

# Colombia's Endemic Mammals

Naturetrek Tour Report

31st October – 19th November 2025

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Andean Porcupine



Cotton-top Tamarin



White-footed Tamarin



Grey-legged Night Monkeys

Tour report by Robin Smith  
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Tour participants: Robin Smith (leader) with seven Naturetrek clients

## Day 1

Friday 31st October

Most guests departed London Heathrow on Avianca's direct flight to Bogotá.

## Day 2

Saturday 1st November

Upon arrival in Bogotá, the group cleared customs, and we all met up in the departure lounge for a short connecting flight to the central Andean city of Pereira. Here, we were met by our friendly bus driver and made the short transfer to Otun Quimbaya, a cloud forest reserve to the east of Pereira.

After some food, we were able to start enjoying the bird feeders, which attracted various attractive species such as Bay-headed Tanager, Rufous-tailed Hummingbird and Red-crowned Woodpecker. However, our first mammal of the tour would have to wait until this evening.

Having rested up for much of the afternoon, we headed out in 4x4s and into the reserve. Here, while searching for our first mammals of the tour, we enjoyed views of some special birds including Red-ruffed Fruitcrow and the endemic Cauca Guan. As darkness fell, we started enjoying our first mammal sightings of the tour, which included great looks at Derby's Woolly and Common Opossums, and Colombian (Lemurine) Night Monkey. We were off to a great start, as mammal sightings in higher elevation zones are often tough to acquire: but it was well worth the effort.

## Day 3

Sunday 2nd November

The day largely followed the same pattern as the previous one, albeit at a more relaxed pace, as we woke up in our friendly guest house and enjoyed a delicious local breakfast with freshly brewed coffee from the local area, which produces some of the finest coffee in the world.

Having enjoyed the birds around our accommodations' gardens, we again headed into the reserve late in the afternoon. We enjoyed some excellent mammal sightings, with the prize being excellent looks at Olinguito and a beautiful bat (of the *Platyrrhinus* genus). We also enjoyed point-blank views of the rare Rufescent Screech Owl, which surely counted as an honorary mammal! However, despite considerable efforts, we were unable to find the elusive Mountain Tapir, a species which has been relatively reliable in the area over the last few years. Having spoken to some locals, we learned that several individuals had succumbed to a nasty screw-worm infection, although we also found out that a mother and her young calf had been sighted just a few days earlier, so we must hope that the next generation will prevail and that the area will continue both to protect and to offer sightings of this rare Andean mammal in the future.

## Day 4

Monday 3rd November

Having spent a long night in the field, we had a relaxed morning around the lodge, and a few guests loaded up on some of the excellent coffee sold in the local cafés. Late in the morning, we headed off in our comfortable bus and

started to make our way northwards, along Colombia's central Andes, which offered spectacular views. A local lunch was taken along the way, with the ice-cream dessert crackers proving a real hit.

We arrived at our next lodge, Hacienda Venecia, in the afternoon and had some time to settle in, and to enjoy the spectacular location and views from all our cabins. After dinner, we headed out for a short night walk, which although quiet did provide a very interesting record of the rare and little-known White-tailed Olalla Rat, as it vocalised from deep within a stand of Chusquea Bamboo.

## Day 5

## Tuesday 4th November

The morning was spent enjoying the birding delights of Hacienda el Bosque, which included Equatorial Antpitta, Sword-billed Hummingbird, Barred Fruiteater, and the highlight, Grey-breasted Mountain Toucan. We also added another mammal to our list, with excellent views of a subspecies of Red-tailed Squirrel (surely to be split before long).

Having enjoyed the delights of Hacienda el Bosque, and with appetites sated by another delicious meal served up by the reserve's excellent restaurant, we headed off in our bus and crossed over into the Magdalena Valley (on the eastern slope of the Central Andes). Here, we were based in a small village with a beautiful central plaza, with a most impressive 150+ year-old Ceiba tree at its heart. The accommodation here was simpler, but as with everywhere we visited on the tour, our hosts were most welcoming, and we settled in happily for a couple of nights.

