

Costa Rica Tours 2018

by Sherry Lane

We ran two back to back bonus trips to Costa Rica from February 17 to March 6, 2018. The first tour comprised Northern Costa Rica where we visited the best birding sites of the Central Pacific including Carara National Park, the dry NW known has the Guanacaste, the Northern Caribbean wetlands of Cano Negro, and the Caribbean foothills of scenic Arenal Volcano. The second tour covered the Southern backbone of Costa Rica, the Talamanca Highlands and Cerro de la Muerte. We also traveled to the Pacific foothills including Los Cusingos Reserve and Talari Mountain Lodge ending in the SW coastal lowlands of Esquinas Rainforest and the Rincon Bridge/Osa Penninsula.

Northern Costa Rica trip report:

Ten birders including myself flew into San Jose and we all met up at the Hotel Robledal, which is a small friendly family owned hotel that is not far from the airport. This is a very convenient location with plenty of birds on the property. There were some folks who arrived early and went out birding with Emmanuel Guzman who is one of the sons of the hotel owners and a very good bird guide. The next morning we met up with our awesome local guide Steven Easley who arrived with our bus and driver, Vernon, who also is a great bird guide. We loaded up into our spacious, comfortable Toyota Coaster mini bus and headed to the Central Pacific lowlands near Carara NP. We made some nice birding stops along the way adding Pearl Kite, Double-striped Thick-knee, Orange-fronted parakeet, Nuttings Flycatcher, Lineated and Pale-billed woodbeckers among many others to our rapidly growing list.



Pale-billed Woodpecker
by Sherry Lane

We arrived at the Hotel Villa Lapas where we stayed at for the next 2 days while exploring the Pacific mangroves as well as the rainforests of Carara NP. This included an amazing boat trip on the Rio Tarcoles where we saw 76 species in just 2.5 hours! Favorites included Bare-throated Tiger Heron, Boat-billed Heron, Crane Hawk and Mangrove Vireo. A favorite of mine was the Collared Plover.



Collared Plover
by Steven Easley

Carara National Park and mangrove areas were very productive. We had nice looks at a Great Tinamou. We had Blue-crowned, Orange-collared, Red-capped and Long-tailed Manakins. We saw 4 species of Trogons including Bairds's. We had Lesson's and Turquoise-browed Motmots. There were lots of Scarlet Macaws. In one tree we saw both Rufous Mourner and Rufous Piha which made for nice comparisons of the two species. Although they look similar they are of completely different families with Rufous Mourner being of the Tyrant Flycatchers and Rufous Piha of the Cotingas. We had great looks at Blue-throated Goldentails and the endemic Mangrove Hummingbird.



Blue-crowned Manakin
by Steven Easley



Mangrove Hummingbird
by Steven Easley

On day 3 we began our travels north into the dry Guanacaste to Hacienda Solimar which is a large cattle farm with extensive wetlands as well as dry forest. The lodge is rather basic but the birding is incredible from the large noisy White-throated Magpie Jays flying about to the tiny Canivet's Emeralds feeding on flowers there was always something to look at. Driving around the farm is amazing and this is where we got our first looks at the enormous Jabirus. We saw both Spot-breasted and Streak-backed Orioles and we were very pleased to see a skulky Lesser Ground-Cuckoo. There were lots of raptors and it was great to observe 3 species of owls in the day!



Pacific Screech-Owl
by Steven Easley



Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl
by Sherry Lane



Spectacled Owls
by Sherry Lane



Jabiru by Steven Easley



Laughing Falcon with Olive Water snake
by Steven Easley

From Hacienda Solimar we continued to travel north and east to the Northern Caribbean wetlands of Cano Negro. We stayed at the Cano Negro Natural Lodge for 2 days where we explored the wetlands via 3 different boat trips. We were delighted to see Sungrebes, White-necked Puffbirds, Gray-headed Kites and a late evening surprise Agami Heron. In one day we saw all of the 6 species of New World Kingfishers, including the rare Green-and-rufous Kingfisher!



Green-and-rufous Kingfishers
by Steven Easley



American Pygmy Kingfisher
by Steven Easley



(subadult) Bare-throated Tiger-Heron
by Steven Easley



Black-collared Hawk
by Steven Easley



Gray-headed Dove
by Steven Easley



Central American Spider Monkey
by Steven Easley



Central American Spider Monkey (with baby flying from tree to tree)
by Steven Easley

On day 6 after leaving Cano Negro we went on yet another boat ride on the Medio Queso canal which gave us looks at Pinnated Bitterns, Lesser Yellow-headed Vultures and a Mangrove Cuckoo to name a few.



