

**COSTA RICA – Grand Circuit
Birds, mammals & breathtaking landscapes**



COSTA RICA TRIP REPORT - 20February-5March 2020



The following is a detailed **Trip Report of our February-March 2020 Costa Rica tour.**

We had seen 351 species, heard another 15 and Spot-fronted Swift was seen by leader only. This group was put together by our good old friend, Bernie Forbes who this time was accompanied by his cheerful wife, Carol and many friends who were with us at various former tours ranging from Ethiopia through Hungary and Mexico or Belarus. So the cheerful team members were Simon, Jenny and Tim, Helen, Mark, Clive, Shoan and Norainne, Ivan, Bernie and Carol.

For daily species list please contact us at ecotoursgabororban@gmail.com or cancuninfo@gmail.com

All pictures in this material were made by participants and leaders.

Fact File

- 15-day-long birding holiday with some mammals, butterflies, amphibians, reptiles, orchids and other tropical plants, plus breathtaking landscapes

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- start and finish in San Jose, Costa Rica
- using 6 accommodations to maximise the visited areas, but each minimum for 2 nights and all with great on-site birding and en-suite rooms
- this tour was a modified version of our websignup itinerary, please ask for details

Highlights

- visit Carara NP and **optional boat trip** at River and mangroves of Tarcoles
- visits to Pacific Coast sanctuaries, National Parks and reserves including **optional whale-watching and birding boat tour** at Bahia Ballena NP; Baru area; Piedras Blancas NP
- birding and staying at Wilson Botanical Garden in the Coto Brus area, close to Panama
- Talamanca Mountains and Cerro de la Muerte with Paramo vegetation
- Savegre Reserve, high mountain cloud forests
- La Virgen de Sarapiquí and La Selva Region, Caribbean Slope
- birding at Arenal & Volcan Tenorio area, near the Nicaraguan border- wide variety of birds, mammals, reptiles, butterflies and habitats



Accommodation

- 2 nights at Carara NP, Villas Lapas, Northern Central Pacific
- 2 nights at a Lodge at Southern Central Pacific
- 3 nights at Wilson's Botanical Garden, South Pacific, close to Panama
- 2 nights at San Gerardo de Dota at Savegre Mountain,
- 3 nights Gavilan Lodge Sarapiquí, Cordillera Central, Caribbean slope
- 2 nights Celeste Mountain Lodge Bijagua-Volcan Tenorio, near Nicaragua
- 1 overnight flight home



We tried hard to get everything clean & tidy by the time the group arrived :-)

Activity level & weather

Timing was perfect and we were very lucky with the weather, we had crystal clear weather most of the time. In the hills mornings were chilly, but without wind it was tolerable. On the plains sometimes it was hot, but dry, so again it was not bad at all especially that sometimes during the hottest hours we had a bit of siesta time. Only at the Southernmost and the Northernmost parts of the tour we had rain once at

each place, but we managed to keep dry.

Most of the birding walks were easy so regardless of age and fitness everybody could do it.



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Detailed day by day description of the tour and observations:

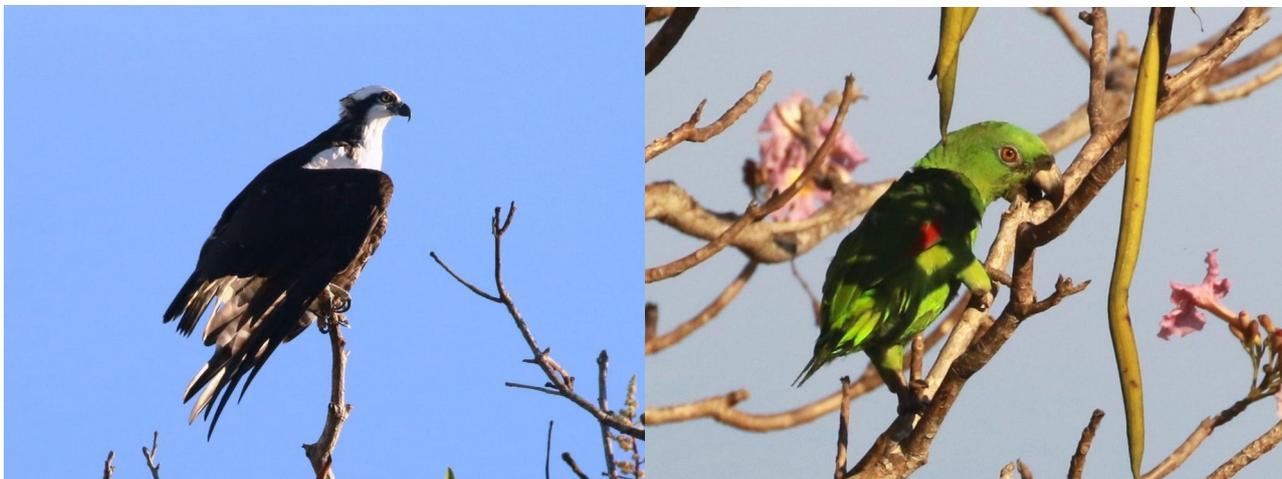
Day1 20February 2020



Andi and Gabor started their journey up to San Jose early this morning from their beautiful Pacific Costa Rican home, Toucan Birding Ecolodge & Wildlife Reserve, www.toucanbirdingecolodge-costarica.com, while the group started their flight from London around 11am. We finally met at the airport around 6pm. The group had a size of a football team, so they could easily fit in the comfortable 25 seater bus, commanded by Louis, our excellent driver.



Within less than one and a half hour drive we arrived to our accommodation at the edge of Carara National Park. We checked in quickly and soon we enjoyed our first full all you can eat dinner. We discussed the next day and since everybody was tired and we planned an early start we decided to go to bed right after dinner.

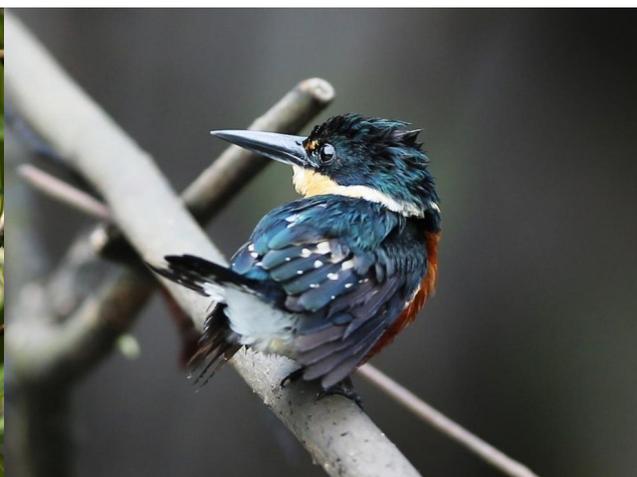


Day2

21February 2020



Our first full day started early, but it was worth to meet before 5.30 and soon we heard Spectacled Owl which Gabor pointed out on a large tree. Common Parakeets were around as well and one of them offered excellent photo opportunities. Later we drove to the nearby small port alongside the Tarcoles River where the first bird was a Rufous-naped Wren. We started a 2 hours long mangrove boat trip where both the captain and the local guide really know not just where to go but how to spot the birds. So it was a great cooperation between them and us, so we ended up with close to 100 species.



Mealy Parrots were loud around us and Mangrove Swallows tried to land on our boat which was large and comfy even for a large group. We had excellent views of perched Yellow-naped Parrots, Baltimore Oriole, Crested Caracara, Anhinga and juvenile Jacana.



