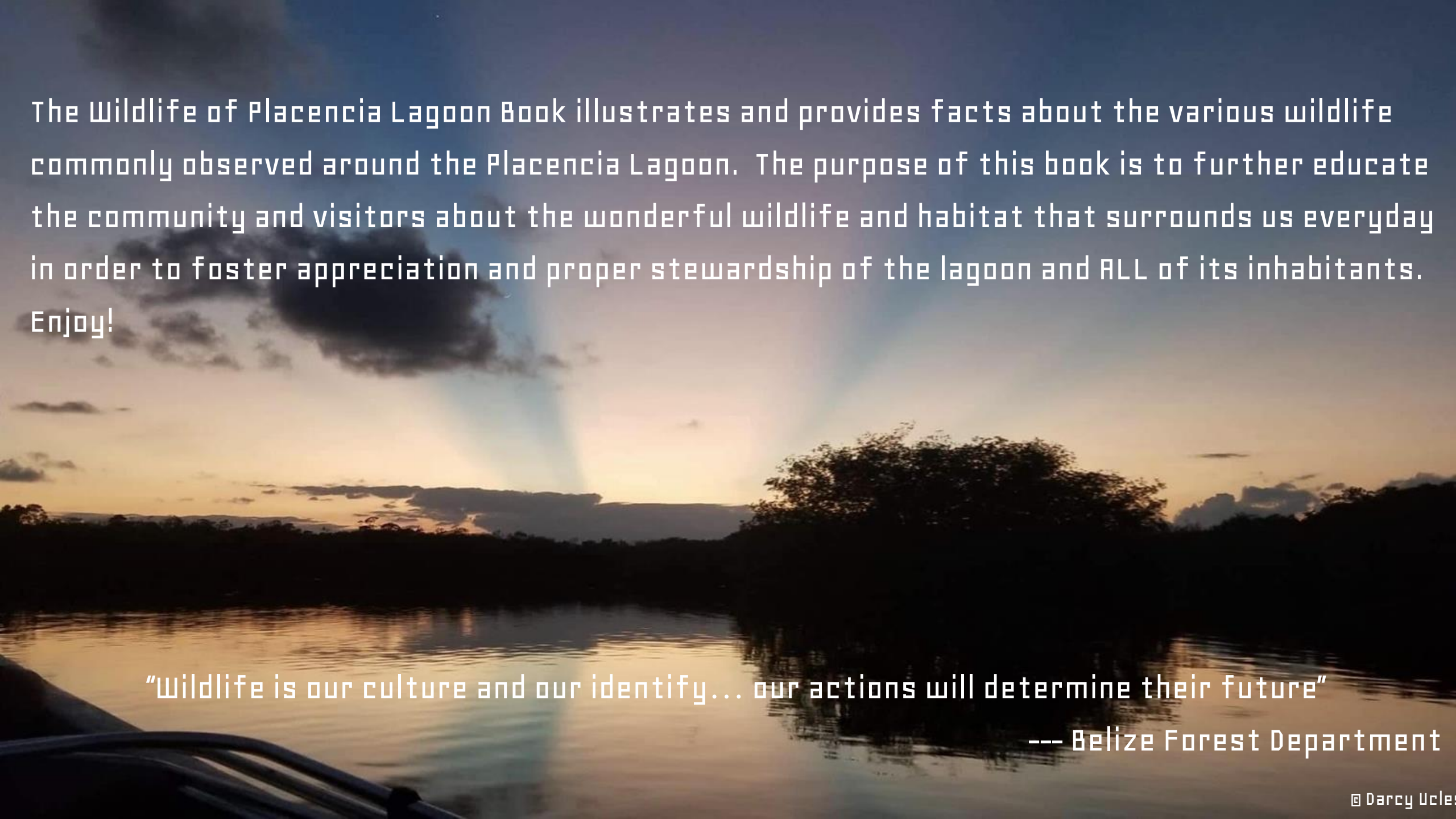




*WILDLIFE OF PLACENCIA LAGOON*



The Wildlife of Placencia Lagoon Book illustrates and provides facts about the various wildlife commonly observed around the Placencia Lagoon. The purpose of this book is to further educate the community and visitors about the wonderful wildlife and habitat that surrounds us everyday in order to foster appreciation and proper stewardship of the lagoon and ALL of its inhabitants. Enjoy!

