



ORIOLE BIRDING



TOUR REPORT COSTA RICA 6TH – 17TH JANUARY 2018

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SATURDAY 6TH JANUARY – 23C and showers

Our arrival into San Jose from our direct British Airways flight from London Gatwick was roughly on time, though unfortunately the experience was marred somewhat by a farcical immigration in San Jose which took no less than three hours. The queues were so long they filled the whole arrivals hall, all the corridors and virtually made it back out onto the tarmac! This meant that by the time we had met with our guide Erick and driver Rodrigo, and made the half hour transfer to Hotel Bougainvillea, it was too dark to add more than our first Great-tailed Grackles. Nevertheless, we enjoyed a very good dinner and all turned in early for a good rest after what had been a very long day.

SUNDAY 7TH JANUARY – Mainly drizzly and cool, 16C

Our pre-breakfast walk around the gardens of Hotel Bougainvillea would give everyone the chance to get to grips with many of the common neotropical birds which would be featuring throughout the tour, plus one or two good ones thrown in! The lush gardens are a great place to start a birding trip, and despite the fresh winds, we were soon enjoying a nice selection of birds. Very common species such as **White-winged** and **Inca Doves**, flocks of **Crimson-fronted Parakeets**, **Great Kiskadee**, **Social Flycatcher**, **Chestnut-collared Sparrow**, **Blue-grey Tanager**, **Tennessee Warbler** and **Clay-coloured Thrush** were all easily encountered. Our gentle walk around the garden soon began to add one or two more interesting species, such as **Hoffman's Woodpecker**, **Greyish Saltator** and the superb **Rufous-naped Wren**. A pair of these delightful birds were nesting in one of the palm trees, and while watching them a superb **Blue-crowned Motmot** flew in and dazzled us. North American migrants included a belting male **Summer Tanager**, a showy **Philadelphia Vireo** [giving a useful comparison with the similar looking Tennessee Warbler] and two male **Baltimore Orioles**. A **White-eared Ground Sparrow** was a really nice surprise, most likely being the only sighting we would have on the trip. The cool winds were keeping hummingbird activity down, but we had nice views of our first **Rufous-tailed Hummingbird** at least. There was another chance to get great views of two more **Blue-crowned Motmots** – now split as Lesson's Motmot here – and a **Red-billed Pigeon** was also noted. Back in for breakfast then, and to load up ready for our next stop up in the mountains.



Blue-crowned Motmot and Rufous-collared Sparrow

The drive to Paraiso de Quetzales went really smoothly and in fact we were there in two hours, having wound our way up to around 7000ft elevation along the mountain roads from San Jose. We stopped just before the lodge, and began birding the cloud forest along the entrance road. Almost

right away we were in amongst a mixed feeding flock of **Sooty-capped Bush-tanagers**, and along with them came a dazzling **Wilson's Warbler**, and better still a **Barred Becard**, which is not an easy species to connect with. Wandering further down towards the lodge, we found a female **Collared Trogon** perched in the open, and had superb close views of **Black and Yellow Silky Flycatcher**, **Black-thighed Grosbeak**, **Yellow-thighed Finch** and **Black-capped Flycatcher**. **Chestnut-collared Sparrows** were very common here, and we also saw both **Sooty** and **Mountain Thrush**, and three stunning **Collared Redstarts**. These brilliant little birds just never sit still, sallying like fairies with their white tails dancing behind them, and defying attempts to be photographed!



Magnificent Hummingbird

A **Large-footed Finch** was more obliging, and we also had a glimpse of our first **Black-billed Nightingale Thrush** here. The lodge itself was our next stop, and a session on the verandah overlooking the valley was in order – the hummingbird feeders here providing top entertainment! We marvelled at the close up views of **Magnificent**, **Fiery-throated**, **Scintillant** and **Volcano Hummingbirds**, **Green Violet-ear** and even a **Slaty Flowerpiercer** thrown in! The birds were so close you could almost touch them – in fact one or two of us actually had birds land on us! Looking down into the gardens below, Erick pointed out that the drizzle was keeping the temperature down and hence the bird activity was higher than normal. We saw **Flame-coloured Tanager**, **Hairy**

Woodpecker, Sooty Thrush, Wilson's and Yellow Warblers and best of all a Golden-browed Chlorophonia feeding quietly in a fruiting bush. What a fantastically bright bird! Less dazzling were Olive-striped Flycatcher and Mountain Elaenia, both part of the group of yellowish flycatchers with two wing bars which all look rather similar! A Spot-crowned Woodcreeper was also seen, our first example of this group and handy that we were looking down on it and could therefore see the diagnostic crown pattern extremely well. An excellent lunch followed of typical Costa Rican fayre, washed down with the rather excellent coffee. We were ready for another session!



Black-capped Flycatcher

Driving up through the clouds to the paramo at around 11000ft, we were confronted with a bit of a challenge to find our two target birds – the Volcano Junco and Timberline Wren. We were literally in the clouds here and so a thick mist was rolling past on the strong wind making birding pretty difficult. Nevertheless we stuck at it and eventually found the Volcano Junco right at the summit, hopping around in the open at close range. There were very few other species up here, but we did see Slaty Flowerpiercer, Volcano Hummingbird and Mountain Elaenia. A small group of Sooty-capped Bush Tanagers were also seen but we couldn't find the wren – maybe one to try again another day in better weather. We decided instead to descend to the Savegre Valley below to use the latter part of the day to try a couple of favoured spots for the quetzal.

The wet forest along the Savegre river valley leading down to the lodge provided some more excellent birding, though this was largely based around finding mixed feeding flocks with long spells in between when few birds were noted. Mountain Thrush was very common along this section, and soon we were bumping into roving groups of Sooty-capped Bush-tanagers again and this gave us a chance to pick out other things. A Flame-throated Warbler was a great bird to pick up, its luminous orange-red throat glowing out in the gloom of the forest understorey, and it was quickly followed by

a **Ruddy Treerunner** in the same flock. Wilson's Warbler was also numerous and we picked up **Band-tailed Pigeon** and **Yellow-winged Vireo** too. The drizzle had turned into something more substantial by this point, and we were getting to the point where the end of the day seemed nigh when the shout of 'quetzal' sprung us all back into life! Right by the road, in a small Wild Avocado tree, was a stunning pair of **Resplendent Quetzals**! We had superb views of these iconic birds for about ten minutes as they foraged on the small fruits, and if it wasn't for the rain we could have managed some excellent photos. We were more than happy with the sighting though and we followed the birds as they eventually flew back up to the forest beyond, the male dragging his impressive tail streamers along behind. A perfect way to end our first day in Costa Rica, and the pressure is now off for tomorrow!



Resplendent Quetzal

MONDAY 8TH JANUARY – *Calm and dry, 18C*

We met at 6am this morning on the viewing terrace for coffee and to watch the birdlife waking up around the gardens. Flocks of **Sulphur-rumped Parakeets** were leaving their roost and heading across the valley, and everywhere around the grounds were Chestnut-collared Sparrows and roving groups of Sooty-capped Bush-tanagers. The feeders here attract one or two really nice birds down from the forest, and we enjoyed point blank views of Blue Grey, **Silver-throated** and **Flame-coloured Tanager**, a stunning male **Baltimore Oriole** and an **Acorn Woodpecker**. **Long-tailed Silk Flycatcher**, **Band-tailed Pigeon** and **Blue and White Swallow** were also noted just around the lodge, before we set off on foot for a pre-breakfast walk along one of the trails. We enjoyed a really good selection of birds in a relatively short walk here – **Ruddy-capped Nightingale-Thrush**, **Emerald Toucanet**, **Brown-capped Vireo**, **Yellow-thighed Finch** and **White-throated Mountain-gem** being the pick of the bunch. Close to the river, a superb **Louisiana Waterthrush** gave excellent scope views along the fringes of a small pool, a really striking example with buff-washed underparts contrasting with snow white supercilium. In the waterside trees, many migrant North American warblers could be seen – mainly Tennessee and Wilson's Warblers, but also another cracking **Black-throated Green Warbler** a brief glimpse of **Flame-throated Warbler**. Heading back along the road, we saw two **Tufted Flycatchers** by the river, and had excellent views of **Stripe-tailed Hummingbird**. We were now late for breakfast!



