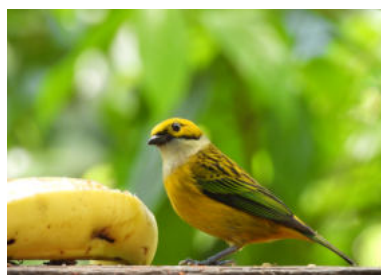
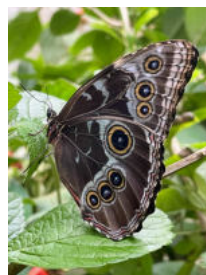
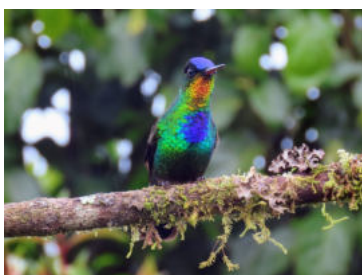
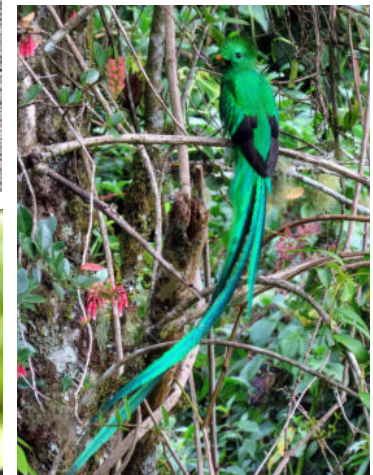
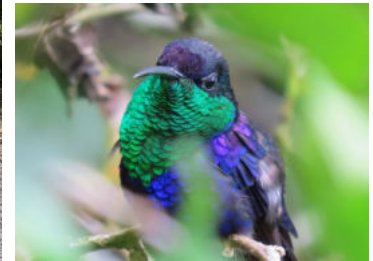


# Costa Rica: Birding & Nature

## Feb. 11 - 22, 2024 | Trip Report | by Kent Skaggs



**Guides Johan Fernandez and Kent Skaggs, with 11 participants: Deborah & Nels, Elizabeth & Peter, Karen & Jim, Leann & Mary Ann, Margaret & Ron and Patricia**



### **Sun., Feb. 11**

### **Arrival in San Jose | Hotel Bougainvillea Gardens**

Welcome to Costa Rica! Several members of the group arrived early and were provided transfers from the airport to our accommodations by our host company, Horizontes. Hotel Bougainvillea was where we would be starting our trip and with 10 acres of botanical gardens on the premises to explore, it's a great place to be introduced to tropical birding. Most of the group gathered midafternoon to see what we could find on the grounds. A pair of Mottled Owls along with a pair of Lesson's Motmots highlighted our late afternoon walk, along with a Great Kiskadee and a Boat-billed Flycatcher sitting fairly close together allowing us to briefly study



the distinguishing field marks of these very similar species. We also encountered Variegated Squirrels and a Green Iguana moving around in the treetops.

The group took a short break before gathering in the bar at 6:00 PM for a welcome drink and to do our first species checklist for the trip. We were then joined by our leader/local guide, Johan Fernandez, who gave a brief presentation on what was in store for the group in the coming days. Afterwards we moved to the restaurant for dinner before returning to our rooms to prepare for the following day.

## **Mon., Feb. 12                      Cinchona Waterfall | Pierella Garden**

Most of the group gathered at 6:00 AM for a final walk through the gardens to see what else we could find. Hoffmann's and Lineated Woodpeckers were seen moving about in the trees and we had a flyover by a Yellow-headed Caracara being harassed by a Great-tailed Grackle. We also heard and eventually saw a Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl being mobbed by several birds including a Cabanis's Wren. We returned inside for breakfast and then back to our rooms to grab our bags. The tour was about to start in earnest.

