



Costa Rica Sampler Trip Report (Jan 29 - Feb 8, 2024)

[Link: Costa Rica Sampler Trip Report \(Jan 29 - Feb 8, 2024\)](#)

Guides: Ernesto Carman and Paz Angulo Irola Day 1. We began our tour driving down from the airport, located in the Central Valley, along the Virilla river drainage until we reached the Pacific coast to bird the Mata de Limón mangroves near Caldera. This is a great site where tropical dry forest and mangrove meet and we had great diversity with species such as White-lored Gnatcatcher, Prothonotary Warbler, **Black-headed Trogon**, Rufous-naped Wren, Streak-backed Oriole, Brown-crested and Nutting's Flycatcher, White-throated Magpie-Jay and **Turquoise-browed Motmot**.



Black-headed Trogon © Ernesto Carman

We also had several mangrove specialties such as Northern Scrub Flycatcher, Panama Flycatcher and Mangrove Yellow Warbler. In a nearby field we found a pair of **Double-striped Thick-knees** resting in the shade of a coyol palm. We arrived at our hotel, Punta Leona, and were greeted by many Scarlet Macaws, Yellow-throated Toucans and a **Bare-throated Tiger-Heron** calling from the top of a gazebo.



Bare-throated Tiger-Heron © Ernesto Carman

Day 2. Before breakfast we had some amazing species such as Orange-billed Sparrow, **Laughing**

Falcon, Pale-billed Woodpecker and Scaly-breasted Hummingbirds mimicking the calls of several other bird species, frequently fooling the Merlin app! We visited Carara National Park for the rest of the morning and had a nice selection of neotropical families with great views of **Great Tinamou**, Black-hooded Antshrike, Tawny-winged Woodcreeper, Rufous Piha, **White-whiskered Puffbird**, Mealy Parrot and a **Collared Forest-Falcon** guarding the entrance of its nest cavity. We had the best possible views of Velvety Manakins that came in to bathe at a tiny stream and we watched them at point blank. We also saw several mammals including Collared Peccary, Central American Agouti, White-nosed Coati and Geoffroy's Spider-Monkey.



White-whiskered Puffbird © Ernesto Carman



Collared Forest-Falcon © Ernesto Carman



Birding in Carara National Park © Ernesto Carman

After lunch we took a boat tour on the Tárcoles River where we had countless egrets and herons, Collared Plover, Muscovy Duck, several kingfishers and the endemic Mangrove Hummingbird. As the sun neared the horizon over the Pacific we sorted through a large flock of terns and gulls including Laughing Gull, Sandwich, Royal and Elegant Tern, Black Skimmer and a very rare **Heerman's Gull**.



Tarcoles boat tour © Ernesto Carman

Day 3. After breakfast we worked our way up through the Central Valley and up to the Talamanca Highlands and had lunch at Paraíso Quetzal where we also began seeing some of the highland specialties including Long-tailed Silky-Flycatcher, Mountain Thrush, Sooty Thrush, Sooty-capped Chlorospingus, Golden-browed Chlorophonia and several hummingbirds including Fiery-throated, Talamanca and Volcano and Lesser Violetear. After lunch we visited Finca La Florida where we went searching for a must-see highland bird, the Resplendent Quetzal. After some searching and waiting near a fruiting wild avocado tree we spotted a male high up in an oak tree! After some persistence and hiking we all got views, though not the most pleasing. We also had a cousin of the quetzal, the Collared Trogon.



Day 4. Before breakfast we had many new hummingbirds including the largest and the smallest, Violet Sabrewing and Scintillant Hummingbird, as well as Plain-capped Starthroat, Blue-vented Hummingbird and a Magenta-throated Woodstar. We also saw **Northern Emerald Toucanet**, Spotted Wood-Quail, White-winged and Flame-colored Tanager.



