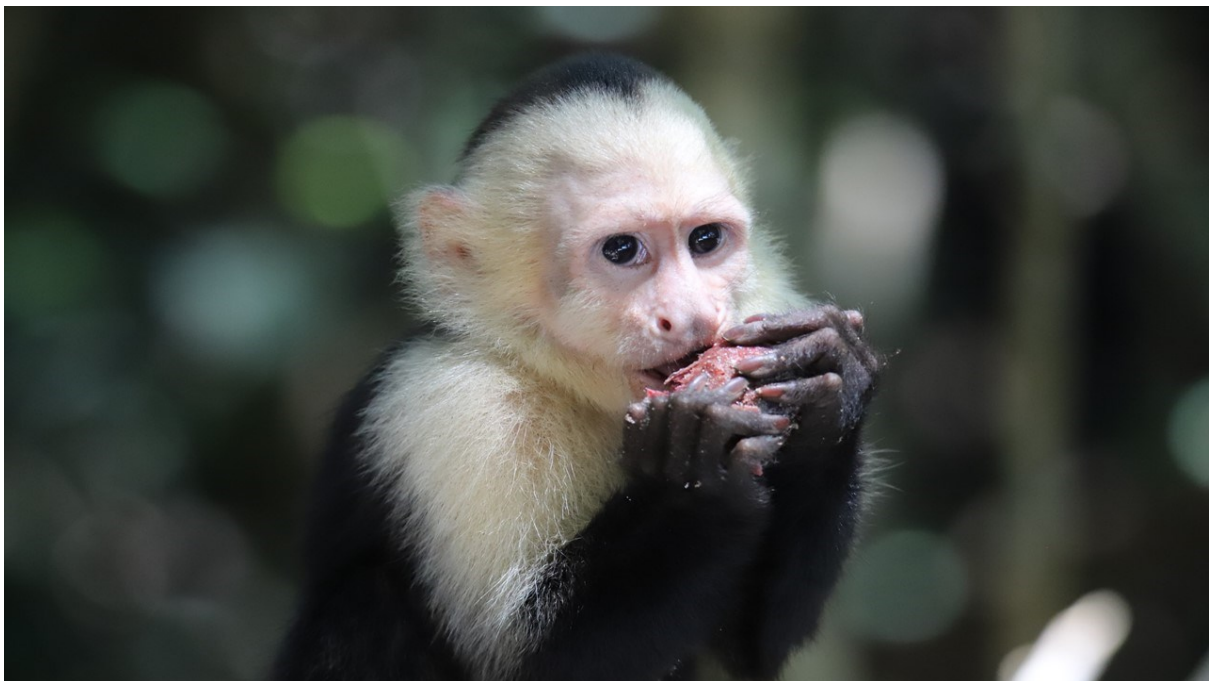
As soon as we arrived at our accommodation (Hotel Manuel Antonio), we booked the tour into the national park through the reception (it was with a company called Jade Tours). We spent the rest of the afternoon and the evening at the main beach and the various mangrove habitats that are found there. White faced-capuchin monkeys are truly common, and you can expect to see them anywhere. The bird watching along the mangroves is wonderful and expect to run into Spiny tailed iguanas and various crab species all along the beach.

We were having a late dinner by the beach and we were shocked to cross paths with a really bold White tailed deer that just appeared out of nowhere on the beach and just casually strolled towards Manuel Antonio village.

We also saw a Raccoon later in the night raiding for bins, it was probably a common Northern Raccoon.



A White-tailed deer that just casually strolled away towards Manuel Antonio village. The guy in the background was not shocked at all. White-faced Capuchin monkey below.





