



Costa Rica Birding Tour (Feb 9 - 25, 2024)

[Link: Costa Rica Birding Tour \(Feb 9 - 25, 2024\)](#)

Written by Ernesto Carman

Day 1. Hotel Bougainvillea

We began our tour with a short walk in the spectacular gardens of the hotel and saw a few of the most common yard birds of Costa Rica's Central Valley such as Clay-colored Thrush, Rufous-collared Sparrow, Red-billed Pigeon and Crimson-fronted Parakeet, but we also saw the resident pair of Mottled Owls that roosts in the clump of bamboo.



Day 2. La Paz de San Ramón, Punta Leona

We were met by our driver Ramón Vargas and left the hotel early to drive to the western-most point of the Central Valley in La Paz de San Ramón. Here we were met by Romain and Ignacio Arias who maintain feeders for both hummingbirds and fruit loving birds. One of the very first birds we saw was a White Hawk spotted by Ramón and the Costa Rican endemic Coppery-headed Emerald feeding and fighting with Stripe-tailed Hummingbird, Green-crowned Brilliant and the ubiquitous Rufous-tailed Hummingbird. In the gardens we also picked-up **Collared Trogon**, Northern Emerald Toucanet, Masked Tityra and an immature Fasciated Tiger-Heron. We also watched the feeding station at their house and had **Blue-gray**, Palm, Scarlet-rumped and **Crimson-collared Tanagers**, Montezuma Oropendola, Giant Cowbird, Baltimore Oriole, White-eared Ground-Sparrow and even a Long-tailed Manakin feeding in the native bushes around the feeders. After lunch we drove down to the dry forest and made a stop before reaching our next hotel. Here we saw White-throated Magpie-Jay, Turquoise-browed Motmot, Blue-vented and Cinnamon Hummingbirds, Lineated Woodpecker, White-fronted Parrot, Stripe-headed Sparrow and Groove-billed Anis.



Collared Trogon © Ernesto Carman



Crimson-collared Tanager © Ernesto Carman

Day 3. Punta Leona, Carara National Park

Before breakfast we picked-up some new birds including Rose-throated Becard, Northern Barred Woodcreeper, Streaked Flycatcher and Scarlet Macaws flying all over the place! After breakfast we visited Carara National Park and started out seeing a Three-toed Sloth in the parking lot and a whole variety of Neotropical birds including White-whiskered Puffbird, Rufous-tailed Jacamar, Lesson's Motmot, Black-hooded Antshrike, Dot-winged Antwren, Plain Xenops, Wedge-billed Woodcreeper and three species of trogon: Baird's, Slaty-tailed and Gartered. On our walk back out of the park we had fantastic views of several male Orange-collared Manakins displaying on their lek at very close range! In the afternoon we birded the grounds at the hotel and certainly the highlights were Gray Hawk and the loud, but very elusive, Collared Forest-Falcons feeding on an iguana!

Day 4. Punta Leona, Caldera Mangroves, Tárcoles Boat Tour

After our usual **morning Macaws** and a pair of Ferruginous Pygmy-Owls we had breakfast and made our way to a patch of mangroves near Caldera where we saw both Black-crowned and Masked Tityras, Scrub Euphonia, Streak-headed Woodcreeper, Baltimore and Streak-backed Oriole, and close views of Panama Flycatcher. From here we visited the Guácimo road where we saw Orange-fronted Parakeets, Streak-backed Oriole, **Double-striped Thick-Knee** and Southern Lapwing. After lunch we did a boat tour on the Tárcoles River and racked-up an awesome variety of egrets and herons, four species of kingfishers, Wood Stork, Roseate Spoonbill, Yellow-naped Parrot, Black-headed Trogon, Brown Pelicans, White Ibis, Collared Plover, Magnificent Frigatebird, the endemic Mangrove Hummingbird and at the river mouth, with a **glowing sunset as a backdrop** we saw Royal, Sandwich and Elegant Terns and a pair of American Oystercatchers. After dinner we took a short walk around the grounds and saw several **Common Pauraques**.



