



Costa Rica Birding Trip Report (Mar 6 - 22, 2025)

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Day 1: Hotel Bougainvillea

We started our tour with a brief stroll through the stunning hotel gardens, where we observed some of the Central Valley's typical yard birds, including the Clay-colored Thrush, Rufous-collared Sparrow, Red-billed Pigeon, and Crimson-fronted Parakeet. We were also fortunate to spot resident Mottled Owls roosting among a clump of bamboo.

Day 2: Caldera Mangroves and Dry Forest

After having a delicious traditional breakfast, we started our drive to the Pacific Coast, first stopping near Orotina to bird in some dry forest and farmland habitats. Here we found Harris's Hawk, Ferruginous Pygmy-owl, Turquoise-browed Motmot, Hoffmann's Woodpecker, and Yellow-green Vireo. We also had great looks at a Gray-crowned Yellowthroat! Further along the road we saw Southern Lapwing and Stripe-headed Sparrows. Our next stop was the Caldera Mangrove where we had amazing views of Mangrove Cuckoo. We also saw Banded Wren, Prothonotary Warbler, Black-headed Trogon, Scarlet Macaw, Rose-throated Becard and Cinnamon Hummingbird. Mangrove Vireo was heard by some but never cooperated enough to show itself. We then explored some more mangrove habitat near the town of Tarcoles - here we added even more dry forest and mangrove specialties, such as Boat-billed Heron, Anhinga, Hoffmann's Woodpecker, and three species of Kingfishers: Ringed, Amazon and Green! This was all while Magnificent Frigatebirds soared over our heads.

Day 3: Carara National Park and Tárcoles Boat Tour

We started our third day with a pre-breakfast walk about the resort's lush gardens where we found many amazing birds including great looks at Gray-cowled Wood-rail, Crested Guan and a pair of

nesting Scarlet Macaws. We also saw our first toucans: a small group of Yellow-throated Toucans foraged overhead. Other highlights included Montezuma's Oropendola, Streak-backed Oriole, Giant Cowbird and Masked Tityra. After breakfast, we visited Carara National Park and it certainly lived up to its reputation! Along the trail we had fantastic views of White-whiskered Puffbird, Black-hooded Antshrike, Chestnut-backed Antbird and Rufous Piha, as well as King Vulture, Swallow-tailed Kite, Northern Black-throated Trogon, and incredible views of a pair of very tame Great Tinamou walking next to the trail on our walk out. After lunch, we took a short drive to the Tárcoles River, where we embarked on a boat trip guided by our expert birder and captain, Juan Carlos. This excursion offered fantastic birdwatching and photography opportunities, with a wide variety of species including egrets and herons (e.g., Yellow-crowned Night-Heron and Boat-billed Heron), as well as, Ringed, Amazon, Green, and notably, American Pygmy Kingfishers. We also observed numerous shorebirds like Willets, Whimbrels, Western, Least, and Spotted Sandpipers, Wilson's, Semipalmated, and Collared Plovers, and the striking Roseate Spoonbills. Just before turning back for the dock we had the amazing luck to see a Rufous-necked Wood-rail skulking in the mangroves! We finished our boat tour by watching Lesser Nighthawks foraging over the river at sunset.



Roseate Spoonbill © Blair Dudeck

Day 4: Punta Leona to Osa Peninsula

We started our drive to the Osa Peninsula with a quick stop in the hills near Punta Leona where we picked up good views of King Vulture, Short-tailed Hawks, Dusky Antbird, Blue Dacnis, and Golden-Hooded Tanagers. Just before heading out we finally found our primary target, a beautiful male Long-tailed Manakin! We reached Danta Corcovado Lodge shortly before sunset, where warm welcomes from the friendly staff greeted us. At the same time, we observed dozens of Central American Squirrel Monkeys returning to roost in a palm tree near the restaurant, completing our arrival with a lively encounter.