Dinner was taken in a local restaurant just a few minutes outside the village, and afterwards we headed to a nearby reserve which protects rare and threatened Magdalena Valley forests. Here we had five minutes of incredible mammal watching, with incredible views of a rare Hoffmann's Two-toed Sloth as it went slowly about its evening activities, and then just minutes later, we found the recently-split (and thus Colombian endemic) Voss's Porcupine! Absolutely magnificent stuff! Having enjoyed these rare species, we continued to search for more mammals and enjoyed views of a family of Gray-legged Night Monkeys, as well as looks at Brown-eared Woolly Opossum. Other notable sightings for the evening included close-up views of Mottled Owl and stunning looks at several Colombian Funnel Web Spiders. All in all, it had been a most exciting and eventful evening!

## Day 6

## Wednesday 5th November

Our mission today was to find one of Colombia's most wanted endemic primates: the magnificent White-footed (or Silvery-brown) Tamarin. Our morning efforts drew a blank, although the group were nevertheless able to enjoy a wonderful family group of Gray-legged Night Monkeys as they peered out from their daytime roost, which in this case was a hole in a tree. However, the tamarins were a no-show, even at a small feeding station which they sometimes frequent.

Throughout the tour, in quiet mammal moments, we enjoyed the bird life on offer, although we were not calling birds in and searching for our key mammal targets always took precedent. Today was no different, with some nice species observed, such as the endemic White-mantled Barbet, Citron-throated Toucan and Scarlet-fronted Parakeet, among many others.

In the afternoon, we again set out with tamarins on our minds. We surely couldn't leave without these most endearing of primates, and this was our last chance, as they are only found in these threatened Magdalena Valley forests! Thankfully, after careful searching in known hangouts, we were able to track down a large family troop feeding on a fruiting tree just metres away from us! With our key target safely in the bag, we headed back to the village for a relaxed evening and another excellent dinner.

## Day 7

**Thursday 6th November**

Today was a travel day, although we did have time to squeeze in a morning excursion before setting off in earnest back to Bogotá. However, conditions weren't on our side and we were unable to ford a stream that had risen sharply thanks to heavy overnight rain. Consequently, our Colombian Red Howler Monkeys would have to wait for another day, although we did enjoy some more birds, with highlights including Red-breasted Meadowlark, Aplomado Falcon and Barred Puffbird.

We made the journey back to Bogotá, crossing the Magdalena River and climbing up into Colombia's eastern Andean range: the Andes split in the south of Colombia, forming three distinct ranges, which are a major driving factor of the country's incredible biodiversity. We just about arrived before the really heavy rush hour traffic clogged up our entrance to the city. The night was spent in a hotel close to the airport.

## Day 8

**Friday 7th November**

Our flight to the southern department of Putumayo was brought forward by several hours, so we grabbed a quick coffee and snack before making the ten-minute transfer to the airport. We flew south, crossing more spectacular scenery, with the most impressive awaiting us upon arrival in the lush, forested lowlands of Putumayo. Here, we were met by our local guide and driver, and made our way to a local family-owned reserve called Donde Se Oculta del Sol, and its sister lodge, Portal del Sol. Few outsiders visit this part of Colombia, and we were all taken aback by the beautiful and warm welcome which our hosts offered, not to mention the delicious food. Our first lunch was fish, cooked to perfection in the traditional banana leaf style of the region.

Having enjoyed a siesta after lunch (and thereby avoiding the hottest and least active part of the day), we headed out on foot in search of mammals. It all seemed pretty quiet, but just as the sun was dipping below the forested horizon, we found a small family group (just three individuals) of the endemic Black-handed Titi! Mammal watching in the neotropics often requires patience and persistence, but with views of this jet-black, super-rare primate, the rewards were definitely worth it! After dinner we enjoyed a short night walk, and enjoyed excellent looks at a very obliging Mount Pirri Climbing Mouse.

