





A cascade of gold sweeping over the rainforest canopy

The rainforest canopy at dawn, seen from one of the observation towers.

formed around that time in conjunction with a warm, moist climate related to widening of the Atlantic Ocean. Up until 10 to 15 millions years ago, parts of western Amazonia were located beneath water, and this may have included the area of Bahuaja-Sonene at various times during its history. The rainforests of the Amazon and Bahuaja-Sonene are also thought to have gone through dry periods associated with glaciation in other parts of the globe during the past one million years. As climate in some parts of the Amazon basin became drier and converted the rainforests into savannahs, the area encompassed by the National Park and much of southeastern Peru are believed to have

retained their forest cover. Arguments for this are supported by southeastern Peru being one of the most biodiverse areas of the entire Amazon rainforest and the existence of several species of plants and animals that are endemic to the region. During most of their history, the rainforests of Bahuaja-Sonene were untouched by people. Although it's hard to say when humans first walked through the cathedral-like rainforests of southeastern Peru, given that the first known settlement in the Amazon dates back 11,000 years, nomadic tribes may have first hunted in the forests of Bahuaja-Sonene anywhere from 10,000 to 5,000 years ago. Since that time, the main people who resided in the tropical forests and savannahs of



Mealy
Amazon or
Mealy Parrot
Amazona
farinosa on a
clay lick. Light
conditions near
deep forest licks
such as this one
can often
prove quite
challenging,
and the use
of a tripod or
beanbag is
mandatory.

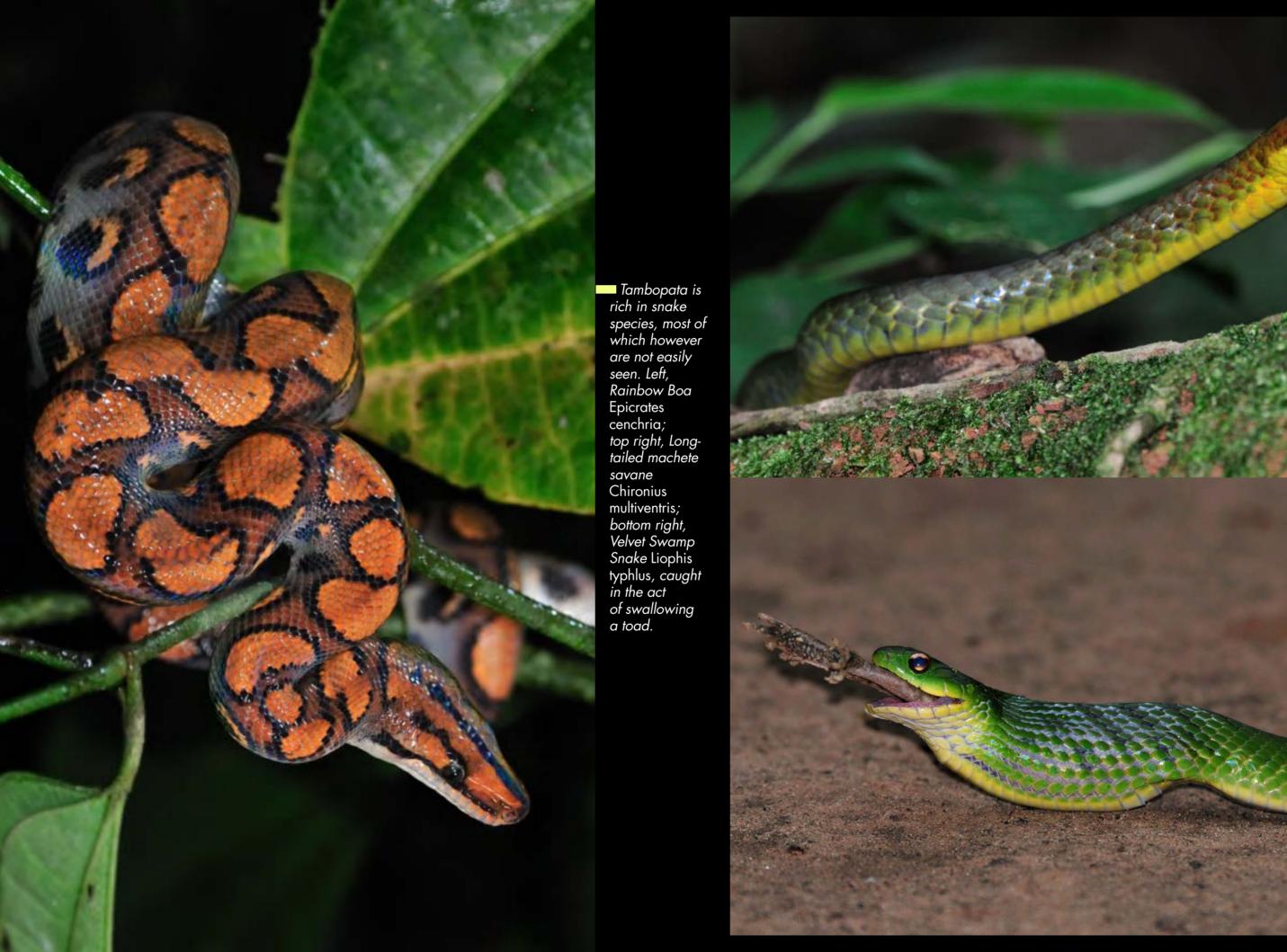
Bahuaja-Sonene belonged to the Ese-Eja culture. Living in small communities, they cultivated manioc, foraged for wild fruits and plants in the forest, and hunted for wild animals such as tapirs, deer, and gamebirds. Communities of Ese-Eja people continue to live near the boundaries of the National Park at present times. Since the creation of Bahuaja-Sonene in 1996, very few people have penetrated the heart of the park.

