



Costa Rica 2020 Trip Report

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Day 1. Hotel Bougainvillea At four in the afternoon we gathered in the lobby for a quick greeting and then walked in the amazing gardens of the hotel. Fortunately, the weather was fantastic and birds were very active, right away we began spotting Social Flycatcher, Great Kiskadee, Blue-gray Tanager, Inca Dove, White-winged Dove, Great-tailed Grackle, Rufous-collared Sparrow, Squirrel Cuckoo, Lesson's Motmot and even a White-eared Ground-Sparrow hopped out into the open for everyone to see! Although these are not rare birds it was a great introduction to some of Costa Rica's widespread species. As the sun set, we went back to our rooms to prepare for what would become our daily evening routine: bird list and dinner.



Ernesto at Hotel Bougainvillea

Day 2. Hotel Bougainvillea, La Paz Waterfall Gardens, Cerro Lodge At 6 a.m. we gathered for our pre-breakfast walk through a residential area to reach some coffee farms which were rapidly disappearing due to urban expansion. Down this road we saw Yellow-headed Caracara, White-fronted Parrots, Baltimore Oriole, Melodious Blackbird, Rufous-capped Warbler, Turkey and Black Vultures and a pair of Lineated Woodpeckers whose crests were flaring in the morning light. We were particularly trying for the endemic Cabanis's Ground-Sparrow however we were only able to hear it calling from the dense coffee plantation. We returned for breakfast and were picked-up by Jorge León and we drove up to the low pass between Barva and Poás Volcanoes to La Paz Waterfall Gardens where we spent the rest of the morning watching the busy feeding station. It was hummingbird overload right away: Violet Sabrewing, **Green-crowned Brilliant**, Green Hermit, Purple-throated Mountain-Gem, Rufous-tailed Hummingbird, Black-bellied Hummingbird, **Copper-headed Emerald** and Green Thorntail.



Green-crowned Brilliant © Ernesto Carman



Coppery-headed Emerald © Ernesto Carman

On the non-hummingbird front we saw Spangle-cheeked Tanager, Silver-throated Tanager, Prong-billed Barbet, Black Guan, Common Chlorospingus and one of our targets for this site, Sooty-faced Finch, we saw in the restaurant as we ate lunch. After lunch we drove back to the Pacific side and began working our way down into the dry forest and the scenery was colorfully ornamented with shades of white, purple, pink and yellow because of the peak blooming of the Pink and Yellow

Tabebuia trees. As we reached Cerro Lodge we stopped to look at a **White-necked Puffbird** perched high-up in a Guanacaste tree and a pair of Ferruginous Pygmy-Owls as well, a good sign of the birds to come. We reached our lodge, settled into our rooms and then gathered for some deck birding in front of the main lodge and the welcoming committee was quick to greet us: Scarlet Macaws flying this way and that! We also saw Rufous-naped Wrens, Rose-throated Becard, Clay-colored Thrush and as the sun was setting the sky filled with Lesser Nighthawks that were coming out of the mangrove forest to feed.



White-necked Puffbird © Ernesto Carman

Day 3. Cerro Lodge, Carara National Park Early in the morning, we birded from the main deck and had the usual suspects plus Cinnamon and Blue-vented Hummingbird, Yellow-naped and Red-colored Parrots, **Orange-fronted** and Orange-chinned **Parakeets**, Gartered Trogon and Hoffman's Woodpecker.



Orange-fronted Parakeet © Ernesto Carman

After sharing breakfast with the Rufous-naped Wrens we drove a short distance to Carara National Park and spent the morning there. Upon arrival we were greeted by a very obliging Purple-crowned Fairy perching just over the trail and feeding from the orange heliconia flowers. Throughout the morning we had a great selection of neotropical families with Dusky and Chestnut-backed Antbird, Rufous-breasted and Black-bellied Wren, Cocoa Woodcreeper, White-whiskered Puffbird, White-winged Becard, Stripe-throated Hermit and Charming Hummingbird, Ruddy-tailed Flycatcher, Black-headed and Baird's Trogon and a King Vulture soaring overhead. The whole time there were **Scarlet Macaws** flying back and forth over the forest letting us know they were there with their raucous calls (this is by no means a complaint!).



