



Costa Rica Sampler Trip Report (Feb 1 - 12, 2026)

[Link: Costa Rica Sampler Trip Report \(Feb 1 - 12, 2026\)](#)

Day 1. Hotel Bougainvillea

We gathered in the late afternoon for our first group birding in the spectacular gardens of Hotel Bougainvillea where we saw a few of the common yard birds of Costa Rica's Central Valley including Crimson-fronted Parakeet, Blue-and-white Swallow, Great Kiskadee and the resident Mottled Owls that roost in the large bamboo clump. After birding we had our briefing and dinner before going to bed to get prepared for our first full day of birding.



Crimson-fronted Parakeet © Ernesto Carman

Day 2. Caldera Mangroves, Guácimo Road, Tárcoles Birding Hotel, Hotel Punta Leona

To avoid traffic and heat we departed Bougainvillea bright and early after a quick cup of coffee and drove west to the Pacific coast with our first stop being the Caldera mangroves. After a satisfying picnic breakfast we began seeing new birds very quickly including Orange-chinned and Orange-fronted Parakeets, **Turquoise-browed Motmot**, Streaked Flycatcher, Baltimore Oriole, Cinnamon, Blue-vented and Scaly-breasted Hummingbird, Common Ground-Dove and Inca Dove, Gray Hawk, Short-tailed Hawk, White-lored Gnatcatcher.



As the temperature began to soar we boarded the air conditioned bus and went birding along the Guácimo Road where we saw Green-breasted Mango, Streak-headed Woodcreeper, **Streak-backed Oriole**, Groove-billed Ani and Clay-colored Thrush, and a little further down the road we spotted another one of our targets for this road, the **Double-striped Thick-Knee**, standing beside a big brahman cow. We drove to Tárcoles Birding Hotel where we had lunch while we enjoyed the view of the Golfo de Nicoya and enjoyed great views of several hummingbirds feeding from a vervaine hedge including Ruby-throated and Cinnamon Hummingbirds. After lunch we drove to the small village of Tárcoles where we saw Black-headed Trogon and a **Black-and-white Owl** roosting in a mango tree along the roadside! From here we drove the short distance to our hotel where we settled in for the evening and enjoyed a fantastic dinner.



Double-striped Thick-knee © Ernesto Carman



Black-and-white Owl © Ernesto Carman



Birding Punta Leona © Ernesto Carman

Day 3. Carara National Park, Hotel Punta Leona

We gathered at sunrise in the gardens of the hotel, surrounded by giant Rain Trees. Before breakfast we spotted some great birds including Rufous-backed Wren, Lineated, Hoffmann's and Red-crowned Woodpeckers, Gartered Violaceous Trogon, Rose-throated Becard and a pair of adorable

Ferruginous Pygmy-Owls, and all of this while Scarlet Macaws flew back and forth over our heads. After breakfast we visited Carara National Park and birded the Quebrada Bonita Trail which took us through portions of mature tropical rainforest with gigantic trees towering above us. Here we saw Rufous-breasted Wren, **White-winged Becard**, White-tipped and Gray-chested Doves, Eye-ringed Flatbill, Greenish Elaenia, Lesser Greenlet and, White-shouldered Tanager. A little deeper in the forest we encountered one of the jackpots of Neotropical birding: an army ant swarm! As the front of the swarm crossed the trail and hunted for arthropods in the leaf litter, several species of birds followed them to catch the escaping critters. Here we had fantastic views of **Bicolored Antbird**, Black-hooded Antshrike, Black-faced Antthrush, Gray-headed Tanager and Northern Barred, Cocoa and Tawny-winged Woodcreepers. Towards the end of the trail we spotted a **Collared Forest-Falcon** perching above us in a massive tree. We also saw several interesting non-bird species including **Yellow-headed Gecko**, **Racket-tipped Rubyspot** and Central American Whiptail Lizard. After lunch we walked the hotel grounds and enjoyed many more views of **Scarlet Macaws**, Crested Guan, **Yellow-throated Toucan**, Bare-throated Tiger-Heron, Cinnamon-bellied Saltator, Ruddy Ground-Dove and Streak-backed Oriole.



