

It's hard for me to put into words my time at Tapiche Reserve in Perú. In fact, it has taken me weeks to fully digest everything that I got to experience while visiting at the end of February. I am a trained ecologist and work as a Naturalist Guide—I am fortunate that I get to work in some of the most pristine wilderness in North America. I have also had many opportunities to travel to remarkable natural places around the world. However, the five days I spent exploring the primary, flooded várzea rainforest in Amazonian Perú that makes up the Tapiche Reserve was the greatest wilderness experience of my life.

The trip starts with a full day traveling up various tributaries of the Amazon River. The further you get from Requena (roughly the halfway point between Iquitos and Tapiche Reserve), the more mature the surrounding forest becomes. Quick glimpses of Tucuxi river dolphins (*Sotalia fluviatilis*) and common squirrel monkeys (*Saimiri sciureus*) teased us as we travelled onward but our incredible guide, Katoo (owner, operator, and main guide), assured us that we would get better viewing opportunities within the Reserve. Twelve hours after starting our journey in Iquitos, we found ourselves in a small “lodge” formed of about ten buildings (cabins, bath houses, dining room/kitchen, etc) and elevated boardwalks connecting them all. The cabins are very rustic, with electricity only available for a few hours each evening, but comfortable. They are equipped with all the bedding you could need, including mosquito nets, plus some local critters as roommates, such as beautiful treefrogs, a small possum, and even some curious antbirds that had found their way in and gotten stuck (we promptly caught and released them). The meals were all prepared for us and shared with the staff in a way that made us feel like we were a part of the close-knit Tapiche family, if only for a little while. The surrounding, mostly flooded, land was great for seeing wildlife as well, including smokey jungle frogs (*Leptodactylus pentadactylus*), Suriname toads (*Pipa pipa*), *Bothrops* snakes, and even Spix's night monkeys (*Aotus vociferans*) with a baby that crossed through the trees only a couple meters over our heads.

Each day we made our way out, bright and early, to catch the morning choruses of the resident primates. Since it was getting towards the end of the rainy season (and the water was extremely high) we explored the Reserve via boat. Our group of travelers (only 4 of us in all) plus Katoo and a local guide would work our way through the forest as silently as possible, listening for the tell-tale sounds of wildlife. It was because of the high water, incredibly knowledgeable guides, and patient fellow travelers that we got to see more mammals than I thought possible. We also got to see them in a relaxed, natural state—free from the threat of hunters, the primates especially, were able to be noisy and playful, curious and downright entertaining.



brown-throated three-toed sloth (*Bradypus variegatus*)





yellow-crowned brush-tailed rat (*Isothrix bistrata*)



pygmy marmoset (*Cebuella pygmaea*)



white-fronted capuchin (*Cebus albifrons*)



Tucuxi river dolphin (*Sotalia fluviatilis*)

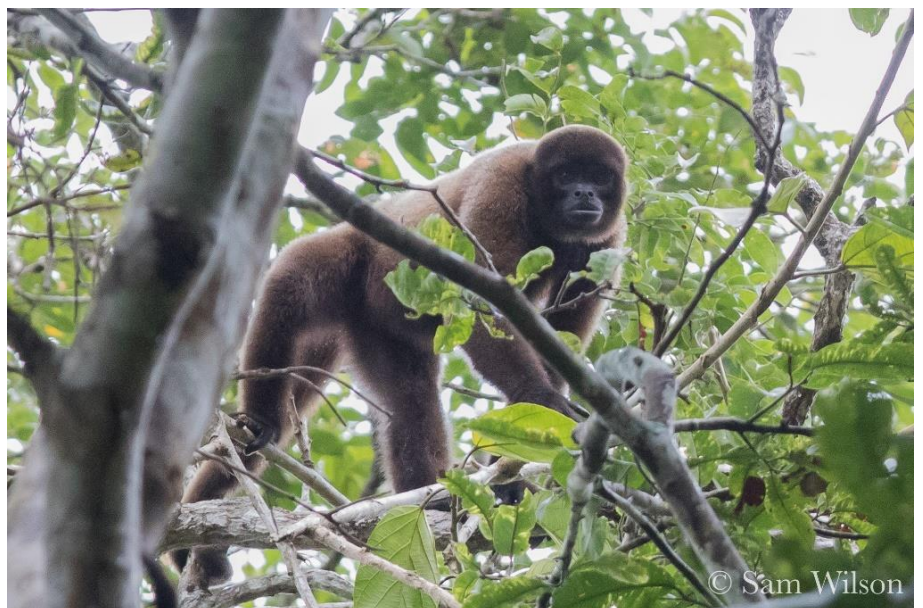
The evening of our second full day in the Reserve Katoo sent us out with one of the local guides for some dolphin watching. After checking some quiet lagoons we ended up at the junction of multiple river channels, surrounded by dolphins. We estimated there were about 25-30 Tucuxi river dolphins (*Sotalia fluviatilis*) and about 6-8 Boto or pink river dolphins (*Inia geoffrensis*). We sat silently in the boat and watched for about 2 hours as the dolphins fed in the dwindling light.