We returned to the lodge for lunch and some free time before heading out to bird the mangroves in Caldera. As soon as we got off the bus we found a flowering Chameleon Vine (*Combretum fruticosum*) which is a magnet for many species because of its copious nectar production and short flowers which allow all sorts of birds to feed from it. First off, we saw Ruby-throated, Scaly-breasted, Blue-vented and Cinnamon Hummingbird, Prothonotary, Yellow and Tennessee Warblers and Baltimore Oriole. On the other side of the road we hit a nice hot spot and found several mangrove specialties including Northern Scrub Flycatcher and Mangrove Yellow Warbler as well as White-colored Gnatcatcher and Great-crested Flycatcher. A little further down the Vine and we hoped this one would be hosting one of Costa Rica's scarcest and most endangered endemic species, the Mangrove Hummingbird. Sure enough as soon as we got off the bus we spotted a male feeding only a few meters in front of us!!! This species has an incredibly restricted range occurring only in the Pacific mangroves of Costa Rica which itself is an endangered habitat. To finish off we also had a male Painted Bunting, Common Black Hawk, Peregrine Falcon and Gray Hawk. The sun was getting low so we began working our way back to Cerro Lodge, but made one brief detour to look for **Double-striped Thicknees** and sure enough there was a pair of them in a pasture, one standing and the other almost certainly incubating eggs. We also saw White-throated Magpie-Jays, Yellow-naped Parrots and two pairs of **Turquoise-browed Motmots** on the roadside, allowing for great observation and photography! Back at the lodge we went through our usual routine and then off to bed.



Double-striped Thicknees © Ernesto Carman



Turquoise-browed Motmot © Ernesto Carman

Day 4. Cerro Lodge, Bijagual Road, Playa Azul and Tárcoles River boat tour. Once again the deck awaited us for birding with coffee before breakfast, then we departed to bird some side roads nearby. At our first stop we were treated to a pair of **Scarlet Macaws** NESTING in a dead palm trunk at very close range which provoked some oohing and aaahing from everyone of us.



Scarlet Macaws nesting © Ernesto Carman

We reached another patch of mangrove near the town of Playa Azul and literally cleaned-up on the rest of our mangrove specialties, getting fantastic views of Panama Flycatcher and Mangrove Vireo

as well as Streak-backed Oriole and pair of Olivaceous Piculets which even allowed for scope views. After this productive spot we went to check on a couple of stakeout owls on day roosts and sure enough we found Black-and-white Owl and Pacific Screech-Owl. Feeling quite good about the morning we returned to the lodge for lunch and a short rest before departing for our boat tour on the Tárcoles River. Having seen all the strictly mangrove targets over the last two days took all the stress off the guides and we could spend more time enjoying all the other species to be seen, which were many!!! Apart from the close-up views of American Crocodiles we saw many egrets and herons, including the rare Reddish Egret, Belted, Ringed, Green and **American Pygmy-Kingfisher**, Roseate Spoonbills, White Ibis, Brown Pelican, Magnificent Frigatebirds bathing in the river, Osprey, Whimbrel, Northern Jacana, Muscovy Ducks and many Scarlet Macaws to mention a few!!! Boat rides always make for pleasant birding and today was not the exception.



