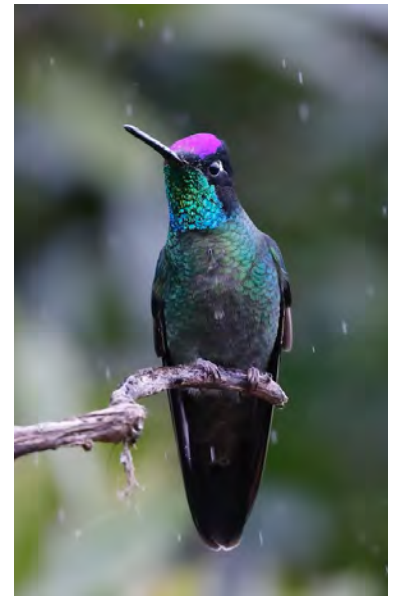


Costa Rica: Birds & Nature | Jan. 5-12, 2025 w/ Pacific Coast Ext. – Jan. 12-16, 2025 Trip Report by Rick Weiman



Guides: NJ host Rick Weiman, local guide Johan and driver Mauricio
Participants: Julia, Dana, Damon, Jennifer, Robert, Nancy, Kay R.,
Suratha, David, and Kay W. (also answers to Kat 😊)



Sun., Jan. 5: Arrivals in Costa Rica

Today was arrival day. Host Rick and 5 clients had arrived the previous day and were dropped off at the Hilton Doubletree only 10 minutes from the airport. After breakfast, the group decided to visit the 10-acre gardens of the nearby Hotel Bougainvillea, which Rick was familiar with from past tours. One of the highlights was a sleepy Mottled Owl perched in a large stand of bamboo. There have been a pair present there for several years now. A reliable Lesson's Motmot pair soon made an appearance as did a flock of Brown Jays, several Baltimore Orioles, a male Rose-breasted Grosbeak, and a Philadelphia Vireo. All in all, the group observed 17 species during their visit of which two (the owl and the grosbeak) that ended up being unique to the tour. The rest of the group

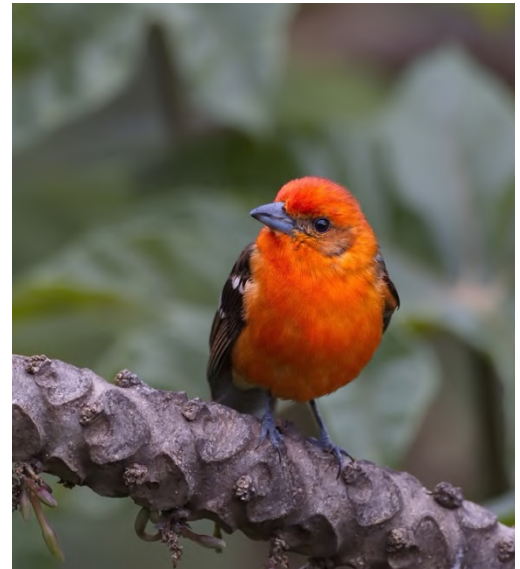


arrived in the mid-afternoon, most on time or close to it despite a winter storm heading towards the northeast US. Prior to dinner, the group met for introductions and cocktails and our local guide, Johan, gave us an orientation talk of what to expect on the tour. We then had dinner in the hotel restaurant and retired to our rooms, excited for the official start of the tour tomorrow morning.

Mon., Jan. 6: Talamanca Mountains | Paraiso Quetzal Lodge | Savegre Valley

After a buffet breakfast at the hotel, we loaded up our spacious Coaster bus and met our driver Mauricio who would be with us for the entire main tour. After skirting San Jose traffic, we stopped in Cartago and visited Our Lady of the Angels Basilica before starting our drive up the Cerro de la Muerte and the Talamanca mountains cloud forest. We made a stop at about 5,000 feet elevation at an area known as Palo Verde. Johan knew of some hummingbirds that frequented the vervain flowers there and, before long, we had good views of the endemic Coppery-headed Emerald as well as several Blue-vented Hummingbirds. A pair of Long-tailed Silky-flycatchers were observed eating berries and an immature Summer Tanager and a male Baltimore Oriole shared a tree branch together, perhaps discussing whether they really needed to migrate north in the spring. We continued up the mountain road and before long we had reached the summit at 9,865 feet. As we started our descent down, we made a stop at Paraiso Quetzal, a restaurant and lodge with lovely flower filled gardens and an observation deck overlooking the valley with half a dozen nectar feeders. The feeders were a bustle of activity, with Lesser Violetear, Talamanca and Volcano Hummingbirds, and Fiery-throated and White-throated Mountain-gems, all battling for prime positions. After a delicious hot lunch, we walked the garden trails and added Slaty Flowerpiercer, Large-footed Finch, and a pair of dazzling Golden-browed Chlorophonias.