HABITATS OF TAMBOPATA

The grand total of 1, 091, 416 hectares of Tambopata National Reserve include such habitats as the following:

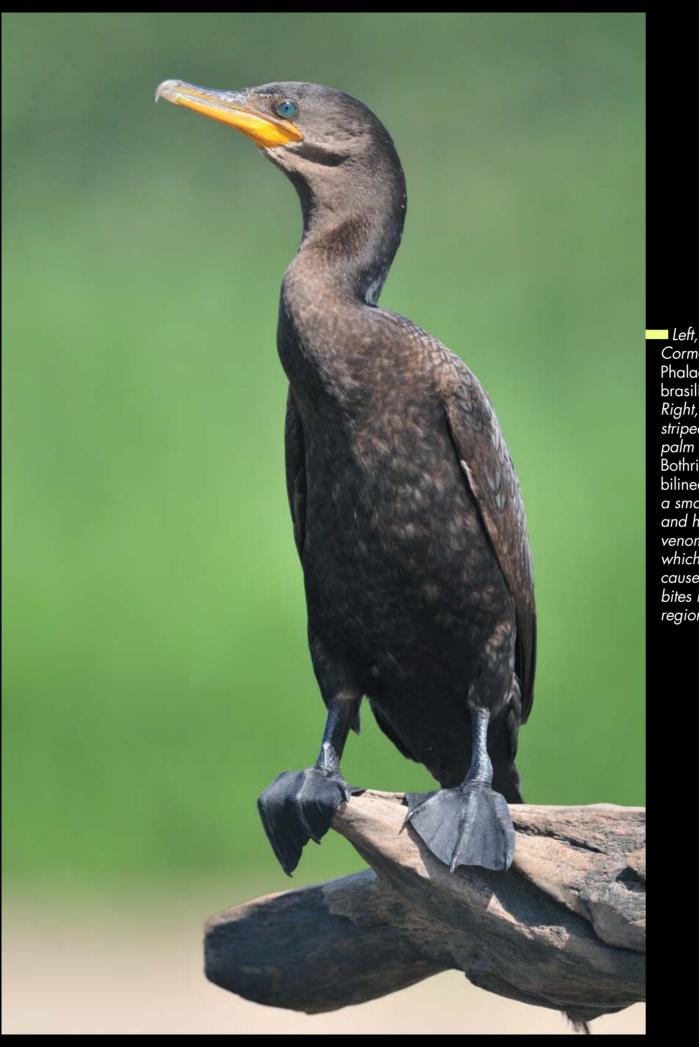
- Endless tracts of old-growth Amazonian rainforest: many of the trees are 30 meters (90 feet) or more in height and are covered in vines, moss, bromeliads, and other plants.
- Thick groves of bamboo: native species of bamboo flourish along the rivers and in some parts of the forest.
- Rainforests that grow in floodplains: these tall, beautiful forests are periodically flooded by rivers during the annual rainy season.
- Oxbow lakes: these blackwater lakes are formed by meanderings of rivers and host a huge variety of fish, aquatic birds, and animals such as Anaconda and Black Caimans.
- Palm Swamps: poorly drained areas sometimes host swamps where palm trees are the dominant vegetation. These areas act as critically important