American Pygmy Kingfisher © Ernesto Carman

Day 5. Cerro Lodge, Hotel Zima, San Isidro Before breakfast we took a walk along the entrance road past the lodge to look for some more dry forest birds before heading south into the rainforest. The early morning was very active: Black-headed and Gartered Trogon, Lesser Greenlet, Yellow-throated and Yellow-green Vireo, Banded Wren, Masked and Black-crowned Tityra, Brown-crested and Nutting's Flycatcher, Scrub Euphonia, Turquoise-Browed Motmot, Bat Falcon, Barred Antshrike, Orange-fronted Parakeet and you guessed it, Scarlet Macaws! We had breakfast and packed the bus once again to begin driving south-east along the coast and did not stop until Quepos for a pit stop and the somewhat hippie beach town of Dominical for lunch. From here we crossed over the coastal range to end up in the city of San Isidro del General where we stopped in front of a high school facing a small remnant of forest to look for a very colorful and tricky bird to see, the **Turquoise Cotinga**. We stood around scanning treetops, spotting other blue birds like Blue Dacnis and Red-legged Honeycreeper until finally after about half an hour we spotted two males, one adult and one immature, sitting on an exposed branch a couple hundred yards away. We got decent views despite the distance and the heat distortion and drove five minutes to our lodge.



Turquoise Cotinga © Ernesto Carman

After settling into our rooms, we gathered at four p.m. for some birding on the hotel grounds and despite being near such a populated area the birding was amazing! First we had a Peregrine Falcon perched high on a cellphone tower, a pair of Piratic Flycatchers that had recently stolen the nest from a pair of Social Flycatchers who were in the process of building a new nest. Then a pair of Golden-hooded Tanagers perched just over our heads in the sunlight and a Bay-headed Tanager was fighting against its reflection in the mirror of the bus. Behind the hotel we spotted a family of Fiery-billed Aracaris working on a nest, taking turns to modify the entrance hole. We also had a few other species such as Yellow-bellied Elaenia, Smooth-billed Ani, Green-breasted Mango, Red-legged Honeycreeper and Common Tody-Flycatcher before heading back inside. **Day 6. Hotel Zima, Los Cusingos, Bosque del Tolomuco** Before breakfast we made our way to our Turquoise Cotinga to try and get a better view and sure enough we got what we asked for as a male came in at much closer range and showed off very well! We returned for breakfast and got ready for our next bout of birding. This morning we were heading to a preserve called Los Cusingos which was the home to one of the fathers of Costa Rican ornithology, Alexander F. Skutch. Skutch wrote dozens of books on many topics of natural history, but most were about birds and based on patient observation. Following Skutch's teaching we used patient observation and found some very nice birds! Black-throated and Baird's Trogon, Tawny-crowned Greenlet, Golden-naped and Red-crowned Woodpeckers, Blue-crowned Manakin and White-breasted Wood-Wren. Before we left we watched the bird feeder for a while and saw a couple of interesting butterflies visiting the fermenting fruit when a Green Honeycreeper came down and after a few bites of fruit decided she wanted something a bit more substantial and caught one of the butterflies! We left Los Cusingos to have lunch at a small family-run restaurant called Soda Las Vueltas which serves fantastic food and has bird feeders. As we ate we saw Green and Red-legged Honeycreepers, **Golden-hooded**, Blue-gray, Palm and Speckled Tanagers and Yellow-bellied Elaenias. After filling our bellies, we drove up into the hills to a small bed & breakfast called Bosque del Tolomuco which has been maintaining feeders for many years and have an incredible assortment of attendees. On the fruit feeders we saw **Scarlet-rumped**, **Silver-throated** and Speckled Tanagers, Red-headed Barbet, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, and **Flame-colored Tanager**. On the hummingbird front we had Violet Sabrewing, Green-crowned Brilliant, Long-billed Starthroat, Stripe-tailed Hummingbird, White-throated Mountain-Gem, White-

tailed Emerald, Magenta-throated Woodstar and both male and female **White-crested Coquette**. As we birded several Swallow-tailed Kites circled overhead at very close range. After a very pleasant time we returned to the hotel for our evening routine.



