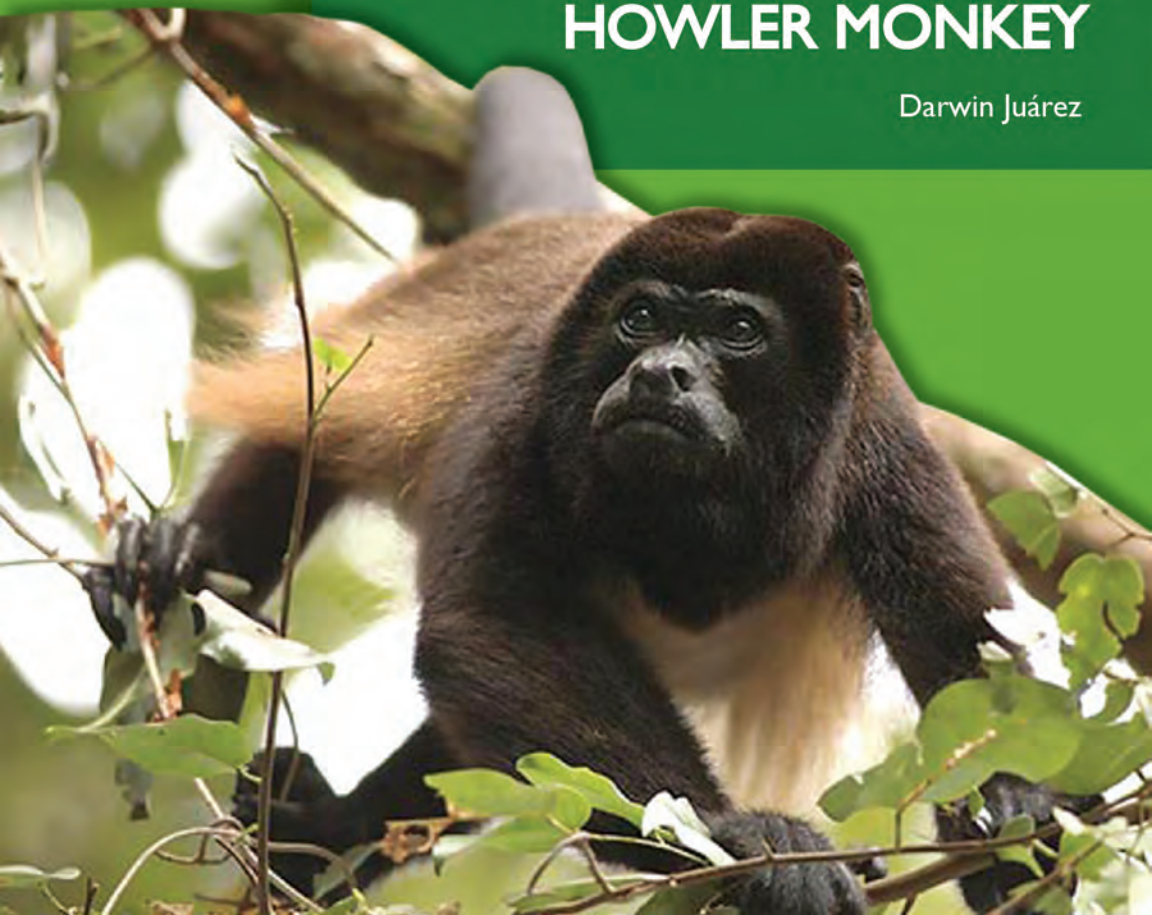


# THE INTIMATE LIFE OF THE HOWLER MONKEY

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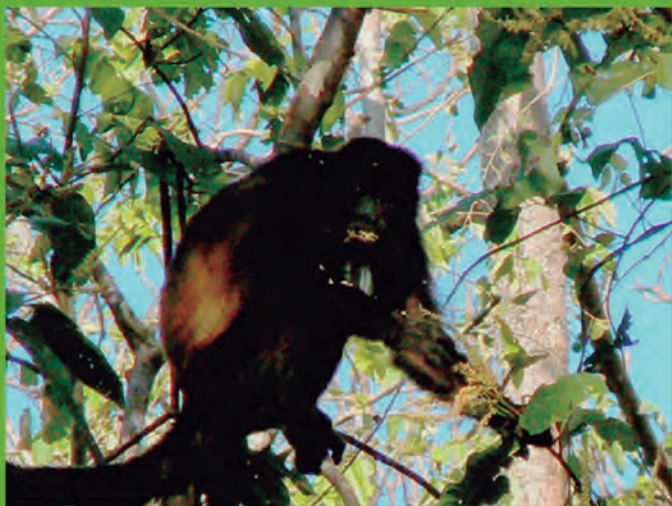
## IN THE INTIMATE LIFE OF THE HOWLER MONKEY

Without any doubt, the small space provided by Villas Playa Madera has become, in a short span of time, the biggest and securest refuge for the Congo Aullador - Howler Monkey (*Alouatta palliata*). Such is the case that a visitor can take the liberty to venture, with all confidence, in the life of one of the three species of primates living in Nicaragua in its natural habitat. This fact has been proven by the studies conducted in site since 2004 by the National Autonomous University of Nicaragua (UNAN – Managua).

