Eagle-Eye Tours



Costa Rica: Mountains to Caribbean Trip Report 2022

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October 1, 2022 Hotel Bougainvillea, Heredia At 4:00p.m. we gathered in the hotel lobby for our first rendezvous, but the normal afternoon rain kept us inside so we took advantage of the moment to study the large map at the hotel entrance to better understand the route we would be taking during the tour. **October 2, 2022 Hotel Bougainvillea to Hotel Quelitales** At 6:00 a.m. we met in the astounding hotel gardens which form a true oasis within the city and immediately started seeing some of Costa Rica's most widespread species such as Rufous-tailed Hummingbird, Rufous-collared Sparrow, Clay-colored Thrush and Blue-and-white Swallow, but we also had fantastic views of White-tailed Kite, Lesson's Motmot, Rufous-browed Peppershrike and Red-billed Pigeon. Being October the gardens were flooded with Neotropical migrants and Red-eyed Vireos were virtually everywhere we looked! Along with the vireos, though, were Yellow, Blackburnian, Chestnut-sided and Tennessee Warblers, Swainson's Thrush, Baltimore Orioles, Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, Eastern Wood-Pewees and even an Olive-sided Flycatcher. To finish off our early morning walk we had great scope views of a Mottled Owl roosting in a cluster of bamboo. After breakfast we met Jorge León, our driver, and headed out to the eastern side of the Central Valley making our first stop in Coris, an area of open, grassy fields and farmland. We had fantastic views of Eastern Meadowlark, Ruddy Ground-Dove, Tropical Mockingbird, Great-tailed Grackle and extended scope views of one of our main targets for this stop, the small and skulky Grass Wren! After a quick bathroom stop we drove up into the Talamanca Mountains to our lunch stop, **Casa Tangara Dowii (Lunch and birding at Casa Dowii)** which not only feeds humans, they also feed birds so we were well entertained for our meal. Silver-throated Tanagers, Common Chlorospingus, Chestnut-capped Brushfinch, Spotted Barbtail, Purple-throated Mountain-Gem, Ruddy-capped Nightingale-Thrush, Collared Redstart and even a male Brewster's Warbler, a Blue-winged/Golden-winged Warbler hybrid. However one of the species we most wanted to see here, Buffy-crowned Wood-Partridge, had not shown yet.