Day 7. San Isidro, Cerro de

la Muerte, Paraíso Quetzal, San Gerardo Today we planned on getting high, high up in elevation that is! We drove up the Panamerican highway into the Talamanca highlands and the view was phenomenal on such a clear morning with Costa Rica's highest peak (Chirripó, 3821m) showing clearly to the east. We made our first stop when we hit 3,100m in elevation at the village of Villa Mills. As we gain elevation diversity decreases, but endemism increases; that is there are fewer species in the highlands but many of them you will not find anywhere else. As soon as we got off the bus we began spotting new species left and right, Black-capped Flycatcher, Sooty Thrush, Sooty-capped Chlorospingus, Yellow-bellied Siskin, Wilson's Warbler, Long-tailed Silky-Flycatcher and Yellow-winged Vireo. From here we drove to the top of **Cerro de la Muerte** which is above timberline and is dominated by very short bamboo. The view was phenomenal, and we could see the entire Central Volcanic Range to the north and the Pacific coast to the southwest and after the photo opportunities we were back to business looking for the Volcano Junco. We did not have to walk too far until we found a pair of them with their yellow eyes and pinkish bill and had great views as they scratched around on the ground, digging-up certain enlarged plant roots which are full of water and some nutritious value. We also saw many Volcano Hummingbirds and **Slaty Flowerpiercer** before we drove to our lunch spot at Paraíso Quetzal. Apart from lunch we also had some good birds including Long-tailed and Black-and-yellow Silky Flycatchers, Fiery-throated and Talamanca Hummingbird, Lesser Violetear, Collared Redstart, Band-tailed Pigeons and Blue-and-white Swallows. After lunch and birding we began working our way to the valley of San Gerardo de Dota where we would spend the next two nights. Before reaching our hotel though, we made a stop along the roadside where we knew one of our most wanted targets had a nest: The **Resplendent Quetzal**. The dead trunk where the nest was located was about 75m away from the road and our plan was to wait until the parents decided to make a change in incubation. Meanwhile we saw Mountain Thrush, Mountain Elaenia and Yellow-thighed Brush Finches working in the surrounding trees until all of a sudden a flash of green caught our attention and sure enough the male Quetzal had arrived with food for the newly born chicks and was ready to take his turn on the nest! He posed out in the open for a couple minutes before flying to the cavity to feed the young and finally enter the nest and the only part visible are his two longest tail coverts sticking out of the nest hole. What a show!!! We made our way to the hotel just ten minutes down the road, checked in and

gathered once more for some birding around the grounds.



