

**COSTA RICA – Central & South Pacific and Talamanca Mountains
Birds, mammals, butterflies, wildflowers & breathtaking landscapes**



COSTA RICA TRIP REPORT - 8-21March 2020



The following is a detailed **Trip Report of our 8-21March 2020 Costa Rica tour**.
Text written by Ruth Cooper, species list accumulated by John Cooper, pics and tex edited by Gabor Orban.

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

We had seen around 240 species and heard a few more. This group was put together by Christine Eberl who heard about Ecotours – Worldwide Travel’s special offer and contacted all the other fellow Canadians. So the cheerful team members beside her were John and Ruth Cooper from Ottawa; Keiko and Malcolm Fitz-Earle from near Nelson, BC and Micheline (Mimi) and Tom Bell from Castlegar, BC.

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

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Fact File

- 14-day-long birding holiday with some mammals, butterflies, amphibians, reptiles, orchids and other tropical plants, plus breathtaking landscapes
- start and finish in San Jose, Costa Rica
- using Toucan Birding EcoLodge www.toucanbirdingecolodge-costarica.com as a base for a week and 3 other accommodations during a week-long circuit, each for 2 nights and all with great on-site birding and en-suite rooms
- this tour was a modified version of our web-signup itinerary, please ask for details

Highlights

- visits to Pacific Coast sanctuaries, National Parks and private reserves including Baru area; Piedras Blancas NP and some other areas
- 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
- wide variety of birds, mammals, reptiles, butterflies and habitats



Accommodation

- 5 nights at Toucan Birding Ecolodge, Baru Mts., Central Pacific
- 2 nights at Wilson's Botanical Garden, South Pacific, close to Panama
- 2 nights at Rio Tico Lodge at Southern Central Pacific
- 2 nights at San Gerardo de Dota at Savegre Mountain
- 2 nights at Toucan Birding Ecolodge, Baru Mts., Central Pacific



Andi & Gabor 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.

Most of the birding walks were easy so regardless of age and fitness everybody could do it. But in the hilly area you might need precaution with altitude sickness if you sensitive.

Cultural Note: *Costa Ricans are called Ticos because of the unique way of saying diminutives in Spanish. (e.g. when saying something is small, or "chico", CR say it is chiquitico", or very small. They have a laid back life, of "Pura vida" or "live life", "enjoy life".*



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Detailed day by day description of the tour and observations:

Day1 Sunday, March 8th, 2020

John and Ruth waited with Keiko and Malcolm at the Radisson Country Inn, near the airport, for the transfer which Andrea and Gabor organized for them. This was a private transfer from the airport hotel up to Platanillo in the Central Pacific area. Javier, the driver of "Monkey Ride" put all our luggage up on top of the van and tied it down. Then we went on **Barrito** to pick up Micheline (Mimi) and Tom and drove out to the Pacific coast and along the road to **Playa Jaco**. Just outside of the town we saw 14 Scarlet Macaws up on a hill flying around the trees, and stopping in the trees to eat almonds. What a colourful start! We also saw some Brown Pelicans and a Mangrove Swallow.

The homes are much like the Cuban ones out of the city, only many are bigger. There are fences around most properties here. We went by a few large African palm plantations, with endless lines of monoculture growth. As later Andrea and Gabor explained these were like green deserts, even worse than the former banana plantations. We stopped at **Rio Tarcoles** and saw some crocodiles in the river, including a very large one, sitting on the river bottom, near the shore. We also saw a small Green Kingfisher on a post near the river, a Black-bellied Whistling-Duck, a Snowy Egret, and a Hoffmann's Woodpecker. At the little restaurant nearby, we got some papaya sliced up for us to eat.



Then on to a last stop at **Platanillo**, where we were let out at a small restaurant. Just as the Monkey Ride van was leaving, we saw a tall man with a birding shirt coming towards us, who indeed turned out to be Gabor. He drove the ladies of the group, Mimi, Keiko and

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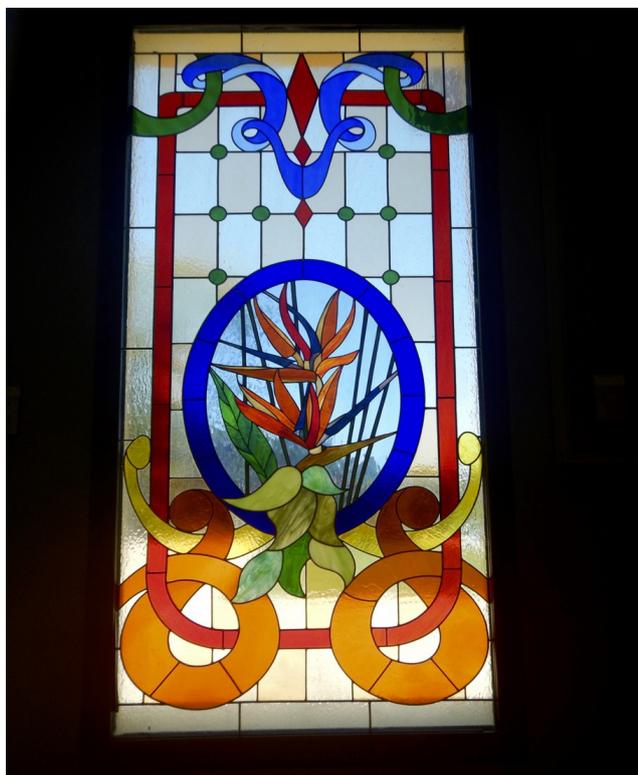
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me up to "**Toucan Birding Lodge**". There we met Andrea, Gabor's wife and Christine Eberl, from Ottawa.



The "lodge" or home, is a gorgeous 4 bedroom place with two storeys and lots of large windows. The entire open-concept house is tiled, so it is cool and the large, screened windows allow great breezes. The house is situated at the very top of the hill. The land was purchased by a Belgium / Italian male botanist and his wife, a French / Spanish artist. It is about 460 metres above sea level. The garden area, right up to the hill's edge, is landscaped with native plants and the pool sits right on the "lip" of the hill's edge, almost like an infinity pool. Surrounding the home and gardens, is almost 60 acres of primary and secondary tropical rainforest, with several miles of small trails through some of it. Four hammocks are also suspended in a gazebo overlooking the valley, catching a great breeze and view. Sprinkled throughout the gardens are hummingbird feeders, so many colourful "hummers" are always buzzing around, making a circuit amongst them.

We went out on an early evening walk on a short trail to a little open garden and nursery area (el Vivero), and saw a large number of Mealy Parrots and 2 Red-lored Parrots. We also saw two Yellow -throated Toucans and an Owl-eyed butterfly.



Also seen was a Long-billed hermit, a Purple-Crowned fairy (both hummingbirds), a Rufous-tailed hummingbird, a Black vulture, a Turkey vulture, a Swallow-tailed kite, a White-necked puffbird, a Golden-naped woodpecker, a Masked Tityra, a Bright-rumped Attila, a Golden-hooded tanager, a Crested guan, a Roadside hawk, a Riverside wren and a Blue dacnis.

We sat out in the evening for a bit, with no mosquitoes and then came in for a delicious home-made dinner of black beans, rice and chicken and salad and dessert of a date turnover. Everyone had a long day and we all went to bed early. Even at these higher altitudes, it is very hot during the day at about 29 Celsius and only going down to about 27 at night.

