

Costa Rica

26 March–11 April 2007

Participants:

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Leader: Steven Easley



White-whiskered Puffbird

Day 1: Travel day, overnight in Hotel Bougainvillea.

Day 2: We began our Costa Rican adventure by birding the beautiful Hotel Bougainvillea grounds. Some of the first interesting species noted were White-tailed Kite, Crimson-fronted Parakeet, Squirrel Cuckoo, Canivet's Emerald, Blue-crowned Motmot, Hoffmann's Woodpecker, Boat-billed Flycatcher, Blue-and-white Swallow, Plain Wren, Blue-grey Tanager, Grayish Saltator, Rufous-collared Sparrow and the stunning White-eared Ground-sparrow. After breakfast, we made our way to the spectacular and active Arenal Volcano. While travelling over the Caribbean slope several stops were made in the lovely La Virgen del Socorro Valley. While admiring stunning waterfalls and forested valleys that extend as far as the eye can see, we were able to find Swallow-tailed Kite, Short-tailed Hawk, Green Hermit, Violet Sabrewing, Green Thorntail, Coppery-headed Emerald (a Costa Rican endemic), Prong-billed Barbet, Torrent Tyrannulet, Grey-breasted Wood-wren, Tropical Parula, Louisiana Waterthrush, Mourning Warbler, Silver-throated and Bay-headed Tanagers and a pair of skulking Sooty-faced Finches. The afternoon and the next morning were spent birding in the forested foothills of the Arenal Volcano. We were all treated to amazingly clear views of this impressive volcano. The massive boulders crashing down the steep mountain slopes certainly kept us all entertained.

Day 3: Morning spent birding in the forested foothills of the Arenal Volcano where Pied-billed Grebe, Fasciated Tiger-heron, Crested Guan, Brown-hooded and Red-lored Parrots, Common Pauraque, Chestnut-collared Swift, Violet-headed Hummingbird, Blue-throated Goldentail, Violaceous Trogon, Broad-billed and Rufous Motmots, Black-cheeked Woodpecker, Spotted Woodcreeper, Russet and Barred Antshrikes, Streak-crowned Antvireo, Dull-mantled and Spotted Antbirds, Masked Tityra, Cinnamon Becard, White-ruffed Manakin, Sulphur-rumped Flycatcher, Black-headed and Common Tody-Flycatchers, Southern and Northern Rough-winged Swallows, Stripe-breasted and Band-backed Wrens, Tropical Mockingbird, White-throated Thrush, Long-billed Gnatwren, Montezuma Oropendola, Golden-crowned and Buff-rumped Warblers, Tawny-capped and Yellow-throated Euphonias, Red-legged and Green Honeycreepers, Scarlet-thighed Dacnis, Crimson-collared and Hepatic Tanagers and the uncommon Slate-colored Grosbeak were just some of the many birds noted during our visit. After lunch, we drove to Rancho Naturalista for a three-night stay.

Day 4: On our first morning at Rancho Naturalista, we began birding from the famous hotel balcony. Nearly 300 species of birds have been recorded from this small balcony over the years. While sipping our coffee and admiring the picturesque Tuis River Valley, we were able to see many species of tanagers and hummingbirds feeding at close range. After breakfast, we birded the trails that lead into the hotels extensive forest property. Birds seen on the Rancho Naturalista trails included Grey-headed Chachalaca, Common (Grey) Potoo, Band-tailed Barbthroat, Stripe-throated Hermit, Brown Violet-ear, Green-breasted Mango, Black-crested Coquette, Violet-crowned Woodnymph, Snowcap, Bronze-tailed Plumeleater, Purple-crowned Fairy, Collared Trogon, Collared Aracari, Keel-billed Toucan, Smoky-brown Woodpecker, Wedge-billed Woodcreeper, Slaty Spinetail, Plain Xenops, Tawny-throated Leaf-tosser, Plain Antvireo, Checker-throated Antwren, Immaculate Antbird, White-winged Becard, White-crowned and White-collared Manakins, Bright-rumped Attila, Tawny-chested Flycatcher, Scale-crested Pygmy-Tyrant, Brown Jay, Black-headed Nightingale-thrush, Blue-winged and Kentucky Warblers, Chestnut-headed Oropendola, Red-throated Ant-tanager, White-lined and White-shouldered Tanagers and Black-headed Saltator.