Red-headed Barbet

At 0830, following another hearty desayuno, we had arranged for 4x4 trucks to take us up the steep mountain trail behind the lodge to the cloud forest above. The ride up was quite exciting, and once there we had this whole area of oak forest to ourselves. It was a lovely morning with no wind and a bit of sunshine, so the light conditions were excellent. The first part of the walk through mossy, bromeliad covered trees was eerily quiet, but we soon began to hear calls and pick up birds. **Acorn Woodpecker** was really common here, and we also found a pair of **Ruddy Pigeons** perched high on an emergent tree, preening one another. **Spot-crowned Woodcreeper** was noted several times here, and we saw our first **White-collared Swifts** flying high above the canopy – a large species the size of Alpine. The narrow rocky path took careful negotiation, but frequently we came to open areas where we could stand and listen for calls and watch for movement. This allowed us to pick up a pair of very skulking **Grey-breasted Wood-wrens**, and better still a **Black Guan** sitting motionless high up in the canopy. By following the trail a little higher, we were able to get a scope on the bird and see its blue facial skin and red legs – superb! A flycatcher which we initially thought to be Tufted didn't quite seem to fit – it was too large, and closer inspection revealed a long and broad based bill, despite the near identical plumage. We quickly realised it was an **Ochraceous Pewee**, quite a rare bird of these high cordilleras and a really good one to pick up. Just then, three **Sulphur-winged Parakeets** flew in and we were able to scope them as they foraged on fruits way above us. All the while, the forest was resounding to the 'ticks' of American wood warblers – mainly Wilson's but we also saw a lovely **Golden-winged Warbler** too. **Collared Redstart** was seen flycatching right beside the trail,

and a pair of **Ochraceous Wrens** gave good views as they climbed around on the moss-covered trunks. It was quite atmospheric now, as the cloud had descended and the whole forest was shrouded in mist. This began gathering on the foliage and dripping down from the trees like rain! We had already started to make our way back down by this point, but were stopped in our tracks by a call which we initially thought was a quetzal. As we quietly moved closer, we realised this was not the case and that it sounded more like a raptor. We continued until we were almost on top of the birds which seemed to be calling to each other in a duet, but we couldn't see them among the misty trees. Eventually, one flew out and landed in the open at the edge of the track for a few seconds – it was a **Barred Forest-falcon**! This group of raptors are extremely difficult to see, being far more often heard when they call at dawn and dusk. This sighting was a rare treat indeed, and rounded off what had already been an excellent morning very nicely. Our transport arrived right on cue, to take us back down the mountain to the lodge, where a tremendous lunch was waiting for us.



Ochraceous Pewee

After a bit of a break, we met up again shortly after 2pm and went on foot down along the road which follows the Savegre River downstream. It was drizzling when we set off but soon cleared, and the birds began to pop out after the rain. Tropical Kingbird, a species which would become much more common once we reach the lowlands, showed beautifully along the side of the road, and we added our first **Yellow-faced Grassquit** taking advantage of blossoms opened up by the Slaty Flowerpiercers. High up on the ridge line, we picked up two **Red-tailed Hawks** perched on a dead tree, and then along the gushing river the aptly named **Torrent Tyrannulet** appeared. This fantastic

little flycatcher was one of our main targets for the walk, so it was particularly pleasing to get such nice views. Crossing the river, we made our way up a hiking trail into the forest and were soon picking up more new birds. A **Yellowish Flycatcher** posed above the trail, and three **Black-cheeked Warblers** were working in the undergrowth just behind. One of the species we had missed out on in the morning was the **Black-faced Solitaire**, so we were delighted to catch up with one here his afternoon. It was very brief though, and not everyone got onto it, as some had been lagging a bit behind watching a **Louisiana Waterthrush**! The cloud rolled in much like it had done in the morning, making for murky viewing, but now we found a mixed feeding flock by the river with dancing **Collared Redstarts**, **Black-thighed Grosbeak**, **Black-throated Green Warbler**, **Ruddy Treerunner**, **Spot-crowned Woodcreeper** and more excellent views of **Black-cheeked Warbler**. High up in the canopy, two **Golden-bellied Flycatchers** were seen, quite a scarce member of the larger and rather similar looking group of 'yellow bellied' flycatchers. Making our way back out the way we had come, we found the **Black-faced Solitaire** again and this time everyone got a good view of this beautiful bird. More surprising though, were three small green parakeets feeding unobtrusively beside the trail at eye level. Initially we couldn't work them out, until we realised they were in fact **Barred Parakeets**. This was most unusual, as this species is seldom seen perched since they forage high in the canopy. To see them so low was amazing – one was feeding so close to the path we could make out the finely barred nape and black streaks along the rear flanks which give the bird its name. Re-crossing the river back towards the road, the **Louisiana Waterthrush** gave more good views and we found a **Black Phoebe** along the river too, sallying up from the rocks and adjacent dead branches in typical fashion. The sun was back out now, and bringing more small birds into view among the mossy trees along the road. **Yellowish Flycatcher** and **Ochraceous Wren** were seen again, and an **Olive-striped Flycatcher** showed briefly for some. Arriving back at the lodge around 5pm, a **Black Guan** greeted us by the entrance – a superb afternoons birding indeed.



Collared Redstart

TUESDAY 9TH JANUARY – *Calm day with sunny spells, warm at the coast to 25C*

We took a slightly more relaxed approach to the morning today, having now seen all of the key species in the Savegre area and of course having bagged up great views of the quetzal on day one! We had breakfast at 7am (yes, in the tropics that counts as leisurely!) and set off shortly after to begin winding our way back up and out of the valley. Some of the group saw a **Black Guan** feeding on the ground right around the cabins as we loaded up, and at day break we could hear **Spotted Wood-quails** calling too. This species was one we had missed out on, but a short stop along the valley as we headed out put that to rights as Erick picked up three of them scrapping about in the leaf litter down a narrow gulley below the road. We watched them for about fifteen minutes – their legs were surprisingly long as they used them as rakes to pull through the dirt and leaves, picking out tiny morsels disturbed by the activity. Great birds to see up close and such finely detailed plumage. Next we decided to head back up to Bella Vista mountain, where we had gone two days previously for the Volcano Junco. We had missed out on the **Timberline Wren** before, and the weather had also been poor as we had been shrouded in cloud. By contrast today, we were above the cloud! This meant it was calm and pleasant at the summit, at around 11,000ft, and within moments of leaving the bus we were watching our target – a gorgeous little Timberline Wren roving about in the vegetation at the edge of the track. **Volcano Hummingbird** was also seen well here, having only been glimpsed previously, and the views at the top were stunning.



Barred Antshrikes

Basically today was a travelling day as we headed south-east down out of the mountains to San Isidro, down to the coast then north-west back up to Quepos, following the Pacific. This meant a long descent down winding roads, until we reached the lower elevations of San Isidro, and the warmer temperatures to go with it! After a quick comfort stop we made a short birding stop at the edge of the town, between the school and police station! Here we had one particular target in mind,

and we spotted it before the bus had even stopped moving – a stunning male **Turquoise Cotinga**, perched high in a tree ahead of us. Thankfully it stayed there long enough for us to pile out, set up a scope and get everyone a nice view before it took flight – that was lucky! We couldn't believe how hot it was here compared to the last stop, and we soaked up some rays while watching a big flowering tree which was being visited by many small birds. **Steely-vented** and **Rufous-tailed Hummingbirds** were seen, plus a fine male **Baltimore Oriole** and our first **Bananaquit**. Heading out on the Quepos road, we made another short stop by some roadside sewage ponds and here the list went crazy – **Black-bellied Whistling Ducks** and **Blue-winged Teal** were in large flocks, while we also picked out a single female **Lesser Scaup**, **Northern Jacana**, **Southern Lapwing**, **Spotted Sandpiper**, **Tropical Mockingbird** and **Snowy Egret**. A pair of **Green Herons** were nesting in the tree above our chosen pull-off, and we also picked up **Crested Caracara**, **Roadside Hawk** and **Mangrove Swallow**.



Broad-winged Hawk

The journey was progressing well, and it certainly made it much more comfortable to break it up with a number of short stops for birds or food! Next up was lunch, at a delightful restaurant in the hills outside San Isidro and with spectacular views down across the river valley below. A party of **Grey-headed Chachalaca** greeted us as we arrived, until a **Broad-winged Hawk** spooked them all noisily up into the trees. The hawk posed beautifully, and we could scope it from the verandah where we would enjoy coffee and lunch. Birds were all around – **Yellow-throated Vireo**, **Palm Tanagaer**,

Great Crested Flycatcher, Red-crowned Woodpecker and both Green and Red-legged Honeycreepers were all birds more familiar with this lower elevation. Two Fiery-billed Aracari's also put in an appearance in the trees below, such whacky looking birds and hopefully not the last we would see of them. After a superb lunch, we continued on our way and now we were heading down towards sea level the roadside become a lot more birdy, with Tropical Kingbirds on the wires and an increase in Black and Turkey Vultures. We saw two beautiful Swallow-tailed Kites circling close by, and pulled over to watch a dazzling Scissor-tailed Flycatcher on a fenceline. Ruddy Ground-dove, Great Egret, Osprey, Wood Stork and our first Black-mandibled Toucans were also seen. Just before Parrita, we stopped again by some freshwater lagoons which gave us yet another flush of new birds. A Ringed Kingfisher was perched on a wire the whole time we were here, and the pools held Anhinga and Little Blue Heron. The lush vegetation around the pools produced White-collared Seedeater, Boat-billed Flycatcher, scores of Social Flycatchers and Great Kiskadees, and a pair of Barred Antshrikes which were perhaps the highlight of the stop. They worked their way out through the vegetation and up onto the top of a dead tree, where the male began calling with tail vibrating to the sound. An American Kestrel watched on from the top of a windsock and a flock of Crimson-fronted Parakeets swirled in and landed in some distant trees – but close enough to see the key features through the scopes. Cherrie's Tanager, Baltimore Oriole, Southern Beardless Tyrannulet and Grey-crowned Yellowthroat were some of the other small birds seen here, while an Amazon Kingfisher flew in and landed on the wire by the bus just as we were about to leave this superb spot.