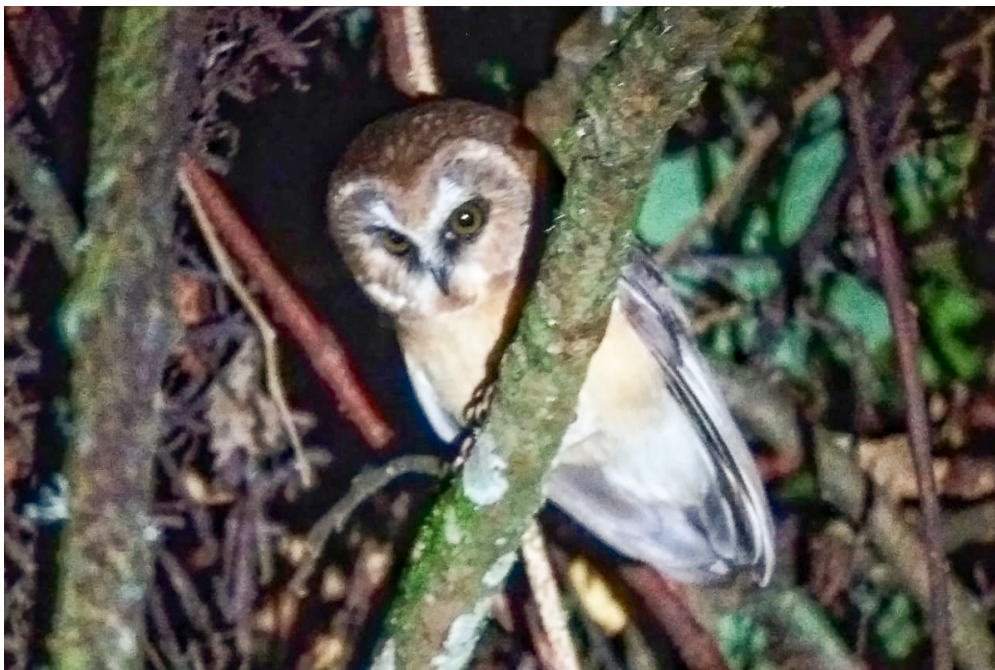
Slaty Flowerpiercer © Ernesto Carman



Resplendent Quetzal © Ernesto Carman

Day 8. San Gerardo de Dota Being at 2200m it was a nice, cool morning when we gathered for our pre-breakfast birding and we had some great views of Yellowish Flycatcher, Ruddy-capped Nightingale-Thrush, Spot-crowned Woodcreeper, Collared Redstart and a covey of the hard-to-see

Spotted Wood-Quail. After breakfast we drove back up the valley a bit to reach the mature oak forest and found a couple good mixed species flocks with many of the highland specialties including Black-cheeked Warbler, Flame-throated Warbler, Ruddy Treerunner, Buffy Tuftedcheek, Golden-browed Chlorophonia, Large-footed Finch and Black-billed Nightingale-Thrush. We made a quick stop at Miriam's, a small restaurant that feeds birds and had great views of Acorn and Hairy Woodpeckers, Flame-colored Tanager and White-throated Mountain-Gem before we went back for our own lunch. In the afternoon we walked down the road along the Savegre River and had Dark Pewee, Torrent Tyrannulet and a very hard to find Black-faced Solitaire. After dinner we went owling and the first place, we tried calling in some owls was unsuccessful and did not bode well. We drove a bit further up the valley to about 2800m and gave another try at the extremely elusive **Unspotted Saw-whet Owl** and we had a response a long way down the valley! We played the call again and within a matter of seconds it was calling a few meters away from us, so we shined a light and there it was, we had spotted the Unspotted Saw-whet Owl!!! We had fantastic views and got good photos, so we left it alone and returned to the hotel feeling quite pleased.



Unspotted Saw-whet Owl © Ernesto Carman

Day 9. San Gerardo, Paraíso, Ujarrás, Café Cristina, Río Perlas After breakfast we packed up and moved on out of the valley and made a stop down a little side road along the ridge top to try for a couple more highland endemics and we got fantastic views of Ochraceous Pewee, Timberline Wren and Black-and-yellow Silky-Flycatchers. From here we worked our way down to the Central Valley and stopped in the small town of Paraíso to see a pair of **Tropical Screech-Owls** that roost in the busy town square! For lunch we visited El Cas Restaurant which serves a spectacular buffet of family-style food in front of bird feeders to provide some meal-time entertainment. As we ate, we saw Gray-headed Chachalaca, Golden-hooded Tanager, Bananaquit, Mourning Warbler, Variable Seedeater and we were lucky enough to get views of Cabanis's Ground-Sparrow! After lunch we visited Finca Cristina, an organic, shade-grown coffee farm and had a thorough tour of the coffee process and as we did we were interrupted by a Keel-billed Toucan at its nest! At the end of the tour we filled our packs with coffee and drove the short distance to our next hotel near Orosi, Hotel Río Perlas.



