

BEST OF COSTA RICA

January 3 – January 14, 2018

Costa Rica has been a favorite spot for nature lovers and birders for decades, and for good reason. About 25% of the country is made up of protected national parks and rain forests which hold 5% of the world's diversity. Over 800 species of birds have been recorded there, and you are likely to encounter other wildlife as you search the forests for avian life. Sloths, Coatis, at least 3 different species of monkeys and several species of lizard are but a small portion of the myriad of species that inhabit this naturalist's paradise. You can expect comfortable lodging and good food while exploring one of the best birding locations in Central America.

Day 1, January 03

Arrive in Costa Rica and transfer to the Hotel Robledal for welcome dinner and overnight. An after-dinner owl prowl could produce Tropical Screech-Owl and Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl.

Hotel Robledal (D)

Day 2 January 04

Pre-breakfast birding will offer an opportunity to become acquainted with some of Costa Rica's most common and widespread birds, including Rufous-tailed Hummingbird, Tropical Kingbird, Blue-gray Tanager, Great-tailed Grackle, and the country's national bird, the Clay-colored Thrush. Other likely species are Inca Dove, White-winged Dove, Squirrel Cuckoo, Lesson's Motmot, Grayish Saltator, and Melodious Blackbird.

After breakfast, we will begin our journey across the Central Valley and up into the Talamanca highlands. As we gain elevation the vegetation will change and the air temperature will become a bit cooler. Any given birding stop could yield highland endemics such as Black-capped Flycatcher, Black-and-yellow Silky-flycatcher, Yellow-winged Vireo, Flame-throated Warbler, and/or Yellow-thighed Finch.

Paraiso Quetzal Lodge (B/L/D)



Yellow-thighed Finch



Black-capped Flycatcher

Day 3, January 05

There are many special montane birds whose company we will enjoy, perhaps foremost among them the bustling hummingbirds at the feeders—Fiery-throated Hummingbird, Lesser Violetear, Magnificent Hummingbird, and Volcano Hummingbird. But the true object of our quest here in the highlands is the

Resplendent Quetzal. After dark, we may go in search of Dusky Nightjar, Bare-shanked Screech-Owl, and Unspotted Saw-whet Owl.

Paraiso Quetzal Lodge (B/L/D)

January 06

We will pack up and continue along the PanAmerican Highway, stopping at its highest point to look for Timberline Wren, Volcano Junco, and Peg-billed Finch. Dropping down into the Valley of El General, we'll begin spotting species such as Smooth-billed Ani, Red-crowned Woodpecker, Fork-tailed Flycatcher, Tropical Mockingbird, and Cherrie's Tanager, while keeping an eye out for perched raptors, including Pearl Kite and Laughing Falcon.

Talari Mountain Lodge (B/L/D)



Bay-headed Tanager

January 07

Birding the grounds of the lodge is always productive, with potentials that include Chestnut-collared Swift, White-crested Coquette, Snowy-bellied Hummingbird, Fiery-billed Aracari, Olivaceous Piculet, and Orange-billed Nightingale-Thrush. We'll travel a short distance to Los Cusingos—the former home of the late Dr. Alexander F. Skutch, one of the great pioneers in neotropical bird studies. Prying our eyes away from the Green Honeycreepers, Bay-headed and Speckled Tanagers, and Buff-throated Saltators that may be visiting the fruit feeders, we could have the fortune of spotting a perched male Turquoise Cotinga up in the canopy trees surrounding the garden clearing. A walk along one of the forest trails might produce any number of surprises, including Baird's Trogon, White-whiskered Puffbird, Rufous Piha, or Red-capped and Blue-crowned Manakins.

Eventually, we'll leave the San Isidro area and travel down to the Pacific coast, where we head north up the coastal highway to Hotel Villa Lapas.

