



Costa Rica Sampler Trip Report (Mar 20 - 31, 2025)

[Link: Costa Rica Sampler Trip Report \(Mar 20 - 31, 2025\)](#)

Day 1

Today was the official start of the tour! We met up in the lobby for a brief and headed into the grounds to do some birding! The wonderful garden oasis in the middle of the central valley yielded some great first birds, including Mottled Owl, White-winged Dove, White-tailed Kite, Squirrel Cuckoo, and an unexpected Cooper's Hawk! Following our afternoon birding session we had a nice orientation to the country's climates and ecosystems. Then we had a nice dinner at the hotel.



Mottled Owl © James Lees



Birding in Costa Rica © Benny Jacobs-Swartz

Day 2

Our first morning together included a great walk into the gardens! We observed 31 species before breakfast! Highlights included a heard-only Ferruginous Pygmy Owl, Tropical Screech Owl, Lesson's Motmot, a Yellow-throated Vireo, and a pair of Chestnut-capped Warblers. Just over the hotel's wall,

a large flowering tree yielded fantastic looks at Crimson-fronted Parakeets and Baltimore Orioles! These colorful birds blended in well with the large orange flowers, but putting them in the scope sure helped to see them clearly! After a delicious breakfast, we made our way to the dry forest! We stopped several times at small creeks and sections of forest where we observed stunners like Turquoise-browed Motmots, a crowd favorite! Other great birds detected during our time in the dry forest included Double-striped Thicknee, Gray-crowned Yellowthroat, Rose-throated Becard, Plumbeous Kite, and six different Scarlet Macaw! During the mayhem of seeing the Thicknee and the Macaws we had a fleeting view of a Yellow-billed Cotinga flying overhead! It happened so fast, but the snow white colored bird was unmistakable! We ducked out during the heat of the day, and had a delicious meal from a local restaurant. Here, we got to try our first tropical natural beverages. Folks seemed to like the Guanabana, aka Soursop! After lunch, we drove for about an hour to our hotel for the next three nights. After checking into our rooms, we met up for a late afternoon session here on the hotel grounds! Highlights from our walk included White-whiskered Puffbird, Northern Barred Woodcreeper, Summer Tanager, and Green Honeycreeper!



Summer Tanager © James Lees



Crimson-fronted Parakeet © James Lees

Day 3

Today we walked the grounds before breakfast, which at first light and a hot coffee overlooking the creek that runs through the property was idyllic! In 90 minutes, we detected an incredible 45 different species! Standout observations included Streaked Flycatcher, Golden-hooded Tanager, Bright-rumped Atilla, and White Ibis in the river! After breakfast on site we drove a short distance to Carara National Park. This incredible park is a convergence zone between species found in the Dry Forests of the NW and the Rainforests of the Central/South Pacific, so here an incredible diversity of bird species can show up! Highlights here included King Vulture, Slaty-tailed Trogon, Black-hooded Antshrike, and we got to see a nest of Purple-crowned Fairy hummingbirds!



Birding in Carara National Park © Benny Jacobs-Swartz

For lunch, we headed back to our lodge to refuel and take a siesta during the hottest part of the day. Once it cooled down, we loaded back up and explored another section of Carara National Park! During the second session, we detected our first Antpitta species, the Streak-chested Antpitta. Although we only heard it, the group was still thrilled to be in its presence! We also heard several wrens, including Black-bellied Wren, Rufous-breasted Wren, and Rufous-and-white Wren. We then had an even better observation of the White-whiskered Puffbird, which sat along the trail and allowed scope views for all! We wrapped up in the town of Tarcoles with a fantastic view of two Black-and-White Owls that we found on their day roost! We enjoyed an incredible sunset at the beach with Magnificent Frigatebirds gliding overhead and dozens of Lesser Nighthawks emerging just at sunset! Afterwards, we had dinner and went over our checklist at the lodge!



Black-and-white Owl © James Lees



Our group at sunset © Benny Jacobs-Swartz



Lesser Nighthawk

Day 4

We kicked our day off with some optional pre-breakfast birding and coffee! We lucked out and saw a family of six Marbled Wood-Quails foraging in the forest! Other highlights included better looks at Golden-hooded Tanagers and lekking of the Long-tailed Manakins! After breakfast, we drove a short while to a beautiful mangrove forest. Here, we explored a totally new ecosystem, where we lucked out with a great mix of species. Highlights here includes Mangrove Vireo, Common Black Hawk, Black-crowned Tityra, Streak-backed Oriole, Prothonotary Warbler, Yellow Warbler (Mangrove). The mega highlight here was seeing and learning about the endemic and endangered Mangrove Hummingbird! We went back for lunch and mid-day relaxation time. Our afternoon session was an incredible boat tour on Rio Tarcoles! This magical tour exploring the birdlife of the river yielded an unbelievable 93 species in a mere three hours! Highlights here included American Pygmy Kingfisher, Wilson's Plover, Marbled Godwit (rare for here), Bare-throated Tiger Heron, Zone-tailed Hawk, Bat Falcon, Yellow-naped Amazon, and Panama Flycatcher. We also got great looks at Mangrove Swallows and a pair of Scissor-tailed Flycatchers along the river! After the boat trip, we enjoyed a fantastic dinner off-site, checklists, and a short drive back home!



