

Costa Rica Birding Tour Trip Report (Jan 22 - Feb 7, 2025)

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Day 1. Hotel Bougainvillea

We met for our first birding as a group and despite the breezy conditions we saw the resident **Mottled Owls** roosting in the bamboo clump, Hoffman's Woodpecker, Red-billed Pigeon and Rufous-backed Wrens before heading off to what would become our evening routine of going over the bird list and having dinner.

Day 2. Caldera mangroves and dry forest

Early but not so bright we had coffee and tea before heading west out of the Central Valley and dodging the potentially hindering traffic. We arrived at Caldera and enjoyed a lovely picnic breakfast and birding along the roadside which has mangroves on one side and tropical dry forest on the other. It was not long before we began seeing new birds with **Turquoise-browed Motmot**, Black-headed Trogon, Northern Scrub Flycatcher, Mangrove Vireo, Streak-backed, Baltimore and Orchard Orioles, Prothonotary and Tennessee Warblers, White-lored Gnatcatcher and the Blue Jay on steroids, **White-throated Magpie-Jay**. After lunch we birded another gravel road for some more dry forest specialties and activity was low until we found a Crane Hawk which gave us phenomenal scope views and the tree it was perched in, a flowering Erythrina, was loaded with birds! Here we saw Green-breasted Mango, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Plain-capped Starthroat, White-browed Gnatcatcher and just when we thought it could not get any better a pair of the critically endangered **Yellow-naped Parrots** perched on top of the tree, glowing in the afternoon sunlight.

Day 3. Carara National Park and Tárcoles Boat Tour

Just after sunrise we met outside our rooms at Villa Lapas for some pre-breakfast birding and we noticed a large, fruiting fig tree just over the pool and it was full of birds! In a matter of minutes we had seen three species of trogons, Black-headed, **Slaty-tailed** and Gartered, Yellow-throated Toucan, Fiery-billed Aracari, Red-capped Manakin, Yellow-throated Euphonia and Buff-throated Saltator! While all this was going on **Scarlet Macaws** were flying around overhead. After breakfast we visited Carara National Park and it certainly lived up to its amazing birding reputation; from the parking lot itself we saw a White-necked Puffbird thanks to our driver, Rodrigo, as well as a roosting **Lesser Nighthawk** and a Blue-vented Hummingbird. Along the trail we had fantastic views of **White-whiskered Puffbird**, **Black-hooded Antshrike**, Chestnut-backed Antbird and Rufous Piha, as well as Northern Barred Woodcreeper, Wedge-billed Woodcreeper, Black-striped Woodcreeper, Velvety Manakin and Golden-crowned Spadebill. After lunch we drove a short distance to the Tárcoles River and boarded our boat navigated by our birder/captain Juan Carlos. The number of birds and photo opportunities on this tour are incredible, with many egrets and herons including Yellow-crowned Night-Heron and Boat-billed Heron, Ringed, amazon, Green and especially **American Pygmy-Kingfisher**, dozens of shorebirds including Willet, Whimbrel, Western, Least and

Spotted Sandpiper, Wilson's, Semipalmated and Snowy Plover, Roseate Spoonbills and after much perseverance waiting in front of the Tea Mangrove flowers we saw a Mangrove Hummingbird. It had been a long day, but the excitement was not over as Rodrigo alerted us of the presence of a pair of Spectacled Owls in the gardens so we abandoned our dinner table and were treated to a delightful spectacle (no pun intended...) of a pair of **Spectacled Owls** engaging in courtship behavior!



Black-hooded Antshrike © Ernesto Carman



American Pygmy Kingfisher © Ernesto Carman

Day 4. Villa Lapas to Osa Peninsula

We met at the fig tree once again and had our usual **trogon party**, Red-capped Manakin, Yellow-throated Euphonia, Streaked Flycatcher, Lesson's Motmot and many **Scarlet Macaws** flying about. We also had scope views of several Blue-throated Goldentails singing from their courtship perches showing off their bright red bills. After breakfast we packed our bags and began making our way south towards the Osa Peninsula, picking up a few new birds on our way including Southern Beardless Tyrannulet, Red-crowned Woodpecker, Smooth-billed Ani, Piratic Flycatcher and a few distant King Vultures. We arrived at Danta Corcovado Lodge just before dusk and were greeted by the friendly staff and dozens of Central American **Squirrel Monkeys** that were coming in to sleep in a palm tree by the restaurant!