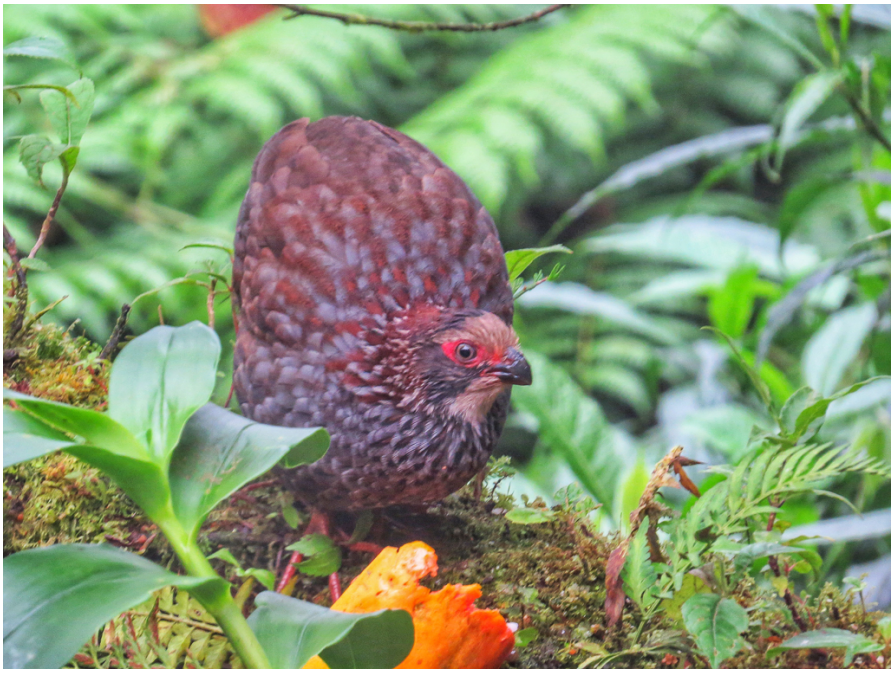


Lunch at Casa Dowii



Birding at Casa Dowii

We enjoyed our delicious traditional Costa Rican lunch made by the owner, Sergio, and prepared to get on the road again. Once we were all on the bus, Sergio came running out of the house and waving to us: "The partridges are here! Hurry!". We went back inside and sure enough the family of four **Buffy-crowned Wood-Partridges** were at the feeder and gave us walk-away views from every angle.



Buffy-crowned Wood Partridge © E Carman

Once we were satisfied, we got back on the bus and drove back down into the Central Valley and made a stop in the town of Paraíso where we saw **Crimson-fronted Parakeets** and two species of owl that have lived in this park for decades, **Tropical Screech-Owl** and Barn Owl. From here we drove to Hotel Quelitales in time to relax in the late afternoon, have dinner and get to bed for a good night's rest.



Crimson-fronted Parakeet © E Carman



Tropical Screech Owl © E Carman

October 3, 2022 Hotel Quelitales, Río Macho, Irazú Volcano At dawn we gathered to try to see a very secretive bird called the Scaled Antpitta which sometimes shows at the forest edge behind the lodge. This morning it did not want to show, but fortunately there were many other birds to see! We birded at the base of a small waterfall surrounded by amazing middle elevation, oak-elm forests covering the steep mountainsides and soon had great views of several hummingbirds including the massive Violet Sabrewing, Lesser Violetear, Green-crowned Brilliant and the Green-fronted Lancebill, which spends much of its time close to fast flowing mountain streams where it catches tiny gnats over the water. Before going to breakfast we also saw Green Honeycreeper, Sooty-faced Finch, Slate-throated Redstart, **Keel-billed Toucan** and a Louisiana Waterthrush looking for aquatic insects on the vertical face of the waterfall.



Keel-billed Toucan © E Carman

After a hearty breakfast, we drove to Río Macho, just outside the town of Orosi, to bird along a road that leads through a gorgeous forest. We soon found a mixed species flock which kept us busy for over an hour! Red-headed and Prong-billed Barbets, Spotted, Olivaceous and Wedge-billed Woodcreepers, Slaty Antwren, Streaked Xenops, Red-faced Spinetail, Black-and-white and Golden-winged Warblers, Tropical Parula and White-winged Tanagers all provided fantastic views. On our way to lunch we made a brief stop at a pasture and found Southern Lapwings, Northern Jacanas, Groove-billed Ani and Giant Cowbird. After lunch in Orosi, we drove up the slopes of Costa Rica's highest volcano, Irazú Volcano, to try for some of the highland endemics. The temperature dropped as we went up in elevation and at our first stop we found Mourning Dove, Black-capped Flycatcher, Slaty Flowerpiercer, Large-footed Finch, Fiery-throated Hummingbird, Wilson's Warbler, Sooty Thrush, Black-cheeked Warbler and Spot-crowned Woodcreeper. As we birded along the roadside under the massive oak trees, coyotes began howling on the hillsides as the sky began reddening. Part of our plan was to stay into dusk for some night birding and as we enjoyed a breathtaking sunset, we heard one of the most elusive owls in the Western Hemisphere, the Unspotted Saw-whet Owl. We did get fantastic views of a Dusky Nightjar along the roadside before we drove back to the hotel for dinner. **October 4, 2022 Hotel Quelitales, Café Cristina, Cariblue** Before breakfast we walked back to the waterfall and once again found a great assortment of birds, Golden-olive Woodpecker, Yellow-throated Euphonia, White-eared Ground-Sparrow, Black-bellied Hummingbird, Swainson's Thrush and incredible scope views of the elusive Middle American Leaftosser. After breakfast we headed out and made a brief stop in some farmland and had brief views of the endemic Cabanis's Ground-Sparrow and Hook-billed Kite which feeds exclusively on land snails. Our next stop was at Café Cristina, an organic, shade-grown coffee farm owned by Ernesto's family. Here we walked through the whole coffee process from start to end, with a strong emphasis on the efforts made to encourage biodiversity on the farm. We then began our drive towards the south Caribbean and arrived at our hotel at dusk. **October 5, 2022 Puerto Viejo, Cahuita, Cariblue** One of the highlights of this tour is the opportunity to see massive bird migration and the south Caribbean of Costa Rica is the best place for this as the country's geography creates a major bottleneck, concentrating millions of birds in a very small area. The swallows were the best evidence of this as there was an almost constant stream of Barn, Cliff and Bank Swallows flying overhead. Before