We were now on the final leg of our journey through the resort town of Jaco along the Pacific coast and on to our accommodation at Villa Lapas by the Tarcoles River. This last part of the drive produced more roadside birds than the rest of the journey put together – Roadside and Grey Hawks, Osprey, Yellow-headed and Crested Caracara, Great Egrets, White Ibis, Brown Pelican, flocks of Magnificent Frigatebirds, Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, Groove-billed Ani and best of all, three magnificent Scarlet Macaws flying along beside us in perfect, stunning light. Costa Rica really is the country that keeps on giving, and as we checked in to our lodge with dusk beginning to fall, we were already anticipating what tomorrow would have in store for us in the adjacent Carara Biological Reserve.

WEDNESDAY 10TH JANUARY – *Hot and humid, 30C*



Spectacled Owl

We rose at 0530 this morning, as we wanted to make the most of the cooler first part of the day knowing activity would die down once the heat of the day kicked in. We had coffee on the verandah by the river, watching a pair of **Spectacled Owls** calling by torchlight in the trees above the restaurant! The birds stayed around for half an hour, before eventually flying off into the forest just as dawn began to break. In the same tree, a **Bare-throated Tiger-heron** was renovating its nest, unperturbed by the enormous owls sitting just a few metres away! Once there was enough light to start birding, we set off slowly along the track through the grounds, noting our first **Orange-billed Sparrows** along the way. It basically then took us an hour to walk no more than 100m, as the trees in the gardens were absolutely hooching with birds. In one tree we saw three species of trogon – **Gartered**, **Black-throated** and **Slaty-tailed Trogons**, plus a whole host of tanagers and flycatchers too numerous to list. **Grey-capped Flycatchers** basically replaced Social here, and we also saw **Streaked** and **Boat-billed Flycatchers** and the diminutive **Common Tody-flycatcher** too. In the same fruiting tree we managed to get everyone great scope views of males of both **Red-capped** and **Long-tailed Manakins**, **Buff-throated Saltator**, **Rose-throated Becard** and **Fiery-billed Aracari**. At regular intervals, **Scarlet Macaws** would float noisily along above the treetops, and a **Pale-billed Woodpecker** was seen way up in the distance. Other new species included **Streak-headed Woodcreeper**, **Wedge-billed Woodcreeper**, **Northern Waterthrush** and **House Wren**, before a well earned breakfast.



Scarlet Macaw

The rest of our morning would be spent exploring the trails of the nearby Carara Biological Reserve, only a five minute drive away. The four hours birding here was nothing short of spectacular, and our planned early return to the lodge for a break before lunch went totally out of the window. The forest was really active with several mixed feeding flocks encountered, and this meant we saw more birds than we could keep up with at times. A superb **Gartered Trogon**, male **Red-legged Honeycreeper**,

Yellow Warbler and Rose-throated Becard set the tone just around the car park, before we even started the trail! Once inside the forest, the neck-ache birding began! Mixed flocks contained Yellow-olive Flycatcher, Eye-ringed Flabill, White-shouldered Tanager, Lesser Greenlet, Chestnut-sided Warbler, Plain Xenops, Cocoa Woodcreeper, Shining Honeycreeper, Golden-hooded Tanager and Black-hooded Antshrike. Scarlet Macaws perched overhead and in the shady leaf litter below we saw no less than three different Great Tinamous! These large ground-dwellers are incredibly shy throughout most of their range, but seem strangely tame here presumably due to the fact there is no hunting in Costa Rica. Also on the forest floor we saw Ruddy Quail-dove, and watched an Agouti nibbling at fruits discarded from the macaws above. Chestnut-backed Antbird was more tricky, moving ninja-like through the undergrowth and only occasionally pausing on an open branch – the laser pointers really are key to showing these types of birds to the group! There were no such problems with a pair of Pale-billed Woodpeckers, renovating their nest hole above us. The female was throwing out great bill-fulls of sawdust and wood chippings from inside the hole, in rather comical fashion! Reaching the river, we found Streak-headed Woodcreeper, Bare-throated Tiger-heron, Sulphur-rumped Flycatcher and White-winged Becard, while a Squirrel Cuckoo was a real favourite as we scoped it climbing around in a tangle of vines above us.



Bicoloured Antbird

The second half of the trail took us deeper into the forest, and one of the highlights here was a **Stripe-throated Hermit** singing from a typical song perch a few inches above the ground. Incredibly hard to spot, once we knew where it liked to perch we just had to wait for it to return! **Leaf Cutter Ants** were trooping across the path, and we marvelled at the colossal trees, buttress roots, bromeliads and Strangler Figs so typical of this type of rainforest. Often we would find a good bird sitting quietly beside the trail or working on the forest floor, like the superb female **Blue-crowned Manakin** which landed just inches from our noses. Our morning was made though by the discovery of an Army Ant swarm – anyone who has birded in the neotropics will know how key it is to find these ants, in order to see some of the real forest interior specialists that follow them. The birds are not eating the ants themselves, but the other insects fleeing from the clutches of the ant swarm. We stood in one spot for around 45 minutes and soaked up one great bird after another. **Grey-headed Tanager** and **Bicoloured Antbird** appeared most frequently, often at point blank range beside the path. At least two **Black-faced Antthrush** were also present and eventually everyone got to see one well. **Riverside Wren**, **Tawny-winged Woodcreeper**, **Black-hooded Antshrike**, **Orange-billed Sparrow**, **Wood Thrush** and **White-whiskered Puffbird** were also following the swarm, while two **Northern Barred Woodcreepers** also appeared and were oblivious to us right beside the trail. In the meantime, the ants were swarming in colossal numbers, coating the trail, rocks and branches and turning them into a moving river of ferocious mini-predators – no wonder everything tries to flee! In the end we simply had to tear ourselves away, as otherwise we would miss lunch altogether! A troop of **Spider Monkeys** moving through the canopy was our last action on this memorable trail - what a superb morning.



Boat-billed Heron

A long lunch break gave us a bit of downtime (or at least time to catch up with the trip report!) before we met up at 1430 for the short drive to the jetty where we would be taking a boat trip on the

Tarcoles River. Two **Black-striped Sparrows** were seen by the side of the track as we drove out of the hotel, in the same field where a Crested Caracara had been parading around earlier. What a treat we had in store for the afternoon, and even as we sat in the boat waiting to pull away, we had our first sightings of **American Crocodiles**, Great and Snowy Egrets, **Great Blue** and **Little Blue Herons**. These species would all be virtually continuously on show for the next two hours, along with occasional **Green Herons**, **Yellow-crowned Night Heron**, **Bare-throated Tiger Heron** and **White Ibis**. First we headed upstream, gliding underneath **Common Black Hawks** perched up in the trees and watching Ospreys fishing in the river ahead. The tide was low, so there were extensive mud banks exposed where we could see **Spotted Sandpipers**, **Hudsonian Whimbrel**, **Ruddy Turnstone**, **Willet** and **Semipalmated Plover**. A **Black-crowned Night Heron** was perched up in the mangroves, and the bushes along the top of the river bank were full of **Red-winged Blackbirds**. Continuing upstream, we passed several more crocodiles, including an impressive 12ft beast hauled out on a small island – wow! **Yellow-headed Caracara** flew across the river, as did **White-crowned Parrot**, **Grey-breasted Martin**, **Mangrove** and **Barn Swallows**. Eventually we turned the boat, heading back downstream, and enjoying fantastic views of a **Roseate Spoonbill** along the way. Next we headed for the mangroves, marvelling at the huge **Green Iguanas** on the river bank as we passed, and spotting a **Peregrine** perched way up on a dead branch above us. More views of the mangrove form of **Common Black Hawk** with its red cere were to be had as we passed just beneath them, and now we began to pick up our first **Prothonotary Warblers**. These stunning bright yellow and steel grey warblers were quite common in the mangroves, and we marvelled at two feeding in the company of a female **American Redstart**. **Scaly-breasted Hummingbird** was seen feeding at the mangrove flowers, and careful inspection of all the overhanging branches revealed several **Green Kingfishers**, and singles of both **Ringed** and **American Pygmy Kingfisher** too. The latter was so close, we could almost reach out of the boat and touch it! **Spotted Sandpipers** were really numerous here, and we must have seen a couple of hundred, dotted along the mud banks and flying past the boat in flocks twenty strong. **Northern Waterthrush** also became common, and their chipping calls were a frequent occurrence along the waters edge. The furthest point we reached, just before turning back, was perhaps the most productive for small birds. Here we found the superb **Mangrove Warbler** [red-headed resident form of **Yellow Warbler**], and the endemic **Mangrove Hummingbird** which gave super views perched just beside the boat. Another near-endemic here is the **Panama Flycatcher**, found only along a narrow Pacific coastal strip of Costa Rica and of course in neighbouring Panama. Heading back by the same way, birds were gathering to roost and we saw flocks of **White Ibis** and **Neotropic Cormorant** up in the trees, and hordes of **Brown Pelicans** out on the mud banks. A single **Laughing Gull** was also seen resting here, and we nosed the boat underneath half a dozen roosting **Boat-billed Herons**, just getting ready to wake up for their nights work. The trip was wrapped up with a stunning sunset out over the Pacific Ocean as we chugged back to port – what a fantastic trip! There was even time for two more highlights, as dusk fell around the car park. First a **Ferruginous Pygmy-owl** flew up and perched beautifully on a dead snag, and then the **Lesser Nighthawks** began to emerge, flying high over the trees above us. Just another day in the jewel of the neotropics!