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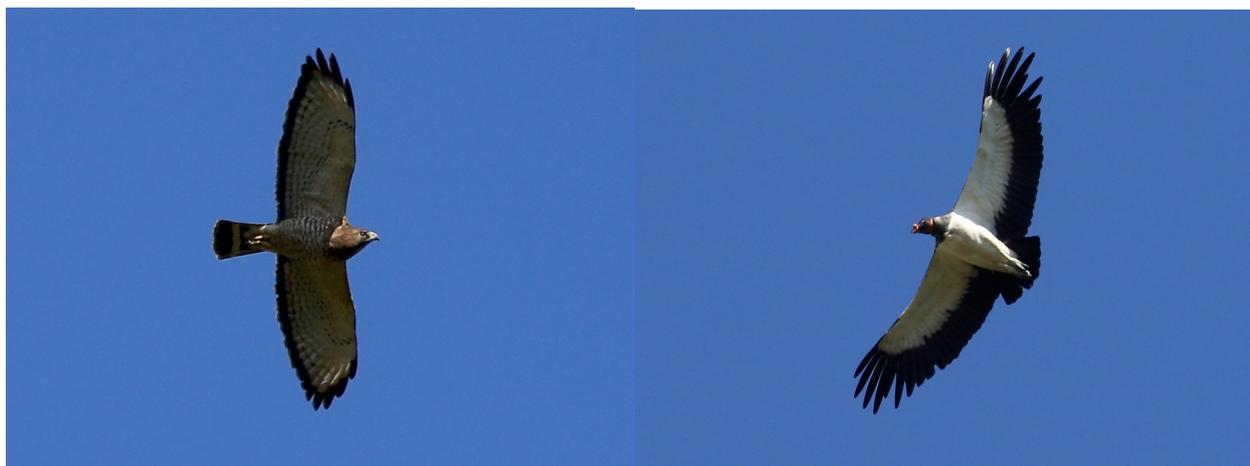
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Day2

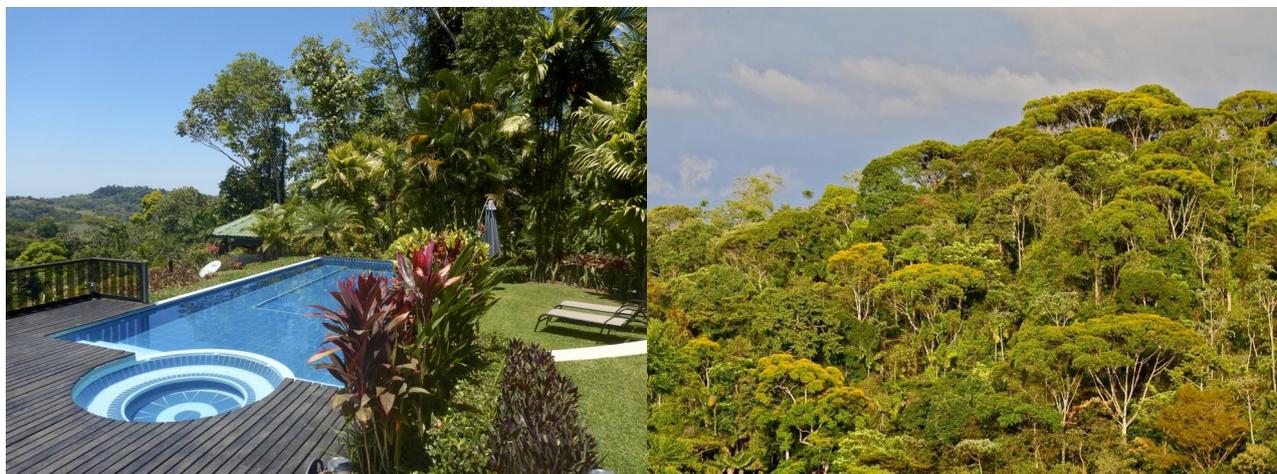
Monday, March 9th, 2020



Our first full day started early, but it was worth to be up at 5:00 am to go on a bird walk. By the time we got on the trail, at 5:30 am, the sun was up and there was lots of bird activity. We saw a Slaty-tailed trogon, Yellow-throated toucans, 2 Mealy parrots, Orange-chinned parakeets, Ochre-bellied Flycatcher, Rufous Mourner, Streaked Flycatcher, Blue-and-white Swallow, Tropical Gnatcatcher, Riverside wren, Montezuma Oropendola, Baltimore oriole, Blue dacnis, Bananaquit, Crested guans, 2 Chestnut-collared Swifts, a Lesser swallow-tailed swift, a Roadside hawk, a Black-hooded Antshrike, a Bright-rumped Attila, and a Golden-naped Woodpecker.

We came back and had a filling breakfast of fruit and yogurt and granola, with toast and papaya juice. We then had a little rest and went out again at 9:30 am until 1 pm on the Lodge's forest trails. We saw Yellow-throated Toucans, a Wedge-billed Woodcreeper, Dot-winged Antwren, Cocoa Woodcreeper, a Blue-crowned Manakin and a Violet-crowned Wood-nymph hummingbird at the Verbena bush. Also, we saw a Yellow-headed Caracara. Along farther on the trail, we saw an incredible giant vine, a strangling ficus that had encased and strangled a tree long ago. The tree had long since decayed and disappeared and had left only the ficus, as an empty shell, tracing the outline of where the old tree once stood. It was huge and incredible and I had never seen anything like it in those proportions before.

We saw a helicopter dragonfly, and a really neat iridescent Blue Morpho Butterfly. It was hot outside now and the temperature was probably about 29-30 Celsius with rainforest humidity.



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Interesting Cultural Note: *In most towns / communities and homes, only human waste is allowed in the toilets. Any used toilet paper must go in a separate garbage pail, within a plastic bag liner. These are picked up daily. There is no huge water treatment infrastructures for most sewage systems in Costa Rica and they want very little excess solids, as their process can't cope with it. (Costa Rica still has low sanitary sewer coverage in the country, reporting 26% of the territory. Its potable water access, however, has improved greatly in the last decade.)*

We had lunch and then some took a break in the hammock and watched hummingbirds (Violet-crowned Fairy and Long-billed Hermits) buzz in and out among the feeders.

In the afternoon, around 4 pm, we walked to the end of a trail, to an open meadow of the neighbour's land. We could see up much of the valley, and some huge old trees standing out.

We saw Turkey vultures, 2 Vaux's Swifts, a Crowned Woodnymph, a Golden-naped woodpecker, Yellow-headed Caracara, Chestnut-backed Antbird, a Tropical Kingbird and Red-rumped Cacique.

Then we came back, many showered and we sat out and visited until our 7 pm dinner of black beans, ground beef and gallo pinto rice. For dessert we had a jelly roll. We all visited for a bit and then to bed at 9 pm!





Day3 Tuesday, March 10th, 2020

We were up at 7 am to take a walk on the trails. We saw a Purple-crowned fairy, Magnificent Frigatebird, Black-throated trogon, Slaty-tailed Trogon, Fiery-billed Aracari, Golden-naped woodpecker, Orange-chinned parakeet, Tawny-winged woodcreeper, Red-capped manakin, Tropical kingbird, Scarlet-rumped cacique, King vulture, Double-toothed kite, Blue-crowned manakin, Ruddy-tailed flycatcher, Chestnut-sided warbler, Red-legged honeycreeper, Turkey vulture, Roadside hawk, American Redstart, Shining honeycreeper, Dusky-capped Flycatcher, Green honeycreeper, Tennessee warbler and a Yellow warbler.

We had breakfast and at 9 am, we went out again and saw a King Vulture, a Double-toothed Kite, a Blue-crowned Manakin, a Ruddy-tailed Flycatcher, a Chestnut-sided warbler, a Grey-headed tanager, a Scarlet-rumped tanager (Cherrie's) and a Red-legged Honeycreeper.

When we came back, there were White-crowned parrots and parakeets and a White-necked Puffbird in the large trees, that we could view from the patio. Then time for a siesta. In the meantime Gabor went for the 4x 4 van. Christine will drive one 4x4 standard and Gabor will drive the other.



