

THE TAMBOPATA NATIONAL RESERVE

The Tambopata National Reserve is a 275,000 hectare conservation unit created by the Peruvian government in 1990 to protect the watersheds of the Tambopata and Candamo rivers. It is adjacent to the huge 1 million hectare Bahuaja Sonene National Park. Whilst the reserve was created with an underlying philosophy of sustainable resource use, the park was created with the purpose of wholeheartedly protecting the forests within. Both units protect some of the last untouched lowland and premontane tropical humid forests in the Amazon. This Connecticut-sized (or Switzerland-sized) area of pristine forest contains 1300 bird species, 32 parrot species (10% of the world's total), 200 mammal species, 1200 butterfly species and over 10,000 species of vascular plants.

Less than 5000 people (equivalent to a minor league sports event) inhabit the reserve's "area of influence" to the north. They make a living off slash and burn agriculture, small scale gold mining, timber extraction, and hunting and fishing. One thousand Ese'ejas live in four titled communities within this area of influence. The undergoing construction of the Interoceanic Highway, joining Brazil's north Atlantic coast with Peru's Pacific Coast and access to the Asian markets presents the principal threat over the mid term to this region's incomparable wilderness.

The Tambopata conservation units form part of the titanic 30 million hectare Vilcabamba Amoro Conservation Corridor. The corridor is formed by 16 protected areas ranging from the Vilcabamba mountain range to the west of Cusco to the Amoro National Park in central Bolivia, and includes Manu National Park, the Machu Picchu Historical Sanctuary and the Madidi National Park, among others. This corridor protects over 40 ethnic groups. Its objective is to spur the region's development through participatory planning for the strengthening of local organizations, sustainable small businesses and agroforestry in order to minimize the loss of biodiversity.

Within this context, lie our three lodges - Posada Amazonas, Refugio Amazonas and the Tambopata Research Center. They are a small part of the network of organizations and communities that are attempting to protect this amazing wilderness by creating and sharing the value of leaving the forest standing.

WILDLIFE OBSERVATION AND PHOTOGRAPHY

The Amazon is extremely diverse, but large wildlife encounters are uncommon.

Tambopata is one of the world's most diverse wildernesses. It is also one of the best preserved. However, the vast majority of the rainforest's diversity is in the form of insects. The world record diversities of birds and mammals are mostly in the form of small, unspectacular species. Large spectacular species are rare, shy, unpredictable and very difficult to see, with few notable exceptions. So don't come expecting the wildlife densities of the African savannahs or the Antarctic Peninsula. We aren't in Jurassic Park or Disneyland, either.

Nevertheless, Tambopata is diverse and it is well preserved and exciting encounters do occur on a regular basis. At Tambopata Research Center, you will have some of the Amazon's best chances of seeing jaguar, tapir, giant river otters, harpy eagles, macaws, etc. However, the Amazon's best chances for some of these species are very slim, although they do occur. On average, for example, we encounter some 20 jaguars a year, perhaps the most difficult to see of the aforementioned species.

Not only are large wildlife encounters uncommon, but they are usually distant and/or fleeting.

Another important thing to keep in mind is that when you do encounter wildlife, you will not have the clear, ample field of view of the African savannahs or Antarctica, or the reposed exhibits of a zoo. In all

likelihood you will see the wildlife through branches, leaves, vine tangles and dense vegetation, scampering, stampeding, flying or leaping away from you, at heights of up to 40 metres for less than a minute. But wonderful encounters do happen. Jaguar encounters were mentioned above: one was of a jaguar eating a dead tapir, at 18 metres seen for 15 minutes by 8 people. Another one was of a jaguar sleeping on the beach in front of the Tambopata Research Center. Our driver did three return trips to show everyone at the lodge, including staff, the sleeping jaguar. It was even filmed by a crew from the BBC! The next day, it was there again. Still another was of a jaguar that walked dead on to the middle of a group on a trail, was surprised by it, and then leapt the other way.

So...

Do not expect wildlife to be encountered as it is found in African or North American parks. Come relaxed, with your eyes open and lots of curiosity. You will be in a place where every horizontal and vertical meter of forest probably has hundreds of species of organisms, different from one metre to the next. Just that thought should keep your sense of wonder alive throughout the trip. Then, all of a sudden, you may see that jaguar.

If wildlife observation is hard, imagine photography!

The Amazon, with its magnificent scenery and diversity of fauna and flora is a photographer's paradise. However it is a challenging environment for nature and wildlife photography.