THURSDAY 11TH JANUARY – *Hot and dry, 30C*

We started at 0545 this morning, hearing the **Spectacled Owl** calling again as we met up for coffee overlooking the river. Today we wanted to explore the trail which runs upstream into the forest behind Villa Lapas, and try for one or two species which we were missing. The gardens were birdy again, and we had to resist the temptation to hang around too long there! Two **Slaty-tailed Trogons**, a pair of **Yellow-throated Euphonias**, **Buff-throated Saltator**, **Fiery-billed Aracari** and **Cocoa Woodcreeper** were seen nevertheless. A pair of **Buff-rumped Warblers** along the river were a delight, their pale yellow tails flashing in the dark overhanging vegetation as they constantly bounced and flaunted them to one another. Once we reached the start of the trail, we found a superb male **Black-throated Trogon** calling low in the canopy above us. An **Ovenbird** was walking on the trail ahead but quickly flipped into cover as we approached and we didn't see it again. This open, leafy forest floor proved to be a great place to seek such elusive ground-dwellers, and by walking slowly, and stopping frequently to scan for movement, we enjoyed good views of several **Wood Thrush**, **Black-faced Antthrush**, **Grey-chested Dove** and **Swainson's Thrush**. A pair of **Dusky Antbirds**

gave themselves up too, eventually showing really well in among tangled vines in the middle storey. **Long-tailed Manakin**, **Band-tailed Barbthroat** and **Great-crested Flycatcher** were also noted before we turned back with breakfast calling. Reaching the start of the trail again, we found a **Rufous-tailed Jacamar** which was calling up on the slope above. We managed to get some superb scope views of the bird, before it flashed off up into the trees with a dazzling streak of iridescent green. Back in the hotel gardens, two **White-tipped Doves** were foraging on the lawns, along with a small flock of **Painted Buntings**. These colourful birds looked so improbably gaudy, with their red, blue and gold plumage. A **Black-mandibled Toucan** perched in the open above us as we headed back towards the restaurant, and a pair of **Rufous-breasted Wrens** were gathering nest material beside the path. It had been another breathless session, and we were now all well and truly ready for breakfast!



Rufous-tailed Jacamar

Loading the bus around 9am, we set off on the journey north along the Pacific coast towards our next base at La Ensenada. A short stop at the river mouth added some great views of flocks of Brown Pelicans, Magnificent Frigatebirds and Laughing Gulls. A nice roost of **Royal Terns** was also present, but it was now getting very hot and the air conditioned bus beckoned! We didn't stop again until we

were off the tarmac road and about 15km out from La Ensenada. Here we stopped to bird the dry forest for a short while, and quickly added some nice new species. Whistling the call of the **Ferruginous Pygmy-owl** brought **White-lored Gnatcatcher**, **Yellow Warbler**, **Rufous-naped Wren** and both **Yellow-bellied** and **Brown-capped Flycatcher** into view. Our first **White-throated Magpie-jays** were seen in the acacia trees here and as we continued on our way we had nice roadside views of **Scissor-tailed Flycatcher** and **Groove-billed Ani**. La Ensenada is a beautiful small lodge tucked away overlooking the Gulf of Nicoya, and its full of birds too! Even before we had all got out of the bus, Erick had a roosting **Pacific Screech Owl** in the scope for us! The local speciality hummingbird – the lovely **Cinammon Hummingbird** – also gave itself up while we waited for our rooms to be allocated. A superb lunch followed (accompanied by the **White-throated Magpie Jays**, determined to steal some of it for themselves!), and then it was straight back out into the field for our afternoon session to the fabulous Solimar wetlands.



Pacific Screech Owl

Solimar was about an hours drive away, made a little slower by impromptu stops for **Harris Hawk**, **Mantled Howler Monkeys** and a **Ferruginous Pygmy-owl**! Once at the entrance to the estate we picked up local guide Dimitrio en route as his local knowledge would be indispensable for navigating around the area and finding the best of the birds on offer. We spent the next three hours driving around the various tracks that criss cross this vast wetland area, used as a ranch for 7000 head of cattle. The numbers of birds, particular egrets, storks and herons, was just mind-blowing, and we were constantly surrounded by hundreds of Cattle and Great White Egrets and Little Blue Herons. **Bare-throated Tiger-herons** lined every ditch, and Green Herons would spring up from lush patches of grass as we drove by. Our main target here would be the very localised and highly impressive **Jabiru**, and it didn't take long to reach a spot where we could see its colossal stick nest high in the branches of a big acacia tree, with an adult and two chicks visible. They were a bit distant, but we were still delighted to see them. This open grassland terrain also produced a pair of **White-tailed Kites**, **Eastern Meadowlark**, **Green-breasted Mango** and good views of **Laughing Falcon**. The latter was dislodged from its perch by a young **Snail Kite**, adding further to the raptor tally. The first significant patches of water produced Northern Jacana, **Solitary Sandpiper**, **American Purple Gallinule**, **Roseate Spoonbill** and of course more herons. Larger stretches of wet grassland hosted flocks of **Black-necked Stilts**, **Blue-winged Teals** and a brace of **Greater Yellowlegs**. The unusual looking **Limpkin** was also seen, and half a dozen **Kildeer** were in a newly tilled field. Stopping to view these delightful waders, we had more ridiculously close views of **Bare-throated Tiger-herons**, several **American Crocodiles** and another **Jabiru** nest this time with two adults birds standing on top. An **Orange-chinned Parakeet** was also seen, perched high up on a dead tree, and **Yellow-naped Parrot** flew over.



Ferruginous Pygmy-owl

Three hours simply flew by here with the sheer number of birds bewildering us at every stop. An impromptu bail out for a cracking **Turquoise-browed Motmot**, also produced four **Black-crowned Night Herons**, **Northern Beardless Tyrannulet**, **Brown-capped Flycatcher**, **Red-winged Blackbird**, **Groove-billed Ani** and a superb **Ferruginous Pygmy-owl** which sat calling in the sun right in front of us for about twenty minutes. A little further on, we stopped by a big pre-roost gathering of **Cattle Egrets** and found two **Boat-billed Herons** in amongst them. **Snail Kite** and **Laughing Falcon** again showed really well in the trees around, where **White-fronted Parrots** and **Orange-chinned Parakeet** were also seen. A stunning male **Spot-breasted Oriole** also, appeared, and a couple of **White-faced Capuchin Monkeys** wandered across the track in front of us. A **Double-striped Thick-knee**, unperturbed by our vehicle, stood motionless in the open, and the final leg of the excursion in the beautiful sunset added **Ringed Kingfisher**, **Peregrine** and another **Eastern Meadowlark**. There couldn't have been a more fitting finale to our visit here though, as Dimitrio spotted an adult **Jabiru** by the side of the track. As we pulled up it took flight, and passed right around the side of our vehicle before continuing up into the trees. What a spectacular bird, and fantastic end to another amazing day.



Jabiru pair and nest

FRIDAY 12TH JANUARY – *Hot day with sunny spells, 30C*

We started at 0545 for a pre-breakfast walk around the grounds of La Ensenada, which provided us with a whole host of new species typical of Pacific dry forest habitats. A fruiting tree at the edge of the gardens was absolutely full of **Great Kiskadees**, and we saw at least three **Black-headed** and single **Gartered Trogon** in the same tree too. **Spot-breasted** and **Streak-backed Orioles** were both conspicuous specialities of this area, and we saw our first **Montezuma Oropendola** – though as Erick pointed out, it would not be the last! Both **Orange-fronted** and **Orange-chinned Parakeets**

also showed well in the bare acacias by the parking area, where they seemed less skittish than normal in the early light of dawn. **Melodious Blackbird** was another localised species which we would only see on this element of the tour, though perhaps not the most exciting looking bird we would encounter here! Walking a bit further on through the cattle pasture, the area was scattered with small trees and we found **Common Ground-dove**, **Ruby-throated Hummingbird**, **Rose-throated Becard** and **Rose-breasted Grosbeak** here. **White-fronted Parrots** were frequently flying around, and eventually we had stunning views of them perched in the early morning sunshine. A trio of **White-necked Puffbirds** showed really well, perched high up in the open in typical fashion, and of course the ubiquitous **White-throated Magpie-jays** were advertising themselves all around the place with their raucous calls. At the furthest point of our walk, we found two new birds for the trip – **Banded Wren** and **Canivet's Emerald** – before heading back along the same trail. **Yellow-naped Parrot**, **Brown-capped Flycatcher**, **Turquoise-browed Motmot**, **Lineated Woodpecker** and **Mantled Howler Monkey** were all noted before we reached the lodge for a welcome coffee and breakfast.