Day 5: Rincón Bridge and Danta Corcovado

After an early coffee, we drove a short distance to the bridge over the Rincón River. It gave us a

great view of both the rainforest and mangrove, which are key spots for one of our main birds, the endemic Yellow-billed Cotinga. It didn't take long before we started seeing several male and female cotingas in the treetops and flying against the deep blue sky. It was truly amazing!



Yellow-billed Cotinga © Blair Dudeck

But we didn't just see Yellow-billed Cotingas. We also got good views through the scope of a female Turquoise Cotinga! Other highlights included Golden-naped and Red-rumped Woodpeckers, Black-striped Sparrows, Thick-billed Seedfinches, very close Red-lored Parrots, Thick-billed Euphonias, and a pair of Piratic Flycatcher building a nest next to the bridge. And all of this happened before breakfast! After breakfast, we birded one of the trails at the lodge and had Cocoa Woodcreeper, Black-hooded Antshrike, Golden-naped Woodpecker, Chestnut-backed Antbird and several Orange-collared Manakins snapping their wings at a lek. After lunch and a short break we visited the Puerto Jimenez mudflats where we picked up two very sought-after hummingbird species: the Veraguan Mango and the Mangrove hummingbird! We also saw several species of shorebirds including Whimbrel, Ruddy Turnstones and Willet, as well as nice looks at Sandwich Terns flying over the water.

Day 6: Danta Corcovado Lodge, La Gamba

Before breakfast, we walked nearby trails and saw a Black-faced Antthrush at very close range, venturing out on the trail in low light conditions, as well as Little Tinamou and Ruddy Quail-Dove. We then made the drive towards the Panama border where we explored the foothills and lowlands for unique species that are difficult to find anywhere else in Costa Rica. Here we added species such as Gray-lined Hawk, Snowy-bellied Hummingbird, Long-billed Starthroat, Streaked Saltator, Rusty-margined and Fork-tailed Flycatcher. We finished the day by birding along the La Gamba road where we saw Rusty-margined Flycatcher, Shiny and Bronzed Cowbird, Southern Lapwing, Red-breasted Meadowlark.



Black-faced Antthrush © Blair Dudeck

Day 7: Danta Corcovado Lodge, Talamanca Highlands

We walked the trails one more time before breakfast and had better views of the Black-faced Antthrush, Pale-billed Woodpecker, White-necked Puffbird, Orange-billed Sparrow, as well as good views of several Baird's Trogons. After breakfast we left this fantastic spot to make our way to the Talamanca Highlands. We climbed the Talamanca Mountains and enjoyed clear skies and fantastic views of the highest mountains. We stopped for lunch at a local restaurant with a beautiful views and several hummingbird feeders, which meant that we enjoyed a lovely meal and great looks at several hummingbird species: Brown Violetear, Green Hermit, Snowy-bellied Hummingbird and Magenta-throated Woodstar. We then made a stop at one of the highest points in all of Costa Rica: the Cerro Buenavista Communications Towers. Here we had great views of some true high-elevation specialists, including Volcano Junco, Timberline Wren and Large-footed Finch. We finished our day driving down into the San Gerardo Valley to spend our first night at the Toucanet Lodge.



Red-breasted Meadowlark © Blair Dudeck



Volcano Junco © Blair Dudeck

Day 8: San Gerardo Valley, PN Los Quetzales, Paraiso Quetzal

We started our day at first light, birding the road just past our hotel for one of Costa Rica's most iconic birds, the Resplendent Quetzal. It didn't take us long to find this magnificent species as we quickly found several birds foraging in the avocado trees next to the road. In addition to the quetzals

we also saw several other new species including Slate-throated Redstart, Brown-capped Vireo and Spotted Wood-Quail. After a lovely breakfast back at the hotel, we did some quick birding around the grounds and added Spot-crowned Woodcreeper, Red-faced Spinetail, Dark Pewee, Scintillant Hummingbird and a very cooperative Orange-billed Nightingale-thrush. Our next stop was to explore PN Los Quetzales, a truly magical park in the Talamanca Mountains. Here we found many highland specialties such as Silvery-fronted Tapoculo, Ruddy Treerunner, Barred Becard, Black-capped Flycatcher, Yellow-winged Vireo, Mountain and Sooty Thrushes, as well as both Black-and-yellow and Long-tailed Silky-flycatchers! Despite this, the highlight was definitely the displaying male Resplendent Quetzal which repeatedly flew directly over us! Truly an unforgettable experience!



