



Peggy Starborn's Notes from the Palacio

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Here at the Palacio we are justifiably proud of the variety and extent of human arts and design. But these are merely a backdrop for the real artist here- Mother Nature. By encouraging the growth of native trees and flowers, an amazing assortment of animal life can be experienced by those willing to patiently look and listen. Without the din of loud music, traffic and other human activity, the voices of our animal neighbors can be surprisingly loud. So, with eyes and ears, let's explore the Palacio world.

Early morning brings the crested magpie jay family, with its discordant gurgles, mumbles and squawks. They will want to steal your breakfast, so don't turn your back if you're eating outdoors. Several kinds of hummers visit the feeders all day long, each one with its distinct hum and chatter... the rufous-tailed, the cinnamon and the emerald, to name a few. Got your binoculars? (We have extra if you forgot) Check out the big Pachote Tree for the royal trogon, the iridescent mot-mot, the ... did you see that large iguana on the limb? That knocking noise is probably a woodpecker. There are several species, one of which, the lineated, is very similar to our own piliated woodpecker. Somewhere on the

hillside the chachalaca makes a home - it's the size of a large pheasant and dashes along the tree branches without hesitation. It's a chatty bird, so much so that the locals call a talkative person a chachalaca.

The heat of the day brings out our reptilian friends. Those little geckos and anoles and spiny lizards are busy eating mosquitoes and other pests. So if you see them on the wall, say hello and Thank You. We are after all just visitors in this tropical world. The big black iguanas patrol their various territories on the hill, bobbing their heads and chasing each other. They can be amusing, but don't invite them to lunch. They can be rude and pushy guests.

The local troop of howler monkeys is also waking up. The roars can be heard for a mile or so, but they also make soft cooing and hooting noises while feeding. They can be right above you in a tree and go unnoticed except for the munching. That little pitter patter on the leaf litter may be their droppings or urine. They are frequent visitors



to the Palacio when their favorite foods are available. Since you're already looking up, check the skies for soaring frigate birds, hawks, vultures, and falcons. They coast along on the thermals for hours with little effort. Sometimes it makes you wish you could be one of them.

As the day warms up even more, the birds quiet down... well, except for the parrots, which often pass over in noisy chattering groups, sometimes alighting in the trees. There is nothing so wonderfully companionable as a flock of parrots. They seem so boisterously happy to be all together. Although, loud in



flight, they seem to disappear quietly into the foliage while feeding. A coatimundi, a raccoon-like creature with a long pointy nose and ringed tail may be passing through. Coatis can be very friendly and inquisitive but

again, refrain from offering tidbits, even healthy ones. There's another loud humming noise, rather like a small remote controlled airplane- it's a long horned beetle, gleaming iridescent green with six inch antennae. Not to be missed is the twelve inch stick insect. Look carefully, it appears to be grass but it moves... very slowly. Swiftly passes a parade of butterflies, dozens of kinds, each seeking its favorite food. The insect and spider life here is spectacular – if you are drawn to six and eight legged wildlife, you will be occupied from dawn to – well dawn. And don't miss the procession of leafcutter ants. See if you can trace them from food source to nest - it's a long trek for a little ant carrying a large chunk

of food. Ounce for ounce, ants make up the majority of herbivorous animals in Costa Rica, large four legged plant eaters being far from common. Most creatures here are not in abundance, so we should protect and respect each individual. Bear in mind that almost all the foliage is either someone's food or someone else's home. Please leave the flowers on the plants for the bees and hummingbirds, and don't shake the Acacia Bushes.

Nighttime brings its chorus of tree frogs and toads, a symphony of honks, quacks, trills, burps, and squeaks. Armed with a flashlight or headlamp, you might find them drawn to the pool and waterfall. You might as well just sit and listen – they don't care if you sleep or not. The lights attract other things as well; huge grasshoppers and a moth with a six inch wing span. Footsteps and rustling in the dark may reveal a raccoon or a skunk. They are just passing through on their nightly search for leftovers.

As night falls (and it really does, quite suddenly) the bats emerge from their retreats by the dozens. It's amazing – the sunset, the bat flight, the sound of the surf on the beach below. It's one of the best times of the day. So turn off the T.V., bring your favorite refreshment, and grab a front row seat in paradise. Ten minutes till sunset!

Recommended Field Guides Include:

Costa Rica- The Ecotravellers' Wildlife Guide by Les Beletsky

Field Guide to the Wildlife of Costa Rica by Carrol Henderson

The Birds of Costa Rica by A. Skutch