White-fronted Parrot

After check out, we drove in the bus just a short way to some small Salinas adjacent to the property. The tide was rising on the nearby Gulf of Nicoya, and we hoped to find some roosting shorebirds here. Black-necked Stilts were already in residence as we arrived, along with White Ibis, Little Blue Heron, Roseate Spoonbill and Yellow-crowned Night Heron. Careful scanning of the muddy pools revealed **Greater Yellowlegs**, **Short-billed Dowitcher** and two diminutive **Least Sandpipers**. And then the 'peeps' started to arrive. Several flocks of fifty or more small waders began to drop into the pans, and we enjoyed comparing non-breeding plumaged **Semipalmated** and **Western Sandpipers** in excellent light. We also had some superb flocks of **Wilson's** and **Semipalmated Plovers**, which again allowed useful comparisons of structure and bill size. We tried to soak up all the features, and

remember the key points in case we ever needed to put them into practice back home! Hudsonian Whimbrel, a flock of Blue-winged Teal and several Wood Storks were also noted at this productive spot. The cloud cover was providing a useful bit of shade from the already intense sun, and allowed us to take a short walk along the edge of the mangroves to look for passerines. We didn't find too much among the many Yellow Warblers present, but a cracking **Black and White Warbler** was about all we needed anyway! Another **Cinammon Hummingbird** was seen, before we rejoined the bus and set off on our journey to our next base.



Great Potoo

The drive today would take us over the continental divide and onto the Caribbean slope. A stop for coffee was followed up ninety minutes later by a very enjoyable stop for lunch along the northern shores of Lake Arenal. From here it was a relatively short final hop to the dam, where we saw our first troop of Coatis and made a productive birding walk along the trail towards Arenal Observatory Lodge, our base for the next two nights. A **Great Potoo** was roosting on a dead stump high above us, but the light was excellent and the cryptic beast even stirred enough to turn its head a few times as we watched! **Passerini's Tanagers** were in the bushes, and we also noted **Buff-throated Saltator**, **Black Phoebe**, **Palm Tanager** and the elusive **Yellow-billed Cacique**. A call from the forest nearby, which one of the group thought sounded like a donkey, was actually a **Keel-billed Motmot** – one of the most desirable species to find in this area. We had close scope views of the bird, with its turquoise fore-supercilium and khaki green plumage being diagnostic. We continued walking up the trail, with Rodrigo bringing the van to us later on. We found **Long-tailed Tyrant**, **Black-cheeked Woodpecker**, **Broad-winged Hawk** and **Chestnut-sided Warbler** here, plus had close views of **Yellow Tyrannulet**. The best bird though was a tiny **Black-crested Coquette**, perched way up in the canopy, which sat long enough for everyone to enjoy a scope view. From here it was 8km to the lodge

along a rough track, but even as dusk approached we were not quite done for the day! First a group of **Crested Guans** were found foraging close to the trail, and prompted a quick bail out. Next up was a cracking **Fasciated Tiger-heron** in the river just before the bridge, and finally a **Rufous Motmot** showed well by the entrance gate! We just about kept to our plan of checking in at the lodge before it got dark – another super day!

SATURDAY 13TH JANUARY – *Breezy with a lot of rain, 20C*

Now that we were on the Caribbean slope, we had to expect rain – and lots of it! Torrential downpours in the night were followed by more shortly after dawn, and two more bursts by lunchtime. This was no light shower – we had to run for cover each time! As it got light, the fruit feeders at the lodge were taken over by noisy **Montezuma Oropendolas**, and we had amazing views of the **Great Currasows** which just wander around oblivious to people here! White-nosed Coatis were also roving about under the feeders and Brown Jays came in too. The verbena flowers just below the decking attracted two new hummingbirds for us – **Crowned Woodnymph** and **Violet-headed Hummingbird**. Just before the next downpour set in, we headed across the rope bridge and up to the second observation deck which overlooks the gardens. When the rain stopped, it went mad with birds! Bay-headed and **Emerald Tanagers**, **Black and White Warbler**, **Squirrel Cuckoo**, **Black-striped**, **Golden-olive** and **Pale-billed Woodpeckers**, **Crested Guan**, **Tawny-capped** and **Yellow-throated Euphonias**, **Keel-billed** and **Black-mandibled Toucans**, **Collared Aracari**, **Band-tailed** and **Red-billed Pigeons**, **Tropical Parula**, male **White-collared Manakin**, **Paltry Tyrannulet** and **Cinammon Becard** all appeared in the trees just around. We literally did not know where to look next! The low shrubs beneath us hosted **House Wren**, **Black-striped Sparrow**, **Golden-winged Warbler**, **Northern Waterthrush** and **White-necked Jacobin**. It was not, however, difficult to pick a highlight here – one of the local guides spotted a male **Lovely Cotinga**, a rare bird seen only infrequently in the area and one which Erick had primed us about, as it had been visiting the gardens recently. This stunning bird gave us fantastic views, as we were on the same level as the bird from our raised vantage point. The locals were back-slapping and high-fiving, as it was a new bird for them. A treat to get to share in their enjoyment!



Lovely Cotinga

After breakfast we set off on foot around the gardens. The lodge is such a fantastic place to see typical birds of the lowland humid Caribbean forest, and we filled our boots. A female **Black-crested Coquette** was the best hummingbird seen around the extensive clumps of verbena, but we also had **Scaly-breasted Hummingbird** too. **Black-mandibled** and **Keel-billed Toucans** are easier to see here than any of the other places we have been, and we even had them low down in fruiting shrubs in the flower borders knocking back berries!



Golden-hooded Tanager

A fruiting tree was proving very popular with a host of different birds, and we must have notched over twenty species in this one spot. **Band-backed Wren** was a lovely addition, and among the variety of tanagers and warblers in the tree we saw female **White-ruffed Manakin**, **Bananaquit**, **White-throated Thrush**, **Tropical Parula** and **Wood Thrush**. We then took one of the circular forest trails, which proved to be an absolute highlight with some really top quality species sighted. Things were slow to start with, with several species proving really tricky to see in the dark, dense undergrowth and tangles of vines and bromeliads. **Stripe-breasted Wren**, **Golden-crowned Warbler** and **White-breasted Wood-wren** were such examples. **Collared Aracaris** overhead, and cracking views of **Broad-billed Motmot** – completing our set – were much easier to see though! Pressing on, we heard a call from the undergrowth and Erick indicated that he thought it was a **Dull-mantled Antbird**. Playing a burst of the call, two birds popped into view, and began displaying with their white feathering fluffed out on their backs! Amazing views of another skulking species and the first time Erick had seen this behaviour. We thought that was it, and began heading back for lunch, but we were in for yet another treat! Another group had found an Army Ant swarm, and told us they

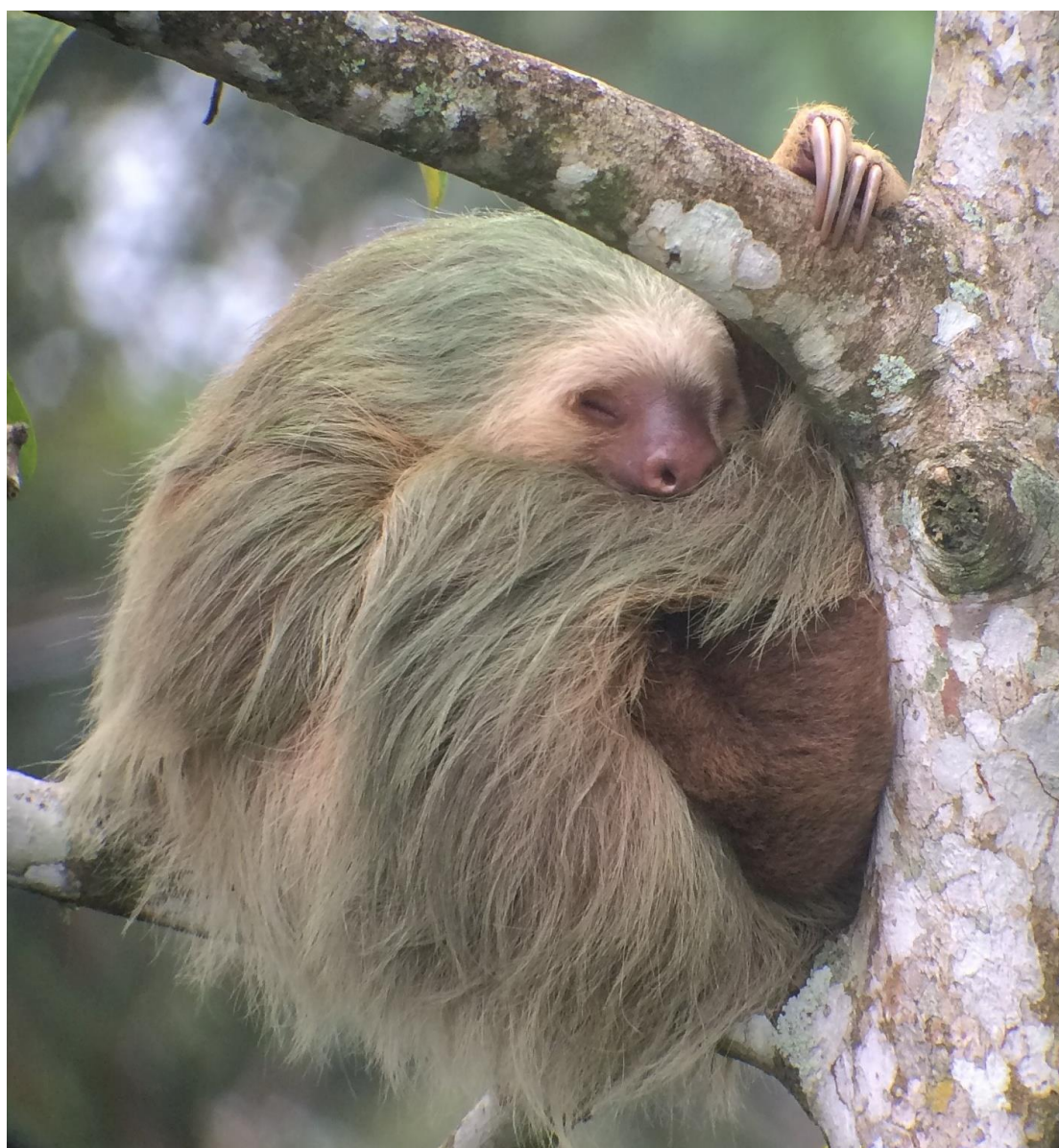
had just seen **Ocellated Antbird**! This neotropical gem is difficult to connect with, and is only ever encountered around ants – would it still be around? We stood quietly and watched, trying to latch onto every movement in the undergrowth. Several gorgeous **Spotted Antbirds** showed well, themselves a new species for the trip, and there were also appearances from **Buff-rumped Warbler**, **Northern Barred Woodcreeper** and **Dusky Antbird**. Eventually a large, dark shape shot past – it was the **Ocellated Antbird**! Over the next half an hour it showed occasionally, but only perched in view for a second before disappearing again. We managed to get one person in the group a scope view, another two or three saw it through bins. The rest only saw it in flight – not easy! We headed back to the lodge for lunch, just before an hour of torrential rain set in – we had been very, very lucky.