breakfast we also saw White-crowned Parrot, Tennessee Warbler and Prothonotary Warbler, as well as the artificial-looking Green-and-black Poison Dart-Frog and **Strawberry Poison Dart-Frog**.



Strawberry Poison Dart Frog

After breakfast we drove to a nearby side-road and found Scarlet-rumped Cacique, Purple-throated Fruitcrow, Black-striped Woodcreeper, White-shouldered Tanager and hundreds of Barn, Bank and Cliff swallows, but we also had our first taste of the raptor migration this area of Costa Rica is famous for. Hundreds of Turkey Vultures and Mississippi Kites began circling overhead, as thousands of Broad-winged Hawks filled the sky! We also saw a few Peregrine Falcons, Merlin and Osprey mixed in with the rest of the flock. After lunch we had a bit of down time at the lodge before heading back out in the afternoon. This time we were joined by Julio Madriz, the principal hawk counter at the Kéköldi Hawkwatch which is the second site worldwide which counts the most raptors. Julio explained to us all the details about how the hawkwatch functions and its importance for conservation. We birded along a side road where we found Variable Seedeaters and Olive-crowned Yellowthroats, but the best sighting was certainly two sloths in a small tree pointed out to us by a local. But not only were there two sloths, it was one of each species, **Hoffman's Two-toed Sloth and Brown-throated Three-toed Sloth**!!! Literally a two for the price of one deal.



Hoffman's Two-toed Sloth and Brown-throated Three-toed Sloth © E Carman

October 6, 2022 Cahuita National Park, Cariblue On our pre-breakfast walk to the beach we found Gray-headed Chachalaca, Pale-vented Pigeon, Squirrel Cuckoo, Gray-cowled Wood-Rail, Chestnut-backed Antbird, Northern Waterthrush, Tawny-crested Tanagers and large flocks of Eastern Kingbirds and Dickcissels migrating overhead. After breakfast we drove to Cahuita National Park to walk along a trail which is composed of a boardwalk through seasonally flooded tropical rainforest. We had a great morning walking along this trail under the massive trees and Mantled Howler Monkeys, getting great views of White-flanked Antwren, Cocoa Woodcreeper, White-collared Manakin, Yellow-bellied and Acadian Flycatchers, Ruddy-tailed Flycatcher, Stripe-breasted and Bay Wren, as well as Summer and Scarlet Tanagers. We also saw two species of Blue Morpho butterflies (***Morpho helenor*** and *Morpho cypris*) glowing blue as they glided through the understory.



Blue Morpho © E Carman

After a hearty lunch in the small town of Cahuita we walked to a small creek at the park entrance and found several interesting species such as Yellow-crowned Night-Heron, Boat-billed Heron and Yellow-headed Caracara, but by far the best sighting was an **Agami Heron**, one of the most elusive herons in the Americas!



Agami Heron © E Carman

We headed back to the lodge for a siesta followed by a short walk to the beach and found Black-crowned Antshrike, Long-billed Gnatwren, Gray-capped and Social Flycatcher, Red-throated Ant-

Tanager and Scarlet-rumped Tanager. Jorge also pointed out a young Two-toed Sloth hanging casually over the parking lot.



