



## Heath River Wildlife Center

### **Two Ecosystems: Jungle and Savanna** **Heath River Wildlife Center** **(5D / 4N)**

On this trip to Heath River we will find the most impressive, varied and pristine rainforest the Upper Amazon Basin has to offer. The small and cozy Heath River Wildlife Center is the only eco-lodge in the remote Rio Heath; on the wild frontier of Bolivia and Peru. Few lodges can offer this unbeatable combination of distance away, but accessibility through airport and through the local river system.

Our lodge is located within areas of natural importance in both Peru and Bolivia. Madidi National Park in Bolivia has a total 18,900 km<sup>2</sup> (7,297 mi<sup>2</sup>), while reserves adjacent, Candamo and Bahuaja Sonene across the border, account for more than 13,700 km<sup>2</sup> (5,290 mi<sup>2</sup>). Together they form the second largest area of nature conservation and by far the most biologically diverse of all South America.

Our visit to the forest will be active, with some hiking trails required to maximize the experience. At the Heath River Wildlife Center we witness one of the most spectacular displays of nature; a mass meeting of macaws and parrots of brilliant colors in the macaw clay lick along the Heath River.

The area offers numerous activities to occupy yourself during your visit. You can admire wildlife along the trails in this remote jungle, and perhaps view the mammal clay lick and the elusive Tapir, the largest mammal in the Amazon. We can visit a section where we will see a lake, inside the Bahuaja Sonene National Park, abundant with birds and possible monkey sightings and the family of giant otters (*Pteronura brasiliensis*). There is an amazing diversity of environments that can be experienced in the short walk from the river to the Pampas of Heath; a trip that passes through a nesting place for the Blue and Yellow Macaw.

### **Itinerary**

**Day 1: Puerto Maldonado to Heath River Wildlife Center.** Our staff will welcome you at the airport in Puerto Maldonado and drive you through the city to the boat dock on the Tambopata River. Here we board a motorized canoe and head towards the nearby confluence of the mighty Madre de Dios River to the mouth of the Heath River, which is the natural border of Peru and Bolivia. In the haven of this important Amazonian tributary we have a vision of the diversity of the riverside environment; cliffs of red earth with outreaching forest are interspersed with thick banks of *Cecropia* trees and couch grass. After brief formalities at border crossings, we take the boat through the narrow waters for a couple of hours, enjoying the intimacy of the mysterious forest on both sides. Occasional sightings of native children splashing along the banks are interspersed with long, silent stretches where we can locate herons, hawks, cormorants, geese, orinoco, and perhaps a family of Capybaras, which is the

world's largest rodent can weigh up to 55Kg. After this interesting trip we arrive at our simple, but comfortable accommodation of the Heath River Wildlife Center, just in time for dinner. **(Box Lunch, D)**

**Day 2: Heath River Wildlife Center.** Today we start very early to visit the most spectacular attraction of this area: the parrot and macaw clay lick along the river. Here these colorful birds gather to eat the clay in the cliffs on the riverbanks to neutralize certain toxins in their daily diet (poisonous berries and hallucinogenic plants). Sometimes they congregate in the hundreds, pushing and squabbling over the best place to eat. This noisy and unforgettable show can go on for two or three hours, and can collect varieties of parrots, parakeets, Chestnut Fronted Macaws and their larger cousins, the Red and Green Macaw. This extraordinary display occurs in only a handful of places in the Upper Amazon Basin. Our floating platform provides us with comfort and is completely hidden, so here we will enjoy a full breakfast during the show.

We make land back down the river will walk back along a section of the extensive jungle trails. Here we will find huge Chestnut, Kapok and fig trees; along with the dark strangler fig whose strategy of life is as sinister as its name implies. Our guide will point out and explain the medicinal use and trade of dozens of plants and trees, while keeping eyes and ears open for birds or one of the eight species of monkeys found in this region. We could run into a small herd of the two species of wild pigs that are common in this area. In order to mark their territory they use scent glands so powerful that they can be smelt long before being seen.

After lunch we hike along the trail leading to the point where the forest abruptly gives way to the vast plains of the Pampas of Heath. This unique land is a result of poor soil and extreme climatic cycles of droughts and floods. It is the largest intact tropical savanna in the Amazon is the habitat of endemic birds and mammals, such as the Fork-Tailed Hummingbird and the Manned Wolf. Just beyond the edge of the forest you can climb to an elevated platform that allows for a great view of this vast expanse of grasslands and shrubs, dotted with palm trees.

The palm tree *Mauritia flexuosa* produces nuts rich in palm oil and dry hollow stems that provide vital food and shelter for nesting pairs of Red Bellied Macaws and the rare Blue and Yellow Macaws. We aim to arrive around sunset, when the parrots are returning from their daily search for food to gather in this place.

We return to the lodge at night using headlamps and flashlights, and perhaps stopping here and there in total darkness to listen to the ever-changing sounds of frogs, insects, and other animals; the magic of the jungle at night. We may run into frogs the size of small rabbits, homes of hairy tarantulas or night monkeys hanging from the trees; there is a huge and unpredictable collection of nocturnal creatures in the night. After dinner some guests may choose to visit the lick of mammals, with the hope of seeing the Lowland Tapir, the largest mammal in the jungle. **(B/L/D)**

**Day 3: Heath River Wildlife Center.** On our second full day in at the lodge we can choose from a wide range of activities available in this diverse and unique tropical environment. Many people choose to make a second visit to the macaw clay lick or spend more time on the trails. Later we can take a canoe tour around the Cocha Guacamayo, an oxbow lake that is home of a family of giant otters. The lake is located inside the Bahuaja Sonene National Park, a short distance by boat from the lodge.

We return by boat after dusk looking for caimans; a crocodile cousin that lives in the Amazon. This region is home to the Black Caiman, which is endangered, and almost always distinguishable along the river's edge with its glowing orange eyes. **(B/L/D)**

**Day 4: Heath River Wildlife Center.** Today we will explore the extensive network of forest trails in the area to deepen our understanding of the jungle and its ways; and to search for birds or other creatures that we have not seen yet. Perhaps we will encounter the peccary or add two or three species of monkeys to our have seen lists. Our guides will point out various species of trees and plants, explaining their medicinal, commercial, or ritual use. Towards the end of our trek we will pass by the mammal lick, which could give us a sighting of a Tapir or a Red Deer. **(B/L/D)**

**Day 5: The Heath River Wildlife Center to Puerto Maldonado.** We leave at dawn for the return journey downstream. This is the peak of wildlife activity, so keep a sharp eye on the banks of the river where we may see families of Capybaras; and perhaps be rewarded with a rare glimpse of Jaguar or Tapir swimming through the stream. We return to Peru through the Madre de Dios River and head upstream to Puerto Maldonado, where you will be transferred to the airport for flights to Cusco or Lima. **(B)**

*Please note all itineraries may vary slightly to maximize wildlife viewing. This will depend on the reports of our researchers and experienced naturalist guides.*

*Please note that the Heath Lodge is located on the Bolivian side of the Heath River so passports will be required to pass the Bolivian control of documents.*