Northern Emerald Toucanet © Ernesto Carman

After breakfast we drove to the top of Cerro de la Muerte where we successfully searched for Volcano Junco and had many Volcano Hummingbirds. We then worked our way down the Savegre river valley which is surrounded by massive oak forests. Here we found Black-cheeked Warbler, Tufted Flycatcher, Long-tailed Silky-Flycatcher and fantastic scope views of Black-faced Solitaire. We went for lunch at a restaurant which has fantastic food, but more importantly it was strategically chosen because of the fruiting wild avocado tree which stands just next to it and as we waited for our lunch we suddenly vacated the place because we had spotted a **male Quetzal** feeding in the tree! We found where he was resting and had walk-away views through the scope and got plenty photographs as well. What a moment! After lunch we visited Miriam's Feeders and saw Yellow-thighed Brushfinch, Large-footed Finch, Acorn and Hairy Woodpecker, Sooty Thrush, Sooty-capped Chlorospingus and several of our highland hummingbirds. After dinner we went for a drive through the oak forests searching for Unspotted Saw-whet Owl as we learned all about the USWO Project and their conservation efforts. Though we did not see the saw-whet we did get fantastic views of **Bare-shanked Screech-Owl** and a Cacomistle running along the branches.



Bare-shanked Screech-Owl © Ernesto Carman

Day 5. After breakfast we worked our way out of the Copey valley and made a stop in a patch of forest where we had Spot-crowned Woodcreeper, Yellow-winged Vireo, Yellow-bellied Siskin, Black-throated Green Warbler and the charismatic Collared Redstarts. Our next stop was at Café Cristina where we learned all about how coffee is produced and processed, but more importantly how Ernesto's family produces it in the most ecologically friendly way possible, making many changes to the farm to promote biodiversity. We were also entertained by a flock of Collared Aracaris and a Lesson's Motmot just behind the roaster! After stocking up on coffee and lunch we drove through the chayote plantations in Ujarrás where we saw several **Hook-billed Kites** and learned all about them as Paz explained the subject of her Master's thesis involving this raptor that specializes on snails. We then drove down the Reventazón river valley and found a Sunbittern which showed itself very well as it walked along the river below us.



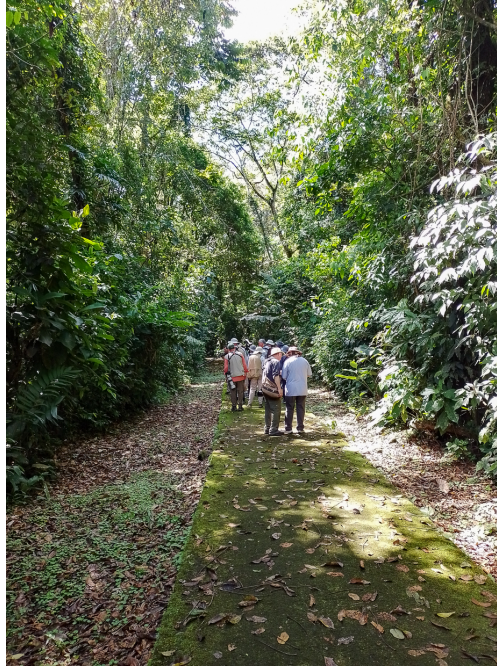
Hook-billed Kite © Ernesto Carman

Day 6. We were now in the Caribbean lowlands where diversity sky rockets! As we stood outside our lodge watching the forest in front of us we began seeing one new bird after another. We also had a line-up of some of the look-alike flycatchers with Great Kiskadee, Boat-billed Flycatcher, Social, Gray-capped and White-ringed Flycatcher all perched around us simultaneously, helping us learn the differences...or confusing us further! We also saw Shining Honeycreeper, Masked and Black-crowned Tityras, Long-tailed Tyrant, Bright-rumped Attila, **Black-cheeked Woodpecker** and Plain-colored Tanager.



Black-cheeked Woodpecker © Ernesto Carman

After breakfast we visited La Selva Biological Station which is one of the better studied tropical rainforests in the world. As soon as we arrived we began spotting a variety of birds including Black-cowled Oriole, Pied Puffbird, Crested Guan and a female Snowy Cotinga. On the trails we found both Keel-billed and Yellow-throated Toucans, Fasciated and Black-crowned Antshrike, Squirrel Cuckoo, Scarlet-rumped Cacique, Broad-billed Motmot and Red-throated Ant-Tanagers.