"Wildlife is our culture and our identify... our actions will determine their future"

--- Belize Forest Department

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## Brown Pelican *Pelecanus occidentalis*

Brown Pelicans are piscivores [fish eaters]. They hunt by spotting schools of fish while flying above and then dive bill first to catch their prey in their large throat pouch. The salt water is then strained out of their pouch and they can swallow just the fish. They have learned to hang out around fish cleaning locations, picking up scraps for an easy meal. They have vast wing spans that can reach 7 feet. The Brown Pelican is a residential bird species, found all along the coast and nesting in colonies in remote mangroves for safety.





**Cownose Ray**  
*[Rhinoptera bonasus]*

Cownose Ray is named for the shape of its head. From above, the two lobes at the front of its head resemble a cow's nose. They are found in shallow, brackish water, and tend to swim at the surface. They rarely rest at the bottom of the sea floor, preferring to be nearly constantly swimming and are often found in large groups. They forage for shellfish by sucking the animals into their mouth, expelling water through their gills, and crushing the shells with their mouth.





## Fer-De-Lance *[Bothrops asper]*

This pit viper species goes by many names in Belize, including Yellow-Jaw Tommygoff. They are the most venomous snake in the Americas and can be identified by the yellow underside of their flattened diamond-shaped head. They are nocturnal hunters and spend the day resting, utilizing the camouflage to blend in with leaf litter. If encountered, it is best to back away and give them a lot of space as they can get very defensive and aggressive if provoked.

## Central American Boa *Boa imperator*

Locally known as the “wowla”. They are a commonly seen snake and the largest found in Belize, reaching up to 12 feet. They are not dangerous to humans and will not bite unless provoked. Boas are non-venomous snakes and kill their prey by squeezing it to death with their powerful muscles. Boas feed on birds, small mammals, and are excellent for controlling mice and rat populations. They are found throughout Belize and even on offshore cays. Color varies greatly by habitat but they can be identified by their irregular saddle spots down the entire body.







Great Egret  
*[Ardea alba]*

The Great Egret inhabits various bodies of water [wetlands, streams, lagoons, and ponds]. They forage in marshlands, primarily on small fish and occasional frogs and insects. Mangrove islands provide a safe habitat for their nesting colonies. They can be identified by their yellow bill and black legs. They are one of the most wide ranging species of birds in the world.



