

Saturday, September 21 – Large oxbow lake

We are on the water again at 5:15; off to another, larger oxbow lake. It's about a 20 minute boat ride, then a 20 minute walk to the oxbow lake. We leave our transportation tied along the river and start down the trail.

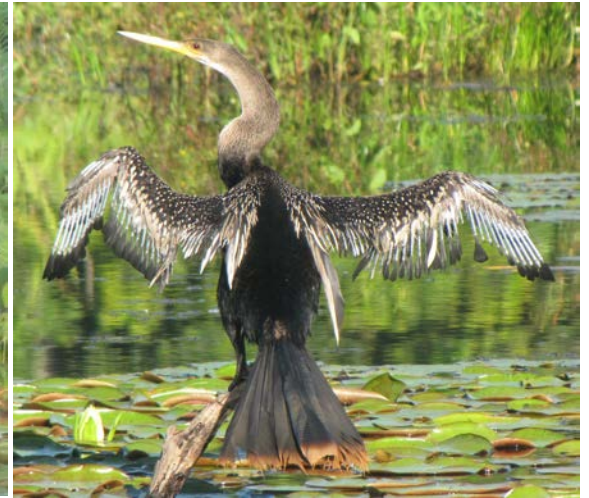


Ed and Ann lag a bit behind the group and get to see a group of tiny, tiny spider monkeys up in the canopy. This is a privately owned lake and you must pay to get in (which has been included in our trip cost). There is also have a full-time caretaker with a tiny cabin near the pier and boathouse.

When Ann and Ed catch up with the others the caretaker is very excited, telling them about a jaguar he saw lurking around the pier and his cabin yesterday morning. He is pretty agitated and is trying to decide whether to stay there tonight or leave when we do. The jaguar is likely long gone. They have huge ranges and wouldn't stay long without some compelling reason. We're sure the caretaker feels he is in great jeopardy, but with so much easy prey around in the forest it's doubtful that the jaguar is interested in him. But still, he may be right to worry; a full-grown male jaguar is almost as large as an African Lion, and would have no trouble taking down a human for his dinner if he chose to do so.



This lake also has a large platform boat on top of two canoes and Ernesto and Raoul are our paddlers. The boat is docked at the end of a roofed pier into the lake. It's the same kind of morning as yesterday, warm but not hot, calm and peaceful, no insects out on the water.



We see many wonderful water birds, Wattle-necked Jacana, Black-capped Donacobius, Horned Screamer (*above left*), Anhinga, Snowy Egret (*below left*), of course the ever-present Hoatzin (*below right* - pronounced "what-sin") and many more. One of the Anhinga's we see (*above right*) has just molted and is especially raggedy-looking as he suns himself between dives.



The Hoatzin is an interesting bird. We saw these yesterday, and Ann had seen them at Amazonia Lodge. But today we get



closer to them, 10-12 feet away; they seem oblivious to our presence. They are a "pre-historic" looking bird, and somewhere in size between a chicken and a turkey. In fact they do have many primitive characteristics; claws on their wings and their way of digesting food (they are vegetarian, never eating animals or insects). They use their claws to crawl through the tree branches, very un-birdlike, and they are extremely clumsy flyers. They seem like something between dinosaur and bird, and they resemble some prehistoric "link" creatures; evolutionary intermediates between the two.



The lake is so peaceful and beautiful and we are grateful guests, gliding quietly amid the wildlife. We know from past experience that the best way to see wildlife is by boat if the terrain allows. Birds and animals will take note of any sound in a forest, but seem oblivious to anything on the water. And a slow-moving boat is much quieter than a foot-fall on land.



We do see Giant Otters and we're very happy with that. Looked like it was a family of three or four, although the most we saw together was two. Some good views, but not the best photo-



This was our last chance to see them, and we were lucky; they are severely endangered and uncommon as well as shy. They are indeed "giant", weighing over 100 pounds or more and measuring six to seven feet long. They prefer quiet water to rapid currents, and primarily live in river bayous and backwaters. Oxbow lakes are a favorite. You are not allowed to get close to them, though how you ever could is a mystery to us. They are superb, fast swimmers and can disappear in an instant. We see them undulating up and down in the water in search of the 20 -30 pounds of fish they require as a daily intake. They are high-energy animals and have a sizable body to keep nourished. We've gone far up the lake, almost to one end, and we stop to have our picnic breakfast on board the craft and then slowly bird our way back to the boathouse.

The boathouse is at the end of a pier and sheltered by a thatched roof. As we de-bark from our floating platform we glance up and see that the ceiling is liberally covered with bats. A few bat pictures and then back along the path to our boat in the river, and a nice, cool cruise back to the lodge.





As we cruise back to the lodge we can see how the river has been eating away the banks. There is even some fresh green at the edge of the river that must have been brought down during the rain we had as we were arriving here at Manu Lodge.

We are “home” by 11:30 with nothing scheduled for the afternoon so we have plenty of time to pack in daylight. And the afternoon off hits the spot with us; it’s hot again and we’ve really had enough hiking in the jungle. Here is Ann at one of the buttress-root trees on the lodge grounds. It’s big, but less than half the size of the Cieba trees with the canopy towers.



Packing is quick, and we have the dining room to ourselves for lunch. We spend most of the afternoon reading in the lodge building (kitchen, dining room, lounge and bar all in one big room) since there are comfortable chairs and no chairs of any sort in our cabin, only the beds and two small tables. Our Kindles have reduced our luggage weight on this trip, and they’ve worked well. Then, it’s back to the cabin for a quick shower before dinner, and a long time

trying to dry off. It’s a “no shoes” policy at the lodge, and when we go out onto the porch to put our shoes on, we see that the butterflies have taken them over. They are probably after the salt that the shoe-leather contains.

We meet for a last Cusqueña Grande, a wonderful “blond” beer that Ann has acquired a taste for, and another delicious lunch. We do our last bird list update with Doris. By now the list is huge. We won’t do a final count until we get home, and we will see more new species during our boat trip to Puerto Maldonado.



We will be up at 4:00 am tomorrow for a 5:00 am departure to Puerto Maldonado and our afternoon flight to Lima . . . then home.