



TRIP REPORT COSTA RICA AUGUST 2019



Carolina Bird Club sponsored a fantastic Costa Rica Tour with LifeBird Tours, LLC, August 10-20, 2019.

We started in the Pacific lowlands and birded our way up to the cooler lush cloud-forests of Monteverde. Next we moved from the Pacific slope to the Caribbean to the beautiful Arenal Observatory Lodge at the foot of the Arenal Volcano. Finally, we descended into the Caribbean lowland rain forests of La Selva Biological Station which is one of the best birding sites in Costa Rica! We also visited other key birding areas including La Virgen del Socorro, Cope's famous feeders, the Old Butterfly garden and La Paz Waterfall Gardens.

On our first day of birding in the beautiful country of Costa Rica we started it off right with good looks at a Spot-breasted Oriole while enjoying breakfast at our friendly local family owned Hotel Robledal. Following breakfast, we began the descent into the hot Pacific lowlands. We visited a wide range of habitats and were very fortunate to find our target species of the dry scrub habitat known as Guanacaste. The targets we found included Lesser Ground-Cuckoo, Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl, Black-headed Trogon, Turquoise-browed Motmot, Hoffmann's & Lineated Woodpeckers, White-throated Magpie-Jay, Rufous-naped & Banded Wrens, White-lored Gnatcatcher, Stripe-headed & Olive Sparrows.



Lesser Ground-Cuckoo, photo by Steven Easley

From here we made our way further north up the Pacific Coast and birded the mangroves near the small village of Caldera. At this site, we had great looks at a stunning male Mangrove Hummingbird. This a Costa Rican Endemic and an endangered species. Other nice finds within the thick coastal mangroves included a Mangrove Vireo and the colorful “Mangrove subspecies” of Yellow Warbler.



Mangrove Hummingbird, photo by Steven Easley

Following a tasty lunch at a local restaurant, we continued even further north and visited a wetland area known as Punta Morales. Arriving at high tide the shorebirds were numerous and we added 14 different species to our growing CR list. Late afternoon, began our ascent to the cooler and lush cloud-forest habitat of Monteverde. Our hotel , Fonda Vela, was lovely and very comfortable, a perfect place for a 3-night stay.



Turquoise-browed Motmot *Photo: Steven Easley*

On our mornings in the famous Monteverde area, we started by birding the gorgeous hotel grounds of Fonda Vela. Northern Emerald-Toucanet, Lesson's Motmot, Blue-and-white Swallow, Orange-billed Nightingale-Thrush, Cabanis's & Rufous-and-white Wrens and the towhee-like White-eared Ground-Sparrow were a few of our seen species. The shy and retreating Black-breasted Wood-Quail was heard near the cabins, but we were unable to lure this species into view.



Northern Emerald-Toucanet, photo by Sherry Lane

Following breakfast, each day we set out to explore the surrounding gorgeous cloud forests including Santa Elena, Curi-Cancha and Monteverde Cloud Forest Reserve. Each forest was unique with its own beauty. Monteverde is a pristine cloud-forest which covers an area of around 26,000 acres and is home to one of the most beautiful birds in the entire world, the aptly-named Resplendent Quetzal. We were able to get looks at this spectacular species. We also encountered several mixed feeding flocks with Prong-billed Barbet, Spotted Woodcreeper, Spotted Barbtail, Red-faced Spinetail, Ochraceous Wren, White-throated Thrush, Common Chlorospingus and Costa Rican Warblers. We had nice looks at an Orange-bellied Trogon. In Curi-Cancha we were delighted to see two Mottled Owls roosting. A Three-wattled Bellbird was seen perched and heard singing his strange metallic sounding bells which sounds travel for miles around. Also we were treated with very active hummingbird feeders that were busy with Lesser Violetear, Violet Sabrewing, Purple-throated Mountain-gem and the Costa Rican endemic Coppery-headed Emeralds all seen at close distances making for great photo opportunities!

We had wonderful lunches at Morphos Restaurant!