Our driver, Armando, had arrived and we loaded onto the bus. As we headed out of the city Johan provided some background on himself and his country. The skies were clear so as we enjoyed Johan's narrative, we were also able to enjoy the surrounding countryside. Mid-morning we arrived at our first stop, Soda Cinchona. This little roadside restaurant is a known eBird hotspot as there are hummingbird feeders and a feeding station with fruit placed out for the birds. We ordered some beverages and settled in for a while to see what was showing up at the feeders and to enjoy the great view of the landscape in front of us which included the San Fernando Waterfall. Green-crowned Brilliant, Talamanca Hummingbird, Violet Sabrewing, Coppery-headed Emerald and Black-bellied Hummingbird were all seen visiting the hummingbird feeders and Red-headed Barbet, Northern Emerald-Toucanet, Clay-colored Thrush, Common Chlorospingus, Baltimore Oriole, six species of tanagers (Crimson-collared, Scarlet-rumped, Blue-gray, Yellow-winged, Palm, and Silver-throated), Red-legged Honeycreeper, Bananaquit and Buff-throated Saltator were visiting the fruit feeding station. It was quite the variety that was on display in front of us, but after about an hour it was time to get back on the bus to head to our next destination.



A short distance down the road from Cinchona we made a brief stop to take a short walk at Virgen del Socorro. More new bird species were awaiting us including Squirrel Cuckoo, Common-Tody Flycatcher, Yellow Tyrannulet, Black-thighed Grosbeak, Golden-hooded Tanager and Scarlet-thighed Dacnis. Back on the bus, we headed to where we would be having lunch and spending the afternoon, Pierella Garden. Upon arrival we headed to a little open-air restaurant where we had a family style meal of chicken and several tasty side dishes. Once we finished, we watched a demonstration on how to make chocolate from cocoa harvested on site. It was very informative, and we were also able to sample the end product! We then went on a guided hike on trails through the property to see what wildlife was there. As it turned out, there was quite a lot. Several new bird species were seen including Crested Guan, Common Pauraque, Rufous-tailed Jacamar, Yellow-throated Toucan, White-collared Manakin, Long-tailed Tyrant, and Black-faced Grosbeak, plus some cool mammals including our first sloth species (Hoffmann's Two-toed Sloth), a close up look at several Honduran White Bats, and a resting Mexican Hairy Dwarf Porcupine. But probably the highlight of our visit were the butterflies. Pierella Garden was started as a butterfly farming project for export and morphed (pardon the pun) into something much more. We were taken into an enclosure that was a butterfly nursery for several species of butterflies. There were stunning Blue Morpho butterflies, Owl butterflies, Cydno Longwings, and Green Malachites. There was a wooden cabinet that housed butterfly pupa (or chrysalis) and eggs were also being collected here. Pretty cool.

Although we hated to leave, it was getting late in the afternoon and we needed to get checked into our lodging. We said goodbye, then drove about 40 minutes to La Quinta de Sarapiquí Lodge where we would be staying for the next two nights. We settled into our rooms and then gathered to do the species checklist for the day, before eating dinner. It had been a great day with lots of colorful birds and butterflies seen, with a few mammals and amphibians and a reptile to boot. And it was just day two.

## **Tues., Feb. 13                      La Selva Biological Station | Sarapiquí River Boat Tour**

We started this morning at 6:30 AM by checking a feeding station near the reception area and walking some trails on the grounds where we saw several species previously seen, but also added a Blue-black Grosbeak which was new. Then breakfast, a quick break, and loading up on the bus to go to La Selva Biological Station where we would spend the morning.



Once there, we met our guide and then walked a little way back down the entrance road we came in on to see if we could locate a Snowy Cotinga. The cotinga was a no-show, but we did get some close-up looks at a couple of male Slaty-tailed Trogons competing for the attention of a female perched nearby. We headed back towards the visitor center and started down one of the many trails on the property. As we walked, we were seeing and hearing several birds that we had already encountered but continued to add new ones as well. First a Rufous-winged Woodpecker, then a Long-billed Gnatwren, then a Great Tinamou. We eventually turned around and doubled back on the trail. On our way back we came across some Strawberry Poison Dart Frogs that stayed put allowing us to get good looks. Just shortly after leaving the frogs, it started to rain, gradually picking up in intensity. As we waited out the rain, we saw that other folks on the trail had located a Brown-throated Three-toed Sloth which Johan got in his scope for a closer look. The rain subsided and we continued on back down the trail. We stopped briefly near the visitor center, where our guide utilized some maps of La Selva to give the group a better understanding of the landscape and some of the research that is being done. Then we headed to a suspension bridge that spanned the Puerto Viejo River. As we started across, a female Gartered Trogon landed on a cable of the bridge right in front of us. It didn't seem too concerned with us as it was focused on finding something for lunch. We continued on across and just before exiting the bridge there was a second Gartered Trogon perched on a branch near the bridge. We exited the bridge and immediately heard a Rufous Motmot calling. Eventually we were able to locate it and get good looks before we headed back across the bridge to finish our time at La Selva.