## Day 9

**Saturday 8th November**

This area of Colombia holds a great diversity of potential wildlife, and for mammal enthusiasts there is a mouthwatering selection of primates. So, with various key targets to search for, we headed out after a delicious breakfast (the food of Portal del Sol really is something else, all freshly cooked lovingly by the wonderful Alexandra), and headed to a known haunt of Pygmy Marmoset. However, the marmosets had other ideas, and after a couple of hours without much luck, beads of sweat were dripping down ever more furrowed brows! However, cometh the hour, cometh the woman: in this case the sharp-eyed Zoraida who was doing her daily

rounds of the reserve to check all was in order. She thankfully spotted the marmosets over a nearby creek. What followed was surely one of the highlights of the entire tour, as the group watched a large family group go about their day from just metres away! Behaviour witnessed included grooming, hunting and two tiny babies playing in the amongst tangled vines. It was all quite astonishing, and we left feeling as if we'd been granted access to an otherwise totally private existence of these tiny monkeys, which are often touted as the smallest in the world (their only real competition coming from the equally diminutive Madame Berthe's Mouse Lemur of Madagascar).

Another knockout lunch was enjoyed back at the lodge, with yet another unidentifiable yet lip-smackingly delicious tropical fruit juice to quench our collective thirst. There was time for a siesta in the middle of the day, before we headed up onto a forested ridge trail leading out from the lodge itself. We enjoyed more excellent looks at Black-handed Titi, but otherwise it was a quiet afternoon mammal-wise. A rainy evening killed any hopes of a night walk, so we all recharged our batteries ready for another excursion the following morning.

## Day 10

## Sunday 9th November

A pre-dawn start (accompanied by freshly-brewed coffee) was the order of the morning, as we had to head off in the bus to a reserve some ninety minutes away. Upon arrival, we enjoyed a quick breakfast, before getting out on foot in search of more primate targets. Thankfully, we got straight into the action, with impressive views of a large mixed troop comprising mainly of Humboldt's Squirrel Monkeys, as well as smaller numbers of Lesson's Saddle-backed Tamarins, both new species for the tour! Continuing gently along the forested entrance road of the reserve, we enjoyed further excellent views of both species, including close-up views of a small number of tamarins which were foraging for grubs and tasty morsels in an old and decaying fallen tree.



Mottled Owl



Cauca Guan



Orinoco Crocodile and Llanos Side-necked Turtles



Pygmy Marmoset

Further down, we came to a bridge river crossing, where we enjoyed more views of Pygmy Marmoset, as well as some nice birds such as Swallow-winged Puffbird and Greater Yellow-headed Vulture. From here, we were picked up by our bus and headed back to the main house of the private reserve, where a tasty local lunch awaited us, served up with refreshing juice. Today it was freshly-squeezed lemonade, which really hit the spot after a hot and sweaty morning walk. Appetites sated, we enjoyed a coffee and a short siesta, before a small family troop of elusive Monk Sakis were spotted moving quickly and somewhat incongruously in a patch of forest behind our lunch spot. Sadly, a deep stream and thick forest ensured we were unable to follow them, and only one of the group managed brief views. Nevertheless, it was a nice record of a difficult and often elusive species.

Having enjoyed the delights of this wonderful reserve, we made our way back to the lodge, passing through beautiful scenery in this little-visited region of southern Colombia. The remainder of the afternoon was spent relaxing and enjoying some light birding around the lodge. In the evening, Isabella (the young daughter of the lodge owners, and a future expert guide and conservationist) performed a traditional dance in honour of the Jaguar, which she had learned at school, much to the delight of the group.