In the later afternoon, we went up to the hill area, around **Alto San Juan**, above the little village, **Tinamaste**, and up near a communication tower. Developments are happening on the hill for new housing. Roads into cleared terraced areas are evident. We saw White-crowned parrots up close, a Blue-grey tanager, Orange-chinned parakeets, Tawny-winged

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woodcreeper, Double-toothed kite, Ruddy-tailed flycatcher, Scarlet-rumped tanager (Cherrie's), Red-legged Honeycreeper, Scaled Pigeon, Red-crowned Woodpecker, Grey-headed chachalaca, Yellow-headed caracara, Brown jay, White-throated thrush, Clay-coloured thrush, Blue dacnis, Great Curassow, Black-striped woodcreeper, Bananquit, Band-tailed pigeon, White-tipped dove, Slaty-tailed trogon, Red-crowned woodpecker, Elegant Euphonia, Gray-headed tanager, Bay-headed tanager, Silver-throated tanager, Scarlet-thighed dacnis, Blue dacnis and Buff-throated Saltator.

The Cecropia trees make it easy to see the birds in them with scarce large leaves and tall up in the forest canopies.

Interesting fact: *is they have a symbiotic relationship, going back 8 million years, with the aggressive Azteca ants. The queen ants start a new ant colony within the tree's internode stock, and when the new colony forms, they keep any other insect species, that may harm the tree, off the tree. They retrieve the tree's nectar and in exchange disperse the tree's pollen, as well a protect the tree from invading insects. See this:*

See this: https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=93&v=zXG7_ejJ2KY&feature=emb_title



There were very hilly roads with very little or no shoulders. Often only a few feet from the end of the road, the hill drops off to precipitous cliffs. The 4 x4 WD is certainly very useful here!

We came home and had a nice Costa Rican-style lasagna and salad. For dessert, we had cake and ice cream. Again, we all talked around the table and then off to bed.



Day4 Wednesday, March 11, 2020

John was up early and saw a White-crested Coquette, a lovely tiny hummingbird which comes down from higher elevations seasonally.

John also added several other great species to the morning list such as Golden-naped woodpecker, Pale-billed woodpecker, Black-striped woodcreeper, Plain Xenops, Masked Tityra, Streaked Flycatcher, Montezuma oropendola, White-shoulder Tanager, and Bananquit.

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We had breakfast at 7 am and off by 8:45 am for the ***Hacienda Barú***, a national wildlife reserve, in Costanera Sur, Guapil, Provincia de Puntarenas, Savegre. It has 330 hectares of land along the Pacific, with 7 kilometres of trails. We saw a Ruddy ground dove, White-tipped dove, Violet-headed hummingbird, Black-hooded Antshrike, Chestnut-bellied antbird, Ruddy woodcreeper, Orange-collared manakin, Streaked flycatcher, Lesser Greenlet, Scarlet-rumped Tanager and Red-legged Honeycreeper.



We also saw white-faced capuchin monkeys, a mother sloth and her baby, then another sloth curled up in a tree, a lizard and a White-nosed coati running across our path. We saw a Violet-headed hummingbird, a Ruddy woodcreeper, and a Tennessee warbler. Then we went into a gift shop and purchased wooden souvenirs, made out of salvaged wood. I saw a Spiny-backed lizard (iguana) eating pecans under the tree. We had lunch there of a vegetarian plate with cucumbers, lettuce, tomatoes, fried veggies and potatoes. (Some had snapper or chicken). We also had a delicious mango drink.

Then, we were off to a hilly road. It was very hot. Around 2 pm we saw a hummingbird species, 3 Black Vultures, and 3 Turkey vultures, a Roadside Hawk, an American Redstart, a warbler species, a Scarlet-rumped Tanager, a Blue Dacnis, a Shining Honeycreeper, a Red-legged Honeycreeper and a Green Honeycreeper.

Then we went farther down another road and saw a Dusky-capped Flycatcher, a Tennessee warbler, a Yellow warbler and a Blue dacnis.



Then we came back to **Dominical Estuary** at Rio Barú for more bird watching at around 4 pm. We saw a Ruddy ground dove, Brown Pelicans, a Great Blue Heron, a Great Egret, a

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Green Heron, a Common Black hawk, a Zone-tailed hawk, a Fiery-billed Aracari, a Yellow-throated Toucan, Orange-chinned parakeets, Great Kiskadees chasing 2 White-throated Magpie jays from a nest, a Social Flycatcher, a Shiny Cowbird, a Blue-and-white Swallow, House wren, Melodious Blackbird, Prothonotary Warbler, Scarlet-rumped tanager, Palm Tanager, Blue Dacnis, a Southern Rough-winged Swallow, Melodious Blackbird and a Great-tailed Grackle.

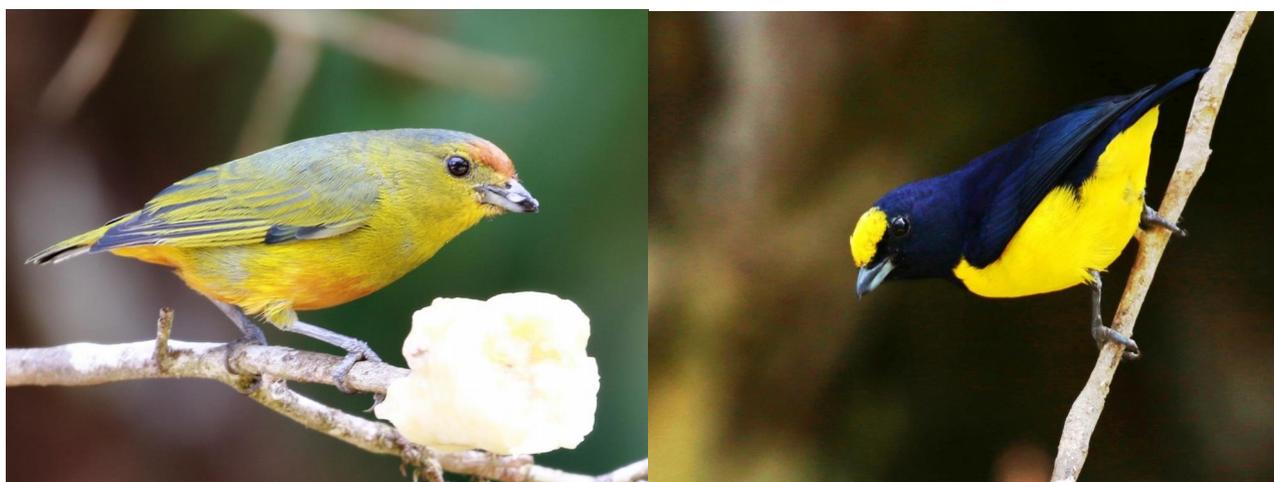
There had been a police check on the other side of the road as we came in, but fortunately by the time we were ready to go, they were already closed up for the day at 5:30 pm. Dinner and bed early again.



Day5 Thursday, March 12, 2020

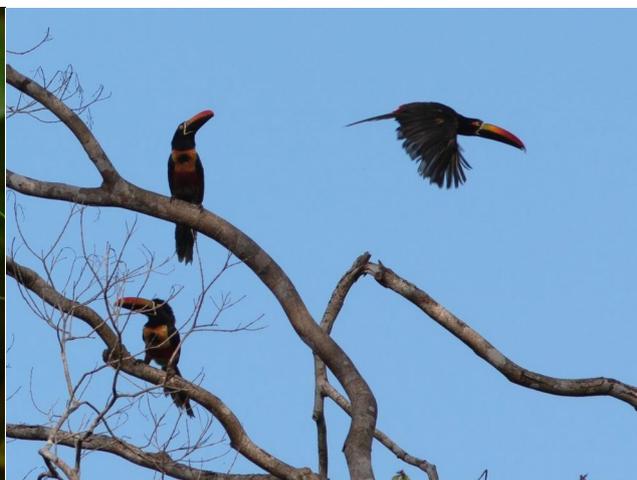
Up for 7:30 am breakfast. We saw a Stripe-throated hermit at the feeder. Then we drove up to the hills, overlooking the area around 9 am. We saw a Grey-headed Chachalaca, Yellow-headed Caracara, Buff-fronted Foliage-gleaner, Tennessee warbler, Scarlet-rumped Tanager, Streaked Saltator, Smooth-billed Ani in a bush near the cell tower, Swallow-tailed Kite, Red-crowned Woodpecker, Great Kiskadee, Chestnut-sided Warbler, Bay-headed Tanager, Bat Falcon on top of the cell tower, being harassed by two swifts, Piratic Flycatcher, Morelet's Seedeater, and Yellow-faced Grassquit.