Scarlet Macaws © Ernesto Carman



Double-striped Thicknee © Ernesto Carman



Common Pauraque © Ernesto Carman

Day 5. Punta Leona, San Isidro

Before breakfast we drove to the dry forest for some early morning birding and had a good lot of species including Dusky-capped, Brown-crested, Great-crested and Nutting's Flycatchers, Greenish Elaenia, Ruby-throated Hummingbird and a roosting Pacific Screech-Owl. After breakfast we began driving south along the coast and made a stop at Playa Bandera where we found White Ibis, Southern Lapwing, Little Blue Heron Northern Jacana, Lesser Yellowlegs and Solitary Sandpiper. After a quick bite to eat in Dominical we reached our hotel in San Isidro and went for a late afternoon stroll, and despite how close we were to the city, the birds were amazing! The two highlights were, however, **Fiery-billed Aracari** and a male **Turquoise Cotinga** glowing blue in the late afternoon light.



Fiery-billed Aracari © Ernesto Carman



Turquoise Cotinga © Ernesto Carman

Day 6. Los Cusingos and Vista del Valle

We began our day in the gardens around the hotel and saw Gray-cowled Wood-Rail and Piratic Flycatcher and after breakfast we headed to Los Cusingos, a private reserve which used to be property of one of Costa Rica's most prominent ornithologists, Alexander Skutch. Despite the loud

and incessant cicadas we saw some great birds including four Rufous Pihas, **Golden-naped Woodpecker**, Gray-headed Tanager, Slaty-tailed Trogon, Green Shrike-Vireo and a male Red-capped Manakin. After this we gained some elevation for lunch and birds at Vista del Valle Restaurant, where, while we waited for lunch we saw Streaked Saltator, Red-headed Barbet, White-tailed Emerald, Violet Sabrewing, Brown Violetear, Snowy-bellied Hummingbird and Swallow-tailed Kites. In the afternoon we birded along a gravel road near La Bonita and saw a Pearl Kite, Indigo Bunting, Garden Emerald and Fork-tailed Flycatcher.



Golden-naped Woodpecker © Ernesto Carman

Day 7. San Isidro, Savegre and Verdesana Lodge

Before breakfast we birded a side road in a nearby village and saw Southern-beardless Tyrannulet, Smooth-billed Ani, Scaled Pigeon and Black-crowned Tityra. After breakfast we packed our bags and made our way up the Talamanca Mountains and made a stop at Cerro de la Muerte in the páramo habitat. Here we saw Red-tailed Hawk, Volcano Hummingbird, Fiery-throated Hummingbird, Black-throated Green-Warbler, Wilson's Warbler, Flame-throated Warbler and the endemic Volcano Junco. From here we drove down the Savegre Valley for lunch and to try our luck with a bird which is always on everybody's wishlist, the **Resplendent Quetzal**. We visited Casa Monge, a farm where they have kept several fruiting wild avocado trees and forest and we were lucky enough to see a pair of these spectacular birds which just sat and allowed for amazing views! We also saw a family of Spotted Wood-Quail before heading to our next stop at Miriam's Restaurant. Here we watched the feeders and saw Yellow-thighed Brush-Finch, Large-footed Finch, White-throated Mountain-Gem and Acorn Woodpeckers.



Resplendent Quetzal © Ernesto Carman

Day 8. Verdesana, Copey, Paraíso Quetzal

Today we had a very productive pre-breakfast walk with many hummingbirds including Green Hermit, Green Thorntail, Purple-crowned Fairy, Coppery-headed Emerald, Blue-vented and Scintillant Hummingbird as well as Red-headed Barbet, Red-faced Spinetail and Brown-capped Vireo. After breakfast we gained elevation again and birded a high elevation oak forest and saw Golden-browed Chlorophonia, Spot-crowned Woodcreeper, Rufous-browed Peppershrike, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Yellow-bellied Siskin, Common and Sooty-capped Chlorospingus, Black-cheeked Warbler, Hairy Woodpecker, Ruddy Treerunner, Barred Becard, Black-and-yellow Silky-Flycatcher, Long-tailed Silky-Flycatcher and Collared Redstart.