Hotel Villa Lapas (B/L/D)

January 08

Though the hotel grounds are very birdy, much of today will be spent at the nearby Carara National Park. Here we will hope for a variety of "ant things" that include Black-hooded Antshrike, Dot-winged Antwren, Chestnut-backed Antbird, Black-faced Antthrush, and Streak-chested Antpitta. Fascinating flycatchers such as Stub-tailed and Golden-crowned Spadebill, Greenish Elaenia, Northern Bentbill, Slate-headed Tody-Flycatcher, and Bright-rumped Attila also inhabit the forest. However, the star attraction here is the raucous Scarlet Macaw. At some point during our time in this area, we'll also check out some mangroves for habitat specialists that include Northern Scrub-Flycatcher, Panama Flycatcher, Mangrove Vireo, the mangrove race of Yellow Warbler, and the endemic Mangrove Hummingbird.

Hotel Villa Lapas (B/L/D)



Scarlet Macaw

January 09

Today we leave the Pacific side of Costa Rica and travel to the Caribbean foothills of the Tilaran Mountains and the impressive Arenal Volcano.

Arenal Observatory Lodge (B/L/D)

January 10

In recent years, the activity of Arenal Volcano has been reduced to mere steam emanating from the top of the volcano; fortunately for us, the bird activity is just as good as it has always been! A walk through the lodge garden can often produce more than half a dozen hummingbird species, including Black-crested Coquette, Violet-headed Hummingbird, Scaly-breasted Hummingbird, White-necked Jacobin, Green Hermit, and Brown Violetear. As we're having breakfast, a parade of birds should be taking their turn at the fruit feeders just off the restaurant balcony. Among the regular visitors are Black-cheeked Woodpecker, Brown Jay, Passerini's Tanager, Yellow-throated Euphonia, and Montezuma Oropendola. Some time will also be spent on forest trails, where the birding is never as easy as out in the open, but with patience, persistence, and some luck skulkers such as Purplish-backed Quail-Dove, Spotted Antbird, Thicket Antpitta, Nightingale Wren, Stripe-breasted Wren, and Black-headed Nightingale-Thrush might be glimpsed.

Arenal Observatory Lodge (B/L/D)

January 11

En route to the Caribbean lowlands, we'll take a short detour up into lower middle elevation forest at the spectacular Catarata del Toro (Bull Waterfall). Hummingbird feeders here will provide a chance at still more new species, such as Green Thorntail, Black-bellied Hummingbird, White-bellied and Purple-throated Mountaingems, and Violet Sabrewing. Should we cross paths with a mixed flock in the forest, the likes of Spotted Woodcreeper, Red-faced Spinetail, Ochraceous Wren, Slate-throated Redstart, Spangle-cheeked Tanager, and Common Chlorospingus could have our heads spinning trying to keep up with the action.



Green Thorntail



Violet Sabrewing

By late afternoon, we'll reach our destination: La Selva Biological Station, where research projects are carried out on every conceivable aspect of the tropical forest system. Perhaps at the dinner table a young researcher will be glad to discuss their own studies with you.

La Selva (B/L/D)

January 12

It can often be difficult to get to the cafeteria before the end of the breakfast meal time as so many birds can get in the way. The clearings around the main buildings are typically alive with birds ranging from the diminutive Bananaquit to the turkey-sized Great Curassow. By now, some will be familiar faces, but this will also be our first chance to encounter species such as Slaty-breasted Tinamou, Green Ibis, Olive-backed Quail-Dove, Chestnut-colored Woodpecker, Great Green Macaw, Black-capped Pygmy-Tyrant, Snowy Cotinga, and Plain-colored Tanager.

La Selva (B/L/D)

January 13

Our final day in the field will give us one last opportunity to add a few more species to our by now bulging species list, which in addition to hundreds of birds should include a dozen or more mammals along with numerous reptiles and amphibians. Eventually, we'll return to the Central Valley and overnight at the Hotel Aeropuerto.

Hotel Aeropuerto (B/L/D)

January 14

Take the hotel shuttle to the airport for your departing flight.

End of services

Price includes:

- ~ Lodging
- ~ All meals as indicated
- ~ Airport transfers
- ~ All land transportation within Costa Rica
- ~ Mangrove Boat Tour on the Tarcoles Rover
- ~ Entrance fees to all parks and reserves
- ~ Expert local bilingual naturalist guide (Leonardo Garrigues)

Price does NOT include:

- ~ International airfare
- ~ Trip insurance
- ~ Expenses of a personal nature such as laundry, phone calls, extra drinks and snacks, souvenirs, etc.
- ~ Gratuities