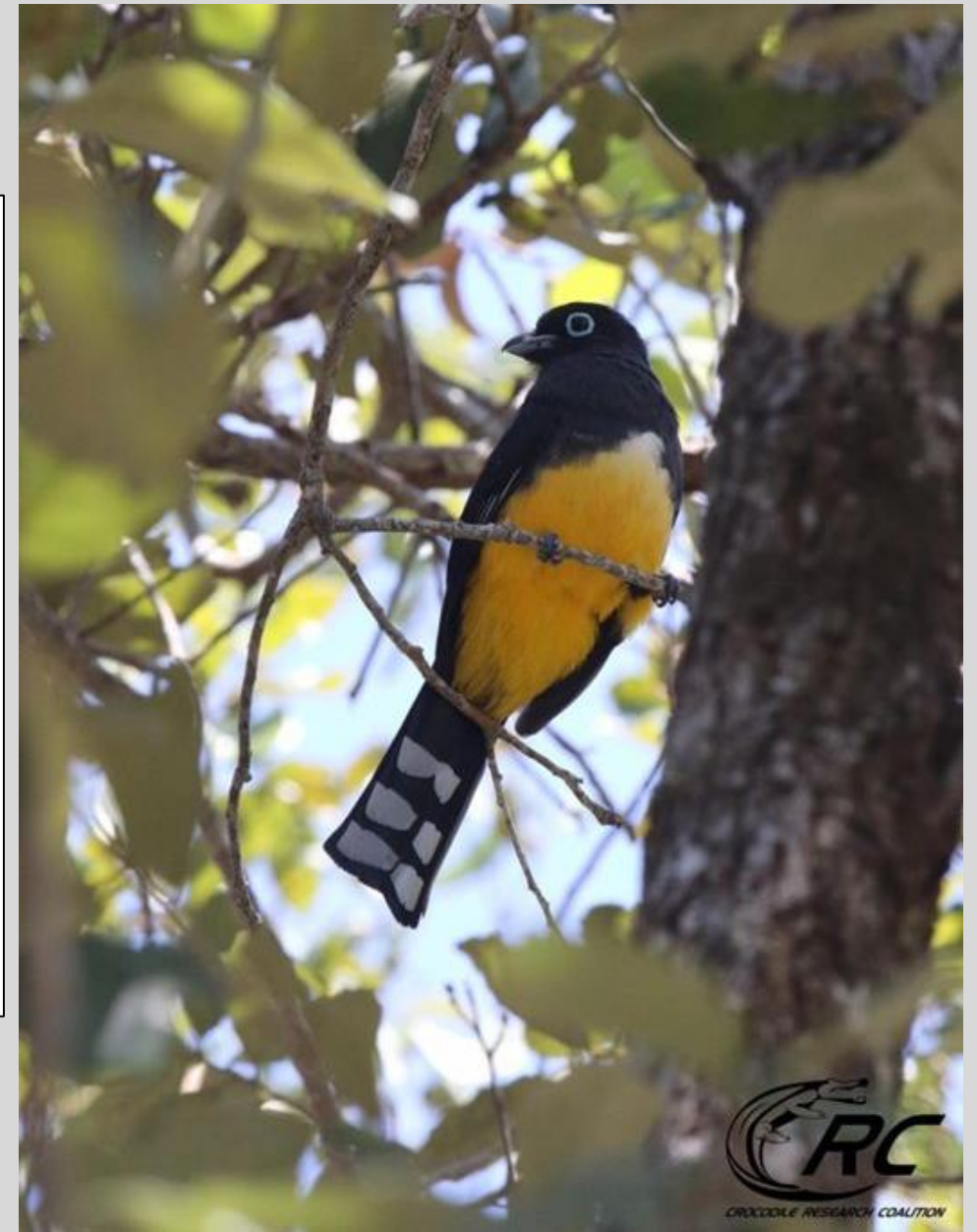
## Green Iguana *Iguana iguana*

The largest lizard in Belize: an adult male can reach 6 feet long, most of it being the tail. They are herbivores, feeding on fruit, flowers, and leaves. Males turn bright orange during the mating season. Head bobbing is a aggressive behavior, most commonly seen between two males during the mating season. They are often seen in tall trees along Belize's rivers. They are excellent swimmers and if threatened, they will leap from a branch and escape into the water below. They have strong jaws, sharp teeth and extremely powerful tails for defense. The Green Iguana is a favorite food species, often called "Bamboo Chicken" in Belize. However, it is illegal to hunt in their breeding and nesting season, February 1st to June 30th.



## Black-Headed Trogon *Trogon melanocephalus*

A distinctive trogon species with a bright yellow underbelly, white and black stripes on the tail, and light blue eye ring. Males will have brighter bellies and a green-blue sheen on their back. They inhabit open/patchy forest and scrub, mangroves and moist lowlands. The Black-Headed Trogon's main diet is fruit and insects. They have unique nesting behavior, rather than building their own, they dig holes into arboreal termite nests and raise their young inside.







## White Nosed Coati or Coatimundi [*Nasua narica*]

Coatimundi are found throughout Belize, travelling on the ground as well on trees. They are size size of a large housecat, have distinctive long snouts and long ringed tails, similar to a racoon. They are omnivores; feeding on fruit as well as digging in rotten logs and dirt for insects and small lizards. The have unique ankle joints that can rotate backwards, allowing them to climb down trees facing forward. Coatimundi travel in large groups of 20+ but males are solitary, traveling alone to avoid aggression. They have sharp canine teeth and long claws for digging but both can be used for self-defense. Their tails are held vertical when travelling, which may help the group stay together in tall grass or thick vegetation.



## Yellow-Headed Parrot

*[Amazona oratrix belizensis]*

A stocky, fruit-loving, short-tailed green parrot identified by its bright yellow head. They nest in the less developed Pine Savannah areas of the lagoon. They leave their nest in the early morning to forage all day on a variety of fruit species and return early evening. They are pair bonded for life and are seen flying in these pairs at dawn and dusk. Their loud cackling call has become a natural alarm clock for many living in the northern part of the Placencia Peninsula. Yellow-Headed Parrots are extremely endangered due to the pet trade. Keeping parrots as a pet without a special permit is illegal in Belize. Despite this, chicks are still stolen from nests to support the demand for pets.





