Eagle-Eye Tours



# Costa Rica Caribbean Trip Report (Oct 14 - 25, 2024)

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**Day 1.** We gathered in the late afternoon at Hotel Bougainvillea for our first birding as a group and the fantastic gardens of this hotel are a perfect place to do so, offering a ample variety of common Costa Rican yard birds including Clay-colored Thrush, Blue-gray Tanager, Tennessee Warbler, Rufous-tailed Hummingbird, Rufous-collared Sparrow, the ubiquitous Crimson-fronted Parakeets and the resident pair of Mottled Owls.



*Blue-gray Tanager © Benny Jacobs-Schwartz*

**Day 2.** After our early morning caffeination we revisited the gardens and bird activity was outstanding, especially with Neotropical migrants.  Mid-October is peak migration and all available habitats such as Bougainvillea's gardens become inundated with many species including Chestnut-sided, Yellow, Blackburnian and Tennessee Warblers, Yellow-bellied, Acadian and Olive-sided Flycatchers, Red-eyed and Yellow-green Vireos and Swainson's Thrush. After breakfast we were met by our driver, Ricardo Gómez, headed east to Cartago and worked our way up the southern slopes of Irazú Volcano, climbing into the cloud forest at about 2800m.a.s.l. In Costa Rica, as you gain elevation species diversity decreases however endemism increases, so many of the birds we would find here we would not find anywhere else. One of our targets at this stop was none other than one of the showiest birds in the world, the Resplendent Quetzal, and we had not even gotten off the bus when our driver, Ricardo, pointed out where three of them were feeding in a wild avocado tree! After indulging in spectacular views of this bird we also found some highlands specialties such as Fiery-throated Hummingbird, Sooty-capped Chlorospingus, Sooty Thrush, Slaty Flowerpiercer, Hairy and Acorn Woodpecker and Black-and-yellow Silky-Flycatcher, as well as Wilson's Warbler and Black-throated Green Warbler. We also ventured to the top of the mountain, climbing above 3200m.a.s.l. and successfully saw Volcano Junco, Timberline Wren and fantastic views of male Volcano Hummingbirds displaying right in front of us! After lunch and a couple more hummingbirds, Lesser Violetear and Talamanca Hummingbird, we drove down to the town of Paraíso where we saw Barn Owl and Tropical Screech-Owl, as well as the 1.8m sculpture of the Cabanis' Ground-Sparrow which was declared the county bird of Paraíso in 2022.



*Resplendent Quetzal © Benny Jacobs-Schwartz*



*Black-and-yellow Silky Flycatcher © Benny Jacobs-Schwartz*

**Day 3.** After an early breakfast we drove to the forested hills near Orosi in the Río Macho Forest Reserve and spent the morning birding this middle-elevation forest. Just as we got off the bus we found several species feeding in a flowering Inga tree, including Coppery-headed Emerald, Purple-throated Mountain-Gem, Stripe-tailed and Black-bellied Hummingbird, Brown-capped Vireo, Slate-throated Redstart and Long-tailed Silky-Flycatcher.  Despite the height of the trees we had good birding throughout the morning including Black Hawk-Eagle, Red-faced Spinetail, Scaly-throated Foliage-Gleaner, Wedge-billed Woodcreeper, Common Chlorospingus, Silver-throated Tanager and Ruddy-capped Nightingale-Thrush. As we left the forest we spotted Giant Cowbird and Southern Lapwing and a Fasciated Tiger-Heron in the river. After a filling lunch we visited Café Cristina, an organic shade-grown coffee farm that takes coffee growing to a new level with a genuine interest in conservation. During the coffee tour we learned about all the steps in the coffee process, from the growing of the plants to the roasting of the beans, with a strong emphasis on the steps the Carman family has taken to ensure the farm functions more like a natural habitat than a coffee plantation, and it was certainly proven by all the birds we saw! We were constantly distracted by Tropical Parula, Dusky-capped Flycatcher, Eastern Wood-Pewee, Black-and-white Warbler, Scarlet Tanager, Masked Tityra and Elegant Euphonia, all proving the point! After we loaded up on coffee we returned to the hotel and relaxed before dinner.