Day 5. Rincón Bridge and Danta Corcovado

After some early coffee we drove the short distance to the bridge over the Rincón River which provides a fantastic view of both the rainforest and the mangroves which is a crucial combination for one of our target species, the endemic Yellow-billed Cotinga. It was only a matter of minutes before we began seeing several male and female cotingas in the tree-tops and flying overhead against the deep blue sky, a remarkable experience indeed! But not only did we see **Yellow-billed Cotingas**, we also had good scope views of male and female Turquoise Cotingas, Golden-naped and **Red-rumped Woodpeckers**, Black-striped Sparrow, Thick-billed Seedfinch, very close Red-lored Parrots, Thick-billed Euphonia and a pair of Baird's Trogons, all before breakfast! After breakfast we birded one of the trails at the lodge and had Cocoa Woodcreeper, **Black-hooded Antshrike**, Dot-winged Antwren, Chestnut-backed Antbird and several Orange-collared Manakins snapping their wings at a lek. After lunch and a siesta we revisited the Rincón Bridge and had some more views of Yellow-billed Cotinga, Golden-naped Woodpecker, Mangrove Swallow, Gray-breasted Martin, Southern and Northern Rough-winged Swallow, Fiery-billed Aracari and more than twenty Yellow-throated Toucans calling from the treetops after the light shower. We returned to the lodge in time for the Squirrel Monkey rendez-vous before our usual evening routine.

Day 6. Danta Corcovado Lodge, La Gamba, Coto 47

Before breakfast we walked the closer trails and saw a Black-faced Antthrush at very close range, venturing out in the trail in the low light conditions. After breakfast we worked our way to the mainland to bird along the La Gamba road where we saw Rusty-margined Flycatcher, Shiny and Bronzed Cowbird, Southern Lapwing, Red-breasted Meadowlark, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Scarlet-rumped Cacique, Yellow-bellied Seedeater and Amazon Kingfisher. Our next stop was in Las Pangas, near Coto 47, where flooded fields were filled with water birds including thousands of Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks, Blue-winged Teal, Northern Shoveler, Black-necked Stilt, many egrets and herons, Glossy Ibis, Short-billed Dowitchers, Black-crowned Night-Heron and several raptors including **Pearl Kite**, **Gray-lined Hawk** and even a Laughing Falcon! An ice-cream stop was very well received in the heat of the day before we returned to the lodge. In the late afternoon a few of us walked the trails and saw several Black-faced Antthrushes and even a Great Tinamou! After dinner we went for a night walk and saw many invertebrates including spiders, millipedes, **whip-scorpions** and large click beetles with glowing green head lamps!

Day 7. Danta Corcovado Lodge, Cerro de la Muerte, San Gerardo

We walked the trails one more time before breakfast and had better views of the Black-faced Antthrush, **Blue-black Grosbeak**, White-whiskered Puffbird, Orange-billed Sparrow and White-shouldered Tanager, as well as Ruddy Quail-Dove. After breakfast we left this fantastic spot to make our way to the Talamanca highlands, making one more stop at the Rincón Bridge to catch a few

more sightings of the Yellow-billed Cotinga and a low-flying King Vulture. We climbed the Talamanca mountains and enjoyed fantastically clear skies and views of the highest mountains before dropping down into the San Gerardo valley for our first taste of highland birds and cooler temperatures with Black-cheeked Warbler, Black-faced Solitaire, **Long-tailed Silky-Flycatcher**, Black Guan and our first views of one of the showiest birds of the highlands, the Resplendent Quetzal.



Blue-black Grosbeak © Ernesto Carman



Black Guan © Ernesto Carman

Day 8. San Gerardo Valley

We gathered at sunrise for some caffeine before driving back to bird along the roadside for better views of the Quetzal but we had no luck with this species. We did see many other highland specialties though, including Collared Redstart, Yellow-thighed Brush-Finch, Wilson's Warbler, Flame-throated Warbler, Sooty-capped Chlorospingus, Tufted Flycatcher, Mountain Thrush and Ruddy Treerunner. After breakfast we studied the many hummingbirds in the garden including White-throated Mountain-Gem, Volcano, Scintillant and Talamanca Hummingbirds and the Lesser Violetears with their incessant, rhythmic singing. We drove a short distance to Finca Monge to check for the **Resplendent Quetzal** and sure enough there was a pair feeding from a fruiting wild avocado and we had fantastic walk-away views. Later that morning we visited Miriam's feeders and saw Sooty Thrush, Large-footed Finch, Yellow-thighed Brush Finch, Acorn Woodpecker and better views of the highland hummingbirds. After lunch we visited the feeders again and saw three **Spotted Wood-Quails** feeding on cracked corn below us. We stayed out until sunset and spotlighted in search of nocturnal species and found a **Dusky Nightjar** which gave us amazing views.



