

# Costa Rica

18 March–3 April 2011

## Participants

Phil and Susan Beaver

Norman Briden

Steve Griffiths

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Gail Marsden

Al McNee

Roger Morton

Bob Power

Gary Rowe

John Sirrett



Black-crested Coquette

**Leaders** Steven and Magdalena Easley

**Day 1:** We left Heathrow for a 10hr 25 minute Continental Flight to Houston, Texas, and from there for a 3hr 40 minute flight to San Jose, Costa Rica. We were met at the airport by our young guides for the next two weeks, Steven and Magdalena Easley, and were escorted with our baggage to a large coaster van driven by our driver, Vernon. It was dark when we arrived. There was a short transfer to our hotel and bed.

**Day 2:** As day broke we were out in the beautiful hotel gardens for our introduction to Costa Rican birds. The hotel had eight acres of gardens, containing many species of native trees, bromeliads, orchids, Heliconias, and cacti. A tree at the front of the hotel was covered with the national flower, a purple orchid known as Guaría Morada. Bob and I immediately identified a Clay-coloured Robin on the lawn. This brownish *Turdus* with yellowish bill and reddish-brown iris is the national bird of Costa Rica, where it is known as the yigüirro. We followed this up with pairs of Hoffmann's Woodpeckers, Great Kiskadees, repeatedly uttering 'SPEAK to MEE', and Great-tailed Grackles. Hoffman's Woodpecker is endemic from southern Honduras to Costa Rica. We joined the rest of the group and our guides. In less than an hour Steven had showed us some of the common birds: White-tipped Dove, Blue-grey Tanager, Greyish Saltator, Crimson-fronted Parakeet, Rufous-collared Sparrow, the diminutive Inca Dove, Plain Wren, the lovely Blue-crowned Motmot, Rufous-tailed Hummingbird, Boat-billed Flycatcher, the attractive White-eared Groundsparrow, Tropical Kingbird, Melodious Blackbird, Red-billed Pigeon and Squirrel Cuckoo. The parakeet is endemic from southeastern Nicaragua to western Panama. Steven said to us the Tropical Kingbird is a "Tropical Trashbird" the commonest most frequent bird we would encounter; he offered us a 'scope view if we promised not to call them again! The number and variety of North American migrants came as a surprise. We saw Black-and-white Warbler, five+ Yellow Warblers, Baltimore Orioles – ten or more in this small garden, a male Summer Tanager and a Red-eyed Vireo. As we made our way to a breakfast of rice, beans, omelette and tropical fruits an early Crimson Patch butterfly fluttered by. It was bright and sunny and a warm day was in prospect. After breakfast, we loaded up and left the hotel and Central Valley along the C1 'motorway'. We travelled over the Southern Pacific slope into the hot, dry, cowboy country called Guanacaste, where there is little rain at any time of year. The region is named after the national tree of Costa Rica, the Guanacaste, or Elephant Ear Tree. A large proportioned tree known for its curiously ear shaped seedpods. As we drove along Broad-winged Hawk and Crested Caracara were seen and Turkey and Black Vultures hung in the air; the latter were extremely common and were not called again except by accident. We made the first of many short roadside stops on the trip in a small square park in the centre of Oratina. We were looking for Black-and-white Owls at a well known day roost, and Hoffmann's Two-toed Sloth, which also occurs here. Disappointingly we saw neither. We did however make the following additions to our list: Cinnamon Hummingbird, Grey-breasted Martin, Rose-throated Becard, Orange-chinned Parakeet, Yellow-green Vireo, Social Flycatcher and White-winged Dove. We also had seconds of Clay-coloured Robin, Great-tailed Grackle, and Yellow Warbler, birds we would find common in most habitats. Our next stop was amongst agricultural land along the Guacimo Road looking for White-throated

Magpie-jay. We found a noisy straggling flock of four of these unmistakable blue and white jays with long graduated tails and an extravagant crest of long, forwardly curved feathers, moving through low trees. Magda played the tape of a Ferruginous Pygmy-owl to stir up the local bird population. The monotone toots attracted a Ferruginous Pygmy-owl and through Steven's Leica or Magda's Swarovski 'scope views were enjoyed by all. Other good spots in the leafless winter trees were two hummers: a male Plain-capped Starthroat and Green-breasted Mango. More common birds included Groove-billed Ani, a dark-morph Short-tailed Hawk, a passage of migrating Cliff and Barn Swallows, lovely Scissor-tailed Flycatchers, Eastern Meadowlark, Yellow-throated Vireo, Common Ground-dove, Yellow-olive Flycatcher and a pair of Masked Tityras. A second stop for Banded Wren followed quickly. The wren responded to tape allowing us to enjoy 'scope views of this bright brown wren with black barring on the sides and flanks as it jumped through cover. Other good spots included a Western Kingbird, two Double-striped Thick-knees, and just as we were driving off Bob spotted our only Lesser Ground-cuckoo of the trip. Also here were Brown-crested and Nutting's Flycatchers. Our third stop produced both Olive and Stripe-headed Sparrows, Steely-vented Hummingbird and Tropical Pewee. More common birds included Dusky-capped and Great Crested Flycatchers, Common Tody-flycatcher, Yellow-bellied Elaenia, Tropical Gnatcatchers, Yellow-headed Caracara, two migrant Swainson's Thrushes, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, two Long-tailed Manakins included a juvenile male with red cap and long central rectrices, great flight views of a Grey Hawk, Lineated Woodpecker and the national bird of Nicaragua an eye catching Turquoise-browed Motmot. We continued along the CR27 towards Caldera through low rolling sparsely wooded hills rejoining the C1 towards Canas heading into northwest Costa Rica. We pulled up for a lunch at a Caballo Blanco Restaurant, where we were offered our second helping of the day of rice and beans with chicken, beef, pork or fish. It was hot by now and the beer drinkers in the group were more than happy to make the acquaintance of the local Imperial brew. All the restaurants we stopped at were licensed. A relaxed lunch over we continued along the 132 to Punta Morales and the Gulf of Nicoya. Our next roadside stop produced Streak-backed Oriole, and Canivet's Emerald, three aerial Wood Storks and an unmistakable male Rose-breasted Grosbeak. We stopped again after Vengas and began working the salt ponds at Punta Morales and Colorado de Abangares. The first group of ponds were viewed through mango trees. A lovely Rufous-naped Wren and a dark-capped grey-and-white White-lored Gnatcatcher were early finds. Willet and (Hudsonian) Whimbrel fed on the pond edges. A Lesser Nighthawk roosted in the trees through which the resident chestnut headed race of Yellow Warbler referred to as the Mangrove Warbler flitted. Surely an obvious split! Opposite in low scrub male and female Blue Grosbeaks and a stunning male Painted Bunting hopped on the ground: so many cracking new birds to take in. We drove on to view further ponds used as a high tide roost. Those with telescopes started scanning through the many waders, gulls and terns present. There were 40 or so Black Skimmers amongst a large flock of Laughing Gulls. Five Caspian and three Sandwich Terns were amongst a large roost of Royal Terns. The many roosting waders were mostly (Hudsonian) Whimbrel, Short-billed Dowitchers, Western and Least Sandpipers. There were smaller numbers of Black-bellied (Grey) Plovers and Black-necked Stilts were seemingly everywhere. Wilson's Plovers numbered ten or more, Semipalmated Plover 3, Marbled Godwit 3, Lesser Yellowlegs 2, and Greater Yellowlegs 1. A few adult (blue) and juvenile (white) Little Blue Herons fed amongst the waders. Behind us in the scrub we found another brilliant male Painted Bunting, this one with two females, and with our first White-collared Seedeater. We drove on to further ponds nearer Solimar. In addition to the species we had already seen we found 15 Stilt Sandpipers, 2 Semipalmated Sandpipers, and 3 Spotted Sandpipers. There were more heron species here and amongst the many Snowy and Great Egrets and White Ibises we found a single Tricoloured Heron. A White-tailed Hawk hovered and a Zone-tailed Hawk cruised by. Passerines featured with a single Grey-crowned Yellowthroat and several, Scrub Euphonias. This was the only time I used my telescope and tripod on the trip. I wish I had known before I left Blighty! A change to our itinerary meant we were not staying at Palo Verde, but at Hacienda Solimar, Canas. Steven said the reason for the change was a serious fire at Palo Verde but that we should get the same species at the Solimar Lodge. I later read that raging forest fires in 2010 had destroyed 500 hectares of the Palo Verde reserve. A near crisis at Solimar was averted by Steven shooting out and returning with a crate of Imperial! It was then a warm and pleasant night on the veranda.

