

Thursday, September 19 – Clay lick, Canopy tower and animal sightings

As we went to bed last night, Doris said that if it was raining when we woke, just to go back to sleep, as the birds will not visit the clay lick in the rain. Sure enough come 4:15 am, we hear gentle raindrops on the thatch. Just as Ann is almost asleep again, Ed says that the rain has stopped and so we haul out of bed and are at the main lodge by 5:15 and on the river by 5:30. It is cool and beautiful, the weather is going to be good, and we hope the birds think so as well.



We motor about ½ hour down the river and pull in by a mud bank. Then it's up and over the side of the boat, up the mud hill and onto a nice trail for a ½ hour jaunt through the jungle on a nice path to a wonderful viewing platform overlooking the lick.

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Our experience at the clay lick is so wonderful that we have separate pages following "today's pages" to describe it all.

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We stay at the lick until about ten and then walk and bird our way back to the boat. We see more small monkeys in the trees. Parakeets are feeding on the beautiful orange blossoms of some sort of tree, and the ground below is littered with flower petals they drop as they feed.





Further along the trail we see a fallen hummingbird nest and a couple of toads, and then it's back on the river for our ½ hour back to the lodge. There are swarms of unusual-looking butterflies in the mud near the dock, and a beautiful pink-blossomed tree along the river.

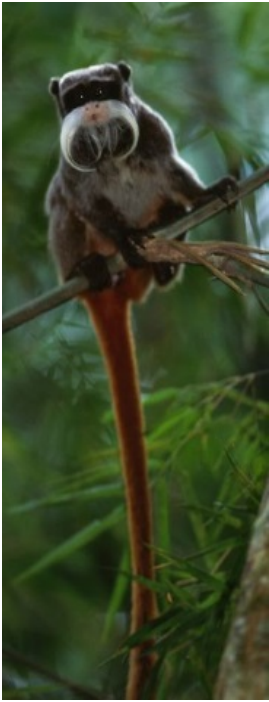


The weather is lovely and the short trip back feels like a pleasure cruise. A contrast to our LONG trip here yesterday, which felt as if we were crossing the River Styx.

We have an early lunch and a few hours rest before birding again in the afternoon. We now have the lodge to ourselves, the Jains have left. We see more monkeys just as we're finishing our lunch, Saddle-back Tamarin and Emperor Tamarin, just outside the dining room.



Unfortunately in the rush to get out of the dining room to see these monkeys, Ed stubs his toe HARD (no shoes allowed in the main lodge building). A later look shows it to be entirely bruised black halfway up his foot and it HURTS. He thinks he may have broken it, but broken toes are basically allowed to heal themselves without any special medical treatment, so it's on with the adventure. The toe is something he'll worry about once we're back in Tucson. Nevertheless it makes for an uncomfortable afternoon when we go back out on the trails again.



Both species are very small and incredibly cute. The Emperors with their “fu-manchu” moustaches are easily identifiable (*far left*); and they are so tiny, half the size of the small Saddle-backs (*left*). They’re not far away so we get some really good views and pictures.

At about 2:30 in the afternoon, we are out on the trail again; the pleasant morning is long gone and it’s incredibly hot and humid with not a breath of air movement. We see some good birds as we



walk the trails going out around the lodge. We are headed for a “canopy tower” platform; 135 feet up in a huge Kapok tree, and the tree continues for probably 50-75 feet above the platform.



The access is a metal circular staircase that rises next to the tree and the good-sized platform is built in a sturdy crotch of the tree. These are huge trees and the branches supporting the platform are as large as some of the surrounding trees. 165 steps, we counted them. Finally we are up to the bottom of the platform, then on top. The trees and branches are covered with various aroids, mosses, ferns; a little forest in itself on each huge tree. A good workout for the quads!



The Kapok is an emergent species which means it gets so tall that it emerges well above the forest canopy, and so it is ideal for these viewing platforms. You can see birds in the Kapok tree, the surrounding canopy trees, other emergent trees nearby and simply flying by. Some exceptional birding up here, with some species you would never see from the ground. The scenic view is incredible and birds are relatively easy to spot. Well, easy for Doris, but the rest of us do spot some also. With Doris's spotting scope we are able to see birds up to ¼ of a mile away easily and clearly. The miracle is that she spots them with the naked eye and then brings them in on the scope. And we find out that Boa, our boat pilot, has an eye as good as Doris's.



The only challenge is that we are visited on the platform by FLIES. They are about ½ the size of house flies and everywhere, in your eyes, in your nose, under your shirt. Our Deet has no affect on them, it almost seems as if they like it. We know they like the salty sweat that coats our skin. Fortunately, they do not bite but they DO drive us crazy with their buzzing and tickling our necks and ears. And actually they are the first obnoxious bugs we have encountered. Well, not quite the first, there WAS an infestation of tiny, tiny red ants (barely the size of a grain of fine-ground pepper) that we picked up either at Cock-of-the-Rock or at Amazonia Lodge. They are tiny and crawled into and out of Ann's computer and our Kindles, they seem attracted to the electronics. They didn't bite us, but we are concerned about the health of our electronic devices. Whether they live on to return to Tucson with us remains to be seen. Insects can be devious and persistent, after all we imported a scorpion to Peru.

