

Atenas Today

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Really Want to See Birds?

by Alicia Jackson

On a morning in March, our alarm clock went off at 4:45AM reminding me that I was to drag myself from under the warm covers, and call Ries. In exactly 30 minutes, he was in our driveway and we were off in the *Dawn's Early Light*.

Several months earlier, I had asked Ries if I could tag along on one of his bird watching trips. He remembered. It was an experience that I place up there with my favorite flavor of ice cream.....

Taking Highway 34, Carara Reserve is about a 40 minute drive from Atenas. The park is open daily from 8AM to 4PM. Naturally, being the outlaws we are, Ries and I arrived at the park about 6AM and off we went.

All I could think was "*oh please Lord, don't let me make a fool of myself and trip over the first rock or tree limb I come to*". All I could imagine was that Ries would point to a tree stump and say "Sit!", while he went off and had all the fun. But I was in luck. The path was well manicured, easy walking, and wheel chair accessible.

As we entered the park, it was like a magical paradise. The sun had risen enough to allow streams of light to flow through the tree branches, spider webs were covered with early morning dew, and the wakeup sounds of wildlife were coming from every direction.

We had no more than started our journey when a toucan flew over our heads, as if to say, "Welcome to my world." We walked another 25 yards, and there above us flew a flock of Scarlet Macaws.



Scarlet Macaw

I can not begin to impart the feeling of seeing these magnificent birds flying free within their own natural habitat. From that point on, it was a bird watchers paradise.

To name a few species we saw, they are as follows: White Tipped Doves, Orange Chinned Parakeets, Squirrel Cuckoo, Pale Billed Woodpecker, Dotted Winged Antwrens, Barred Antshrike, Tropical Kingbirds, Masked Tityta, Wrens, Robins, Brown Jay, Baltimore Oriole, Tanagers, Rd Legged Honeycreeper, Sparrows, and various hummingbirds.

There would be times when Ries would point in the direction of a bird's call, and say: "That's a" Sure enough, from out of the branches would fly a How amazing it was to me that he could identify it just by its call. It must take many years of birding to be able to accomplish this feat.

At various times and places along the trail, we encountered 3 Central American Agouti. Now these are some funny looking mammals. I could not decide if their ancestors were pigs, rats, opossums, or a mixture of all. Talk about street dogs sometimes looking weird--well these guys are in competition for the Weird Looking Animal Award.



Boat Billed Heron

After we had walked for about a mile, we came to a lovely open area, which housed the gentle flowing waters of the Tarcoles River. Nestled in this lazy stretch of water were elegant lily pads, various water grasses, and trees with their limbs extending over the water's edge. Here we were greeted by an array of various water birds. There were Boat Billed Herons, Blue Herons, Tricolored Herons, Bare Throated Tiger Herons, Great Egrets, and Northern Jacana. You can only imagine my amazement when I looked up and found that we were within 25 feet of several crocodiles. They were resting on logs watching the sunrise, with only their eyes showing above the water. It was hard to drag myself away from this particular spot.

We continued along the trail for another 10 to 15 minutes. Then we stopped and listened. The wake-up sounds of the early morning was beginning to diminish. Slowly the morning search for food and nesting materials, and the general chatter, were coming to an end. At this point, we decided to retrace our steps back along the trail of my early morning wonderment.

While walking back, we encountered a group of about 10-15 tourists, along with their guide. They were standing in their huddled group, listening to the guide talk. We walked past, and then again encountered a group of about 6-8 tourists with a guide talking. The songs of the birds in the trees had become silent. The sun had risen to its full height. The tourists were being herded.

At that point, I was thinking to myself how very lucky I was to have a friend who said to set my alarm for 4:45AM, and then took me along on an early morning walk to the waking world of the Carara Reserve.

Location: On Hwy 34, Approx. 9 miles North of Jaco, (40 minutes away from Atenas).

Hours: 8AM-4PM.

Entrance Fee: \$7 (Less if resident).

Security: Do NOT leave anything visible in your car.

With special thanks to Ries Samson.



Orange Chinned Parakeet