**Day 3:** We gathered on the veranda at first light. It was pleasantly warm. Canivet's Emerald and Ruby-throated Hummingbirds took nectar from the purple spike like blooms of Jamaican Vervain. Barn Swallows swept over the fields. White-tailed Kites hovered in the distance and a Wood Stork flew past. Groove-billed Anis and a Turquoise-browed Motmot occasionally dropped to the ground from their low perches. We boarded the van and were driven to a strip of forest. We were joined by Demetrio, a local guide whose main job seemed to be to open and close the cattle gates that we passed through on the ranch. Once inside this small ribbon of dry riverine gallery forest one of the first sounds we heard was the mournful calls of a Thicket Tinamou: our only contact with this species on the trip. Our first trogon, a male Black-headed Trogon, was 'scoped and we had views of a Bare-throated Tiger-heron and Green Kingfisher along a woodland stream. Despite its small size we left this forest with a long list of birds: Blue-black Grassquit, Bright-rumped Attila, the robin-like Dusky Antbird, Ferruginous Pygmy-owl, a begging juvenile Grey Hawk, Green-breasted Mango, Hoffman's Woodpecker, Lesser Greenlet, Long-billed Gnatwren, Long-tailed Manakin,

Mourning Dove, Northern Waterthrush, Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, Short-tailed Hawk, Slate-headed Tody-flycatcher, Squirrel Cuckoo, Streak-backed Oriole, wing flicking Streak-headed Woodcreeper, Stripe-headed Sparrow, Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher, numbers of, shush, 'Tropical Kingbirds', Turquoise-browed Motmot, White-fronted Parrot and Yellow-green Vireo. From the edges of the forest many Black Vultures, Great Egrets and Wood Storks could be seen, and five or six Cave Swallows, Great Blue Heron, Osprey and Roseate Spoonbill. As we left the forest a small flock of Montezuma Oropendolas flew over towards a cluster of their pendulous nests high up in a Guanacaste tree. It is a colonial breeder. Each colony has a dominant male that mates with most of the females following the elaborate bowing display, which we were frequently to witness. We were driven back to Solimar Lodge for breakfast. But before eating walked down the drive to view an adult and two young Pacific Screech-owls in the small tree where they had bred: very approachable, very photogenic. Five White-throated Magpie-jays and a Spot-breasted Oriole moved through nearby trees. After breakfast it was back out in the van driving through the waterlogged fields of large humped white Nelore cattle, and smaller numbers of Brahman Grey and Brahman Red. These three Indian breeds are favoured because the lowland Costa Rican climate is compatible with that of India. We made a brief road side stop to look at a local population of small, pale, Grasshopper Sparrows. Two more Stone Curlew-like, Double-striped Thick-knees slept in the shade of a nearby tree and we saw Brown-crested Flycatcher and several Inca Doves. As we continued in the van, along a drainage canal a Limpkin took flight, and there were numbers of Cattle Egrets in the fields and Green Herons rising intermittently from the canal. We parked up by a remnant of tropical dry forest: the prevalent forest type of the northern Pacific lowlands. At this time of year, the dry season, most canopy trees within these forests are leafless, some are in flower. The understory is dominated by stiff, small-leaved, often spiny scrubs and lianias (various long-stemmed, woody vines). Terrestrial bromeliads (members of the pineapple family) are common, with the few epiphytes mainly cacti. A Giant Swallowtail butterfly and the aptly named Helicopter Damselfly flew around us: the later whirling yellow wing tips. The Helicopter Damselfly specializes in preying on web-building spiders, and breeds in the small 'pools' of water held by plants like bromeliads. Demetrio, Steven and Magda set off into the forest to search for roosting Spectacled Owls, leaving the rest of us to watch and wait. Thick layers of leaf litter crunched like corn flakes under our feet. Soon we were called, and taken two by two to look through the 'scopes that Steven and Magda had set up for us to view a pair of striking Spectacled Owls. As we backtracked we came across a stunning male Long-tailed Manakin, giving prolonged views in the scopes. A tiny male Scrub Euphonia was added before Steven uttered a catch phrase we became familiar with on the trip "va-moos" (from Spanish vamos – let us go): we left hurriedly. The next two hours were spent cruising flooded agricultural land using the van as a hide to view the legions of birds feeding in the flooded meadows. There were thousands of Black-bellied Whistling-ducks, and many hundreds of Black-winged Stilts, Blue-winged Teals, Great Egrets, Wood Storks and White Ibises. There were smaller numbers of Green Herons, Limpkins, perhaps thirty Northern Jacanas, and Spotted Sandpipers. We also saw Anhinga, Bare-faced Tiger-heron, Black-crowned Night-heron, two more Double-striped Thick-knees, Great Blue Heron, and Ringed Kingfisher. Raptors were represented by Snail Kite, a small pale, heavily streaked juvenile seen perched and an all dark adult with white tail band cruising the 'marsh', a Peregrine swooping in hunting flight, and a sub-adult Harris's Hawk. Star of the show however were the three stork-like Jabiru, Costa Rica's largest bird at 14.3 lb and 60 in. We saw two adults with a juvenile. As we turned to leave the area a few Plain-breasted Ground-doves were seen in a stockyard amongst Common Ground-doves. Back at the lodge we took lunch and packed up the van. Our last birds at Solimar were the all-black Melodious Blackbird, Hoffman's Woodpecker, Groove-billed Ani, Great-tailed Grackle and a female Rose-breasted Becard. We were braced for the long haul on the road up to Monteverde. It had received a billing as a rough unforgiving road that would take several hours. It was not that bad and the views were lovely. As we ascended we picked up, from the van, a Grey Hawk perched on roadside wires, six Caribbean-slope-endemic Orange-fronted Parakeets and the migrant, rather than resident race of Red-tailed Hawk. Resident *costaricensis* has a pale rufous belly whereas migrant races are more variable but typically show dark streaking across the belly. We made a brief stop to view a stunning Rufous-capped Warbler and saw Steely-vented Hummingbird and Brown Jay. Although not fully appreciated we were now to enter endemics heaven. It was late in the day when we arrived at Monteverde. Steven had warned "the wind in Monteverde constantly blows day and night". It was dull and overcast, much cooler, and windy. We were glad for our fleeces. We made straight for a hummingbird wildlife refuge, the Refugio El Colibri. Eight different hummers buzzed around the feeders allowing close approach. Chief amongst which was the diminutive coppery rumped, mainland Costa Rican endemic Coppery-headed Emerald: our first true endemic. We saw both male and female. Also present was a Chiriquí endemic Magenta-throated Woodstar. Whilst Green-crowned Brilliants, the glittering violet male Violet Sabrewing, rufous winged Stripe-tailed Hummingbird, Green Violet-ears that occasionally flashed their violet ears, the large, curved-billed Green Hermits, and the aptly named Purple-throated Mountain-gem. These plus Bananaquits vied for position on the feeders. Cameras clicked incessantly but in truth the light was too dull for decent photography. We left after half an hour heading for the hotel. Bob and I took a quick walk about our lodge in the last of the light adding House Wren, Blue-and-white Swallow and female Yellow-throated Euphonia to our list. Monteverde is set within the Tilarán Mountain Range and a few kilometres away from the Monteverde Cloud Forest Reserves. The extensive hotel grounds were excellent for birding. The feeding station outside the restaurant window

was particularly popular with birds, variegated squirrels, the racoon-like White-nosed Coati and Central American Agoutis.

**Day 4:** We were up at 05.45. Turquoise-browed Motmot, Great-tailed Grackle and Blue-and-white Swallow were our first birds as we waited to board the van. It was overcast, misty, cold and damp, like November at home! We drove out from the lodge through Monteverde village stopping along a forest road. New birds came thick and fast: the dull, Mountain Elaenia, the arboreal chicken like Black Guan, Black-faced Solitaires, with their creaking gate calls, Common Bush-tanagers (Bushies), trunk hugging, Ochraceous Wrens, a Red-faced Spinetail fanning its tail from side to side, two coveys of elusive Black-breasted Wood-quail, Slate-throated Redstarts cocking their black tails to display their white outer tail, the northwest race of White-throated Thrush rippled its speckled throat in giving its frog like calls, an elusive Elegant Euphonia flew from tree to tree, two dull, Hawfinch-like, Pronged-billed Barbets, and what felt like best of all, a beautiful male Orange-bellied Trogon seen down to 10 feet. In no time at all we had seen an amazing six Chiriquí endemics. We drove to the main Monteverde Cloud Forest Reserve car park: a car park in a rush hour. Steven exchanged pleasantries with the guides he knew. The Emerald Toucanet had been returning regularly to its nest site. We stood and waited. Band-tailed Pigeon flew through. Steven soon tired and uttered “va-moos”: a local guide shouting after us in Spanish that we had no staying power. Back at the lodge, breakfast was a freshly cooked omelette, with rice and beans. Around the feeders a heady mix of North American migrants and colourful tropical species: Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher, Sociable Flycatcher, several Clay-coloured Robins, several Baltimore Orioles, Bronzed Cowbird, Mountain Elaenia, Red-legged Honeycreeper, Scarlet-thighed Dacnis, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Brown Jays, Blue-grey Tanagers, Tennessee Warbler, Hoffmann’s Woodpecker, Yellow-throated Euphonia and White-eared Ground-sparrow. We were especially fortunate to see the rare endemic Chiriquí Quail-dove come into the feeder. We drove to the Santa Elena Cloud Forest Reserve located high on the Caribbean slopes of the Cordillera de Tilarán. This high-elevation forest reserve is characterized by a persistent, canopy-level cloud cover which provides the forest with a continual supply of moisture. We paused outside the reserve to view a perched Broad-winged Hawk and a male Scarlet Tanager. Once inside we parked up and passed through the visitor centre and onto the trails beyond. We spent the rest of the morning traversing the Encantado, Cano Negro and Del Bajo Trails searching for flocks of wintering birds. The forest did not generally seem to hold that many birds. Wet weather conditions did not help. Even when we located a winter flock, it was not easy. We were faced with a lot of cover and few viewing spaces along narrow muddy trails. It was limiting for a party of our size. We were also totally reliant on our guides to spot and identify the species. It is to their credit that most people eventually got good views of the species they found: Silvery-fronted Tapaculo, Ruddy Treerunner, Collared Redstart (an approachable species given the local name “Amigo de Hombre” (Man’s Friend), Sooty-capped Bush-tanager, Ochraceous Wren, Barred Becard, Green-crowned Brilliant, Slate-throated Redstart, Tufted and Olive-striped Flycatchers, Black Guan, the black and yellow Black-thighed Grosbeak, Prong-billed Barbet, the rufous-capped Sooty-faced Finch, Purple-throated Mountain-gem (said to be endemic to Nicaragua and Costa Rica), the chunky Spotted Barbtail, Three-striped Warbler, Lineated Foliage-gleaner, Yellow-thighed Finch, ‘Bushies’, Grey-breasted Wood-wren and the darkest of all the nightingale-thrushes, the Slaty-backed Nightingale-thrush; seven more Chiriquí endemics for our list. It remained hard work, not made any easier by the rain which began to fall heavier and heavier until we retreated in defeat to the shelter of the visitor centre to eat our packed lunch. We sat there in ponchos dripping wet, starrng at our sandwiches willing the weather to clear. It did not, but we went out again. This time it was very wet. We moved deeper along the trails seeing little. Steven at last found a bird, a perched Chiriquí endemic, a female Orange-bellied Trogon, and whilst we watched, Roger found a female Resplendent Quetzal. The quetzal is a type of trogon. It is probably the most dazzling and culturally important bird in Central America; a bird which had great ceremonial significance for the Aztecs and the Maya Indians. This should have been the birding moment of the trip, but it wasn’t as a bedraggled quetzal looked down upon a bedraggled band of birdwatchers. There was little to catch on film. We returned to the visitor centre hoping for the heavy rain to pass. At the front of the visitor centre a warbler caught Magda’s eye. A Black-throated Green Warbler was soon joined by a bright yellow Wilson’s Warbler and a small party of ‘Bushies’. A red crowned Ruddy-capped Nightingale-thrush briefly stuck its head out to see if it had stopped raining. It hadn’t. Some missed it though we saw a second and a third bird soon afterwards. We went out again but it remained quiet after the rain and the damp mist which followed the rain made viewing difficult. We were grateful to see Spangled-cheeked Tanager, Mountain Thrush, Grey-breasted Wood-wren, Chestnut-capped Brush-finch and Bright-rumped Attila, one more Chiriquí endemic (two follow) before Steven said va-moos. We left Santa Elena and drove around the surrounding dirt roads birding from the van. As we lost elevation the sun reappeared and Vernon spotted several brilliant green Golden-browed Chlorophonias. A roadside stop followed so that we could scope the birds and pretty soon we were enjoying Yellow-faced Grassquit, Olivaceous Woodcreeper, Three-striped Warbler, White-throated Thrush, Slate-throated Redstart, Ruddy Treerunner and Black-faced Solitaire, very smart, slate gray, almost black, with a darker face mask and contrasting orange bill and legs. We returned to the Hotel Fonda Vela as the sun set via a short roadside stop alongside a strip of forest where in falling light a Bare-shanked Screech-owl responded to Magda’s tape.