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As we approached the estuary we found lot of Brown Pelicans and Magnificent Frigatebirds. The next birds were Muscovy Duck, Little Blue Heron, Snowy Egret, Yellow-crowned Night-heron, Tricolored Heron, Willet, Spotted and Least Sandpiper, Whimbrel, Laughing Gull, Black Skimmer, Semipalmated Plover. We also had Green Kingfisher but the Scarlet Macaws stole the show. We heard regularly Rufous-browed Pepper-shrike but could not see it, but we managed to see properly Mangrove Yellow Warbler, Protonotary Warbler, Tennessee Warbler and Yellow-headed Caracara. A very cooperative Mangrove Cuckoo was really nice and we also enjoyed 2 Plumbeous Kites circling above.

A small group of Black-necked Stilts were quite close and we had our first Hoffman's Woodpecker and Red-winged Blackbird. Heard and then spotted Northern Waterthrush. We also added Sanderling, Gray Plover and Ringed Kingfisher to the list. But among the kingfishers definitely the American Pygmy Kingfisher offered a great view and we found it several times. Also it was great to see up close the funny looking Boat-billed Flycatcher.

Well, this tour was surely a fantastic start and the day was far from over. We returned to the hotel for a buffet style breakfast which was really tasty and filling. During breakfast we saw Yellow-throated Toucan, Hoffman's Woodpecker and Scarlet-rumped Tanager.

So after 9.30 we ventured out again, this time discovering the area on land. First we stopped alongside a watery-marshy area partly covered by mangrove which hold lot of herons, egrets and wood storks. From here we walked a but further where on a lonely mango tree Andi found 2 Black-and-White Owls. We had stunning views and photographs.



Here we met with a local guy who asked us whether we would be interested in some more owl? We eagerly said yes, so we walked a bit further (few hundred Costa Rican meters) and went in to an abandoned garden. After a few calls a Ferruginous Pygmy Owl came in and offered an excellent view for everybody. Only a few trees further among dense cover we had another great species, Pacific Screech Owl. Well, we surely could call this a great Owl day, having four different species within a few hours!

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It started to get really hot, so we decided to visit the beach in hope of some breeze and a closer views of Scarlet Macaws. Both worked well at the edge of the Tarcoles village where we had the Macaws feeding on an almond tree just in front of us. Bernie pointed out a Peregrine Falcon which hunted over the shore. We had a Royal Tern and a Hoffman's Woodpecker.



After this stop we went a bit further, crossed the Tarcoles River and had lunch at the Crocodile Restaurant. Finally we returned to the hotel, had siesta time during the hottest part of the afternoon and then from 4pm we tried to discover the gardens. At the beginning we were hit by a heavy rain which we survived sitting on benches under the roofs. After the rain we had better bird activity with different tanagers including Scarlet-rumped, Blue-grey, Palm and Flycatchers such as Social & Gray-capped. We also had Pale-vented Pigeon, Buff-rumped Warbler and after crossing a nice pedestrian bridge we found ourselves in a different garden. Here we found Rufous-naped Wren making its nest, Red-legged Honeycreeper, Cocoa Woodcreeper, Wilson's Warbler and Purple-crowned Fairy. We even saw a pair of Scarlet Macaws. Finally we returned for dinner which we started 7.30pm, later continued with the list.



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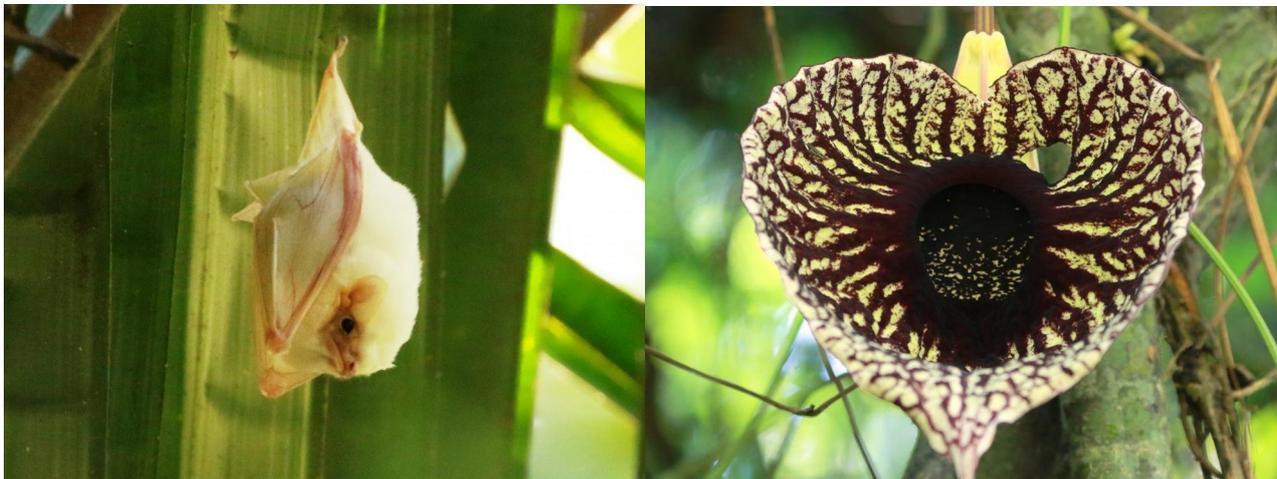
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Day3 22February 2020

Today's morning after breakfast we dedicated for birding in the Carara National Park. We met with a local guide, Mauricio at the main entrance where we bought the tickets, but after that we went to the Laguna Meanderica trail. At this entrance first we had a Pale-billed Woodpecker right above our head. This was followed by Black-hooded Antshrike, Tennessee Warbler, Philadelphia Vireo and some hummingbirds such as Blue-throated Goldentail, Long-billed Hermit and Rufous-tailed Hummingbird.



It was a bit entertaining that each time we found a bird, Mauricio called out the name and told his brother a page number where he was supposed to open the book and show the bird. But since the brother many times went ahead, searched and found birds we were not sure whether Mauricio just invented numbers while the brother knew exactly where to open the book. Still it was an interesting performance and from now on there was a pressure on Gabor not just to find and ID birds, but announce the page number as well! :-)



We found some more great birds such as Gartered Trogon and White-Whiskered Puffbird. We also added Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, American Redstart, Rufous-naped Wren, Short-billed Pigeon and Summer Tanager. A Black-headed Trogon offered a good comparison with the previously seen trogons. We also had White-tipped Dove, Dusky Antbird and Crested Guan. A big surprise was a Tayra, crossing in front of us really close. We encountered more and more species such as Yellow-crowned Euphonia, Purple-crowned Fairy and Blue-black Grosbeak. Then a great surprise was found by Andi, a raptor sitting just above the trail which caused quite a lot of discussion. Maurice did not know the bird, neither the page number. We checked all the details and also the pics made by Simon and we came to the conclusion that it was a Gray-lined Hawk. The next great bird with which we spent quite a lot of time was Orange-

collared Manakin. Once a Ruddy-tailed Flycatcher landed on the same branch where the manakin displayed. We also had Yellow-bellied Flycatcher.

Finally we returned to the bus, Mauricio and his brother surprised us with some slices of chilled watermelon and then we returned to our hotel to check out at noon. After less than 2 hours drive South alongside the Pacific coast we arrived to Andi and Gabor's favorite restaurant, Ricar2. Here we had a very rich and dense Aztec soup in huge deep plates. It is a Mexican recipe but popular in Costa Rica as well. Surely it was enough till evening. Beside an airplane, a swimming pool this restaurant could boast with quite good local birding as well, so we saw Scarlet-rumped Tanager, Yellow Warbler, Bananaquit, Red-crowned Woodpecker, Stripe-throated Hermit, Violet-crowned Woodnymph, Palm Tanager and Fiery-billed Aracari. Finally we continued our way and about an hour later we arrived to our new accommodation which had a completely different style and concept than the previous one. Here we had luxury safari tents with en-suite bathrooms alongside a roaming river with rapids and small cascades. We had a little time to look around and found a few species such as Nothern Crested Caracara or Buff-throated Saltator.