Scarlet Macaw © Ernesto Carman



Yellow-throated Toucan © Ernesto Carman



Collared Forest-Falcon © Ernesto Carman

Day 4. Carara National Park, Tárcoles River Boat Tour

After breakfast we visited a different trail in Carara National Park and had another great morning of birding despite the heat and humidity. We had great views of Black-hooded Antshrike, Cocoa and Wedge-billed Woodcreeper, Blue-throated Goldentail and more **Scarlet Macaws**. We also

encountered a mixed species flock with Dot-winged Antwren, Chestnut-backed Antbird, Barred Antshrike and Slaty-tailed Trogon. After lunch we drove to the Tárcoles River where we were going to embark on a boat tour for the rest of the afternoon. We met our captain, Juan Carlos, and began seeing new birds every time the boat moved! We had an amazing array of egrets and herons, **Roseate Spoonbills**, **Wood Stork**, Blue-winged Teal, Muscovy Ducks, Black-necked Stilts, four species of Kingfisher (Ringed, Amazon, **Green** and Belted), Scarlet Macaws, **Yellow-naped Parrots** feeding with the golden afternoon light illuminating their plumage with neon green, hundreds of **Magnificent Frigatebirds** and Brown Pelicans, Common Black Hawk, Peregrine Falcon, Osprey and a group **Royal Terns** and a Black Skimmer. We enjoyed a spectacular sunset as Lesser Nighthawks and hundreds of bats began leaving the mangroves for the night and we returned to the lodge for dinner and got a good night's sleep.



Tárcoles Boat Tour © Ernesto Carman



Yellow-naped Amazon © Ernesto Carman

Day 5. Punta Leona, Paraíso, Café Cristina, Hotel Quelitales

We loaded the bus and departed after breakfast and made our way east across the Central Valley. We made our first stop in the town square of the town of Paraíso where we saw the resident **Tropical Screech-Owls** and learned about the local conservation efforts for the Cabanis's Ground-Sparrow as we marveled over the large sculpture of this species which stands tall as the county bird of Paraíso. Afterwards we reached Café Cristina, Ernesto's family's farm where his parents awaited us with a magnificent lunch before we learned all the ins and outs of producing coffee, specifically organic, shade-grown coffee and how doing it the right way can greatly benefit the environment. We also saw several species on the bird feeders including **Tennessee Warbler**, Summer Tanager, and Montezuma Oropendola. We made our way to Hotel Quelitales in time to do a little late afternoon birding and saw Sooty-faced Finch, Chestnut-capped Brush-Finch, White-eared Ground-Sparrow, Violet Sabrewing, Green-crowned Brilliant, Green Hermit and Green-fronted Lancebill.

Day 6. La Esperanza, Cerro de la Muerte, Paraíso Quetzal Lodge

We departed early as we had a mission: today we were going to look for the Resplendent Quetzal! Despite the wet and cold weather at the hotel we climbed up into the Talamanca mountains to the village of La Esperanza where we were met by our local guide Jorge Serrano. We walked up a short trail through a farm where we were going to wait in front of a fruiting wild avocado tree while we had our packed breakfast with plentiful tropical fruits for ourselves! We had not even finished eating when Jorge told us to look in the scope and when we did we spotted our target, the **Resplendent Quetzal** feeding from the fruiting avocado tree! We had walk-away views of both male and female before we were distracted by a mixed species flock where we saw several of the highland specialties including Sooty-capped Chlorospingus, Mountain Thrush, Mountain Elaenia, Ruddy Treerunner, Yellowish Flycatcher and Wilson's Warbler.



Resplendent Quetzal © Ernesto Carman

After this amazing experience we drove even higher up the Talamanca Mountains, all the way up to Cerro de la Muerte at 3400 m.a.s.l. where we saw another one of our targets, the **Volcano Junco** which gave us fantastic views. We then visited Paraíso Quetzal Lodge for lunch and more birds and the food was good but the birds were even better! The hummingbird feeders were spectacular providing up-close and personal views of White-throated Mountain-Gem, **Lesser Violetear**, Talamanca and Volcano Hummingbirds and one the most colorful of all, the **Fiery-throated Hummingbird** with their multicolored gorgets. In the gardens we also saw **Black-and-yellow Silky-Flycatcher**, Ruddy-capped and Black-billed Nightingale-Thrush, Slaty Flowerpiercer, a pair of Golden-browed Chlorophonias and just as we were heading to the bus we spotted a pair of **Long-tailed Silky-Flycatchers**. Satisfied with the amazing birds we had seen, we drove back down to Hotel Quelitales where the rain continued.



