

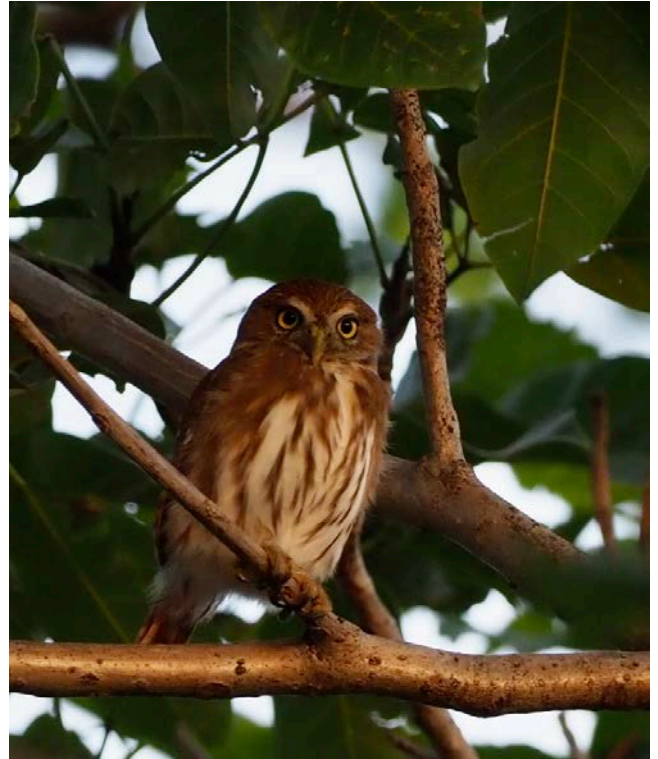
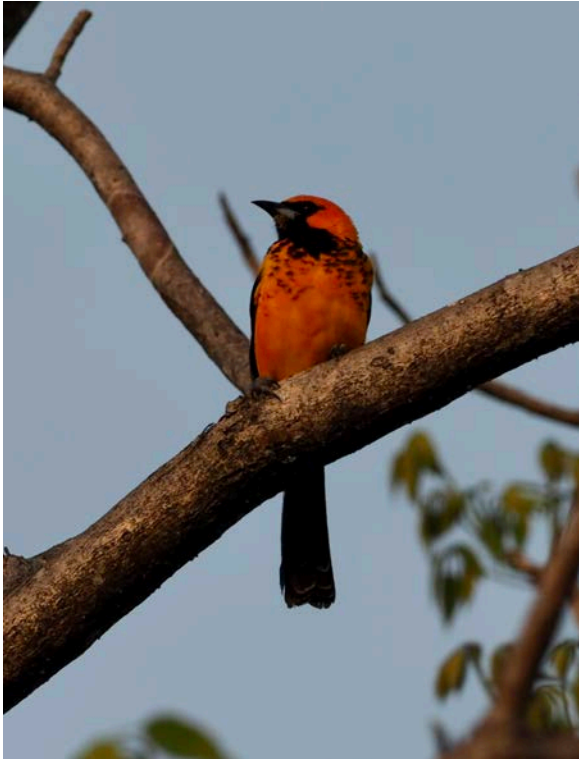


**COSTA RICA ADVENTURE
THE TRIP REPORT:
JANUARY 29-FEBRUARY
10, 2023**

Day 1: We arrived in Costa Rica and were welcomed to the Robledal Hotel by singing **Rufous-naped Wrens** and White-winged Doves. Hotel Robledal is a wonderful, friendly, family run hotel near the airport that has a nice garden to start us out on our first list of tropical birds!



Rufous-naped Wren



Spot-breasted Oriole and Ferruginous Pygmy-owl were both found in the hotel gardens.

Day 2: Our group of 9 birders was led by the amazing local guide, Juan Diego Vargas of Lifer Nature Tours. After birding the hotel grounds we set out on our Costa Rican adventure heading first towards the Pacific to the dry Guanacaste foothills. Our final destination was the beautiful Heliconias Rainforest Lodge but we birded our way there with several productive stops along the way. One these stops was at the Salt Ponds in Punta Morales where we found some specialty birds of that habitat including Cinnamon and Mangrove Hummingbirds, **Turquoise-browed Motmot**, Brown-crested and Nutting's Flycatchers as well many shorebirds and waders.