Resplendent Quetzal © Blair Dudeck



Long-tailed Silky-Flycatcher © Blair Dudeck

After lunch we made a stop at the Pariso Quetzal Lodge gardens. Here we were treated to incredible views of all of the highland hummingbird species allowing everyone to fill their camera cards with photos of Lesser Violetear, Talamanca, Fiery-throated and Volcano Hummingbirds! We also got great looks at Ruddy-capped Nightingale-thrush, Long-tailed Silky-flycatchers and the always popular Golden-browed Chlorophonia. A very unexpected find was a pair of Buffy-crowned Wood-partridge skulking around the flower beds.



Talamanca Hummingbird © Blair Dudeck



Fiery-throated Hummingbird © Blair Dudeck



Golden-browed Chlorophonia © Blair Dudeck

Day 9: Parasio, Ujarras, Hotel Quelitales

After breakfast at the Toucanet Lodge, we started our journey back into the central valley. Our first

stop of the day was at a lower elevation in the town square of Paraíso where we saw a roosting Tropical Screech-Owl and a Barn Owl. Here, we also 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 found a real Cabanis's Ground-sparrow in the farmland in the town of Ujarras. After lunch we then made our way to our accommodations for the night, Hotel Quelitales where we birded for the rest of the afternoon and saw a variety of hummingbirds including Green Hermit, Green-crowned Brilliant, Green Thorntail, Violet Sabrewing and White-bellied Mountain-gem. We also had fantastic views of White-eared Ground-sparrow, Sooty-faced Finch and Black Guan. As the sun set, the famous Scaled Antpitta also made a brief appearance.



Tropical Screech-Owl © Blair Dudeck



Black Guan © Blair Dudeck

Day 10: Hotel Quelitales, Guarumo Lodge, La Quinta de Sarapiquí Lodge

Some pre-breakfast birding around the hotel grounds provided even more great birds including a few new hummingbirds such as Green-fronted Lancebill, Black-bellied Hummingbird and Copper-headed Emerald. We were also treated to incredible views of a pair of Sunbitterns and their nest! After Breakfast we started our drive North toward the Caribbean slope of Costa Rica. Our first stop of the day was for lunch and some birding at Guarumo Lodge. The lodge's grounds and feeders provided us with beautiful views of Hoffmann's Woodpecker, White-collared Manakin, Olive-backed Euphonia, Giant Cowbird and Shining Honeycreeper. We finished the day checking into the Sarapiquí Lodge where we still managed a little birding before dark, adding Black-cheeked Woodpecker and Red-throated Ant-tanager.



Sunbittern © Blair Dudeck



Shining Honeycreeper © Blair Dudeck

Day 11: La Selva Biological Station, Puerto Viejo Surrounding Areas

We started the day by birding the entrance road to the La Selva Biological Station, which provided some very good birding, including nice looks at Broad-billed Motmot, Collard Aracari, Golden-olive Woodpecker and our first looks at the often difficult to see Snowy Cotinga! Once the station opened,

we were shown an incredible 78(!) species by our local guide. The highlights were numerous and included Semiplumbeous Hawk, Middle American Screech-owl, Rufous Motmot, Chestnut-coloured Woodpecker and Keel-billed Toucan. However, the biggest highlight of our walk was when we were lucky enough to cross paths with an army ant swarm, which was of course being followed by three species of antbirds: Spotted, Bicoloured, and the absolutely stunning Ocellated Antbird! After several hours of exploring the reserve we had lunch at the station's cafeteria, and while recovering from our tasty meal we were treated to a lovely dessert of extreme close-up views of a male Snowy Cotinga that came in to eat figs in the garden.