A young Spectacled caiman Caiman crocodilus spotted at night along the river bank.









Left, Neotropic
Cormorant
Phalacrocorax
brasilianus.
Right, Twostriped Amazon
palm viper
Bothriopsis
bilineata,
a small, cryptic
and highly
venomous snake
which is a major
cause of snake
bites in the
region.









Far left,
a lonely Mealy
Amazon or
Mealy Parrot
Amazona
farinosa at the
crack of dawn.
Left, a quartet
of squabbling
Red-and-green
Macaws Ara
chloropterus
near a clay lick.

include the following:

- Harpy Eagle: the wild, extensive forests of the National Park hold healthy populations of this large, rare bird of prey. The largest eagle in the Americas and one of the biggest in the world, the Harpy preys on sloths, monkeys, and can even take Brocket Deer.
- Hoatzin: frequent around oxbow lakes and wetlands, the Hoatzin is a common resident in the park.
- 13 tinamou species: this represents the highest diversity of tinamou species for any area of equal size.
- 8 macaw species: In Bahuaja-Sonene National Park, four large and four small macaw species have been recorded. Big, healthy populations of macaws along with 17 species of parrots and parakeets occur in the intact, extensive forests of the National Park. Six of the macaw species from the National Park can be seen at the Tambopata Research Center clay lick.

Among the 174 species of mammals that occur in the park are healthy populations of such rare mammals as:

- Jaguar: healthy populations of this large, rare feline live in the National Park.
- Giant Anteater: although it occurs in the rainforests of the Park, it is more common in the savannahs along the Heath River.
- Giant Otter: several large families are commonly observed at the Tres Chimbadas lagoon.
- Amazonian Tapir: the forests of the Park harbor a large number of tapirs.









- Maned Wolf: this endangered canine is only common in protected savannahs such as those of Bahajua-Sonene National Park.

At least 100 species of reptiles and amphibians are known from the National Park and given the difficulty in finding them in the wild, there may be more species awaiting discovery. Species occasionally encountered include the Two-lined Palm viper, the Fer-de-lance, the Rainbow boa and the Amazon Tree boa.

An astounding 20,000 species of plants are known from the park and the Tambopata Reserve. This number is even more amazing when one considers the strong possibility that there are several plant species occurring in the canopy that have yet to be discovered.