From there we stopped at Hacienda La Pacifica for a nice lunch and some good birding with great looks at a male Black-headed Trogon and a stunning male **Long-tailed Manakin!**

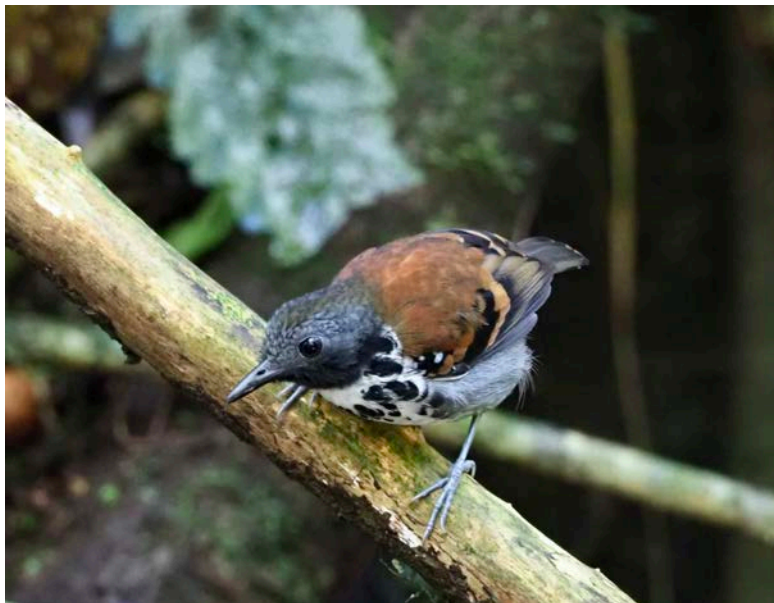


The afternoon was full of more good Guanacaste birding with Crested Bobwhites, Canivet's Emerald, Double-striped Thick-knee, White-throated Magpie-Jay, Brown Jay, and Stripe-headed Sparrows just to name a few!

Day 3: We birded the grounds of the beautiful Heliconias Rainforest Lodge early before breakfast and then breakfast was a special treat with tables facing the large windows that look out at very active feeders! Here we had close up views of Collared Aracari, Yellow-throated Euphonia, Montezuma Oropendola, Scarlet-rumped Tanager and Buff-throated Saltator. After breakfast we hit the trails on the lodge property again and were rewarded with finding an Army Ant swarm! Ant swarms bring the insects out of hiding which in turn brings out the skulky birds to feed on the insects. Finding ant swarms in the forest is like hitting gold and many "ant type birds" that are usually very secretive come out of hiding and can be seen. We found Chestnut-backed, Zeledon's, Bicolored, Ocellated and **Spotted Antbirds** all at the ant party! We also were happy to see a cute Tody Motmot and a pair of roosting Crested Owls to highlight the morning!



Fun Birding Group!



Spotted Antbird

The afternoon brought more adventure as we headed from the lodge to BirdSongs Garden which is small garden full of local Verbena flowers which usually brings in some nice hummingbirds, we found Long-billed and Stripe-throated Hermits but not the Snowcap or Black-crested Coquette that we were targeting. However, just when we were about to leave Juan Diego found us a rare **Yellow-eared Toucanet** perched behind the bathrooms! What a great consolation prize!



Yellow-eared Toucanet (female)



From BirdSongs garden the search for our target hummingbirds led us to a beautiful reserve called, Tapir Valley, where we were incredibly fortunate to see a mother with a **baby Baird's Tapir** moving through the protected property. These are endangered animals and it was a privilege to witness them in the wild! We also found the male Black-crested Coquette!

After a full day of birding we topped it off with some hunting for nocturnal species after dinner. We didn't find any owls but we had great looks at a **Great Potoo**!



Day: 4 We decided to once again try for the Snowcap at Tapir Valley reserve early this am and this time we got lucky with a gorgeous male! It was a good morning for hummingbirds with White-necked Jacobin, Band-tailed Barbthroat, Brown Violetear, Purple-crowned Fairy, Black-crested Coquette, Violet-headed Hummingbird, Rufous-tailed and Scaly-breasted Hummingbirds and Blue-throated Goldentail in addition to the Snowcap!

After another great breakfast with a feeder show at Heliconias Rainforest Lodge we packed up and began our birding journey towards the famous Arenal Observatory Lodge. On our way we birded Arenal Peninsula Road and added a nice Keel-billed Motmot and Long-tailed Tyrant to our growing list. Once at the beautiful Arenal Lodge we enjoyed the amazing feeders that bring in an extensive variety of unique birds such as **Crested Guan**, Great Curassow, **Collared Aracari**, Yellow-throated Toucan, Montezuma Oropendola, Golden Hooded, Bay-headed, Emerald and Silver throated Tanagers.