Back on the bus, we returned to the lodge for lunch and then took a break before our next activity. Mid-afternoon we got back on the bus and drove to a location where we were scheduled to take a boat ride on the Sarapiquí River. Once there the group found their seats and settled in for a nice relaxing afternoon on the water. Not long after leaving the dock, we got a surprise when a Neotropical River Otter was spotted near the bank. It was very active and constantly diving, presumably looking for food as it didn't seem to be concerned with us. It eventually disappeared and we continued. Soon thereafter, an adult Little Blue Heron was seen on a log, then a female Green Basilisk lounging on a branch in the shade just above the water, then an Anhinga on a log with its wings outstretched drying out in the afternoon sun. A little further we came across some Proboscis Bats that were hanging on the side of a log, and then watched a Gray-capped Flycatcher taking a bath by splashing into the surface of the water and retreating to a tree branch to preen. Further yet we came across a fairly good sized American Crocodile resting on the bank and then a group of Mantled Howler Monkeys



scattered in the trees. We eventually turned around to head back to where we started, stopping when we encountered something new like some White-throated Capuchins hanging out in some trees close to the water. Once back to the dock, we thanked the Captain for the tour and loaded back onto the bus to return to the lodge.

Back at the lodge, we took a quick break before gathering to go over the species checklist for the day. Then dinner and to bed. It had been a very productive day with lots of wildlife seen and beautiful weather making it even better.

### **Wed., Feb. 14 Sarapiqui Area | Rancho Naturalista**

The next morning most of the group decided to get some extra sleep as only one hardy soul (Karen) showed up for the early morning walk. She was rewarded by getting good looks at several species including Northern Black-throated Trogon which was new for the trip. We were joined by the rest of the group at breakfast, then back to our rooms to finish packing up as we were headed for a new destination.

Loaded back on the bus, we made a couple of stops in the Sarapiqui area before continuing on. One stop was at a known roosting location for Great Green Macaws, but if they were present they weren't making it known. We did, however, see a pair of Scarlet Macaws which was a nice substitute. We saw our first Northern Jacana a little further down the road before settling in for the drive to Rancho Naturalista where we would be staying the next two nights.

Upon arrival at Rancho Naturalista, we checked in and were shown our rooms before returning to the main lodge for lunch. After we finished eating, we took a break before gathering again midafternoon to explore some of the trails on the property. The first trail took us uphill through the forest, eventually coming to an opening where we scanned the trees above and below us. A Keel-billed Toucan was perched in a distant tree with a Red-billed Pigeon sitting nearby and a Montezuma Oropendola was in the area as well. Four White-crowned Parrots were spotted in some distant trees, so we got them in the scopes before deciding to head back towards the lodge to check out another trail.

This trail went downhill through the forest and terminated at a viewing platform that had been built above a small stream. In the stream between some rocks were small pools that hummingbirds and other bird species utilized for bathing, which typically occurred late in the day. There were six pools that were identified by Johan



to keep an eye on, so we watched intently for the first bird to arrive. We didn't have to wait too long before we heard a buzzing sound, followed by a small object darting about over pool #2. It was a male Crowned Woodnymph. It splashed into the water several times before darting to some cover next to the stream to preen. Then a bird showed up at pool #6, a Band-tailed Barbthroat. The Crowned Woodnymph returned to pool #2 for a second bath and again retreated out of sight. As we waited for more hummingbirds there were other birds visible nearby. A couple of Red-throated Ant-Tanagers were curious about all of the humans gathered on the viewing platform and a Carmiol's Tanager could be heard but remained out of view. A Wilson's Warbler was seen near the stream and another Crowned Woodnymph came to get cleaned up. Daylight was rapidly fading so we headed back up the trail and returned to our rooms for a little break before dinner.