Day 9. Verdesana, Finca Cristina, Quelitales

Before breakfast we had our usual selection of hummingbirds but also picked up Magenta-throated Woodstar, as well as Louisiana Waterthrush, American Dipper, White-naped Brushfinch and Orange-billed Nightingale-Thrush. As we drove out of the valley we spotted a pair of Elegant Euphonias feeding from a cluster of mistletoe along the roadside. Our next stop was in the town square of the town of Paraíso to see the resident pair of **Tropical Screech-Owls** and the Crimson-fronted Parakeets, and being Saturday we took the opportunity to walk through the farmer's market on one side of the park to explore the wide variety of fruits and vegetables available. We then visited Café Cristina where we learned all about how the Carman family grows and produces organic, shade-grown coffee while providing habitat for as many species possible. From here we made our way to Hotel Quelitales and did a bit of birding before dinner and saw Scarlet-thighed Dacnis, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Black-bellied Hummingbird and **Green-fronted Lancebill**.



Tropical Screech Owls © Ernesto Carman



Green-fronted Lancebill © Ernesto Carman

Day 10. Hotel Quelitales, Guarumo, La Quinta

Before breakfast we drove a short distance to the Ujarrás Valley to look for one of Costa Rica's endemic species, the **Cabanis's Ground-Sparrow**. It was not long before we spotted our main target and learned all about its natural history and conservation and we also saw Cabanis's Wren,

Northern Rough-winged Swallow, **White-tailed Kite**, Garden Emerald, Green Ibis, Southern Lapwing and several Hook-billed Kites amongst the chayote plantations. After breakfast we began making our way down to the Caribbean lowlands. We made a stop along the Pejibaye River and spotted Fasciated Tiger-heron and fantastic views of Sunbittern. In the lowlands we stopped at Guarumo Lodge where we had a lovely picnic lunch and watched the feeders which were full of new and colorful species including Russet-naped Wood-Rail, Shining, Red-legged and Green Honeycreeper, Chestnut-headed Oropendola White-collared Manakin and White-necked Jacobin.



White-tailed Kites © Ernesto Carman

Day 11. La Quinta, La Selva Biological Station

Today we visited the world famous La Selva Biological Station and despite the intermittent rain we saw an amazing variety of species! As we arrived early in the morning, activity was over the top with a constant stream of new birds showing in the trees around us including Keel-billed and Yellow-throated Toucans, Collared Aracaris, Crested Guan, several species of woodpeckers, **Snowy Cotinga**, Black-faced Grosbeak, Oropendolas, tanagers, parrots, flycatchers and swifts, and all of this from the parking lot! We also birded the grounds and one of the forest trails and at one particular fruiting fig tree we saw three different species of manakins, White-ruffed, White-collared and **Red-capped** as we waited for the rain to stop. As it did let up we walked into the primary forest and saw Great Tinamou, Black-throated Trogon, Broad-billed Motmot and a roosting pair of **Middle American Screech-Owls**. After lunch we birded along a nearby side road with one main target in mind, the critically endangered Great Green Macaw, and we were successful.



Snowy Cotinga © Ernesto Carman



Red-capped Manakin © Ernesto Carman

Day 12. La Quinta, Pueblo Nuevo, Medio Queso, Caño Negro

After some productive early birding and breakfast we headed out and birded the Pueblo Nuevo road where we had Gartered Trogon, Olive-throated and **Orange-chinned Parakeets**, Canebrake Wren, Olive-crowned Yellowthroat, Thick-billed Seed-Finch and most exciting of all, a perched **King**

Vulture! We continued driving north towards the Nicaraguan border and arrived at the Medio Queso wetlands in mid afternoon and saw many egrets and herons, Wood Stork, Roseate Spoonbill, four species of Kingfishers including **American Pygmy Kingfisher**, Nicaraguan Grackle, **Pinnated Bittern** and amazing views of Jabiru. From here we drove west towards the small village of Caño Negro, making a stop along the way to see Red-breasted Meadowlark and the regional endemic **Nicaraguan Seed-Finch**.