Arenal Volcano, Crested Guan and Collared Aracari

Day: 5 The morning was devoted to birding the fantastic trails and grounds of Arenal Observatory Lodge and despite the intermittent rain showers we continued to find many great birds. In the afternoon we visited the trails of Sendero Bogarin, this is a place that has an area of wetlands where we were happy with finding the elusive Uniform Crake as well as White-throated Crakes and Russet-naped Wood-rails! A Three-toed Sloth was observed with a baby in the trees.

Day: 6 We spend another great morning of birding the lodge grounds, adding many more species to our growing list including **Red-legged Honeycreeper**, Black-and-yellow Tanager, White-throated Shrike-Tanager, White-fronted Parrot, Golden-bellied Flycatcher, Rufous Mourner and Rufous Motmot. After breakfast we packed up and said goodbye to Arenal but as we were leaving the area we got great looks at a stunning **White Hawk** and two beautiful Sunbitterns! Some of the mammals we saw at Arenal included Mantled Howler, White-headed Capuchin and Spider Monkey's, Northern Tamandua Anteater, White-nosed Coati and Central American Acoati.



Red-legged Honeycreeper

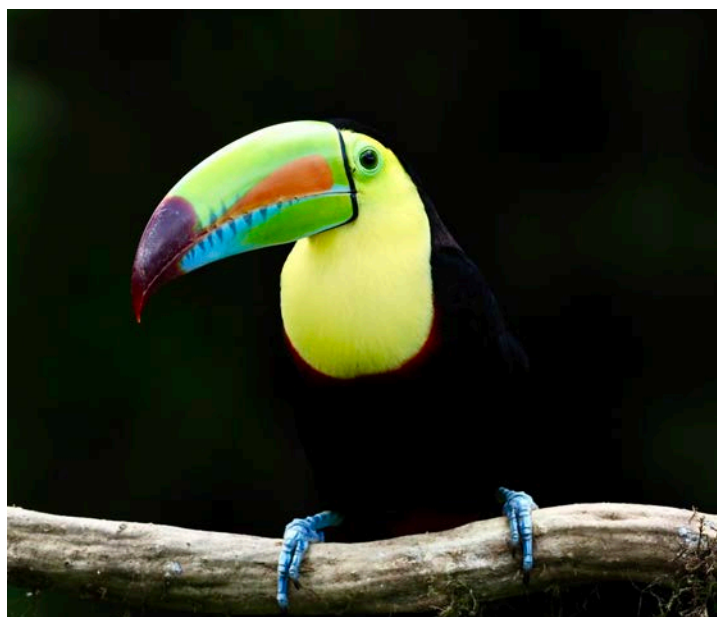


White Hawk

We began heading north to Cano Negro Refuge but along the way we had an amazing lunch stop at “Papa’s Place” for a local home-cooked meal to enjoy while overlooking an incredible yard with bird feeders! At one point there were both **Keel-billed** and Yellow-throated **Toucans** sharing the feeder along with five Collared Aracari! We had a brief look at a White-tipped Sicklebill that came to flowers and we had views of 2 White-fronted Nunbirds in a nearby field. It was a very productive lunch spot plus the local owners were so gracious and the food was delicious!



Golden-hooded Tanager



Keel-billed Toucan

Day 7: This day we explored the expansive northern wetlands of Cano Negro. First with a morning boat ride down the Rio Frio where we were excited to see the world's most beautiful heron, **Agami Heron**! We also saw many other great birds and had a total species list of 63 just during the morning boat ride. It was great for kingfishers as we saw all 6 species of American Kingfishers including the rare **Green-and-rufous Kingfisher**! Later that morning we took a walk through Cano Negro wildlife refuge headquarters where we found White-crowned and Olive-throated Parrots among many others. After lunch we had another boat ride this time going up the Rio Frio and we found both male and female **Sungrebes** and the elusive Yellow-breasted Crake. Other good sightings: Boat-billed Heron, Pacific Screech-Owl on a day roost and Yellow-tailed Oriole which was rare for that area. Just before dark we saw two Nicaraguan Grackles in with Great-tailed Grackles roosting for the night on a large tree by the river.



