

COLOMBIA 16 JANUARY 2022 - 23 JANUARY 2022

In January of 2022 I unexpectedly had some free time that I was able to fill with a mammal watching trip. I had been to Colombia once before, but did not have time to explore the Northern coast region. I contacted Wild About Colombia, run by the fabulous Rob Smith and Claudia Diaz, to set up the trip. While they both had commitments during this time and could not travel with me, they were quick to answer questions and were easy to contact during the trip. I traveled with my friend Sarah.

The trip was broken into three sections

1. Cartagena - staying at the Casa La Fe in the historical district.
2. Tayrona National Park - staying at the lovely Villa Playa Tayrona, complete with 6 rooms, beach and river views, and a no children policy. Heaven.
3. El Dorado Nature Reserve -staying at the El Dorado lodge.

Day 1 - I took an overnight flight on Copa airlines that arrived in Cartagena around 08:36. We were picked up at the airport by Daniel Grey, a local guide that did our city tour for the morning. He was a great person to be around and I wish he was a wildlife guide and could have been the tour leader for the entire trip. Daniel took us in and around the historical district. We saved the best for last however with a stop at the Parque del Centenario, The small city park is located across from the Puerta del Reloj gate in the historical district. The park was created to commemorate those who lost their lives in the revolt for independence in Colombia. I had read a post by Ignacio Yufera that a small population of introduced free-ranging Cotton-top Tamarins, White-handed Tamarins, and their hybrid offspring were living wild in the park. The park itself has a small population of trees lining the walkways. I was initially concerned for the well being of the tamarins been able to find food until I watched the entire family group surround a family that was having a picnic along one of the walk ways. I think the word "no" was not in their vocabulary.





The park also has Brown-Throated Three-toed Sloths that were clearly a fan favorite. One individual had about thirty people standing under the tree he was in.

Day 2 - This was spent as a relaxing day. We had a driver take us from Cartagena to the Villa Playa Tayrona hotel. The pool and the beach involved all of our afternoon activities.

Day 3 - We waited at dawn outside of our hotel for our next guide Cristian Sierra. Cristian is an excellent spotter. While waiting for him there were many bats flying around the hotel and over the pool. Cristian was able to get us early access into Tayrona National Park at the Zaino entrance. This proved to be very helpful, because as soon as the park opened, a hoard of tourists piled in. Along the main road we saw Crab-eating fox and the first of many Central American agoutis.

I had two main goals in the park, to see the introduced Cotton-top tamarins and the native Santa Marta white-fronted capuchin. Cristian positioned us along a section of the main road and within minutes we were watching a large troop of capuchins. We then did some other trails along a closed beach section and saw more agoutis. At this point I was enjoying the flat gentle walk and made a comment to Sarah that I could walk like this all day. My comfort level bubble however was quickly burst when we starting hiking up and UP and UP, in the



heat, along the Knowledge Trail, which Cristian told us was the best trail to see the tamarins. Half way up we saw a very relaxed family of Colombian Red Howler Monkeys.

When we finally reached the top of the trail, a small troop of capuchins were doing their best to get tourists to feed and interact with them. Luckily, I did not see anyone doing this. Also at the top of trail was a small drink station. Cristian



asked the person there if he had seen the tamarins, and we were quickly told the rowdy group of capuchins we just experienced had chased them off before we got there.....



We spend the rest of the morning hiking down the trail close to a beautiful tourist free beach. We took a horse trail to get back to our car and along the way saw more agoutis, howler monkeys and capuchins. That afternoon we relaxed back at the beach. While I was changing in the room, Sarah also saw a Nutria in the river at the back of the hotel.