For dinner we went further down alongside the river valley to a small local restaurant. Food was great, but the light was not enough to make the list, so we decided to do that back at Rio Tico lodge.



Day4 23February 2020

Several people were eager to go out before breakfast to search birds. Species were found included Black-cowled Oriole, Lesson's Motmot, Red-crowned Woodpecker, Smooth-billed Ani, Golden-hooded Tanager, Gray-necked Woodrail, Ruddy & Blue Ground-dove, Cattle Egret, Coca Woodcreeper, Wilson's Warbler and White-necked Jacobin.

After a great breakfast with some real coffee we traveled to Uvita, stopped at a Whale-watching tour organizer company, signed some papers and paid before we went closer to the beach to park. We got everything we needed for a 3-3,5 hour long boat trip and walked to the boat, which was really comfortable for the group.

We have traveled quite a lot to and back from Cano Island covering more than 100 kilometers. During the journey we had a few times Pacific Spotted Dolphins and Parrot Turtles. Birds included Brown and Red-footed Boobies. Black and Turkey Vultures. One of the most challenging bird was a Wandering Tattler but we also had a Yellow-crowned Night-heron.

When we arrived back to Uvita before we boarded the bus we found a female Green-berated Mango sitting in her nest on the electric wire.

From Uvita we went to a small restaurant which had a great surrounding. Lot of palm trees, edge of a small forest and a picturesque beach which we all visited after having lunch. We had several Clay-coloured Thrushes and Rufous-tailed Hummingbirds, but also had Dusky-capped

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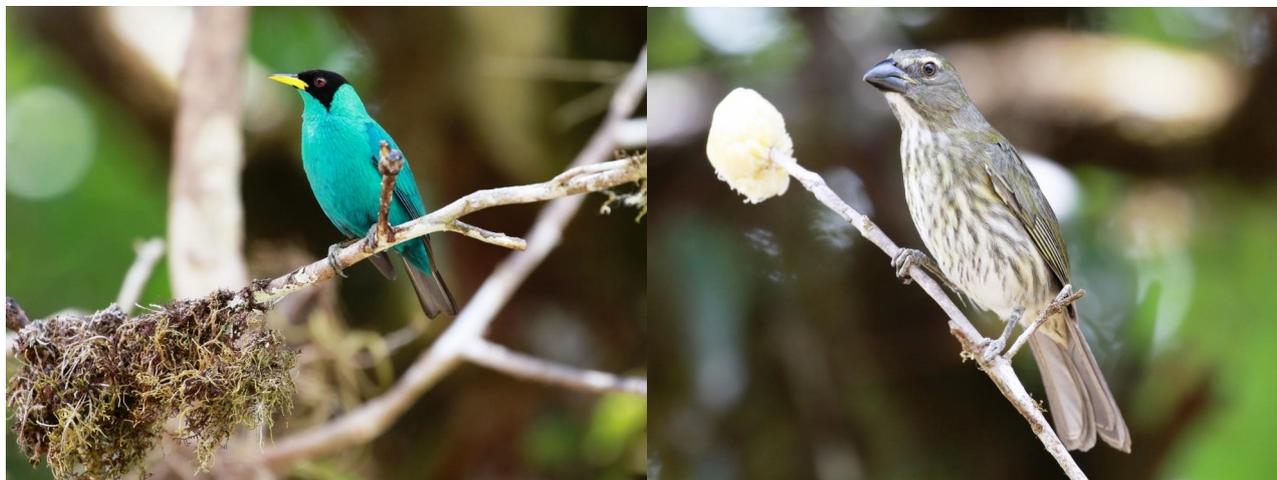
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Flycatcher, Red-legged Honeycreeper, Scarlet-rumped Tanager, Bananaquit, Spotted Sandpiper and Red-crowned Woodpecker.

Finally we returned to the Rio Tico lodge where Gabor offered a tour up to a fantastic panoramic lookout point from where one can see huge forests all over. The walk was quite steep but not too long. We had not too much bird activity but the scenery was breathtaking.

Soon we had to go down because we started to lose light so we just managed to get back.

This evening dinner was at an even closer restaurant which mainly offered Tilapia fish and chicken.

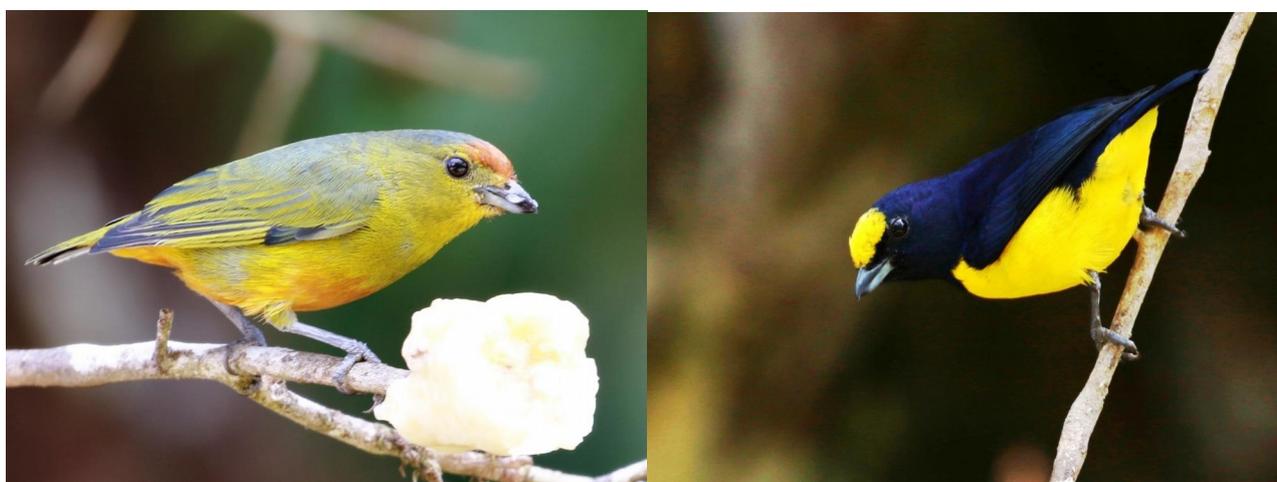


Day5 24February 2020

We had breakfast at 7 and said goodbye to our host, Kees at 8 and continued our tour towards the Panamanian border. After about one hour drive South we stopped close to the Boruca indigenous people territory alongside a river. Here we found Yellow-throated and Yellow-crowned Euphonia, Broad-winged Hawk, Streak-headed Woodcreeper, Tropical Gnatcatcher, gray-breasted Martin, Great Kiskadee and Red-eyed Vireo. Of course Black and Turkey Vultures were around as well.

From here we continued driving along for a long time, searching a good place to look for birds before we arrive to our new destination. But lot of areas were cleared or at the few good sections it was not possible to stop with the bus.

So finally we stopped just before arriving to the Wilson's Botanical garden alongside the road. Here we had quite good bird activity but it was hard to show things. Green Honeycreeper, Golden-hooded Tanager, Gray-headed Chachalaca and Blackburnian Warbler were identified, but possible there were much more. We surely heard a very strong, strange voice which neither of us could identify. We also saw a few Swallow-tailed Kites majestically flying over.