Black-mandibled Toucan

We reconvened in the afternoon at 3pm, after our long morning, and travelled out along the entrance road in the bus. It was raining pretty hard, so our resolve was tested somewhat to look for birds! We did see a couple of really nice things along the way though, including a perched **Grey Hawk**, and a nest-building **Rufous-tailed Hummingbird**. It was pretty tough going though, and the light wasn't the greatest, so we returned as far as the bridge over the river by the lodge entrance. Here the rain eased off, and we had a very good half hour. **Crimson-collared Tanager** and **Bay Wren** were both seen well [with some perseverance!] in the lush vegetation along the edge of the river, and a **Rufous-tailed Jacamar** was perched up by the bridge and returning to the same perch in between sallies. **Black Phoebe** and **Grey-capped Flycatcher** were also seen, so it had been far from a wasted journey. To be honest, it was quite nice to take a break from the frantic birding we had been enjoying, and we were quite happy to return to the lodge early and enjoy a cuppa and have chance to catch up with our notes from the morning.

SUNDAY 14TH JANUARY – A wet day, clearing in the afternoon. 20C



Hoffman's Two-toed Sloth and baby

We had a leisurely start this morning (breakfast at 7am!) and added a single new species on the fruit feeders as we ate – **Chestnut-headed Oropendola**. Then it was time to load up the bus and make a two hour drive to the east, though of course this was punctuated with one or two impromptu stops. The first was for an absolutely cracking view of a **Hoffman's Two-toed Sloth**, hanging in a small secropia by a busy crossroads! The creature was virtually at eye level, giving a rare close up view indeed. Further on and we had stops for **White-crowned Parrots**, two **Green Ibis** perched up in a tree and a nice **Bat Falcon**. It was pouring with rain as we wound our way up into the foothills, crossing raging rivers which had swollen to the tops of their banks with tumultuous brown water. Eventually we climbed to the top of the ridge where a small café awaited us – and what a tremendous place it was! A verandah overlooked fruit and sugar feeders, and with the torrential rain sheeting down off the roof we could stand in the dry, drink coffee, eat tortilla and watch some fantastic birds at touching distance! **Prong-billed Barbets** were feeding side by side with **Red-headed Barbet**, **Palm**, **Blue Grey**, **Common Bush** and **Silver-throated Tanagers**. **Emerald Toucanets** were eating bananas so close you could almost touch them, and stonking male **Baltimore Orioles** vied for position with **Buff-throated** and **Black-headed Saltators**. And then there were the hummingbirds! **Violet Sabrewing**, the largest hummingbird in Costa Rica, was buzzing in and out and frequently landing

on a perch just inches away. **Green-crowned Brilliant** was also present in numbers, and was a new species for all of us to boot. A **Green Hermit** also put in a very brief appearance, and perhaps best of all a **Buff-fronted Quail-dove** appeared. Initially sneaking about in the undergrowth and hard to view, it eventually flew up and perched on a branch right in front of us – what a bonus! It was hard to tear ourselves away from this magical spot, but we still had another hour to go before we reached our final lodge – Selva Verde.



Emerald Toucanet

Arriving in the dry, as the rain had now fizzled out, we checked into our spacious rooms and met up at the restaurant overlooking the bird feeders. New species came thick and fast again, with **Red-throated Ant-tanager** and **Blue Dacnis** on the bird table. A superb **Crimson-collared Tanager** also popped in, and we saw a **Great Tinamou** walking among the leaf litter close by. It was pretty hard to get through lunch! Red-legged and Green Honeycreepers and bold male Summer Tanagers wowed us as suddenly the bird table would become a hive of activity for a few minutes, before dying back to 'just' Clay-coloured Thrushes again! Elsewhere in the grounds, by our cabins, we enjoyed wonderful views of two **Red-lored Parrots** breaking open fruits to get at the seeds within, and a dazzling male **Red-capped Manakin** popped up in the same tree too. We decided to leave the rest of the grounds until tomorrow morning, and instead made the fifteen minute drive after lunch to the edge of La Selva Biological Station. Pausing on the way by the river, we marvelled at the torrent of water coming downstream after the earlier rain! Black Phoebe, **Southern Rough-winged Swallow** and a showy **Olive-backed Euphonia** were noted in the process. Reaching the edge of La Selva, we did some

gentle birding along the approach track, finding **Mourning Warbler**, **Slaty Spinetail**, a flock of **Masked Tityra** and plenty of other common tanagers. Two **Great Green Macaws** flew in calling, and we watched them through the scope as they settled nicely on an open perch and began preening one another. We had several more sightings of this magnificent parrot as we wandered along the track – a real highlight. Other species seen here included a lovely pair of **Bat Falcons**, a party of **Grey-headed Chachalaca**, **Common Tody-flycatcher** and **Red-ored Parrot**. A busy tree by the side of the track produced two new flycatchers in quick succession – a pair of **Yellow-bellied Elaenia** and a brief and rather out of place **Ochre-bellied Flycatcher**. Rejoining Rodrigo with the bus, we watched two **Black-cheeked Woodpeckers** and then found a skulking **Rufous-winged Woodpecker**, feeding unobtrusively in the crown of a big tree. We all managed a scope view, as dusk began to descend on another busy day in Costa Rica.

MONDAY 15TH JANUARY – *A calm overcast day with frequent light rain, 23C*



Gartered Trogon

It was raining at first light this morning, so our pre-breakfast amble was rather limited to the covered walkways around Selva Verde grounds. Nevertheless we saw a few birds, including a couple of new species – **Black-crowned Tityra**, **Tropical Gnatcatcher** and **Bright-rumped Atilla** – along with excellent views of **Red-throated Ant-tanager** and another **Hoffman's Two-toed Sloth**. After breakfast, we boarded the bus and made the fifteen minute drive back to La Selva Biological Research Station, where we would spend the morning. Birding along the entrance road produced **Dusky-capped Flycatcher**, **Broad-billed Motmot**, **Blue-black Grosbeak**, **Scaled Pigeon**, **Gartered Trogon** and many other common species with which we were now very familiar. Reaching the station, we signed in and birded our way down and across the bridge over what was now a rather spectacular river – having risen again overnight! **Crested Guan**, **Collared Aracari**, **Masked Tityra**, **Bay-headed Tanager**, **Pale-billed Woodpecker**, **Keel-billed** and **Black-mandibled Toucans**, **Bronze-tailed Plumeleteer** and **Boat-billed Flycatcher** were all seen in this immediate area, Crossing the bridge, two **Green Ibis** were roosting in the trees, and soon we found our first **Collared Peccaries** in the

gardens on the other side. They were rather confiding, and obviously well used to people! Males of both **White-ruffed** and **White-collared Manakins** were seen, and a **Black-faced Solitaire** dropped down onto the path where it sat long enough for everyone to get a nice scope view – a bit of a surprise to see it at such low elevation!