Orange-chinned Parakeet © Ernesto Carman



King Vulture © Ernesto Carman



Nicaraguan Seedfinch © Ernesto Carman

Day 13. Caño Negro and La Fortuna

Today we started the day with an early morning boat ride in the Caño Negro Wildlife Refuge where we saw great diversity of egrets, herons, **Boat-billed Heron**, Anhinga, Neotropic Cormorant, Russet-naped Wood-Rail, Gray-headed Kite, Pied Puffbird and Royal Flycatcher. After breakfast we birded along the edge of the wetlands and had an amazing number of birds including a flock of migrants including Prothonotary, Hooded, Golden-winged and Yellow Warblers. We also saw Yellow Tyrannulet, Striped Cuckoo, Mangrove Cuckoo, Slaty Spinetail, Black-collared Hawk, Black-necked Stilt, Greater Yellowlegs, Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks and a roosting **Black-and-white Owl**. After lunch we worked our way to Arenal Observatory Lodge at the base of the Arenal Volcano.



Black-and-white Owl © Ermesto Carman

Day 14. Arenal Observatory Lodge

We started our day at the main deck overlooking the fruit feeder and were immediately greeted by the flock of **Great Curassows**, Crested Guans and Gray-headed Chachalacas that dominated the feeder, and once they moved out the smaller species began arriving including many tanagers, euphonias and honeycreepers. After breakfast we walked the gardens and a trail and had many hummingbirds feeding from the vervaine hedges, including Blue-throated Goldentail and Black-crested Coquette and in the forest we saw Dull-mantled Antbird, Golden-crowned Warbler, Slaty Antwren, Rufous-winged Tanager and even an Ornate Hawk-Eagle collecting nesting material from the trees above us! After lunch we birded the entrance road to the lodge and saw both **Keel-billed and Broad-billed Motmots** perched together, Sulphur-rumped Flycatcher, the rare Sharpbill, White-collared Swift, Western Woodhaunter, Rufous Mourner, White-throated Thrush, Carmiol's Tanager and Scale-crested Pygmy-Tyrant.



Great Curassows © Ernesto Carman



Broad-billed and Keel-billed Motmots © Ernesto Carman

Day 15. Arenal Observatory Lodge, Tilajari Resort

We awoke to our usual set of birds at the feeders before heading out after breakfast to the Peninsula Road which runs through Arenal National Park. Here we had great views of both Broad-billed and Keel-billed Motmots as well as Rufous-tailed Jacamar, Stripe-breasted Wren, Russet, Great and

Fasciated Antshrikes and Long-tailed Tyrant. When we returned to the hotel for lunch we were pleasantly surprised to find a **Yellow-eared Toucanet** feeding from a fruiting fig tree just behind the parking lot. After lunch we packed-up and drove to Tilajari Resort and had a nice review of many of the common yard birds for this region.



Yellow-eared Toucanet © Ernesto Carman

Day 16. Arenal area

Before breakfast a quick walk around the hotel grounds produced great views of Yellow Tyrannulet, a Bat Falcon eating a Palm Tanager, a roosting **Lesser Nighthawk**, Harris's Hawk and many other birds we had seen previously. After breakfast we began our drive up into the foothills and did not get to far before we spotted a **Hoffmann's Two-toed Sloth** hanging in an Erythrina tree with her baby on her belly. We then birded along a side road that leads to the Alberto Manuel Brenes Reserve and found some widespread species such as Squirrel Cuckoo, Boat-billed Flycatcher and Bright-rumped Attila when all of a sudden we heard the tell-tale sign of an army ant swarm, with both Spotted, Bicolored and Ocellated Antbirds just a few meters away from the edge of the road. After some work we managed to see the birds and just for fun mentioned how all we needed now was the holy grail bird of Costa Rica, the Rufous-vented Ground-Cuckoo. Not more than half an hour had passed when we heard the dry clacking of a Ground-Cuckoo snapping its bill and panic set in as we made a plan to find the best place to try and see this bird. Though a tight fit, we found a spot to watch the ants-warm and in the one spot of sunlight hitting the ground all of a sudden the cuckoo made its appearance, showing off its iridescent purples and greens! This brief yet amazing encounter was totally unexpected and certainly made for a special finale, but we still had some more birds to see! Our lunch stop at San Luis Adventure Park was filled with colorful tanagers coming to eat fruit, including Speckled, Crimson-collared, **Bay-headed**, **Silver-throated**, Emerald and the range restricted **Blue-and-gold Tanager**.



Hoffman's Two-toed Sloth © Ernesto Carman



Bay-headed Tanager © Ernesto Carman



Silver-throated Tanager © Ernesto Carman



Blue-and-gold Tanager © Ernesto Carman