

Endemic Mammals of the Dominican Republic

Destination: Dominican Republic, Hispaniola

Season: Jan - Feb



100% success rate in finding endemic Hispaniolan Solenodons and Hutias



World renowned scientific guide throughout, one of the leading biologists in D.R.



Specialist spotlighting sessions with expert local guides for the rare mammals



Chances for some of the world's rarest mammals, birds and reptiles to be found



Excellent chances for large endemic Rhinoceros & Ricord's iguanas

Dates:

Next tour: 24th – 28th February 2023

Private / Tailored Tour information:

This is one of the most specialist mammalwatching trip around, heading to a small country not known for its diversity of mammal life but instead known for some of the world's rarest and most unusual species such as the solenodon and hutia.

The best season for looking for mammals in the Dominican Republic is the dry season height of the dry season (January and February) as the solenodon is nocturnal and moves around at night, the best way of finding them is to listen to them rustling around on the dry leaves. However if you wish and subject to availability the trip can be booked any time in this period. But we recommend the above mentioned dates.

This trip is ideally limited to 4 people in total but we can accommodate larger groups on request. We can also arrange private tours for solo travellers and couples and we can provide prices for any group size on request.

We also have flexibility for the duration of trip you would like to book as some people prefer to add on some birding, whale watching or looking for manatees and other species as part of this trip, if you are interested in these or other options please just let us know.

Some of our clients prefer to add this trip to trips to other islands in the Caribbean or Central American countries and can also organise these trips for you if you wish.

Prices (2023 season):

Group Tour (4 nights)

£1,995 per person (based on 4 pax)

*single supplement £150

£2,300 per person (based on 3 pax)

*single supplement £150

£2,950 per person (based on 2 pax)

*single supplement £150

£3,995 per person (based on 1 pax)

Overview

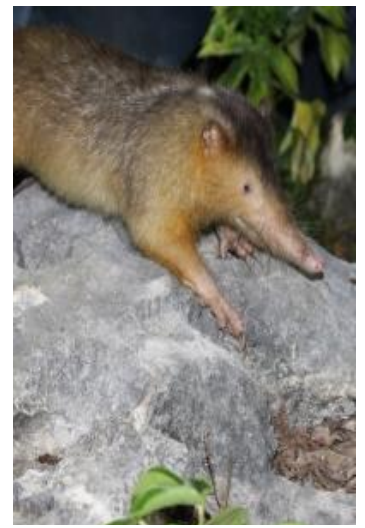
Day 1: Santo Domingo / Pedernales

Day 2: Jaragua National Park

Day 3: Lagoon Oviedo / Barohuco National Park

Day 4: Santo Domingo

Day 5: Home





Tour Information

Introduction

The Caribbean is not widely known for its mammal life, or even much terrestrial wildlife at all. And it is right that many species have become extinct since the arrival of Europeans to the New World in the 1400's. But there are some species still, mostly clinging to existence in the more remote areas of the larger islands such as Jamaica, Cuba and Hispaniola. With the help of the foremost biologist and conservationist on the island (Dr. Brocca) we will be able to track down two of the Caribbean's most elusive and unusual mammals. The solenodons and hutias have nothing else like them in the natural world, when they are lost forever this entire group of animals becomes extinct.

So it cannot be underestimated the importance of the work being done by Dr. Brocca and his team. The two main mammals that we will be looking for on this trip are the Hispanoilian solenodon and Hispaniolan hutia, they are both endemic to Hispanoila (although largely extinct in Haiti) and are the only members of these genera that are still alive today.

The solenodon is so unusual that its description defies belief, about the size of a house cat, with an awkward and slow gait, they look like oversized shrews that have a venomous bite and a ball and socket joint on their nose. Hutias are giant arboreal beavers in appearance and struggle to survive as they are favoured for food and suffer when deforestation occurs. This short trip is one that will fascinate anyone interested in rare and unusual wildlife.

Alongside the two targeted mammals we will also search out endemic birds and reptiles within this short time frame. Despite being a short trip and there not being a huge variety of wildlife to be seen, this trip is designed to offer the chance of seeing and photographing two of the world's most unusual, little known and critically endangered mammals. On this aim we have very high hopes and should be successful.