Mangrove Cuckoo
by Sherry Lane

Our next destination was the beautiful Arenal Observatory Lodge located at the base of the Arenal Volcano. The grounds of this lodge are a birders paradise with toucans, motmots and feeders full of tanagers, honeycreepers, dacnis's, euphonias, Montezuma Oropendolas and Great Curassows. There are hummingbirds everywhere, my favorite was a stunning male Black-crested Coquette. The trails came alive with mixed flocks led by White-throated Shrike-Tanagers and Carmiol's Tanagers followed by many other species who feel safe in the large circles of mixed company. We had White-collared and White-ruffed Manakins. We did really well with antbirds after Steven Easley found us a nice ant swarm. We had Bare-crowned, Bicolored, Spotted, Dull-mantled and Ocellated Antbirds! We had great looks at White-fronted Nunbirds. Our last trail in this area was the Arenal Sky Walk with several very high swinging bridges that led to a deck where an Oranate Hawk-Eagle could be observed on a nest feeding a chick. Also, we had super looks at a Double-toothed Kite and a flyover White Hawk.



White Hawk
by Steven Easley



Dull-mantled Antbird
by Steven Easley



Ocellated Antbird
by Steven Easley



Yellow-throated Toucans
by Sherry Lane



Broad-billed Motmot by Steven Easley

On the final day of birding for the northern trip we stopped at a small reserve at the edge of La Fortuna where a small pond and feeders were busy with the usual tanagers, saltators and Gray-headed Chachalacas. A nice surprise was seeing a White-throated Crake near the pond. We were also surprised when some Tico locals led us down a trail where a Black-and-white Owl was roosting. We made a last stop at the feeders at Cinchona on our way back to San Jose for more close up views of hummingbirds, barbets and toucanets!



White-throated Crake
by Sherry Lane



Northern Emerald Toucanet
by Steven Easley

The first tour ended at the lovely Hotel Bougainvillea which sits on the slopes overlooking San Jose. This is where I said goodbye to the northern group and greeted the southern group of CBC birders who had already that same day arrived.

Southern Costa Rica trip report:

February 26 we started the Southern birding tour in the beautiful gardens of Hotel Bougainvillea where we saw Squirrel Cuckoo, Yellow-bellied Elaenia, Masked Tityra, and Rufous-capped Warbler to name a few. After a wonderful breakfast we loaded the bus with our new group of birders. We began our ascend up to the Talamanca highlands which is the Southern backbone of Costa Rica. Our first stop was at Los Quetzales NP where we enjoyed seeing highland species such as Fiery-throated and Volcano Hummingbirds, Timberline Wren, Sooty Thrush, Black-and-Yellow Silky-flycatchers, Flame-throated Warblers and Large-footed Finch.



Timberline Wren
by Steven Easley



Sooty Thrush
by Sherry Lane

Our next stop was at the famous Miriam's Restaurant where the feeders are alive with Lesser Violetears, White-throated Mountain-gems, Talamanca and Volcano Hummingbirds. We had a wonderful Costa Rican home-style lunch while watching Long-tailed silky-flycatchers, Yellow-thighed Finch and Flame-colored Tanagers.



Long-tailed Silky-flycatcher by Sherry Lane



Flame-colored Tanager
by Sherry Lane

After lunch at Miriam's we headed to Bosque Del Tolomuco which is a lovely lodge at a lower altitude. Here we had 9 species of hummingbirds, including Striped-tailed and Snowy-bellied, White-tailed Emerald, Violet Sabrewing and a very cooperative female White-crested Coquette! The fruit feeders here were hopping with Silver-throated, Cherrie's, and Speckled tanagers, as well as Red-headed Barbets. We had 4 Elegant Euphonia's fly in which were a delight to all. Chestnut capped and White-naped Brushfinch were another group pleaser.



Violet Sabrewing
by Steven Easley



White-crested Coquette
by Steven Easley



Red-headed Barbet
by Sherry Lane



Silver-throated Tanager
by Sherry Lane

Next began a descend into the foothills arriving at Talari Mountain Lodge where we stayed the next 2 nights. The before breakfast birding sessions were excellent here with highlights like long-billed Starfront, Lesson's Motmot, Streaked Flycatcher and my favorite the Olivaceous Piculet!