Two-toed Sloth © E Carman

October 7, 2022 Cariblue, Limón, Hotel Los Ríos Our early **morning beach birding** gave us a review of birds we had seen the previous mornings and we added a few species along the beach such as Brown Pelican, Neotropic Cormorant, Great-blue Heron and Whimbrel.



Beach Birding © E Carman

After breakfast we packed-up and began our drive back up the coast towards Guápiles, but we had not gone far when we began seeing large kettles of raptors circling low over the trees, trying to make headway in their migration despite the cloudy, cool weather. **We stood on the roadside in awe** as the sky literally began to crawl with **Broad-winged Hawks**, Turkey Vultures and Mississippi Kites. In a matter of 40 minutes we saw over 15,000 raptors swarm through, a number we confirmed with Julio at the hawkwatch!



Broad-winged Hawk migration © E Carman



Watching raptor migration © E Carman

The rain began to come down and migration halted so we got back on the bus and made our way again. We did stop at a few estuaries to look for shorebirds and found Semipalmated, Collared and Black-bellied Plover, Sanderling, Spotted Sandpiper, Ruddy Turnstone and Willet. By mid-afternoon we reached Los Ríos, our hotel for the next two nights and a quick walk around the grounds proved quite productive as we found **Fasciated Tiger-Heron**, Mangrove Swallow, Crested Caracara, Little Blue-Heron and a mixed flock of swifts including Chestnut-collared, Spot-fronted, Gray-rumped and Lesser Swallow-tailed Swift.



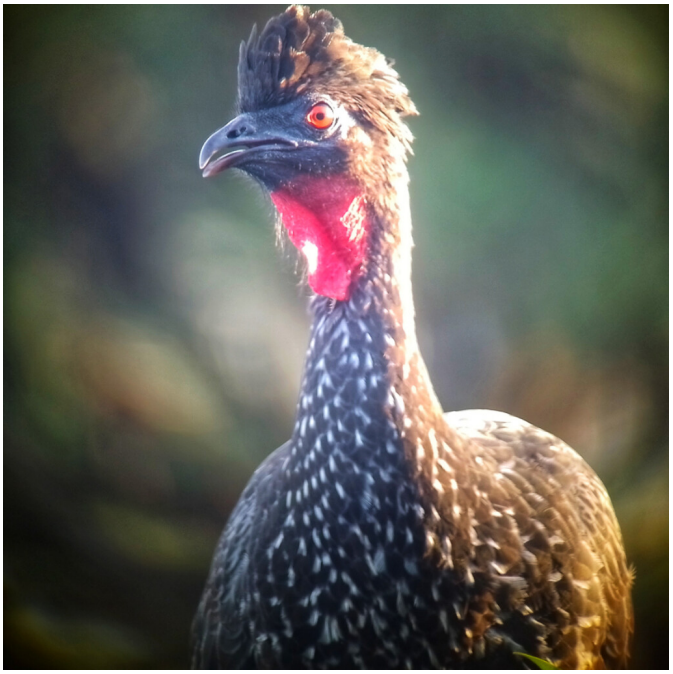
Fasciated Tiger Heron © E Carman

October 8, 2022 Las Brisas Nature Reserve Our pre-breakfast walk was productive with a review of the previous afternoon plus **Amazon Kingfisher**s, Louisiana Waterthrush and the critically endangered Great-green Macaws flying overhead.



Amazon Kingfisher

After breakfast we drove a short distance to Las Brisas Nature Reserve, a private reserve dedicated to research and conservation located in one of the most important stopover sites for Neotropical migrants in Costa Rica. We very quickly began seeing new species including Golden-hooded, Emerald, Bay-headed and Speckled Tanagers, Red-eyed and Yellow-green Vireos, Crowned Woodnymph, Violet-headed Hummingbird, Keel-billed Toucan, **Crested Guan**, White-crowned and Brown-hooded Parrots, Olive-throated and Orange-chinned Parakeets, Russet Antshrike and a whole load of other migratory species including Bay-breasted, Blackburnian and Canada Warblers.