## Day 11

## Monday 10th November

An early morning walk in the forest resulted in more views of Black-handed Titi, and we enjoyed views of a female Andean Cock-of-the-rock, which was an interesting record considering the relatively low altitude of the reserve. Back at the lodge, we enjoyed a final delicious lunch before making our way to the small regional airport at Villagarzon. From here, we flew back to Bogotá, arriving at our hotel just in time for dinner and a restful night.

## Day 12

## Tuesday 11th November

We made an early start this morning, as there were reports of road works and delays on the route to Restrepo, a small town near Villavicencio. Unfortunately, our efforts were in vain, as we ended up in a long traffic jam which delayed our arrival, and we finally arrived into our lodge in the afternoon. In the lodge gardens, the group enjoyed excellent views of a family of endemic Brumback's Night Monkeys, which lifted everyone's spirits following the morning's frustrations.

Thankfully, there was still time to head out this afternoon, and we enjoyed excellent open country birding (with highlights including Lettered Aracari and Great Potoo) as well as super views of several Giant Anteaters as they foraged for termites in the open countryside. We also heard an Amazon Bamboo Rat vocalising from a dense stand of bamboo, but we were unable to get views of this large rodent.

## Day 13

## Wednesday 12th November

Due to the delays yesterday, we hadn't managed to find Ornate Titi, so we rearranged the plan for this morning and headed to a private farm. After some searching, we managed to track down a group of these special, endemic primates as they made their daily morning vocalisations.

We continued on our way to the small city of Yopal, where we enjoyed a delicious local lunch, washed down with more freshly-squeezed lemonade. We transferred into 4x4 vehicles and headed east, passing through beautiful scenery along the way. Eventually, the paved road ran out, and we started to enjoy some of the spectacular and

abundant avian fauna of the region, with Jabiru, Scarlet Ibis and many others making appearances. However, perhaps the highlight of the transfer was a South Tamandua, a smaller cousin of the Giant Anteater. We arrived at the lodge after dark, and following dinner we retired to our rooms for a restful night's sleep.

## Days 14 and 15

## Thursday 13th and Friday 14th November

The next two days were spent enjoying safari-style and walking excursions from the lodge, exploring the Hato La Aurora reserve and its spectacular wildlife. The most abundant mammals were Capybaras, and they lined the lagoons in the heart of the reserve. Here we also found the wonderful Orinoco Crocodile and Llanos Side-necked Turtle, along with many smaller Spectacled Caimans and an abundance of birdlife. Mammals included White-tailed Deer, Crab-eating Fox and Black Agouti, the latter seen on a night walk.

Colombian Red Howler Monkeys were heard close to the lodge on one of the mornings, and we were able to get good views of these beautiful (and loud) primates. Another excellent sighting for the region was Northwestern Red Brocket (deer), which was seen well not too far from the lodge.

## Day 16

## Saturday 15th November

Having thoroughly enjoyed the last few days, we enjoyed a final morning excursion, before making the overland journey back to Yopal and taking a short flight to Bogotá. Three of the group caught their return flights back to the UK (arriving the next day), while the remaining party members transferred to a nearby hotel in preparation for the Cotton-top Tamarin post-tour extension.

## Cotton-top Tamarin extension

## Day 17

## Sunday 16th November

Today was largely a repositioning day, and after breakfast we made the short transfer to the airport for a flight to Santa Marta, and a short onward transfer to our delightful lodge near the entrance of Tayrona National Park. The afternoon was spent in the lodge gardens in search of Cotton-top Tamarin, but we had to settle for birds on this occasion.

## Day 18

## Monday 17th November

We made a very early start this morning, and entered Tayrona National Park around 6.00am (our local partners having arranged special early access before 'regular' visitors). Of course, our main target was the charismatic Cotton-top Tamarin, and we were soon enjoying mind-blowing views of this special Colombian endemic primate! Throughout the morning, we also enjoyed excellent views of Santa Marta White-fronted Capuchin and Colombian Red Howler Monkeys, as well as Central American Agouti, not to mention a fine selection of dry forest birds. There was time to explore one of the beautiful beaches for which the park is famed, before heading back to the lodge. The morning ended with spectacular views of Brown-throated Three-toed Sloth, which we found as we were leaving the park.