A short stop, known as Kilometer 71, resulted in a pair of Timberline Wrens responding to our recording and several of us got quick looks at them. A brightly colored male Black-throated Green Warbler was found feeding among some epiphytes, and Damon noticed a Flame-throated Warbler high up in the canopy. It was then time to head to our new lodgings for the next two days, the Savegre Lodge, and check-in, but as we got near, we noticed a group of birders along the road and discovered they had a male Resplendent Quetzal in view. After locating the partially obscured bird, a female showed up and they were soon interacting and flying from branch to branch, giving us nice views of both birds. With all the Quetzal excitement, a Black Guan was missed by



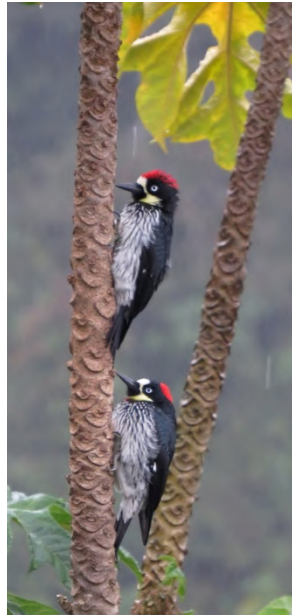
several of us but luckily was seen by others in the group. Also found in the canopy was a cooperative Collared Redstart and a singing Black-faced Solitaire.

We checked in to our individual cabins and, after a short rest, met at the bar to complete our first species checklist of the trip, followed by dinner, then retiring for the evening after an eventful first full day!

Tues., Jan. 7: Savegre Reserve | Miriam's Quetzal Restaurant

The group rose early and all of us participated in the optional 6:00 AM bird walk on the grounds and nearby road along the Savegre River. At the lodge's fruit and nectar feeder station, we had a pair of Silver-throated Tanagers and several of the same hummingbirds seen the day before. During our morning walk, we had our first Stripe-tailed Hummingbird feeding in some roadside flowers. Other new birds were a perched and singing Mountain Elaenia, a Spot-crowned Woodcreeper, several Mountain Thrushes, and at least three Torrent Tyrannulets foraging on exposed rocks in the river. A Louisiana Waterthrush was also spotted on a river rock by Jen and we added our first Yellow-thighed Brushfinch and Flame-colored Tanager of the tour.

After a filling buffet breakfast, we visited the nearby Savegre Reserve to hike some trails high above the Savegre Lodge. We hopped into two 4x4 vehicles that drove us up the steep hillside a few miles for our hike down. We started birding immediately after exiting the vehicles and one of the first was a life bird for Rick, a Golden-throated Flycatcher. He quickly found out that when Johan helps a Naturalist Journeys guide get a lifer you owe him a beer. Let's just say Johan drank well on this tour. We then headed down the La Quebrada Trail into the forest. Interestingly, one of the most common birds observed were multiple over-wintering Wilson's Warblers. We had the good fortune of running into several mixed flocks on our descent that included Ruddy Treerunners, Spangle-Cheeked Tanagers, Collared Redstarts, and Black-cheeked and Flame-throated Warblers. Our 3-mile hike down the relatively pristine montane forest on winding, well groomed trails continued as we passed over creeks and bridges and several small waterfalls. We even witnessed clouds floating through the forest canopy, then dissipating as their moisture was absorbed by the bromeliads, mosses, and aerial plants that depend on them. One of our last new birds was a diminutive Tufted Flycatcher sallying from tree to tree high in the treetops. In all 28 species of birds were tallied.