We drove to a few beautiful hilly areas with rough roads. We had lunch at a Restaurant on a hill overlooking San Isidro de El General. We had a nice soup of tomato, garlic, chicken, avocado, cheese, corn and taco chips, an ancient "Aztec soup".



After lunch we returned and saw Great Kiskadee, House wren, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Blue-gray tanager, Palm tanager, Green Honeycreeper, Crested Guan, Rufous-tailed Hummingbird, Turkey Vulture, Swallow-tailed Kite, Fiery-billed Aracari, Golden-naped Woodpecker, Red-crowned Woodpecker, Lineated Woodpecker, Yellow-headed Caracara, White-crowned Parrots, Crimson-fronted Parakeets, Lesser Greenlet, Golden-winged Warbler, Chestnut-sided Warbler, and Golden-hooded Tanager.

Then, we drove back to the house. John saw a Hog-nosed skunk with a white tail beside the house. We ate dinner and early to bed.

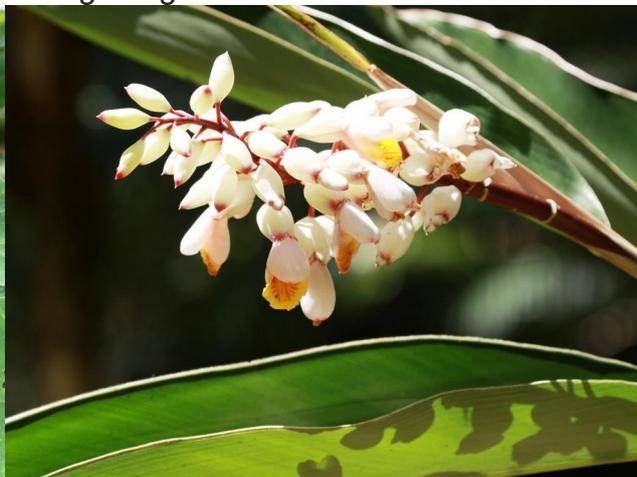


Day6 Friday, March 13, 2020

John got up early for a 6:15 am walk and saw a Crested Guan, a White-tipped Dove, a White-collared swift, a Yellow-throated toucan, a Pale-billed woodpecker, a parrot species, a Chestnut-sided Warbler and Grey-headed Tanager.

At 7:30 am we had breakfast. We repacked into 1 suitcase for our van journey. Mimi saw two interesting dusty white frogs on the outside of the bedroom wall. (Rosenberg's Gladiator Tree Frog??) We found one on our balcony wall as well.

Then at 9 am, John, Tom, Christine, Malcolm, Keiko and Gabor went for a drive to the **Estuary** again. They saw an Inca Dove, Mourning dove, Costa Rican Swift, Royal tern, Sandwich tern, Neotropic Comorant, Brown Pelican, Great Egret, Snowy Egret, Little Blue Heron, Tricoloured Heron, Green Heron, White Ibis, Great Black Hawk, Black-crowned Tityra, Common Tody-Flycatcher, Mangrove Swallow, Great-tailed Grackle, and Northern Waterthrush. Mimi and Ruth stayed and visited and watched Jonathan, the gardener, do the gardening with manual tools, including trimming hedges with a machete.



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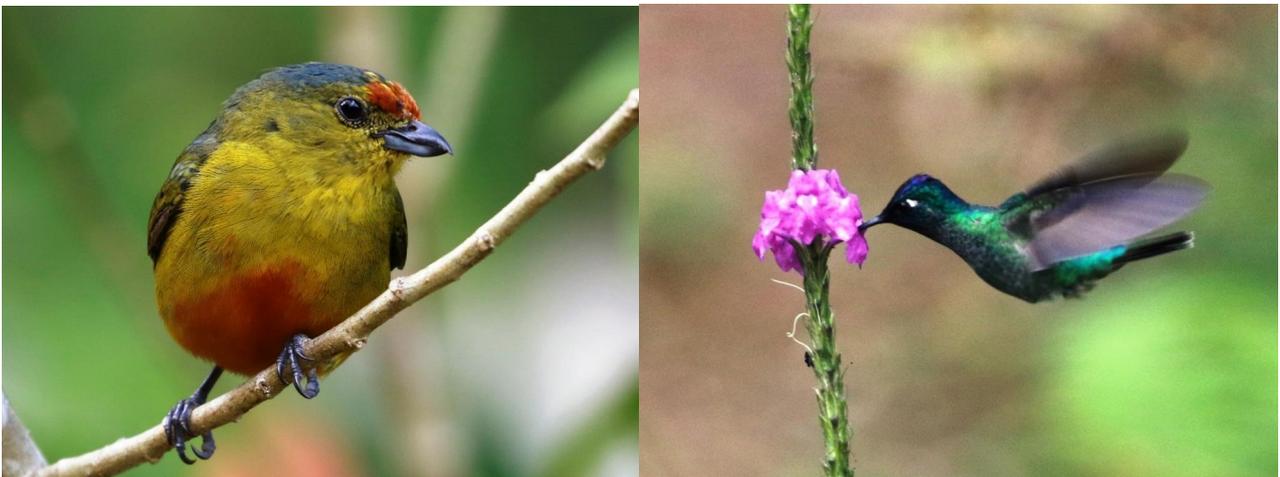
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We had lunch at 12 and then our baggage was set out at 1pm. Just before we left, we saw a Broad-winged Hawk fly overhead. We packed into the 12 person van and were off! We drove down the mountain to the Pacific shore and looked at the beach for terns. Fishermen in the distance were hauling boats in to shore by hand. We then took a road trip up into the mountains and came to **Wilson Botanical Gardens** at about 1100 metres above sea level, high in the Talamanca Mountains.

This huge garden was started by Robert and Catherine Wilson in 1963 and ten years later control was transferred to the Organization for Tropical Studies. Earlier, in the 50s, they had purchased their original land, that was cleared cattle fields. They tried growing tea and then bananas originally, and slowly started planting other plants and purchasing more land. Their house is still there at the top of the hill. There are more than a 1000 species of plants on the grounds. These gorgeous gardens are used as training for scientists, students and their education programs for the public are excellent too. The gardens also preserve endangered species. There are heliconias, bromeliads, tree ferns, bamboo and orchids. There are also over 700 species of palms there.



At the Wilson Botanical Gardens at the Las Cruces Biological Station, there are 145 hectares of land. The 12 double occupancy “tropical cabins” (gorgeous wooden interior décor, louvered windows, clean, small balcony) accommodate visitors. All are named after different plants. It is very close to San Vito. Many young students were there when we were there.