EXPLORING THE RAINFOREST

The rainforest is mainly explored on foot, with occasional (and rather brief) boat trips along the river to spot birds, caimans and (hopefully - we had no such luck, alas!) jaguars. Trails are mostly well maintained and clearly marked, but a few routes can occasionally be slippery, muddy and confusing, so we do not recommend going around alone. Visitors are taken to the forest in small guided groups, but if one is really serious about one's photography this is the case where going the extra mile and getting a private guide might make a huge difference - not so much in sightings,





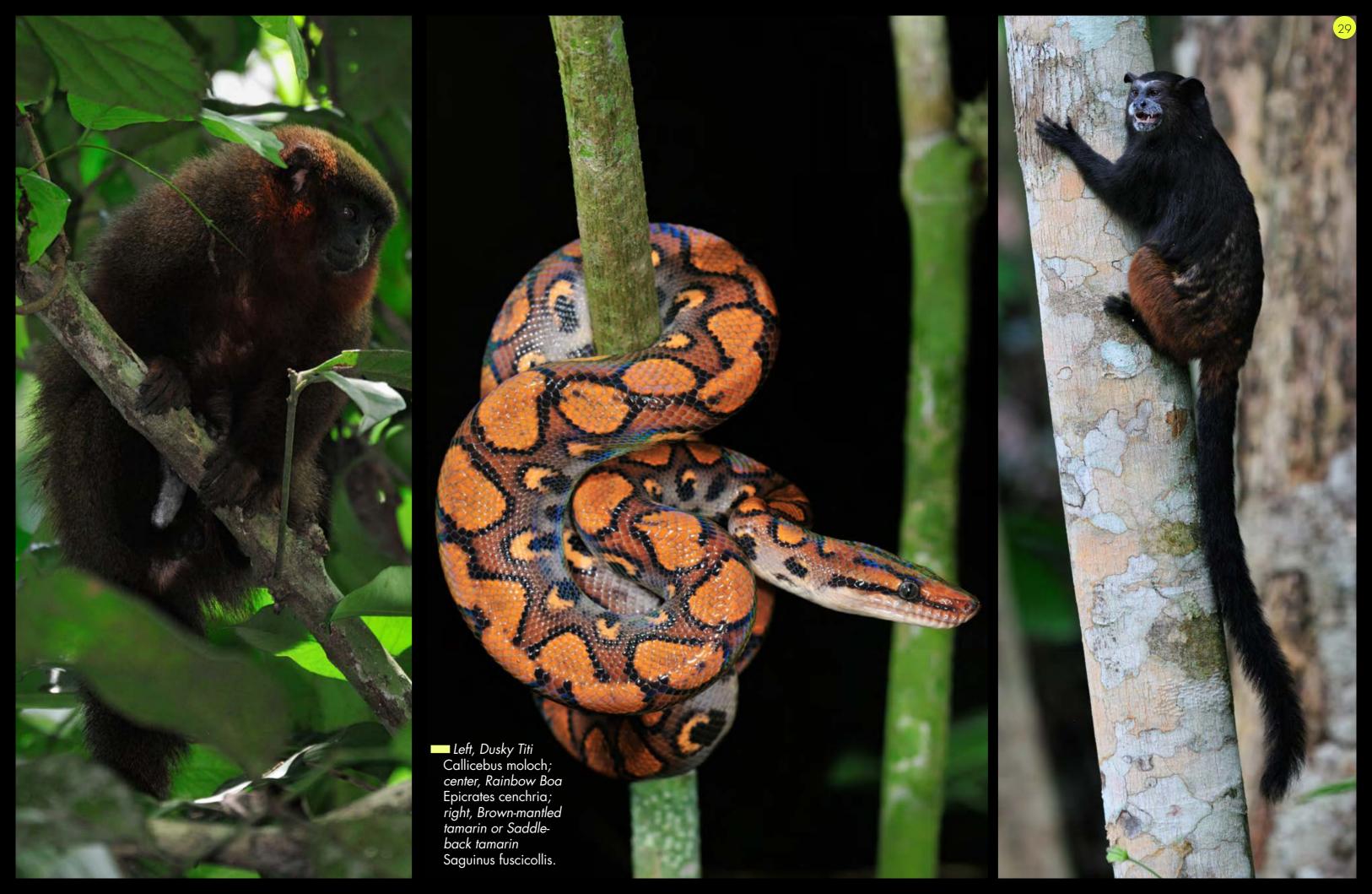




which are always dependent on a degree of luck, but rather on the amount of time one can spend with a photographic subject and the peace of mind which comes when the risk of getting lost (especially at night) is minimized. Wildlife photography in the Amazon is never easy - in Tambopata one ideally needs a long telephoto or zoom (up to 500mm at the very minimum) for monkeys, macaws and birds in general; a good macro lens for small snakes, tree frogs, spiders and insects in general; and a medium