

## ECUADOR 26 March 2021 -3 April 2021

After 13 months of no international travel, two jabs of Moderna in my right upper arm, and reading Ian Thompson's trip report to Ecuador for inspiration, I finally did my first mammal watching trip in what seemed like an eternity.

All three of the places I visited have been mentioned in detail before so I decided to add some information that might be helpful to other travelers visiting the same places.

1. Cabanas San Isidro Lodge - Most likely this lodge is best known to mammal watchers for having a salt lick that attracts Mountain Tapirs, and a small corn feeding station for Black Agoutis. However, I had nothing but monkeys on my mind and came to see the Lemurine Night Monkeys (*Aotus lemurinus*) that live on the property. I was interested in finding out where the day roost/tree hole was for the monkeys and asked my guide Andreas and the co-owner of the lodge Mitch, where to look. I was told that they do not roost in tree cavities, and similar to some night monkeys I saw in Colombia resting in bamboo, they tend to find an area of dense vegetation in trees to sleep during the day. I was told that the monkeys were "almost guaranteed" and that in the two nights that I had booked to stay at the lodge I had about a 70 percent



chance of seeing them. Mitch told me that people had come to the lodge in the past to see the monkeys and failed. The most common place they tend to sleep is in a dense area of trees right behind cabins 10 and 11. They put my friend and I in cabin 10 to increase our chances of seeing them. I would have tried to to walk in the trees behind the cabins, but a steep slope and dense vegetation made this difficult. To the left is the view of the trees from the balcony of the rooms. The first night I was there we stood underneath the balcony and waited

until dusk. Like clockwork, as soon as it got dark, branches along the tree in the left of the photo started shaking and I had my first view of the monkeys. They proceeded to go along the main path to the restaurant. We ended up seeing them multiple times that evening along the same path and in the trees in the parking area. They are also known to like to hang around the trees in the restaurant area of the lodge. We also saw a lone Kinkajou (*Potus flavus*) in the trees behind our cabin while waiting for the monkeys.



The second night was a different story. We did the same thing, waiting until dusk under the balcony and the monitoring for any movement in the trees. Nothing. We then looked along all the main trails and by the restaurant before and after we ate dinner. I was told that sometimes the monkeys sleep deeper in the forest and do not hang out by the cabins. Another factor that may have played a part is that the lodge has been attracting clients from Quito since the

pandemic to weekend at the lodge with promises of a beautiful heated pool, excellent cuisine, and a small man made boat ride down a waterway. We had booked both nights on the weekend and each night there were three families with young children. Both nights we were not alone waiting for the monkeys under the cabin. While for the most part they were quiet during the initial wait and see period, there was some small human vocalizing once the monkeys were found. Whether this played a part in failure the second night I am not sure. But booking your stay during the week may be a more quiet option. I did not see the Mountain Tapirs, a species I have seen before, but the Black Agoutis (*Dasyprocta fuliginosa*) were easy to see by the corn feeding station.



When I got to the lodge I did the typical “tell me what mammals are common to see in a visit”. Mitch and Andreas told me that for the previous three weeks an Oncilla had been seen hanging around the restaurant area. Mitch also stated it was a species he had seen many times in the past and told me that people have found them on trails with heat scopes (just after giving me the judging look of why I did



not have one..). The first recent sighting was around 8 am when some people were watching a night monkey in the tree above the sign that leads to the restaurant. They got Mitch then asked him if the lodge had a cat. The cat turned out to be an Oncilla sitting quietly in the tree, near a very terrified night monkey. I was then told one of the lodge guides had watched it walk down the main path to the restaurant mid day the week before, and the woman in the kitchen stated that sometimes they see it walking behind the restaurant. I tried all kinds of tactics, sans a heat scope, looking for the Oncilla. Including asking Andreas to search

underneath cabins 15 and 16 which were the closest to the

restaurant.



The largest “kick in the gut” was the second day I was there ,around 10 am while I was on a trail, the Oncilla decided to walk across the concrete path next to the boot washing station right in front of one of the families that I had been looking at monkeys with the night before.

Andreas, rightfully so, initially did not want to tell

me. Considering the multiple sighting of this individual in the last few weeks, maybe with more time and a heat scope it could found.

2. Choco Lodge - Canande Reserve - My main reason for wanting to come here was to see the three monkeys that call the reserve home. The Brown-Headed Spider Monkey (*Ateles fusciceps rufiventris*), the Ecuadorian Mantled Howler (*Alouatta palliata aequatorialis*) and the Colombian White-faced Capuchin (*Cebus capucinus*).

A few things about the lodge and reserve itself. Getting there it takes about 7 hours from Quito.



Two of those hours involve being on a dirt road that in areas is very unkept. Also to get to the lodge you have to take a “ferry” that is pushed around by a small boat. The actual ferry ride itself is only about five minutes. We are told that if the river is too high from rain the ferry will not run.