White-faced Capuchin Monkey

Taking the trail deeper into the forest, we were surrounded by bromeliads, mosses, vines and buttress roots as we quietly walked along looking for movement. It was fairly quiet, and we had to work hard for what we did see, but there was some real quality to be found. A group of **White-faced Capuchin Monkeys** entertained us, and following them closely was a **Double-toothed Kite**. This forest raptor perched beautifully for us in the open on a mossy branch, so we could see its distinctive double pointed edge to its upper mandible. In the same area, we could hear a **Black-capped Pygmy-tyrant** calling and eventually located it in the scope – the smallest passerine in the world! High in the canopy above, we saw more toucans, and a small feeding flock of **Olive-throated Parakeets**. Making our way back out along the trail, a tinamou crossed our path and we spent some time waiting quietly for it to reappear. Some of us managed a decent enough view to identify it as a **Slaty-breasted Tinamou**, its pinkish-red legs being the main giveaway, in combination with its size. As we neared the forest edge, we became aware of a feeding flock above us, so we headed into the clearing in order to look back. A female **Western Slaty Antshrike** was seen, along with great views of **Squirrel Cuckoo**, **Cocoa Woodcreeper**, **Wedge-billed Woodcreeper**, **Black-cheeked Woodpecker** and for some a **Rufous Mourner** in the scope. Best bird here was a male **Fasciated Antshrike**, which showed up among some palm leaves and gave everyone a good view. **Yellow-throated Vireo** and **Bronzy Hermit** were

the final birds of the morning as we re-crossed the suspension bridge back to the centre. As is typical in this type of terrain, perseverance paid off in the end with some really good birds seen this morning.



Double-toothed Kite

After a leisurely lunch, we headed back to La Selva again in the late afternoon to try another trail. With the river so high, and much of the forest underwater, we felt we had a really good chance to find the elusive Sunbittern which may have been pushed off some of the smaller watercourses. Sadly this particular target didn't materialise, but we did see some cracking birds instead. **Grey-chested Dove** and **Rufous Motmot** were seen well as a result of careful scanning of the dark forest understorey. **Black-throated Wren** was a new list addition and we had absolutely fantastic views of a pair of **Chestnut-coloured Woodpeckers**. **Semiplumbeous Hawk** is one of those neotropical forest raptors which is more often heard than seen, and we could hear one calling not far away but were unable to locate it. The mosquitoes were starting to take a grip of proceedings as afternoon wore on towards dusk, but we persevered and added a brief **Long-billed Gnatwren** and had excellent scope views of a **Rufous Mourner**, a bird most of us had missed in the morning. Heading back up to the main trail, Erick spotted the **Semiplumbeous Hawk** through a window in the foliage, and it was a stunning view! Every now and again the bird would stretch a little and call with wide eyes and a gaping bill – quite superb! The track was busy with **Orange-billed Sparrows** as we headed back out, and we had more cracking views of **Rufous Motmot** and **Grey-chested Dove**. Perhaps our toughest session of the trip, but with the list now over 350 species, it was always going to get harder! Back to the lodge for some packing, before 'happy hour'.



Red-eyed Tree Frog

TUESDAY 16TH JANUARY – *Overcast with rain, 25C*

Our final day today but with an evening flight we still had half a days birding before lunch. Around Selve Verde pre-breakfast we added **Lesser Swallow-tailed Swift** to the list and saw a few other nice birds – **Orange-chinned Parakeet**, **Masked Tityra**, **Bright-rumped Atilla**, **Buff-rumped Warbler**, **White-necked Jacobin** and **Red-throated Ant-tanager**. After breakfast, we loaded up our luggage for the last time and made the forty minute drive towards ‘cope’s house’ where we would spend the morning. Cope is a talented artist, photographer and outstanding field naturalist, who invites groups to visit his humble abode which he has turned into a tiny nature reserve with a freshwater pool and feeding station, complete with viewing gallery. On our way there, we stopped at one of the many gushing rivers (the Rio San Jose), to check again without success for Sunbittern. Instead we found **Louisiana Waterthrush**, **Olive-backed Euphonia**, **Yellow Tyrannulet** and our first **Bay-breasted Warbler** of the trip. Ten minutes or so later and we reached Cope’s, where we were taken into his garden ‘hide’. What a treat this place is – the feeding station was busting with birds of all shapes, sizes and colours! Both **Montezuma** and **Chestnut-headed Oropendolas**, **Scarlet-rumped Cacique**, **Collared Aracari** and **Pale-vented Pigeon** were among the larger species often dominating the feeders, but these would disappear leaving an army of **Palm**, **Passerini’s**, **Blue-Grey**, **Silver-throated** and **Emerald Tanagers** to take over. Both **Red-legged** and **Shining Honeycreepers** could be seen side by side, and there were also visits from **Melodious Blackbird**, **Black-cheeked Woodpecker** and even a **Black-mandibled Toucan**! All this was playing out no more than 5 metres away – absolutely stunning! Cope also had many hummingbird feeders around the hide, and these were buzzing with feisty **White-necked Jacobins** and **Bronze-tailed Plumeleteer**. **Long-billed** and **Stripe-throated Hermits** were also occasional visitors. We had to tear ourselves away, as we were birding against the clock today, and Cope wanted to take us a short distance in the bus to check a **Crested Owl** roost. Unfortunately, and probably due to the weather, no owls were present on this occasion. We did

however have a very unexpected bonus – two cracking adult **King Vultures** circling overhead! A **Grey-headed Kite** was also seen – we were still picking up new birds, even at this late stage of the trip!



Silver-throated Tanager

From here we had to make the journey over the mountains, through the clouds and some more torrential rain, to reach San Jose. We had timed our journey to allow for any eventualities, such as potential landslides on the mountain road, but the journey all went smoothly meaning we had plenty of time to spare. Erick and Rodrigo took us to an excellent restaurant on the edge of the city for a slap up farewell lunch, and then we continued through the traffic to the airport. We could hardly believe it was already time to go home – even though in many ways, it felt like we had been in Costa Rica for months given how much we had packed in! Our flight back to London departed on time, around 1845, and we arrived back at Gatwick at 1100 the next day.



Passerini's Tanager



Chestnut-headed Oropendola

SYSTEMATIC LIST

1. Great Tinamou
2. Slaty-breasted Tinamou
3. Brown Pelican
4. Neotropic Cormorant
5. Anhinga
6. Magnificent Frigatebird
7. Bare-throated Tiger-heron
8. Fasciated Tiger-heron
9. Black-crowned Night-heron
10. Yellow-crowned Night-heron
11. Boat-billed Heron
12. Cattle Egret
13. Green Heron
14. Little Blue Heron
15. Tricoloured Heron
16. Snowy Egret
17. Great Egret
18. Great Blue Heron
19. Jabiru
20. Wood Stork
21. Green Ibis
22. White Ibis
23. Roseate Spoonbill
24. Black-bellied Whistling Duck
25. Blue-winged Teal
26. Turkey Vulture
27. Black Vulture
28. King Vulture
29. Osprey
30. Grey-headed Kite
31. American Swallow-tailed Kite
32. White-tailed Kite
33. Double-toothed Kite
34. Snail Kite
35. Semi-plumbeous Hawk
36. Common Black-hawk
37. Zone-tailed Hawk
38. Grey Hawk
39. Roadside Hawk
40. Broad-winged Hawk
41. Short-tailed Hawk
42. Red-tailed Hawk
43. Crested Caracara
44. Yellow-headed Caracara
45. Laughing Falcon
46. Collared Forest-falcon (H)
47. Barred Forest-falcon

48. Bat Falcon
49. American Kestrel
50. Peregrine
51. Great Curassow
52. Black Guan
53. Crested Guan
54. Grey-headed Chachalaca
55. Spotted Wood-quail
56. Grey-necked Wood-rail
57. White-throated Crake (H)
58. American Purple Gallinule
59. Northern Jacana
60. Limpkin
61. Double-striped Thick-knee
62. Black-necked Stilt
63. Southern Lapwing
64. Wilson's Plover
65. Semipalmated Plover
66. Collared Plover
67. Kildeer
68. Hudsonian Whimbrel
69. Willet
70. Spotted Sandpiper
71. Semipalmated Sandpiper
72. Western Sandpiper
73. Ruddy Turnstone
74. Greater Yellowlegs
75. Short-billed Dowitcher
76. Solitary Sandpiper
77. Least Sandpiper
78. Laughing Gull
79. Royal Tern
80. Scaled Pigeon
81. Band-tailed Pigeon
82. Pale-vented Pigeon
83. Red-billed Pigeon
84. Ruddy Pigeon
85. Short-billed Pigeon
86. White-winged Dove
87. Inca Dove
88. Ruddy Ground-dove
89. Common Ground-dove
90. White-tipped Dove
91. Grey-chested Dove
92. Buff-fronted Quail-dove
93. Ruddy Quail-dove
94. Scarlet Macaw
95. Great Green Macaw
96. Crimson-fronted Parakeet
97. Olive-throated Parakeet