For the Howler Monkeys, any given morning starts with a “group stretching”. While the laziest continue sleeping, the youngsters unleash themselves with games and stunts. Gradually, as the adults, they will participate in the most important activity of the day: obtain their breakfast and forage at the top of the trees. The newly born don't have any problems; because the warm milk their mothers provide is the best and most nutritious feeding source.

## A HEALTHY BALANCED DIET

Howler Monkeys do not concern themselves as we human do, regarding cholesterol and triglycerides. Their balanced diet of leaves, small buds, fruits and flowers, eventually completed with some distracted insect –nutritive protein with wings – assures them good health and enough energy for all their activities during the day. Food is best in winter than in summer.



Eating flowers and leaves of Guácimo de ternera (*Guazuma ulmifolia*) during the transition between the rainy and the dry season.

Eating flowers in the tallest and most thorny branches of the Pochote tree (*Pachira quinata*) during the dry season.



A buffet of a variety of 24 flower species constitutes the menu throughout the year. In Villas Playa Madera the number of guests to feed is not small, considering the 35 hectares on this small but safe refuge for the fauna of the Pacific dry tropic of Nicaragua. In our property and surroundings, biologists from UNAN have counted 77 specimens during the dry season and 57 during the rainy season in the last years.

Guarumo leaves (*Cecropia peltata*), Guásimo (*Guazuma ulmifolia*, flowers and Pochote buds (*Pachira quinata*), or Poro poro (*Cochlospermum vitifolium*) and Jobo fruits, or Papayo Montero (*Carica mexicana*), alternate in the diet of these magnificent cebidae throughout the year.

## FAMILY HIERARCHY AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Although at first sight these individuals seem with no worries, just like with humans, the care of the youngsters and the weak ones is always provided by the adults of this black and brown hairy troop. If their journey is made difficult, the body of the older primates serves as a bridge in order for them to transit from one tree to another. Meanwhile, babies grasp unto the hairy womb of their mothers and with their tail and back extremities they hold on to the mother's tail. The prehensile tail of these American monkeys constitutes a great advantage for them to swing safely in high altitudes.

The youngsters that become more independent soon learn that ripe leaves are not the best food, due to their high concentration of rotenone, alkaloids, and other toxic substances that plants produce to defend themselves against depredators.

The dominant male or alpha male stands out in the group due to its size and loudness of their voice, easily heard for over a kilometer in the distance throughout the dense forest. He takes the lead and is followed – first, by the female alpha and only when the last member of the family or the troop has passed, he will continue to lead the way.



Female assisting a youngster to slide along the difficult areas of the canopy.  
Notice the prehensil tail of *Alouatta palliata*.

## THE RESTING TIME, OPPORTUNITY FOR SEX

Break time on the highest branches of the forest during the transition between the rainy and dry season.



Around midday, when the sun finds itself over the zenith and the temperature rises to its maximum, Howler Monkeys tend to take a well deserved nap, generally choosing the closest leafy tree. In the rainy season, this same tree will protect them from the hardships of the weather and it will provide a shelter for them to spend the night.

Those moments of rest give room for a young female in heat (after three years old) to make herself noticed by her possible suitors. The alpha male, with his outstanding scrotum is the first to acknowledge and, of course, the first to consummate an intimate relationship for he is the first guest. This will not take him more than a minute.

Moments after, the female in heat searches for another tree, and since Howler Monkeys no nothing of jealousy, the females are always willing to share their favors with other males, in the order in which the hierarchy allows it—in plain sight and approval- of the troop. It is believed this is a healthy practice to avoid disputes and rivalries that characterize other species of primates.

Six or seven months after, a new born baby monkey will come alive to repeat the cycle of life, in the case of the Howler Monkey, up to 20 years of age. The males reach their reproductive stage at the age of four, and the females, at the age of three.



Alpha male showing part of the key attributes that make him dominant and attractive to females in heat. As a primate it has no limits with his reproductive period, which lasts throughout the year.

## BEWARE OF CURIOUS HUMANS

While Howler Monkeys have no rivalry or struggles amongst themselves, the majority dislikes the approach of humans and prefers to keep at a distance their intimacy. So, if you are a curious observer who wishes to know more of these close relatives in the zoological scale, you must take precautions.

If you come too close, surely the alpha male will let you know that you have transgressed the limit with an audible warning. The next time, it will not be a simple audible warning; the intruder could be the object of a singular ferocious attack, during which the monkeys aim at the target. If they hit the target, the visitor will not take with him gracious memories as he would have wanted, however; he will have more stories to tell. The intense bombardment of smelly urine and feces is the last resource the Howler Monkey will use in order to put distance between them and the intruders: safeguarding their intimacy of those screaming and furry cousins making themselves the lords and owners in the kingdom of the canopy in Playa de Madera Villas.





The Howler Monkey trail is a good place to start to know them, where you can also enjoy the wild flora and fauna that has established itself in a definitive way in this small area, in a process of ecological restoration in the south west of Nicaragua.



Pájaro Cuco Ardilla (*Piaya cayana*), forages insects and berries. It nests in the middle and tallest areas of the dry forest of Playa Madera Villas, where it lays two chalky white eggs. Their young are taken care by both parents.



Lunch time. Who is intimidating whom? Male Howler Monkey foraging flowers of Roble (*Tabebuia roseus*).



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