**Day 5:** Pre breakfast we scoured the hotel grounds for an Emerald Toucanet. We saw 27 species but no toucanet. Rufous-and-white Wren and Grey-headed Chachalaca were added to the trip list, but for many, views of a small covey of four Black-breasted Wood-quails in the open stole the show. Bob and I looked at the cover of our *Birds of Costa Rica* field guide it threatened to be a painful reminder that we had missed the toucanet. This was going to be a hard one to live with. We packed up after breakfast and assembled in the car park prior to our departure. Most people had taken their seat on the coach when the shout went up. There in the trees above the car park an Emerald Toucanet. Job done, back in the van, we head off for the Arenal Volcano. We stopped on our way out at the hummingbird wildlife refuge at Refugio El Colibri: Green-crowned Brilliant, Violet Sabrewing, Stripe-tailed Hummingbird, Purple-throated Mountain-gem, Green Violet-ear, Green Hermit and the endemic Magenta-throated Woodstar and Coppery-headed Emerald were again on view. It was an opportunity for photographs and a little bit of shopping in the gift shop before we left the Cordillera de Tilarán Mountains for Arenal. Our journey took us along dirt roads through Monteverde to Tilarán then along the 142 around the Laguna de Arenal, Costa Rica's largest 'lake'. We made three stops en route. The first a comfort stop added Northern Rough-winged Swallows to the list. The second prompted by the sight of three Keel-billed Toucans flying across the road also added Greyish Saltator. The third was for a Long-tailed Tyrant perched on top of a large pole, a striking long tailed black tyrant flycatcher with white supercilium and a white stripe down its back. We spent some time at this spot trying to get views of a Caribbean slope endemic Black-throated Wren which was heard to call: better views were had of a stunning male Green Honeycreeper, Ringed Kingfisher, and Buff-throated Saltator. Lunch was taken at the El Novillo del Arenal, a really nice roadside restaurant which had fantastic views of the Arenal Volcano opposite. Arenal is Costa Rica's most active volcano and one of the ten most active volcanoes in the world. Although the activity nowadays is less damaging, you can still see ash columns and sudden explosions on a daily basis. We picked up a good collection of birds around the restaurant included the Caribbean race of Variable Seedeater, White-collared Seedeater, Golden-hooded Tanager, Golden-olive Woodpecker, the Caribbean slope endemic Yellow-crowned Euphonia, Short-tailed Hawk, House Wren, Rufous-crowned Sparrow, Grey-capped Flycatcher, Green Heron and Tropical Peewee. Our fourth roadside stop was again impromptu when two Crested Guan's were seen from the van. As we got out they soon took cover from the field into nearby trees and we were on our way again. We arrived at our hotel, the Arenal Observatory Lodge, mid afternoon. We did not go straight to the hotel but instead worked some of the hotels private back roads. We were in the Caribbean foothills, wet forest at 2000 feet and with a completely different species list to look forward to, with one or two old favourites. We saw the first of many Red-winged Blackbirds, and a Long-billed Starthroat from the van before walking one of the roads. Eight White-fronted Parrots perched in an open tree with a Pale-vented Pigeon. Two male and a female Great Curassow crossed the road in front of us. Steven called Black-headed Tody-flycatcher, Rufous-tailed Jacamar, Slaty-tailed Trogon and Buff-rumped Warblers before Steve crowned the moment by finding a roosting Great Potoo. We drove on towards the lodge stopping on the main entrance road for eight Red-lored Parrots, two more Keel-billed Toucans and two Chestnut-mandibled Toucans. I struggled to see the later but eventually made it. We checked into our rooms at the lodge and Bob and I made for the bar and the adjacent feeders. We ended the day with Clay-coloured Robin, Summer Tanager, Bananaquit, Rufous-tailed Hummingbird, Passerini's Tanager, Blue-grey Tanager, Red-legged Honeycreeper, Golden-hooded Tanager, and a refreshing glass of Imperial. The Arenal Observatory Lodge is just two miles south of the volcano and has stunning views of it together with the adjacent Arenal Lake and dam. The volcano was believed to be dormant until a major eruption in 1968, and the day after we left there was a small eruption which featured on the national TV service. Such eruptions have clearly never been an issue for the hotel as it has been there over thirty years!

**Day 6:** At first light we assembled back at the feeders. Species added to yesterday's list were Montezuma Oropendola, Great Kiskadee, Green Thorntail, Green Honeycreeper, Tropical Parula, Wilson's Warbler and Variable Seedeater. Above us three Vaux's Swifts and two White-collared Swifts circled over the valley. We walked out of the lodge down a steep road to the raucous calls of Crested Guans. As we walked Steven pointed out Chestnut-sided Warbler, Chestnut Becard and a female Dusky Antbird. We were making for a large fruiting tree into which the very rare Lovely Cotinga had been coming to feed on small avocado like fruits. A total of 37 species came into feed or were seen whilst we stood by the fruiting tree. These included Black-cowled Oriole, Crimson-collared Tanager, Slaty Spinetail, Sulphur-breasted Flycatcher, Black-cheeked Woodpecker, Streak-headed Woodcreeper, Southern-rough Winged Swallow, Orange-chinned Parakeets, Gartered (Violaceous) Trogon, Grey-capped Flycatcher, Scarlet-thighed Dacnis, Rufous Mourner, Hepatic Tanager, Red-lored Parrot, Purple-crowned Fairy, and White-throated Jacamar. I was particularly pleased to see five Swallow-tailed Kite cruising the valley as this North American migrant has eluded me on two previous trips to the Americas. Oh, and of course we saw the stunning Lovely Cotinga come into feed. Although not endemic this was probably the bird of the trip? On our return to the lodge for breakfast Steven indulged himself by deciding upon nicknames for some of us, henceforth Bob would now be known as Motmot Bob and me as Jacamar John. We headed out after breakfast into the lodge gardens following the Garden Trail down to the falls, which we never reached. We recorded over 40 species in two hours including four new Caribbean slope endemics. A hedge of