Day 5: On our second day in this diverse area, we birded the Tuis River Valley and the foothills of Silent Mountain. Specialties encountered were Bat Falcon, Olivaceous Woodcreeper, Buff-throated Foliage-gleaner, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Rufous-browed Tyrannulet, Slaty-capped and Olive-striped Flycatchers, Bay Wren, Yellow-green and Yellow-throated Vireos, Speckled and Emerald Tanagers and the uncommon Lesser Goldfinch.

Day 6: After breakfast, we headed towards Tapanti National Park. En route we stopped at several small ponds, where we added Least Grebe, Blue-winged Teal, Killdeer and Solitary Sandpiper. Tapanti National Park is normally a very wet place, with an average rainfall that is staggering, however, on this day we enjoyed nothing but sunshine. As we birded from the road and several of the small trails within the park, we were able to find Black-bellied Hummingbird, White-bellied Mountain-gem, Black-banded Woodcreeper, Red-faced Spinetail, Yellowish Flycatcher, American Dipper, Ochraceous Wren, Slaty-backed Nightingale-thrush, Slate-throated Whitestart, Golden-browed Chlorophonia and the brilliant White-winged Tanager. After lunch, we began our ascent into the mountains on the Pacific slope. The final destination being Savegre, Home of the Resplendent Quetzal! This extensive highland forest is home to a wealth of avian treats, most of which are endemics shared with Costa Rica and Panama. Magnificent Hummingbird, Green Violet-ear, Grey-tailed Mountain-Gem, Scintillant and Volcano Hummingbirds, Blue-throated Toucanet, Acorn Woodpecker, Mountain Elaenia and the elegant Long-tailed Silky-flycatcher were just a few of the many species seen in route to our comfortable hotel.

Day 7: During our full day in this charming valley we were able to locate Red-tailed Hawk, Black Guan, Spotted Wood-quail, Band-tailed and Ruddy Pigeons, Sulphur-winged Parakeet, the amazing Resplendent Quetzal, Spot-crowned Woodcreeper, Dark Pewee, Black-capped and Tufted Flycatchers, Black-faced Solitaire, Ruddy-capped and Black-billed Nightingale-thrushes, Rufous-browed Peppershrike, Brown-capped and Yellow-winged Vireos, Golden-winged, Black-cheeked and Flame-throated Warblers, Collared Whitestart, Spangle-cheeked and Flame-coloured Tanagers, Common and Sooty-capped Bush-tanagers, Rose-breasted and Black-thighed Grosbeaks, Slaty Flowerpiercer, Yellow-thighed Finch and the colourful Yellow-bellied Siskin. In the evening we found the localized Dusky Nightjar. We had prolonged and fabulous views of this attractive nocturnal species from a mere 4 meters away.

Day 8: This morning we visited Cerro de la Muerte. This is the second highest peak in the country, which is more than 10,000 feet above sea level. The stunted habitat above tree line, called Paramo, is where we observed the fairly tame and local Volcano Junco. Next we paid a visit to a nearby restaurant with hummingbird feeders, where we found the gorgeous Fiery-throated Hummingbird. Our final stop in the morning was along Providencia road, where we were able to pick up several new species. These included Costa Rican Pygmy-owl, Hairy Woodpecker, Barred Becard, Timberline Wren, Mountain Thrush, Zeledonia (Wren-Thrush) and the bizarre Large-footed Finch. After lunch, we drove several hours to the Caribbean lowlands. Along the Sarapiquí River, near the town of Puerto Viejo, we settled into our hotel for a three-night stay.

