

Panama - Mammals of the Canopy Tower

Naturetrek Tour Report

12 - 22 May 2010



Brilliant Forest Frog *Rana warszewitschii* – by Jose Soto



Rothschild's Porcupine – by Lee M. Hunter



Black Myotis *Myotis nigricans* – by Jose Soto



Examining a bat – by Jose Soto

Images by Jose Soto and Lee M. Hunter

Report compiled by Jose Soto



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Day 1

Wednesday 12th May

Arrival

Today the group arrived to Panama at about 6:00 pm and then they were transferred to Canopy Tower, 45 minutes away from the international airport.

Day 2

Thursday 13th May

Semaphore Hill, Summit Gardens, Ammo Ponds and Chagres River

On the second day we started up on the Canopy Towers observation deck, where we were at treetops level surrounded by the beautiful tropical rain forest of Soberania National Park. We also had the opportunity to see the world famous Panama Canal from the same spot. This was a great chance to see some of the canopy birds, usually hard to see from the ground. Toucan, Parrots, Pigeons and Honeycreepers were some of the birds that adorned the tree tops. We spent about one and a half hour up in the observation deck. Then we went down to the dining room to have a good breakfast and enjoyed the company of a small family of Geoffroy's Tamarin that came to the Cecropia trees just a couple of feet from the windows.

On our walk down Semaphore Hill, we saw many birds including Broad-billed Motmots, Dot-winged Antwrens, Black-breasted Puffbird, and of course a good variety of mammals such as the Central American Agoutis, a male White-nosed Coati, one small family of Mantled Howler Monkeys and Greater White-lined Bats roosting under a bridge.

Lunch was ready at 12:30pm. We took a little break until about 3 pm. Then we went to the Summit Botanical Garden. After a visit to the Harpy Eagle Visitor Center we walked around the garden for an hour and then drove north along the Canal for about 20 minutes to the town of Gamboa. Our first spot was the Ammo Ponds. Then we drove about 2 km back south to the Chagres River. Just as we were learning about the Jacanas, Limpkins and Black-bellied Whistling Ducks that inhabit the river, we saw a female Lesser Capybara and her young. It was time to get back to the Tower and we saw a Great False Vampire Bat at dusk coming in to feed on the Cecropia fruits. We then headed home for drinks and dinner.

Day 3

Friday 14th May

Barro Colorado Island and Night Ride down Semaphore Hill

We started with breakfast at 6am to be on time at the Smithsonian dock in Gamboa for our visit to the world famous Barro Colorado Island. We were on the boat at 7:15 am, ready for a 40 minute ride on the Panama Canal. Once on the island, our guide gave us a brief introduction about this “living laboratory” considered the most studied tropical area in the world. Even though the mammal activity was a bit poor, there were many other wild creatures. One of the most interesting behaviours was a Hawk Wasp hutting and dragging an enormous Panama Blond Tarantula, all the way back to its nest to feed its young. The Green-and-black Poison Dart Frogs were everywhere, as well as some spiders including Silver Argiopes and Golden Orb-Spider.

We got back to Gamboa at about 4 pm and then we were transferred back to Canopy Tower. We had an early dinner at 6 pm. We were all ready at 7pm to go out in our first night ride down Semaphore Hill.

On this first night ride we spotted Forest Rabbits, Panamanian Spiny Pocket Mouse, Common Opossum and a pair of Western Night Monkeys that quickly crept away from us making long leaps from branch to branch.

Day 4

Saturday 15th May

Jungle Boat Trip on the Gatun Lake-Panama Canal and Night Ride from the Panama Rain Forest Discovery Center in Pipeline

The weather today did not seem to be on our favour. We had breakfast at 6:15 am to be ready to leave to Gamboa. But this is the rain forest! The rain stopped right on time at 8 am so we could start our incredible jungle boat trip right on the Panama Canal. The trip started with the fast and graceful swimmer and local resident of the dock area, a Neotropical River Otter. We explored some the inlets and small islands and of course the monkey island, which was definitely our highlight. On this island we had the opportunity to see and photograph White-faced Capuchin Monkeys, which were literally only a couple of feet from our boat. We also had some sightings of American Crocodile, Common Slider Turtle, Mantled Howler Monkeys and tiny Proboscis Bat. Many birds were also spotted, including Limpkins and many Snail Kites.

