

Northern Ecuador January, 2022: Mammal Watching Trip Report

Aidan Place, William von Herff, Ryan Zucker



Olinguito, Bellavista Lodge

Summary- Mostly a birding trip, but a few specific mammal spots were worked in. Despite the bird focus, we had pretty good success with mammals with **Mountain Tapir**, **Olinguito**, **Tayra**, **Western Lowland Olingo**, **Culpeo**, and **Lemurine Night Monkey** as highlights.

Itinerary Synopsis- Flew into Quito and went west to Mindo. Stayed six days around Mindo before driving to the east slope via Papallacta Pass. Stayed three days near Guacamayos Ridge and then two days near WildSumaco. One final day was spent in transit back to Mindo. All travel was done by an Avis rental car (2021 Jeep Compass).

Reports by Location-

Reserva Yanacocha: Went here well predawn to make the hike for Imperial Snipe. On the entrance road, we had an **Andean Tapeti** cross the road.

Refugio Paz de los Aves: The only mammal seen here was a **Red-tailed Squirrel**, but we saw cat tracks which, based on size, seem very likely to have been **Oncilla**.



Apparent Oncilla Track, Refugio Paz de las Aves

Reserva Amagusa: Only mammals seen here were **Red-tailed Squirrels** on the entrance road. We had heard of a Mountain Coati coming into their fruit feeders regularly, but we did not see any sign of it in the couple hours we spent there.

Rancho Suamox: Stopped here for the Brown Wood-rail that comes into their compost heap. While waiting in the blind, we had several **Central American Agouti** coming in to eat fruit. I would advise others to avoid this location for the husband of the new owner (who bought the property within the past month) is vehemently anti-vaccine and will find any excuse to bring up his views to anyone, even adding emphatically that, “there’s going to be a second Nuremberg Trial for those who created the COVID lockdowns.” Made our whole time there rather unpleasant.

San Jorge de Milpe Lodge: This was the one lodge we stayed at during our time in Ecuador as it was at the time closed to non-guests (seems since they have opened it up for a steep entrance fee) and we really wanted to see the Banded Ground-cuckoo that was coming into their moth sheet. It ended up being one of the better spots for mammals on the trip. Pre-dawn I managed to spotlight a **Western Lowland Olingo**. Later, while waiting out a rainstorm we had a **Tayra** come into a fruit feeder at the “Forest Lodge.” We talked to the owner and he said they regularly have Tayra coming into feeders at both lodges.

Bellavista Lodge: This lodge high in the cloud forest has an excellent feeder setup for mammals. The star of the show is, of course, **Olinguito**, with two individuals visiting the banana feeders outside the lodge restaurant just after dark. Kinkajou and Andean White-eared Opossum come into this feeder as well, but while the Olinguito is apparently a consistent presence, these other two species fluctuate with how frequently they appear. When we were there, we were told by the lodge staff that neither had been visiting much at all for the past couple months. However, we were able to locate an **Andean White-eared Opossum** at a fruit feeder next to the parking lot. We did not see any of the Tube-lipped Tailless Bats that are supposed to come into the hummingbird feeders.

We did not stay at Bellavista, preferring to use cheaper accommodations in Mindo. We were permitted entrance to see the mammals with a \$25 per person fee which covered dinner as well. A pretty good deal on the whole.

Reserva Geobotanica Pululahua: We visited this nature reserve in a volcanic crater outside Quito at night to look for Buff-fronted Owl. On the way out of the crater on Via el Pululahua we had great views of a **Culpeo** on the side of the road.



Culpeo

Papallacta Pass: The classic spot for Spectacled Bear and Mountain Tapir did not disappoint with distant, but excellent views of a **Mountain Tapir** early in the morning around **(-0.348211, -78.198966)**! This was the undisputed mammal highlight of the trip and seeing my first tapir is not something I'm likely to forget for a long time. No bears could be found despite our best efforts, although we talked to some Belgian mammal watchers a few days prior who had no fewer than 5(!) in a morning. On the road to the antennas **(-0.318566, -78.191240)** we had a number of **Andean Tapeti** and a few **Andean White-tailed Deer**.



Stunning Paramo Habitat at Papallacta



Mountain Tapir!!

Guacamayos Ridge Trail: A spot near San Isidro (-0.6236667,-77.8404444) that is much better known to birders than to mammal watchers, we nonetheless had some excellent mammal sightings at this spot. The trail starts at the top of a ridge and then winds down through some excellent habitat for about 4km before reaching a pipeline which you can continue to walk down if you wish. We spent three morning on this trail and in that time had plenty of **Red-tailed Squirrels**, two **Amazon Dwarf Squirrels** (presumably the Dwarf Squirrels on the east slope of the Andes are of this species?), **Spectacled Bear** tracks, and daily sightings of troops of **Poepig's Woolly Monkey**.



Spectacled Bear Track



Amazon Dwarf Squirrel

Via Sierra Azul (San Isidro Lodge Entrance Road): Due to budget constraints, we were not able to stay at this excellent lodge for mammal watching. In addition, due to the pandemic, they were also not accepting visitors. Therefore, to look for Lemurine Night Monkey we had to content ourselves with searching along the entrance road. Thankfully, we succeeded at this fairly easily with a small group of **Lemurine Night Monkey** not long after dark near the turn off for the lodge. The lodge itself is, of course, much more reliable for this species, but it's good to know that they are gettable on the entrance road. We also had **Brazilian Tapeti** (or whatever the rabbits here will be when the taxonomic dust settles).



Lemurine Night Monkey

WildSumaco Lodge: An excellent birding spot in the eastern foothills of the Andes that we unfortunately did somewhat badly with for mammals. I'm sure it would have been better had we not been focusing so much on our huge number of bird targets here. We had a brief look at a **Black Agouti** near the lodge and heard a second one later on one of the trails. Despite seeing on trip reports that they're supposed to be consistent at the lodge feeders, we did not have any in about an hour-long stakeout. After dark we had an **arboreal Rat sp.** along one of the trails. We could not find any Black-mantled Tamarins on either of our two days here.

We paid a \$30 per person entrance fee to access this site without staying at the lodge.

Reserva Antisana: We had huge numbers of **Andean White-tailed Deer** and a couple **Andean Tapeti** at this paramo spot. Note that the entrance closes at two, something we learned the hard way when we try to enter at four and were turned away.