

The herpetofauna of Costa Rican lowland wet forest

Costa Rica is a small country in Central America, situated between two continents and oceans. The physical geography divide the country in several climate zones which gives a wide biological diversity, the herptiles are no exceptions and 396 species of reptiles and amphibians were recorded 2002 and the number of described species have probably increased since then.

Lowland wet forest is the most diversified ecosystem and contains the largest number of species in most organism gropes and herptiles is no exceptions. Fragments of lowland wet forest are found along the Caribbean coast and in the south eastern parts of the pacific.

Corcovado national park is situated in the south east and contains the most important part of the pacific lowland wet forest in the country. The climate is hot and humid and the average annual temperature is about 29°C, and never drops below 24°C. The main part of the park contains of primary forest but a smaller area was cleared up and cultivated during the 1960, today second growth cover that place.

American crocodile (*Crocodilus acutus*), caiman (*Caiman crocodilus*) is quite easy to observe. Different species of pitvipers (Crotalidae), as the black headed bushmaster (*Lachesis melanocephala*) and terciopelo(*Bothrops asper*) are present in the area. And among the Boidae; *Boa constrictor* and Central American dwarf boa (*Ungaliophis panamensis*) is frequently

observed. The diversity of true snakes (Colubridae) is large, the cat-eyed snake (*Leptodeira septentrionalis*) is one of the most common species. Among lizards different species of the Iguanidae, Teiidae and Polychrotidae is dominating. Black iguana (*Ctenosaura similis*), *Ameiva festiva* and *Anolis polylepsis* are some of the most common lizards in the area.

The beaches around the park is important egg deposit places for many sea turtles. Turtles are the most species poor group in Costa Rica, in Corcovado the mud turtle (*Kinosternon scorpioides*) is the most frequently observed.

Among the amphibians different species of rain frogs (*Elutherodactylus*) is dominating, different species of treefrogs (Hylidae) as *Agalychnis callidryas* and a few poison dart frog (Dendrobatidae) as *Phylllobates vittatus* and *Dendrobates auratus* can also be found. Lungless salamanders of *Oedipina* and the cryptic species of Caecilians (Caeciliidae) are more infrequently found.

Most famous of the Costa Ricans parks is La Selva, situated on the Caribbean side, on an altitude of 60 meters above sea level and with an average temperature of 24°C. The area contains of primary and secondary lowland wet forest and is connected with other protected forest at the Caribbean coast.

The herpetofauna is more or less the same as in Corcovado at the general level but species composition and frequents is differing. *Iguana iguana* is much more

common as the eyelash viper (*Bothriechis schlegelii*) at La Selva and *Lachesis melanocephala* and *Phyllobates vittatus* is for example replaced by *L. senophrys* and *P. lungubris* respectively. The most common amphibians in La Selva are *Dendrobates pumilio*.

Another nice place to visit on the Caribbean side is Rara Avis, situated in the same rainforest complex as La Selva but at an elevation of 600 meter above sea level. The annual precipitation is about 8000 mm and the climate is cooler than La Selva.

The herpetofauna is affected by the weather and in particular snakes as *Erythrolamprus mimus* tend to be more diurnal. Different species of glass frogs (Centrolenidae) are quite common and the harlequin frog (*Atelopus*) was present in the area before the world wide amphibian decline started, 20 years ago.