Purple-throated Mountain-gem, photo by Sherry Lane

We had a successful visit to Refugio de Vida Silvestre for great looks at a male Long-tailed Manakin! Other amazing cloud forest birds seen were Black Guan, Buffy Tuftedcheek, Ruddy Treerunner, Ruddy-capped Nightingale-Thrush, Yellowish & Tufted Flycatchers, Spangle-cheeked Tanager, Olivaceous Woodcreeper, Black-headed Nightingale-Thrush, Eye-ringed Flatbill, Plain Antvireo, White-naped Brushfinch, Elegant Euphonia and the brilliant Golden-browed Chlorophonia.



Spangle-cheeked Tanager, photo by Steven Easley

After 3 days of exploration of the cloud forest we packed our bags for the drive to Arenal Volcano. During the drive we passed from the Pacific slope to the Caribbean and the habitat and avifauna shifted radically. Every roadside stop produced new and exciting species. Collared Aracari, Slaty Spinetail, Golden-hooded & Scarlet-rumped Tanagers, Black-cowled Oriole and squadrons of impressive Montezuma Oropendolas are just a few of the new birds we encountered.



Scarlet-rumped Tanager, photo by Sherry Lane

Once we reach the Arenal area we spent the rest of the afternoon birding the Arenal Peninsula. We quickly picked up Smoky-brown & Rufous-winged Woodpeckers, Broad-billed Motmot, Rufous-tailed Jacamar, Bare-crowned Antbird, Fasciated, Russet & Barred Antshrikes, Common Tody-Flycatcher, Black-throated Wren, Yellow-billed Cacique, White-shouldered, Crimson-collared and Golden-hooded Tanagers and Red-throated Ant-Tanager.



Red-throated Ant-Tanager, photo by Sherry Lane

We had a wonderful 2 night stay at Arsenal Observatory Lodge. The lodge is beautiful with great birding everywhere on the gorgeous grounds! We began each morning meeting on the balcony which overlooks a nice bird feeder setup. Curious family groups of White-nosed Coati fill the ground desperately trying to reach the fruit feeders. Great Currasow, Scaly-breasted Hummingbird, Tropical Parula and glowing Red-legged Honeycreepers make for nice viewing with a cup of excellent Costa Rican coffee.



Our most excellent bird guide Steven Easley with Tom Lee getting ready for the new day!

