

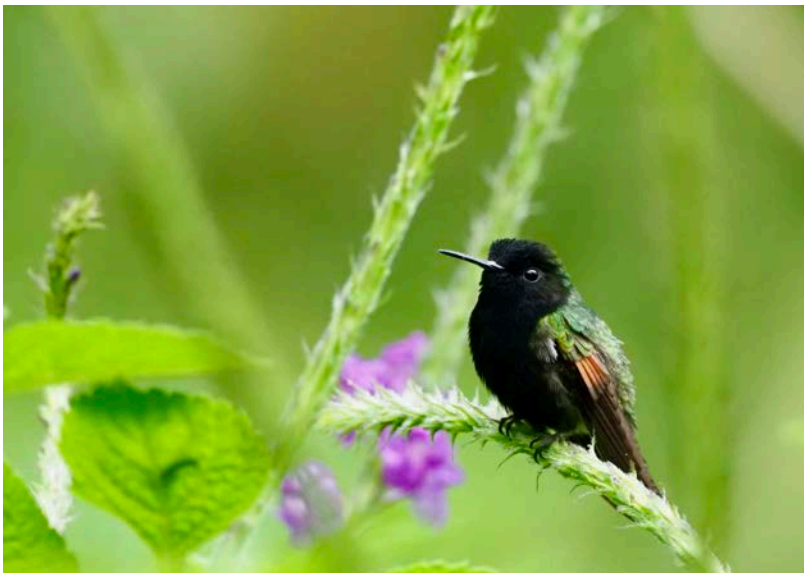
# COSTA RICA TRIP REPORT: JANUARY 20-31, 2024

Written by and all bird photos taken on the tour by Sherry Lane unless specified otherwise.

Day 1: The 2024 LifeBird Costa Rica tour began with eight fun birders, me as tour leader, our amazing bird guide, Juan Diego Vargas, and our excellent driver, Luis. We kicked off the tour at the family-owned Hotel Robledal near the San Jose airport. We woke up to the sounds of Rufous-naped Wrens, Melodious Blackbirds, Great Kiskadees, and Spot-breasted Orioles singing in the background. After birding in the gardens, we moved forward with our adventure in our spacious comfortable van, with our first stop along the road to find the elusive Cabanis's Ground Sparrow, which gave us quick looks as it darted about in the bushes. Next, we transferred to the Quelitales Hotel. The grounds of the Quelitales Hotel were beautiful, and



the afternoon birding session was very productive. We had great looks at the endemic White-bellied Mountain-gem. The feeders were active with other hummingbirds like the Stripe-tailed and **Black-bellied Hummingbirds**, Green Hermit, Violet Sabrewing, and Green-crowned Brilliant. Also, we happily witnessed a Green-fronted Lancebill taking sips of water out of the bottom of the waterfall.



However, the highlight of the evening was a Scaled Antpitta, which came to a feeding station. This is the first successful antpitta feeding station in Costa Rica.



The lodge stands out alongside the property's beautiful grounds and has outstanding gourmet cuisine served in the dining area. We especially loved the Baileys Crepe dessert!

Day 2: The morning started with birding the beautiful hotel gardens, and then, after a delicious breakfast, we packed up and headed up to the highlands to find some higher-altitude species. Our main target here was the rare Maroon-chested Ground Dove. Our excellent bird guide, Juan Diego Vargas of Lifer Nature Tours, got the group on this fantastic bird. We also had looks at several beautiful Flame-throated Warblers, Talamanca, Fiery-throated, and Volcano