Itinerary

Day 1 Santo Domingo / Pedernales

Arrival & Travelling

Accommodation:
(Local Guest House)

Food:
Dinner only today.

Transportation:
Private vehicle.

On arrival in Santo Domingo you will meet Dr. Brocca and be transported westward along the southern coast. The drive takes us past some stunning coastal scenery, the waves of the turquoise sea crashing onto the limestone cliffs, eventually arriving at the fishing town of Pedernales.

The rest of the day is free to relax and rest as we will be heading out in search of the solenodon after dark. After sunset we pick up the local trackers in a nearby village. The local trackers are trained by and paid for by Dr. Brocca and his organisation. They nearly always used to be poachers and are now employed to track and monitor the solenodons and hutias in the region.

We then climb in altitude into Jaragua National Park, this is the habitat of the solenodon. In fact the insectivorous solenodons have now adapted reasonably well to cattle pasture and so we would focus our searches around the farmland neighbouring the forest. Finding a solenodon is best left to the local guides and so off they go into the pastures and forest as we wait in the car on the main road for the call. Once the solenodon has been found it is caught by the trackers and placed into a canvas bag, when Jorge catches up with the trackers the animal is weighed, tagged, measured and also checked for parasites and disease.

We will then have some time with the animal after it is released for viewing and photography before the solenodon retreats back into the wilderness to continue its nights feeding and we retire to our accommodation.

Day 2 Jaragua National Park

Wildlife Watching

Accommodation:
(Local Guest House)

Food:
All meals included today and served in between wildlife watching activities.

Transportation:
Private vehicle & walking.

When we start today will be dictated by whatever time we get back to the accommodation last night after searching for the solenodons.

When you decide to start the day we will travel to the coast and the sharp and jagged limestone and salt karst formations in search for reptiles and birds. This harsh landscape has kept most of the area wild and it is the best place to see some of the larger animals in the island. The two species of iguana that inhabit Hispaniola, the large



and more common rhinoceros iguana and the poorly understood and very endangered Ricord's iguana. These would be our two targets this afternoon.

Reptiles are best looked for in the afternoon as the sun is at its height and the reptiles are sunning themselves and very active. As well as looking for the many smaller lizards such as ameivas and curlytails around the limestone rocks we hope to see some huge rhinoceros iguanas. Along the coastline we can also see a wealth of birdlife, from frigate birds and tropic birds flying over the sea to small todys and hummingbirds in the mangroves; we will also head inland a little way to larger cliffs and the preferred habitat of the endemic and critically endangered Ricord's iguana. This reptile is in severe decline and now confined to one small area of cliff, this land is now protected to an extent however the farmland abuts the protected land and habitat encroachment is rampant here. But luckily Dr. Brocca has found local guides and works with iguana researchers with a genuine knowledge and passion for protecting these animals.

We will continue our exploration around the coastline here for a little longer, visiting sites like Bahia de Aguilas. These coastal lagoons are fantastic places for birds and in the right season turtles, manatees and even dolphins enter the bay (although these are very hard to spot at this time of year).

After visiting here we would head back to town and have some dinner and wait for it to get dark enough for the hutias to be active.

Tonight we could go back to search for the solenodon again (if we didn't find on last night or the sighting wasn't as good as you may have hoped for), but otherwise we spend tonight searching for hutias. They need the forests to live in and so we headed to a different area in Jaragua National Park and with the same guides we used for the solenodons we would wait until they called having located one in the trees.

They are harder to find than the solenodons as they do not make any noise and can remain in the thick foliage of the trees. But our guides are well skilled and have a great track record in finding them. Once again it could be a long night and afterwards we will return to the accommodation.

Day 3 **Lagoon Oviedo & Barohuco NP**

Wildlife Watching

Accommodation:

(Local Guest House)

Food:

All meals included today and served in between wildlife watching activities.

Transportation:

Private vehicle & walking.

Like yesterday the exact time of our start this morning will be dictated by what time we get in from looking for solenodons or hutias last night.