Chestnut-colored Woodpecker © Blair Dudeck



Ocellated Antbird © Blair Dudeck



Nicaraguan Seed-finch © Blair Dudeck



Keel-billed Motmot © Blair Dudeck



Snowy Cotinga © Blair Dudeck

After leaving La Selva, we took time to explore the surrounding countryside in search of some local specialty species. The first of these was the critically endangered Great Green Macaw of which we were lucky to find several pairs. Our next target was the ridiculously-proportioned Nicaraguan Seed-finch. We found a pair of these impressive birds in a small wetland where they put on a great display of cutting grass with their oversized beak. Another great day of birding!

Day 12: Virgen del Socorro, Soda Cinchona, Medio Queso Wetland

After a quick breakfast, we departed Sarapiquí Lodge and headed to the nearby foothills of Virgen del Socorro. Here we walked the road down to the river picking up many new species for the tour. We encountered several mixed flocks on the way down the road. The highlights of these flocks were Zeledon's Antbird, Fawn-throated Foliage-gleaner, Bay Wren, Olive-crowned Yellowthroat, Tropical Parula, Scarlet-thighed Tanager and Crimson-collared Tanager. We also had several very nice looks at soaring raptors including Swallow-tailed Kite, Barred Hawk and Short-tailed Hawk. From an old bridge, we watched a pair of American Dippers building their nest on the river bank. We then had lunch at Soda Cinchona whose feeders provided us with great looks at Green Thorntail, Buff-fronted Quail-Dove and Northern Emerald-Toucanet! Once we finished lunch, we started the long drive towards the Nicaraguan border. We finished our days birding at the Medio Queso Wetland, where we immediately found some amazing wetland species including several Pinnated Bitterns, Purple Gallinule, Northern Jacana, Snail Kite and close up views of a Lesser Yellow-headed Vulture.



Pinnated Bittern © Blair Dudeck



Lesser Yellow-headed Vulture © Blair Dudeck

Day 13: Caño Negro, Arenal Observatory Lodge

After an early breakfast we set out on the boat tour of the Caño Negro wetland system. This is an incredibly unique and diverse ecosystem filled with hundreds of waterfowl and other wetland species. We had many exciting species and targets including Jabaru, Sungrebe, Nigaragaun Grackle, Boat-billed Heron and American Pygmy Kingfisher! After this very fulfilling boat tour, we had a quick lunch and then started on our way to Arenal. We arrived at Arenal Observatory Lodge fairly late in the day but still had time to do some birding before dinner. We primarily focused on the lodge's flower gardens; the highlights were Bay-headed and Emerald Tanager, White-necked Jacobin, and Great Curassow.