Saw lots of Honeycreepers, gorgeous old palms, and bromeliads, heliconias, an agoutis (a small rodent that looks like a cross between a rabbit and a rat), huge beautiful blue

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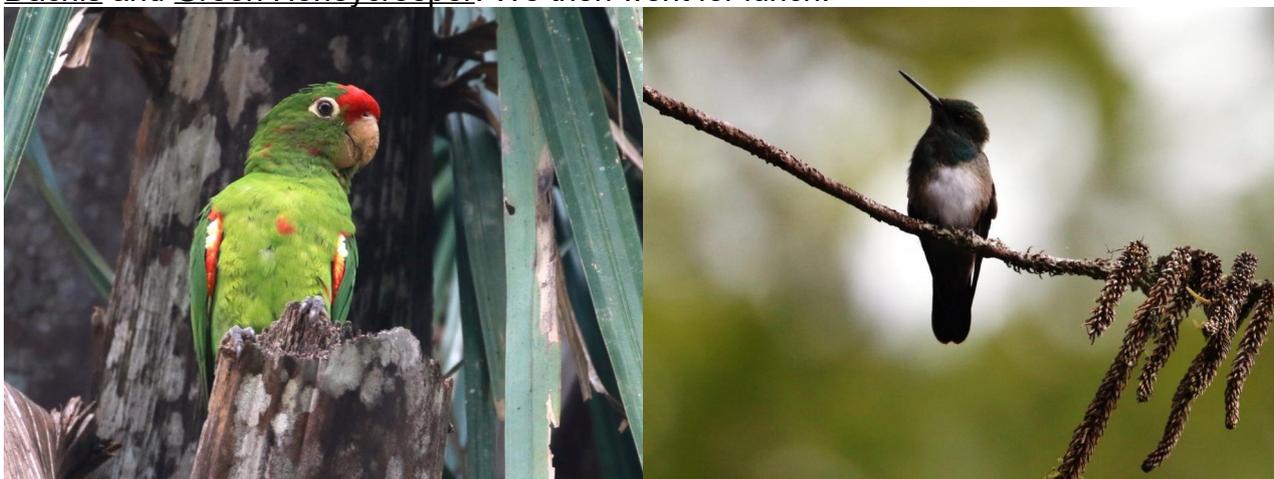
morpho butterflies, and a coati running across the road. We were just in time for dinner, before they closed up for the night and instead of having it all on tables, they served the plates from the kitchen, due to the Coronavirus. The dining hall was open with a balcony and glass interior areas, open at the top of the windows.



Day7 Saturday, March 14, 2020

We had another nice day. John was up early for a 5:15 am walk. He saw a Crested Guan, White-collared Swift, another large swift, Lesson's Motmot, Pale-billed Woodpecker, White-crowned Parrot, another parrot species, Great Kiskadee, Clay-colored Thrush, Crested Oropendola, Chestnut-sided Warbler, Scarlet-rumped Tanager, Golden-hooded Tanager, and a Blue dacnis.

We had a gentle walking tour around the gardens and trails at 7:30 am with a centre guide, named Jeisson, whose grandfather was an original worker with the Wilson's and planted many of the trees. His father worked there too. Jason grew up among the gardens. We saw a Gray-headed Chachalaca, Scaled Pigeon, Stripe-throated Hermit, Rufous-tailed Hummingbird, Swallow-tailed Kite, Roadside Hawk, Lesson's Motmot, Yellow-throated Toucan, Lineated Woodpecker, Blue-headed Parrot, Eye-ringed Flatbill, Yellow-olive Flycatcher, Yellow-bellied Elaenia, Mistletoe Tyrannulet, Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, Bright-rumped Attila, Piratic Flycatcher, White-throated Thrush, Clay-colored Thrush, Thick-billed Euphonia, Common Chlorospingus, Golden-winged Warbler, Slate-throated Redstart, Scarlet-rumped Tanager, Palm Tanager, Speckled Tanager, Scarlet-thighed Dacnis, Blue Dacnis and Green Honeycreeper. We then went for lunch.





We had an early afternoon walk until it began to pour, a true tropical rain shower. We ran and took shelter in Wilson's carport and Malcolm and Keiko ran for their cabin.



Then, we had a mid-afternoon meeting about the travel situation and Canada urging travellers to come home immediately, due to the Coronavirus. We have concerns about flight restrictions and cancellations and borders shutting down. Argentina was already shut. Tom and Micheline rebooked for our Saturday flight home, as flights were going fast and some we saw yesterday were no longer available or affordable. (There had been some Tuesday and Wednesday economy flights, but now all gone. Business class at \$2000/person. Two for Friday at \$1,150, but only a day earlier. Did not want to go through the States, with its chaos and possible border shutting with Trump. Did think about going through Houston, because a week is a long time away! Stressful!!)





Then in late afternoon, around 4 pm, we walked and climbed up the tower. We saw the Magnificent Frigatebird, Black Vulture, Turkey Vulture, Swallow-tailed Kite, Broad-winged Hawk, Lesson's Motmot, Blue-headed Parrot, Crimson-fronted Parakeet, Clay-coloured Thrush, Thick-billed Euphonia, Rufous-collared Sparrow, Tennessee Warbler, Chestnut-sided Warbler, Summer tanager, Scarlet-rumped Tanager, Speckled Tanager, Golden-hooded Tanager, Bay-headed Tanager, Silver-Throated Tanager, and Green Honeycreeper.



John and I headed back to the cabin. The rest of the group saw a White-ruffed Manakin, after we left, near the tower.





Day8 Sunday, March 15, 2020

We were up at 6:30 am and saw Gartered trogon in a tree as we ate breakfast on the balcony. We packed up and were on our way. We stopped at a few places along the way, including driving through a very pretty mountain town. We saw these along the way: Blue-winged Teal, Ruddy Ground Dove, Black-necked Stilt, Northern Jacana, Great Egret, Little Blue Heron, Cattle Egret, Great-tailed Grackle, Great Tinamou, Gray-cowled Wood-Rail, White Ibis, Green Kingfisher, Lineated Woodpecker, another woodpecker sp., Crimson-fronted Parakeet, Great Kiskadee, Fork-tailed Flycatcher, Red-breasted Meadowlark, Great-tailed Grackle, Scarlet-rumped Tanager and Thick-billed Seed-Finch.



We went down a road beside a Palm plantation and saw a Baird's Trogon in a tree beside us, as well, we saw King Vulture and a White-shouldered Tanager.

At one bird stop, we saw a local family picnicing on a pebbled river shore and swimming in the deep pools of the stream. A car also stopped with a family and some puppies in it and an older man held out some unopened packages of crackers for us. We had lunch a little farther down, at a running brook, where we opened our Wilson's bagged lunches. In the containers were gallo pinto, an apple and juice and some cookies. We stopped at a remote place where the endemic black cheeked ant tanager is only found. The bird, however, refused to come out to show itself. In early afternoon, we stopped at a beach, in a motel and pavilion complex, and looked at several birds, then stopped to have a drink at the beach-side pavilion. *We had some papaya juice at 1500 colones (\$3.65 CDN) each.*

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It was around **Golfito Refuge area** in Puntarenas and we saw a Whimbrel, Willet, Tricoloured Heron, White Ibis, Yellow-headed Caracara, Clay-coloured Thrush, Great-tailed Grackle, Laughing Gull, Royal tern, Magnificent Frigatebird, Brown Pelican, Ringed Kingfisher, Yellow-bellied Elaenia and Tropical Mockingbird.

Just as we were heading out, we saw 2-4 Scarlet Macaws in a road-side tree. We all had an awesome view of them.



Then we drove to **Rio Tico Safari Lodge**, Calle Vergel, Osa CR-Puntarenas. On the way in along the darkened road, around 8 pm, we saw a Common pauraque, in the same family as the Whip-poor-will. It was on the road side and flew off into the bush when we got nearer.

We were guided to our African Safari tents with soft path lightning along the way, that was motion sensitive as we passed. The tent was magical with little corner lights on as we entered, along with bamboo stem lights, with little holes drilled into them, on bedside wooden tables, beside a huge king-sized bed. There was a fan blowing soft moving air at us. The room had gorgeous tropical wood flooring, that was a deep reddish brown. Then, through another zippered door, a step away, there was a separate tiled enclosure, with a shower, sink and toilet, sheltered by another canvas roof.

We settled in and then went to dinner at a restaurant, The Tilapia, near the resort with a gorgeous rippling stream under a wooden bridge, covered with twinkling lights, and a nearby waterfall. It was too dark to venture out that night to explore the grounds and they had kept the place open so that we might have dinner. In fact, the server also had her two little girls there, both under the aged of 4. We all had fajitas with all the fixings, without the tortilla shell. Also most of us had a cool PILSEN beer! There was also a wee kitten there, complete with fleas!