Lesser Violetear © Ernesto Carman



Fiery-throated Hummingbird © Ernesto Carman



Black-and-yellow Silky-Flycatcher © Ernesto Carman



Long-tailed Silky-Flycatcher © Ernesto Carman

Day 7. Hotel Quelitales, Ujarrás and Cachi

Once again we departed the hotel early and drove 15 minutes to a rural corner of the Ujarrás Valley where it did not take long to find one of our two pre-breakfast targets, the endemic and threatened **Cabanis's Ground-Sparrow**. We also enjoyed spectacular views of another species which Paz and

Ernesto study, the **Hook-billed Kite**, getting fantastic views of a female, as we learned a great deal about its natural history and the ongoing research. We returned for breakfast and had a blast watching the feeder where Montezuma Oropendola, Scarlet-rumped, Silver-throated and Summer Tanagers, White-eared Ground-Sparrow and Baltimore Orioles joined us for breakfast. After breakfast we drove back out the valley and had close-up views of a pair of **Sunbitterns**, **Bat Falcons** hunting and feeding on birds and dragonflies, **Garden Emerald**, Boat-billed Flycatcher, Southern Lapwings, **Collared Aracari** and Green Ibis, then ended up visiting the Ruinas de Ujarrás, the **ruins of an old church** from the seventeenth century before heading back to the hotel for lunch and some late afternoon birding. Despite the light, constant rain which continued to come down, we saw several new birds from the comfort of the roofed area, including Black-bellied and Stripe-tailed Hummingbird, White-bellied Mountain-Gem, Green-fronted Lancebill, Louisiana Waterthrush, Chestnut-capped Brush-Finch, Sooty-capped Nightingale-Thrush and a male Golden-winged Warbler.



Sunbittern © Ernesto Carman



Golden Emerald © Ernesto Carman

Day 8. Hotel Quelitales, La Hoja Garden, Arenal Observatory Lodge

We had breakfast, packed the bus and began our drive east following the Reventazón River to Siquirres, which is a beautiful scenic route through rural Costa Rica. We stopped at La Hoja Garden near Guápiles for lunch and to watch the incredible bird feeders which were literally hopping with birds! All **three species of Honeycreepers**, **Chestnut-headed** and Montezuma Oropendolas, **Black-cowled** and Baltimore Oriole, **Orange-chinned Parakeets**, **Black-cheeked Woodpecker**, **Collared Aracari** and even Yellow-throated Toucan and **Keel-billed Toucans** came in to feed from the plantains. To top it all off we also saw a momma Three-toed Sloth with her baby in a tree just above the feeders. Bellies and memory cards full, we continued heading west towards Arenal Observatory Lodge, but we made one stop as we spotted a **Semiplumbeous Hawk** perched in a tree along the roadside! As we neared the lodge, the impressive Arenal Volcano welcomed us, and the many birds flying across the road made our expectations grow for the following day.



Black-cowled Oriole © Ernesto Carman

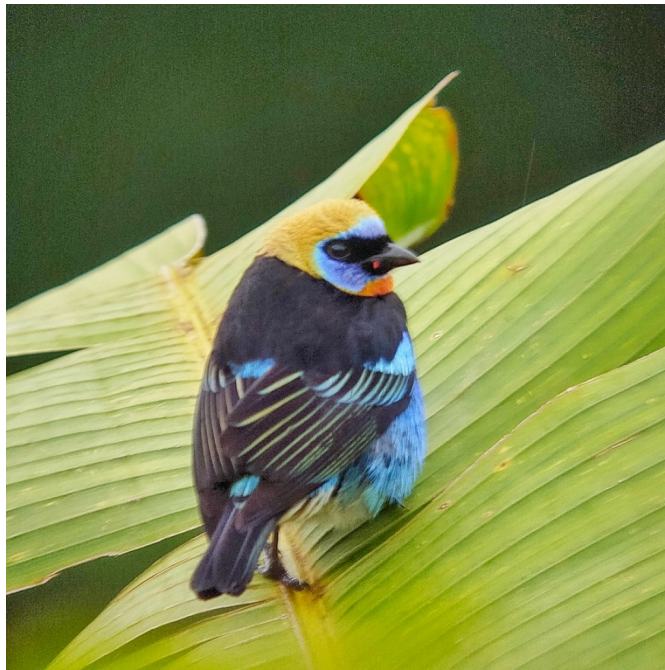


Semiplumbeous Hawk © Ernesto Carman

Day 9. Arenal Observatory Lodge

We gathered at 6:00 a.m. in front of our rooms and right off we spotted a Semiplumbeous Hawk perched behind our rooms. Fortunately for us there were many fruiting strangler figs in the garden and we had fantastic views of many of the colorful tanagers: Bay-headed, Rufous-winged, Scarlet-

rumped, Golden-hooded, Silver-throated and Emerald Tanager.



Golden-hooded Tanager © Ernesto Carman

After breakfast we birded off the main deck in front of the restaurant and has a bird feeder at eye level, and the birds were already lining-up and showing their pecking order with Great Curasows, **Crested Guans** and Montezuma Oropendolas feeding first, then all the smaller species came in including Red-legged and Green Honeycreepers, Yellow-throated Euphonias, Golden-hooded, Emerald, Silver-throated and **Hepatic Tanagers**. We also saw Black-and-yellow Tanager, **Red-lored Amazon** and White-crowned Parrot. We also birded the gardens and one the shorter trails behind the lodge and had nonstop birds! We started out with fantastic scope views of a **White-tipped Sicklebill**, Spotted Antbird, Streak-crowned Antwreio and an extremely obliging male **Yellow-eared Toucanet**.