Agami Heron (above) and Green-and-Rufous Kingfisher (below)





Sungrebe (female)



Happy Birders after a great day on the Rio Frio!

That night we went out owling and after much driving and searching of power lines we were finally rewarded with finding an amazing **Striped Owl** who was on the hunt in the middle of a pasture land!

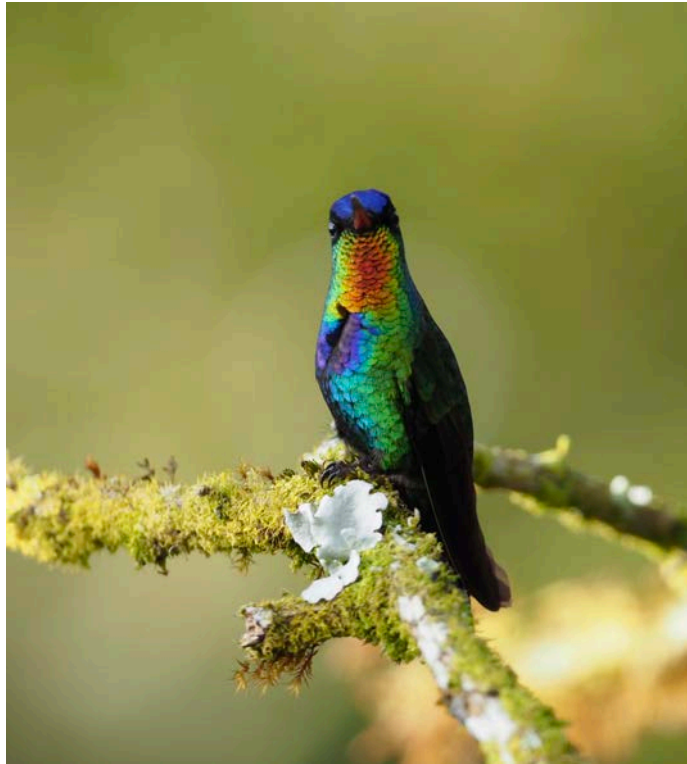


Day 8: We began our journey to the Talamanca Highlands, but had a very productive stop on the way at the San Emilio wet pastures where the wetland pools were packed



with birds including 100's of Woodstork, Great, Snowy and Cattle Egrets, Roseate Spoonbill, Bare-throated Tiger-Heron and the leader of the pack, the giant **Jabiru**! We also had good looks at Bat Falcon and Double-striped Thick-Knees.

We arrived to the gorgeous Paraiso Quetzal Lodge in time to visit their busy hummingbird feeders before dinner. This is the best place to see the beautiful **Fiery-throated Hummingbird**! Also with it, the **White-throated Mountain-gem**, Volcano and Talamanca Hummingbirds are all endemic to Costa Rica and Western Panama and all were active at the feeders. After a fabulous dinner we were ready to rest for tomorrow's new adventure!