We got back to the dock at about 12:00 pm to be on time for lunch at the Tower. After a longer break, we headed back to the Gamboa area at about 4:00 pm, this time to visit the Panama Rainforest Discovery Center and its canopy observation tower. Once we got to the top of the observation tower, many birds started to show up, including the majestic male Blue Cotinga, Red-legged Honeycreeper, many Keel-billed Toucans and Black-crowned Tityra. Just before dusk we had our packed dinner at the visitor centre.

Then at about 6:45 pm we slowly started our way back to the Canopy Tower. On our way back, we spotted a pair of roosting Chestnut-mandible Toucans and a small group of 3 Night Monkeys this time they were moving more stealthily so we got much better views this time. Right at the Canopy Tower gate, getting back from pipeline that night, we saw our first Hoffman's Two-toed Sloth.

Day 5

Sunday 16th May

Pipeline Rd and Plantation Rd

After having breakfast at 7 am (and been counted as part of the National Population Census, which was held that day!) we drove about 7 miles to the world famous Pipeline Rd. As soon as we got there, we took a little side trail down to a hollow tree, that works as a roost site for three Western Night Monkeys. We also enjoyed looking at many beautiful birds, for example Slaty-tailed, Violaceous and Black-tailed Trogon, Crimson-crested and Cinnamon Woodpecker. We hiked until 12:00 pm and then went back to the Tower for lunch a little siesta time. At 3:00 pm we took a short one mile ride down to the Plantation Rd seeing birds like Rufous Motmot, Shaggy Bat and other wildlife.

Day 6

Monday 17th May

Dawn Ride down Semaphore Hill Metropolitan and Panama Canal Visitor Center at Miraflores Locks

It was time for a very early start. At 5:00 am we started our dawn ride down semaphore hill and part of the main road that leads to Gamboa, until about 6:00 am. Apparently the animals decided to sleep in this morning, so we did not see many new species. Then we had breakfast and at about 7:00 am, we were on our way to the Metropolitan Park in Panama City. On the "Mono Titi" trail (Spanish for Tamarin Monkey) we saw, Lance-tailed Manakin and unexpected Pheasant Cuckoo, several Geoffrey's Tamarins and Two-toed Sloth. Many other birds were also seen. We also went for a short visit to the Amador Coastway area to look for Crab Eating Raccoon. After lunch at Canopy Tower, at 2:30 pm we visited the Panama Canal Miraflores Locks Visitor Center to learn more about one of the wonders of the world.

Day 7

Tuesday 18th May

San Lorenzo National Park and Night Ride down Semaphore Hill

Breakfast at 4:00 am! Yes, that early! Well we wanted to get to San Lorenzo National Park at 6:30 a.m, and it is a one and a half hour drive to the Atlantic side. We hiked for about 2 hours along a paved road with no traffic and with beautiful forest on both sides. Our first sighting was a Hoffman's Two-toed Sloth sleeping deeply - one of the 4 Sloths we saw! We had a good midmorning snack at a historical place, the San Lorenzo Fort built in the 15th century by the Spaniards.

At about 11 am and after a little dip in the warm waters of the Caribbean Sea, we worked our way back towards the Gatun Locks. Before crossing the locks, we stopped at a secret spot to see a Golden-Collared Manakin Lek and just as we walked into the lek, a curious Kinkajou came out of its roosting spot to see what we were doing. How exciting! He showed up with no previous announcement. It was by far the sighting of the day!

After we got back to Canopy Tower we had a delicious BBQ, and still had some energy left to go out for a last night ride. We were positive we would find a new mammal and we sure did... a Rothschild's Porcupine, one of the most difficult and poorly known mammals of the area due to its nocturnal and arboreal habits. For some people this porcupine was their favourite sighting of the week. What a way to end our week at Canopy Tower!