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Finally we arrived to the Wilson's Botanical Garden where we filled out some papers, got our bracelets for food and our rooms as well.



Right after that we had our lunch and also checked the feeders nearby where we found Green Honeycreeper, Golden-hooded Tanager again, but with a much easier view. We had several new species as well such as Streaked Saltator, Spot-crowned and Thick-billed Euphonias. Later Gabor led a walking tour in the upper part of the garden between 4 and 5.30pm where he showed Crimson-fronted Parakeet, Blue-headed Parrot, Yellow-throated Toucan, Thick-billed Euphonia, Rufous-napped Parrot, Costa Rican Swift, Violet Sabrewing and Snowy-bellied Hummingbird.



Finally we returned, had a short break and then a tasty dinner. Gabor and Andi secured a separate lecture room for completing the bird-list without the noise of other guests and students who just arrived here as well. They also prepared a cooler with chilled beer and wine which was not offered otherwise due to the regulations of the biological station. We finished the day soon after and were ready to rest till next morning.



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Day6 25February 2020

Today we had breakfast at 7 and from 8 we had a 2 hours long guided walk with a very sympathetic guide, Jeisson. We started at the feeders and continued at the upper part of the garden. First birds were Crimson-fronted Parakeets, House Wren, Variable Seed-eater. There were several new species within a short period of time, such as Common Chlorospingus, Red-faced Spinetail and regional endemics such as White-tailed and Snowy-bellied Hummingbirds.



Golden-olive Woodpecker and Garden Emerald was new as well, but it was good to see a Fiery-billed Aracari as well. On a huge orange-coloured Poro tree (Erithrina) we saw Charming Hummingbird, Crested Oropendola and some more birds.



We saw A beautiful Bay-headed Tanager while we heard the call of Olivaceous Piculet. Further new species were White-winged Becard, Green Hermit and Riverside Wren. We had also Lesson's Motmot, White-berated Wood-wren and Chestnut-sided Warbler.



We had a good view of Golden-olive Woodpecker, Blue-headed Parrot, Northern Watertrush, Yellow-bellied Toucan. We had a hard time to show everybody Rufous-capped Warbler, Common Tody-flycatcher and Yellow-bellied Flycatcher but finally we had a success with all. It got quite hot so we gave a bit of time to rest before and after lunch, but then in the afternoon we walked shortly to a tall lookout tower in the hope of finding some raptors. Well, there was not too much activity at all so apart from a Yellow-olive Flycatcher and a few Swallow-tailed Kites we could not see much.



For those who were not too tired Gabor offered a walk on a short loop trail in the forest. Here we had again White-breasted Wood-wren, Ruddy-tailed Flycatcher, but the best was Slate-throated Redstart offering excellent views. Finally at the feeders we had Streaked Saltator and the "usual stuff". The biggest show was the flight of 100s of Crimson-fronted Parakeets.

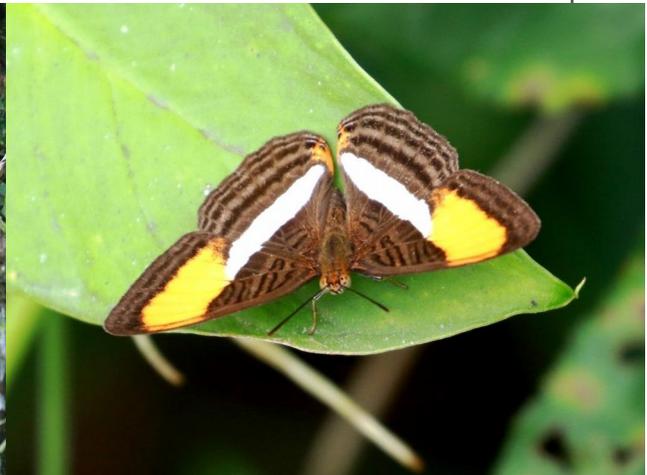




Day7 26February 2020



Today we had breakfast at 6.30 so we could hit the road around 7.30. We traveled down on the steep, curved road to sea level and within about an hour reached the La Gamba road. Here we stopped first at a small bridge where from the shade Gabor first pointed out a beautiful male Baird's Trogon. This was followed by Common Tody Flycatcher, Purple-crowned Fairy, Squirrel Cuckoo, Tropical Gnatcatcher, Short-billed Pigeon. As we were leaving this first plagreat spot Jenny pointed out a bird sitting low, almost in the grass. White in the front, dark head in a distance, looked like first as a perched Blue-and-white Swallow, but with a better view turned out to be a Fork-tailed Flycatcher. A bit further at a marshy area after some search we all had excellent views of Red-breasted Meadow-Lark. We also had here Purple Gallinule, Great Egret, Black-striped Sparrow, Variable Seed-eater and Blue-black Grassquit.



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From this open area we walked a bit further alongside a palm plantation and forest edge where we found a flock at a fruiting tree which included Tawny-winged Wood-creeper, Blue Dacnis, Golden-naped Woodpecker, Fiery-billed Aracari and Yellow-throated Toucan. We heard Grey-cowled Wood-rail and Simon took a photo of Striped Cuckoo and White-tipped Dove.

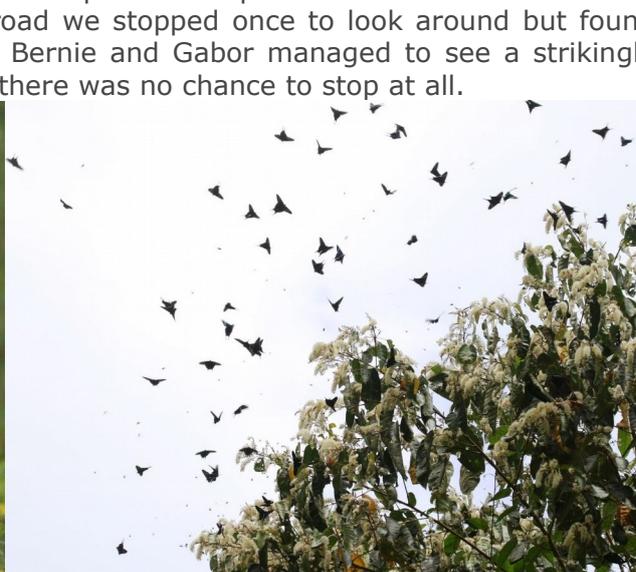
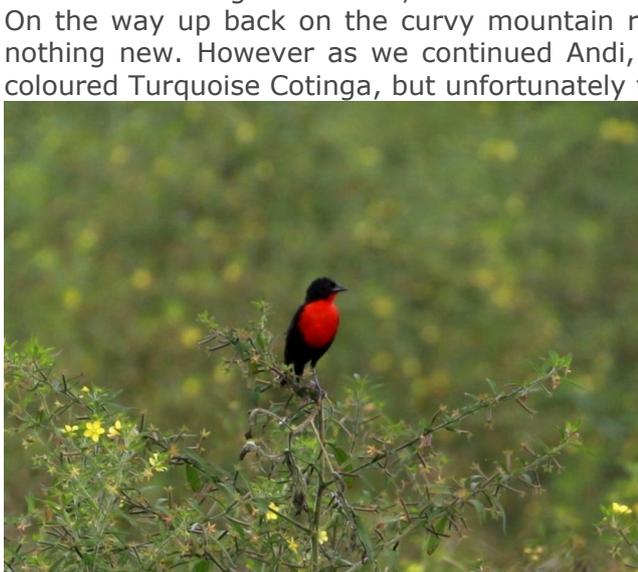


Later on we continued our journey through a lovely forest. We tried Black-cheeked Ant-tanager, but just a few people managed to see this Costa Rican endemic. We heard Beard's Trogon and suddenly Gabor got really excited to have a perched male White-crested Coquette in front of the group, which unfortunately left before everybody could observe it. At this time we did not know that we will have an excellent opportunity later on up in the hills. Scarlet-rumped Cacique was great and we had myriads of butterflies around as well. While we were walking, Luis, our driver saw a Tayra from the bus.