## Agouti

*Dasyprocta punctata*

The agouti is a medium-sized, tailless rodent and is strictly herbivorous, feeding mostly on fallen fruits and nuts. They are built for speed and take off running when they sense a threat. While fleeing, they will raise hairs on their rump to appear larger. They live solitary or in mating pairs with defined territories. An average of two babies are born at a time and the mother will hide them in small nests, returning to feed them until they are old enough to travel with her. Agoutis are very active, feeding in the early morning and late afternoon. They have a keen sense of smell and communicate through scent marking. They are important seed dispersers because of their forgotten fruit and nut caches.

## Grey Fox

*[Urocyon cinereoargenteus]*

The grey fox has a distinctive black line extending from its eyes, giving it the nickname "Zorro". They are shy, solitary animals preferring to hunt alone at dawn, dusk, and throughout the night for small animals and insects. During the day, they hide and rest in dens made out of fallen logs, hollowed stumps, or other burrows. They have a bushy tail that is one third of their entire body length. They are unique in the Canidae [dog] family because of their ability to climb trees with strong, hooked claws.



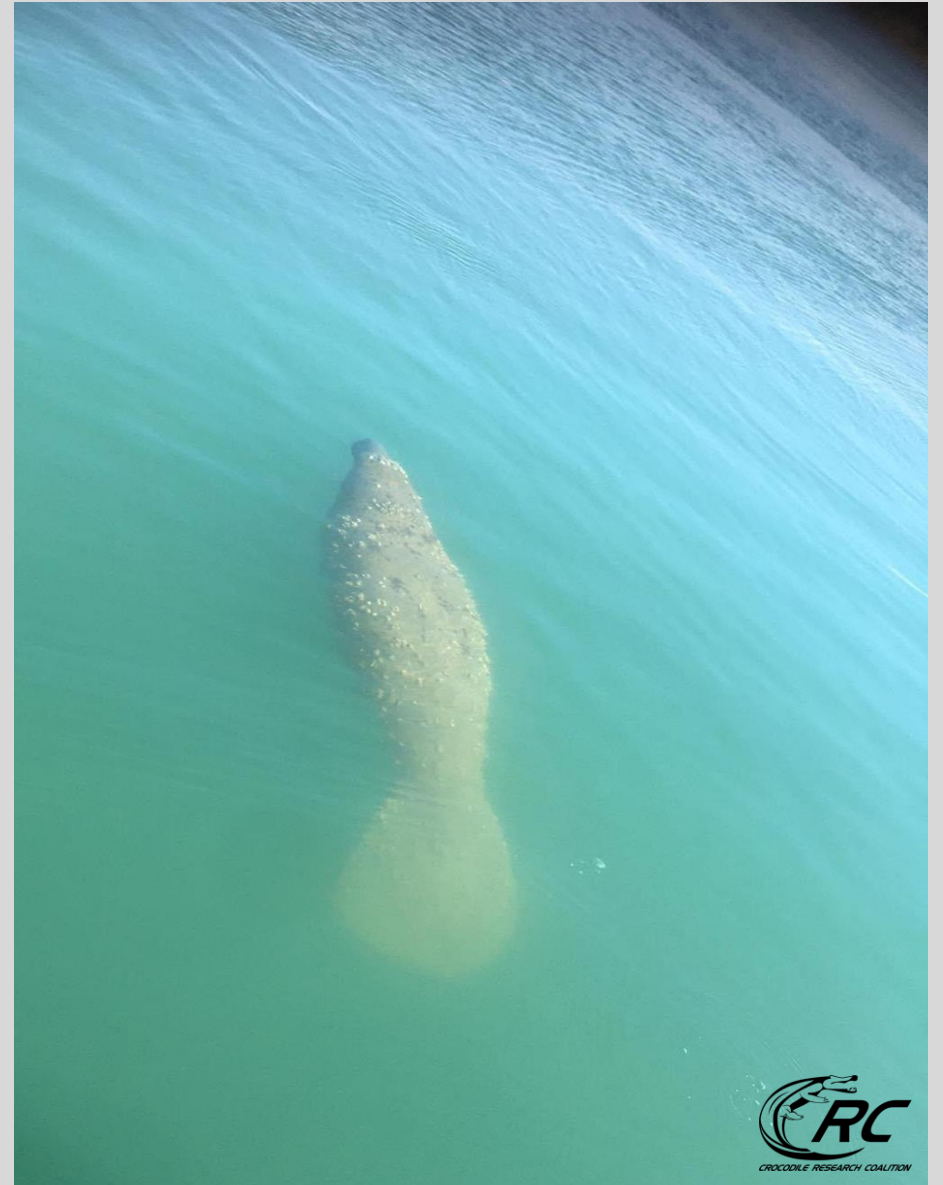
Maye G Guifarro



## Antillean Manatee

*[Trichechus manatus manatus]*

Manatees are slow-moving swimmers, they are known as the “sea cows” due to their size, speed and diet. They are often seen in the Placencia Lagoon, feeding on seagrass, mangroves, and other plant species. They prefer shallow waters for warmth and the safety of mangroves, especially when with young. Outside of the breeding season, they are generally solitary. However, they are not territorial and will occasionally gather in feeding locations. They are found along the Belizean coast, in lagoons, and up rivers but need salt water to survive. They swim below the surface, only coming up to breathe. Due to their slow speed, they are victims of boat collisions. Please go slow in manatee zones of shallow, brackish waters, especially near river mouths!



## Bottlenose Dolphin [*Tursiops truncatus*]

Dolphins are extremely intelligent and have a complicated communication system. They are seen in pairs or small group swimming in the lagoon or out at sea. Groups are separated by sex; the young staying with their mothers and males travelling together in a separate group. They do not have strict hierarchy but establish dominance within the group through biting, hitting, and chasing. They feed on a variety of fish species like snapper and barracuda as well as squid and crustaceans. Depending on the prey, they may collaborate in their hunting techniques. Just like manatees and all wildlife, if you are lucky enough to see dolphins in the wild remember to give them space to be wild and do not stress them out by trying to approach or touch them!