Day 9 La Selva is certainly a must on any Costa Rican birding tour. Located in the Caribbean lowlands, it is home to a wide variety of birds. Birds were plentiful and showy on our first day in the privately run La Selva OTS Reserve. Some of the many species encountered included Swainson's and Broad-winged Hawks (migrating in large numbers), Laughing Falcon, Great Curassow (male), Grey-necked Wood-rail, Short-billed Pigeon, Grey-chested Dove, Olive-throated and Orange-chinned Parakeets, Mealy and White-crowned Parrots, Crested Owl, Central American Pygmy-owl, Short-tailed Nighthawk, Lesser Swallow-tailed and Spot-fronted Swifts, Bronzy Hermit, Slaty-tailed Trogon, Rufous-tailed Jacamar, White-necked and Pied Puffbirds, Chestnut-mandibled Toucan, Rufous-winged and Chestnut-coloured Woodpeckers, Fasciated and Great Antshrikes, Western Slaty-antshrike, Snowy Cotinga, Eastern Kingbird, Long-tailed Tyrant, White-ringed and Yellow-margined Flycatchers, Rufous Mourner, Black-capped Pygmy-tyrant, Bank and Cliff Swallows, Black-throated Wren, Scarlet-rumped Cacique, Black-cowled and Yellow-tailed Orioles, Olive-backed Euphonia, Golden-hooded and Dusky-faced Tanagers and Orange-billed Sparrow.

Day 10: On our second day in the La Selva area we visited the Braulio Carrillo National Park about 45 minutes from our hotel. The weather was clear most of the morning, but changed to light rain showers about an hour before lunch. Several of the highlights noted within this massive park included White Hawk, Black-throated Trogon, Yellow-eared Toucanet, Northern Barred-woodcreeper, Song Wren, Black-and-yellow and Tawny-crested Tanagers, Blue-and-gold Tanager, and noisy flocks of Black-faced Grosbeaks. In the afternoon we visited a reliable sight for the one of a kind Sunbittern. After searching for about 30 minutes we finally found a pair of these unusual birds. We had surprisingly close views of one individual from about 5 meters away. Later in the afternoon we birded El Tigre Marsh. Around the swampy margins we encountered Green Ibis, Olive-crowned and Grey-crowned Yellowthroats, Giant Cowbird and the strange Nicaraguan (Pink-billed) Seed-finch.

Day 11: Departing from our hotel after breakfast, we made our way to La Virgen del Socorro. The morning was plagued by rain and fog and we were unable to locate many of the species we were looking for. Consolation prizes for some were a juvenile Barred Forest-falcon and the uncommon Eye-ringed Flatbill. We later crossed the Pacific Slope to our destination, the Tarcoles River Valley in the Pacific lowlands. In route to our hotel we made a quick stop in Orotina. Here we found the famous pair of Black-and-white Owls, which roost in the town square. Several locals were also interested and had nice scope views of their local nocturnal friends. In the afternoon we took a boat ride on the Tarcoles River and were able to add a host of new species to our list. Many of the highlights while drifting through the peaceful mangrove swamps, included Brown Pelican, Anhinga, Magnificent Frigatebird, Bare-throated Tiger-Heron, Yellow-crowned Night-heron, Boat-billed Heron, Tricoloured Heron, Snowy and Great Egrets, White Ibis, Roseate Spoonbill, Black-bellied Whistling-duck, Muscovy Duck, Osprey, Mangrove Black-hawk, Bay-winged and Zone-tailed Hawks, Yellow-headed Caracara, Peregrine Falcon, American Purple Gallinule, Double-striped Thick-knee, Collared Plover, Ruddy Turnstone, Western and Least Sandpipers, Sandwich and Royal Terns, Lesser Nighthawk, Mangrove Hummingbird (an endangered Costa Rican endemic), Ringed, Amazon and Green Kingfishers, Panama Flycatcher, Mangrove Swallow, Mangrove Vireo, Mangrove Warbler and several striking male Cherries's Tanagers.