After a short break and then a delicious lunch at the lodge, we departed up the mountain road to Miriam's Quetzal Restaurant to spend time on its back deck, which had fruit and nectar feeder stations. The deck had a roof top which was very useful, as our first light rain of the tour started to fall. We spent 2 hours there enjoying coffee and fruit-flavored teas in addition to the bird activity, adding several new birds such as Sooty Thrush, Yellow-bellied Siskin, Blue-gray Tanager, and Band-tailed Pigeon. Our by now well-known hummingbirds were also present including five species previously seen on the tour. One of the highlights was seeing half a dozen Flame-colored Tanagers, including several glowing orange males, joined at the feeding station by a small flock of Acorn Woodpeckers. Several Red-tailed Squirrels also enjoyed the fresh bananas while Yellow-thighed Brushfinches and Large-footed Finches fed on the seeds spread out under the fruit feeders.

Then it was time to head back to the lodge, complete our checklist for the day over cocktails and enjoy another delicious dinner in good company. Rainbow Trout is farmed here in the clear mountain waters of the Savegre River, and many of us enjoyed the freshest trout dinner on the planet.

Wed., Jan. 8: Savegre Valley | Savegre Reserve | Rancho Naturalista

Today was departure day for our next destination and we all admitted this was indeed a difficult place to leave. We were fortunate enough to have seen several quetzals during this high elevation stretch of the tour and it was evident that the local people realize the importance of the quetzals to tourism and many forests have been conserved due to their presence. After breakfast, we departed up the mountain road but made a quick roadside stop to search for the elusive Wrenthrush - a unique small dark bird with a yellow-orange crown that resides in its own family of birds (*Zeledoniidae*). Johan played its recorded song and soon half the group were able to get quick looks at the bird along with a Grey-breasted Wood Wren, as both played hide and seek with us in a dark tangle of vines and leaves.

To break up the drive and also have a bathroom break, we stopped at a small organic coffee farm called Café Cristina where we sampled and purchased some freshly ground local coffee after getting an explanation of the coffee growing, harvesting, and roasting process from Cristina. Our next stop was La Casona del Cafetal which had a lovely restaurant on the shore of Lake Cachi in the beautiful Cachi Valley. We dined outdoors, trying hard



not to focus on the birds in the garden. After lunch, we spotted Great and Snowy Egrets, a Pied-billed Grebe in the lake, as well as several Collared Aracaris and a Ringed Kingfisher. Johan played a Ferruginous Pygmy Owl call which got the attention of multiple birds that popped into view including Common Tody-Flycatcher, Tropical Parula, Scarlet-rumped Tanagers, Yellow-bellied and Mountain Elaenias, and a male American Redstart, among many others. In all, 47 species were observed during our stop there!

Upon arrival at Rancho Naturalista and after a quick visit to our rooms, we headed for the famous veranda overlooking the garden and banana and hummingbird feeding stations. White-necked Jacobins, Green-breasted Mango hummingbirds, and dazzling purple and green Crowned Woodnymphs all jockeyed for position at the nectar feeders only a few feet away from us. Feeding on the vervain flowers in the garden were several colorful butterflies, Rufous-tailed Hummingbirds, and a diminutive Stripe-throated Hermit. At the banana station, a male Summer Tanager and several Brown Jays made an appearance as a Black-striped Sparrow foraged below. We watched the birds until the sun set and the dinner bell rang and then enjoyed a delicious family style Costa Rican meal followed by tallying our growing species list in the comfortable lounge area.

Thurs., Jan. 9: Rancho Naturalista

We awoke early, anxious to bird the veranda at first light. Those that arrived before 6:00 were rewarded with a Lesson's Motmot visiting the banana feeder station and a gathering of twenty Gray-headed Chachalacas. We enjoyed coffee with the birds and added several new ones including Violet Sabrewing, Black-cheeked Woodpecker, and Bronze-tailed Plumeleteer. The bananas were almost gone by the time the breakfast bell rang as more chachalacas, Brown Jays, Red-Billed Pigeons, and Montezuma Oropendolas descended on the garden. A Variegated Squirrel and Central American Agouti also joined in the feast.