Dusky Nightjar © Ernesto Carman

Day 9. San Gerardo, Paraíso Quetzal, Paraíso, Café Cristina, Hotel Quelitales

Before breakfast we birded the gardens and saw Sulphur-winged Parakeets, Spot-crowned Woodcreeper, Slaty Flowerpiercer and Silver-throated Tanagers until it was time to head out. Our first stop was at Paraíso Quetzal Lodge where the **hummingbird feeders** were exploding with color, especially when the Fiery-throated Hummingbirds were hit by sunlight showing a rainbow of colors. Our next stop was at a lower elevation in the town square of Paraíso where we saw roosting **Tropical Screech-Owls** and a Barn Owl and we learned about the conservation efforts focusing on Cabanis's Ground-Sparrow and admired the large sculpture of this species which stands tall in the park. We then headed to Café Cristina where, after a delicious lunch, we walked through the **coffee farm** and learned how Ernesto's family produces some of the best coffee while providing habitat for hundreds of species. After our visit to the coffee farm we drove to the town of Cachí and Hotel

Quelitalles where we birded for the rest of the afternoon and saw a variety of hummingbirds including Green Hermit, Green-crowned Brilliant, **Black-bellied Hummingbird**, Violet Sabrewing and Green-fronted Lancebill. We also had fantastic views of White-eared Ground-Sparrow and Sooty-faced Finch.



Fiery-throated Hummingbird © Ernesto Carman



Black-bellied Hummingbird © Ernesto Carman



Café Cristina © Paz A Irola

Day 10. Ujarrás, Guarumo Lodge, Chilamate Rainforest Retreat

Early in the morning we drove to the Ujarrás Valley in search of two main targets, the endemic Cabanis's Ground-Sparrow and the snail specialist **Hook-billed Kite**, two species Paz and Ernesto conduct research on. We were successful finding the ground-sparrow as well as many other species such as Painted Bunting, Cabanis's Wren, White-lined Tanager, Barred Antshrike and White-crowned Parrots before heading to another site in a chayote plantation and soon had fantastic views of several Hook-billed Kites as they foraged for snails in the plantations.



Group learning about Hook-billed Kite habits © Ernesto Carman



Hook-billed Kite © Ernesto Carman

After breakfast we did a short walk in the gardens of Hotel Quelitales and spotted a few new species including great views of a **Sunbittern**! It was then time to leave so we began our drive to the Caribbean lowlands along a rural and scenic route along the Reventazón River. Once we reached the lowlands we spotted a flock of **Great Green Macaws** feeding from a balsa tree alongside Orange-chinned Parakeets, one of the largest and smallest parrots feeding together! We had lunch at

Guarumo Lodge and spent quality time watching the bird feeders which were absolutely amazing: **Keel-billed** and **Yellow-throated Toucans**, **Collared Aracaris**, Chestnut-headed and Montezuma Oropendolas, Orange-chinned Parakeets, Yellow-throated and **Olive-backed Euphonias**, Red-legged, Shining and Green Honeycreepers, orioles, tanagers and more! After filling our eyes and memory cards with colorful birds we drove to our next lodge in Chilamate, Sarapiquí.