Day 8

Wednesday 19th May

Gamboa, Transfer to Canopy Lodge and Chorro el Macho Trail and Bat Night at the Lodge

Before we departed from Canopy Tower, we went for a quick visit back to the Chagres River to look for Capybaras one last time. Then we drove up to the foothills of where the Canopy Lodge is located where many birds, that are frequent visitors of the feeders, were there to greet us. We had lunch and a siesta time. At about 3 p.m we took a short and easy walk from the lodge up the “El Macho” waterfalls. On this trail we spotted a beautiful White Hawk, perched just over the trail. We also found some Tink Frogs.

Then it was time for dinner and a glass of wine. After a delicious dinner, we decided to reward our inaugural mammal-tour group with a bonus activity - a Bat Night! We first enjoyed an excellent PowerPoint presentation and lecture by Veronika Cottontail on Chiropteran families, behaviour, morphology, biology and echolocation. Veronika, and co-researcher Kirstin Übernickel (both from Ulm University, Germany), are conducting post-graduate work. Their field work has been in collaboration with scientist and world-renowned bat expert, Dr. Elisabeth Kalko. Kirstin and Veronika had set up two sets of mist nets in the Canopy Lodge gardens specifically to safely capture and identify bat species. In all they ensnared 15 individuals, comprising 4 species (Seba’s Short-tailed Bat (*Carollia perspicillata*), Common Long-tongued Bat (*Glossophaga soricina*), Black Myotis (*Myotis nigricans*) and Orange Nectar Bat (*Lonchophyla robusta*). After quick IDs, the bats were freed, unharmed. The next part of the evening was identification - by echolocation! Each bat species has a specific sonogram signature. By using software employing a high-resolution spectrum sonogram program, and by recording bats in the field using a microphone, the recorded sounds are compared to the known sonograms of bat species. With this tool we were able to identify 3 additional species, including Bonda Mastiff Bat (*Molossus bondae*), Silver-haired Myotis (*Myotis albescens*) and Western Red Bat (*Lasiurus blossevillii*). Everyone thoroughly enjoyed this activity, thanks to our two incredible instructors who made our bat night a rousing success!

Day 9

Thursday 20th May

El Nispero Amphibian Center and Cerro Gaital Natural Monument and Night Walk around Canopy Lodge Ponds

On this day we started with a cloudy sky and a little bit of rain, but after breakfast there was a big downpour lasted all morning. Fortunately our plan for this morning could be changed, and we had an indoor activity as a plan B. So we headed up to the Amphibian Rescue and Research Center, only 10 minutes from the Lodge. There we learned more about the Panamanian frogs and how they are doing in the tropics with the threat of a fungus that is killing these amphibians and the importance of places like this, to preserve this beautiful creature from extinction. After about 2 hours of rain, it was a good time to do more indoor activities, so we decided to visit the local market. We went back to the lodge for lunch. After a break, we drove up to El Gaital Natural Monument, located about 4 miles from the lodge. We hiked all the way up to the top of the hill where we were about 1000 feet high. There were not many mammals this time, but we did see some beautiful birds such as Silver-throated Tanager, Black-faced Grosbeak and Green Hermit. Since we started the day with frogs...why not end the day with frogs? After dinner, we got our flashlights and put on our headlights and went out to look for frogs, right on the lodge grounds. We were delighted by a chorus of frogs, and after looking carefully around the ponds we finally saw some; a Red-webbed Tree Frog (very common), Blue-spotted Tree Frog and White-spotted Glass Frog.

Day 10

Friday 21st May

La Zamia and Chorro el Macho Trail and transfer to Panama City

We got to the end of a wonderful week, but we were not finished yet. We still had all morning to do one more trail. So we headed up to la Zamia trail, at the foot of Cerro Gaital. We hiked for about 2 hours. Variegated Squirrel was our only mammal, but we did see some birds like Northern Barred Woodcreeper. We decided to go back to el Chorro Macho waterfall trail, and what a good decision! We found a roosting Great-crested Owl! What a sighting! Not a bad way to end our trip. Then it was time to go back to the lodge for lunch and packing. We all had a great time...

Day 11

Saturday 22nd May

Return to London.