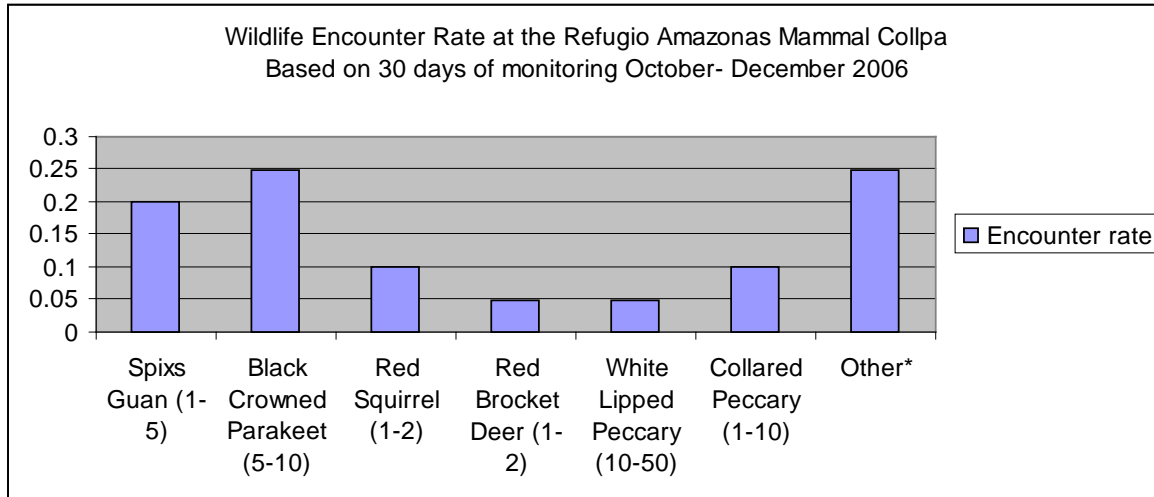
The first challenge photographers will face is with their camera equipment. Even before the first wildlife encounter, you will have to deal with elements that can cause havoc with your camera equipment. The high level of humidity, the ever changing weather conditions and even plastic-melting insect repellent will be a challenge to even the most reliable equipment.

The second challenge comes in the form of the wildlife. Even though many guests have left the lodges with some very good images of macaws, river otters and even the extremely rare jaguar, we feel that it was because of good luck and being at the right place on the right time. Photography in the rain forest is a painstaking process and a game of long waits and Zen-like patience. Most people arrive after having viewed documentaries of the Tambopata area produced by the Discovery Channel or the BBC and have seen the pictures taken by famous professional photographers like Tui De Roy, Franz Lanting, Andre Bartschi or Heiko Beyer. These photographers visit the area on many occasions and spend months working to capture their images relying on climbing gear, tons of scaffolding, laser sensitive devices to detect movement and the expert help of teams of lodge staff and guides. It is a natural but unrealistic reaction to believe that a person with a good camera and powerful zoom lenses can achieve the same results in a visit of a few days.

In general, you will require lenses above 300mm to produce good wildlife photography on a full-frame camera. For macro photography, a flash will be required often. To make sure your equipment is protected from the elements, we recommend the use of river bags or waterproof camera cases. The use of dry bags and desiccant sachets are highly recommended to alleviate the problem with humidity, rain and the occasional water splashing in the canoe during the trips on the river. Zorb-it produce a range of moisture control packages excellent for this purpose. The use of a tripod at the clay lick is recommended and lenses ranging from 500mm upwards are necessary for bird close-ups at the clay lick itself, although shorter lenses can be used to capture the overall spectacle.

REFUGIO AMAZONAS MAMMAL CLAY LICK OBSERVATION CHART

(Source: Caterina Cosmopolis unpublished data)



WILDLIFE ENCOUNTER CHART

(Source: Rainforest Expeditions wildlife encounter reports)

APA=Posada Amazonas, ARA=Refugio Amazonas, TRC=Tambopata Research Center

	APA	ARA	TRC
Agouti	44	36	63
Anteater	1	3	5
Blue/Yellow Macaw	21	37	96
Brown Capuchin	27	24	62
Capybara	62	71	98
Chestnut F. Macaw	50	40	85
Collared Peccary	1	11	29
Dusky Titi	82	31	83
Giant Otter	51	10	45
Hoatzin	83	75	88
Jaguar	0	2	12
Paca	3	10	5
Red/Green Macaw	77	36	83
Red Bellied Macaw	27	9	98
Howler Monkey	30	11	67
Tamarin	35	63	66
Scarlet Macaw	56	59	99
Squirrel Monkey	47	23	81
Tapir	0	2	4
Tayra	0	4	17
Toucan	59	90	84
Tree Frogs	35	53	63
White Caiman	45	98	56

TRC MACAW CLAY LICK ENCOUNTER CHART

(Source: Donald Brightsmith Tambopata Macaw Project, unpublished data)