Lunch at Guarumo Lodge © Paz A Irola



Collared Aracari © Ernesto Carman



Birding in Chilamate © Ernesto Carman



Great Green Macaw © Ernesto Carman

Day 11. Chilamate Rainforest, La Selva Biological Station

It had been raining on and off throughout the night, giving us the true rainforest experience, but by

breakfast time the rain had stopped. We drove the short distance to La Selva Biological Station where we were going to spend the morning and were met by our local guide Gilbert Molina who helped us find many amazing birds and other wildlife! We began our visit with fantastic views of a **Semiplumbeous Hawk** drying its wings in a tree just over the parking lot, Crested Guans engaging in a sensual courtship display, Rufous and Broad-billed Motmots, an extremely obliging pair of **Spotted Antbirds**, Black-crowned Antshrike, Chestnut-colored Woodpecker, Brown-hooded Parrots and a roosting Great Potoo, as well as a golden Central American Eyelash Pitviper, **Strawberry Poison-Dart Frog**, Green-and-black Poison-Dart Frog and a family of Honduran White Bats roosting under a self-made tent under a heliconia leaf. We returned to the hotel for lunch and got distracted by a few birds outside the restaurant including Red-throated Ant-Tanager, Wood Thrush and spectacular views of a male Great Antshrike! After lunch we drove up into the middle elevations to Mirador Cinchona where we watched the dozens of birds visiting the feeders with the impressive San Fernando waterfall in the background. Amongst the dozens of Silver-throated Tanagers we also saw **Prong-billed** and **Red-headed Barbet**, **Buff-fronted Quail-Dove**, **Northern Emerald Toucanets**, Black Guans, Common Chlorospingus, White-bellied Mountain-Gem and a distant Barred Hawk. Driving back to the lodge we made a brief stop at a bridge and spotted **Fasciated Tiger-Heron**, Louisiana Waterthrush, Torrent Tyrannulet, Green Kingfisher and a pair of American Dippers. After dinner, when we returned to our rooms we found a couple interesting reptiles including the Turnip-tailed Gecko and the rare **Orangebelly Swamp Snake**.



Bird feeder at Cinchona © Ernesto Carman

Day 12. Chilamate, San Emilio, Caño Negro

Before breakfast we birded the gravel road past our lodge and had Mantled Howler-Monkeys and Geoffrey's Spider-Monkeys and the birding could not have been more exciting! Initially we found a small flock with Golden-winged Warbler, Cinnamon Becard, White-ringed Flycatcher and Lesser Greenlet, but then we hit a hotspot at the top of the hill where we found White-fronted Nunbirds, Cinnamon Woodpecker, **Bicolored Hawk** and a male **Snowy Cotinga** displaying in the top of a dead tree! We returned for breakfast, packed the bus and headed north towards Nicaragua and began birding our way into the village of Caño Negro. Our first stop was along flooded cattle pasture which

was teeming with birds including Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks, Blue-winged Teal, Wilson's Snipe, White and Glossy Ibis, Ringed Kingfisher, American Kestrel, Wood Stork, the range-restricted Nicaraguan Seed-Finch and all of a sudden we spotted what seemed to be a white, small aircraft soaring above us, and it was **a Jabiru!** Moments later the large stork came in and landed in the field in front of us, giving us the best views ever.



Jabiru © Ernesto Carman

After all this excitement we finally reached Caño Negro where we checked in to our hotel for a little rest before going for a stroll through the village later that afternoon. We had good views of birds we had seen previously on the tour, such as Masked Tityra and Collared Aracari, but the highlight was certainly an adult and recently fledged young **Black-and-white Owl** roosting in a tree above the road. After dinner we went for a night drive and spotted many **Common Pauraques** sitting in people's yards and great views of a **Striped Owl** perched in a bush in a field.



Birding in Caño Negro © Ernesto Carman



Black-and-white Owl © Ernesto Carman



Black-and-white Owl fledgling © Ernesto Carman

Day 13. Caño Negro Wildlife Refuge, Medio Queso Wetlands, Papa's Place, Arenal Springs

Early in the morning we drove to the dock to get on the boat for our tour in the wildlife refuge. Due to the amount of rains this year the water levels were still very high and birds were not concentrated, but we still had fantastic birding with many egrets and herons, **Russet-naped Wood-Rail**, Purple Gallinule Black-collared Hawk, Gray-headed Dove, Yellow-naped Amazon, Olive-throated Parakeet, **Roseate Spoonbill**, Neotropic Cormorants, Amazon, Ringed and Green Kingfishers, Dickcissel, Spot-breasted and Canebrake Wren and even brief - but good - views of Yellow-breasted Crane! We returned to the hotel for a later breakfast, packed our bags and began our trip out to the Medio Queso Wetlands where we saw another Jabiru, Pinnated Bittern and Lesser Yellow-headed Vulture. From here we drove straight to La Fortuna and for a later lunch at Papa's Place where our friends Gerald and Priscilla served us an amazing home-cooked meal which we ate as we watched toucans, guans and Great Curassows feeding in their back yard!