Tropical Screech Owls © Ernesto Carman

Day 10. Río Perlas, Río Macho, Río San José, La Quinta Before breakfast we had a target, the Sunbittern, a species that lives along streams and rivers. It was not long before we found a pair of them and we even watched them copulating! After breakfast we packed up the bus again and drove to Río Macho, a gravel road with forest on both sides. We did very well here, Brown-capped Vireo, Blackburnian Warbler, Spotted Woodcreeper, Brown-billed Scythebill, Scaly-throated Foliage-Gleaner, Red-faced Spinetail, Streaked Xenops, Chestnut-headed Oropendola and Elegant Euphonia. From here we headed north crossing Braulio Carrillo National Park and ending up in the Caribbean lowlands. After lunch we stopped at the San José River and found Fasciated Tiger-Heron and Black-faced Grosbeak before heading to our next lodge, La Quinta. **Day 11. La Quinta, La Selva Biological Station** This morning we were going to visit La Selva Biological Station which is one of the best studied rainforests in the world since research has been going on here since the 60s. We began birding on the gravel entrance road that leads into the station which passes through a variety of habitats and tends to be much more diverse than the old-growth primary forest. Red-ored and Mealy Parrots, Black-headed and Buff-throated Saltators, Slaty-tailed and Black-throated Trogons, a female **Snowy Cotinga**, Rufous-tailed Jacamar, White-collared Manakin, Fasciated Antshrike, Black-headed Tody-Flycatcher and a very close Chestnut-colored Woodpecker working the flowers of a Heliconia. We met our local guide Joel who gave us a great introduction to La Selva before we went into one of the trails where, apart from fantastic birds, we also saw Collared Peccaries, Three-toed Sloth and Strawberry Poison-Dart Frog. We were also lucky to find a Great Tinamou walking on the forest floor and other species such as Olive-backed Euphonia, Plain-colored Tanager, Pied Puffbird, Gray-headed Kite, Collared Aracari, Scarlet-rumped Cacique and White-ringed Flycatcher. We returned to La Quinta for lunch and a little down time before heading back out and the first thing we did was walk down one of the trails at the lodge to see a Spectacled Owl on its day roost! We then drove back towards La Selva but turned down a side road by the police station where we hoped to see the rare Great-green Macaws. As we waited for them, we saw Thick-billed Seed-Finch, Variable and Morelet's Seedeaters and the endemic **Nicaraguan Seed-Finch** with its massive, pink bill. We eventually found a Great-green Macaw feeding in a large tree in the distance and eventually the light improved, and we got decent views of this endangered species. Successful once again we returned to La Quinta for our last night there.



Snowy Cotinga © Ernesto Carman



Nicaraguan Seed-Finch © Ernesto Carman

Day 12. La Quinta, Caño Negro Before breakfast we watched the feeders for a while and saw Scarlet-rumped, Crimson-collared, Blue-gray, Palm, Golden-hooded and Red-throated Ant-Tanagers, Black-cheeked Woodpecker, Green and Red-legged Honeycreepers and Orange-billed Sparrow. We also walked around the grounds and found Bay-breasted Warbler, American Redstart, Royal Flycatcher and Streak-headed Woodcreeper. After breakfast we began making our way north and

made a couple stops along the way to find Yellow Tyrannulet, Giant Cowbird, Olive-throated Parakeet and the minute Black-capped Pygmy-Tyrant. By midafternoon we were driving west from the town of Los Chiles towards the village of Caño Negro and made a stop in some open fields to pick-up Amazon Kingfisher, Ruddy-breasted Seedeater, Red-breasted Meadowlark, Wood Stork and Northern Jacana. A few kilometers further along the road we stopped near a large Kapok tree and on one of the thickest horizontal branches was a **Jabiru** on its nest! After reaching our hotel in Caño Negro we went for a walk along the edge of the wetlands and saw Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks, Blue-winged Teal, Black-necked Stilts, Southern Lapwing, Red-winged Blackbird, Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, Anhinga and Roseate Spoonbill.