purple flowering Jamaican Vervain held several new species of hummingbird: Black-tufted Coquette, Violet-headed Hummingbird, White-necked Jacobin, Brown Violet-ear and Violet-crowned Woodnymph. We saw four new species of wren, the pretty Band-backed Wren, Black-throated Wren, Stripe-breasted Wren and an elusive White-breasted Wood-wren. Other birds included male and female Scarlet-thighed Dacnis, Black-striped Sparrows, Palm Tanager, the tail fanning Sulphur-rumped Flycatcher, a male White-ruffed Manakin, Streak-crowned Antvireo, a pair of Tawny-capped Euphonias, Spotted Antbird, Spotted Woodcreeper, Olive Tanager of the race known as Carmiol's Tanager, and Slaty-capped Flycatcher. We also saw ten or more Tennessee Warblers and several Bay-breasted Warblers. Whilst Steven pointed out Helicopter Damsel, a Rusty-tipped Page Butterfly, and the leaves of a tree he referred to as the Blood of Christ, a tree which employs red pigment in the underside of its leaves to attract pollinating insects. A Double-toothed Kite appeared briefly over the forest. I said it looked like our Eurasian Sparrowhawk. Steven said "it looks like a Double-toothed Kite to me"! We moved to the Saino Trail and added Black-headed Nightingale-thrush, Long-billed Gnatwren, Olivaceous Woodcreeper, Russet Antshrike, an acrobatic Plain Xenops, Scale-crested Pygmy-tyrant, the North American migrant Golden-winged Warbler and the local Golden-crowned Warbler. It was then back to the lodge for lunch followed by a siesta time. Rather than sleep I chose to go back around the gardens where I was delighted to hear the unmistakable bell-like calls of a male Three-wattled Bellbird calling from deep within the forest. Left to my own devices I ignored all the hummingbirds albeit the male White-necked Jacobins were easy enough to identify. Far easier than hummingbirds were the Black-cowled Oriole, Black-striped Sparrow, House Wren, Passerini's Tanager, Variable Seedeater, Clay-coloured Robin, Wilson's Warbler, Olive Tanager and Tropical Kingbird I quietly ticked off for myself. We met up again in the late afternoon and boarded the van to the lakeside. Here we recorded a single Pied-billed Grebe, our only one of the trip, four Anhingas, a Great Egret, Amazon and Ringed Kingfishers, a Least Grebe, an American Coot and several Northern Jacanas. Several Northern Rough-winged Swallows and a Mangrove Swallow flew over Costa Rica's largest reservoir, which held a disappointingly small number of waterbirds albeit most were trip ticks. An Ornate Hawk-eagle soared over us on broad, heavily pinched, paddle like wings, its orange banded tail telling us it was a juvenile. In the roadside vegetation we found Olive-crowned Yellowthroat, a female Barred Antshrike, Greyish and Black-headed Saltators and more Grey-headed Chachalacas. We moved on parking by a bridge over a small stream. Small numbers of swift were mostly the bat-like Vaux's but Steven picked out two Chestnut-collared which "always fly with wings slightly tilted down" and a Spot-fronted Swift which is "like a European Swift, they always fly high up on sickle shaped wings". In the roadside vegetation we found three Slaty Spinetails moving about in cover; long tailed, dark grey, with rufous cap and wings. A Common Tody-flycatcher was a bit more co-operative whilst an Osprey and five White-fronted Parrots flew over. We worked the road stopping at points for Orange-collared Manakin. We were in a good area for them. A female responded to tape but kept to cover giving only the briefest of views, I could just about make out that it was a brown bird, as opposed to most female manikins which are green. We moved on and parked up again. We walked the length of the road chasing up a Broad-billed Motmot which could be heard in the distance. We saw Crested Guan, several Swallow-tailed Kites, Black-headed Saltator, Smoky-brown Woodpecker, White-shouldered Tanager and Ochraceous Flycatcher. In failing light and down to ten feet we eventually had our Broad-billed Motmot perched in an overhanging branch along the road. Returning to the lodge for dinner Keel-billed Toucan and two Brown Jays could just be made out in flight crossing our path. We went back into the gardens after dinner to see what night birds we could find. It was 'heard' work! We could not locate any owls but eventually managed several flight views of the Common Pauraque which were seemingly calling from everywhere.

**Day 7:** We met up at first light on the deck overlooking the feeders and were soon aboard the van for a pre-breakfast trip. We made a random stop when Steven spotted a Short-billed Pigeon and all got 'scope views. The van went over a small bridge and as we did so we could see the Arenal Volcano was clear of cloud for the first time since we had arrived. A Black Phoebe told us we were near water, and from the van we saw a male Yellow-billed Cacique, and two Collared Araçaris, which were robbing the nest of a hole-nesting species. Other birds included a Masked Tityra with lizard in its beak, a Long-tailed Tyrant, and Crimson-collared Tanager. We disembarked from the van and watched a male and two female Great Curassows cross the road, followed by a few brief views of a skulking Bare-crowned Antbird as it sang from cover. After breakfast we packed up and left the lodge for the Arenal Hanging Bridges. At Arenal Hanging Bridges there are three kilometres of jungle trails that meander through lush primary rainforest, over six hanging and eight fixed bridges, and through a tunnel. They had names like Tarantula Bridge, Fer-de-Lance Bridge, Pit Viper Tunnel, and Ant Hill Bridge to indicate some of the wildlife that may be encountered. The idea was that we would be able to view some of the rainforest canopy species up close and personal. Well that was the plan, but our 'reality' was that the 'park' was packed out with tourists visiting on the back of a reality TV show, which had shown celebrities crossing a recently built bridge made to look old and missing many planks, which we later observed from the safety of the adjacent metal suspension bridge. The problem was that no more than 15 persons were to be on any hanging bridge at any one time and the local guides were impatient to get their groups around and to get onto the next fee paying group. We encountered a fair degree of impatience and pushing in, which Steven slapped down, but saw

little by way of birds on the way up as we were pushed along. Slate-coloured Grosbeak and White-fronted Nunbird were the only additions to our list and a list of hoped for species went begging. Before we set off on the walk Steven had warned us to watch out for the Fer-de-Lance snake which is responsible for 100 deaths a year in Costa Rica. We did not see one here or elsewhere on our tour, but we did encounter an Eyelash Viper and Bob had a close encounter with a Costa Rican Coral Snake. The Eyelash Viper is a venomous pit viper species; it's most distinguishing feature, and origin of its common name, is the set of modified scales over the eyes that look much like eyelashes. The eyelashes are thought to aid in camouflage, breaking up the snake's outline among the foliage where it hides. As usual on trips like this when you come across a snake it is no more than a photo opportunity. We also saw a female Violet-headed Hummingbird on its nest oblivious to the stream of tourists passing a metre away. It was a little less manic down the back straight of the trail and we were able to take time to enjoy a migrant Wood Thrush, and catch up with Slaty-backed Antbird and the rare Keel-billed Motmot. We left Arenal and stopped for lunch at the El Novillo del Arenal restaurant again before setting off on the long drive to the Cana Negro wetlands. The Cano Negro wetlands are located in the northern zone of Costa Rica, close to the small village of Los Chiles in the Province of Alajuela. Caño Negro is mainly conformed by the Caño Negro Lagoon and the Rio Frio. It is one of the most important biological areas in Costa Rica and one of the four most important wetland areas in the world. This Costa Rica ecological treasure is the natural habitat of more than 350 species of birds, as well as the emerald basilisk, iguanas, river turtles, caimans and jaguars. We made our first roadside stop in agricultural fields on our approach to Caño Negro for the Caribbean slope endemic Nicaraguan Seed-finch, and found two birds in a leafless tree. As we scanned about our first Laughing Falcon was found nearby and two Olive-throated Parakeets. From the van as we continued we saw three Lesser Yellow-headed Vultures, a yellow-headed version of the Turkey Vulture and a Plumbeous Kite; both species are specialities of the Caño Negro region. We made a second roadside stop for another North American migrant, American Kestrel, and saw Giant Cowbird here. Our third roadside stop picked up a Ruddy-breasted Seedeater a good find amongst many Collared and Variable Seedeaters, and as we drove on we saw our first Roadside Hawk, two Red-lore Parrots and a small flock of 15 Olive-throated Parakeets. After dinner, we went on a nocturnal outing in search of the Common (Gray) Potoo and owls. We parked up by water to the sound of Spectacled Cayman's sliding into the water. The Common Potoo soon responded to tape and we watched in torch light as the male uttered its haunting melancholic song, a BO-OU, BO-ou, bo-ou, bo-ou, bo-ou, bo-ou, bo-ou, bo-ou dropping in both pitch and volume from a nearby tree. Driving around nearby lanes we had a brief flight view of a Common Pauraque, followed by further views of a second flying in front of us along the road. We found a wood where Mottled Owl responded to tape but we could not get it to show despite a prolonged attempt. A Great Tinamou joined in a chorus with the owl and our tape. The black and yellow bicoloured subspecies of Costa Rican Coral Snake slithered across our path. Caño Negro is only 30km from the Nicaraguan border making this the right place to stay.