So in the evening we all share a couple of beers (Limonada for Ed), and sit down with Doris to update our bird list with what we have seen today, then go over to the dining area to enjoy dinner. In the middle of dinner someone runs in from the kitchen, waving excitedly and saying, "Vanessa's here! Vanessa's here!" Who in the world is Vanessa we wonder, but everyone on the staff is running out behind the kitchen, and Doris refuses to tell us who Vanessa is, just says, "come outside and see for yourself" and heads for the door.

We follow, and then we meet Vanessa . . . *Tapiris terrestris* , a South American Tapir. She's 350 pounds of BIG love, about 4 feet tall and 6 or 7 feet long; and kind of "cute" in her ugly way. Seems that about four years ago some of the workers at the Center found a baby female tapir stranded in the flooded river with no mother anywhere in sight. So they brought the baby Vanessa back to the lodge where we're staying, and raised her. Then one day Vanessa reintroduced herself to the wild; she just disappeared. Now about once a month she returns, pigs out on fruit (that is the giant tapir's diet) for an "evening out" and then leaves again. The Lodge staff will always sacrifice a 5-gallon bucket of whatever fresh fruit they have at the time she visits. She apparently is "semi-wild". Two years ago she brought her new baby with her. And now she is pregnant again (she's apparently a popular girl). What a gentle giant. We are able to feed her out of our hands, sort of like feeding apples to a horse (if the horse had a long, flexible snout). And if the apples aren't coming fast enough she puts her head into the bucket and chows down from there. Really, who is going to try and stop 350 pounds of appetite.



She is a perrisodactyl (meaning odd number of toes), the family of horses and rhinos. Artiodactyls (meaning even number of toes) include pigs, goats, deer, etc. Animals with a cloven hoof. (Sorry for the zoology lesson.) So presumably Satan is an artiodactyl!?

Quite the proboscis on Vanessa. Really a "mini-trunk", and she uses it that way to the extent she can.



We are privileged to have met her. The chances of spotting a tapir in the wild are slim, and she rarely visits the Lodge these days. Then it's back to the dining room to finish our dinner and head for bed. Up early again tomorrow.

## Macaw Clay Lick

This is first class bird watching. You even remove your shoes before entering the platform to keep mud out, and there is a REAL toilet. There are a few other birders in the platform when we arrive, and soon a few others arrive. There are about 20 of us altogether, but the platform is so large that there is no crowding whatsoever.



As we wait for the birds, Ann reads from her Kindle.



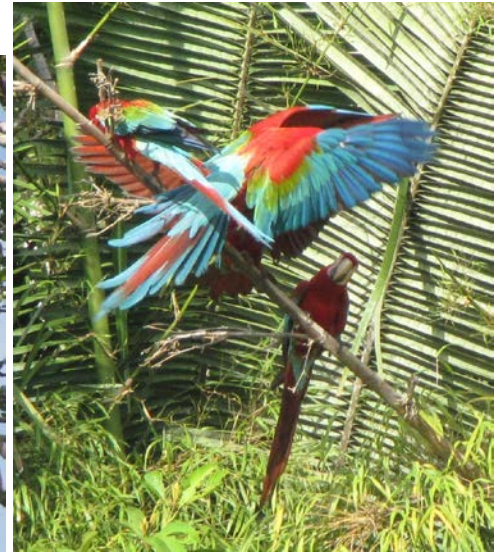
We are no more than 150 feet from the lick. Many other clay licks that tourists visit in the Amazon are much further from the viewing areas, some more than 100 yards. The lodge packed a breakfast for us; pancakes and fruit. No birds yet, and Doris says we are a bit early for the birds, so we dig into the breakfast. Then wait for the birds . . . and it's not long.

Around 7:00 am the parrots begin arriving. They are mostly green with various shades of feathers; darker, or lighter, but all about the same size, like a pigeon. And are they noisy! They fly back and forth, in the trees, out  
184 of the trees, until there are hundreds of them.





Then the macaws begin to arrive. They work the lick sequentially, the parrots first, then the macaws will go after the Parrots have finished. According to Doris, they almost never mingle on the lick. As the parrots eat the clay the Macaws gather in surrounding trees. First two or three here and there, then small groups form, and finally the trees are full of Macaws. Macaws are elegant birds and most are with their life-time mates. But until about 8:00 am, it's parrots, parrots and more parrots.



Apparently, both the parrots and macaws are cautious about feeding at the lick as they are vulnerable to predators at that time. It would be easy for a hawk to swoop down and seize a parrot and there are cases of ocelots taking Macaws at the lick. Large hawks and eagles are often seen here. That seems to be the reason for all the “futzing and puttering” they do. Then suddenly one of the parrots sounds an alarm call and up and away they go, hundreds of them at once. A dangerous place that clay lick . . . but it's just as dangerous to stay away. The birds MUST have clay or be slowly poisoned by the food they eat.



We watch the Macaws for a couple of hours as they swarm all over the clay bank. Then they get skittish and start to do more fluttering around. You can tell they're getting nervous. Finally something spooks them and they all fly off. Bye bye, Macaws. Time to go back to the Lodge.

