



Costa Rica Sampler Trip Report (Feb 16 - 27, 2026)

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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 Owl that roosts 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.

Day 2. Caldera Mangroves, Guácimo Road, Tárcoles Birding Hotel, Hotel Santa Lucía

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 as we had hit the jackpot with the native Chameleon Vines (*Combretum farinosum*) in full bloom and because of the shape of the flowers and the amount of nectar it produces, a wide variety of birds visit them. The most abundant bird at the flowers was Prothonotary Warbler, but over time we saw, Tennessee Warbler, Rufous-backed Wren, Melodious Blackbird, Scaly-breasted, Blue-vented and Cinnamon Hummingbirds. We also saw Orange-fronted Parakeets, Turquoise-browed Motmot, Baltimore Oriole, Common Ground-Dove and Inca Dove, Gray Hawk, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, White-throated Magpie-Jay and good views of most of the mangrove specialties including, Northern Scrub and Panama Flycatcher, Mangrove Yellow Warbler, Mangrove Vireo and the endangered Mangrove Hummingbird. As the temperature began to soar we boarded the air conditioned bus and went birding along the Guácimo Road where we saw Yellow-throated Vireo and Hoffmann's Woodpecker, Gartered Violaceous Trogon, and a little further down the road we spotted another one of our targets for this road, the Double-striped Thick-Knee.

We drove to the Tárcoles River. After lunch we drove to the small village of Tárcoles where we saw Boat-billed Heron, Wood Stork and Scarlet Macaws. From here we drove the short distance to our hotel where we settled in for the evening and enjoyed a fantastic dinner.



Turquoise-browed Motmot © Ernesto Carman



Double-striped Thick-Knees © Ernesto Carman



Boat-billed Heron © Ernesto Carman

Day 3. Carara National Park, Lagunillas dry forest

We gathered at sunrise in the gardens of the hotel, surrounded by giant Rain Trees. Before breakfast we spotted some of the common yard birds of this hotel including Gray-capped, Social and Streaked Flycatchers, Southern Beardless Tyrannulet, Buff-rumped Warbler and Bare-throated Tiger-Heron. 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 Black-hooded Antshrike, Chestnut-backed Antbird, White-browed Gnatcatcher, Rufous Piha and a Lesser Nighthawk roosting in a large Guanacaste tree over the parking lot. A little deeper in the forest we found a Collared Forest Falcon and had prolonged, unobstructed views of Scaly-throated Foliage-gleaner. In the afternoon we birded a gravel road which runs near the Tárcoles River on the north side, the dry forest side, and saw Orange-fronted Parakeet, Laughing Falcon, Groove-billed Ani, White-lored Gnatcatcher, Green-breasted Mango, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Striped Cuckoo, Gray-crowned Yellowthroat, Stripe-headed Sparrow, Purple Gallinule, Lineated Woodpecker, Orange-chinned Parakeet and awesome views of a Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl in the light of the setting sun. After dinner we went for a night walk and saw Common Pauraque, Northern Cat-eyed Snake, Harlequin, Masked and Drab Tree Frogs, Dry Forest Toad, a gorgeous Tarantula and many Cicadas flying down on us at one section of the trail, attracted to our lights.



Laughing 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, Chestnut-backed Antbird, Dusky Antbird, Cocoa Woodcreeper, Rufous-tailed Jacamar, Dot-winged Antwren and more Scarlet Macaws. At one point where the understory was fairly open and providing good visibility 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, Gray-headed Tanager and Northern Barred, Cocoa and Tawny-winged Woodcreepers. 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, three species of Kingfisher (Ringed, Amazon and Green), 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, Elegant and Sandwich Terns. 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.



Birding the mangroves © Ernesto Carman



Scarlet Macaws © 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 Cafe 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.



