



JANELLE M. PANSZA

Insects, such as this katydid, often exhibit remarkable cryptic patterns and colors, in this instance, looking just like a leaf, scars and all.

cony. Our final day in the cloud forest was spent touring a reptile farm, the serpentarium, and the frog house. Of 135 species of snakes found in Costa Rica, 17 are venomous. This informa-

tion was not entirely academic. A girl on the same trip the year before was bitten by a Fer-de-lance (*Bothrops asper*) and had to spend several weeks in the hospital.

During the rainforest portion of our trip, we saw a Green and Black Dart Frog (*Dendrobates auratus*) and a smaller “Blue Jeans” Dart Frog (*Dendrobates pumillio*). At the La Selva Biological Station, we spotted several species of anoles (*Anolis* spp.), more large Green Iguanas, and, down by the river, American Crocodiles (*Crocodylus acutus*) and Spectacled Caimans (*Caiman crocodilus*). Near the Pacure River, we shared our cabins with many little geckos. Anoles were all over the front porch, Ground Lizards (*Ameiva festiva*) were common on the grounds, and basilisks (*Basiliscus* spp.) basked on rocks along the riverbanks. We did see some individuals running on their hindlimbs but never saw one running on water, a skill for which they received the common name “Jesus Christ Lizard.”

Our last stop was in San Jose. Half a day in the large, busy city was quite a culture shock after passing the previous few weeks in the green serenity of the forests. Costa Rica was an experience of a lifetime. Although I had been forewarned, I was amazed to see such biodiversity in such a small geographical area. I recommend a visit to anyone with even a casual interest in nature — but make sure you bring a good camera. PURA VIDA!!!

From Here It's Possible: A Texan Visits the Tropics

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Clinging to the front seat of the “turismo” bus for dear life, I anxiously awaited certain death as the bus squeezed past cars on the winding, narrow road leading to the small town of Atenas near San Jose. I wanted to close my eyes but couldn't sacrifice the view. Within a half hour, the landscape had changed from crowded city to meandering emerald green hills and slopes. Tropical trees draped over the serpentine road, and small houses littered the roadside, their occupants busy in the fields beyond.

We spent some time at the School for Field Studies in Atenas. Drifting through town, I gazed into store windows and savored the sweet aroma of baking breads and empañadas. Uniformed school children sat on the steps of a whitewashed church, and people were quietly strolling and relaxing on benches in a park that seemed to blend naturally into the greenery encompassing the town.

Three days later, we drove through mountain slopes patterned by a mosaic of coffee plantations, arriving at Poás National Park by mid-morning. Fortunately, clouds had not yet risen over the crater, so the chamber was clearly visible. Water gurgled and bubbled while sulphurous gases seeped out of the sides and a biting wind tried to steal my hat. Within minutes, clouds wafted over the crater, covering it like a blanket. While

walking up a trail to a crater lake, a Poás Squirrel (*Syntheosciurus poasensis*), endemic to the park, tried to charm us in exchange for food. The lake's deep blue water contrasted sharply with the tangled dark green forest around us.

The next day, during an eight-hour drive over the central mountain range, we pulled off the road. The air was crisp, thin, and chilly. Anxious to stretch our legs, we piled out of the bus and attacked a hill covered with sub-alpine páramo vegetation. Huffing and puffing, I reached the top, almost 11,000 feet high and above the clouds. Below me lay richly verdant mountain slopes and birds soaring in the distance. The view will be a snapshot in my memory forever.

Several hours of pouring rain and narrow, bumpy roads later, we arrived in the swampy town of Sierpe, from where we were to visit the Osa Peninsula and Corcovado National Park, traveling through mangroves and out into the ocean. A three-hour ride, weather permitting, would take us to Sirena Station. Soon, the narrow river view opened to an endless vista of ocean stretching into an azure sky. The water turned from murky brown to a deep, transparent blue. The boat pulled into a cove where a waterfall cascaded into the ocean, and the boulders housed an array of tropical birds. Later, a school of dolphins

accompanied our boat. Our arrival was abrupt. The refreshing breeze was replaced by intense humidity. We quickly disembarked. As the boat pulled away, I realized how isolated we were. I felt a surge of excitement and heard the first of many mysterious howls, hoots, and screeches emanating from the jungle.

After the initial shock of the heat wore off, the Osa Peninsula became a paradise. Sirena Station consisted of a kitchen, screened rooms with bunk beds, and a lab frequented by researchers. Surrounded by forest, you can sit on the porch and watch the wildlife pass. Howler Monkeys (*Alouatta* sp.) served as alarm clocks, hooting and screaming as if they were right in the room.