We came back and headed to bed, with the covers of all our six large windows all rolled up open to let the faint humid breeze through. There was also ceiling windows too for venting moisture out. In 29 – 30 Celsius weather during the day and only going down to about 26 - 27 at night, with rain forest humidity, one needs all the moving air one can get! The cycadas started their roaring “electrical engines” about dusk and serenaded us well into the evening.

Day9 Monday, March 16, 2020

We woke up for breakfast at 7 am, but had time for a short sit out on the little wooden balcony before, surrounded by the tropical rain forest. We had crepes, eggs and toast and papaya fruit. Then at 8 am, we were off for a walk. We spotted a tiny hummingbird, the

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White-crested coquette, on an end of a branch. We also saw a White-necked Jacobin, King Vulture, Turkey Vulture, Roadside Hawk, Broad-winged Hawk, Slaty-tailed Trogon, Yellow-throated Toucan, Wedge-billed Woodcreeper and another, unidentified Woodcreeper species, Great Kiskadee, Social flycatcher, Grey-capped Flycatcher, Tropical Kingbird, Clay-coloured Thrush, Black-and-White Warbler, Summer Tanager, Scarlet-rumped Tanager, Palm Tanager, Green Honeycreeper, Morelet's Seedeater and the Buff-throated Saltator.

We also saw a Collared ant-eater, a teddy-bear like fuzzy furred body attached to a tiny long tube-like head, on a bridge of the neighbour's land. Gabor had perhaps woken it up from its sleep, under the bridge, when he walked out onto it. It's brown middle portion almost stood out like a "saddle" as he stood motionless, with one paw suspended in the air, as he gazed at Gabor, unaware, at first, of the furry creature behind him.



We returned to our tents and took a break and cooled down from the intense heat and humidity. *Heat rashes have started on Christine and myself!* We then had lunch at the same restaurant as last night, the Tilapia. Indeed, they served that fish to us – tilapia fingers! (Some had chicken fingers.) We then walked down the garden path to see the 500 year old Ceiba tree, which they claim is the third biggest and oldest in Costa Rica. I believe them. It was huge and the surface roots went on for ever in the garden!! Then we walked to the waterfall, a beautiful tower of cascading water in the woods.

We then went back to the lodge and relaxed. Tom had his first cappuccino for this trip! The air around Rio Tico smells really fragrant, especially around the lodge in the evening. The Dutch owner, Cees said it probably is the *elan* (??) flower. The cycadas were singing again from dusk on.



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Day10 Tuesday, March 17, 2020



John got up and went birding early. We had breakfast again at 7 am of eggs, crepes, toast and juice. We packed up and took pictures of each other in front of our Safari tents. Then we drove off, first along the Pacific Ocean and stopped to see seabirds and fishermen in boats. Gabor told us that there was a nice restaurant on the point down the shore a bit. We drove on and swerved to miss a large snake crossing the road. Then we got into higher altitudes around 10:30 am and on to Mirador Restaurant and hotel, on Highway 2, north of San Raphael and south of Villa Mills (Carretera Interamericana Sur, Perez Zeledon CR-San Jose). They are situated on the top of a mountain, overlooking the valley and one can see San Isidro de El General in the distance, with its huge cathedral in the centre of town. This little place had some zip lines through the forest, though only at the top of the mountain. Their bird feeders were constantly busy with birds. We birded and had a fruit drink there or Snickers chocolate bar! We saw a Green-crowned Brilliant, Violet Sabrewing, Crowned Woodnymph, Rufous-tailed Hummingbird, Swallow-tailed Kite, Clay-colored Thrush, Rufous-collared Sparrow, Chestnut-headed Oropendola, Baltimore Oriole, Scarlet-rumped Tanager, Palm Tanager, Speckled Tanager, Golden-hooded Tanager, Silver-throated Tanager and Streaked Saltator.



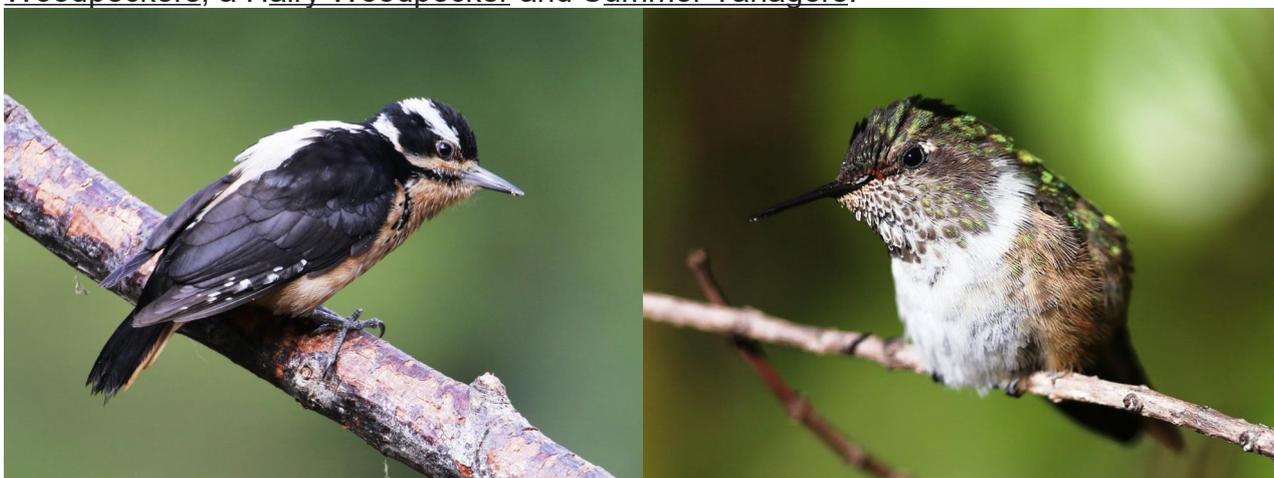
Then, around noon, we arrived at the highest elevation that we would go to at "Cerro de la Muerte", PN- Tapanti, at 3340 metres above sea level. We parked and ascended the road a bit to a path, where we saw the Volcano Hummingbird, the Sooty Thrush, the Black-billed Nightingale-Thrush, the Volcano Junco and the Flame-throated Warbler.

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There was very different vegetation here with more conifers, cypress and desert-like plants, such as sedums, etc. Tom even noted that it had a smell like in the southwest US, like the creosote trees.



We then drove on for lunch and birding at “Miriam’s Quetzal Restaurant”. While we waited for lunch, we went out back on her balcony and watched many hummingbirds, Acorn Woodpeckers, a Hairy Woodpecker and Summer Tanagers.

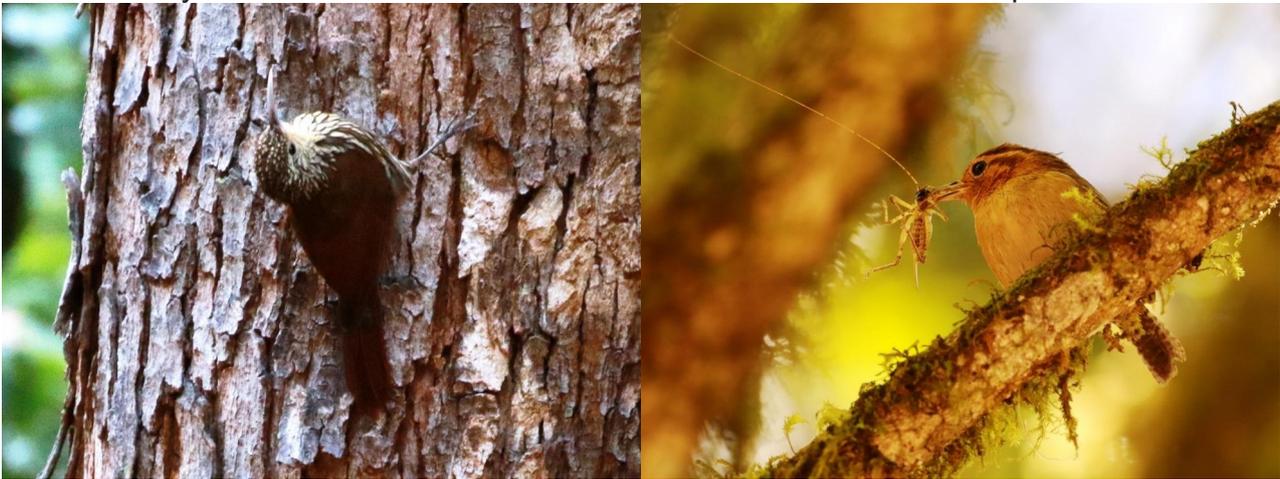


We had the best meal of trout, salad, black beans and yucca (that tastes a bit like potatoes when boiled) and plantain. We purchased some souvenirs (T-shirts mainly) and went back outside again until a bus load of a Motmot tour group came and we left. Apparently, around 4 pm, the quetzal often shows up at the feeder, but we headed out before that, with the crowd there. This is truly the valley of the quetzal.