or even better wide-angle lens for the occasional panorama. A tripod, monopod or at the very least a sturdy beanbag are required for shooting at the macaw clay licks, where one has often to sit in patient wait for long stretches of time until the flocks of macaws show up. This can be a demanding task as the high humidity, the heat and the omnipresent mosquitoes can occasionally test the less experienced photographers' patience. Bird photographers do not want to miss the marvelous sights offered by climbing - before dawn - the 30 meter tall scaffolding observation tower nearby Posada Amazonas, where excellent sightings of toucans, parrots and macaws are guaranteed. Wildlife sightings may differ depending on where one is staying, so a brief overview of the three main options offered by Rainforest Expeditions is in order:

- Posada Amazonas is a 30-bedroom rainforest lodge just a 45-minute boat

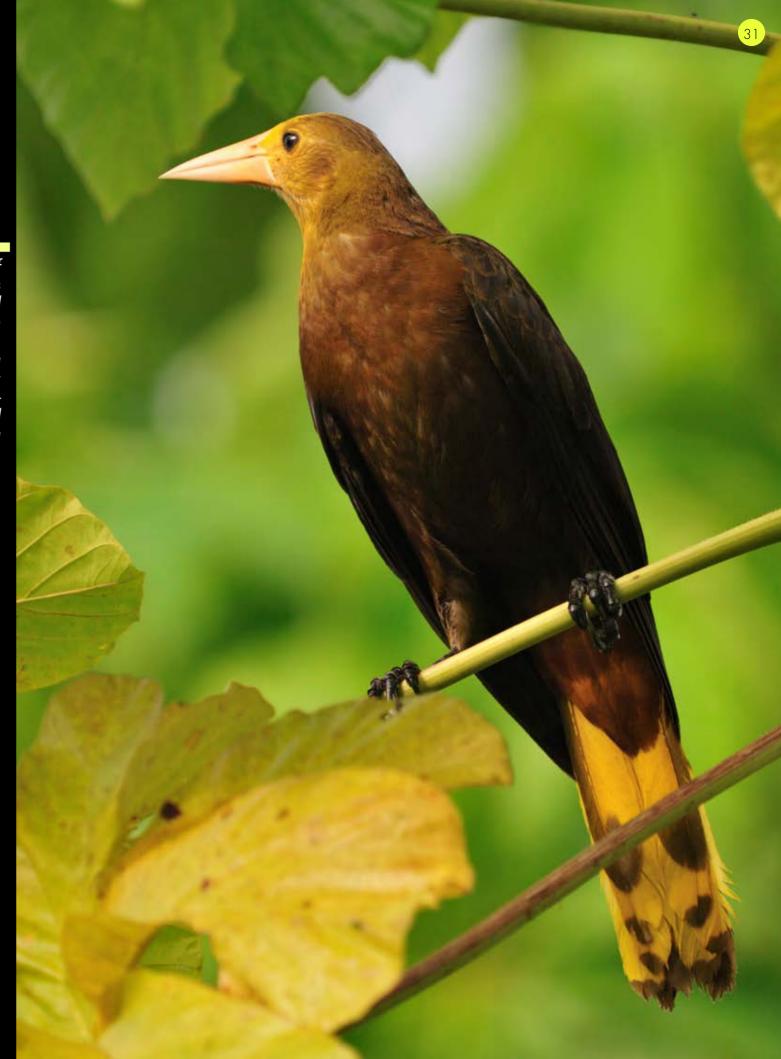
Red-and-green Macaw I Ara chloropteru







Left,
a flash flight of
Scarlet Macaws
Ara macao and
Red-and-Green
Macaws Ara
chloropterus on a
clay lick,;
right, Russetbacked
Oropendola
Psarocolius
angustifrons.