The dinner bell rang, and we gathered for a great meal, followed by updating the species checklist before retiring to get some rest as we were going to be up a little earlier in the morning.

## **Thurs., Feb. 15                      Rancho Naturalista Grounds | Angostura Lagoon**

Most of the group gathered at 5:30 AM at a location where there was a small open sided shelter with a light and vertical sheet hung in the middle. The light was turned on at night to attract insects which would land on the sheets for closer inspection. At first light birds would come in to see what tasty morsels they could glean from the sheets. Unfortunately, the light had been turned off sometime during the night and there were no insects when we arrived, but all was not lost as the birds that regularly show up to this insect station still came to investigate. Brown Jays were hanging out close by but stayed away as apparently there weren't enough insects to entice them to come in. This was a good thing and allowed some smaller species to come in close. Orange-billed Sparrow, Chestnut-capped Warbler and Golden-crowned Warbler all came in and stuck around long enough for us to get good views. There were also Rufous Motmots calling but not within view. We then returned for breakfast before heading back out on the grounds to see what we could find.

We started by heading back up the first trail we had taken the day before. Johan was looking for a specific bird, a male Lovely Cotinga, and the open area we had visited was the place to see it. As we scanned in all directions looking for it, there were several birds moving around in the top of a tall conifer not too far away. We got the scopes on the birds to find Tropical Kingbirds and Social Flycatchers. Then a Black-crowned Tityra, followed by three Scarlet-thighed Dacnis. As we were marveling at the variety of the birds that were in the top of the tree, it



appeared, the Lovely Cotinga! It landed in the same tree. We got it in the scopes as quickly as possible for folks to look before it flew. What a gorgeous bird. It did eventually fly away out of sight, so we headed back down the hill to see what else we could find. We came off the trail and started down the entrance road where there was lots of bird activity. A light rain had started to fall so Armando came to the rescue with the bus and took us to another lodge on the property where we scanned rows of Verbena shrubs for new hummingbird species. We were in luck as Garden Emerald, Snowcap, and Black-crested Coquette were all present. As we enjoyed the hummingbirds and some Golden-hooded Tanagers nearby, a Black-cowled Oriole appeared which was another new bird for the trip. We eventually said goodbye to the hummers and Armando took us back up the hill so we could take a little break before lunch.

After another scrumptious meal, we took another short break before we loaded up on the bus to go to Angostura Lagoon about 40 minutes away, to look for some wetland bird species. There was a light rain when we arrived, so we broke out the umbrellas to provide some shelter as we scanned the wetland with the spotting scopes. Some of the first birds seen were some Blue-winged Teal fairly close and some Snail Kites further out in the wetland. A Purple Gallinule was seen walking along the water's edge before disappearing into vegetation, only to be replaced by its cousin the Common Gallinule. Northern Jacanas were seen fairly close, and a flock of Black-bellied Whistling Ducks made a flyby. Johan picked out a Limpkin standing in some taller vegetation and then he spotted a Wilson's Snipe as well. Further out there were several Neotropic Cormorants perched in trees along with some Anhingas and Great and Snowy Egrets standing in the water looking for a meal. It was getting late in the day and we had one more place that we wanted to visit before returning to Rancho Naturalista, so we got back on the bus and headed to our next destination.

We drove for about 40 minutes to the small community of Platanillo where we got out to search a section of a small stream that ran through town. Our target bird was a Sunbittern. We began looking downstream of a bridge that crossed the stream. There were a couple of Torrent Tyrannulets and a Black Phoebe on rocks in the stream and lots of Northern Rough-winged Swallows flying above it, but no Sunbittern. After looking for about 15 minutes, we returned to the bridge. Johan then set up his scope upstream of the bridge on a branch that extended out over the stream, and in his scope was a Sunbittern sitting on a nest. A nice way to cap off a very productive day.

We returned to Rancho Naturalista just in time for dinner. After another fabulous meal we updated the species checklist and then went to our rooms to pack our things as we would be moving on in the morning.