**Day 8:** We were up early. Lineated Woodpecker, Black-striped Sparrow and Olive-throated Parakeet were our garden birds. We boarded the van and took the short drive to the boat dock. As we walked along the boardwalk towards our boat we saw the diminutive woodpecker Olivaceous Piculet, a red data list bird. Around the river edge, several Grey-necked Wood-rails fed and the vireo-like Yellow Tyrannulet worked its way through the trees, along with Golden-olive Woodpecker, Yellow Warbler and Common Tody-flycatcher. We boarded the small boat 'Green Kingfisher' and set off for a 3-hour boat trip along the slow-flowing Rio Frio winding our way towards Caño Negro Lake. The weather was warm and sunny with a delicious cool breeze, and it was very relaxing, observing and photographing the wildlife that we came across along the shores of the river and in the trees that bend over its waters. Our main target, the Caribbean Slope endemic Nicaraguan Grackle, was picked up fairly quickly and we had good views of two pairs of this sought-after species. We were also very lucky that Colin alerted us to a female Sungrebe as none had been seen for several months. We watched for several minutes as the Sungrebe circled our boat seeking out the little cover it could find. We saw five species of kingfisher, Amazon was the commonest, American Pygmy, Belted, Green, and Ringed the others. Neotropic Cormorants were the only cormorant we saw in Costa Rica and they were common here, as were Anhingas. Herons included Black-crowned Night-herons, Boat-billed Heron, Cattle Egret, Great Blue Heron, Great Egret, Green Heron, Little Blue Heron, Snowy Egret and Tricoloured Heron. At one point we went ashore in pursuit of a singing Spot-breasted Wren and found it in trees along with Coco and Steak-headed Woodcreeper, Orchard Oriole and Tropical Gnatcatcher; a welcome break ashore where we could make use of the facilities. We did well for doves with the only Blue Ground-doves and Grey-headed Doves of the trip, whilst the Pale-vented and Red-billed Pigeons seen were a little more common. Raptors were represented by two Yellow-headed and two Crested Caracaras and an Osprey. Waders included our first Southern Lapwings, a few Least and Spotted Sandpipers whilst Black-necked Stilts were common. Miscellaneous waterbirds included Northern Jacana, Purple Gallinule, Wood Stork, White Ibis, Roseate Spoonbill, and singles of Limpkin and Jabiru, the last we would see on this trip, and one I missed, Glossy Ibis. Parrots seen were Crimson-fronted, Orange-chinned Red-lore, and White-crowned plus Olive-throated Parakeet. The boat trip over, we returned to Natural Lodge Cana Negro for breakfast and to pack. It was a long drive to our next destination, La Selva. We lunched at the Hotel Bar Restaurant Huetar and made a couple of roadside stops. The first

roadside stop was for the black and white, Pied Puffbird. The second produced two more of these, plus a male Black-faced Grosbeak and a pair of Pale-billed Woodpeckers. It was late when we arrived at the La Quinta and after dumping our bags it was sufficient just to relax around the feeders with a beer watching Keel-billed Toucan, Blue-grey, White-lined and Passerini's Tanagers. La Quinta is located on the Sarapiquí River in the Caribbean lowlands, less than 2kms off the beaten track, 20 minutes west of Puerto Viejo de Sarapiquí. We each had our own bungalow, with a thatched roof porch facing the gardens complete with hammocks and rocking chairs facing gardens rich in Heliconias, palms and flowering trees.

**Day 9:** We were up at first light listening to a Speckled Owl calling in the hotel grounds. It was hot already. The La Selva area is perhaps the single most diverse area for birding and wildlife in the whole of Costa Rica. A variety of habitats with primary Caribbean lowland rainforest, secondary and gallery forest, rivers, and marshes, provide a haven to one of the most diverse ecosystems on the planet. An extensive trail system provides an opportunity to explore the usually inaccessible Caribbean lowland rainforest. After checking in we were soon birdwatching in the gardens surrounding the 'Estacion Biologica La Selva'. The lawned gardens made species easier for us to see. White-ringed and Boat-billed Flycatchers perched on overhead wires flew sallies out after flies. A Grey-capped Flycatcher joined them. We recorded three swift species: Grey-rumped Swift, Lesser Swallow-tailed Swift and a migrant Chimney Swift. Birds came thick and fast: a photographable Caribbean slope endemic Rufous-winged Woodpecker, a pair of Gartered (Violaceous) Trogon, Long-billed Hermit and three Plain-coloured Tanagers, the only time we would see this speciality Caribbean slope endemic tanager. Two Green Ibises, similar to their Glossy cousins, drifted down the Sarapiquí River as we crossed the large suspension bridge leading to the forest trails. A Cinnamon Becard whistled its descending wood warbler like calls. More species: White-crowned Parrots, Common Tody-flycatcher, Golden-winged Warbler, Chestnut-sided Warbler, Black-crowned Tityra, Black-faced Grosbeak, a male Fasciated Antshrike, black, with fine white barring. Some we had seen before but not many people tire of seeing such wonderful birds in breeding plumage. A Little Tinamou whined like a donkey. Tinamous, often heard, rarely seen, surely they should be lumped with the mythical Andalusian Buttonquail! Still more species: Broad-winged Hawk, Red-billed Pigeon, a yellow-legged male Shinning (shimmering blue would be more appropriate) Honeycreeper completing our list of the three Costa Rican Honeycreeper species, Long-tailed Tyrant, Keel-billed Toucan, Olive-throated Parakeets and Mealy Parrots followed. Then a couple of real specialities, Red-throated Ant-tanager, large, dull with lovely red throat and perhaps best of all a Yellow-tailed Oriole performed as Steven anxiously ordered "get on this bird"! Still the species came as we worked the large trees along the Sarapiquí River: Scaled Pigeon, Plain Xenops, Shiny Cowbird, male Olive-backed Euphonia and Double-toothed Kite. We were lucky to see six, Great Green Macaws fly along the forest edge as they are seasonal. Some missed them but would get a second opportunity to see them later. I called a raptor, oh God what have I done, should have kept quiet, it will be a Turkey Vulture. Steven looked interested as it came closer eventually telling everyone to get on this bird, it was our only Grey-headed Kite of the trip. Whether it was the time of the day, or the time of the year, the numbers of birds encountered began to slow. There was time to appreciate some of the other species: Green Iguanas, some measuring more than a metre in length, Green Basilisks, Strawberry Poison-Dart Frogs and a host of butterflies and other insects. Steven showed us the inch long Bullet Ant, warning of its bite. Banded Peacock butterflies, which are the commonest Costa Rican butterfly, flitted around our feet. We finished with a few more great species: female Black-throated Trogon, female Slaty-tailed Trogon, a tiny Black-capped Pygmy-tyrant at its nest, the world's largest motmot, the Rufous Motmot, Northern Barred-woodcreeper and a male Western Slaty-antshrike. My notes for this final session clearly show I had reached a certain stage of physical and mental exhaustion!!! We collapsed on the porch of the centres cafeteria downing cold drinks and eating copious amounts of ice cream. Others have had Semiplumbeous Hawk and the angelic Snowy Cotinga from this porch – we were just grateful for the ice creams, and the Grey-capped Flycatcher. We returned hot and sweaty to the La Quinta Inn for lunch and a siesta: the couple of hours off left time for watching the feeders and that beer. Black-cowled Oriole, Rufous-tailed Hummingbird, Bronzy Hermit, Blue-grey Tanager, Buff-throated Saltator and White-lined Tanager were the principal diners. We returned to La Selva in the late afternoon for a second session reworking the trails over the suspension bridge. New species continued to show themselves: Collared Aracari, Sulphur-breasted Flycatcher, migrating Cliff Swallows, White-necked Jacobin, Tropical Gnatcatcher, Chestnut-mandibled Toucan, Scarlet-rumped Cacique, White-headed Puffbird, Stripe-throated Hermit, Short-billed Pigeon and Green Kingfisher. Bright skies had now become overcast, but it was still like a sauna out there. The weather conditions never seemed quite right for our birdfinder general Steven no matter what it was like. It may have been quieter than Steven would have liked but we continued to record birds another Slaty-tailed Trogon, this one a male. An endemic Yellow-crowned Euphonia gave poor flight views in a song flight above the trees. A Slaty-breasted Tinamou gave a call not unlike a steam train entering a tunnel. Chestnut-vented Oropendola completed our oropendola list, as we had no chance of seeing the range restricted Crested Oropendola. Still our trip list and day list grew: Violet-crowned Hummingbird, Ivory-billed Woodcreeper, Broad-billed Motmot, Anhinga, Mealy Parrot and Crested Guan. As dusk began to fall Great Tinamous began calling, one here, and one there, one over there, then another, surely we must see one eventually – well no



actually. A Lesser Swallowtail Swift flew over, Steven calling its diagnostic features, tapered spike of a tail, contrasting white rump and throat. A dark Dusky-faced Tanager uttered its scolding calls as it skulked in deep cover offering no more than several brief flight views. A La Selva speciality a White-necked Puffbird gave everyone stunning close views. Attention briefly focused on a bleeding Rainforest Hognosed Pit-viper dropped by a motmot. Despite the lack of light the cameras came out and the venomous snake encircled. A fairly stocky pit-viper; tip of snout of rounded triangle head is strongly upturned, providing the basis for its name. Palm Tanager, the attractive Buff-rumped Warbler and two Green Ibises going to roost called an end to general birdwatching. As night fell the woods became quite dark, scary even. We gathered on the suspension bridge where at dusk we were told, the very distinctive Short-tailed Nighthawk may suddenly appear over the forest edge. We waited and heard a Black-and-white Owl call just as the nighthawk gave us a brief fly past then another, before the light was totally gone. Boy was it dark.