Crested Guan © E Carman

We enjoyed a picnic lunch as we continued birding and had good views of a South American Snapping Turtle in the nearby pond. Before reaching our hotel we saw Red-lored Parrots, Groove-billed Anis, Blue-gray and Palm Tanagers and the constant flow of migratory swallows. **October 9, 2022 Las Brisas Nature Reserve, Arenal Observatory Lodge** We walked around the hotel grounds again scanning the boulders in the rocky, mountain stream hoping to find a Sunbittern and we were quickly rewarded with fantastic views of an individual foraging along the rocky shores. We also saw Buff-rumped Warblers, Northern Waterthrush and a **Nine-banded Armadillo** casually digging around the grounds searching for grubs and earthworms.



Nine-banded Armadillo © E Carman

After breakfast we drove back to Las Brisas Nature Reserve, but this time we visited the lower elevations of the property. The first birds we saw when we got out of the bus were four **Great-green Macaws** perched in the treetops as a Bat Falcon circled overhead!



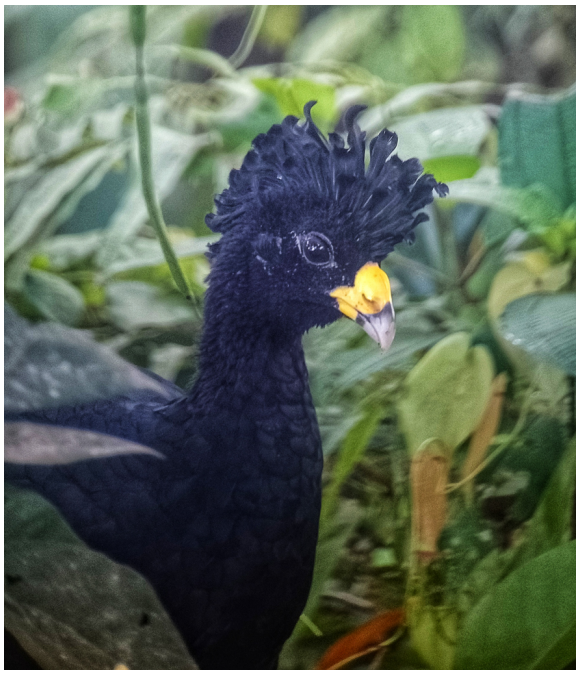
Great Green Macaw © E Carman

We also saw Little Blue-Heron, Green Ibis, Green Kingfisher, Broad-billed Motmot, Plain-brown Woodcreeper, Golden-winged Warbler, Acadian Flycatcher, Purple-throated Fruitcrow and, after a fair bit of searching, a Central American Pygmy-Owl calling from a dense treetop. As we left Las Brisas to head further inland towards Arenal, a White Hawk saw us on our way, perched in a dead tree overlooking the pineapple plantations. As we neared the town of La Fortuna the sky cleared and the diagnostic cone of **Arenal Volcano showed itself impressively over the northern lowlands**. Nestled at the base of the volcano in an unbeatable scenario, we arrived at Arenal Observatory Lodge in the mid-afternoon and settled into our rooms.



Arenal in the distance

October 10, 2022 Arenal Observatory Lodge Early in the morning we met on the deck in front of the restaurant and bird activity was tremendous! **Great Curassows** and Crested Guans walked on the ground as Collared Aracaris, Keel-billed Toucans, tanagers and honeycreepers perched in the trees around us and visited the fruit feeders and Red-lored, White-fronted and Brown-hooded Parrots flew overhead. And all **of this was going on with the imposing Arenal Volcano as a background**!



Great Curassow © E Carman



Birding at Arenal Observatory Lodge

After breakfast we went for a walk around the massive grounds and one of the nearby, paved trails and found a great diversity of birds. A pair of Red-lored Parrots were checking out a potential nesting cavity in the same tree where Montezuma Oropendolas had their colony of woven, hanging nests and in the flowering vervaine hedges we had great views of several new hummingbirds including Scaly-breasted Hummingbird, **Bronze-tailed Plumeleteer**, Snowcap, Black-crested Coquette and Blue-throated Goldentail.