Day 12: Today we birded the incredibly diverse Carara National Park. All day was spent birdwatching and admiring the beauty of the Pacific lowland forest. Some of the better birds encountered included Ruddy Ground-dove, Scarlet Macaw, Striped Cuckoo, Costa Rican Swift, Western Long-tailed Hermit, Steely-vented Hummingbird, Turquoise-browed Motmot, White-whiskered Puffbird, Pale-billed Woodpecker, Scaly-throated Leaf-tosser, Black-hooded Antshrike, Dot-winged Antwren, Dusky and Chestnut-backed Antbirds, Black-faced Antthrush, Rose-throated Becard, Black-crowned Tityra, Long-tailed, Red-capped, Blue-crowned and Orange-collared Manakins, Stub-tailed and Golden-crowned Spadebills, Slate-headed Tody-tyrant, Northern Bentbill, Riverside, Rufous-naped, Rufous-breasted, Rufous-and-white and Black-bellied Wrens, Rufous-capped Warbler, Melodious Blackbird, Spot-crowned Euphonia, Scarlet Tanager, Blue Grosbeak, Indigo and Painted Buntings and the large Stripe-headed Sparrow. After dinner we set off in search of several nocturnal species and we happily returned

with a bounty. Barn Owl, Ferruginous Pygmy-owl and the exquisite Striped Owl were all enjoyed before returning back to the hotel.

Day 13: After breakfast, we departed for the unique habitat zone called Guanacaste. This habitat is home to many species not found in other areas within Costa Rica. The wide-open savannah and dry woodland patches contrast dramatically with other parts of the country previously visited. Our final destination was a lovely hotel just outside of the Palo Verde Reserve for a one-night stay. However, in the early morning before leaving the Tarcoles River Valley, we were able to locate the skulking Lesser Ground-cuckoo in some riverside scrub. Certainly a nice way to start any day! This was followed by a mid-morning stop in some very dry scrub country, where we found a pair of Hook-billed Kites, Spot-bellied Bobwhite, Common Ground-dove, Orange-fronted Parakeet, Black-headed Trogon, Lineated Woodpecker and a singing Olive Sparrow. Before reaching the hotel we visited an extensive wetland area, where we added Black-necked Stilt, Wilson's and Semipalmated Plovers, Willet, Short-billed Dowitcher, Semipalmated and Stilt Sandpipers, Gull-billed and Caspian Terns and several graceful Black Skimmers.

Day 14: Today we departed early from the hotel and began birding along the entrance road into Palo Verde. Several of the many specialties seen in and around the reserve included Wood Stork, Jabiru, Glossy Ibis, Pearl Kite, White-tailed Hawk (a very uncommon Costa Rican resident), Great Curassow (female), Pectoral Sandpiper, White-fronted and Yellow-naped Parrots, Mangrove Cuckoo, a pair of Spectacled Owls, Cinnamon Hummingbird, Scissor-tailed and Sulphur-bellied Flycatchers, Brown-crested and Nutting's Flycatchers, White-throated Magpie-jay, Banded Wren, White-lored Gnatcatcher, Streak-backed Oriole, and the well-dressed Scrub Euphonia. After lunch, we made our ascent on the winding mountain roads to Monteverde for a one-night stay. On a nighttime outing, we had point-blank views of an adult Mottled Owl.

Day 15: The fresh, cool morning air was certainly a nice change from the hot lowlands. We began our birding along the entrance road to the Monteverde Cloud Forest Reserve. Birds seen in the lush forest before breakfast included Purple-throated Mountain-gem, Golden-olive Woodpecker, Streak-breasted Treehunter and the tiny White-throated Spadebill. Later we visited the beautiful Santa Elena Reserve and whilst hiking the well-constructed trails within the reserve were able to locate Stripe-tailed Hummingbird, Spotted Barbtail, Silvery-fronted Tapaculo, Golden-bellied Flycatcher Three-striped Warbler and the absolutely gorgeous Chestnut-capped Brush-finch. However the highlight of the morning was a spectacular male Three-wattled Bellbird singing from his tree top perch. After lunch, we made our way back to the bustling city of San Jose.

Day 16: With wonderful memories left in our minds of the amazing country we had just experienced, we sadly left Costa Rica for our overnight flight home.

Day 17: Arrival back in the UK.