American Pygmy Kingfisher © Blair Dudeck



Sungrebe © Blair Dudeck

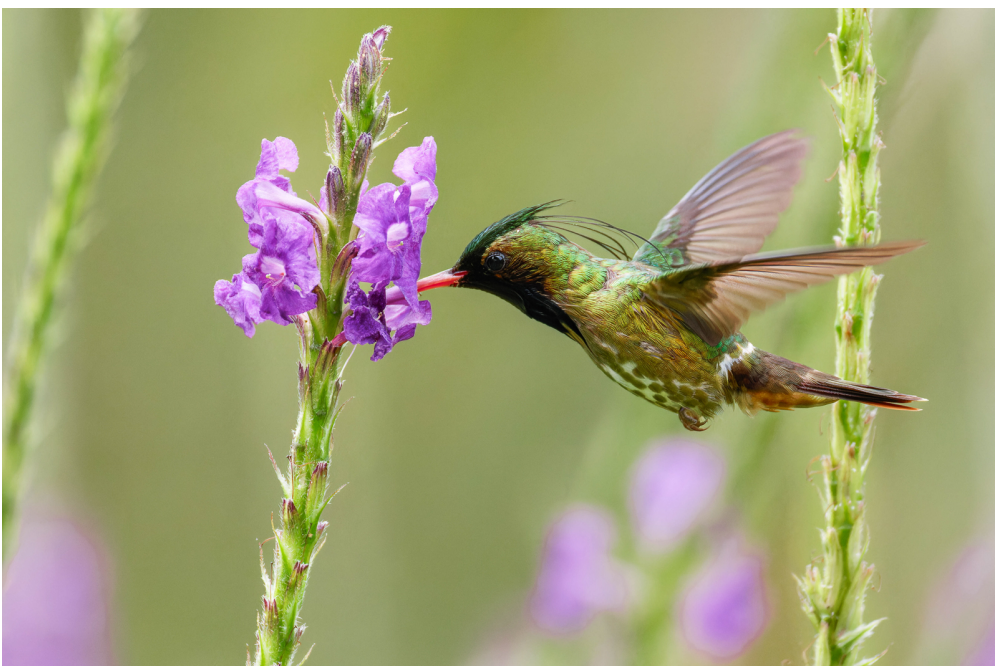
Day 14: Arenal Observatory Lodge

For our first full day in Arenal, we explored the trails and gardens of the Arenal Observatory Lodge. In the morning we took a walk through the garden trails - these trails were bustling with mixed flocks of tanagers as well as other species. Highlights from our morning birding included Broad-

billed Motmot, White-throated Thrush, Chestnut-headed Oropendola, Scarlet-rumped Tanager and Scale-crested Pygmy-Tyrant. After lunch we explored more trails and found even more exciting mixed species flocks. The biggest surprise of these were Western Woodhunter and a stunning White-throated Shrike-Tanager! Before dinner our group spent some time staking out the flower patch that was popular with several Black-crested Coquettes - these fantastic birds put on an amazing display visiting the small purple flowers every few minutes showing off their incredible head adornments!



Keel-billed Toucan © Blair Dudeck



Black-crested Coquette © Blair Dudeck

Day 15: Arenal Observatory Lodge, Arenal Peninsula Trail

We started our last full day of the tour walking the grounds of the Arenal Observatory Lodge. We added some great looks at Dull-mantled Antbird, Thicket Antpitta, Masked Tityra, Sulphur-rumped Flycatcher and Black-and-yellow Tanager. At breakfast the fruit feeders allowed great looks at several Great Curassow, Crested Guan and Yellow-throated Toucans. After breakfast we took a short drive to the Arenal Peninsula Trail, an area known for amazing birding. Due to poor road conditions we had to walk into the tail head, however this ended up being a blessing in disguise because on our walk in we came across another army ant swarm! This time it was followed by four species of antbirds: Spotted, Bicoloured, Ocellated and, new to the tour, Bare-crowned Antbird! After the antswarm, we immediately found another target from this area, the Boat-billed Motmot, with this individual putting on a great show and allowing many good views and photos! After getting to the peninsula trail itself we had many more fun sightings including, Nightingale and Song Wren, as well as even better views of the Bare-crowned Antbird. After lunch and a siesta, we spent one more afternoon around the flower gardens watching the Black-crested Coquettes, Bronze-tailed Plumeleteer, Violet-headed and Rufous-tailed Hummingbirds put on a show until it was time for dinner. After dinner we heard a Black-and-white Owl calling from the nearby forest but, sadly, it never showed itself - still it was another amazing day in this wonderful country!

Day 16: Road to Sky Adventures, San Luis

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. First, we birded the entrance road to Arenal Canopy Tours and got some nice looks at Olive-crowned Yellowthroat and Northern Tropical Pewee. Our last birding stop was at the feeders at Canopy San Luis where we saw Tawny-capped Euphonia, Chestnut-capped Brush-Finch and Black-headed Nightingale-Thrush and the highly sought-after Blue-and-Gold Tanager. We then drove to San Jose and had one final dinner together where we celebrated our amazing tour. Overall, we finished with an astonishing 501 species and made countless memories!



Blue-and-Gold Tanager © Blair Dudeck

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