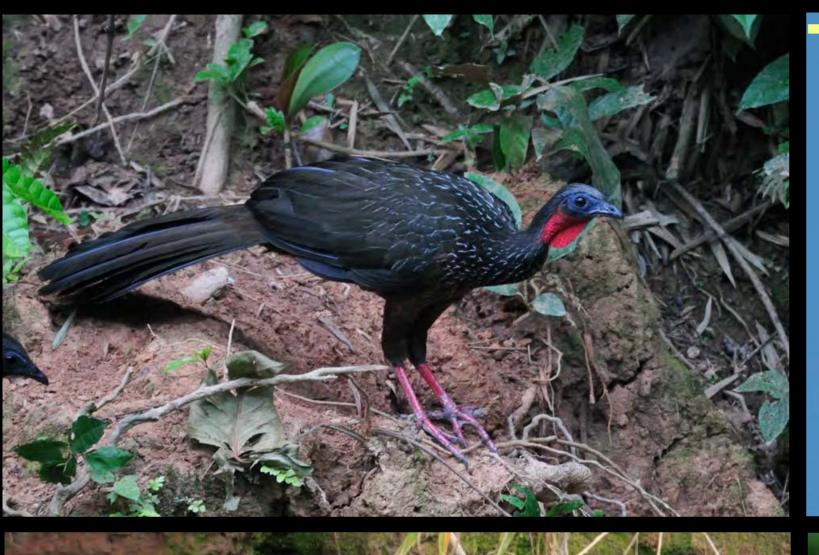


ride from the town of Puerto Maldonado. Besides its spectacular canopy tower, it offers trips to the Tres Chimbadas lagoon, with its resident family of Giant River Otters and wildlife such as hoatzins, caimans or horned screamers. Despite being relatively close to Puerto Maldonado, the Posada Amazonas offers ample opportunities to see wildlife, including Saddle Backed Tamarins, Squirrel, Brown Capuchin, Red Howler and Dusky Titi Monkeys, parrots at a clay lick, parrots from the canopy tower, Giant River Otters and caimans and capybaras on the river banks.

- Refugio Amazonas is a 32-bedroom lodge four hours from the Puerto Maldonado airport. It boasts another 30 meter scaffolding canopy tower offering good chances of spotting toucans, parrots, macaws or mixed species canopy flocks, plus boat trips to Lake Condenado and clay licks. Jungle wildlife one can observe there includes Saddle Backed Tamarins, Squirrel, Brown Capuchin, Red Howler and Dusky Titi Monkeys, parrots at a clay lick, mixed species tanager flocks, caimans and capybaras on the river banks and active harpy eagle nests.

- The Tambopata Research Center is sited several hours up the Tambopata river, within the 700,000 hectare uninhabited nucleus of the reserve. Here sightings of monkeys, macaws and other large species become more frequent, with jaguars being sometimes seen near the river bank. This is one of the most remote rainforest lodges in

A solitary Redand-green Macaw Ara chloropterus flies above the forest canopy at dawn.

















South America, offering travelers an outstanding chance to engage with the natural wonders of the Amazon. The TRC's isolated location, inside an uninhabited area of the Tambopata National Reserve and next to the Bahajua-Sonene National Park, means that the rainforest ecosystem around it remains pristine, while the populations of wild animals are all at carrying capacity. Much groundbreaking macaw conservation research has also been carried out from the TRC. Species one can very probably spot there include macaws - (the largest known macaw clay lick in the Amazon is 500 yards from the lodge), Dusky titi, Squirrel, Brown capuchin, Howler and Spider Monkeys, capybara, caiman, agouti and White lipped peccary Although very difficult to see, jaguars, tapirs and harpy eagle are also occasionally glimpsed by visitors.