If you enter as a quiet visitor, the diversity is amazing. Once my eyes adjusted, I saw Leaf-cutter Ants (*Atta* sp.) hauling leaves to their massive mounds. Bulging Strangler Figs (*Ficus* sp.) even-

tually smothering the trees on which they grow. One cool morning on the bank of the Río Claro, I was sitting on a tree trunk watching a Tiger Heron (*Tigrisoma mexicanum*), when a sudden



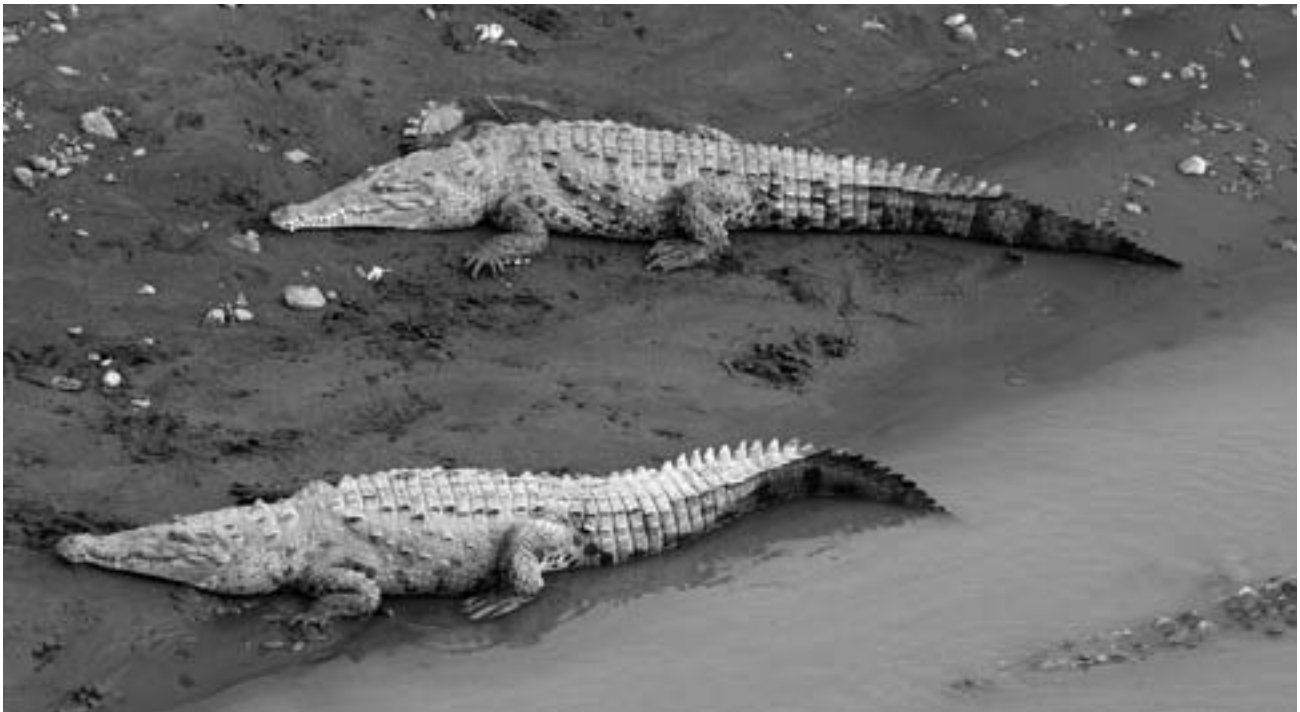
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Hot vents in the forest provide ample evidence of Central America's volcanic origins.



GAD PERRY

Costa Rican wildlife, such as this Lesser Anteater (*Tamandua tetradactyla*), has become quite accustomed to humans.



CLINT BOAL

American Crocodiles (*Crocodylus acutus*) basking along rivers are a common sight in conservation-minded Costa Rica.

commotion in the nearby brush turned out to be a Kinkajou (*Potos flavus*), rarely seen by day. Once, we stumbled onto a pack



GAD PERRY

Seventeen of Costa Rica's 135 species of snakes are venomous. This is a light-brown Eyelash Viper (*Bothriechis schlegelii*), named for the scales that protrude over the eyes.

of Javelinas or Collared Peccaries (*Tayassu tajacu*) sifting through a mud pile. Most of the activity during the day is in the canopy, where Keel-billed Toucans (*Ramphastos sulfuratus*) call and Spider Monkeys (*Ateles* sp.) swing. At night, the rainforest truly comes to life. Insects come out in full throttle, and the bats soon follow. The Catch-22 of walking at night was the choice of stumbling blindly through blackness or sacrificing my flesh to the hordes of mosquitoes and other bloodthirsty insects attracted to my flashlight. The hollow clicks of Red-eyed Treefrogs (*Agalychnis callidryas*) echo from above, and tiny fluorescent-yellow Palm Treefrogs (*Hyla ebraccata*) chirp happily on waxy leaves. Wading through a swampy pond, we found sleeping Basilisks (*Basiliscus* sp.), Cat-eyed Snakes (*Leptodeira septentrionalis*), a caiman (*Caiman crocodilus*), and a treeboa (*Corallus ruschenbergerei*).

When not in the forest, I ventured onto the beach. At low tide, perfect conch shells washed ashore and melted into the black sand. Although I longed to cool off in the water, the prospect of encountering a Bull Shark (*Carcharhinus leucas*) restrained me. Scarlet Macaws (*Ara macao*) flew overhead, squawking and littering the ground beneath the high tree in which they perched with rotting fruit and molted feathers. American Crocodiles (*Crocodilus acutus*) floated where the river met the ocean.

Eventually, we had to leave. Coming back was a shock. Tropical forest was replaced by small town, then by big city. From walking, cold showers, and occasional power, we went back to cars, electricity, and hot water. Clothing could once again be washed, and we had options for food. Eventually, we got on a plane and came back to the dry, flat landscape that surrounds Lubbock, Texas. I don't miss the mosquitoes, but I do miss Costa Rica. I'll be back...



CLINT BOAL

Black Iguanas (*Ctenosaura similis*), locally known as "Garrobos," are abundant and amazingly tolerant of close approaches by humans.