Hepatic Tanager © Ernesto Carman



Yellow-eared Toucanet © Ernesto Carman

The rain intensified during the afternoon which gave us a good excuse to get some rest, but after dinner we went for a night walk and had spectacular views of a Crested Owl, Common Pauraque, Savage's Slender-toed Frog, Brilliant Forest Frog and Pygmy Rain-Frog.



Crested Guan © Ernesto Carman



Birding at Arenal Observatory Lodge © Ernesto Carman

Day 10. Arenal Observatory Lodge, Peninsula Road

After breakfast we drove downhill to the peninsula road which traverses part of Arenal National Park and fortunately the rain lightened and allowed for some birding. We had not gone far before we made our first stop to see **Broad-billed Motmot** and **Rufous-tailed Jacamar**. A bit further down

the road Ricardo spotted a small raptor in the trees and when we got out to see it we found there was not one, but four Double-toothed Kites had the opportunity to enjoy watching their unique behavior of following troops of White-faced Capuchin Monkeys, catching the insects flushed by the movement of the monkeys and to an extent camouflaging themselves in the commotion to catch unsuspecting birds below.



Rufous-tailed Jacamar © Ernesto Carman

At our next stop we had **Keel-billed Motmot**, Long-tailed Tyrant, **Red-lored Amazon** and Long-billed Hermit before the rain picked-up again. We made a bathroom stop on our way back and had fantastic views of White-throated Magpie-Jays in the parking lot.



After lunch we walked the grounds again and had more views of the common fig-feasting tanagers, Semiplumbeous Hawk, close-up Spotted Antbirds and even an immature **Ornate Hawk-Eagle** which flew overhead and suspiciously headed towards the bird feeder, so we did the same and low and behold, there it was, perched at eye-level just off the observation deck, eyeing the activity at the bird feeder! The smaller tanagers and euphonias did not seem too worried about its presence, but the Curassows and Guans were hiding behind the dense hedge, peeking their heads out every so often to see where the hawk-eagle was. We watched this gorgeous raptor for at least half an hour, clumsily attempting to catch one of the smaller birds at the feeder, unsuccessfully. It was a well earned prize after having to bird for several days in the rain!



Ornate Hawk-Eagle © Ernesto Carman

Day 11. La Selva Biological Station, Cinchona and Hotel Robledal

We departed early to make our way east to La Selva Biological Station where we spent the morning birding the rich lowland tropical rainforest. Here we were met by a resident guide, Kenneth Alfaro, who explained to us how La Selva and the Organization for Tropical Studies operates and all the research they do at the site. We were also met by more rain, but we persisted in our birding and we were very glad we did! As we walked through the gardens we spotted Blue Dacnis, Masked Tityra, Blue-chested Hummingbird and Gray-rumped Swifts, then we entered one of the paved trails into the forest and right away we noticed a familiar scenario: streams of ants crossing the trail and birds flying back and forth over the swarm. Once again we were lucky enough to encounter an army ant swarm where we could see the birds and saw **Spotted Antbird**, Plain-brown, Wedge-billed and Northern Barred Woodcreepers, **Rufous Motmot**, White-whiskered Puffbird and even a Great Tinamou lurking in the undergrowth. We also saw the ants kill and dismember a cricket and a Fer-de-lance Viper escaping the swarm in a hurry. We walked a bit further and found **Graceful Black-throated Trogon** and many Strawberry Poison Frogs. As we walked back out of the forest we revisited the army ant swarm and had phenomenal views of one of the obligate ant followers, the

colorful **Ocellated Antbird**! But the fun was not over because as we neared the parking lot of La Selva we spotted six of the critically endangered **Great Green Macaws** preening and squawking in the top of a very tall tree.



Great Green Macaw © Ernesto Carman

After a fantastic visit to La Selva we drove to Mirador Cinchona for lunch and we saw **Prong-billed Barbet** and Common Chlorospingus coming to the feeders. We reached Hotel Robledal mid afternoon, checked in and had time for some late afternoon birding and saw Rufous-backed Wren, **Spot-breasted Oriole**, Summer Tanager and the pair of resident **Ferruginous Pygmy-Owls** before meeting for our farewell dinner and we reminisced over our favorite memories of our trip. Hasta pronto!



Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl © Ernesto Carman

[Costa Rica Sampler birding tour \(Feb 1 - 12, 2026\) species list \(eBird\)](#)