THE FUTURE OF TAMBOPATA

The future of this National Park along with the thousands of plant and animal species that live there seems to be secure. Access to the National Park is controlled and few people actually enter it, there are no roads that approach its boundaries, and it is buffered by the Tambopata National Reserve. Although people use the forests in the reserve, attempts are made to control activities and ecotourism is one of the main economic activities in the area. The economic activity generated by such lodges as Refugio Amazonas and the Tambopata Research Center (the closest lodge to the National Park) provide incentives to protect the rich forests of Tambopata and Bahuaja-Sonene National Park.







Huntsman Spider
Olios sp., family
Sparassidae. The
brassy, metallic
shine of this spider
was quite stunning.



Left, Tailless
whip scorpion
or Amblypigid
Heterophrynus
longicornis; right,
a Neotropical
arboreal spider
Syntrechalea sp.,
carrying newly
hatched babies
on its back.

























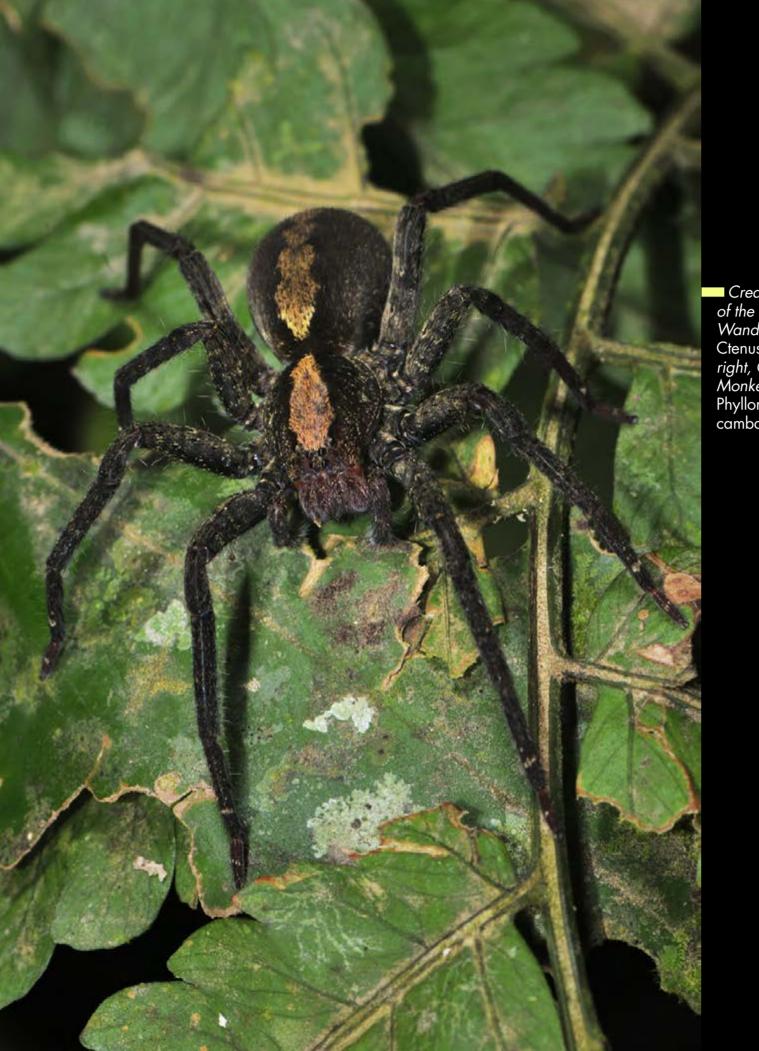




Left, Scarlet
Macaws Ara
macao, Red-andGreen Macaws
Ara chloropterus
and Blue-andYellow Macaws
Ara ararauna
on a well-lit
riverbank clay
lick; right, Redand-green Macaw
Ara chloropterus
on another
riverside clay lick.







Creatures
of the night! Left,
Wandering Spider
Ctenus ornatus;
right, Giant Waxy
Monkey Frog
Phyllomedusa
camba.