Remember to respect the wildlife of the Placencia Lagoon and their habitat. We want to see more of this on our sandy beaches instead of litter and plastic!



## Mexican Red-rump Tarantula (*Brachypelma vagans*)

The Mexican Red-rump Tarantula is a terrestrial species that burrows in the ground for both protection from predators and to ambush prey: mostly insects, small lizards, and mice. Red-rump tarantulas are feisty and semi-aggressive when threatened but present little threat to humans. If left alone or gently removed from an area, they will feel no need to bite.





## The Meso-American Slider *[Trachemys venusta]*

The Meso-American slider has an oval shell with sharp edges that is marked with numerous dark-centered, orange-rings. These turtles are largely aquatic, spending most of their daylight hours basking on logs and rocks. Their diet includes fish, frogs, shrimp, snails, tadpoles and aquatic vegetation.





## Keel-Billed Toucan *[Ramphastos sulfuratus]*

The Keel-billed Toucan is locally known as the 'bill bird'; and is the national bird of Belize. The Toucan has characteristic huge yellow, orange, red, green and black bill. They feed on a variety of tropical forest fruits, insects, spiders. Some think they use their bill for fighting but it serves little as a defense. They are often seen on the western and northern end of the peninsula and with recent observation, they were also spotted in Maya Beach. Toucans are not migratory birds but residential.





© Ellie Coleman

## Striped Basilisk *(Basiliscus vittatus)*

The Striped Basilisk is known as the brown basilisk in Belize. This lizard is sometimes referred to as the 'Jesus Christ lizard', as it can run across water with help from its large, webbed hind feet. The brown basilisk can be found in Central America from Mexico to Northern Guatemala and it can be recognized by the crest on the head.

## Plain Chachalaca *[Ortalis vetula]*

The Plain chachalaca can be described as a long-tailed, tropical chicken. It can be found in tropical environments from southernmost Texas, US to Northernmost Costa Rica. It feeds in the trees and on the ground on fruits, seeds, leaves and flowers. It is mostly diurnal (active during the day), active on cooler mornings and evenings. Interestingly, most of the birds in the family Galliformes, such as turkeys, spend much of their time on the ground, but the plain chachalaca prefers to forage and nest in trees.



© Ellie Coleman



## White Ibis *[Eudocimus albus]*

The White Ibis is a medium-sized bird with an overall white plumage. These birds prefer feeding in shallow waters, consuming small aquatic prey, such as insects and small fish. This exotic bird is found in a variety of habitats but mostly seen in wetlands and mangroves in the Placencia Lagoon.