Jabiru © Ernesto Carman

Day 13. Caño Negro, Medio Queso, Arenal Observatory Lodge After an early shot of caffeine, we went to the dock to do a boat ride along the river. Egrets and herons were everywhere, as well as Ringed, Belted, Amazon, Green and American Pygmy-Kingfishers, Russet-naped Wood-Rail, Neotropic Cormorant, Anhinga, Black-collared Hawk, Glossy Ibis, White Ibis, Nicaraguan Grackles and after a bit of searching we had fantastic views of a female **Sungrebe!** After about three hours we returned to the lodge for breakfast and packed our bags to head out once again, but before we left Caño Negro we made a stop behind the ranger station to see a Common Potoo on its “nest”, the female merely balances her egg on a knot hole! As we drove back out the bumpy road we stopped again at the Jabiru nest and this time the pair of adults were standing at the nest, preening with their massive bills. Our next stop was at a wetland called Medio Queso, which is near the Nicaraguan border, to look for Pinnated Bittern and Lesser Yellow-headed Vulture and we succeeded at getting good views of both. After a late lunch in Los Chiles we headed straight for our next hotel at the base of Arenal Volcano, Arenal Observatory Lodge.



Sungrebe © Ernesto Carman

Day 14. Arenal Observatory Lodge At six in the morning we gathered at the main deck in front of the restaurant to watch the fruit feeder and it did not take long for the Montezuma Oropendolas to clean-up just about all the food and whatever fell to the ground the White-nosed Coatis finished. In between the waves of oropendolas other species would come out such as Great Curassow, Crested Guan, Yellow-throated Euphonia, Black-cheeked Woodpecker and Emerald Tanager. After breakfast we walked around the grounds and the trails and saw Black-cowled Oriole, White-necked Jacobin, Scaly-breasted Hummingbird, Green Thorntail, Black-crested Coquette, Dusky Antbird, Dull-mantled Antbird, Band-backed and Stripe-breasted Wrens, Northern Rough-winged Swallow and a **Great Potoo** on a day roost. Despite the strong wind we saw some good diversity, but activity was rather low. After lunch we walked down to an area that overlooks Lake Arenal and saw Smoky-brown Woodpecker, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Emerald and Bay-headed Tanager, Tawny-capped Euphonia, Scarlet-thighed Dacnis, Long-tailed Tyrant and Broad-billed Motmot. Just as we were getting ready to leave we heard a Three-wattled Bellbird in the distance, so we scanned the nearby ridges and sure enough there he was perching in the top of a leafless tree! After dinner we went for a walk to the frog pond and saw Red-eyed Tree Frogs, a Northern Cat-eyed Snake and a giant Waterbug that was just over three inches long!



Great Potoo © Ernesto Carman

Day 15. Arenal Observatory Lodge, Peninsula Road Today the weather changed, it was raining on and off and the volcano was nowhere to be seen. We had our usual feeder birds as we ran in and out of the shelter then after breakfast, we decided to drive down the hill to look for drier weather. We walked along the peninsula road which has nice forest on both sides and as soon as the rain stopped we had a nice flurry of birds including a pair of Keel-billed Motmots, Broad-billed Motmots, White-shouldered Tanager, Golden-winged and Blue-winged Warblers, Russet Antshrike, Long-billed Hermit, Tropical Parula and Buff-rumped Warbler. We also found a **White Hawk** perching right in front of us just before the rain started again. In the afternoon, we drove back down the entrance road, but the rain and wind hindered our birding severely.



Day 16. Arenal Observatory Lodge, San Luis, Hotel Robledal Before leaving the hotel we went for another quick walk down the trail and saw a few new birds including Spotted Antbird, Bicolored Antbird and Scale-crested Pygmy-Tyrant. Off we went, working our way up over the Central Volcanic Range to a place called San Luis Canopy where we had lunch then watched the feeders for a while. Here we saw Silver-throated, Bay-headed and Speckled Tanagers, Crowned Woodnymph, Brown Violetear, Green Thorntail, Coppery-headed Emerald, Green Hermit and last but not least, a gorgeous male Collared Trogon! Unfortunately, it was time to move on, though we did make one last stop before reaching our hotel and that was for ice cream at Pops!!! ¡Hasta pronto amigos!



Birdwatching at Arenal Observatory Lodge © Ernesto Carman

Day 17. Departure