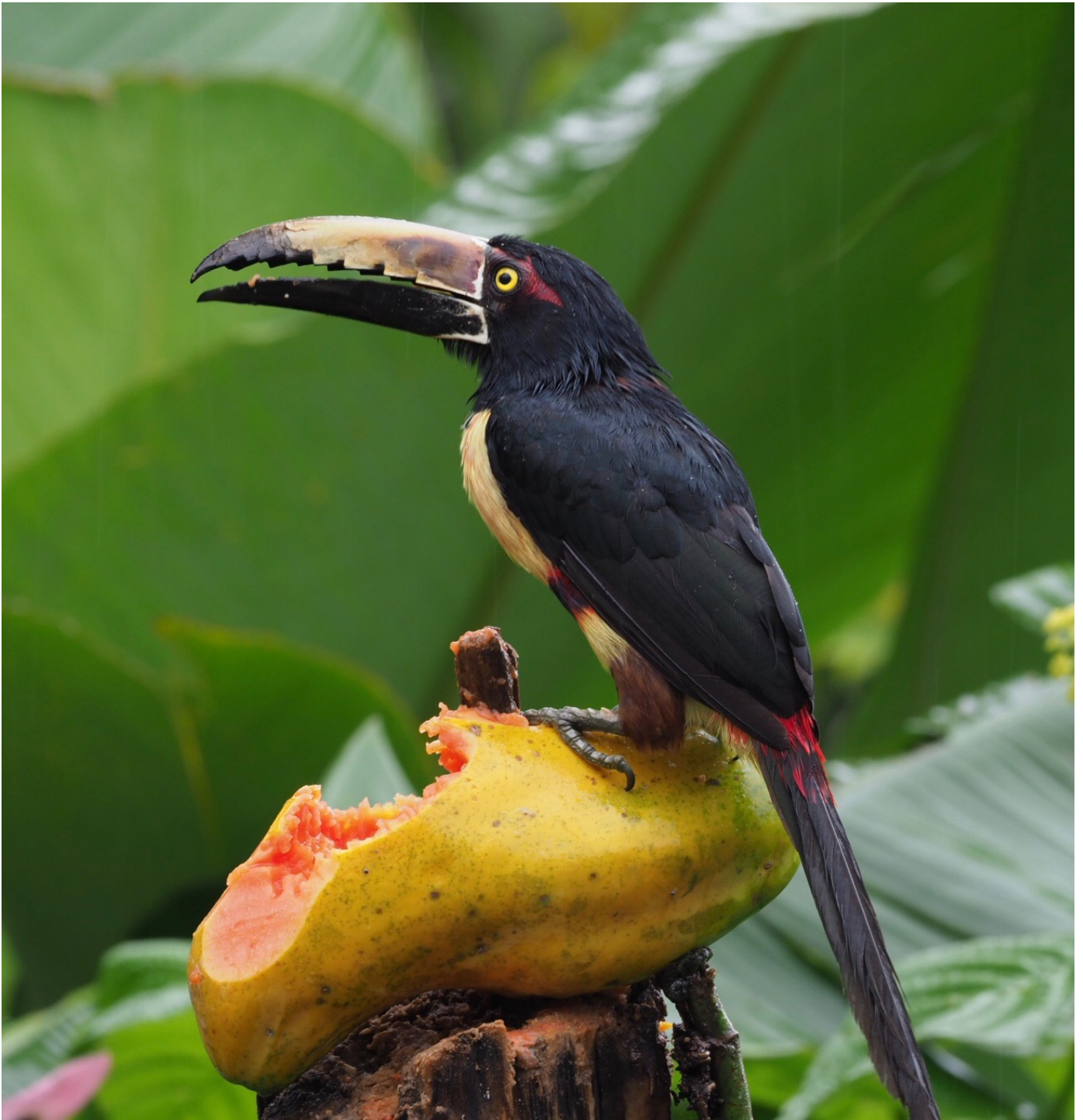


Great Curassow, photo by Sherry Lane



Arenal Volcano

After meeting up at the balcony and the adrenaline rush from the new birds, we hit the nearby trails in search of middle elevation Caribbean slope species. One morning we saw 35 species before breakfast including Gartered Trogon, Black-headed Nightingale-Thrush, Dull-mantled & Spotted Antbirds, Band-backed & Stripe-breasted Wrens, Buff-rumped Warbler, Hepatic Tanager and Tawny-capped Euphonia.



Collared Aracari, photo by Sherry Lane



Spotted Antbird, photo by Sherry Lane

Following a yummy buffet-style breakfast, we drove approximately 45-minutes to a small reserve near the town of La Fortuna called Senderos Bogarin. The feeders at this site are absolutely electric! Gray-headed Chacahalaca, Black-cheeked Woodpecker, Orange-chinned Parakeet, Tropical Mockingbird, Buff-throated Saltator, Yellow-throated Euphonia and Green Honeycreepers were all seen and photographed at point-blank range. Russet-naped Wood-Rail and White-throated Crake were also spotted near a small pond next to the feeders.



White-throated Crake, photo Sherry Lane



Orange-chinned Parakeet, photo by Sherry Lane

After supper and the nightly bird log, we got lucky and found a Black-and-white Owl that lives near the cabins making for a nice ending to an excellent day of birding!

Our last morning in Arenal was very productive with a 52 species morning! My favorite was the difficult to find Tawny-faced Gnatwren. On our drive out of Arenal Observatory Lodge we had nice views of a cooperative Fasciated Tiger-Heron to send us off.



Fasciated Tiger-Heron, photo by Sherry Lane

Our next destination was the lovely La Quinta Lodge located in the Sarapiquí River Valley. Lunch on the way there was in the town of La Fortuna at Rancho Perla, a local restaurant. The grilled tuna here was off the hook, no pun intended! Behind the restaurant by a small pond we found a tree full Boat-billed Herons!



Boat-billed Heron photo by Sherry Lane

We continued to bird our way to Sarapiquí and just before sunset had 4 stunning Great Green Macaws fly right over our heads.

It was nice getting settled in at La Quinta Lodge for our 3 night stay. This lovely lodge is full of birds and other wildlife. The frog ponds were fun to visit at night and we had a visit from a Central American Woolly Opossum after dinner one evening. My favorite visitor was an orphaned baby Three-toed sloth that the lodge owners were caring for.