Birding Hotel Quelitales © Ernesto Carman

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! There were no signs of the Quetzal at this point so we decided to walk a little further into the farm and after a little waiting it finally happened: one of the most spectacular birds in the world appeared and perched where we could all see it and enjoy it! While we waited for the Quetzal we were certainly not bored as we enjoyed seeing many other highland specialties such as Ochraceous Pewee, Sooty-capped Chlorospingus, Mountain Thrush, Mountain Elaenia, Wilson's Warbler, Large-footed Finch and Flame-colored Tanager. 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 worked hard to see another one of our targets, the Volcano Junco, but despite looking hard for it we failed to find it. As we drove back down the gravel road Alberto suddenly stopped the bus and exclaimed "There it is!" and sure enough, there was a Volcano Junco perched in a bush just a few meters from the bus. 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 and Long-tailed Silky-Flycatcher, Black-capped Flycatcher, Slaty Flowerpiercer and just as we were heading to the bus we spotted a male Golden-browed Chlorophonia feeding from a heath in the afternoon sunlight, glowing with unreal colors. Satisfied with the amazing birds we had seen, we drove back down to Hotel Quelitales where the rain continued.



Resplendent Quetzal © Ernesto Carman

Day 7. Hotel Quelitales, Ujarrás and Cachi

Once again we departed the hotel early and drove 20 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 were then met by Paz Angulo, who is an Eagle-Eye guide and researcher who is obtaining her Masters degree studying Hook-billed Kites. We learned all about this fascinating species as we got phenomenal views of several individuals as they came in to feed in the chayote plantations. 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 birded the hotel grounds and feeders despite the 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, Green-crowned Brilliant, Green Hermit, Violet Sabrewing, Chestnut-capped Brush-Finch, White-winged Tanager and Golden-bellied Flycatcher. After lunch we had a break in the rain and the birding was absolutely amazing! Without walking anywhere we saw Elegant and Tawny-capped Euphonia, Scarlet-thighed Dacnis, Bay-headed, Crimson-collared, Silver-Throated and Scarlet-rumped Tanager, White-throated Thrush, Slate-throated Redstart and Mistletoe Tyrannulet. At the waterfall we saw the usual suspects but added Sooty-faced Finch and Green-fronted Lancebill as well.

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

Before breakfast we enjoyed watching the resident Sunbittern building its nest, giving us spectacular views of its wings as it flew down to collect mud and returned to the nest to form it. 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. Taking advantage of the sun we stopped near Cerúlea Nature Reserve to watch for raptors and saw Broad-winged Hawk, White Hawk and Bat Falcon. 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 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.



Sunbittern © Ernesto Carman



Yellow-throated Toucan © Ernesto Carman

Day 9. Arenal Observatory Lodge

We gathered at 6:00 a.m. at the main deck in front of the restaurant which 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. After breakfast we walked one of the forest trails and encountered an amazing mixed species flock where we saw Russet Antshrike, Streak-headed Woodcreeper, Orange-billed Sparrow, Smoky-brown Woodpecker, Black-and-yellow Tanager, Sulphur-rumped Flycatcher, Carmiol's Tanager and White-throated Shrike-Tanager. The rain intensified during the afternoon which gave us a good excuse to get some rest, but after dinner we did spot the resident Black-and-white Owl in the parking lot.



Birding 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 (but remained constant) and allowed for some birding. We had not gone far before we made our first stop to see our first of many Broad-billed Motmots along this back road. A bit further along the road we had Bay Wren and Black-throated Wren, Purple-crowned Fairy, Broad-winged Hawk and Slaty-tailed Trogon. We encountered a mixed species flock with multiple species including Black-cowled Oriole, Spotted Woodcreeper, Golden-winged and Worm-eating Warbler. A bit further along the road we found Graceful Black-throated Trogon and White-ruffed Manakin when we noticed something interesting going on in the bushes along the roadside. There were several Red-throated Ant-Tanagers and Northern Barred Woodcreepers hanging out close to the ground which is a good indication of the presence of an army ant swarm. Sure enough there was a swarm and we had fantastic views of Bicolored, Spotted and Bare-crowned Antbird, Bright-rumped Attila, Rufous Mourner and even a mixed pair of Broad-billed and Keel-billed Motmots came in to take advantage of the feeding frenzy, even flying around our feet catching insects! This was a great finale to our wet morning of birding! After lunch we walked the hotel gardens again, and the light rain continued, but we had great views of Least Flycatcher and Blue-black Grosbeak.