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Species Lists

Mammals

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| 1 | Mantled Howler Monkey | <i>Alouatta palliate</i> |
| 2 | White-faced Capuchin | <i>Cebus capucinus</i> |
| 3 | Geoffrey's Tamarin | <i>Leontocebus geoffreyi</i> |
| 4 | Western Night Monkey | <i>Aotus lemurinus</i> |
| 5 | Kinkajou | <i>Potos flavus</i> |
| 6 | Hoffman's Two-toed Sloth | <i>Choloepus hoffmanni</i> |
| 7 | Brown-throated Three-toed Sloth | <i>Bradypus variegates</i> |
| 8 | White-nosed Coati | <i>Nasua narica</i> |
| 9 | Variiegated Squirrel (Light morph) | <i>Sciurus variegatoides helveous</i> |
| 10 | Variiegated Squirrel (Dark morph) | <i>Sciurus variegatoides melania</i> |
| 11 | Red-tailed Squirrel | <i>Sciurus granatensis</i> |
| 12 | Lesser Capybara | <i>Hydrochoerus isthmius</i> |
| 13 | Central American Agouti | <i>Dasyprocta punctata</i> |
| 14 | Forest Rabbit | <i>Sylvilagus brasiliensis</i> |
| 15 | Panamanian Spiny Pocket Mouse | <i>Liomys adspersus</i> |
| 16 | Rufous Tree Rat | <i>Diplomys labilis</i> |
| 17 | Common Opossum | <i>Didelphis marsupialis</i> |
| 18 | Rothschild's Porcupine | <i>Coendou rothschildi</i> |
| 19 | Proboscis Bat | <i>Rhynchonycteris naso</i> |
| 20 | Black Myotis | <i>Myotis nigricans</i> |
| 21 | Shaggy Bat | <i>Centronycteris centralis</i> |
| 22 | Common Tent-making Bat | <i>Uroderma bilobatum</i> |
| 23 | Seba's Short-tailed Bat | <i>Carollia perspicillata</i> |
| 24 | Common Long-tongued Bat | <i>Glossophaga soricina</i> |
| 25 | Orange Nectar Bat | <i>Lonchophylla robusta</i> |
| 26 | Great False Vampire Bat | <i>Vampyrum spectrum</i> |
| 27 | Common Big-eared Bat | <i>Micronycteris microtis</i> |
| 28 | Greater White-lined Bat | <i>Saccopteryx bilineata</i> |
| 29 | Neotropical River Otter | <i>Lontra longicaudis</i> |

Others species

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|----|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1 | Giant Toad or Cane Toad | <i>Bufo marinus</i> |
| 2 | Blue-spotted Tree Frog | <i>Rhacophorus gauni</i> |
| 3 | Red-webbed Tree Frog | <i>Hyla rufitela</i> |
| 4 | Green and Black Poison-Dart Frog | <i>Dendrobates auratus</i> |
| 5 | Brilliant Forest Frog | <i>Rana warszewitschii</i> |
| 6 | Glass Frog | <i>Cochranella euknemos</i> |
| 7 | Clay-colored Rain Frog | <i>Eleutherodactylus cerasinus</i> |
| 8 | American Crocodile | <i>Crocodylus acutus</i> |
| 9 | Green Iguana | <i>Iguana iguana</i> |
| 10 | Stripe Basilisk (Jesus Lizard) | <i>Basiliscus vittatus</i> |
| 11 | Common Basilisk | <i>Basiliscus Basiliscus</i> |

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|----|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 12 | Four-lined Whip-tailed Lizard | <i>Ameiva quadrilineata</i> |
| 13 | Central American Whip-tailed Lizard | <i>Ameiva Festiva</i> |
| 14 | Blue-tailed Skink | <i>Cryptoblepharus egeriae</i> |
| 15 | Yellow-headed Gecko | <i>Gonatodes albigularis</i> |
| 16 | Fer-de-lance | <i>Bothrops asper</i> |
| 17 | Green Sea Turtle | <i>Chelonia mydas</i> |
| 18 | Panamanian Common Slider Turtle | <i>Trachemys scripta</i> |
| 19 | Forest Giant or Helicopter Damselfly | <i>Megaloprepus caerulatus</i> |
| 20 | Panama Blond Tarantula | <i>Psalmopoeus pulcher</i> |
| 21 | Golden Orb-Spider | <i>Nephila clavipes</i> |
| 22 | Silver Argiope | <i>Argiope argentata</i> |