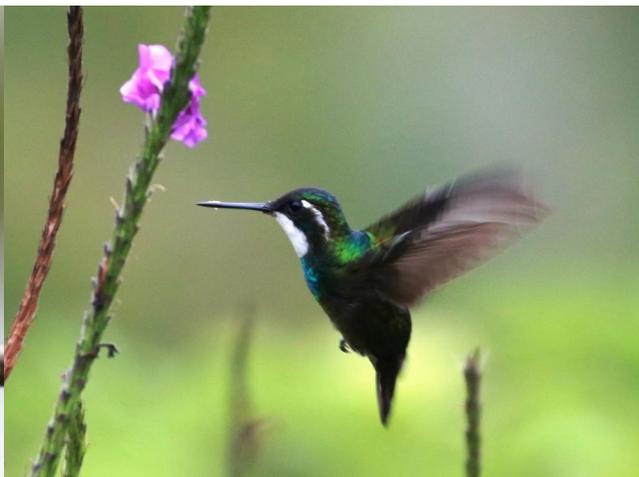
After a few more stops we arrived to Golfito Bay which was excellent for Elegant Tern, Foster's Tern, Green Heron, Spotted Sandpipers, Laughing Gull, Tropical Mockingbird, Short-billed Pigeon. We also witnessed Red-crowned Woodpecker excavating nest and a Yellow-headed Caracara eating a bird. Scarlet Macaws, Osprey, Yellow-bellied Elaenia coloured the day and all this was just during the time when we were waiting our lunch at our picturesquely located restaurant. Food and drinks were great as well, so it was an excellent place to stop.

On the way up back on the curvy mountain road we stopped once to look around but found nothing new. However as we continued Andi, Bernie and Gabor managed to see a strikingly coloured Turquoise Cotinga, but unfortunately there was no chance to stop at all.



Day8

27February 2020



Breakfast at 6.30 We hit the road at 8 am and started our long journey first back to San Vito and up all the way to Cerro de la Muerte. During the travel we had seen White-crowned Parrots and some other birds we had seen before.



We broke the journey with a stop at Santa Ana at a local coffee and immediately we started to see new birds. Jenny pointed out a Black-crowned Tityra while Gábor found a Southern Rough-winged Swallow. On a huge tree there was a great activity with loads of flycatchers, a few Aracaris and Orange-chinned Parakeets. We also walked till the bridge from where we spotted 2 Black Phoebes and a male Honeycreeper on a tree. Gabor saw a Spot-fronted Swift but unfortunately after 2 circles it disappeared so apart from Jenny no-one could see it.



It was almost noon by the time we crossed San Isidro and a bit later we arrived to a lovely mountain garden with lot of fruit feeders and hummingbird feeders. There was good activity

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around so we had loads of Tennessee Warblers, Baltimore Orioles, Rufous-collared Sparrows, Rose-breasted Grosbeaks and of course several Tanagers including Scarlet-rumped, Blue-gray, Flame-coloured, Summer, Golden-hooded and Silver-throated. At the hummingbird feeders we had Violet Sabrewing, Rufous-tailed Hummingbird, Gray-tailed/White-throated Mountain-gem, while the Verbaena bushes and other flowers were visited by Snowy-bellied and White-tailed Hummingbird. We even were lucky with finding a pair of White-crested Coquette. The star at the distant fruit feeder was a male Red-headed Barbet.



We had our packed lunch here with this beautiful environment full with birds. Finally around 2pm we could say goodbye to the place and continued our travel on the Panamerican towards Cerro de las Muerte. Unfortunately we had quite a lot of traffic so it took almost 45 minutes to reach our favorite birding spot here. Here pretty soon had lovely views of Volcano Hummingbird feeding and also perched in front of us showing its purplish throat. A Volcano Junco hopped in front of the group. Later we found a Slaty Flowerpiercer and as we walked down several Sooty Thrushes. The last bird on the trail was a Black-billed Nightingale-thrush which we all could see very well. Finally when we reached the main road we saw 2 Red-tailed Hawks. Half an hour later we arrived to a small coffee where a real birding bonanza waited for us. The hummingbird feeders were busy with Volcano Hummingbirds, Talamanca Hummingbirds, Lesser Violetear, White-throated and Purple-throated Mountain-gems. Acorn Woodpeckers were everywhere plus we had Flame-colored Tanager, Sooty Thrush, Large-footed Finch.

Finally we arrived to our mountain lodge where after some confusion caused by the receptionist we all got our luxury rooms, some close to the reception, others way up in the Cloudforest. For dinner we returned to the coffee where we had an excellent and filling food.



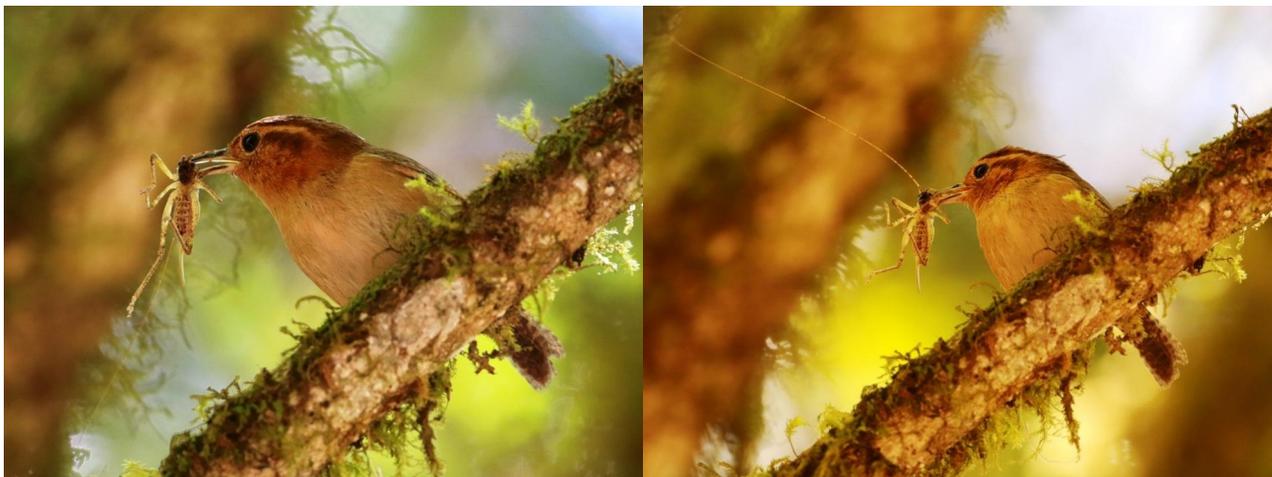
Day9 28February 2020

As we walked down from our luxury chalet we met with a family of Spotted Wood-quails. We also saw a Mountain Thrush.