Mantled howler monkey (above) and a more visible Hoffman's two toed sloth (below)



The next day we started early and we checked the outer borders of the national park for Central American squirrel monkeys but we could not find them. Inside the park, it was really, really busy. The good thing about the high density of guides and wildlife watchers was that no creature was being missed. Both sloth species really are common, but it is exceptionally difficult to see them in the branches. Mantled howler monkeys also roamed around in the canopy while Capuchin monkeys had become a common sight by now. We were surprised to find a few people who did not see the capuchin monkeys though! We did come across another White-tailed deer and the guide found us a well-hidden Common tent making bat. Lots of nice herps and the birding highlight of the day was a Common parakeet.

Day 7-9: Osa and Corcovado National Park:

Satisfied with our sloth sightings, we made our way towards Puerto Jimenez on day 7. We then arranged for a transfer from Puerto Jimenez to Carate where we would be spending 3 nights at Luna Lodge. The journey from Puerto Jimenez to Carate is through beautiful jungle, ranches, streams and rivers. Luna Lodge is situated further away from the Carate airstrip, and it is a difficult place to get to. However, the views from lodge are amazing as you are surrounded by wonderful rainforest and the sights and sounds are something out of a fairy tale.

We arranged for a night walk for that evening, no mammals but a lot of insects, bullfrogs and a Northern cat eyed snake that was hunting for the tadpoles of the Red-eyed tree frog.

The next morning, we did some bird watching and then later in the evening we had arranged for a safari bird watching tour. We came across some amazing birds but the highlight was coming across a lovable troop of Central American squirrel monkeys along with Central American spider monkeys.



Central American squirrel monkeys (above) and Central American spider monkey (below)



On our last day in the lodge, we did a day hike into Corcovado National park. Ideally, we would have liked to hike all the way into Sirena Ranger station and stay there for one or two nights but we were limited on time, so we had to be content with the day hike. All four monkey species of Costa Rica were already in the bag so we could not complain!



Northern tamandua



Common tent making bats (above), Lesser white lined bats (below)



A northern Tamandua sighting greatly added to our list of mammals as it gave us a long and sustained viewing as it sniffed around for ant nests and termite mounds. Our guide also found us some well-hidden common tent making bats and lesser white lined bats.

We also came across more spider monkeys on our way back.

We spent the rest of the evening walking some of the trails in the lodge. Some residents had come across Tayras and we thought given our brilliant luck so far we should be able to cover at least one Tayra but they remained elusive throughout our stay.

Day 10-11 Back to Alajuela and back to the UK

The journey back to Puerto Jimenez and onwards to Alajuela was largely unremarkable. We enjoyed the final days at Hotel Robledas in Alajuela which is a fantastic choice if you find yourself there. The hotel grounds are filled with birds and a pair of Ferruginous pygmy owls are almost guaranteed there.

Transport:

We did not drive ourselves but used shared & private shuttles. Easyride Costa Rica is a great service, and their drivers are really fun. Private shuttles are obviously more expensive but exceptionally convenient. Since we were short on time, we did not mind getting the odd private shuttle from A to B.

We did use the public bus at the end of the trip to go to San Jose from Alajuela & back. The public buses are very cheap, and they seemed to be punctual. They are usually busy but clean and the people are very friendly & helpful, especially if you can speak a little Spanish.

If you have a lot of time to spare and not too much luggage to take care of then we would advise trying out some of the longer distance public transport. The buses almost always state the route in the front. We were carrying a lot of photography & videography equipment (along with the other luggage!) otherwise we would have loved to do some more travelling on the long-distance public buses.

Accommodation:

We booked all the accommodation through Booking.com.

Further Information and Links:

During the lockdown, we got into some wildlife filmmaking and Costa Rica was our first foray into filming wildlife in the tropics, you are welcome to watch the movies here.

Corcovado National Park: https://youtu.be/HA_oVWaTSRM

Monteverde Cloud Forest: https://youtu.be/ubd_kHFBmpg

We are still working on a film on the wildlife we saw in the night walks and the mangroves and surrounding habitats. We find it frustrating when wildlife documentaries on TV use a flurry of creatures in filler shots without identifying them. So, we decided to add the names of almost everything that shows up in the films.