Lunch was enjoyed back at the lodge, and we had time to relax during the hottest part of the day. We headed out in the afternoon and evening, but didn't add any new mammals.

## Day 19

Tuesday 18th November

We were treated to an incredible sighting of Cotton-top Tamarin on this, our final day. A troop passed right in front of the restaurant and we all enjoyed jaw dropping views of this special little primate. It was certainly a fitting way to end the extension! After lunch, we transferred to Santa Marta airport for a flight back to Bogotá, where onward international connections were waiting. It had been an incredible tour full of Colombia's special mammals, and so much more besides!

## Day 20

Wednesday 19th November

Extension tour clients arrived back home after long international flights.

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## Species lists

### Mammals

| Common name                        | Scientific name                  |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| <b>Main tour</b>                   |                                  |
| Derby's Woolly Opossum             | <i>Caluromys derbianus</i>       |
| Brown-eared Woolly Opossum         | <i>Caluromys lanatus</i>         |
| Common Opossum                     | <i>Didelphis marsupialis</i>     |
| Hoffmann's Two-toed Sloth          | <i>Choloepus hoffmanni</i>       |
| Giant Anteater                     | <i>Myrmecophaga tridactyla</i>   |
| Southern Tamandua                  | <i>Tamandua tetradactyla</i>     |
| Brumback's Night Monkey            | <i>Aotus brumbacki</i>           |
| Gray-legged Night Monkey           | <i>Aotus griseimembra</i>        |
| Colombian (Lemurine) Night Monkey  | <i>Aotus lemurinus</i>           |
| Colombian Red Howler Monkey        | <i>Alouatta seniculus</i>        |
| Northern Pygmy Marmoset            | <i>Cebuella pygmaea</i>          |
| Lesson's Saddle-back Tamarin       | <i>Saguinus fuscicollis</i>      |
| Large-headed Tamarin               | <i>Saguinus illigeri</i>         |
| White-footed Tamarin               | <i>Saguinus leucopus</i>         |
| Humboldt's Squirrel Monkey         | <i>Saimiri cassiquiarensis</i>   |
| Black-handed Titi                  | <i>Cheracebus lugens</i>         |
| Ornate Titi                        | <i>Plecturocebus ornatus</i>     |
| Monk Saki                          | <i>Pithecia monachus</i>         |
| Capybara                           | <i>Hydrochoerus hydrochaeris</i> |
| Black Agouti                       | <i>Dasyprocta fuliginosa</i>     |
| Andean Porcupine                   | <i>Coendou quichua</i>           |
| Amazon Bamboo Rat                  | <i>Dactylomys dactylinus</i>     |
| White-tailed Olalla Rat            | <i>Olallamys albicauda</i>       |
| Red-tailed Squirrel                | <i>Sciurus granatensis</i>       |
| Mount Pirri Climbing Mouse         | <i>Rhipidomys latimanus</i>      |
| Bat sp.                            | Chiroptera sp.                   |
| Olinguito                          | <i>Bassaricyon neblina</i>       |
| Crab-eating Fox                    | <i>Cerdocyon thous</i>           |
| Northwestern Red Brocket Deer      | <i>Mazama rufina</i>             |
| <b>Post-tour extension</b>         |                                  |
| Brown-throated Three-toed Sloth    | <i>Bradypus variegatus</i>       |
| Colombian Red Howler Monkey        | <i>Alouatta seniculus</i>        |
| Cotton-top Tamarin                 | <i>Saguinus oedipus</i>          |
| Santa Marta White-fronted Capuchin | <i>Cebus malitiosus</i>          |
| Central American Agouti            | <i>Dasyprocta punctata</i>       |