*Fasciated Tiger-Heron © Benny Jacobs-Schwartz*

**Day 4.** Before breakfast we visited the Ujarrás Valley which was formed by old lava flows and a lake 13,000 years ago and is now one of the largest producers of Chayote (*Sechium edule*) in the world. We successfully found the endemic Cabanis' Ground-Sparrow and Green Ibis as well as several species of swifts including White-collared, Chestnut-collared, Vaux's and Lesser Swallow-tailed Swift. During breakfast we had up-close-and-personal views of the near endemic and scrub specialist, the Garden Emerald. After breakfast we packed-up and began making our way down towards the Caribbean lowlands, picking up a few species as we went including Red-breasted Meadowlark, Gartered Trogon, Squirrel Cuckoo, White-browed Gnatcatcher and Golden-hooded Tanager. After lunch we birded the campus of CATIE (Centro Agronómico de Investigación y Enseñanza) and had fantastic views of Osprey, Prothonotary Warbler, Scarlet-thighed Dacnis, Collared Aracaris and Wattled Jacanas. We made the rest of our drive southeast and soon began seeing small kettles of Turkey Vultures and Broad-winged Hawks migrating and we also made the obligate stop at Estero Negro to see Costa Rica's first American Flamingo which had been hanging around for a few weeks and sure enough we saw it!



*Collared Aracari © Benny Jacobs-Schwartz*




*American Flamingo © Benny Jacobs-Schwartz*

**Day 5.** Before breakfast we gathered by the beach and had both Keel-billed and Yellow-throated Toucans foraging in a Cecropia tree, right next to a Brown-throated Three-toed Sloth! Several of the trees around us were covered in Turkey Vultures which had set down to rest for the night and were waiting for the air to warm up to continue migrating. After breakfast by the beach we headed out to find a spot to catch good views of the raptor migration and we did so just a few minutes from the

hotel with a steady stream of Turkey Vultures, Broad-winged Hawks and Swainson's Hawks feeding in to a kettle just above our heads and relatively close since the day was still early providing for fantastic views and photos against the deep blue sky. We continued birding along a gravel road heading to the village of Carbón 1 and had Long-tailed Tyrant, Black-cheeked Woodpecker, Morelet's Seedeater, Yellow-crowned Tyrannulet, Plain-colored Tanager and a seemingly never-ending flow of raptors overhead. The morning also proved to be fantastic for resident raptors as we had excellent views of Double-toothed Kite, Zone-tailed, Roadside, Short-tailed, Gray and White Hawk, Black Hawk-Eagle and King Vulture. After the productive morning and lunch in the town of Cahuita we had some beach time in the afternoon. Later in the evening we headed out to a side road near the hotel and many toucans and a Gray-cheeked Thrush as we waited for nightfall. At dusk we saw both Common and Lesser Nighthawks flying high above the canopy, migrating and feeding as they went and after dark we found an active Hoffman's Two-toed Sloth and Harlequin Tree-Frog and Red-eyed Leaf-frog. After dinner we also had a Central American Tamandua eating Termites in the trees around our rooms.




*Raptor Migration © Benny Jacobs-Schwartz*




*Zone-tailed Hawk © Benny Jacobs-Schwartz*



*Red-eyed Leaf Frog © Benny Jacobs-Schwartz*

**Day 6.** Our prebreakfast walk produced some nice scope views of Mealy and Red-lored Parrots, Great-green Macaws, the minute White-vented Euphonia and Blue-chested Hummingbird. After breakfast we visited Cahuita National Park which preserves an important seasonally flooded forest and has a boardwalk that allows visitors to enjoy this unique forest. At the bathrooms we saw two different species of bats and as we began the boardwalk we encountered a troop of White-faced

Cappuchin Monkeys. We also had the best ever views of White-flanked antwren and Checker-throated Stipplethroats they foraged in the understory mere feet away from us. Other species we saw at Cahuita included Ruddy-tailed Flycatcher Black-crowned Antshrike, Lesser Greenlet, Stripe-breasted Wren, Dot-winged Antwren and a Great Potoo on a day roost. After lunch in Cahuita town we birded along a rural road and found many toucans Cocoa Woodcreeper, Montezuma Oropendola, Squirrel Cuckoo, Gray-headed Chachalaca and our main target for the afternoon, Black-chested Jay! We also had up-close-and-personal views of a troop of Mantled Howler Monkeys before we returned to the hotel for some down time on the beach.