- 98. Orange-fronted Parakeet
- 99. Orange-chinned Parakeet
- 100. Sulphur-winged Parakeet
- 101. Barred Parakeet
- 102. White-crowned Parrot
- 103. White-fronted Parrot
- 104. Red-lored Parrot
- 105. Mealy Parrot
- 106. Yellow-naped Parrot
- 107. Squirrel Cuckoo
- 108. Groove-billed Ani
- 109. Pacific Screech-owl
- 110. Spectacled Owl
- 111. Ferruginous Pygmy-owl
- 112. Great Potoo
- 113. Lesser Nighthawk
- 114. White-collared Swift
- 115. Lesser Swallow-tailed Swift
- 116. Grey-rumped Swift
- 117. Bronzy Hermit
- 118. Band-tailed Barbthroat
- 119. Long-billed Hermit
- 120. Green Hermit
- 121. Stripe-throated Hermit
- 122. Scaly-breasted Hummingbird
- 123. Violet Sabrewing
- 124. White-necked Jacobin
- 125. Green Violet-ear
- 126. Green-breasted Mango
- 127. Violet-headed Emerald
- 128. Black-crested Coquette
- 129. Canivet's Emerald
- 130. Violet-crowned Woodnymph
- 131. Fiery-throated Hummingbird
- 132. Blue-throated Goldentail
- 133. Mangrove Hummingbird (E)
- 134. Steely-vented Hummingbird
- 135. Cinammon Hummingbird
- 136. Rufous-tailed Hummingbird
- 137. Stripe-tailed Hummingbird
- 138. White-throated Mountain-gem
- 139. Bronze-tailed Plumeleteer
- 140. Green-crowned Brilliant
- 141. Magnificent Hummingbird
- 142. Purple-crowned Fairy
- 143. Ruby-throated Hummingbird
- 144. Volcano Hummingbird
- 145. Scintillant Hummingbird
- 146. Resplendent Quetzal
- 147. Slaty-tailed Trogon

148. Black-headed Trogon
149. Collared Trogon
150. Black-throated Trogon
151. Gartered (Violaceous) Trogon
152. Ringed Kingfisher
153. Amazon Kingfisher
154. Green Kingfisher
155. American Pygmy Kingfisher
156. Broad-billed Motmot
157. Turquoise-browed Motmot
158. Rufous Motmot
159. Keel-billed Motmot
160. Blue-crowned (Lesson's) Motmot
161. Rufous-tailed Jacamar
162. White-necked Puffbird
163. Pied Puffbird
164. White-whiskered Puffbird
165. Red-headed Barbet
166. Prong-billed Barbet
167. Emerald Toucanet
168. Collared Aracari
169. Fiery-billed Aracari
170. Keel-billed Toucan
171. Black-mandibled Toucan
172. Acorn Woodpecker
173. Black-cheeked Woodpecker
174. Hoffman's Woodpecker
175. Red-crowned Woodpecker
176. Hairy Woodpecker
177. Golden-olive Woodpecker
178. Rufous-winged Woodpecker
179. Chestnut-coloured Woodpecker
180. Lineated Woodpecker
181. Pale-billed Woodpecker
182. Tawny-winged Woodcreeper
183. Wedge-billed Woodcreeper
184. Northern Barred Woodcreeper
185. Cocoa Woodcreeper
186. Steak-headed Woodcreeper
187. Spot-crowned Woodcreeper
188. Slaty Spinetail
189. Ruddy Treerunner
190. Plain Xenops
191. Fasciated Antshrike
192. Barred Antshrike
193. Black-hooded Antshrike
194. Black-crowned (Western Slaty) Antshrike
195. Dusky Antbird
196. Chestnut-backed Antbird
197. Dull-mantled Antbird

198. Bicoloured Antbird
199. Spotted Antbird
200. Ocellated Antbird
201. Black-faced Antthrush
202. Barred Becard
203. Cinammon Becard
204. Rose-throated Becard
205. White-winged Becard
206. Masked Tityra
207. Black-crowned Tityra
208. Turquoise Cotinga
209. Lovely Cotinga
210. Red-capped Manakin
211. Blue-crowned Manakin
212. Long-tailed Manakin
213. White-ruffed Manakin
214. White-collared Manakin
215. Black Phoebe
216. Long-tailed Tyrant
217. Scissor-tailed Flycatcher
218. Tropical Kingbird
219. Boat-billed Flycatcher
220. Bright-rumped Atila
221. Streaked Flycatcher
222. Golden-bellied Flycatcher
223. Grey-capped Flycatcher
224. Social Flycatcher
225. Great Kiskadee
226. Rufous Mourner
227. Panama Flycatcher
228. Brown-crested Flycatcher
229. Great Crested Flycatcher
230. Dusky-capped Flycatcher
231. Olive-sided Flycatcher
232. Ochraceous Pewee
233. Yellow-bellied Flycatcher
234. Yellowish Flycatcher
235. Black-capped Flycatcher
236. Tufted Flycatcher
237. Sulphur-rumped Flycatcher
238. Yellow-olive Flycatcher
239. Eye-ringed Flatbill
240. Common Tody-flycatcher
241. Scale-crested Pygmy-tyrant
242. Black-capped Pygmy-tyrant
243. Yellow Tyrannulet
244. Torrent Tyrranulet
245. Yellow-bellied Elaenia
246. Mountain Elaenia
247. Greenish Elaenia

- 248. Northern Beardless Tyrannulet
- 249. Paltry Tyrannulet
- 250. Olive-striped Flycatcher
- 251. Ochre-bellied Flycatcher
- 252. Grey-breasted Martin
- 253. Barn Swallow
- 254. Southern Rough-winged Swallow
- 255. Northern Rough-winged Swallow
- 256. Blue & White Swallow
- 257. Mangrove Swallow
- 258. Brown Jay
- 259. White-throated Magpie-Jay
- 260. Band-backed Wren
- 261. Rufous-naped Wren
- 262. Stripe-breasted Wren
- 263. Bay Wren
- 264. Banded Wren
- 265. Riverside Wren
- 266. Black-throated Wren
- 267. Rufous-breasted Wren
- 268. House Wren
- 269. Ochraceous Wren
- 270. Timberline Wren
- 271. Grey-breasted Wood-wren
- 272. White-breasted Wood-wren
- 273. White-throated Thrush
- 274. Clay-coloured Thrush
- 275. Mountain Thrush
- 276. Sooty Thrush
- 277. Black-faced Solitaire
- 278. Wood Thrush
- 279. Swainson's Thrush
- 280. Ruddy-capped Nightingale-thrush
- 281. Black-billed Nightingale-thrush
- 282. Tropical Gnatcatcher
- 283. White-lored Gnatcatcher
- 284. Long-billed Gnatwren
- 285. Long-tailed Silky-flycatcher
- 286. Black and Yellow Silky-flycatcher
- 287. Yellow-throated Vireo
- 288. Philadelphia Vireo
- 289. Brown-capped Vireo
- 290. Lesser Greenlet
- 291. Bananaquit
- 292. Black and White Warbler
- 293. Prothonotary Warbler
- 294. Golden-winged Warbler
- 295. Tennessee Warbler
- 296. Flame-throated Warbler
- 297. Tropical Parula

- 298. Yellow Warbler (also conspecific Mangrove Warbler)
- 299. Black-throated Green Warbler
- 300. Chestnut-sided Warbler
- 301. Northern Waterthrush
- 302. Louisiana Waterthrush
- 303. Mourning Warbler
- 304. Grey-crowned Yellowthroat
- 305. Wilson's Warbler
- 306. American Redstart
- 307. Collared Redstart
- 308. Golden-crowned Warbler
- 309. Black-cheeked Warbler
- 310. Rufous-capped Warbler
- 311. Buff-rumped Warbler
- 312. Chestnut-headed Oropendola
- 313. Montezuma Oropendola
- 314. Scarlet-rumped Cacique
- 315. Yellow-billed Cacique
- 316. Giant Cowbird
- 317. Melodious Blackbird
- 318. Great-tailed Grackle
- 319. Orchard Oriole
- 320. Spot-breasted Oriole
- 321. Streak-backed Oriole
- 322. Black-cowled Oriole
- 323. Baltimore Oriole
- 324. Red-winged Blackbird
- 325. Eastern Meadowlark
- 326. Golden-browed Chlorophonia
- 327. Tawny-capped Euphonia
- 328. Yellow-throated Euphonia
- 329. Olive-backed Euphonia
- 330. Emerald Tanager
- 331. Silver-throated Tanager
- 332. Golden-hooded Tanager
- 333. Bay-headed Tanager
- 334. Spangle-cheeked Tanager
- 335. Green Honeycreeper
- 336. Red-legged Honeycreeper
- 337. Shining Honeycreeper
- 338. Blue Dacnis
- 339. Blue-grey Tanager
- 340. Palm Tanager
- 341. Passerini's Tanager
- 342. Cherries Tanager
- 343. Crimson-collared Tanager
- 344. Summer Tanager
- 345. Flame-coloured Tanager
- 346. Red-throated Ant-tanager
- 347. White-shouldered Tanager

- 348. Grey-headed Tanager
- 349. Common Chlorospingus (Bush-tanager)
- 350. Sooty-capped Chlorospingus (Bush-tanager)
- 351. Black-headed Saltator
- 352. Buff-throated Saltator
- 353. Greyish Saltator
- 354. Black-thighed Grosbeak
- 355. Rose-breasted Grosbeak
- 356. Blue-black Grosbeak
- 357. Painted Bunting
- 358. Blue-black Grassquit
- 359. Yellow-faced Grassquit
- 360. White-collared Seedeater
- 361. Variable Seedeater
- 362. Slaty Flowerpiercer
- 363. Large-footed Finch
- 364. Yellow-thighed Finch
- 365. Orange-billed Sparrow
- 366. Black-striped Sparrow
- 367. White-eared Ground-sparrow
- 368. Volcano Junco
- 369. Rufous-collared Sparrow
- 370. House Sparrow

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