After a nice (but bit slow) breakfast at 7 we started the day tour at 8am. We drove down to an area which Gabor and Andi knew that a pair of Quetzals used. Here the first bird was a regional endemic, Long-tailed Silky Flycatcher. We also had Sooty Thrush, Rufous-collared Sparrow, Acorn and Hairy Woodpeckers. But no sign of Quetzal, so we went further down. Here at a restaurant with a beautiful natural garden we looked around a bit and soon Gabor pointed out a Tufted Flycatcher. Also we had Wilson's Warbler and some other previously seen birds.

A local guy told us that the Quetzal should turn up at the place what we tried before since it is surely nesting exactly where we tried before. So we went back and this time we found the hole with 2 long tail feathers of a male sticking out. As we were waiting patiently Gabor found nearby another young male Quetzal which had no long tail feathers yet. Everybody managed to have a view through scope so we decided to take walk in the forest. This proved to be one of the most prolific walks with many highland specials. Ivan found some Sulphur-winged Parakeets top of a tree, then we had Yellowish Flycatcher and Ochraceous Wren.



Bernie found a Black-banded Woodcreeper and soon reached a bridge from where we could see a Torrent Tyrannulet hunting its food. Later we were lucky enough to bump into a really big flock of birds where it was easy to understand one of the beauties of tropical birding: loads of birds moving around, dripping from the leaves, hopping, flying across, so it is hard to decide which to watch first. So we had Flame-throated Warbler, Yellow-winged Vireo, incredible views of Spangle-cheeked Tanagers, Red-eyed Vireo, Tennessee Warbler, Common Chlorospingus, Long-tailed Woodcreeper, Yellow-thighed Finch, Ruddy-capped Nightingale-Thrush. The best surprise was a female Barred Becard.



After this really successful forest birding we returned to the Quetzal site and this time after a relatively short waiting we have witnessed the adult male Resplendent Quetzal to return to its nest. Luckily it did not go straight into the nest hole, but hung out for a while like a strange Woodcreeper so it gave possibility to watch it through scope or even take a photograph.



After this great stop we went back to the restaurant where we had lunch, still surrounded by birds. Some of the group members decided to go back to the Quetzals while others remained in the garden of the restaurant. Here we found a nest of a Gray-breasted Wood-wren and also Spangle-cheeked Tanagers. We also had excellent views of Sulphur-winged Parakeets. Finally we went back to the lodge, most of the people decided to rest or enjoy the breathtaking views from their terraces.



For the most keen birders Gabor offered to discover the trails of the lodge. Although most of the time the forest was very silent still they were rewarded by a quick view of an Emerald Toucanet, a skulking group of Spotted Wood-quails and a Bat Falcon.



Later in the evening we went back to the restaurant which opened just for us and had a really enjoyable dinner with various choices of food and super desserts.

Day10 29February2020

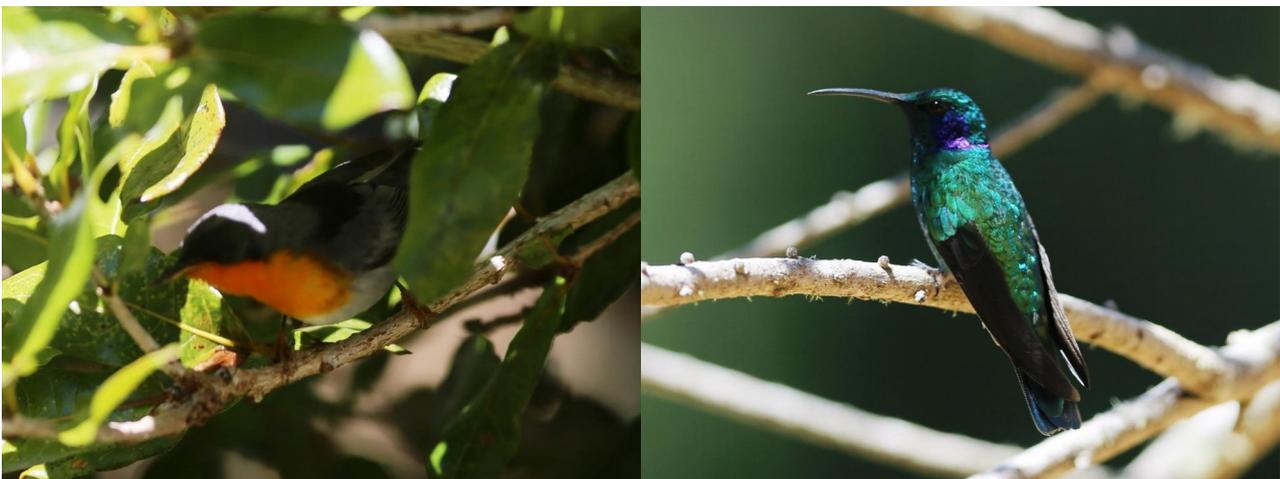


This morning after breakfast we had 1,5 hour free time, so some of us just sat in front of our houses looking down in the forest or at the restaurant area while others ventured on the various trails. Everybody returned with different exciting sightings ranging from Flame-throated Warbler through Long-tailed Silky and Bat Falcon but the most interesting one was surely a Costa Rican Pygmy Owl bathing at a drinking station.

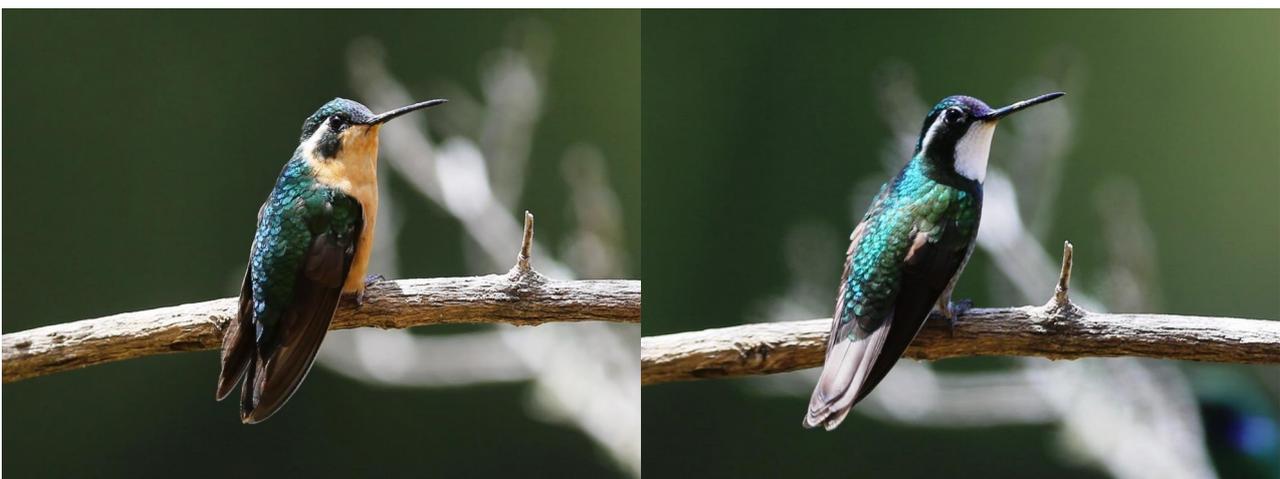




Simon made a photo of a black and yellow bird from below, a bit of a cloaca view which was identified first as Black-and-gold Tanager, but later re-identified as Black-thighed Groesbeak.



Finally we went back to our favorite coffee to spend 2 hours more with watching birds there and also at another place nearby. Both offered pretty good photo opportunities as well while we enjoyed fresh fruit juices. We found some new species as well such as the amazing Fiery-throated Hummingbird and Green-fronted Lancebill.