Caño Negro boat ride g Ernesto Carman

Day 14. Arenal Springs, Peninsula Road, El Castillo

Before breakfast we birded the hotel grounds and saw Northern Barred Woodcreeper, Gray-crowned Yellowthroat and Shiny and Bronzed Cowbirds. After breakfast we drove to the Peninsula Road which runs through Arenal National Park and saw White-throated Magpie-Jay, White-necked Jacobin, Thick-billed Seed-Finch, Bay-headed and Golden-hooded Tanager, Gray-headed Chachalaca, **Keel-billed Motmot**, **Slaty-tailed Trogon**, Smoky-brown and Rufous-winged Woodpecker, Blue-winged and Golden-winged Warbler, Gray-headed Kite, Black-cowled Oriole and Bare-crowned Antbird. After lunch we birded the entrance road to Sky Adventures along El Castillo road and saw Black-headed and Common Tody-Flycatchers, Red-lored Amazons, Dusky-capped Flycatcher, Gray Hawk, Green Honeycreeper and Buff-rumped Warbler.



Keel-billed Motmot © Ernesto Carman



Gray-headed Kite © Ernesto Carman

Day 15. Arenal Observatory Lodge

After breakfast we departed to spend most of the day at Arenal Observatory Lodge. We made a stop along the entrance road and saw a flock of Carmiol's Tanagers, Collared Trogon, Keel-billed Motmot and Orange-billed Sparrow. On the hotel grounds we were fortunate to encounter many fruiting fig

trees which are magnets for many birds. In one tree we had four different species of thrush, Clay-colored, Pale-vented, Mountain and White-throated, allowing for some quality comparisons. In this same tree were some very colorful tanagers as well including Bay-headed, Rufous-winged, Silver-throated, Golden-hooded, Emerald, Scarlet-rumped, Crimson-collared, Summer and Hepatic, contrasting greatly with the afore-mentioned thrushes. We also encountered a Violet-headed Hummingbird building a nest, Golden-crowned Warblers and Streak-crowned Antwreos as well as another **Central-American Eyelash Pit Viper**. After lunch the fruit feeders were refilled and the birds came in with an obvious pecking order from largest to smallest starting with Curassows and Guans, Oropendolas and Aracaris, down to tanagers and euphonias, and all of this was happening with an impressive **Arenal Volcano** in the background! We returned to Arenal Springs for some down time and a short walk near the hotel in the later afternoon where we picked up Yellow-bellied Elaenia and Black-headed Saltator.



Central American Eyelash Pit viper © Ernesto Carman



Arenal Volcano and rainbow © Ernesto Carman

Day 16. Arenal Springs, San Ramón Reserve, San Luis, La Paz, Hotel Robledal

We packed our bags and left Arenal after breakfast to begin working our way back towards the Central Valley, but we had a few planned stops along the way. As we gained elevation and climbed into the foothills we stopped and birded along the entrance road to the San Ramón Reserve, and as soon as we set foot off the bus we began seeing new birds with Russet Antshrike, Black-and-yellow Tanagers and Speckled Tanagers foraging just above the bus. We also spotted Scarlet-thighed Dacnis, Plain Xenops, Emerald Tanager and finally after many attempts we got a visual on Rufous-tailed Jacamar! Our next stop was for bathrooms and feeders at Canopy San Luis where we saw Tawny-capped Euphonia, Chestnut-capped Brush-Finch and Black-headed Nightingale-Thrush before moving on. After lunch we visited Romain Arias's feeding station and had Black-headed Saltator, **Lesson's Motmot**, White-eared Ground-Sparrow and the star of the show, a **Spot-breasted Oriole**. All of a sudden though, every single bird flew into hiding as a Cooper's Hawk flew by and only Montezuma Oropendolas were willing to venture out again. It was time to make the last leg of our journey to Hotel Robledal where we would get our last bit of birding in, finishing off with pleasant views of the resident **Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl**. We gathered one last time for dinner, reminiscing on our favorite moments before we said our farewells and hasta pronto!



Lesson's Motmot © Ernesto Carman



Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl © Ernesto Carman



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[Costa Rica birding tour species list \(Jan 22 - Feb 7, 2025\)](#)