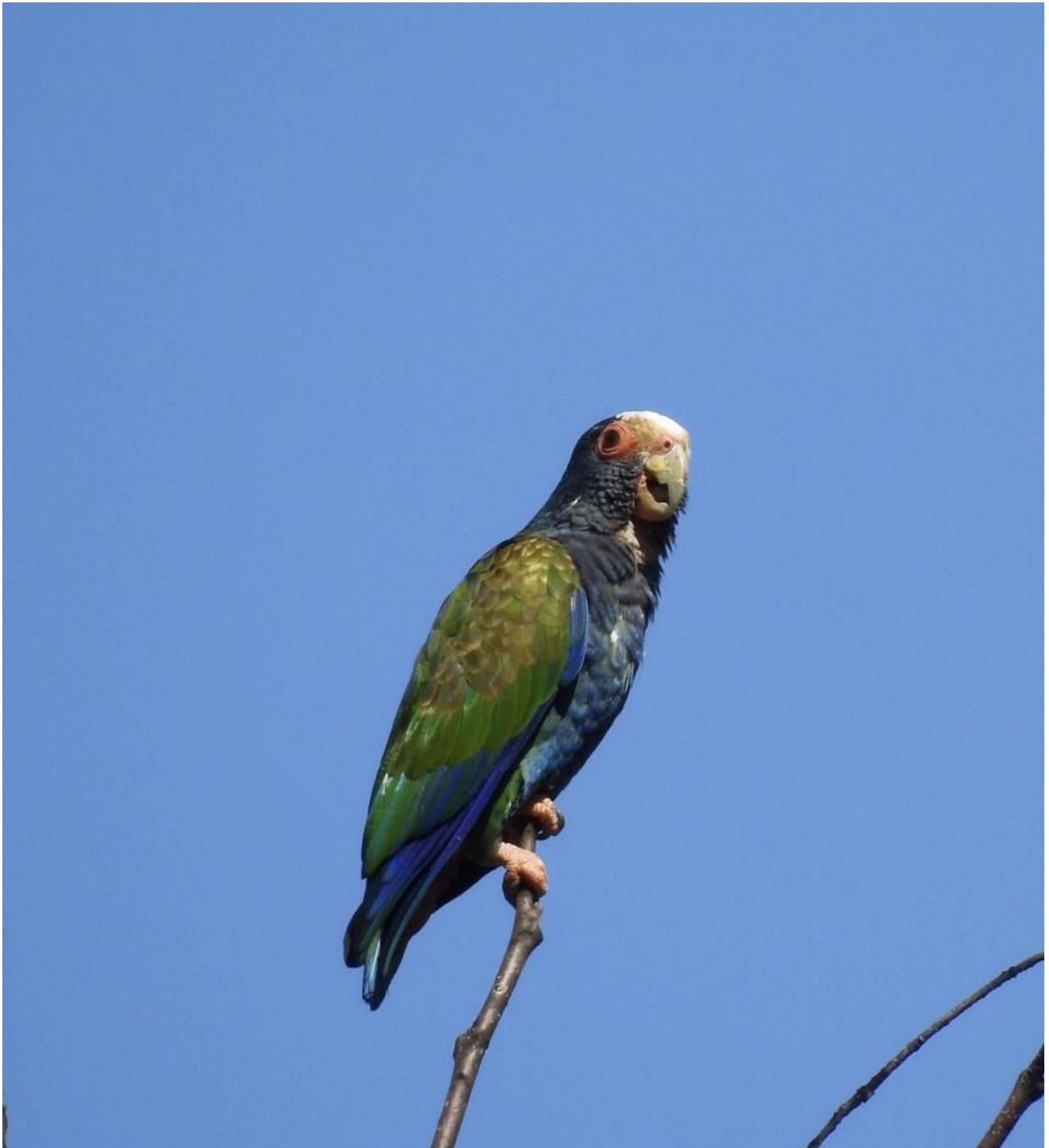


Olivaceous Piculet
by Steven Easley



Streaked Flycatcher
by Steven Easley

The rest of that day and into the next were spent birding Los Cusingos Reserve and surrounding areas. Los Cusingos Reserve was once the home of the famed naturalist Alexander Skutch and is now a forest reserve in honor of his dedication and study of Costa Rica's wildlife, especially birds. In the forests we found Blue-crowned, Orange-collared and Red-capped Manakins. We saw Black-throated Trogon, White-crowned Parrot, Fiery-billed Aracari and had distant looks at Turquoise Cotinga.