After another tasty lunch we started our journey to the Sarapiquí region. We got the news that unfortunately the road we wanted to use was closed so we had to do a much longer detour in smaller roads. In his way the journey instead of 4-4,5 hours took close to 6 hours.

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On the way we saw some birds like Cattle Egrets, Montezuma Oropendulas, Keel-billed Toucans and perhaps a Gray Hawk. Had many picturesque landscapes, including volcanos, meandering rivers, stormy backgrounds. Louis, our great driver worked extremely hard, he had to do the last bit of this long day in the dark.



We all were really tired by the time we arrived, quickly got the rooms and after the dinner and calling out the list we were ready for a rest.



Day11

1March 2020

We had Gallo Pinto, fried eggs and toasts with jam and butter for breakfast from 6.45 and made the very short bus ride to La Selva at 7.30. From 8 till 11.30 we had a very productive walk partly at open areas, partly in the secondary and primary forest with a local guide, Louis.



First Gabor pointed out a male Slaty-tailed Trogon, then Louis showed a Shiny Cowbird. Or was it a Chinese Cowbird? :-). We had almost from one spot Buff-throated Saltator, Chestnut-sided Warbler, Short-billed Pigeon, Palm Tanager, Summer Tanager, Boat-billed Flycatcher, Scarlet-rumped Tanager. Gabor found Band-backed Wren and Louis put the scope on a female Common Parakeet sitting on its nest. A pair of Cinnamon Becards disappeared too fast, but later from the large hanging bridge everybody had an up close view.. A young snake and a strikingly coloured Blue Jeans Poison Arrow Frog was found as well.



Gabor pointed out and explained the difference between the White-ringed Flycatcher and its close relatives. On the ground Thick-billed Seed-finch and House Wren searched food.



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Two White-crowned Parrots sat out in the open on a large dead tree.



Beside the common species like Short-billed Pigeon, Clay-colored Thrush suddenly Gabor found a male White-collared Manakin which unfortunately moved too much, so not everybody managed to see it. But a perched Broad-winged Hawk was much easier for everybody. Red-throated Ant-tanager was heard, but we saw a female Fasciated Ant-shrike instead. Later on we had several Slaty-tailed Trogons with several Howler Monkeys on the same tree. A great surprise was to see a Purple-throated Fruit-crow coming to the same fruiting tree.



Several Rufous Motmots were around, but we could not get a glimpse here, but later also at the hanging bridge. One of the really hard to see birds, an Agami, Heron was found and photographed by Simon. After a bit of seek and search we managed to see 3 Snowy Cotingas. Including a male as well. We added Pale-billed Woodpecker, Squirrel Cuckoo and then we started a walk in the primary forest on a well-maintained trail.





Birding here was much harder, but we still had Collared Peccary, heard Bright-rumped Attila and saw up close a male Great Curassow, making Bittern-like calls. Back in the open area we had Olive-backed Euphonias, Chestnut-sided warbler. At a side trail we found a huge ball up in the canopy which turned out to be a 3-toed Sloth with a baby. On the way back again from the bridge we had a very cooperative Broad-billed Motmot. Finally we arrived back to the restaurant area where we had coffee and a little rest before we returned to our lodge for lunch. Even during lunch we had new species like Crimson-collared Tanager and Thick-billed Seed-finch was as well new for some of the group members.

Lunch was followed by a siesta time till 4pm in the afternoon. Some of us during the time stayed at the open-air restaurant from where we could check the feeders. It was worth to do that since we had excellent views of Dusky-faced Tanagers and Black-cheeked Woodpecker, both species were new for the tour. It turned out that the Collared Aracaris were nesting in the same tree where the feeders were. House Wren, Blue-grey Tanager, Scarlet-rumped Tanager were all around regularly. We had again 2 Scarlet Macaws flying across in the background and a great surprise arrived in a form of a Green Ibis.

Finally we tore ourselves away from the feeder area and visited a short trail to the river. We had a singing Buff-rumped Warbler, a pair of Bay Wrens and on the other side of the river an Amazon Kingfisher. We continued our circle on the trails, but it became quite silent, although we heard Red-lored Parrots and Bright-rumped Attila. We also had a Streak-headed Woodcreeper.



Day12

2March 2020

We were waken up today again by a cacophony of bird songs.

During the pre-breakfast walk Gabor first found Orange-billed Sparrow. We had seen hundreds of Gray-rumped Swifts and the usual Social Flycatcher, Buff-throated Saltator, Scarlet-rumped Tanager. Suddenly a pair of Great Green Macaws flew across. Jenny found close to the river Rufous-named Woodrail, and White-crowned plus Red-lored Parrots flew across as well.

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We had breakfast at 7, so we could leave before 8am and soon we started our walk from the reception of La Selva out on the entrance road. From the very beginning it was obvious that this day there was much less bird activity, partly because yesterday was really exceptional, partly because temperature rose much quickly this time. We still managed finally not just hear but see as well Bright-rumped Attila, also Boat-billed Flycatcher. Later we heard White-throated Spadebill, but not seen it. The usual Chestnut-sided Warbler was around and a small group of Lesser Greenlets moved in the canopy. We tried to find Jacamar, but failed this time. We gradually walked till the chalets of La Selva and back while we also found Yellow-billed Cotinga.



When we returned to the restaurant area we had a little brake and ventured in the riverside trail. It was unusually silent for a while, hardly could see a Rufous Motmot, but at the end Gabor found a Red-throated Ant-tanager and as we were following their small group we realized that we encountered a small tropical flock of mixed birds. So we tried to find and identify more and more birds, including Black-throated Trogon (male and female), Northern Barred and Wedge-billed Wood-creeper, White-throated Wood-Wren and Golden-winged Warbler.

On the way back we found a flock of Dusky-faced Tanagers mixed with Red-throated Ant-tanagers. So finally we were quite happy with the results and eagerly went back to enjoy a good lunch and refreshing drinks.

As soon as we finished lunch Jenny went to discover a little trail leading her to the river where she found a pair of Rufous-tailed Jacamar whose photos she showed us and lead all interested group members to the site. So enthusiasm and determination paid off in her case as well.

We rested till 2pm. and then drove back to our lodge where we extended the siesta time till 4pm. During the time we heard parakeets, parrots and even Laughing Falcon. It must have heard Bernie's newest jokes :-)



We went out in the garden and first we found Orange-billed Sparrow. A pair of Grey-chested Doves walked under the bushes and we had some fleeting glimpses of flycatchers as well beside the omnipresent Clay-coloured Thrushes and Scarlet-rumped Tanagers.

Behind the restaurant area on a leafless tree a Long-tailed Tyrant was found by Simon. On another large tree surrounded by bamboo we found a really good activity. We identified first Summer Tanager, Cocoa Woodcreeper, House Wren, Orange-billed Sparrow, Gray-capped Flycatcher. Then Gabor got excited by a woodpecker which turned out to be new for the tour,

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Rufous-winged Woodpecker. We all had a great view of this bird as well. Surprises were still not over since Gabor pointed out a Black-faced Grosbeak which was not very well visible, so he called it out. We also heard a White-collared Manakin calling and displaying, dashed through once, but nobody had a good view of it in the very dense vegetation. Still it was a very nice walk with great activity and some lovely new species.



