

Celebrating Animals

A mecca for birders from all over the world, the area around the Bellavista Cloud Forest Reserve near Quito, Ecuador, is home to hundreds of species that fill the canopy with color and sound. The lodge there offers not just fantastic bird watching for tourists but research opportunities for scientists and students as well. In May 2008, I spent three weeks on an internship compiling a bird field guide for the lodge. My accommodations were spartan: a bed in the attic of a small house with no electricity, nestled in the forest a one-mile hike from the lodge's restaurant and my meals.

Each morning I hiked for hours until the heavy clouds descended and the rain poured down. After it cleared, I sat in the attic until

evening, watching hummingbirds flock to a flowering vine winding around the trunk of a nearby tree.

The plate-billed mountain-toucans, though common in the area, were not as easy to get a good look at. They're very noisy, and I heard their chatter constantly, but they never sat still long enough or in a spot where I could take a clear photo.

On the next-to-last day of my stay, this foraging toucan perched on a branch of my tree for about five minutes, and I finally got the shot I'd been hoping for. I don't know if he was aware of me, but it did seem that he was giving me his good side.

— *Victoria Gandy, Plano, Texas*

YOUR BEST SHOT

Do you have an inspiring photo of a favorite pet or wild animal? Send it to us for possible publication in *All*

Animals, along with an explanation of 150 words or fewer about why it's meaningful to you. Photos should be at least 300 dpi at a size of 5-by-7" and at least 2 MB.

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