

## Bats in the Nariva swamp



A neotropical swamp sounds rather ominous, even when you're told "It's OK, it's the middle of the dry season. It doesn't rain in the dry season." Nariva swamp, near Trinidad's east coast, is the

largest wetland area on the island. We spent part of a day there looking for tent-making bats, and a long evening mist netting. The reassurance about the dry season was rather compromised by the discovery that it was Trinidad's wettest dry season in years, and the puddles, patches of soft mud and enthusiastic mosquitoes as we walked slowly through a forested area during the afternoon did not augur well for the evening. It was certainly a less comfortable environment than the highland rain forest area in which we had spent the previous couple of days. The heat and the insects were forgotten as we encountered tent-roosting bats. They are difficult to approach, with a tendency to fly off as soon as they are aware of your presence. Nonetheless, two of the three

Gervais' Fruit-Eating Bats (*Artibeus cinereus*) that we found under a large leaf were confident enough to stay while we photographed them. Several species of phyllostomid bats roost in leaf tents, often modifying the leaf by partially biting through the veins near the midrib so that the leaf collapses into a perfect tent shape.

As the afternoon wore on, we located some suitable mist netting spots in dense forest and left the netting gear in place ready for the evening. After a break, we returned and set about the frantic business of setting the nets before darkness came. The mosquito activity increased and by the time we began to catch bats the biting moved beyond intolerable and approached the threshold of excruciating. With your hands occupied by a struggling bat with larger teeth than you like to think



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about there is no way of swatting a mosquito, and several times we would have to hand over the extraction of the bat from the net to someone else while we retreated to beat the mosquitoes away.

The yield of bats was spectacular, though, in terms of both numbers and variety of species. Particularly notable were the Naked-Backed Bat *Pteronotus davyi*, the small nectar-feeding *Anoura geoffroyi* and the delightful Striped Hairy-Nosed Bat *Mimon crenulatum*. We caught three specimens of the largest bat we saw on the trip, the Greater Spear-Nosed Bat *Phyllostomus hastatus*, the second largest bat in the New World. This was a very impressive animal and mercifully good-natured, although one gave Sam a hefty bite after he extracted it from the net. A much smaller bat caught by neotropical bat expert Fiona Reid proved to be a Frosted White-Lined Bat *Saccopteryx canescens*, a new species for Trinidad. A very exciting battling evening concluded with a gathering on the edge of the forest to examine and photograph our haul before releasing the bats and retreating to nurse our mosquito bites. Thanks to our Trindadian guide, Geoffrey Gomes, and to Daniel Hagreaves and Fiona Reid.

*Pictures Bob Cornes apart from bottom right of [Mimon crenulatum](#) which was Jude's There are more photos on the Bat Group website*

*Bob and Jude plan to Trinidad return in March for more adventures... As well as exploring more sites we hope to help Geoffrey with an outreach project he is setting up.*