*Great Potoo © Benny Jacobs-Schwartz*




*Checker-throated Stipplethroat © Benny Jacobs-Schwartz*

**Day 7.** Before breakfast we drove to a rural road that crosses nice, forested habitat and the bird activity was very busy. We had very good views of Red-lored and Mealy Parrots again, Great Green Macaws, perched Brown-hooded Parrots, Pale-billed Woodpecker, Long-billed Gnatwren, Blue Dacnis, Black-capped Pygmy-Tyrant, Dusky-faced Tanager, White-collared Manakin, Slaty-tailed Trogon, Double-toothed Kite and Central American Spider Monkeys. After breakfast we packed the bus and began working our way northwest, stopping briefly to see the American Flamingo and we also had Semipalmated and Black-bellied Plovers and a Brown Noddy. After a pit stop which included ample ice-cream, we arrived at our lunch spot at La Hoja Garden near Guápiles which has a great bird feeder setup.  We indulged in views of Collared Aracari, Yellow-throated and Keel-billed Toucans, Green, Shining and Red-legged Honeycreepers, Gray-cheeked Thrush and Veery, Chestnut-headed Oropendola, Black-cowled Oriole and Russet-naped Wood-Rails. We also caught glimpses of a Chuck-will's-widow being mobbed by several resident birds.  From here we drove to Hotel Los Ríos and picked up Yellow-crowned Night-Heron and Fasciated Tiger-Heron at dusk and after dinner we did a short night walk on the grounds and found several species of glass-frogs (Yellow-spotted, Fleischmann's and Granular) and a Nine-banded Armadillo digging around in the lawn.




*Brown Noddy © Benny Jacobs-Schwartz*

**Day 8.** Before breakfast we did a short walk down to the riverside and spotted both Bare-throated and Fasciated Tiger-Heron, Yellow-crowned Night-Heron, Amazon and Ringed Kingfisher and several Louisiana Waterthrushes. After breakfast we drove to the small village of Lomas, near La Alegría and had Broad-billed Motmot, Black-headed Tody-Flycatcher, White-ruffed Manakin, Golden-winged Warbler, Slaty-tailed and Northern Black-throated Trogons as well as many *Empidonax* flycatchers, mainly Yellow-bellied and Alder Flycatchers. For lunch we were served a traditional Caribbean meal by the local women's association (Asociación de Mujeres La Esmeralda), and we were greeted by a flock of about thirty Great-green Macaws feeding in the trees around us, providing the best views and photo opportunities. After lunch we visited Las Brisas Nature Reserve and had a fantastic mixed species flock with Emerald, Speckled, Silver-throated, Golden-hooded, Bay-headed, White-shouldered and Carmiol's Tanagers all feeding right in front of us. Later in the afternoon the rain began setting in and we returned to the hotel.




*Great Green Macaw © Benny Jacobs-Schwartz*

**Day 9.** Early in the morning we had the same parrot parade as the previous morning with Red-lored and White-crowned Parrots, Olive-throated Parakeets and Great Green Macaws heading to their feeding grounds. We also had our usual herons in the river as well as Mangrove, Blue-and-white, Southern Rough-winged and Barn Swallows flying around the parking lot and a Yellow-billed Cuckoo foraging in the surrounding palm trees. After breakfast we packed the bus and off we went to the west, enjoying spectacular views of Braulio Carrillo National Park. We made a pit stop in Sarapiquí at Costa Rica's Best Chocolate to use the restrooms, stock-up on chocolate supplies and see the amazing Green-and-black Poison Dart Frogs. From here we drove up into the foothills to Mirador Cinchona where a small restaurant maintains a spectacular feeding station for both humans and birds, all with an impressive waterfall in the background. The hummingbirds allowed for great views including Coppery-headed Emerald, Green-crowned Brilliant, Green Hermit, Violet Sabrewing, White-bellied Mountain-Gem and Black-bellied Hummingbird, and the fruit feeders were very productive as all the stars showed one by one including Prong-billed and Red-headed Barbet, Northern Emerald Toucanet, Black Guan, Crimson-collared Tanager and Silver-throated Tanager. In a nearby fruiting tree we also spotted Golden-browed Chlorophonia and a Veery. After several hundred photographs and lunch we made our way towards Arenal Observatory Lodge at the base of Arenal Volcano. As we arrived at the entrance to the lodge we spotted a Green-fronted Lancebill catching insects over the splashing waters of the stream and giving us fantastic views.