Mangrove Hummingbird



Caldera © Benny Jacobs-Swarts



Wilson's Plover



Yellow Warbler (Mangrove)

Day 5

The fifth day of our tour kicked off in usual fashion with pre-breakfast birding and coffee! At the grounds of our lodge, we had detected 60 species, all before breakfast! Avian highlights included Yellow-throated Toucans, Red-capped Manakin, Rose-throated Becard, Golden-crowned Spadebill,

and a Tawny-crowned Greenlet. Ten individual Scarlet Macaws at close distance left us in awe! We packed up our bags and did some local birding before leaving the area for another region of the country! Our nearby stops yielded looks at Boat-billed Heron, Green-breasted Mango, Gray Hawk, and Green Kingfisher! After lunch, we stopped in the town of Paraiso, where we had fantastic looks at Tropical Screech Owl, Barn Owl, and dozens of Crimson-fronted Parakeets! After a short drive in the Ujarras valley and up the hill, we landed at Hotel Quelitales, our birding lodge for the next three nights! With about an hour of light left in the day, we meandered to the back of the property to stake out the unique feeding station of the Scaled Antpitta! In addition, we had great looks at White-eared Ground-Sparrows and Sooty-faced Finch. We finished the day with dinner, checklists, and wind-down!



Scaled Antpitta © Benny Jacobs-Swartz



Barn Owl © Benny Jacobs-Swartz

Day 6

Our first morning in the Caribbean-influenced rainforest produced a whole different assemblage of birds! We explored the grounds before breakfast, and although we had some light rain, we observed a variety of birds, including Black Guan, Collared Trogon, Eye-ringed Flatbill, Golden-bellied Flycatcher, Montezuma Oropendola, Slate-throated Redstart, Speckled Tanager, and the uncommon and stunning White-winged Tanager. This location also hosts a variety of hummingbirds we hadn't seen yet, including Violet Sabrewing, White-bellied Mountain Gem, Green Thorntail, Green Hermit, and Green-crowned Brilliant! Following our on-site birding session, we drove to the misty cloud-forest of the Volcan Irazú, one of the iconic volcanoes that make up the Central Cordillera mountain range of the Central Valley! Home to Irazu National Park, a unique high-elevation forest predominantly made up of Oaks and Alders, and serves to protect the watershed of the Reventado River. Here, we observed some great new birds, including Black-billed Nightengale Thrush, Talamanca Hummingbird, Volcano Hummingbird, Mountain Elaenia, and Flame-throated Warbler. Two incredibly range-restricted species that we successfully tracked down included the Timberline Wren and Volcano Junco! However, undoubtedly, the crowd favorite was the king of the cloud forest, the Resplendent Quetzal! Despite the incredibly foggy conditions, we still managed to observe three or possibly four individuals! As the rain picked up after lunch, we made our way back to the lodge and did some more birding! Here, we got to check out a Sunbittern foraging on the grounds and the nearby female who was incubating eggs on her nest!! Other great highlights included White-chinned Swifts and a Black-and-White Warbler! After a full day, we wrapped up with a delicious dinner and checklists!



Sunbittern © Benny Jacobs-Swartz

Day 7

We had an early breakfast and headed out straight away to look for one of the country's most important threatened and endemic species, the Cabanis's Ground-Sparrow. We lucked out and saw two different individuals. At this site, we also picked up Blue Grosbeak and White-crowned Parrot! We continued birding nearby and picked up Green Ibis and Hook-billed Kite! Two more absolutely fantastic birds! With the better part of the morning ahead of us, we drove about an hour into the forests connected to the Tapantí National Park. This high-elevation rainforest is just below the start of the cloud forest and yielded plenty of fantastic birding! Highlights included Prong-billed Barbet, Red-faced Spinetail, Yellowish Flycatcher, Golden-browed Chlorophonia, Golden-winged Warbler, Spangle-cheeked Tanager, and a pair of Brown-capped Vireos. After an amazing birding session at Rio Macho, we headed to a charming local spot for lunch, where the birding adventure continued at Ernesto Carman's family-run Coffee Farm. The tour was nothing short of exceptional as we delved into the intricacies of their sustainable, ecologically conscious organic coffee farm. From native plant species to passive restoration techniques and their commitment to shade-grown coffee, we gained invaluable insights into the art and science behind top-tier coffee production—all while prioritizing agroecology and biodiversity. Along the way, we spotted some incredible bird species and had the chance to sample and purchase their outstanding coffee. After this enriching experience, we headed back to our lodge for a bit more birdwatching to cap off a perfect day! At the lodge, we picked up a few new birds, including the Coppery-headed Emerald and Stripe-tailed Hummingbird! We had a nice dinner and evening checklist!