But our first stop in the morning will be to Oviedo Lagoon. This is a good birding location and we will be on the lookout for species such as Verbane hummingbird (the second smallest bird in the world), mockingbirds, terns, frigate birds, brown pelicans, red-billed tropicbirds and many other species. In the afternoon we will drive high into the central Cordillera and into the heavily forested Barohuco National Park.

This park is a good habitat for solenodons and many species of birds, reptiles and amphibians. But one of the most unusual aspects of this forest is the strange mixture of vegetation. The conifers are interspersed with palms, mosses, ferns and orchids. The forest is incredibly diverse and one of the most important areas in the whole of the Caribbean and is well protected now.

The park is very hilly with a good selection of pathways, depending on your interests, you can search out some of the endemic birds here or just hike around the various view points and take in the spectacular scenery.

This evening will also be left open, depending on what we have seen on the previous nights and whether you wish to have another night looking for solenodons or hutias. If we have satisfied your thirst for these species then we can have a night at the hotel and catch up on sleep.

Day 4 **Santo Domingo**

Travelling

Accommodation:

El Beatro (4* Hotel)

Food:

Breakfast will be served in the accommodation with lunch en route and dinner not included today.

Transportation:

Private vehicle & walking.

Today is our last full day in the Dominican Republic and we will depart from Pedernales and head back along the coast to the capital Santo Domingo. Along the way back we would once again visit Lagoon Oviedo and if you wish there is an optional excursion by boat (USD \$120 per person) to visit several small limestone islands that are home to dozens of rhinoceros iguanas. After visiting these islands and spending some time with the very friendly iguanas, we will visit some very old petroglyphs (~1,000 years old) on another island nearer the coast.

After leaving Lagoon Oviedo we would carry on and along the way visiting some bat caves along the coast (if you are interested), these caves are the roosting site of several species of bat and we would enter to see which species



are here today. Our journey would continue and on arrival at the hotel in Santo Domingo we would check into the hotel and the rest of the evening is free for you to relax.

Day 5 Home

Departure

Accommodation:

NA

Food:

Breakfast at the hotel is the only meal included today.

Transportation:

Private vehicle.

Today you will be taken to the airport in in time for your flight home.

Your tour and all Royle Safaris services end upon transfer to the airport

Please note that the itinerary stated above is correct as our planned intentions for the tour.

However adverse weather conditions and other local considerations can necessitate some modifications of the itinerary during the course of the tour; any changes will be made to make the best of the time, weather conditions and other constraints forced upon us and all changes will be made in conjunction with our terms and conditions.

Tour Inclusions

Absolutely everything mentioned in the above itinerary is included (except where it is expressly mentioned as an optional extra).

- All accommodation as mentioned above or of a similar standard as mentioned.
- All meals as mentioned in the itinerary; **please note that some lunches and dinners are not included when staying in Santo Domingo in this itinerary.**
- Bottled mineral or purified (boiled) water will be provided throughout and on request.
- Private vehicles for all transfers.
- English speaking local drivers and guides with years of experience in working in the areas we are travelling.
- Local solenodon and hutia trackers for three nights of mammal observation.
- All fuel, tolls, taxes and other expenses relating to driving.
- All wildlife watching and cultural activities as mentioned in the itinerary.
- Entrance fees and permits to all national parks.
- Expertise from the island's leading biologist and world expert in Solenodons.
- Donation towards the ongoing conservation and research work conducted by Dr. Brocca and his team.

Tour Exclusions

Nearly everything you will need is included in the price you have already paid for the tour. However there are some things not included.

- International flights to and from the tour start and end points.
- Travel insurance including any fees that result from emergency medical or evacuation needs.
- Visa fees for entering the country(s).
- Vaccinations and any medication are not included, including covid tests needed on arrival or departure.
- Any food other than the meals provided and mentioned in the above itinerary; **please not that some lunches and dinners when staying in Santo Domingo are not included in this itinerary**
- Any drinks not including in the meal.
- Any items of a personal nature are not included, such as souvenirs, medication, toiletries, laundry and phone calls.
- Tips are also not included.

Please refer to our Terms & Conditions (<http://www.royle-safaris.co.uk/terms-conditions/>) before booking any trips – email or paper copies of Terms & Conditions can be provided if needed