Eagle-Eye Tours



Costa Rica Caribbean Trip Report (Oct 2023)

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We began our tour at Hotel Bougainvillea, in the western part of the Central Valley, where we birded the gardens and had a great selection of the common yard birds of central Costa Rica, including Lesson's Motmot, Red-billed Pigeon, Rufous-tailed Hummingbird, White-winged Dove and Blue-and-white Swallow among others. We then worked our way up the slopes of Irazú Volcano where we had great weather and found many of the highland endemics including Flame-throated Warbler, Yellow-winged Vireo, Sooty and Mountain Thrush, Hairy Woodpecker, Black-and-yellow Silky-Flycatcher, Black-capped Flycatcher, Fiery-throated, Volcano and Talamanca Hummingbirds and Volcano Junco.



Volcano Junco

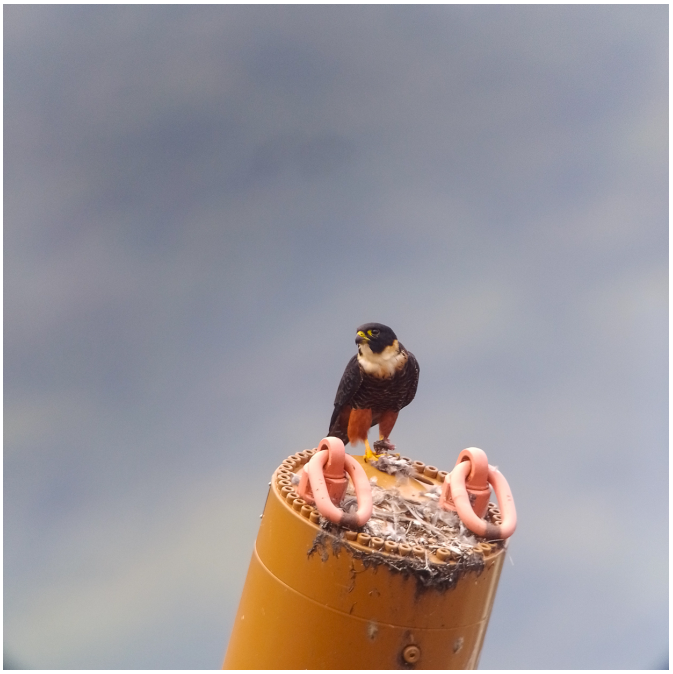


Group on Irazu

Our next destination was Hotel Quelitales and the surrounding areas of Cachí and Orosi, a diverse area with a mosaic of forest, scrub and different kinds of agriculture. We birded the middle elevation forests of Río Macho and saw several characteristic cloud forest species such as Common Chlorospingus, Violet Sabrewing, Northern Emerald Toucanet, Red-headed Barbet and the uncommon Black-and-white Becard. We also visited Finca Cristina and had a tour of how organic, shade-grown coffee should be grown. After tasting the fantastic coffee we drove a short distance to another coffee farm where we searched for Cabanis' Ground-Sparrow and after walking the gravel side-road for a while we ended up seeing several individuals of this endemic. From Quelitales we drove towards the south Caribbean region where the mountains come close to the coast and form a funnel point for many migrants, and this is precisely why we were heading there. As we neared Limón we encountered our first small kettles of raptors which we enjoyed from the roadside. The next morning we were accompanied at breakfast by Russet-naped Wood-Rails and Tawny-crested Tanagers and the roar of the Mantled Howler Monkeys. We visited the Carbón area and very soon we began seeing the stream of Turkey Vultures, Mississippi Kites, Broad-winged Hawks, Osprey and Peregrine Falcons moving nonstop overhead! The conditions were favorable for diurnal migration however it was a bit on the hot side and bird activity was rather slow, though we did get good views of White-vented Euphonia, Lesser Greenlet, American Redstart and Shinning Honeycreeper. After a filling lunch in the small village of Cahuita we birded another side road in the later afternoon where we spotted Olive-sided Flycatcher, Variable Seedeater, Thick-billed Seed-Finch, Red-lored and Mealy Parrots and Summer Tanager.



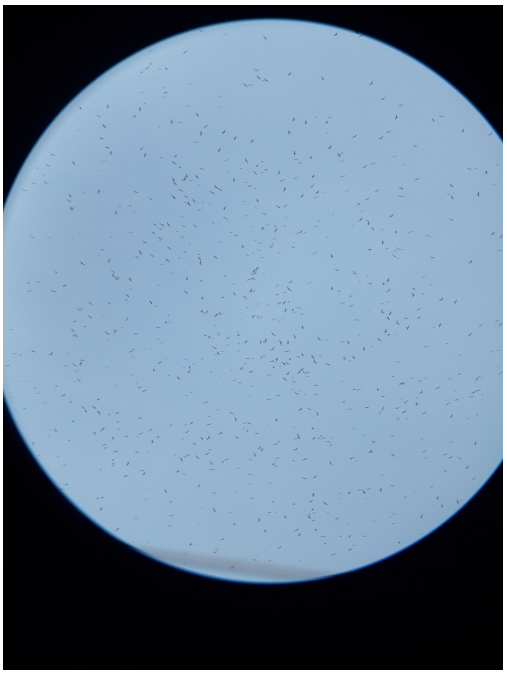
Birding on the Caribbean coast



Bat Falcon

After our early morning walk and breakfast we drove the short distance to Cahuita National Park which has an amazing boardwalk through the seasonally flooded lowland forest with gigantic trees towering overhead. As we began our walk one of the first birds we spotted was an immature male Cerulean Warbler foraging just over the boardwalk! This was certainly not a bad start, but we also picked up White-whiskered Puffbird, Black-crowned Antshrike, Checker-throated Stipplethroat,

