

Short report on mammals seen from my living room (which is in a treehouse in Costa Rica)

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Two years ago I bought a small treehouse, El Fenix, in southern Costa Rica. It is in a community of treehouses called Finca Bellavista, near Piedras Blancas, not too far from the Osa Peninsula (but at a slightly higher elevation). I've really enjoyed the very close contact I have with frogs, lizards, and birds, that come and visit me at eye level. They are joined by quite a good diversity of mammals, and thought I would list the mammals I see regularly, right from my hammock or couch. I'll add some that I have to actually walk for as well.

On my most recent visit I was staring vacantly out at the early morning view (coffee not yet in bloodstream) when I saw a tiny, fast squirrel in the canopy right in front of me. This was my first record of **Alfaro's Pygmy Squirrel**. I wasn't ready with a camera and I doubt that I would have nailed it even if I'd been more prepared. I did get great looks with binoculars – tiny ears and narrow tail being the key features. I quite often see the **Red-tailed Squirrel**, which does not have a red tail in this region. It is quite drab but does have an orange belly.

Looking down below the deck, where I do sometimes add a bit of compost to the forest in the form of rice or tortillas, it is fairly common to see **Central American Agouti** and **White-nosed Coati**. It is hard to get photos of more than their backs from this angle.



White-nosed Coati, *Nasua narica*

Several guests to my treehouse have seen **Central American Squirrel Monkeys** and **White-faced Capuchins** from the front deck, but I have only seen these two species when walking the property (it is 600 acres in total).



Central American Squirrel Monkey, *Saimiri oerstedii*



At any time from dawn to dusk I have fun watching a colony of **Greater White-lined Bats** that roost on my bathroom screen. I even got up early enough one day to watch them return from the forest. The male arrived first, soon followed by a female. He flew up and displayed in front of her, shaking his wings and making audible twitters (well, not for me but for those with good hearing). He marked each female that arrived, and re-marked all the ones already settled, just for good measure. All 6 finally settled into a corner of the screen. Two bats don't roost with the others. One hangs out in the open-air living room above one end of the couch. The other prefers rafters on the lower level deck. I assume they are young males but I don't know for sure.

There is also a colony of these bats and some **Jamaican Fruit-eating Bats** in an extraordinary rock face that looks like the inside of a cave. This is located on one of my favorite walks. I can't reveal details here, but if you decide to rent my treehouse of course all will be revealed!

Greater White-lined Bat, *Saccopteryx bilineata*



Central American Woolly Opossum, *Caluromys derbianus*.
Now *that* is a prehensile tail!

Later in the day, cold beer or rum cocktail in hand, slouched on the couch, I wait for the evening visitors. First is a **Central American Woolly Opossum** who usually shows up at 6:15 to 6:20 p.m. It takes a rather perilous path from one tree to another using a vine. The vine must be better secured than it looks, as just 10 minutes later a **Kinkajou** follows the same route over to my tree for which the treehouse gets its designation. They must both sleep in the tree the squirrels prefer, on the left side of my immediate field of view.



Kinkajou, *Potos flavus*

Two other mammals that are not as well-behaved make their appearance any time after 8 p.m. The **Mexican Porcupine** has a real penchant for guest books and has carefully left his signature around their edges. He also eats wads of hay-like material that did at one time make a decent-looking rug. It is there now just for the porky to enjoy. The second scoundrel that appears when all is quiet and dark is a **Watson's Climbing Rat**. If I forget to close the door to the kitchen, he makes himself at home and if no food is easily available clambers up to the top shelves where he can knock glasses onto the floor and smash them, alarming me and himself. I've had some fun chases around the kitchen grabbing him and chucking him out the front door only to have him beat me to it getting back in before I close up. As this is one of my favorite rodents I do like having him around. I've also had a few visits from an oryzomyine rodent, **Alfaro's Rice Rat**. If I set out onto the ramp that leads to my front door, I usually see another lovely mammal, **Tomes' Spiny Rat**. He lives under the rocks at the end of the ramp and around my small pond. He is easier to follow with a thermal detector, and usually backs off if I shine a light at him. He is very partial to granola and crumbled tortillas.



Mexican Porcupine (*Coendou mexicanus*), photo by Piotr Naskrecki



Tomes's Spiny Rat *Proechimys semispinosus* and Watson's Climbing Rat *Tylomys watsoni*.



Spix's Disc-winged Bats (*Thyroptera tricolor*) in a coiled leaf. This photo shows three bats as you can see from the forearms on left.

These bats are extremely common at the Finca, and though they are super-easy for me to find when I am alone, they are very hard when someone wants to see one!

If the bat detector is right, there are numerous **Shaggy Bats** (*Centronycteris centralis*) working the trails. **Black Myotis** can be found calling over small ponds along the river, as can **Proboscis Bats**. So far we have not done any mist netting on the trails, so all bat notes are from observations.

On one rather long night ramble we found a roost of these uncommon **Chestnut Sac-winged Bats** (*Cormura brevirostris*) under a large dead tree. They always stack up like this, and from a distance look like a giant insect.



There is a roost of **Common Tent-making Bats** (*Uroderma bilobatum*) at the base camp that varies in number from 3 - 40.

A nice larger mammal I see fairly often is the **Paca**, usually after about 10 p.m. on the Red or Green trail. And of course **Common Opossums** can be found around the kitchens at Base Camp. I've seen tracks of mouse opossums along the river, going under large boulders, but so far I haven't seen the animals.

There was report of a **Brown-throated Three-toed Sloth** using the zip-line to cross over the river! Very enterprising fellow, but rather slowed down the humans who wanted to cross. And last but not least, on my last visit I saw an **Ocelot**. Not all that well or for very long, but always an exciting moment.

If you are interested in visiting my treehouse, on your own or as part of a mammal-oriented trip around Costa Rica, please contact me (Fiona.reid7243@gmail.com). Special discount for mammalwatchers may apply! I'd also like to point out that I am not always as lazy as indicated in this report.