Bronze-tailed Plumeleteer © E Carman

As we entered the forest we encountered a large group of White-nosed Coatis feeding at all levels from the ground up into the trees and at this same spot was a large mixed species flock of birds where we had, among many other species, **Collared Trogon**, Mistletoe Tyrannulet, Streak-headed Woodcreeper, tanagers, warblers, vireos, flycatchers and Scarlet-thighed Dacnis.



Collared Trogon © E Carman

In a bush on the side of the trail we saw three different species of euphonias, Tawny-capped, Yellow-throated and Olive-backed, making quite a scandal which almost certainly indicates the presence of a predator, and sure enough, curled up on a leaf was a small **Eye-lash Pitviper**!



Eyelash Pit-viper © E Carman

After lunch and a siesta we met again for some birding just outside of the rooms overlooking lake Arenal and saw Yellow-throated Toucan, Black-cheeked Woodpecker, Southern Rough-winged Swallow, **Rufous-tailed Jacamar**, Red-legged Honeycreeper, Yellow-crowned Euphonia and

Crimson-collared Tanager among many other previously seen species.



Rufous-tailed Jacamar © E Carman



Crimson-collared Tanager © E Carman

October 11, 2022 Arenal Observatory Lodge, Cinchona Feeders and Hotel Robledal We met again on the deck before breakfast, but due to rain we went to the second story, roofed viewing platform overlooking the feeders. We saw the usual Green and Red-legged Honeycreepers, Black-

striped Sparrow, Scarlet-thighed Dacnis, Emerald and Golden-hooded Tanagers, Montezuma Oropendola, but all of the sudden everything flew away as an Ornate Hawk-Eagle cruised through below us, possibly looking for its breakfast! After our own breakfast we loaded the bus and off we went to do some birding intermittently when the rain let up. Along the road known as the peninsula road which goes through Arenal National Park, we found White-throated Magpie-Jays, Gartered Trogon, Long-tailed Tyrant, Black-cowled Oriole and Tropical Pewee. We continued making our way towards the Central Volcanic Range and began climbing into the foothills. We made a brief stop at a stream just before lunch and had great views of the tiny Torrent Tyrannulet, its size contrasting greatly with the rushing torrents of water. We reached our lunch spot in Cinchona, **overlooking the San Fernando waterfall** and literally had lunch with the birds as this small roadside restaurant has both fruit and hummingbird feeders. At the hummingbird feeders we saw Violet Sabrewing, Green Hermit, Green-crowned Brilliant and the Costa Rican endemic Coppery-headed Emerald.



San Fernando Waterfall © E Carman

At the fruit feeders we saw Northern Emerald Toucanet, both Red-headed and **Prong-billed Barbets**, Baltimore Oriole, Silver-throated, Crimson-collared and Scarlet-rumped Tanager. The best way to have lunch!



Prong-billed Barbet © E Carman

We continued our way up the slopes of Poás Volcano and made one last stop on the continental divide to watch hummingbirds visiting a flowering hedge of vervaine and saw Lesser Violetear, Stripe-tailed Hummingbird, Blue-vented Hummingbird, Scintillant Hummingbird and the rose-throated form of Volcano Hummingbird. From here it was not far to our last hotel, Hotel Robledal and as we arrived the rain set in for the evening. Although most people shy away from Costa Rica at this time of year because it is the rainy season, this tour comes to show the Caribbean slope is actually quite stable during October! Even with a hurricane cruising through just north of the country during part of the tour we really did not miss any birding due to rain and the little rain we had provided an augmented experience during the massive raptor migration. Our trip total of 281 species had a good representation of tropical families and a true highlight for all of us on this tour was the sheer numbers of birds actively migrating; a sky-full of raptors is certainly a lifetime experience!