**Day 10:** We left La Quinta early and made our way along route 4 to the Rio San Jose, a highland river where the much sought-after Sunbittern has bred in the past. They have not been seen there for some time but we always had that outside chance. We spent some time walking along a parallel dirt track scanning the river. There were up to four Fasciated Tiger-herons perched on rocks from where they fed and we had some great views of a migrant Louisiana Waterthrush. Other species included Buff-rumped Warbler, Cinnamon Woodpecker, Green Kingfisher, Grey-rumped Swift, Olive-backed Euphonia, Spotted Sandpiper, Swainson's Thrush, and Wedge-billed Woodcreeper. Many were spellbound by the antics of a Neotropical River Otter as it fished the river. We returned to the van and our journey. We paused briefly to photograph the Turrialba Volcano. Steven said they had seen the volcano erupt from their house in January 2010; ash and gas had been emitted in the first eruption from this volcano since 1866. We moved on stopping two miles up the road from Braulio Carrillo at the Old Butterfly Garden we were looking for a speciality hummer on the flowering spikes of Jamaican Vervain. White-necked Jacobin, Violet-headed Hummingbird, Violet-crowned Woodnymph and Rufous-tailed Hummingbird were quickly identified before our target Caribbean slope endemic Snowcap came in briefly to feed. We had several brief views of the distinctive male of this cult-status hummer, views of the female, and an immature male, but none of them hung about! We arrived at Braulio Carrillo National Park one of the largest intact forests on the Caribbean slope. Primary cloud forest and virgin rainforest covers the park, which abounds with flora and fauna species in multiple life zones, innumerable rivers and waterfalls. Steven pointed out a fern, called the plastic fern. It both feels and looks just like plastic! The manú, caoba, oak, caobilla and gavilan are common trees in the park, which has several dormant volcanoes. We took the 1.6 km Las Palmas trail, a difficult habitat to work, especially for groups. To see birds in this type of environment you have to be dressed correctly, you have to keep very quiet and above all stay focused. It was a narrow trail and not always easy to locate the birds that Steven and Magda called. There was a lot of noisy chatter and not all of it was bird song! The song of Nightingale Wren did however ring out: such an odd sounding song. It reminded me of Eric Morecombe and his piano playing, it was singing all the right notes but not necessarily in the right order! It was very damp and wet underfoot along the trail. The best species we saw was a Caribbean slope endemic White-throated Shrike-tanager: the Caribbean race, *leucothorax*, which has a yellow rump and undertail coverts. We also saw Striped Woodhaunter and another Caribbean slope endemic Black-and-yellow Tanager. Those at the back of the queue also saw Tawny-crested Tanager, whilst those at the front struggled for views on the narrow pathway. The cover was dense and seeing all the birds that Steven could hear proved impossible so we heard but did not see Green Shrike-vireo, and the Caribbean Slope /Chiriqui Endemics Lattice-tailed Trogon and Red-fronted Parrotlet but all the species at this site are regarded as difficult. We tried a second trail which was even narrower and recorded Plain-brown Woodcreeper, Ruddy-tailed Flycatcher and Chestnut-sided Warbler. We left Braulio Carrillo National Park seemingly as prematurely as we had left Santa Elena, which was a great pity. We headed off the Caribbean slope and said goodbye to its special birds. We were scheduled to make a stop for a long staying Reddish Egret, but when we pulled up the pond it had been had dried up and there were no water birds present. We moved on to another spot for Bat Falcon, there were none present, but we did see two White Hawks and a Double-toothed Kite. We took lunch at El Paso Restaurant, where cheeseburger and chips made a welcome change from rice and beans. Our first roadside stop in the afternoon was at a small pool on the outskirts of Guadalupe. There were Blue-winged Teal, Cattle Egret, American Coot, Common Moorhen, Least Grebe, Northern Jacana and Al picked up a Merlin. Then Magda picked up a Sora Rail, which she was so excited about because it was a Costa Rican tick for her. Steven pointed out a mockingbird saying that is a good bird; it was several minutes before I realised it was a Tropical Mockingbird and not its commoner cousin a Northern Mockingbird. We moved from the suburbs into agricultural land stopping at Finca El Salto. They were growing Chayote, a type of edible squash, grown on a trellis. We were looking for Prevost's Ground-sparrow. Yellow-faced Grassquit, Indigo Bunting, Baltimore Oriole, Buff-throated Saltator, Clay-coloured Robin and Tennessee Warbler all came our way before we located the ground-sparrow. The Prevost's Ground-sparrow or White-faced Ground-sparrow, is an American sparrow which breeds at middle altitudes from southern Mexico to western Honduras and in Costa Rica. The isolated Costa Rican form is regarded by some authorities as a separate species, Cabanis's Ground-sparrow. In the Costa Rican subspecies, the rufous of the crown extends to behind the eye and is bordered on its anterior edge with black. This black border is

broken by a white eye ring. The forehead is white, bordered below with a thin black line; there is a black malar stripe, and a black central breast patch. This species' English name commemorates French naturalist Florent Prévost, and the scientific name of the Costa Rican subspecies refers to German ornithologist Jean Cabanis. Our next stop was at Cachi Dam near the tiny town of Cachi in the province of Cartago. The Cachi Dam is one of the largest in Costa Rica and sits on the north eastern side of the lake. We soon found the bird we were looking for, a Bat Falcon perched on the dam wall. It briefly launched an attack on a passing Eastern Meadowlark, whilst a Green Heron watched on horrified! There were several market stores around the dam and some welcome fruit was purchased. We arrived at our hotel the Sanchiri Mirador and Lodge reasonably early. We were at 4000 feet and it was much cooler. The hotel gave stunning views over the Orosi Valley. Steven took those in the group interested in a walk around the hotel grounds. The target was Orange-billed Nightingale-thrush which some of the group already had on their list. One was seen by a couple but it still eluded me. Species seen included Yellow Warbler, Paltry Tyrannulet, Yellow-throated Euphonia, Baltimore Oriole, Piratic Flycatcher, White-lined Tanager, the Chiriqui endemic Scintillant Hummingbird, Streak-headed Woodcreeper and our first Hoffman's Woodpecker for several days – we were clearly on the Pacific Slope again. Night birding at Sanchiri Mirador at last produced Mottled Owl whilst all around us Common Pauriques called.

**Day 11:** Before leaving the hotel we made another quick search for an Orange-billed Nightingale-thrush that we could hear singing, but would you believe it we missed it again! Our first roadside stop of the morning was made at a fast flowing stream for Torrent Tyrannulet, a small, perky, tail-wagging flycatcher that stood dipper like on the emergent rocks. We also saw the Chestnut-headed Oropendola, Golden-olive Woodpecker, Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher and Lesser Elaenia. We travelled south east through farmland, bits of teak forest and the coffee plantations of the Santa Lucia Coffee Estates. We stopped and were soon watching two Brown-capped Vireos and a Giant Cowbird. Steven did not have much time for cowbirds and clearly would have been happy if there were none on the Costa Rican list! A migrant Mourning Warbler was an excellent find though views for those that saw it were mostly in silhouette through a tangle of scrub. An accompanying Tennessee Warbler showed little better. Other species included Bay-headed Tanager, Smoky-brown Woodpecker, six or more bright yellow Silver-throated Tanagers, Scarlet-thighed Dacnis, and Chiriqui endemic Dark Pewee, two Killdeers, Common Yellowthroat and the yellow-throated White-naped Brush-finch. Oddity of the day went to an albino House Wren. We drove to the Hotel Kiri Lodge at Tapanti for breakfast but before entering took a short walk along the wooded entrance road. Here we saw more Silver-throated Tanagers, Wedge-billed Woodcreeper, Pale-vented Thrush, another Brown-capped Vireo, Yellowish Flycatcher (another *Empidonax*!), and two new Caribbean slope endemics White-bellied Mountain-gem and the kiskadee-like, Golden-bellied Flycatcher. We continued birding inside the Kiri Lodge from a gallery porch overlooking the forest. Stars of the show were undoubtedly two migrant male Blackburnian Warblers, orange and black faced in full breeding plumage and the uncommon, red bodied(!) White-winged Tanager. Some nice views of birds from the gallery where we also saw Slate-coloured Redstart, Tropical Parula, Purple-crowned Fairy, Prong-billed Barbet, White-throated Thrush, Spangled-cheeked Tanager, Green Thorntail, Green Hermit, Tawny-capped Euphonia, Tufted Flycatcher, Chestnut and White-collared Swifts, Double-toothed Kite and Elegant Euphonium. We logged a few butterflies during the morning including Common Blue Morpho, Mexican Heliconian, Purple-washed Eyemark, Rusty-tipped Page and Short-tailed Morpho. There are two forms of the Common Blue Morpho, *Morpho helenor* in Costa Rica. One, *M. h. narcissus*, almost completely iridescent blue above, is found almost completely on the Caribbean side of the country. In the other form, *M. h. marinata*, on the Pacific side, the blue above is much reduced. The species is attracted to fermenting fruit. We also saw a Giant Green Katydid: a five-inch-long, singing, winged insect belonging to the grasshopper family. The females chirp in response to the shrill song of the males, which supposedly sounds like "katy did, katy didn't," hence the name. It was quite late when we arrived at our hotel the Savegre Mountain Lodge in the Savegre Valley. Savegre is located at an elevation of 7,200 feet in the Cerro de la Muerte region of the Cordillera de Talamanca. Stunning mountains surround this spectacular valley which is crossed by the fast flowing Savegre River. The cloud forests of the area have been acclaimed by birdwatchers as the best place in the country to see the Resplendent Quetzal all year round (in other forests in Costa Rica the quetzal is seen only on a seasonal basis), and as the best location anywhere to see a large selection of Chiriqui Highland endemics – species found only in the highlands of Costa Rica and extreme western Panama. We wasted no time upon our arrival. We went down to the river where an American Dipper was ducking and diving from rocks into the fast flowing waters. The feeders at the hotel held new species of hummer for us, notably Volcano Hummingbird, a Chiriquí endemic, but also Magnificent Hummingbird, (Grey-tailed) White-throated Mountain-gem, and Scintillant Hummingbird, which is Costa Rica's smallest bird, at 2.2 grams and 6 cm. Five species in all, never any more, never any less were seen on these feeders. Acorn Woodpecker, Sooty-capped Bush-tanagers, Long-tailed Silky-flycatcher, Rufous-browed Peppershrike, Flame-coloured Tanager, Slaty Flowerpiercer and Mountain Elaenia were all added within 50 yards of each other before dark fell: three more Chiriqui endemics. We had a two-night stay at one of the most attractive lodges on the tour schedule, the Savagre Mountain Lodge, located in the Chiriqui Highlands in the midst of a beautiful cloud forest at San Gerardo de Dota, in the Talamanca Mountains.

