

Panama
Justin Brown and Linden Stear
December 13th-27th, 2019

Our guide, Alexis Guevara, was excellent. His email is alex_kinkajou@yahoo.com. You can see my videos of the featured species below at:

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCqHcMc_YH8BPPkEMFnjNI2Q

Brown-headed spider monkey: It's not necessary to climb that steep mountain at Chucantí Reserve to see this species. It can be found easily in other places. One place, for example, is Bayano Lake. The indigenous people living around the lake, the Emberá, are allowing (and wanting) tourists to see the spider monkeys in the forests behind their communities on the shore. We saw four or five small troops with very little effort. The lake is only an hour and a half from Panama City. Another place to see the spider monkeys is in forest fragments in the surrounding area of Chucantí. We saw a big troop on the property of a cattle farmer who was more than happy to let us look around. He even got on his horse to help with the search.

Cacomistle: At least three different individuals were showing up to eat bananas during each of our two nights in Cabin 8 at Los Quetzales, which is already well-known to mammal-watchers. The hotel staff started putting out bananas two weeks before our arrival since Cabin 8 isn't occupied very often, and I think this was really important to our success. If you'd like to see cacomistles in a more natural context (i.e., not coming to eat bananas), they can be found in forest patches on the outskirts of the town of Boquete, where many expats live. A local guide took us to his property that is located maybe ten minutes by car from downtown Boquete, and here we had a very nice sighting of a cacomistle (and heard several others) within an hour of looking. We encountered another cacomistle on a farm as we were returning to Boquete from a night walk in a nearby national park.

Bushy-tailed olingo: We saw three on a two-hour night walk in Volcán Barú National Park, which is very close to Boquete.

Pygmy sloth: December, January, February, and March are the worst months to visit Isla Escudo de Veraguas, where the sloth is found, because the sea can get very rough, dangerously rough at times. In August, September, and October, the sea is very placid, almost devoid of any waves. That being said, we wanted to take a chance and visit the island in December because December, in general, is a great time for a trip to Panamá, as it's the beginning of the dry season for most of the country. There are several tour operators going to the island these days, not so tourists can see the sloth but rather for the beaches, lagoons, turquoise waters, etc. The island is beautiful. Most, if not all, of these operators won't take anyone to the island in December, but we were able to make arrangements with a boatman from the Ngöbe village (another indigenous group) directly across the sea from the island. This is the shortest route to the island (about 40 minutes in a one-engine speedboat), and getting to the village can be accomplished through a series of lagoons and man-made channels (the "back" way) from the city of Chiriquí Grande. Most of the tour operators get to the island on the open sea from Chiriquí Grande, and that route takes about an hour and a half. We wanted to minimize our time on the open sea as per December conditions. We were very fortunate in that the day we arrived at the village, the sea was unusually calm, and we took advantage of this by going straight to the island instead of waiting until the following morning, which was the original plan. The sea is generally easier to cross in the morning than in the afternoon, when the winds start to pick up. That turned out to be a smart move, as the conditions on the sea deteriorated a lot the next day. Returning to the village is much easier than getting to the island because the boat is riding/surfing the waves as opposed to fighting through them. Anyway, we camped for one night on the island, sleeping in a tent inside of a structure constructed by fishermen as a shelter from the rain and tide. The sloths were easy to find, and we saw a total of 20 individuals! Most of them were hanging out in the mangroves on different parts of the island (we took the boat around the perimeter of the island and through some of the lagoons), but some were high up in tall trees. The interior of the island is inaccessible, so the sloth-searching takes place on the fringes. Our boatman/guide was familiar with all of the "hot spots" for the sloths, as he often accompanies a Panamanian researcher who goes to the island every few months to study the sloths. The sea was much

worse when we left the island, with big, rolling swells, but our boatman knew how to navigate on and around them.

Rothschild's porcupine: One is regularly sleeping in a hole in a tree close to the road leading up to Canopy Tower.

Lesser capybara: A big group is easy to see at Gamboa Rainforest Resort near the marina, but you have to go very early in the morning because the capybaras disappear into the vegetation as the sun comes up. It's a nervous species.

Other species seen: Central American woolly opossum (including one on Isla Escudo de Veraguas), kinkajou, western lowland olingo, Panamanian night monkey, paca, northern tamandua, common opossum, gray four-eyed opossum, Geoffroy's tamarin, white-nosed coati, Hoffmann's two-toed sloth, brown-throated three-toed sloth, Central American agouti, mantled howler, Panamanian white-faced capuchin, nine-banded armadillo, and West Indian manatee