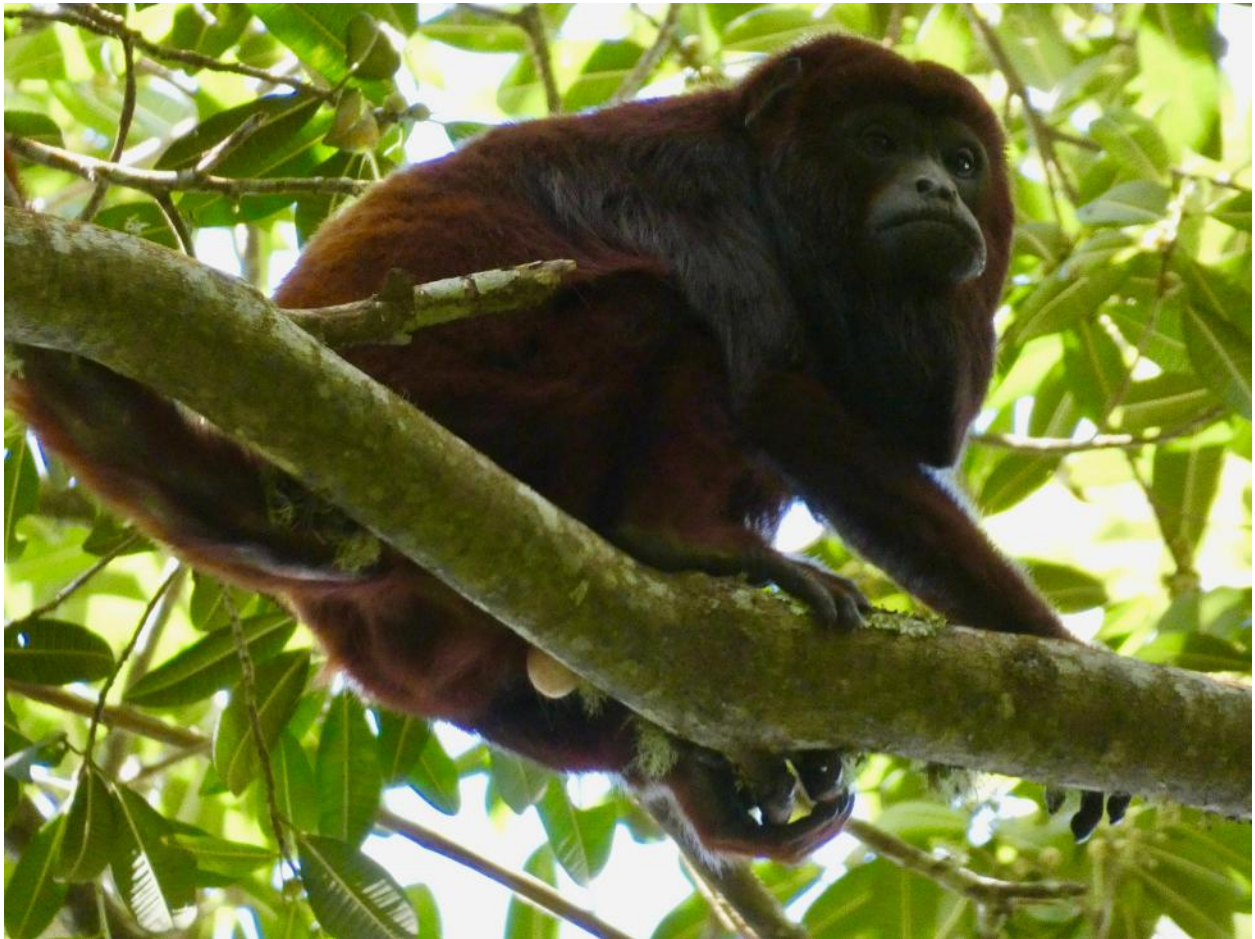
Day 4 - Sarah decided to relax that morning and let me concentrate on looking for the tamarins. The tamarins were initially introduced into the park in 1974. While they are not historically native to this part of Colombia, the tamarin population in the park has flourished, and this is one of the easier places to see the species. Cristian decided to first look for the tamarins in a camping area (there was no sign indicating the name) near the main road. He told me he had never seen them there, but had a hunch about the area. After getting into the campground one of the workers pointed to a small forest patch in the back. Sure enough, three Cotton-top tamarins were sitting in a tree foraging. We ended up spending over an hour with about 12 different tamarins. We also saw Red-Tailed Squirrel with the tamarins.





On way back to the car we saw another large troop of tamarins along the main road. The afternoon was again spent relaxing in and around the beach and pool.

Day 5 - We spent the next portion of the trip focusing on birds (for Sarah) and mammals for me. We first drove to Minca to watch some hummingbirds at feeders. We also saw more Red Tailed squirrels in the trees. We then drove up the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta to reach the beautiful El Dorado Lodge. The lodge is situated in the El Dorado Nature Reserve which is the flagship reserve for the ProAves foundation. The lodge is split into ten former rooms for tourists, which now houses the guides, and the newer five Kogihabs which are individual huts inspired by the architecture of the kogui indigenous tribe. The views from the huts were breathtaking. When we entered the reserve we saw a lone male



Colombian Red Howler Monkey by the road. There are small fruit bird feeders by the main restaurant and I saw the most beautiful Red-tailed Squirrel (color wise) that I had ever seen. To my horror the staff would chase her off when she was raiding the feeders. At the former rooms each night they have a feeding station for Grey-handed Night Monkey and Kinkajou. Sure enough as soon as it got dark, the monkeys emerged from trees across from the rooms. They were able to feed for about ten minutes before being scared off by a kinkajou.



Day 6. - We left the lodge early (04:30) to drive to an area where the locally endemic Santa Marta Parakeet lives. We had nice close views of a small flock next to the road. Insert obligatory bird photo here



We also saw more Red- tailed Squirrels. In the early afternoon I rested while Sarah went bird watching with Cristian. That evening we went back to see the Night Monkeys.



Day 7 - We had a long mammal-less drive to Cartagena.

Day 8 - home.

As usual Colombia did not disappoint me. This was the first time in awhile I mixed relaxing with wildlife watching. Cartagena is also one of my new favorite cities in South America.

Species seen -

1. Cotton-top Tamarin - *Saguinus oedipus*
2. White -handed Tamarin -*Saguinus leucopus*
3. Brown -throated Three-toes Sloth - *Bradypus variegatus*
4. Crab-eating Fox - *Cerdocyon thous*
5. Central American Agouti - *Dasyprocta punctata*
6. Santa Marta White- Fronted Capuchin - *Cebus malitiosus*
7. Colombian Red Howler Monkey - *Alouatta seniculus*
8. Red - Tailed Squirrel - *Sciurus granatensis*
9. Nutria - *Myocastor coypus*
10. Grey-handed Night Monkey - *Aotus griseimembra*
11. Kinkajou - *Potus flavus*