**Fri., Feb. 16**

## **Guayabo National Monument | Paraiso de Quetzales | Trogon Lodge**

We had an early breakfast this morning, packed up our things and said goodbye to the great folks at Rancho Naturalista. It was about 1 ½ hours to our first stop of the day near Turrialba, Guayabo National Monument, so we settled in and enjoyed the scenery along the way. Once there, we met our guide and then set off on an hour-plus tour through the ruins of this pre-Columbian site. Stone foundations of raised mounds for homes and other buildings and cobblestone walkways and roads lay in a clearing in the forest, along with aqueducts, some of which are still working. In another area under the canopy of the forest are petroglyphs and open tombs. After thanking our guide for a very informative tour of the site, we loaded back onto the bus to head to Paraiso de Quetzales where we would be eating lunch.

Upon arrival at the restaurant, we headed outside to check out the hummingbird feeders while our meals were being prepared. Five species were awaiting us - Lesser Violetear, Talamanca Hummingbird, Fiery-throated Hummingbird, White-throated Mountain-Gem, and Volcano Hummingbird, all of which were oblivious to our presence. We enjoyed them until our food was ready and then returned inside. Once we had finished, we started to explore the grounds nearby for birds, but we didn't make it very far before Johan heard a familiar call. He thought he was hearing a Resplendent Quetzal, and he was correct! In some trees on a hillside above us we could see a male and a female. As we approached closer, we discovered two more perched in the same group of trees. We couldn't believe our luck. Everyone got good looks through the scopes then we headed back to the bus as the clouds moved in around us. It was then on to where we would be staying for the next two nights, Trogon Lodge.

About thirty minutes later we turned off of the Pan-American Highway and entered the Savegre Valley, slowly working our way down a winding road until we came to the entrance road to the Trogon Lodge. We were still talking about the quetzals as we crossed a small bridge at the edge of the property when Patricia announced, 'There's one!' Armando stopped the bus and we all turned to look at a male perched in a tree not far away. We then saw why he was there. There was a female on another tree working on expanding a hole for a nesting site. There was a bit of sunshine now, so the birds' beautiful colors were revealed. Resplendent indeed! The female moved from the nest site and the male replaced her and began to do a little excavating himself. We were all a little gobsommed as to the beauty of this fantastic bird and our good fortune to have seen so many. We eventually tore ourselves away so we could get checked into our rooms.





After a break, we gathered to update the species checklist and then headed to the restaurant on site for dinner. There were so many wonderful sights and sounds during this day, everyone was beaming while they enjoyed their meal. Then it was off to bed with possibly visions of a few quetzals dancing around in our heads.

## **Sat., Feb. 17**                      **Savegre Mountain Lodge | Miriam's Restaurant**

Most of the group gathered for a pre-breakfast walk around the grounds of the lodge. Rufous-collared Sparrows had served as alarm clocks for some this morning, and they were not in short supply as we walked around. Large-footed Finches were seen hopping around on the ground and we had good looks at a male Flame-throated Tanager too before returning for breakfast.

After finishing breakfast, we loaded onto the bus for a short drive further down the valley to the Savegre Lodge, where we were going to take a hike on one of the trails on the property. When we arrived, there were a couple of 4x4 vehicles waiting to transport us up a rather steep hillside to where we would be starting our hike. We unloaded at the dropoff point and got ready to start down the trail, but before doing so we headed a little further up to see if we could locate an owl - a Costa Rican Pygmy-Owl that is. We stopped to look and listen for a bit with our eyes focused on a couple of holes about halfway up the trunk of a large tree. Then Johan briefly played the pygmy-owl's song, and we immediately heard a response. A bird flew in and entered one of the holes. We waited for it to reemerge, which it did in short order by coming to the top of the cavity and stopping in the opening to peer out. It began to sing its double 'toot toot' repeatedly and we heard what its mate was presumably responding nearby. We decided to move, but what a nice treat to start our walk.