Day13

3March 2020

After breakfast at 7 we said goodbye to our kind hosts at started our travel towards our last accommodation at the Vulcan Tenorio, stopping en-route at the famous Vulcan Arenal. Most of the morning was quite overcast but when the sun came out it became quite hot quickly. We could not have an impressive view of the Arenal Volcano, but stopped at Linda Vista alongside a river which proved to be a great birding spot. Two rich blue coloured White-crowned Parrots posed on top of a dead tree which was a good start. Then we spent some time with distinguish a Groove-billed any from Smooth-billed. Found a Black-cheeked Woodpecker cleaning its nest hole. From a large tree we heard Gartered Trogons duetting, but the tree was too dense to have a view of them. We searched for Dipper but instead found Green Kingfisher. Male Red-legged Honeycreeper was found by Bernie and then an Osprey flew across. Andi and Clive found Swallow-tailed Kites in a distant. Tree Swallows and Northern Rough-winged Swallows were circling above the water. Gabor pointed out Piratic flycatcher and when we finally started to drive away Jenny pointed out a raptor on top of a post which turned out to be a Laughing Falcon.



We stopped at a road side coffee for restroom and unfortunately we tried the coffee as well. The Christmas decoration all around should give us a hint that the coffee was brewed perhaps since then. Gabor tried to make the ventilators work, but the whole thing just fall of. Luckily with a great catch he saved it and with lot of effort put together and made it work.

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At noon we continued on small roads and soon we started to climb up to Volcan Tenorio. There were a few birds identified from the bus, like Yellow-headed Caracara, Cattle Egret, Road-side Hawk and the usual gang of Grackles and Flycatchers. When we were driving close to the Tenorio National Park we also had a Double-toothed Kite perched very close to us.

We arrived before 1pm to the Celeste Mountain Lodge, so soon we could start our gourmet lunch including 3 courses. The French owners rightly very proud of their food. After the really tasty lunch we enjoyed coffee, tea or juice while we were watching the birds arriving to the feeder. There was quite good movement, so we had Scarlet-rumped and Blue-gray Tanagers, Clay-colored Thrush, Red-legged and Green Honeycreeper. From 3pm Gabor took the group to the other side of the road where the private trail of the lodge starts. The idea was not to make the whole 2 kilometers long loop but to go until we find a good bird activity. But we felt in the air high pressure, chiggers were quite active and the beautiful primary forest with some amazing giant trees were quite silent. Whenever we finally had found a bird or a little activity it was also very hard to see the birds and show to everybody since we were lined up in a forest trail.

Still we managed to see a Little Hermit and Violet-headed Hummingbird which was new. An Eye-ringed Flatbill came closer when we played Central American Pygmy Owl. Gabor saw a Costa Rican Warbler but unfortunately it disappeared very quickly before he could point it out. Two Crested Guans were high in the tree and finally we saw a small flock in a distance, but we had no luck with it, they moved away from the trail, so we could see only a Long-tailed Woodcreeper.

Suddenly it started to rain, but luckily not heavily and soon we finished the circle to the relief of most of the people, since although the distance was not big, but the terrain was quite demanding. Before we left the forest we also had Gray-chested Dove and a bit after 5 pm we were back at the lodge and watched again the feeder and the surrounding area. We had Yellow-throated Toucan, Black-striped Sparrow and 2 distant female White-lined Tanagers caused a confusion for a while. We rested a bit until 7pm when we had a grand dinner which was followed by completing our list. Common Pauraquees were around in good number.

Day14

4March 2020

At 6am we met with Freddy, a young local birder. Although we discussed with him that from 6 to 7 we will bird in the garden he suggested to go to another garden which he said 5 minutes away. When we started to walk he said, oh, but it is with car, if we walk it is 10 minutes. Well, we did not want to disturb and waste time to wake up Louis, so we said 10 minutes walk is all right. After 20 minutes seriously marching down and asking several times how far we still have to go it was obvious something was wrong with Freddy's idea. Finally he said he remembered wrong, it is at



the next hill! By that time several of the group members turned back to avoid climbing back the really steep slope. When finally we reached the place it was great hummingbird activity among the lines of Verbaena bushes, so soon we saw Black-crested Coquette, female Snowcap, White-necked Jacobin, Scaly-breasted Hummingbird I, Blue-throated Goldentail, Rufous-tailed Hummingbird. In the meantime Gabor managed to reach Louis and ask him to rescue us and take back us in time for breakfast.

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After breakfast we went to the other direction to Tapir Valley.

Here we had Rufous-tailed Jacamar, Long-billed Gnatwren, Gartered Trogon. Several parrot species included Mealy, Red-lored, White-crowned and White-fronted Parrots, both Toucan species with marvelous views of Keel-billed Toucan.

We had some light rain, but everybody was well prepared except Gabor, who got a huge blue plastic cover over himself, trying to compete with a Lovely Cotinga, needless to say without success.

When the rain was really heavy we reached a covered platform from where we looked over an area which was really bird-rich. We had Violet-headed Hummingbird, Violet-crowned Woodnymph, Red-legged Honeycreeper and Rufous-winged Tanagers.

But the real highlight was a male Snowcap not too far which performed for us beautifully.

We returned for lunch at 1pm and strangely enough during the whole lunch and a short siesta time it was perfectly sunny but as soon as we started to gather for returning to Tapir Valley it started to rain. Still we went for spending the afternoon with finding some more birds and it was worth to do it. First we tried at the closest forest edge to call Tody Flycatcher but without success. But we had Common Tody Flycatcher, Northern Bentbill, Violet-headed Hummingbird. Pretty soon finally the weather changed again and finally we enjoyed much more sunshine. Bird activity became stronger as well so as we walked on a wide path bushes on both sides were alive with Black-striped Sparrows, Scarlet-rumped Tanagers, different warblers and several species of Hummingbirds which we had seen before. A dense fruiting tree had several Crested Guans, both Toucan species, thrushes and more.

Alongside the marshy area we heard several White-throated Crakes and found Bare-throated Tiger-heron, American Pygmy and Green Kingfisher and Green Heron. Gabor and Andi pointed out a Gray-crowned Yellow-throat. From here some of us decided to go to the platform which was very productive in the morning while others went into the old primary forest where after some search and calls Freddy found the Tody Motmot. Everybody had a great view and even excellent photographs. On the way back Gabor heard a new call and managed to find an attractive White-throated Thrush which was new for Freddy. We enjoyed great views of male Snowcap again and we heard Thicket Antpitta which we tried to see and however we were just few meters away we could not get a glimpse through the dense undergrowth.

On the way back we rejoined with those who were at the platform and started to go back. Had Orange-billed Sparrow and some of the species we had here before.

We made a small detour to another platform but apart from a coati and some distant Mealy Parrots we could not see too much here beside the amazing forest in front of us with perfect late afternoon sunshine.

Finally we said goodbye to this great birding spot and Freddy and went back to our hotel to prepare for our last excellent gourmet dinner which was followed by calling out the list. We finished the tour with close to 350 species without any extreme effort. As it was promised we visited several different corners, some of the best places of Costa Rica with various different simple hotels and top lodges with food ranging from typical Tico food till French gourmet

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delicacies. We enjoyed birding and wildlife from Pacific coast through high mountain paramo and Caribbean foothills till mountain cloud forests and even at Continental Divide and thus had seen great variety of habitats and species.

Surely a great tour to remember!

Day15

5March 2020

After the usual 7am breakfast we had still time to enjoy the feeders eye level from the restaurant and we started our journey back to the airport at 9am with a stop on the way.

We arrived to airport safely in time so there was no rush to catch our flight in the evening, 6.40pm. Shoan and Norainne remained at an airport hotel from where they travelled next day to Corcovado NP.

We hope that by reading this daily diary and looking at the photos we can make you travel back in time and bring back all the lovely memories of this amazing Spring journey! We wish that sooner or later we can enjoy again an amazing Ecotours Holiday together in a great company! Hope to see you soon!!! ☺ With hugs: Gabor and Andrea