Broad-billed Motmot

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, Jehudi, 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 hundreds of Turkey Vultures and a few Swainson's Hawks migrating back north! We first birded the soccer field and saw Slaty-tailed Trogon, Rufous Motmot, Cinnamon Woodpecker, White-collared Swift and Great-green Macaws flying overhead, squawking as they went. On the other side of the suspension bridge we spotted a Three-Toed Sloth scratching itself with its long claws and saw Black-faced Grosbeak, Blue-chested Hummingbird, and a great comparison of several of the look-alike flycatchers including Social and Gray-capped Flycatchers, Great Kiskadee and White-ringed Flycatcher. We also saw White-whiskered Puffbird, Graceful Black-throated Trogon and the best views ever of a Rufescent Tiger-Heron on the boardwalk that crosses a little forested pond! After a fantastic visit to La Selva we drove to Mirador Cinchona for lunch and we saw Prong-billed Barbet and several tanagers we had seen previously 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, Lineated Woodpecker, Spot-breasted Oriole, Summer Tanager, a nesting Cinnamon Hummingbird 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!



White-whiskered Puffbird © Ernesto Carman



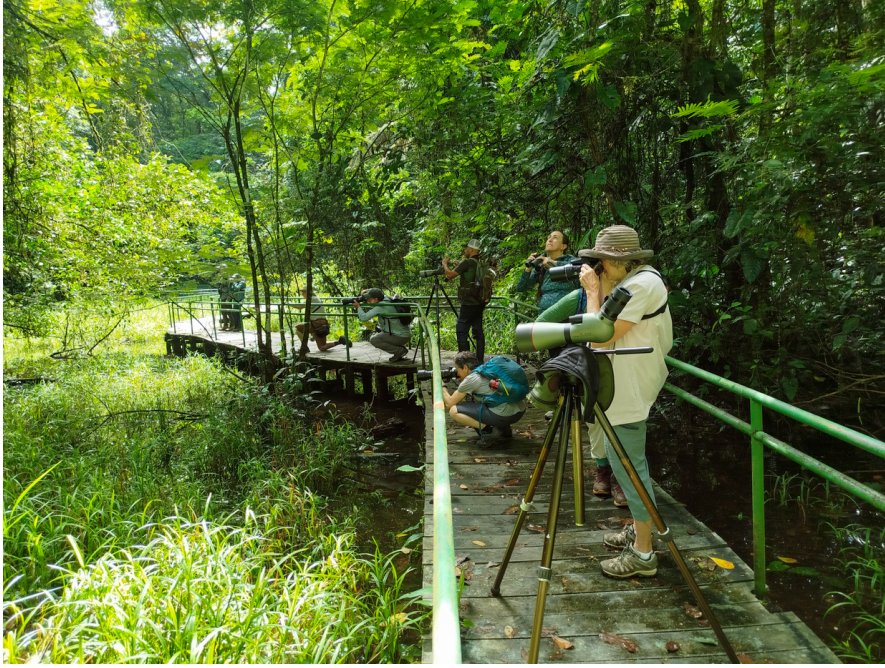
Raptor migration La Selva © Ernesto Carman



Cinnamon Hummingbird © Ernesto Carman



Rufescent Tiger-Heron © Ernesto Carman



Birding La Selva © Ernesto Carman



Brown-throated Three-toed Sloth © Ernesto Carman



Our group

[Costa Rica Sampler eBird list \(Feb 16 - 27, 2026\)](#)