We headed off to **Dantica Cloud Forest Lodge**, Reserva Forestal Los Santos, Dota, about 2660 metres above sea level. All the buildings have red tiled roofs and sleeping cabins tucked up into the hill above the lodge. The lodge had a lovely art gallery attached to it and the sleeping cabins had huge glass windows overlooking the cloud forest below, a small balcony off to the side and small wall-mounted ethanol-fueled fireplaces.



We walked around mid-afternoon a bit and saw a Band-tailed Pigeon, Talamanca Hummingbird, Fiery-throated Hummingbird, White-throated Mountain-gem, Volcano Hummingbird, Acorn Woodpecker, Hairy Woodpecker, Sooty Thrush, Long-tailed Silky-flycatcher, Rufous-collared Sparrow, Large-footed Finch, Wilson's Warbler, Flame-colored Tanager, Blue-gray Tanager and Slaty Flowerpiercer.





Around 4 pm, we saw some more birds: Spotted Wood-Quail, White-throated Mountain-gem, Acorn Woodpecker, Black-faced Solitaire, Ruddy-capped Nightingale-Thrush, Mountain Thrush, Sooty Thrush, Sooty-capped Chlorospingus and Large-footed Finch.



On our way to drive to dinner, we heard a Dusky Nightjar call at Dantica. We decided to have dinner at a Pizzeria down the road, where a young 33 year old, named Victor was chef and owner of the small establishment. He had taken some cooking training in Italy and had a real passion for cooking – the best and freshest flour, olive oil, and other ingredients and love, he told us.





After an enjoyable wait around tables, made from shipping pallets and white plastic patio chairs, our two pizzas arrived. They were, with no doubt, the best we had all enjoyed for a very long time. The crust was delicious and sat to rise for 12 hours, previous to baking in his wood-fired oven for 25 minutes at 400 degrees.

Malcolm announced that it was he and Keiko's 50th wedding anniversary this year (January) and they purchased everyone's beverages for the evening. (Italian wines of course!) It was a great evening with lots of laughs and stories.



Day11 Wednesday, March 18, 2020

John went out early and saw Spotted Wood-quail, Spot-crowned Woodcreeper, a Ruddy-capped Nightingale-thrush and Sooty-capped Chlorospingus. We got up at 7 am for breakfast. The selections were named after birds and the "Toucan" was an omelette and fruit.

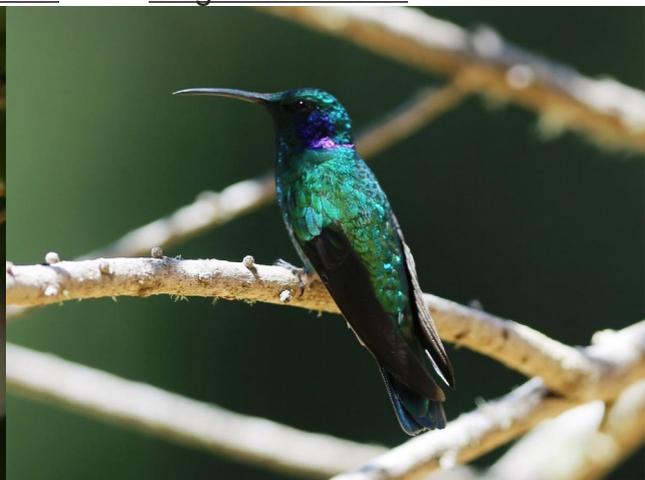




We saw a few birds in the small valley outside our breakfast room, such as Swainson's Thrush, Clay-colored Thrush, Sooty Thrush, Large-footed Finch, Mountain Elaenia, Black-capped Flycatcher and Blue-and-white Swallow.



Then we headed off down the road to find the quetzal. Gabor and Andrea had found a quetzal nest earlier in the month, when visiting the area, (around **San Gerardo de Dota**) and were able to locate it again. There were only two other birders there when we arrived. We saw the male Resplendent Quetzal at the nest, his head partially hidden in the hole. Occasionally he would pop his head out and look around. With careful look we have realized it had his favourite food, aguacatillo in its beak, so we assumed it tried to feed its chicks. We also saw a Rufous-collared sparrow and a Large-footed finch there.

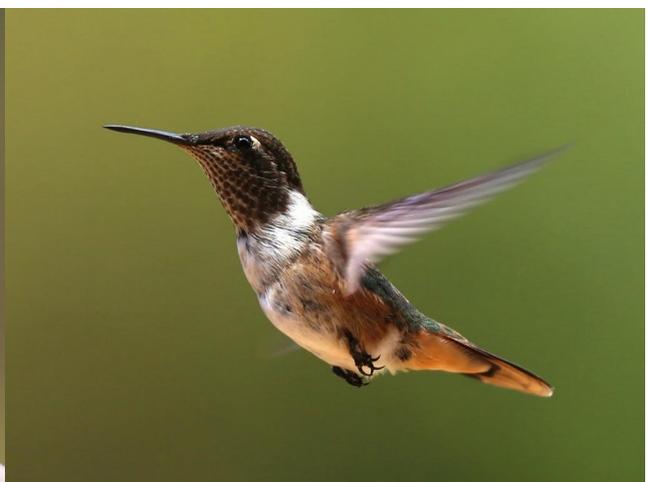




Then we went down the road a bit to the **Rio Savegre**, a gorgeous river with large round boulders and sparkling water. We walked along its shore path for a while and back again. We saw Acorn woodpecker, Turkey Vulture, Torrent Tyrannulet, Yellowish Flycatcher, Black Phoebe, Boat-billed Flycatcher, Long-tailed Silky-flycatcher, Sooty-capped Chlorospingus, Rufous-collared Sparrow, Yellow-thighed Brushfinch, Baltimore Oriole, Flame-coloured Tanager, Blue-gray Tanager and Spangled-cheeked Tanager.



We had lunch at **Café Kahawa**, (San Gerardo de Dota near the Suria Lodge), where a Yellow-thighed Brush-finch was on the balcony rafters. This place had landscaped the property around the river, complete with a playground.