Our last day in the Reserve was full of spectacular viewing opportunities of common woolly monkeys (*Lagothrix lagotricha*) and red uakaris (*Cacajao calvus*). We watched multiple family groups of both species as they moved through the canopy—resting, feeding, and playing with one another. Some uakaris even came lower to get a better look at us and check out our boat. Getting to see these mammals being noisy and rambunctious really brought home the idea that Tapiche Reserve offers a refuge from hunting and deforestation pressures that these animals truly depend on.



Above right: red uakari (*Cacajao calvus*)  
Above center: red uakari with young (*Cacajao calvus*)  
Right: common woolly monkey (*Lagothrix lagotricha*)



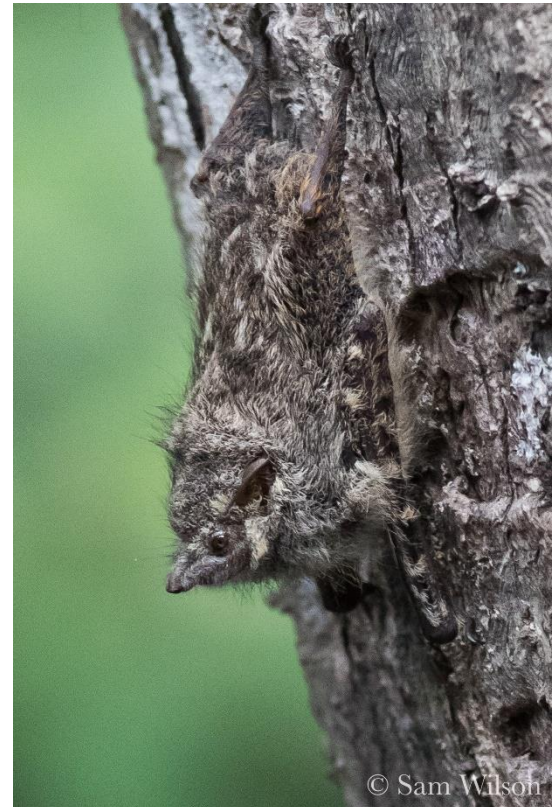


Due to the time of our visit (towards the end of a very wet rainy season) there were some species we missed because of the difficulty of finding them in the flooded forests—species like Giant River Otter, Peccary, and big cats (most of the terrestrial large mammals move up in elevation in the wet season). However our mammals list but the end of our stay was still impressive and a complete list can be found below.

The uniqueness of Tapiche Reserve cannot be emphasized enough—from the pristine, primary rainforest to the protection granted to the Reserve's wildlife, allowing them to act as they naturally would—there is no place in the tropics that I have visited that is comparable. What really makes Tapiche stand out though is the people. The commitment Katoo, Deborah, and the team they have assembled has to not only protect this little piece of paradise, but to share the magic of it with others, is simply astounding. Everything that is done there: coordinating travel and lodging logistics, preparing meals, maintaining the boats and facilities, finding wildlife for guests, and managing potential poachers, is all done with a thoughtfulness that demonstrates the passion they have for this environment. I felt as though I had found a kindred spirit in Katoo—someone who understands the importance and vitality of an intact ecosystem and does everything in his power to protect and maintain this piece of wilderness. I think of my time at Tapiche Reserve often and have already decided I will be going back!



Above: red howler monkey (*Alouatta seniculus*)  
Right: proboscis bat (*Rhynchonycteris naso*)



#### Complete Mammals List (2/26/2019 to 3/2/2019):

common squirrel monkey (*Saimiri sciureus*)  
Bolivian squirrel monkey (*Saimiri boliviensis*)  
saddleback tamarin (*Saguinus fuscicollis*)  
brown capuchin (*Cebus apella*)  
white-fronted capuchin (*Cebus albifrons*)  
red howler monkey (*Alouatta seniculus*)  
red uakari (*Cacajao calvus*)  
common woolly monkey (*Lagothrix lagotricha*)  
pygmy marmoset (*Cebuella pygmaea*)

Spix's night monkeys (*Aotus vociferans*)  
equatorial saki (*Pithecia aequatorialis*)  
titi monkey (genus *Plecturocebus*)

Boto or pink river dolphin (*Inia geoffrensis*)  
Tucuxi river dolphin (*Sotalia fluviatilis*)  
brown-throated three-toed sloth (*Bradypus variegatus*)  
South American coati (*Nasua nasua*)  
yellow-crowned brush-tailed rat (*Isothrix bistrata*)  
proboscis bat (*Rhynchonycteris naso*)  
multiple unidentified possum spp  
additional unidentified rat spp