**Day 12:** It was a cold morning as we boarded the van for a short drive to the area where the Resplendent Quetzal comes into feed. A short walk at 8000 feet on leaden legs and we were staring into the montane oak forest searching for this sought after trogon. Surprisingly, we found ourselves amongst groups of general tourists so Steven moved us to an area he thought might be a bit quieter. None-the-less when the first quetzal appeared there was still an almighty scrum and one overweight German lost his footing and floored me! I recovered and attempted to photograph one of two male quetzals we saw, the light was poor, and there was so much pushing and shoving I gave up after a single record shot. Of course we had already seen a quetzal in the Santa Elena Cloud Forest a week ago. In between we watched Black-throated Green and Wilson's Warblers and had two Chiriqui endemic Sooty Thrushes. Mountain Elaenia and Spotted Wood-quail were heard to call. Having done with the quetzals we birded along the road. We saw a pair of Collared Trogons, and had brief views of the big rufous endemic Streak-breasted Treehunter – what an odd name that is – you do not have to look hard to find a tree in this country at the moment! Sightings followed of the Chiriqui endemic Black-cheeked Warbler (OK it has black cheeks but it also has a bright rufous crown and white supercilium!), the endemic Yellow-thighed Finch (an appropriately named blackbird with yellow thighs!), the robin-like endemic Black-billed Nightingale-thrush (the black bill distinguishing it from the Orange-billed), the bright Chiriqui endemic Yellow-winged Vireo, the endemic Flame-throated Warbler, grey with an extensive orange-red throat, Spot-crowned Woodcreeper, the endemic Black-capped Flycatcher, the endemic Ochraceous Wren and it was back to the hotel for breakfast. Perhaps it would be easier just to comment when a bird is not endemic! It does make you wonder what will happen to all these species when the inevitable deforestation occurs. I sat outside our cabin identifying 'common garden birds': Black Phoebe, Tropical Kingbird, Clay-coloured Robin, Sooty-capped Bush-tanager, Black-billed Nightingale-thrush, Rufous-collared Sparrow, Blue-and-white Swallow and Collared Redstart all passed within feet of me. We assembled at the hummingbird feeders and watched the five species of hummer and an endemic female Slaty Flowerpiercer. We boarded two open-backed jeeps and drove up the steep forest trail deep into the oak forest to the site of a Costa Rican Pygmy-owls nest. We would visit this spot several times during our stay but we would not see or hear the owl. We walked higher up the Los Robles (Oak tree) Trail looking for the, yes you've guessed it, the Chiriqui endemic Silvery-throated Jay, a dark purplish jay with silvery white throat and eyebrow. It took some time to locate but we eventually found an adult bird feeding a begging youngster. We also added the sombre Chiriqui endemic Large-footed Finch as well as Spotted Barbtail, Grey-breasted Wood-wren and the endemic Silvery-fronted Tapaculo. In the damp earth of the trail the footprints of a large cat were clearly visible. The descent was otherwise fairly quiet with Ornate Hawk-eagle, Philadelphia Vireo and Yellow-bellied Siskin amongst by now common species. The sun was out and it was warm despite the elevation so we returned to the hotel for lunch and a siesta for those that wanted it. I wandered around the gardens as Bob slept and rang home. I had been told about a fruiting tree into which Chiriqui endemic Sulphur-winged Parakeets came and after a half hour four of these endemic birds noisily arrived. They departed almost as quickly leaving me to console myself with a stunning male Rose-breasted Grosbeak, the resident subspecies of Red-tailed Hawk and a Swallow-tailed Kite – magic. We assembled late afternoon, boarded the van and drove up Cerro de la Muerte, the highest point in the Costa Rican section of the Inter-American Highway. Its name means "Mountain of Death", since in the past crossing the mountains from the Valle Central meant a three or four day journey, on foot or on horseback and many ill-prepared travellers succumbed to the cold and rain. A drivable track from the highway leads to the summit, with its cluster of telecommunications aeriels. At this altitude, 11,000 feet, temperatures can really dip particularly when wind chill is factored in. The mountain is in Talamanca range, which extends from eastern Costa Rica into neighbouring western Panama. It is a volcanic island that has developed many endemic species of animals and plants, often with affinities to Andean forms. The higher areas are Páramo habitat, with stunted shrubs, dwarf bamboo, and tree ferns, and smaller plants like blueberry, gooseberry and lady's slipper. Nearly fifty percent of the bird species recorded from Cerro de la Muerte are endemic to the Talamanca range. It was cold and windy on the top and an eerie stillness pervaded after a storm. We could see the thunder and lightning moving away in the distance. We were looking for two particular species, Volcano Junco and Timberline Wren. Sooty Thrushes were common but we saw little else at first. Eventually we found two Volcano Juncos, one with nesting material. We tried another area for the wren but did not see one; pairs of Long-tailed Silky-flycatcher and Large-footed Finch were seen. It was getting towards dusk as we descended back into the Savegre Valley and we stopped at a couple of spots before eventually we connected with the Chiriquí endemic Dusky Nightjar, we saw one and heard a second.

**Day 13:** We were up early and boarded the two open-backed jeeps again to drive up the trail to the Costa Rican Pygmy-owls nest. Again it did not show, but we did get 'scope views of a distant Ruddy Pigeon, a new sighting for the trip. We descended via La Querbrada trail Steven eagerly trying to find three or four new local species before we left the Savegre Valley. Almost as soon as we had started down the trail we came across two pairs of the uncommon Caribbean slope endemic Spotted Wood-quail. We also saw a few North American migrants of which Western Wood-pewee was a trip tick. A small party of Black-capped Warblers finally showed themselves to an exasperated Colin, much to everyone's amusement. Also seen were Black-faced Solitaire, Black-throated Green Warbler, Buffy Tuftedcheek, Rufous-capped Nightingale-thrush, Ochraceous Wren, Red-tailed Hawk, Swainson's Thrush, Tufted

Flycatcher, Yellow-thighed Finch, Yellowish Flycatcher, and Wilson's Warbler. Wrenthrush was heard but could not be located. We returned to Savegre Lodge, took breakfast and left. Our first roadside stop was just along the road from Paradiso Quetzal; we were still at 8800 feet. Here we saw three Chiriqui endemics: the Wrenthrush missed earlier, Black-and-yellow Silky-flycatcher and Fiery-throated Hummingbird. The main visitor centre was bedecked with hummingbird feeders allowing close photography of feeding Fiery-throated, Violet-eared and Volcano Hummingbirds. Other species included Large-footed Finch, Mountain Elaenia, Ruddy Treerunner, Slaty Flowerpiercer, Sooty-capped Tanagers, and Sooty Thrush. We made a random stop in stunted Páramo habitat, on the Cerro de la Muerte and very quickly found a pair of endemic Timberline Wrens which we had missed the previous afternoon: another very pretty, bright Costa Rican wren. When we stopped for lunch at the Restaurante La Georgina Steven warned us to take special care of our security and not to leave any cameras or optical gear unattended. He did not elaborate but then again he did not need to. The restaurant was part of Mirador Valle del General which is located in the mountains of Talamanca at 1600 meters above sea level and overlooking El General Valley, Mirador Valle del General. As we pulled up two Swallow-tailed Kites and a juvenile Red-tailed Hawk cruised by within touching distance. We crossed the road from the restaurant to look at a Vervain hedge. Four species of hummingbird were feeding, three of them lowland pacific endemics: male Snowy-bellied Hummingbird, female Magenta-throated Woodstar, male and female Garden Emeralds and the aggressive Rufous-tailed Hummingbird. Four large White-collared Swifts circled overhead. Once inside the restaurant we went onto a gallery overlooking the valley and surrounding forest. We at last connected with Orange-billed Nightingale-thrush but stunning views of summer plumaged Blackburnian Warblers with their dingier Tennessee Warbler cousins stole the show, whilst a pair of Silver-throated Tanagers were observed copulating. It went from cool to warm as we lost elevation down the pacific slope, arriving at the lodge at 14.30. The modest Talari Mountain Lodge is east of San Isidro del General at the base of the Talamanca Mountains in the Pacific south-central region of Costa Rica. Steven offered a walk around the 20 acres of garden for those that wanted: a private primary forest bordering the rushing Chirripo River. As Steven marched us through the forest Phil's joke about the Easley Fitness Video coming out next week had everyone amused. We recorded a long list of birds as we walked around: Greenish and Lesser Elaenias, Boat-billed, the elegant Fork-tailed and Piratic Flycatchers, Common Tody-flycatcher, Red-legged and Green Honeycreepers, Scaly-breasted Hummingbird, Long-billed Starthroat, Buff-throated and Streaked Saltators, the common southwest lowland pacific endemic Cherrie's Tanager (replacing the 'identical' Passerini's Tanager of the northeast), Grey-headed, Golden-hooded, Scarlet, and the distinctive Speckled Tanagers, House and Rufous-breasted Wrens, Lineated and Red-crowned Woodpeckers. Also seen were Orange-chinned Parakeet, Orange-billed Sparrow, the now common Orange-billed Nightingale-thrush, the pacific ssp. of Variable Seedeater, Yellow-green Vireo giving House Sparrow like calls, Black-crowned Tityra, and Paltry Tyrannulet. A female responded to the fart like calls from Magda's tape, which had everyone extremely amused, looking around at who to blame. An Ochraceous Piculet was at its nest and was looking out from the nest hole. The highlight however was undoubtedly connecting with the magnificent lowland pacific endemic Turquoise Cotinga, another bobby dazzler of a male, watched until it finally went down to roost. It had been a hard day but we had had some great views of some great birds. Tropical Screech-owls can sometimes be heard in the evening hours at this location, but tracking them down is not easy, and so it proved today.