After breakfast we hiked one of the main rainforest trails and Johan soon heard a Dull-Mantled Antbird and was able to call it close enough for most of us to get a decent view. Other birds in the forest that were added to our list were Olive-backed Euphonia, White-breasted Wood Wren, and Lesser Greenlet. The trail led to a field that we shared with some local cows and the wide-open views allowed us to locate birds more easily. One of the most beautiful was the male Scarlet-thighed Dacnis, with brilliant hues of blue and turquoise. Several Golden-hooded Tanagers competed with the dacnis for the most stunning bird of the morning. Others observed in the field were Bay-headed Tanagers, Green Honeycreepers, and Buff-throated and Black-headed Saltators. After the



hike, some of us spent a half hour on the veranda before lunch and were joined by a brilliant male Snowcap hummingbird in the vervain flowers - the bird that many come to Rancho Naturalista to try and add to their life-list.

After lunch, some of the group took a break while others headed back to the veranda in the hopes of finding the Snowcap they had missed earlier. Just as Jen and Damon arrived with their new Rancho Naturalista Snowcap shirts, a perfectly timed male Snowcap arrived and there was much rejoicing. Thanks to a tip from a local guide, we then took a short ride in the bus to the Platanillo River and added Sunbittern to our list after we found one patiently hunting along the river's edge near some rapids. We made several more stops in the area and added a cooperative perched Gray Hawk, a Northern-barred Woodcreeper, and a Tawny-capped Euphonia. After dinner, several of us participated in a night walk into the forest with Johan where we found several very cool insects, including a large Orange-kneed Tarantula, several Whiptail Scorpions, a large Orb Spider, as well as a cooperative and photogenic Slim-fingered Rain Frog.

Fri., Jan. 10: Rancho Naturalista | Angostura Lake | Guayabo National Monument | Pierella Ecological Garden

Our final early morning on the veranda of the lodge gave us many of the same birds we'd seen previously, but early arrivers were rewarded with a visit from a pair of Golden-browed Chlorophonias, a Green Hermit, and a singing Bay Wren. The Lesson's Motmot and a male and female Snowcap also made an appearance as did a Tayra - a large black-colored member of the weasel family - who made several visits to the banana station. After breakfast, we departed to the good-bye waves of the entire staff lined up outside the main lodge as the bus drove down the hill towards the main road.

Our next stop was at Angostura Lagoon where we quickly picked up many new birds in a very short time. Our first exciting find was a Bare-throated Tiger-Heron stalking prey near a Great Egret. We added Amazon Kingfisher, Anhinga, Purple Gallinule, Neotropical Cormorant, and many more wetland species to the list. Several ducks also flew in including a flock of Black-bellied Whistling Ducks, some Lesser Scaups, and a Blue-Winged Teal. Perched in trees along the edge of the lake were Yellow-crowned Night Herons, a Roadside Hawk, a flock of Groove-billed Anis, and a lone Wood Stork.



From the lake, we drove to the archeological site at Guayabo National Monument, where we walked the trails with a park guide learning about the history of the indigenous people that once lived there. The site is an archeological marvel that was discovered when the area was being cleared for **coffee and cattle plantations** in the late 1800's. At its peak, around 10,000 people lived in this ancient city. It is believed that the first settlers came here around 1000 BC and had created a bustling city by 800 AD. As to why they all disappeared, it is still not known. Birds were there too, and we had nice looks at our first Keel-billed Toucan of the trip and nearby on another branch, a large Crested Guan with its red throat showing. Other new birds we tallied were a pair of Zeledon's Antbirds, a Band-backed and a Stripe-breasted Wren, and a White-ruffed Manakin. We enjoyed a box lunch from Rancho Naturalista in the park and then departed Guayabo for a long drive to the Caribbean lowlands. During the journey, our driver Mauricio spotted a mammal we all had been hoping to see; our first sloth of the trip. And not just one, but three Brown-throated Three-toed Sloths in the same Cecropia tree, including a mother and her baby! Before reaching our final destination, the Selva Verde lodge and it's 500 acres of preserved tropical forest, we visited the Pierella Ecological Garden. We enjoyed some fresh coffee and their banana feeding station which was loaded with birds. At least a dozen Blue-gray Tanagers along with all 3 species of honeycreepers and a Yellow-throated Toucan were at the feeders. We walked the garden and also had good looks at a small troop of Mantled Howler Monkeys. The garden staff raises butterflies for export and also to release back into the wild, so we walked into a netted enclosure filled with hundreds of native butterflies of several species including Blue Morphos and large Owl Butterflies. Many pictures were taken as they landed and posed on our shoulders, heads, and hats. Before leaving, we enjoyed a presentation on how chocolate is made from cacao pods and several of us got to participate in the process by grinding dried beans with a hand-grinding device. Of course, fresh dark chocolate was sampled, and souvenirs and more coffee were purchased for the folks back home.