© Ellie Coleman

## Baird's Tapir *[*Tapirus bairdii*]*

The Tapir is the national animal of Belize and is known locally as the mountain cow. They are a protected species in Belize and can be found throughout Central America. The Tapir is the largest land mammal in Central America, weighing a maximum of 550 lbs.

## Loggerhead Sea Turtle *Caretta caretta*

The Loggerhead sea turtle can be found in the seas of Belize and sometimes nest on the beaches of the Placencia Lagoon. This sea turtle is considered as vulnerable by the IUCN, being threatened by 'ghost' fishing gear, habitat loss due to development, gillnets and climate change. Reducing the use of single-use plastic, recycling and reducing disturbance to nest sites here on the Peninsula can have a beneficial effect on the populations of these beautiful sea creatures.





# Black Vulture

*[Coragyps atratus]*

The Black Vulture can be found from the north eastern United States through to Peru, Central Chile and Uruguay. It can be identified by its bald black head and white wing tips. The Black Vulture has an important role with their scavenging lifestyle by cleaning up after death, keeping ecosystems healthy and minimizing the spread of disease.





## Mexican Parrot Snake *(Leptophis mexicanus)*

These snakes can be found from Mexico, South to Costa Rica and are recognisable due to their bright green/bronze iridescent looking scales. They are non-venomous and found in a variety of habitats in Belize, including mangrove, savannah and dense canopied jungle.



© Alec Jarboe



## Mexican Hairy Dwarf Porcupine *[Coendou mexicanus]*

The Mexican hairy dwarf porcupine is also known as the Mexican tree porcupine. This porcupine can be found throughout central America, from Panama to Mexico. The Mexican tree porcupine is completely covered in yellow spines, which are obscured by black hair – except for on its head, which gives them a funky blonde hairdo!

## Semi-Palmated Plover

*[Charadrius semipalmatus]*

The semi-palmated plover (*Charadrius semipalmatus*), named after its partially webbed feet – semi meaning half, and palma meaning hand in Latin. The semipalmated plover is a migratory bird and can be seen on the beaches and shores of the Placencia Lagoon during winter, preferring open habitat with little or no plant growth. They forage on beaches for worms and invertebrates and can be recognised by its grey-brown and black wings, white belly and breast with one black neckband. They are similar to the killdeer, but is smaller and only has one black band.





## Spotted Eagle Ray *Aetobatus narinari*



The Spotted Eagle Rays are ovoviviparous, meaning that females of the species retain their eggs and release their young as miniature versions of themselves, which is common with both sharks and rays. They are conspicuous, covered in white spots or rings, making them easy to spot whilst snorkelling and diving. They feed on small fish and crustaceans, and are listed as near threatened by the IUCN due to being caught as bycatch and being collected for the aquarium trade.

## Laughing Gull (*Leucophaeus atricilla*)

The laughing gull can be identified by its laugh-like call and can be found from the Atlantic coast of the USA, throughout the Caribbean to northern South America. It is an omnivore and scavenger and although it is listed by the IUCN as least concern, the population is recovering from depletion due to the feather trade in the 19th century. They are also threatened by climate change and wetland degradation. These gulls can be seen at the Placencia Lagoon and surrounding areas, stealing food from brown pelicans.





## Central American Red Brocket Deer *(Mazama temama)*

The Central American Red Brocket Deer are and elusive species found in primary and secondary forest from sea level to 2500m, across southern Mexico to Western Guatemala and Belize. They are solitary animals that prefer dense jungle habitats. Currently the IUCN lists them as 'Data Deficient' so we do not know if they are threatened, but it is believed that populations of these deer are affected by deforestation.



Blue Grey Tanager  
*[Thraupis episcopus]*



This species of bird prefers habitat with open areas, scattered trees, towns, villages, parks or forest edges and are often seen in the Placencia Lagoon. The wings and tail of Blue-Gray Tanagers are blue (think of coral reef blue) that become darker at the back. They feed mainly on fruits and occasionally on insects, flowers and nectar. They are not solitary, preferring to travel in pairs or groups.



## Bull shark *[Carcharhinus leucas]*

The Bull shark is large and stout, reaching a length of about 8 feet long. Humans on occasion do encounter them while snorkeling, scuba diving, and even quite possibly while swimming at the beach. They often feed in shallow, murky waters, mostly on other fish, smaller sharks, small mammals, and stingrays. They have been fished commercially in the past but today the biggest threat is accidental capture when fisheries targeting other species accidentally trap them in their nets. This, and peoples irrational fear of sharks, is why they could possibly be in danger of extinction.