Birding at La Selva © Ernesto Carman

We also found a fruiting fig tree which was bursting with birds! Crested Guan, Yellow-throated and Olive-backed Euphonias, Silver-throated and Golden-hooded Tanagers, White-ruffed Manakin, Scarlet-thighed Tanager and Black-faced Grosbeaks. Before we left we had a special treat found by our driver Ricardo, a **Central American Silky Anteater** curled up and sleeping just over the trail! As we left La Selva we spotted a **Great Green Macaw** perching at the entrance to a nest hole and gave us spectacular scope views. After lunch we went searching for another regional endemic, the Nicaraguan Seedfinch and we were successful.



Central American Silky Anteater © Ernesto Carman



Great Green Macaw © Ernesto Carman

Day 7. Before breakfast we had great views of Purple-crowned Fairy, Bare-throated Tiger-Heron, both Red-legged and Shining Honeycreepers facing off over a Balsa tree flower, Green Kingfisher, Louisiana Waterthrush and Buff-rumped Warblers on the edge of the Sarapiquí River. We left for our next destination and made our first stop on a bridge over a small creek and saw Torrent Tyrannulet and American Dipper. We also birded and had lunch at the Cinchona feeders where we had some

new hummingbirds including Coppery-headed Emerald, Black-bellied Hummingbird and White-bellied Mountain-Gem and on the fruit feeders we had Prong-billed Barbet, Common Chlorospingus, Northern Emerald Toucanet, Silver-throated Tanagers and many other of the usual banana lovers. From here we drove west towards the town of La Fortuna and already from a distance we could clearly see the Arenal Volcano towering above the surrounding lowlands with its perfect cone. We made a quick stop along some grassy fields and saw two species of Meadowlark, Eastern and Red-breasted, before arriving at Arenal Observatory Lodge which is located in a fantastic setting with Lake Arenal to one side and the ominous volcano to the other.



Arenal volcano © Ernesto Carman

After checking in we watched the feeders from the main deck and had Great Curassow, Black-striped Sparrow, Emerald Tanager, Bay-headed Tanager, Black-crested Coquette and many Montezuma Oropendolas! After dinner we spotted the resident Black-and-white Owl perching next to the street lamp in the parking lot! Day 8. Before breakfast we gathered on the main deck to watch the feeding frenzy and the pecking order at the feeder was very clear, from largest to smallest. It was not until the largest birds, Curassows and Guans, had had their share that smaller species were able to sneak in. Green and Red-legged Honeycreepers, several tanagers, orioles, euphonias and saltators all fought for their bit of watermelon. After breakfast we walked the gardens of the lodge as well as one of the trails and we encountered a very good mixed species flock with Spotted Woodcreeper, Western Woodhaunter, Russet Antshrike, White-throated Shrike-Tanager, Rufous Mourner, Slaty-capped Flycatcher and Stripe-breasted Wren. After lunch we birded the Peninsula road and found Broad-billed Motmot, Long-tailed Tyrant, Black-cowled Oriole, Smoky-brown Woodpecker and the spectacular Crimson-collared Tanager! Just before returning to the lodge we also spotted a Fasciated Tiger-Heron in a stream. After dinner we walked to the frog pond and saw several species of frogs including the Loquacious Tree-Frog, Savage's slender-toed Frog and the iconic Red-eyed Leaf-Frog. Day 9. Before breakfast and the usual feeder birds we added a couple new species such as **Tawny-capped Euphonia** and Rufous-winged Tanager despite the on and off rain, and the volcano had all but disappeared!



Tawny-capped Euphonia © Ernesto Carman

After breakfast we packed the bus and began working our way towards the Central Valley one last time, but not before doing some more birding at San Luis Adventure Center. The feeders here could not be more spectacular with Silver-throated, Emerald, Bay-headed, Crimson-collared, Scarlet-rumped and Speckled Tanagers all at arm's length! But the true star of the show here was the pair of Blue-and-gold Tanagers, a species with a very restricted range. The pair came in and gave us amazing views and photo opportunities. After such a color overload we drove to Hotel Robledal where we were greeted by the resident pair of Ferruginous Pygmy-Owls. [Costa Rica Sampler Species List 2024](#)



Paz and Ernesto