The Caribbean lowlands are filled with an abundance of tropical wildlife and the famous La Selva Biological Station is the best place to find them. The station protects some 3,700 acres of pristine lowland rainforest and is home to a wealth of biodiversity. We started with birding the entrance road and then took to the numerous trails leading into the forest. We found Crested Guan, Yellow-throated Toucan, Short-billed Pigeon, Bronzy Hermit, Chestnut-colored, Cinnamon and Pale-billed Woodpeckers, Black-throated & Slaty-tailed Trogons, White-crowned Parrot, Rufous Motmot, Black-crowned Antshrike, Gray-capped & White-ringed Flycatchers, Stripe-breasted and Song Wren, and Black-faced Grosbeak to name a few. We also found some noteworthy reptiles and amphibians including the dragon-like Green Basilisk, the massive Green Iguana and the tiny Strawberry Poison Dart-Frog.



Crested Guan, photo by Steven Easley

The next day we worked our way up into the foothills and visited El Tapir, also more commonly known as the Old Butterfly Garden. This is a known site for a great selection of hummingbirds. We had excellent looks at a male Snowcap, Violet-headed Hummingbird and the colorful Crowned Woodnymph. We were excited to see 2 King Vultures flyover our heads while we were birding!



Snowcap, photo by Sherry Lane

After El Tapir we visited a local Costa Rican bird whisperer named Cope. He has made an amazing bird sanctuary of his small property. The bird feeders at his home are very productive with Bronze-tailed Plumeleteer, Long-billed & Stripe-throated Hermits, Band-tailed Barthroat, Black-chinned and Hoffman's Woodpeckers, Red-legged and Green Honeycreepers and Chesnut-headed Oropendola all were in attendance. A Green kingfisher flew into the small pond behind his home. A Purple-crowned Fairy sat in a nearby trees not too far from the prehistoric-looking Casque-headed Lizard.



Green Honeycreeper, photo by Sherry Lane



Casque-headed Lizard

After checking the feeders, we drove with Cope to a forest patch a few minutes away. Here, we found an adult and a juvenile Spectacled Owl on their day roost. Another real treat was Cope's ability to locate for us the uncommon Honduran White Bat. A family group of these cute little ghostly white bats convert a large heliconia leaf into a tent in order to get some shut-eye during the daytime. Cope also found us a Pygmy Round-eared Bat resting in a termite nest.



Spectacled Owlet, photo by Steven Easley



Honduran White Bats

On our last morning of birding, we drove to the lovely forested valley of La Virgen del Socorro. Here, we found a few nice mixed flocks with the highlight being 2 Brown-billed Scythebills! Another group pleaser was Torrent Tyrannulet and American Dippers along the rocks of the rushing river.

Next we visited a small feeder station further up the road near the small town of Cinchona. Northern Emerald-Toucanet, Silver-throated Tanager, Green-crowned Brilliant, Brown Violetear and Coppery-headed Emeralds were visiting the feeders. Later, we stopped at the La Paz Waterfall Gardens for a wonderful lunch and some additional birding. This is arguably the best location in the world to see Black-bellied Hummingbird and Sooty-faced Finch both of which did not disappoint us. Other species we encountered on the trails were Chestnut-capped Brushfinch, Bay-headed Tanager and Collared

Redstart. The hummingbird feeders near the restaurant offered an incredible opportunity to see these jewels at very close range. Species here included Green Hermit, Green Thorntail, Violet Sabrewing, White-bellied Mountain-gem, and the unique Black-bellied Hummingbird to name a few.



Black-bellied Hummingbird, photo by Sherry Lane

Overall it was a awesome tour with 322 seen bird species and lots of other interesting mammals and reptiles. Many thanks to our awesome bird guide, Steven Easley of Easley Birding, who got us on so many amazing birds! Also many thanks to Vernon Campos our excellent driver and bird guide also. The tour was a great success which is really because of the wonderful participants who joined together initially as strangers but left Costa Rica as good friends! Pura Vida!



Fun group of birders still laughing at the end of the journey!