

On the morning of May 17 we begin our adventures on the Ucayali. We take the skiffs up the river looking for the entrance to Belluda cañon. Along the banks of the Ucayali are dozens of wood storks, and one lone Jabiru stork. The wood storks take flight at the sound of our engines.



In the Jabiru stork close-up below you can clearly see the characteristic red neck band and the enormous bill.



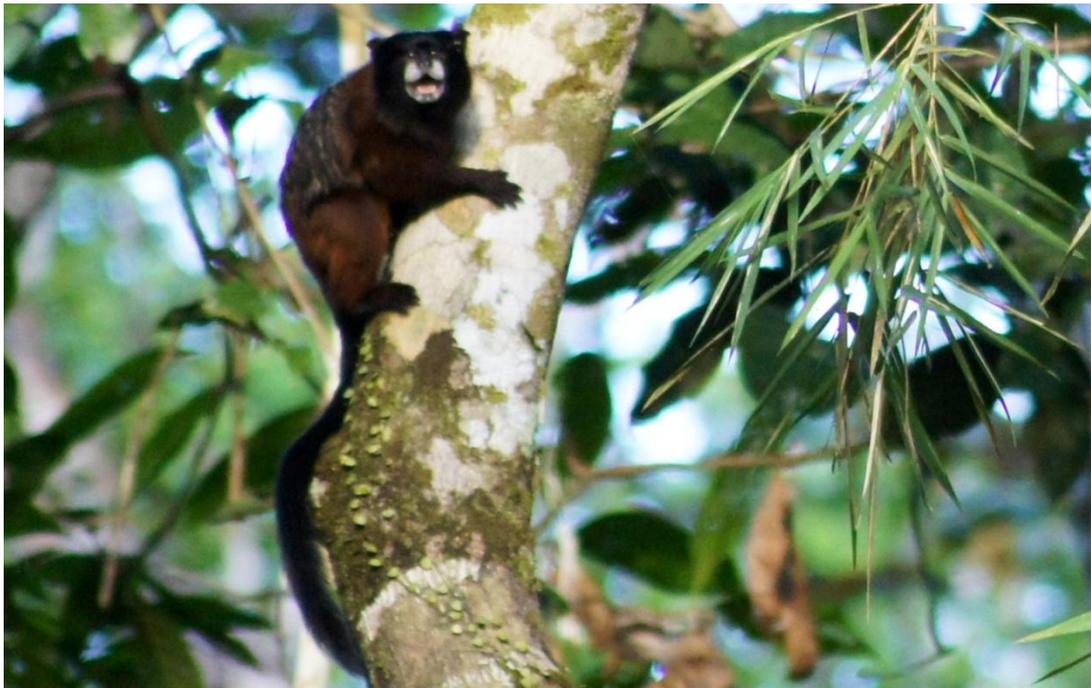
Once we were in the Belluda cañon we saw two Caiman Lizards. These are not the Caimans that are very similar to Alligators and Crocodiles and can grow to 16 feet long, but large lizards that can reach 4 feet long. The Caiman Lizard is also called the Water Tegu.



It is not easy to see mammals during high water. In short order we see five different kinds. An elusive Monk Saki Monkey is seen high in the trees. Our guide says it is a father (not a mother as was first thought) with a baby.



More Tamarins are seen.



Suddenly the skiffs pull into thick brush and we observe a family of Noisy Night Monkeys in their home inside a tree. The guides discovered this group some time ago and make use of the fact that the group has a fixed home and range. Though it is not nighttime they are very interested in us.



These monkeys are also called Owl Monkeys. They are nocturnal, omnivorous, curious and I must say awfully cute.

Not to be outdone by the monkeys, a Yellow-crowned Brush-tailed Rat treated us to a sighting. Yes, rat.



The icing on the cake of mammal sightings was a group of six Long-nosed Bats hanging beneath a log over the water.



Lunchtime came and then a rest. We go out again at 4 pm. We see a Jabiru stork perched on its large nest high in the trees. Then we see something really special, a pair of Hoatzins. These prehistoric looking birds are also called Stink Birds. They digest their food using bacteria in a specialized stomach much like true ruminants and this process produces an odor akin to the smell of manure. They raise their young in thickets over the water. In times of danger the young birds drop into the water, and then climb out using special hooks on their wings, not unlike the wing hooks seen in bats. As they mature, fledge and learn to fly they lose their hooks. DNA studies have attempted to address their lineage but there is still debate over interpretation and methodology. The most recent work suggests that they are not primitive. Take a look and decide for yourself.



We see another Roadside Hawk, which the guides want renamed: Riverside Hawk.



Many Green Parrots were heard and seen in flight. Neotropic Cormorants rested in a kapok tree.



Several Horned Screamers were active, both in flying and in screaming. They are strong flyers and are often seen perched high in the trees. They have a single calcified spike sticking up and forward from their heads. Is this why they are called “horned?” They have “horns,” or spikes, or unmodified, unbranched feather shafts on their wings, just where the hooks are found on bat wings or even on very young Hoatzins. This wing horn is not visible in the picture but is the source of their name. They are large birds and anserine.



In the late afternoon we travel along the El Dorado River. We are finally treated to a sighting of a Caiman, a juvenal Spectacled Caiman.