We started our way down the road we came up on and got some better looks at a family of Acorn Woodpeckers that we had seen when we had first been dropped off. The song of a Black-faced Solitaire seemed to be ever present as we walked, making an already lovely morning even better. We then came across a mixed flock of birds that included Wilson's Warbler, Collared Redstart and Flame-throated Warbler. These very active birds were busy gleaning whatever insects they could find on the leaves and branches of trees and shrubs, making it a bit challenging to get good looks, but we managed, nonetheless. We continued on to a point where we exited the road and got on to a trail that would take us further down the hillside. As we walked, we continued to encounter small mixed flocks of birds, often with the three species mentioned above and the addition at times of a Ruddy Treerunner and Black-cheeked Warbler. Spotted Barbtail and Buffy Tuftedcheek were also seen and at least two Resplendent Quetzals were heard calling along the way. We eventually came back out at the road and there we waited for our ride back down to the restaurant where we would be eating lunch. After a wonderful meal, we loaded back on the bus to return to Trogon Lodge for a little break.



Just as we got back to our rooms at Trogon Lodge the skies opened up and it looked like our birding for the day might come to an end. But just before we were to meet to load up on the bus again, the rain stopped, and the sun even peeked out a little. We then headed back up the winding road we came in on to Miriam's Restaurant, which has hummingbird feeders and a fruit feeding station just off a little deck area on the backside of their building. There was another birding group there when we arrived, so we all shared the space on the deck together and enjoyed the sights and sounds and some beverages. All five expected hummingbirds (Lesser Violetear, Talamanca, Fiery-throated, White-throated Mountain-Gem, and Volcano) were present, plus several Flame-throated and Blue-gray Tanagers. There were a couple of Sooty-capped Chlorospingus hanging out in some shrubs eating berries, a Yellow-thighed Brushfinch, a Hairy and Acorn Woodpecker at the platform feeder, and a pair of Golden-browed Chlorophonias feeding in some shrubs below the platform. Daylight was fading so we loaded onto the bus again to ride back down to the lodge.

Back at the lodge we took a short break before gathering to do one last species checklist as a group and then for our last group meal as tomorrow the tour would be coming to an end for most of the group. It had been a wonderful seven days with great scenery, accommodations, and food, and there had been good diversity among the wildlife seen, in particular birds.

## **Sun., Feb. 18                      Departures**

We gathered for breakfast then loaded onto the bus to drive back up the winding road and out of the Savegre Valley. Once we were back on the Pan-American Highway, we settled in, watching the countryside roll by and for those of us that would be leaving this day, recounting all the things we had seen and experienced during the past week. Margaret and Ron would be continuing on the Pacific Coast Extension with Johan, while Deborah and Nels and Karen and Jim would be doing their own extensions in-country. It wasn't long and we were back at the airport. Those that had flights said goodbye, Margaret, Ron and Johan switched to another vehicle, and Armando took the rest to their next destination. It had been another great visit to Costa Rica and to everyone, Pura Vida!

**A BIG THANK YOU TO JOHAN FOR PUTTING US ON SOME GREAT BIRDS AND TO ARMANDO FOR GETTING US TO ALL OF OUR DESTINATIONS SAFELY!**

*Photos: Group Photo (Kent Skaggs\_KS), Flame-colored Tanager (KS), Crowned Woodnymph (KS), Resplendent Quetzal (KS), Silver-throated Tanager (KS), Fiery-throated Hummingbird (KS), Blue Morpho Butterfly (KS), Hotel Bougainvillea (KS), La Paz Waterfall (KS), Red-legged Honeycreeper (KS), Blue-gray Tanager (KS), Squirrel Cuckoo (KS), Crimson-collard Tanager (Peter & Elizabeth Korpál - PEK), Red-headed Barbet (PEK), Hoffmann's Two-toed Sloth (Johan Fernandez - JF), Common Pauraque (JF), Blue Morpho (Nels Magnuson), Group Birding (KS), Slaty-tailed Trogon (PEK), American Crocodile (KS), Sarapiquí River, (KS), Beehive Ginger (KS), Rancho Naturalista (KS), Keel-billed Toucan (PEK), Snail Kite (Leann Cranson - LC), Poro Tree (KS), Red Vein Indian Mallow (KS), Guayabo National Monument (KS), View from Rancho Naturalista (KS), Fiery-throated Hummingbird (KS), Long-tailed Silky-flycatcher (PEK), Resplendent Quetzal (KS), Talamanca Hummingbird (KS), Costa Rican Pygmy-Owl (KS), Forest trail above Sevegre Mt. Lodge (KS), Sunset over Ensenada Lodge (Margaret Snell), Sooty-capped Chlorospingus (KS)*