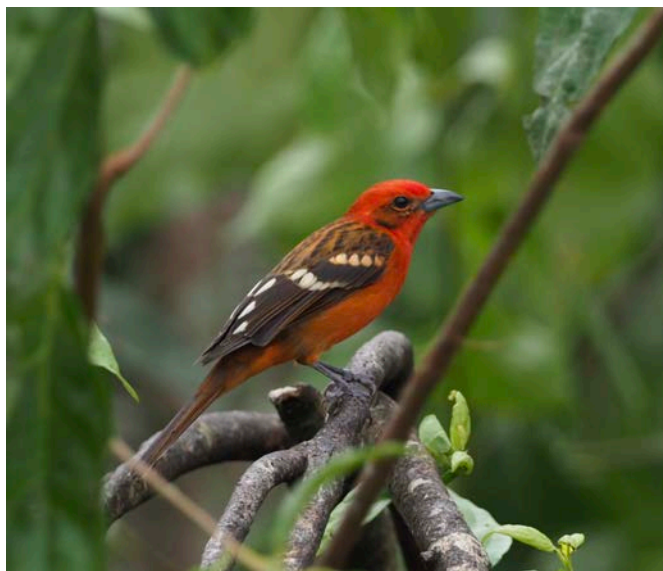
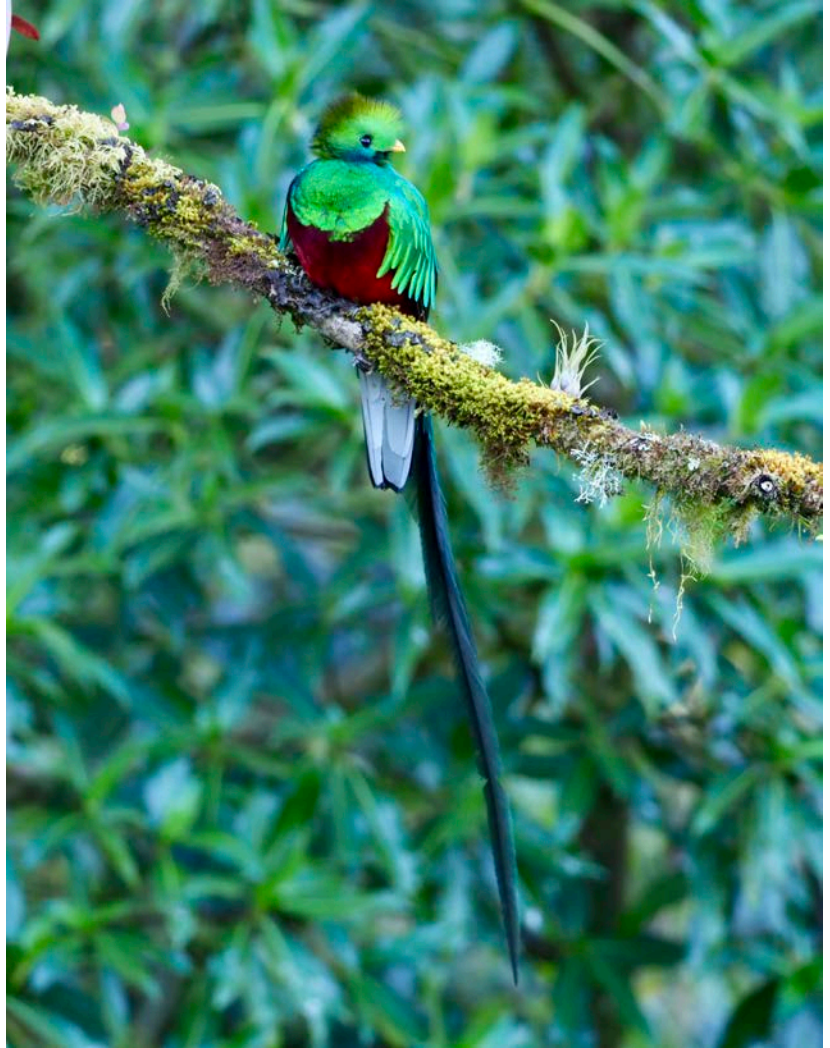


Fiery-throated Hummingbird (above) and White-throated Mountain-gem (below)



Day 9: This morning was devoted to finding the stunning **Resplendent Quetzal**! We drove to a private farm where the owner, Finca William, is part of a project of farmers who have allowed visitors to come on their property to see the Quetzals as they feed on wild avocado trees. This helps to protect the birds habitat and helps the farmers with donations. We got amazing views at close range of two males and one female! Also we saw Spotted Wood-Quail with four fledging and Flame-throated Warbler for a very rewarding morning!

The rest of the day was spent birding Providencia road and the lovely grounds of Pariso Quetzal Lodge which is at an altitude of ~8000 feet so the sightings included Highland specialties such Black-and-yellow and Long-tailed Silky Flycatchers, Large-footed Finch, Golden-browed Chlorophonia, Yellow-thigh Brush-Finch, Black-billed Nightingale-Thrush, and **Flame-colored Tanager** to name a few.



(~11,000 feet) where found **Volcano Junco**.

Day 10: After a delicious breakfast we checked out of our lodge and headed up to the paramo but first we stopped for coffee at the famous Miriam's Restaurant and the feeders were active as always. From there we went up to Cerro Buenavista Towers



Then we began our descend to the Central Pacific and along the way we stopped for lunch at a small local restaurant (Soda Las Vuetas) where Juan Diego knew to be a good spot for Fiery-billed Aracari. He was as usual correct and one flew in while we were enjoying our food at picnic tables. It is so important to have good local knowledge and our guide was the best! We also picked up Speckled Tanager, Blue Dacnis and had a nice flyover Double-toothed Kite.