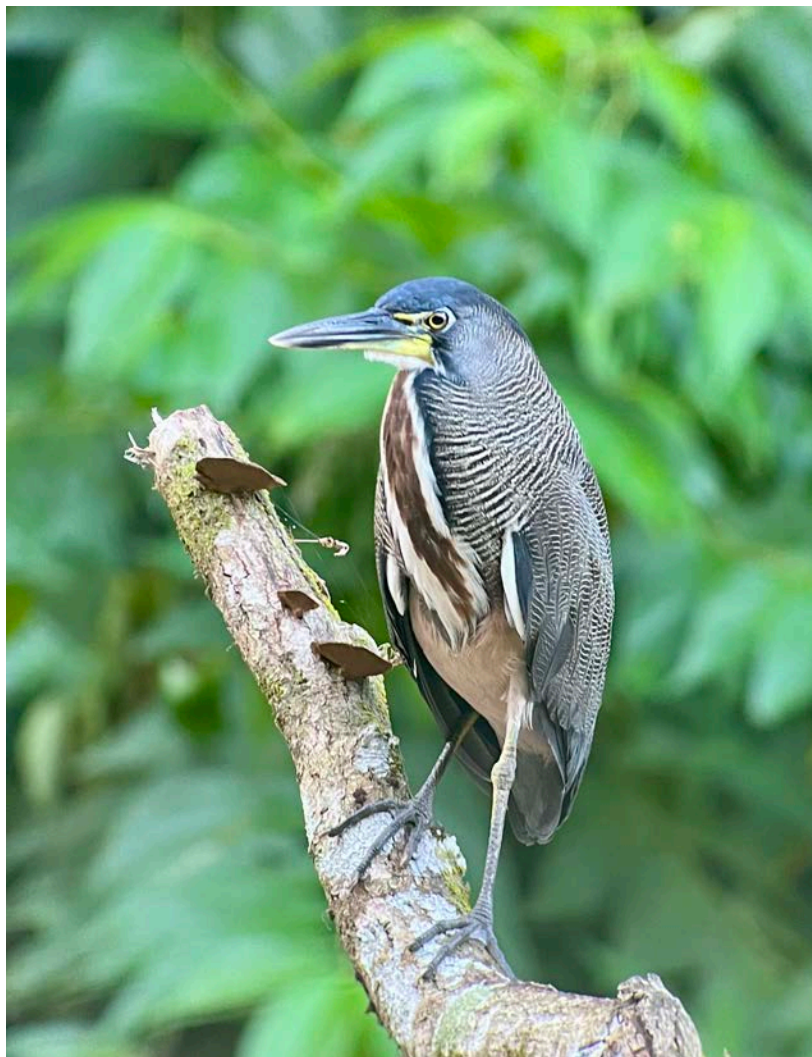
Hummingbirds. After climbing the mountain, we rewarded ourselves with a nice lunch before heading to the Pacific Lowlands, where we spent two nights at the Villa Lapas Lodge.

Day 3: We woke up early before dawn and headed to the Tarcolis River, where we birded via a large, comfortable boat for several hours. This was an incredibly productive birding session, with the species list totaling 90 species that morning. We were lucky to witness the stunning **Scarlet Macaws** flying overhead and feeding on various flowers along the river, which provided us with breathtaking close-up views. We also spotted five different species of Kingfishers, including the tiny **American Pygmy Kingfisher**.



We had great views of the endemic Mangrove Vireo and the Mangrove subspecies of Yellow Warbler. We observed the Bare-throated Tiger-Heron, Magnificent Frigatebirds, Boat-billed Herons, Roseate Spoonbills, and Common Black Hawks up close. Adding to the drama of the experience, we could hear the background sounds of Howler Monkeys and even spotted American Crocodiles in the river.

In the afternoon, we headed to Carrera National Park, where we found Chestnut-backed Antbird, Long-billed Gnatwren, Black-hooded Antthrush, and Streak-chested Antpitta. We also had excellent looks at a Ruddy Quail-Dove foraging on the forest floor.



Day 4: We began with birding on the lodge grounds and were rewarded with great looks at a Fasciated Tiger-Heron resting along the stream. Other good morning birds included a White-whiskered Puffbird, Lesson's Motmot, Chestnut-backed Antbird and a Black-headed Antthrush foraging along the forest floor. After a delicious breakfast, we packed up the bus and started the journey to San Isidro, the foothills of the Pacific slope, where we spent the next several days. Along the way, we stopped to look at a stakeout roosting Black-and-white Owl. We enjoyed a lovely lunch at a local restaurant with a beautiful view, which

included a flyby King Vulture and several Swallowtail kites. Before we reached our next lodge, we stopped in San Isidro, where Juan Diego knew a spot for Turquoise Cotinga. While searching for the cotinga, we got excellent looks at

two Yellow-throated Toucans. When we were about to give up on our target and drive away, the amazing eyes of Juan Diego spotted the gorgeous male Turquoise Cotinga perched in the distance, making for beautiful scoped views.