© Benny Jacobs-Schwartz

Hook-billed Kite



© Benny Jacobs-Schwartz

Golden-browed Chlorophonia



Birding in Rio Macho © Benny Jacobs-Swartz

Day 8

We departed with a delicious boxed breakfast and our bags packed the night before, which allowed us to make the most of our time at La Selva Biological Station! With the help of our local guide, we detected 74 species of birds in this Caribbean lowland birding paradise! We kicked off strong with lots of toucans! Keel-billed Toucan, Yellow-throated Toucan, and Collared Aracari were chowing down on the abundant fig fruits, loading down the trees all over the open garden area! We did well on woodpeckers here with observations of Cinnamon Woodpecker, Chestnut-colored Woodpecker, Rufous-winged Woodpecker, Black-cheeked Woodpecker, and the massive Pale-billed Woodpecker! While a light rain fell, we hunkered down underneath the roof of one of the biological station labs and had fantastic looks at a male Red-capped Manakin feeding on fig fruits! Around 11:30 AM, our tour finished and it was time for us to depart! We loaded into the van and made our way to one more local spot, where we lucked out and observed two Great-green Macaw and the adorable White-throated Crake! We had lunch at a roadside restaurant that had some great birding too! Here, we had great looks at Silver-throated Tanager, Crimson-collared Tanager, and Violet Sabrewing! With our bellies full, we drove to our final destination, Arenal Observatory Lodge! On the way, our incredible driver Ricardo spotted a stunning male Red-breasted Meadowlark just off the side of the road. We pulled over and had a blast, photographing and observing this stunning bird up close.



Keel-billed Toucan



Yellow-throated Toucan © James Lees



Red-capped Manakin



Red-breasted Meadowlark

Day 9

We met up at 5:45 AM for some pre-breakfast birding over the incredible observation deck of our lodge. We spent the whole day birding around the stunning lodge and detected an incredible 109 species! Some of the new birds for our trip here included Black-crested Coquette, Violet-headed

Hummingbird, Spotted Antbird, Fawn-throated Foliage-Gleaner, Slaty-capped Flycatcher, Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher, Rufous Mourner and Hepatic Tanager. This lodge is just exceptional, and we had an incredible day! We even got to see a Black-and-White Owl in the evening after dinner and checklists!



Birding at Arenal Observatory Lodge © Benny Jacobs-Swartz

Day 10

Today was our last full day here in the La Fortuna area, and we made great use of our time! Our birding before breakfast yielded more toucans and oropendolas, but we did pick up several Cinnamon Becards foraging amongst a mixed species flock working its way through the forest, adjacent to the garden road. After breakfast, we went to a nearby hotspot to walk their trails and take in the incredible rainforest! The trails here yielded some pleasant birding, and we bumped into a massive flock of different species. The flock foraged all around us for quite some time. With all the commotion of birds flying here and there and everywhere, we were able to pick up some new species! Streak-crowned Antwireo, Golden-olived Woodpecker, and Smoky-brown Woodpecker were a few of the exciting ones! After crossing a few suspension bridges and walking along the trail, we made our way to the observation deck, where the late morning thermals provided an exciting session of raptor viewing. The birds of prey we observed included Double-toothed Kite, Great Black Hawk, Barred Hawk, White Hawk, and a pair of Ornate Hawk-Eagles! After lunch and some delicious coffee, we scanned the overlook area one more time and picked up a dark morph Short-tailed Hawk! We then drove to a nearby forested road to do some more birding! Here, we picked up some new birds, including Magnolia Warbler, Long-tailed Tyrant, Great Antshrike, and Fasciated Antshrike. Up high in the canopy, we also spotted a tiny green hummingbird with a red gorget, which turned out to be the Ruby-throated Hummingbird! Our last new addition for the day was a pair of Keel-billed Motmots! This species had eluded us thus far! Their call is extremely similar to the Broad-billed Motmot, so we were thrilled to lay eyes on this handsome motmot, to clench the positive identification! After a full day of detecting ~122 species of birds, we enjoyed our final dinner and checklist at the Arenal Observatory Lodge!



Birding from suspension bridges © Benny Jacobs-Swartz

Day 11

Our last full day of birding was a delightful session at an ecotourism project halfway between Arenal and the Central Valley. Here, we enjoyed colorful tanagers at the feeders. Highlight birds here included Silver-throated Tanager, Emerald Tanager, Slaty-capped Brushfinch, and Blue-and-Gold Tanager! Afterwards we did a bit of birding along the road and then made our way back for lunch. Following lunch, we enjoyed a bit more birding at the feeders, and made the drive to our final destination, Hotel Robledal. Here we checked into our rooms, had a delicious dinner, went over our final checklist, and had a nice tour wrap-up! This fantastic tour produced a whopping 387 species of birds, and no shortage of laughter, learning and memories to last a lifetime!



Our group 2025

Day 12

The final day with coffee, breakfast, and goodbyes! We hope to see folks on another tour soon!
Thanks everyone for a fantastic tour! [Costa Rica Sampler eBird list \(Mar 20 - 31, 2025\)](#)