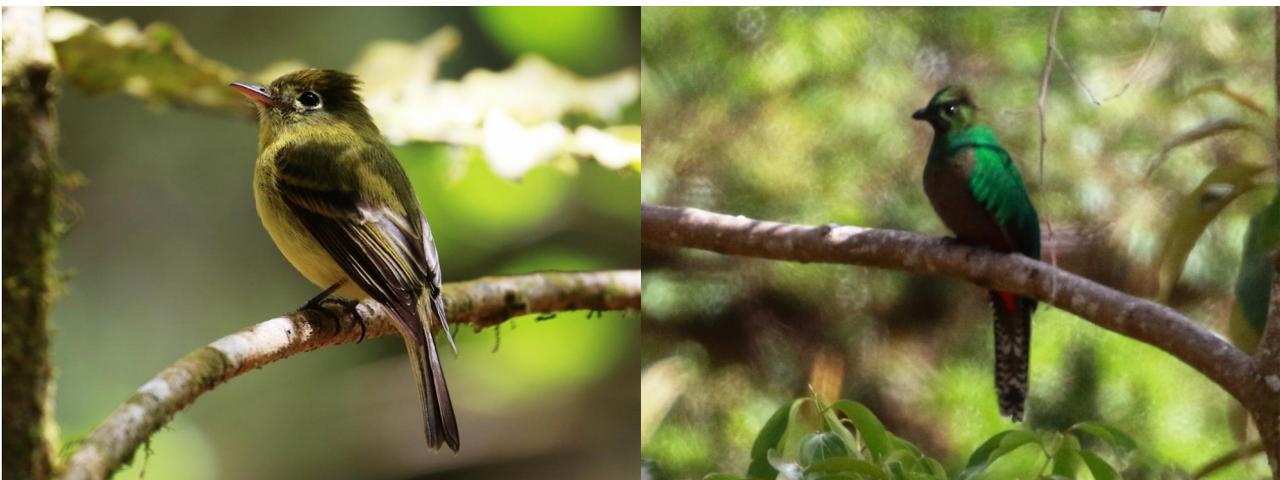




We saw the Lesser Violetear, Talamanca Hummingbird, Volcano Hummingbird, Osprey, Sulphur-winged parakeet, Spot-crowned woodcreeper, Stripe-tailed Hummingbird, Torrent Tyrannulet, Yellow-winged Vireo, Gray-breasted Wood-Wren, Clay-colored Thrush, Rufous-collared Sparrow and Flame-colored Tanager.



We had another delicious lunch of cubed trout pieces and coleslaw salad with cucumber and cream dressing. There was many selections of fruit juices and I had a papaya and passion fruit drink with a bamboo straw. After lunch we went back to the quetzal property (around **San Gerardo de Dota**) and saw the female Resplendent Quetzal perching on a branch near the nest.





We returned to Dantica and walked the trails a bit and saw the Costa Rican Pygmy Owl pop her head out of the nest, after Gabor called her with his taped bird call, in a tree just below our sleeping cabins. She later on flew off. We continued down on one of the Dantica trails, which was very rough, on a steep slope with slippery leaves. At one point, Keiko made a heroic climb over a very large tree trunk over the trail.

On our way back, we got John and Malcolm and Gabor again called the Costa Rican pygmy owl and she again popped her head out just long enough for all to get a good look and picture of her. We then went back for a relaxing rest.

We went back to the same Pizzeria with Victor and ordered pasta this time. Victor had had all his red wine sealed up with police tape, so that it could not be sold. The police, however, had not touched his white wine or beer, in the fridge. They are trying to limit numbers in restaurants and bars, due to the Coronoavirus. Many of us had fettuccini carbonara, which was great as well. John and I bought the drinks, since this night was our actual 30th anniversary night on March 18th. Another good evening of laughs and stories about how everybody met their partners.



Day12 Thursday, March 19, 2020

We were up at 7 am for breakfast. I had an oatmeal that tasted like pablum with heavy cream. It was good. Yesterday the police wrapped around the wines here as well.

This morning we were off to higher elevations of 3300 metres, to see the Red-tailed Hawk (*costaricensis*), who hovered stationary above the peak for several seconds, giving us all a chance to really see him, a Wilson's Warbler, flitting up and down in the scrub, and 2 Timberline Wrens who were very shy and kept close to the brush



along the roadside. Along the other side of the road, where trucks flew by constantly, we saw a Turkey Vulture, Ruddy Treerunner, Yellow-winged Vireo, Back-billed Nightingale-thrush, Sooty-capped Chlorospingus, Volcano Junco and Flame-Throated Warbler.



Then we were off to **Mirador** (Valle del General) for another stop and drink and Snickers bar and to see the Green-crowned Brilliant, Talamanca Hummingbird, Violet Sabrewing, Rufous-tailed Hummingbird, Tropical Mockingbird, Clay-coloured Thrush, Rufous-collared Sparrow and Silver-throated tanager. Tom lost a notebook paper, which was pushed off the balcony roof by Gabor with a bamboo pole and retrieved by a worker.



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We stopped at a roadside grocery store near **Platanillo** for some food for the plane ride home. We had lunch at the same place where we had been originally picked up by Gabor. The inside walls were covered with posters of the Beatles, Jim Morrison and Bob Marley. After lunch, we did a car shuttle to take the van back and we took two trips to get back up to Toucan Birding Lodge. We cleaned up, had showers, and Christine, Mimi and Tom had a swim and then Andrea and Gabor had one as well. We then tried to tape some of the howler monkeys calling in the valley.

We had an evening dinner about 6:30 of pork, yucca and sweet potatoes and a dessert cake and ice cream, with some extremely strong Slovakian berry liquor in it, ironically called Tatra Tea. We had some conversation and then off to bed.



Day13 Friday, March 20, 2020

Several heard a tree fall during the night in the forest. We were up at 8 am for a breakfast of pancakes, fruit and jam, with cream in bags. Then we visited a bit, took a group photo outside of us all. While Gabor and Christine were busy, the rest of us took a little trail walk and saw the Short-billed Pigeon, the Golden-naped Woodpecker, pewee sp.(Contopus) and Chestnut-sided Warbler.

At 11 am, Gabor and Christine were off to Dominical for a bus.(That was a story in chasing buses and finally getting on one!)

The rest of us continued on our small hike and Mimi found an Oriole Snake, that we think is also locally called a Mica. Then we watched a Gray-capped Flycatcher and a Sulphur-bellied flycatcher. On our way back, a female Great Curassow flew up from a branch near

the trail. Keiko located it again and we all had great views of the spiky head feathers, brown flecked tail feathers, and ochre brown mid-section on the bird. It was hot today at about 30 o C. and very humid.



We had lunch of turnovers with cheese and a salad. Then we all had a siesta. In late afternoon, we all congregated outside in the shade to visit until supper at 6:30. We had a great dinner of traditional Costa Rican fiesta food of chicken stewed in a tomato, garlic, peppers, and paprika sauce with rice and sweet potatoes and Toucan napkins! We then visited around the table and then went out to the patio to sit in the lovely rosy-orange sunset. We had the best show yet of birds in the trees as we sat on the patio, there was a serenade of cychadas, and howler monkeys, while 2 White-crowned parrots, 11 Mealy parrots, parakeets, a Golden-hooded tanager, a Yellow-throated toucan, a Roadside hawk, Rufous-tailed hummingbirds, the Fiery-billed Aracari, a Yellow-headed caracara, and, of course, Crested guans all flew in for good sightings. It was an all-star cast, saying goodbye to us. Mimi signed us all up on WhatsApp so that we could keep connected. The sunset faded into darkness and late that night Gabor and John and I heard a Crested Owl call out from somewhere in the forest. We all went to be after a hearty avian goodbye and we heard that Christine had made it to her Bed and Breakfast so one leg down!! Dings from WhatsApp talking went on into the night on phones!

Day14 **Saturday, March 21, 2020**

Up for an 8 am breakfast of fruit, yogurt and scrambled eggs, toast and cream cheese. Then we gave Andrea and Gabor our gift and packed up to be off in two shuttles to the Monkey Ride pick up at **Platanillo**. It was our same driver, Javier, so that was great! All six of us again on our trip back in the van. On our way, John spotted an Amazon Kingfisher at **Rio Naranjo**. We stopped at the same place at **Rio Tarcoles** to eat a hamburger and ice cream bars. We headed onward to San José airport and Tom, Micheline, John and I were dropped off and Malcolm and Keiko were dropped off at the Bed and Breakfast near the airport for their flight the next day.



THE END OF A WONDERFUL BIRDING TOUR!!!

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Further selection of John's pictures:



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