*Violet Sabrewing © Benny Jacobs-Schwartz*



*Green-fronted Lancebill © Benny Jacobs-Schwartz*

**Day 10.** We met early in the morning on the main deck in front of the restaurant to watch the feeding frenzy at the feeders and large to small the pecking order was evident with Great Curassow, Crested Guan, Gray-headed Chachalaca and Montezuma Oropendola getting first picks, followed by the various tanagers, honeycreepers and euphonias. The fruiting Melastome bush below the feeder was also popular providing amazing views of White-ruffed Manakin, Golden-hooded Tanager, Green

Honeycreeper and the spectacular near-endemic Black-and-yellow Tanager. In the flowering vervaine hedge we had a selection of small hummingbirds including Blue-throated Goldentail, Green Thorntail, Violet-headed Hummingbird and Black-crested Coquette. After breakfast we walked the gardens and the trails and ran into a very busy mixed species flock at the forest edge with Rufous Mourner, Slate-colored Grosbeak, Collared Trogon, Russet Antshrike, Philadelphia and Yellow-throated Vireo, Stripe-breasted Wren, Slaty-capped Flycatcher and Rufous-tailed Jacamar. Further along the trail we spotted a Spotted Antbird and an understory mixed species flock with Streak-crowned Antvireo, Sulphur-rumped Flycatcher and Golden-crowned Warbler.  We also found a couple of **Pygmy Fruit-eating Bats (*Artibeus phaeotis*)** under a Philodendron leaf and about a dozen flowering orchids on the tree trunks. After lunch we drove to the peninsula road and had great activity with many previously seen birds, but a batch of new trip birds such as Great Antshrike, Yellow-billed Cacique, White-winged Becard, better views of Broad-billed Motmot and Rufous-tailed Jacamar and a very obliging Broad-winged Hawk. After a nice evening rain and a fulfilling meal, we ventured out for a night walk and saw many frogs including Red-eyed Leaf-Frog, Swamp Tree-Frog, Brilliant Forest Frog, Wet Forest Toad, Cane Toad and several gorgeous snakes including Costa Rican Coral Snake, Northern Cat-eyed Snake and a golden morph of the Eyelash Pit-viper. We also encountered a group of Collared Peccaries and a Spectacled Owl calling in the canopy.



*Crested Guan © Benny Jacobs-Schwartz*



*Black-and-yellow Tanager © Benny Jacobs-Schwartz*



*Costa Rican Coral Snake © Benny Jacobs-Schwartz*

**Day 11.** Before breakfast we birded from the lake-view rooms and had Southern Rough-winged Swallow, Orange-chinned Parakeets, Masked Tityra, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Yellow-bellied Elaenia, Golden-olive Woodpecker and Buff-rumped Warbler before heading to breakfast and packing the bus for one last time. We worked our way up into the middle elevations once again and reached San Luis where we birded the fruit feeders and had our usual rainbow of tanagers including Emerald, Silver-

throated, Crimson-collared and Scarlet-rumped Tanager, Black-cheeked Woodpecker, Tawny-capped Euphonia and just before we were due to leave the star of these feeders, the near endemic Blue-and-gold Tanager, showed briefly. We made our way to the Central Valley and arrived at Hotel Robledal before the worst of the traffic and in time for some late afternoon birding. Here we finished with Inca Dove, Spot-breasted Oriole, Lineated and Hoffman's Woodpeckers, Stripe-headed Sparrow and Scrub Euphonia.



*Emerald Tanager © Benny Jacobs-Schwartz*




*Blue-and-gold Tanager © Benny Jacobs-Schwartz*

## Costa Rica Caribbean Mountains to Coast species list (Oct 14 - 25, 2024)