Ruddy-tailed Flycatcher, White-flanked Antwren and Black-striped Woodcreeper. We had the opportunity to watch a mixed species flock moving through the understory and studying how every species was exploiting a different niche. Once again we had lunch in Cahuita and after a quick siesta we birded along the road to Punta Uva and Manzanillo where we delighted ourselves watching several species bathing in a creek down below us, including Ochre-bellied Flycatcher, Stripe-breasted Wren, Spotted Sandpiper, Northern Waterthrush and a bright Prothonotary Warbler. The following day we did our routine pre-breakfast walk and had quite an active morning, but it was especially evident that many of the species that migrate during the day were beginning to move through fairly heavily including Cliff, Barn and Bank Swallow as well as Purple Martin. After breakfast and packing the bus we began driving back up along the coast but it was not long before we had to stop along the roadside because the gates to the raptor migration had apparently broken open as the sky filled up with an absolutely insane number of Turkey Vultures and Broad-winged Hawks, minimizing the numbers we had seen a couple days ago! After about 30 minutes of observation we estimated a total of about twenty thousand raptors had gone by. But this was just the beginning because as we drove north the stream was continuous for a very long distance. This spectacle is truly one of the highlights of this tour and we hit gold!



Thousands of Hawks

After stopping for some shorebirds at the mouth of a couple rivers we made our way to our next destination near Siquirres, more specifically Las Brisas Nature Reserve. We stopped outside the gates of the reserve to have a quick lunch with local baked goods we had bought in Cahuita and as we ate lunch we heard the unique, loud call of the Great-green Macaws! We finished our lunch and began searching for the source of the call and we found several individuals perched feeding from a sandbox tree and we had fantastic views. With both our bellies and eyes satisfied we drove a short distance to our hotel in time to settle in our rooms and take a quick walk in the later afternoon which yielded species such as Lesser Swallow-tailed Swift, Fasciated Tiger-Heron, Yellow-crowned Nightheron, Ringed Kingfisher, Broad-billed Motmot and Rufous Motmot.



Great Green Macaw



Broad-billed Motmot



Watching Macaws

The following day we took a packed breakfast with us and headed back up to Las Brisas Nature Reserve and were delighted with fantastic views of many hummingbirds including Bronze-tailed Plumeleteer, Snowcap, Cinnamon and Black-and-white Becard, Green Kingfisher, Rufous Mourner, Black-throated Wren, Black Hawk-Eagle and a gorgeous selection of Tanagers as well. During the morning we had over a hundred species! After a filling picnic lunch we drove back down to the hotel for a siesta and early dinner in preparation for our night walk at Las Brisas. It rained fairly hard throughout the afternoon, but the rain stopped as soon as we reached the reserve which was perfect to look for frogs, of which we saw many different species, some of which are endangered such as the Lemur Leaf-Frog. We also had great views of a Great Potoo perched on top of a dead tree!



Great Potoo



Crested Owl

Early the next morning our walk was very productive with many species of swifts and swallows as well as great views of a Sunbittern in one of the two rivers that border the lodge. After breakfast we packed the bus and continued our drive to Arenal Observatory Lodge, but we did make a few stops along the way and found Olive-crowned Yellowthroat, Green Ibis, Purple-crowned Fairy, White-collared Manakin and the unique, fluffy-crested Chestnut-colored Woodpecker!



Sunbittern

After having lunch in La Fortuna we arrived at our hotel which has one of the most jaw-dropping settings in the country with the Arenal Volcano right in front of the deck! Our first birding from the main deck was very productive with birds such as Yellow-throated and Keel-billed Toucan, Collared Aracari, Lineated and Black-cheeked Woodpecker, Crested Guan and Great Curassow. Just before dinner we closed our day with great views of the resident Black-and-white Owl in the parking lot!



Yellow-throated Toucan



Arenal Observatory Lodge



Birding in Arenal



Keel-billed Toucan

Early the next morning the bird feeders were as busy as the breakfast buffet! Tanagers, Euphonias and Honeycreepers constantly trying to find a spot between the larger Curassows, Guans and Oropendolas. After breakfast we drove down to the Old Dam Road to spend the rest of the morning and we got fantastic views of some really awesome birds such as Fasciated Antshrike, Sulphur-rumped Flycatcher, Fasciated Antshrike, Rufous-winged Woodpecker, many Chestnut-sided Warblers, Keel-billed Motmot and a very large group of White-nosed Coatis feeding at all levels of the forest. After lunch we had a nice review of many birds we had seen previously plus a few new ones such as Long-billed Starthroat and Crimson-collared Tanager.



Long-billed Starthroat

Our final morning of birding was very productive despite the on and off showers. Some of the true highlights included an adult male Snowcap, Black-crested Coquette, Blue-throated Goldentail, Scaly-breasted Hummingbird, both Pale-billed and Lineated Woodpecker, Buff-rumped Warbler, White-breasted Wood-Wren and amazing scope views of Streak-crowned Antvireo. We headed out of Arenal after lunch and began working our way up the Central Volcanic Range where we made a stop at the Cinchona feeders where we saw Green-crowned Brilliant, Violet Sabrewing, Green Hermit, Prong-billed Barbets, Silver-throated Tanager, Baltimore Oriole and a Tawny-throated Leaftosser feeding on the ground just below the observation deck! From here we went over the ridge top and dropped down to Hotel El Robledal near the airport.



Cinchona



Lunch