White-crowned Parrot
by Sherry Lane

On day 3 of the southern tour we made our way back to Savegre Valley and spent 2 nights at the beautiful Suenos del Bosque. Savegre Valley never fails to produce the bird which is everyone's favorite, the incredible Resplendent Quetzal! We had distant looks at it in the early morning when they are usually active feeding on the Aaquacate trees, however later on a trail behind our lodge we had one fly right over our heads at close range and landed in a nearby tree. Our amazing bird guide Steven Easley also found us a Buff-fronted Quail-Dove during

our early morning search for quetzals! We got into some nice mixed flocks on the trails near our lodge and I was very happy to see a Black-thighed Grosbeak in the flock.



Resplendent Quetzal by Sherry Lane

Later in the day we visited the Paramo zone of Cerro de la Muerte at an elevation of 11,000 feet for the high elevation species Volcano Junco and more Timberline Wrens. We dipped on

Peg-billed Finch, that one will have to wait for next time. We birded our way down to the valley and found Black Guan, Buffy Tuftedcheek, Black-billed Nightingale Thrush, Barred Becard and a rare Ochraceous Pewee!



Volcano Junco
by Steven Easley

That night on our way home to the lodge we stayed out past dusk for Dusky Nightjar!



Dusky Nightjar
by Steven Easley

On our last day in Savegre we took 4x4 tucks up the mountain and birded some beautiful cloud forest trails. We were rewarded with Lineated Foliage-gleaners, Spotted Barbtail, Ruddy Treerunners, Black-faced-faced Solitaire, Spangle-cheeked Tanagers, Black-cheeked Warblers and Collared Redstarts. We even got amazing looks at a Bare-shanked Screech-Owl!



Spangle-cheeked Tanager
by Steven Easley



Bare-shanked Screech-Owl
by Sherry Lane

On day 5 after birding the forest trails of Savegre we began our journey to the Southwest Pacific lowlands. However, before leaving the area we had to have another delicious lunch at Miriam's restaurant.

Our final birding lodge was the Esquinas Rainforest Lodge which as the name describes is nestled in the rainforest with birds and wildlife everywhere. Before arriving to our lodge we birded the back roads of Golfito and found Gray-cowled Wood-rail, Black-hooded Antshrike, Purple-crowned Fairy, Golden-naped Woodpeckers and Southern Beardless-Tyrannulet to name a few. Next we hit the nearby rice fields for Veraquan Mango, Sapphire-throated Humminbird and Gray-lined Hawk as highlights.



Gray-lined Hawk
by Steven Easley

Esquinas Rainforest lodge and nearby roads provided excellent birding with nice views of Charming Hummingbirds, Band-tailed Barbthroats and Black-striped Woodcreeper, We saw the range restricted Spot-crowned Euphonias and the endemic Black-cheeked Ant-Tanager. We had Slaty-tailed, Baird's and Black-throated Trogons. We found an Eye-ringed Flatbill and a Royal Fycatcher on a nest.



Charming Hummingbirds
by Steven Easley



Black-striped Woodcreeper
by Steven Easley

Our last day of birding began with a very early departure so that we could arrive at the Rincon bridge on the Osa Peninsula at sunrise for the target bird Yellow-billed Cotinga! We saw 9 of these angelic beauties both male and female flyover the bridge landing and perching in the nearby tall trees! We also had flyover Scarlet Macaws, Fiery-billed Aracari and Yellow-throated Toucans. There were lots parrots including Mealy, Red-lored, Blue-headed and Brown-hooded as well as Orange-chinned Parakeets. We had Spot-fronted and Costa Rican Swifts as well as the more common White-collared Swifts. There were Magnificent Frigatebirds flying over our heads and we spotted a White Hawk and a King Vulture!



Magnificent Frigatebird
by Steven Easley



Yellow-billed Cotinga
by Sherry Lane

We made several birding stops on our way back heading north along the Pacific coast with our last stop just outside of San Jose where we found some nice birds to end the trip with such as Turquoise-browed Motmot, Steely-vented and Cinnamon Hummingbirds and Rose-throated Becard as highlights.



Turquoise-browed Motmot
by Sherry Lane

Both trips were a complete success! The Northern trip had more wetlands and that made for a higher bird count of 408 species. The southern trip totaled 304 species with a nice amount of range restricted birds. For both trips combined we found 508 species, including 39 different hummingbirds! We also had 3 monkey species, both sloth species, and lots of reptiles including American Crocodile and Speckled Caiman.

Plans are underway for 2 Costa Rica tours in 2019!

Pura Vida,

Sherry Lane