Day 5: Morning birding started at the El Pelicano Lodge, a beautiful birdie property. At one point, we had over ten species in a small leafless tree we named “the magic tree.” We also had a surprise encounter with endemic Costa Rican Brushfinch. We were happy to see a Snowy-bellied Hummingbird and a White-tailed Emerald. After a delicious breakfast, we jumped in our van and headed a short distance to a private property, Chirripo Oasis, which is a hot spot for **White-crested Coquette**. We were rewarded with the coquette and amazing looks at a male Garden Emerald and Violet-headed Hummingbird. We found an Orange-billed Nightingale-Thrush in the lush gardens in full bloom.



The afternoon was spent at Los Cusingos Reserve, which is the property where the famous ornithologist Alexander Skutch lived and did his research. It is now a dedicated bird sanctuary—the beautiful trails produced **Red-capped Manikin** (photo by Juan Diego) and Three-toed sloth. Also, a Common Potoo was found on a day roost perched on a branch at the trail's end.

Day 6: Once again, we birded the lush gardens of the El Pelicano Lodge and added Northern Emerald-Toucanet, Fiery-billed Aracari, and Squirrel Cuckoo. After breakfast, we packed up and headed towards the North Pacific coast wondering if the “Pelicano” would be following us! After a long drive, we found ourselves at Ensenada Lodge. This completely different environment was comprised of the dry Guanacaste forest and farmlands. The lodge is waterfront on the Nicoya Gulf, making for a **gorgeous sunset** (selfie by Juan Diego)!



Day 7: Birding the Ensenada property in the early morning produced Black-headed Trogon, **White-throated Magpie Jay**, Hook-billed Kite, Orange-fronted Parrot, White-browed and White-lored Gnatcatchers, and Nuttings Flycatcher. The highlight bird of the morning was a singing juvenile male Three-wattled Bellbird. He was getting his vocals ready and tuned to attract the ladies after he migrates to his Highland breeding grounds. We also found a day roosting **Pacific Screech-Owl** napping near the lodge. In the afternoon, we ventured into the mangroves and salt ponds, where we found many shorebirds, including a Surfbird and a Long-billed Curlew. After dark, we were excited to find a Northern Potoo who flew over our heads multiple times, giving us quite a show!



Day 8: We birded the farm property before breakfast and had excellent looks at White-necked Puffbird and Turquoise-browed Motmot. After breakfast, we packed up and headed towards the famous cloud forest of Monteverde. We stopped along the way to bird and Juan Diego found a Franklin's Gull among a group of Laughing gulls, Royal, and Sandwich Terns. Also, overhead, we saw a massive kettle of Magnificent Frigatebirds.

Day 9: The morning and into the afternoon were spent at the Monteverde Cloud Forest, which is a stunning natural wonder of giant trees and lovely trails. During our visit, we were fortunate to encounter several mixed flocks on these trails where we got Spotted Barbtail, Red-faced Spinetail, Golden-winged Warbler, Collared and **Slate-throated Redstarts**, Spangled-cheeked and Silver-throated

Tanager. Of course, the show stopper was seeing four **Resplendent Quetzals** (photo by Juan Diego) My favorite was spending time with a flock of gorgeous Azure-hooded Jays. We also noticed a nice male Collared Trogon. It was an extremely productive day and a joy to return to the luxurious Heliconas Hotel, which looks out over Monteverde.



Day 10: This last morning was spent birding the fantastic forest trails of Curi-Cancha, which produced many lovely birds, including colorful Elegant Euphonia, Scarlet-thighed Dacnis, and Golden-browed Chorophonia. After a nice lunch in town, we went back to Curi-Cancha for one last session, and while we were shooting some photos of a Lesson's Motmot, just under it, a **Chirriqui Quail Dove** crossed the path. We followed him and had great looks and photos of this rare forest dweller. After birding the reserve, we returned to Hotel Robledal in San Jose for a celebration feast and last night in Costa Rica! We saw over 300 species of birds and many monkeys and mammals. **Our group** has bonded into good friends who shared many fun memories of our time in Costa Rica. Hopefully, we will all bird and travel again together!