## The Common Raccoon [Procyon lotor]

You might have seen these little critters traveling through your yard or making trouble going through the trash in Placencia. The raccoon is a relatively common mammalian species throughout North and Central America. They are nocturnal omnivores, meaning they travel and feed primarily at night, but we frequently see them during the day here.



© Clint Lockwood



## Tropical Mockingbird [*Mimus gilvus*]

The Tropical Mockingbird [*Mimus gilvus*] is a frequent CRC neighbor along the Placencia Lagoon and abundant throughout its distribution between southern Mexico and eastern Brazil. Many mocking birds from the family Mimidae traditionally have the ability to mimic a wide array of sounds from their environments, but it is rarely witnessed in this species.



## Osprey [Pandion haliaetus]



The Osprey [Pandion haliaetus] is one of the most revered birds in Belize. This large bird of prey lives by large bodies of water where it can swoop down to catch fish, like in the picture above. Carefully watch the skies and in trees along the water's edge to catch a glimpse of these beautiful birds near the Placencia Lagoon. Polarized eyes. They can see 30 feet underwater AND 130 feet in the air. Their outer digit rotates freely to move fish facing forward.

## The Great Kiskadee [*Pitangus sulphuratus*]

This species is one of the most common bird species found along the Placencia peninsula. Its name is based on the sound it makes, "kiss-ka-dee." These birds are omnivorous, meaning they eat various small plants and animals, but they are a part of the Flycatcher family, so notably, they eat a lot of bugs.



© Clint Lockwood





© Clint Lockwood

## Green Vine snake [*Oxybelis fulgidus*]

This beautiful arboreal snake species feeds primarily on small lizards, birds, or mammals that can be found in the trees. Although this species is considered mildly toxic, they are not threatening to humans, and enjoy a quiet life up in the foliage above us.



## Black Spiny-tailed Iguana [*Ctenosaura similis*]

The The Black Spiny-tailed Iguana is one of the largest lizard species found in Belize, second only to the Green Iguana. They are omnivores that feed primarily on fruit and vegetation as adults and insects as a juvenile.

## Southern Stingray

*Hypanus americanus*

These beautiful rays are common along Belize's coastal waters. They live along shallow ocean bottoms, eating an assortment of shellfish and small fish they can stir up from the sand. The IUCN categorizes this species as near threatened due in large part to being frequently caught as a bycatch of the fishing industry.





## Scorpion Mud Turtle [*Kinksternon scorpioides*]

This species of turtle is found in Mexico, Central and South America. It is highly aquatic, living in any body of water. This turtle was found in the appropriately named turtle pond on one of our terrestrial surveys. They rarely exceed 20 cm in length and eat a wide variety of aquatic invertebrates and vertebrates.



Jared Noodle



## Stauffer's Tree Frog [*Scinax staufferi*]

This tree frog belongs to the family Hylidae and can be found throughout Central America. It can be found in subtropical and tropical dry forests, like that found on the Maya Mountains of Belize and the Savannah too. They're brown all over and have darker brown spots, elongate bodies, and a pointy nose.



## Ghost Anole [*Anolis lemurinus*]

This individual was found on the CRC land and can be found throughout a variety of habitats in Central America. Like most anoles, they are tree-dwelling lizards closely related to the green iguana. Like geckos, the ghost anole has enlarged finger and toe pads with tiny hooks that allow them to be excellent climbers. Males of the species have large throat fans, known as dewlaps, that serve to protect territory and attract females.





@Marisa Tellez

## Neotropical rattlesnake [*Crotalus durissus terrificus*]

The Neotropical rattlesnake [*Crotalus durissus terrificus*] is the only rattlesnake endemic to Belize! A group of CRC team members were fortunate enough to come across this beautiful creature a few days ago. Notice that the snake's eyes are an opaque bluish coloration, signifying that it will soon shed its skin.

## Slender Brown Scorpion [*Centruroides gracilis*]

The Slender Brown Scorpion [*Centruroides gracilis*] is one of four known scorpion species here in Belize. This glowing beauty is endemic to much of Central America and is common throughout Belize. Scorpions are nocturnal animals that hunt at night. Most varieties of scorpions glow like this under ultraviolet light.