Day 11: We enjoyed an early morning birding by boat on the Tarcoles River. We got our target Mangrove Cuckoo, Mangrove Vireo, Mangrove Cuckoo, Panama Flycatcher and Yellow (Mangrove) Warbler as well as over 70 other species! After lunch we hiked the famous Carara National Park trails and were happy to see Marbled Wood-Quail, Blue-throated Goldentail, **Baird's Trogon**, White-whiskered Puffbird, Black-hooded Antshrike, Chestnut-backed Antbird, Rufous Piha, and Orange-billed Sparrow amount many others.



Baird's Trogon

Juan Diego timed our hike out perfectly to end up at the secret manakin pools. This is a beautiful little stream where they come to bath in the evenings. After waiting a few minutes they arrived and we got to share this special time with the incredible cute Velvety and **Red-capped Manakins**!



Red-capped Manakin

Day 12: This morning we birded a different trail in Carara National Park and we got lucky and found another active ant swarm which again brought out the skulkers from hiding! We saw Barred and Black-hooded Antshrikes, Dusky, Bicolored, and Chestnut-backed Antbirds, Tawny-winged Woodcreeper and Northern Barred-woodcreeper, Plain Xenops, Gray-headed Tanager and Northern Bentbill all at this ant swarm! Other great birds seen on the trail were **Scarlet Macaw**, Turquoise-browed Motmot, Gartered Trogon, Long-tailed and Orange-collared Manakins, Royal Flycatcher and Slate-headed Tody-Flycatcher!



Scarlet Macaw

After the morning birding we packed up and started the drive back towards San Jose with one stop on the way to add Chiriqui Foliage-gleaner, Cabanis Wren and Yellow-faced Grassquit to our list. In the late afternoon we arrived back at Robledal Hotel for our final dinner with the whole group of 8 birders plus the tour leader and our awesome guide. Juan Diego prepared a nice farewell video for us with all the highlights of the tour! We had 371 bird species, lots of other cool wildlife and great group of birders!



The Optional Extension to Pocosol Biological Station - The Children's Eternal Rainforest

Day: 13-15

This place was incredible with a wide variety of excellent birds that we encountered on our 3 days at this magical place. We were the only people staying there besides our chef and his assistant. The facility is basic but comfortable and birds like Ornate Hawk-eagle, Northern Schiffornis, **Crimson-Collared Tanager** and even Sharpbill were seen right off our balcony. The forest was filled with amazing trails meandering through giant old trees. We didn't need to leave the property because it was so productive! We saw Brown-billed Scythebill, **Purplish-backed Quail-dove**, and the rare Blue-and-gold and Black-and-yellow Tanagers. Blue-and-gold Tanagers being the only tanager of the genus *Bangsia* (larger and rarer tanagers in the tropics) and a true gem to get in the foothills of Costa Rica. Our stay at Pocosol Biological Station was exciting as the place has so much to offer, not only in terms of great landscape but also bird-wise.

The trails and gardens provided good looks at Black-crested Coquette, **Bay-headed and Emerald Tanagers**, Spotted Antbird, White Hawk, Crimson-collared Tanager among others. Montezuma Oropendola, Buff-throated Saltator, Red-legged Honeycreeper, Scarlet-rumped Tanager were abundant. In the morning we would head to the awesome system of trails with access to the most pristine foothill rainforest of the area. We were hoping to find a good ant swarm and perhaps a chance for the holy grail of Costa Rica birding, the Rufous-vented Ground-Cuckoo. Unfortunately, we did not find the Rufous-vented Ground-Cuckoo but we did see other super birds like the Yellow-eared Toucanet (the hardest toucan of Central America), Purplish-backed Quail-dove, Long-tailed Tyrant, Black-faced, Slate-colored and Blue-black Grosbeaks, White-ruffed and White-collared Manakins! On the day of our departure we got a nice send off from a pairs of Sunbitterns sunning on the rocks of the stream. On our way back to San Jose we had one last night such stop at San Luis Canopy where the feeders and the grounds were hoping with Green-crowned Brilliant, Crowned Woodnymph, Black-cheeked, Smokey -brown and Golden-olive woodpeckers, Tawny-capped Euphonia, Slate-throated Redstart, lots of tanagers and Cinnamon-bellied Saltator!



Some kind of mushroom...go ask Juan Diego! I think he'll know!



Purplish-backed Quail-Dove



Bay-headed Tanager (above) and Emerald Tanager (below)





Crimson-collared Tanager (above) and the children of the Eternal Rainforest (below)





Sunbittern send off...until next time!!