**Day 14:** We started at first light where we had left off last evening tracking around the lodge gardens. Small numbers of Cliff Swallow flew past over our heads with two Vaux's Swifts. A juvenile white Little Blue Heron flew down the river. Many of the birds were repeats from the previous day. We had some close views of two pairs of White-crowned Parrots and another schoolboy snigger at Magda's tape vocalising the calls of Orange-collared Manakin, which this time brought in a lovely male. The best birds were the new ones and included a distant Scaled Pigeon and two showy lowland pacific endemic Fiery-billed Aracaris. We left Talari after breakfast continuing over the pacific slope towards Dominical and Quepos. Our first roadside stop was for an endemic Snowy-bellied Hummingbird that was feeding on Vervain and we had a bonus male and female lowland pacific endemic Garden Emerald and our first sighting of Plain Wren since day one. Good views were also had of Yellow-headed Caracara. Our second stop was to view a group of white flowering trees that Steven's brother had told him White-crested Coquette was coming into the previous week. The White-crested Coquette is an uncommon lowland pacific endemic. We watched and waited. Whilst we were waiting a Pearl Kite flew by and Steven pointed some of the Lepidoptera. The large butterfly like Green Page Moth, an iridescent diurnal moth which migrates from Guatemala to Columbia in vast numbers every few years, and showy Julia and Banded Orange Heliconian. Not everyone's attention was focused and Steven got a little irritated when half the group sped off after an Indigo Bunting! The tiny female Coquette appeared fleetingly its presence given away by its white banded rump, most seemed to get onto it, but not everyone was pleased when we moved off. Let us hope they at least saw the Indigo Bunting! As we came down the slope we scanned the skies for soaring King Vultures but we never did connect with any. We drove on good roads through agricultural scrub country. Our next stop was at the entrance to the Hacienda Baru. It was by now very hot and sunny. A tape was played and a pair of the target woodpeckers duly appeared, the lowland pacific endemic Golden-naped Woodpecker was 'scoped and on the list. Also a lowland Pacific endemic the Riverside Wren was heard calling, they initially proved difficult but we had seen five before we left. The

lowland Pacific endemic Costa Rican Swift put in a timely appearance as did a pair of Thick-billed Euphonias. This was four new species for our list almost in as many minutes. Our next stop was in farmland at Hacienda Matapalo and the target species Smooth-billed Ani was quickly acquired, in all we saw three birds. A second Pearl Kite and two pairs of endemic Yellow-crowned Euphonia were seen next: the euphonia on mistletoe “as they always are”. A Short-tailed Hawk and Black-crowned Tityra later and we were on our way again. We stopped by a river bridge over the Savegre and walked along a track through Palm Oil Palms. Our target barbtail however eluded us and after views of Grey Hawk and Blue-black Grassquit we were on our way again. As we journeyed along the Pacific coast we saw 30+ Roseate Spoonbills, Fasciated Tiger-heron, Amazon Kingfisher, and White Ibis. We stopped for lunch at Restaurante La Fiesta del Marisco on the Pacific Shore. Steven called to Motmot Bob “you wanted to see Magnificent Frigatebird?”. An anxious Bob raced to the end of the bus and the open door. There above us were several hundred frigatebirds circling over a recently landed fishing boat. As we settled into the restaurant under the awnings watching the waves roll in sipping beer we scanned the ocean picking up Brown Pelicans, Royal Terns, and Ringed Kingfisher. But first prize goes to Roger who picked up a distant Wandering Tattler feeding on the rocks: another Costa Rican tick for Magda. The afternoon was spent gently cruising the small mangrove channels of the Tárcoles River. The boardwalk approach produced Panama and Streaked Flycatchers, a seemingly tame Common Black-hawk, the first of many, and the brilliant ‘mangrove’ subspecies of Yellow Warbler. Once on the water we were amongst many Anhingas, herons, kingfishers and other waterbirds. We landed within the mangroves to search for and to see the most important species the Costa Rican mainland endemic Mangrove Hummingbird. Special birds also included an uncommon wader, the Collared Plover. We had close up views of two adults, a juvenile and two nestling Boat-billed Herons. It was a good place for Tricoloured and Yellow-crowned Night-herons: Sand Martin was a trip tick, and we saw a single Plumbeous Kite. Huge Central American Crocodiles measuring a whopping five metres sunned themselves along the riverbanks. Trip over it was onto our hotel Punta Leona. Punta Leona is on a palatial resort on the Pacific coast, surrounded by 750 acres of lush tropical rainforest.

**Day 15:** We assembled at first light by the van outside our lodges. Steven heard an amazing 35 species whilst the more amateur of us pick out Wood Thrush, Northern Barred-woodcreeper, Streaked Flycatcher and Scarlet Macaw, the later showed. We drove out within the hotel grounds and birded along wide tarmac roads. We continued to hear more than we saw. Birds heard included the mournful song of the secretive Grey-fronted Dove, Slaty-backed Trogon laughing deeply, Inca Dove and Blue-black Grosbeak. We saw Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, the lowland Pacific endemic Black-hooded Antshrike, Riverside Wren, Channel-billed Toucan, Bronzy Hermit, Short-billed Pigeon, Dot-winged Antwren, Chestnut-backed Antbird, Black-throated Trogon, a Yellow-olive Flycatcher at its nest, Black-headed Trogon and many Northern Bentbills. We boarded the van to go back for breakfast stopping briefly at an entrance roundabout to look at and photograph a party of ten Scarlet Macaws. Of the sixteen species of parrot recorded in Costa Rica none is as spectacular as the Scarlet Macaw: unmistakable for its large size, bright red body, blue-and-yellow wings, long red tail and white face. After breakfast we drove out to the Reserva Biologica Carara, Puntarenas, passing six Swallow-tailed Kites. This is the northernmost moist-wet forest in Pacific lowlands, limit of distribution for many wet-forest birds. It lies nestled in the River Grande de Tarcoles river basin between Orotina and San Jose and is home to most of the lowland Pacific rainforest specialities. We took the River Trail. This was not easy birding; the birds had plenty of cover and were hard to see, but as always what you do connect with is deeply satisfying. We began by seeing Rufous-breasted Wren, Dot-winged Antwren, numbers of Black-hooded Antshrike, and we caught up with two Gray-chested Dove on the forest floor. We followed this up with Coco Woodcreeper, Scaly-breasted Hummingbird, Squirrel Cuckoo, White-shouldered Tanager, and Lesser Greenlet. Further sightings followed Plain Xenops, Northern Bentbill, Tropical Gnatcatcher gathering nesting material, Dusky-capped Flycatcher, Orange-collared Manakin, a female and a stunning male Chestnut-sided Warbler; this would be the last we would see on our trip of this beautiful little North American migrant. Turquoise-browed Motmot, White-necked Jacobin, and the lowland Pacific endemic Black-breasted Wren followed. We paused at a large open forest pool flushing Bare-faced Tiger-heron, Snowy Egret, Green Heron and Black-necked Stilt. Several Costa Rican Swifts circled the clearing. Eastern Wood-pewee, American Pygmy Kingfisher and the lowland Pacific endemic Baird’s Trogon gave superb photo opportunities. A Collared Forest-falcon was less obliging, most just seeing bits as it perched in cover and quick flight views as it moved off. Great Crested Flycatcher and White-winged Becard completed the morning’s list and we were back to the hotel for lunch and a break. Our trip list had passed 500 seen. Bob and I walked down to the beach area. There was (Hudsonian) Whimbrel and Willet on the beach and 40 plus Brown Pelicans just offshore. We returned to the Reserva Biologica Carara, Puntarenas and took the Headquarters Trail. Magda spotted a Great Tinamou, which watched us for a while as we snapped away with our cameras before sitting down obviously thinking they cannot see us. Tinamous! So tinamous do exist after all. Steven tracked a Black-faced Antthrush through the understory; we eventually saw six and two Streak-crested Antpittas. As we moved silently along the trail Northern Barred-woodcreeper, Northern Bentbill and Eye-ringed Flatbill came our way. Crossing a bridge over a stream eight Muscovy Dusks loafed mallard-like, but were unfortunately feral and not tickable. Once across Wedge-billed Woodcreeper and Golden-crowned Spadebill were added to the list. We settled

down by the stream and as dusk fell Blue-crowned and Red-capped Manakins came into bathe. Several Wood Thrushes, Ochre-bellied and Olive-sided Flycatchers joined them and we ended with a good one, the lowland Pacific endemic Charming Hummingbird. After dinner we took a long drive out towards the coast in search of the Striped Owl. It is never easy and once again despite a lot of effort on Steven's part we drew a blank on our night birding.

**Day 16:** We rose, breakfasted, packed and said our goodbyes to Steven and Magda who are without doubt the best guides I have ever had the privilege of travelling with. We made our way to the airport. We were booked on a flight home departing on a Continental flight leaving San Jose for Houston at 11.45am. We were then to catch a connecting flight from Houston to Heathrow arriving in London at 09.35 on Sunday 3 April. It was fairly chaotic at the airport due to an earlier flight having been cancelled. Bob and I were able to get a 12.10 Delta Airlines flight to Hartsfield – Jackson Atlanta International Airport with a connecting 21.35 Delta Airlines flight from Atlanta to Heathrow arriving London 11.05am. We said brief goodbyes to those in the group we could find and left for Atlanta.

**John Sirrett**