Currently the lodge has four rooms with a balcony overlooking part of the reserve. The view is beautiful. They had a banana feeding station that sometimes attracts Tayras. They are currently in the process of building 8 additional cabins next to the restaurant. On a sadder note there is a lot of logging going on in the Ecuadorian Choco, a lot... And the current rooms are right next to the main road so the sound of logging trucks going by all day and night was not pleasant. The location of the new rooms will be down a

walkway and in the forest, so the noise problem should be solved.

We were assigned a park ranger named Jose who worked hard to find us the monkeys. None of rangers spoke English. I was told that a ranger is supposed to be with you on the trails at all times, but I am not sure how strict this is. Jose did seem interested however in finding us things. Along with Jose, we used the guide David Galarza



([davidgalarza83@gmail.com](mailto:davidgalarza83@gmail.com)). I can highly recommend him. He also was willing to look for wildlife at any time, was a great spotter and great fun to be around.

Jose stated the the spider monkeys were easy, the howlers should not be difficult, and the capuchins can be very hard to find. The reserve has

several well kept paths. Most of them involve some sort of steep elevation changes at times and being there at the end of the rainy season meant that most of the hikes involved some mud. Oddly for the first time in forever on a muddy, steep hike I managed to stay somewhat upright. The first day it was recommended to take the hardest, steepest pathway to get to a clearing with a view point of the Choco. It was also recommended as it is supposed to be the best for good spider monkey and howler sightings. We initially took the Great Green Macaw path to the Banded Ground Cuckoo, then went up a





small hill to the viewpoint. As promised we had amazing views of a family group for over thirty minutes right where the two main trails met.

We did also see three additional families on the way down, however those sightings were less than five minutes each. Right before we came back to the restaurant, two lone spider monkeys were hanging near the restaurant.

We also saw one lone howler monkey on the hike down.

We ended up staying at Canade for two full days, and both days we saw the spider monkeys except for on the Red Capped Manakin Trail. We saw one additional male Howler Monkey, but heard the species many, many times.

Two of the nights we did some spot lighting on the small trail that lead to the Golden Crested Tanager loop. We had planned to do some the last night on the main logging road, but heavy rain made this difficult. Neither night we saw a single mammal. This trail area is also supposed to be good for the capuchins. The last sighting of them was about 1 week prior to my visit according to Jose. Unfortunately I did not see this species.

3. San Tadeo Birding Garden, Mindo - I had been to this birding garden five years before and saw zero mammals. When I saw Karina and Andrey's post about a Mountain Coati (*Nauella olivacea*) showing up, I tried to think of a way to be there one morning to try for the species. However, my schedule was already tight so I did not think I could make it work. The last day at Canade I was telling David about the post and he told me that we would have to drive right by the birding garden to get back to Quito. However, this would be around noon. Luckily, David was friends with the owners husband and called him about the Coati. It turns out that the coati shows up off and on all day, so trying mid day was possible.

We got to the birding gardens and were the only tourists. It involves two tiers, an upper area where fruit was placed and a lower tier down a flight a steps to see hummingbird feeders. There is a very small patch of forest in between the tiers and the place itself is near a busy highway. David called ahead and asked the owner to place extra bananas out to help tempt the coati. As soon as we got there, my friend saw a small brown object walking to the left of the area. It turned out not to be the coati, but one of two Central American Agoutis (*Dasyprocta punctuata*) that have taken up residence in the gardens. I watched in earnest as the two agoutis were taking turns downing entire whole bananas over and over and over. They at one





point would take turns shoving two bananas in their mouths and running off with them.

Next a small army of Red-Tailed Squirrels (*Sciurus granatensis*) descended upon the platforms to eat. This included me seeing my first ever juvenile Red-Tailed Squirrel.



The owner of the bird tables told us that besides the Agoutis, Coati and the Squirrels, a Tayra had been showing up frequently to eat as well.

After an hour of watching the rodents pillage the bananas along with a variety of birds, I was getting nervous. Should more bananas be out , should I be noisy with the agoutis to shoo them away... it was a tense time in a mammal watchers life. I did not realize how much agoutis could actually eat at one time. At this point David asked if we wanted to look at the hummingbirds. I think I muttered something along the lines of F\*\*\* No. My friend and David then decided to see them, leaving myself and the driver to stand watch. I was watching

them walk down the stairs to the left of the garden and as soon as I could no longer see their heads, the Mountain Coati strolled out into the open. It did look at us very shocked at first, then hunger kicked in and it proceeded to eat. It was obvious that it was waiting for us to leave the entire time. This sighting ended up being around 13:15. We called my friend and David to come back up and it quickly left. Luckily, within five minutes it came back again to eat for another 5-10 minutes. Having a decoy human to walk down the steps may be a good move to lure the coati out in the open later in the day.

All in all a great trip in a fantastic mammal watching destination.