After a short drive, we then checked into our next accommodations at the expansive Selva Verde Lodge, and after a rest, met for our species checklist and another excellent dinner - this time a full buffet style meal.

Sat., Jan. 11: La Selva Biological Station | Sarapiquí River Boat Tour

This morning was another early one as most of us met at the fruit feeding station at the lodge restaurant around 6:00 AM. The feeding station was loaded with fresh fruit - mostly papaya and bananas - and this is where the



brilliant colors of the Costa Rican birds put on a show. The Red-legged, Green, and Shining Honeycreepers made the first impression with their brilliant blue, turquoise and green colors, followed by several stunning tanagers - Crimson-collared, Scarlet-rumped, and Golden-hooded - that all rotated through the station for us. Time for a splash of additional color as several visiting Baltimore Orioles and a horde of Blue-gray Tanagers arrived. More excitement followed as some Scarlet-rumped Caciques, Collared Aracari's, and the star of the show a Yellow-throated Toucan showed up, sending the smaller birds in the vicinity fleeing into the forest. We grabbed our plates and coffee from the breakfast buffet and continued to enjoy the birds during our meal.

After breakfast we departed for a 20-minute ride to the La Selva Biological Station where we would spend the entire morning. La Selva is operated by The Organization for Tropical Studies, working on education, conservation, ecotourism, and research. Scientists and students from all over the world visit La Selva every year to work on projects related to biodiversity, forest dynamics, nutrient cycling, native species reforestation, and carbon sequestering. It is known as one of the world's most important sites for tropical ecosystem research, holding over 450 bird species and 70 species of bats.

We were excited to explore its 1600 acres of tropical forest, and upon our arrival we met Octavio, one of the local reserve guides and immediately began birding in the open garden trails. Birds were plentiful and at the start of our walk, an endangered Great Green Macaw flew by. Per Johan, there are only around 800 of these birds left in Costa Rica, but efforts are underway to restore their population. A short distance away from the visitor center, two Laughing Falcons flew in and perched near us for wonderful views. As we walked, we added bird after bird; Fasciated Antshrike, White-ruffed Manakin, Chestnut-backed Antbird, and Black-cowled Oriole were all new to our list. Octavio found us a sleeping Great Potoo just off the trail, looking like the extension of a large dead branch, and a group of ten Honduran White Bats curled up together inside a large leaf. We crossed a foot bridge over a creek and spent some time observing more sloths, including a Hoffman's Two-toed, and a troop of Mantled Howler Monkeys. At another stop on the far side of the Sarapiquí River, we had a distant King Vulture and a perched Bat Falcon. After the walk, Rick bought the group some ice cream from the gift shop to help cool everyone off. In all, we ended up with 54 species during our amazing walk at La Selva.

After lunch back at the lodge, our next big adventure was an afternoon boat trip on the Sarapiquí River with a young Captain Daniel. It was a pleasant afternoon with party cloudy skies as we arrived. The boat trip was scheduled for 3 hours and as soon as we started off, we were counting new birds rapidly. Mangrove and Southern Rough-winged Swallows were gliding over the river, occasionally plopping in flight for a dip or quick



drink. Also, we spotted some reptiles as a Spectacled Caiman, Black River Turtle, an American Crocodile, and a pair of Emerald Basilisks were all viewed through our binoculars resting on the riverbanks and logs. More new birds appeared as we traversed our way downstream including Green Kingfishers, various herons and egrets, a Slaty-tailed Trogon, and a pair of White-fronted Nunbirds. Toward the end of the tour, we had a flock of Black-faced Grosbeaks and several new woodpeckers, including Smoky-brown, Cinnamon, and Rufous-winged. In all, we had 36 species on this rewarding trip on the river.

It was then back to the lodge for a rest, our final species list of the tour, an early night walk where Johan found us a few Red-eyed Tree Frogs, followed by another delicious buffet dinner. During our checklist, we shared favorite memories and birds of the tour. There was no clear bird winner as most everyone had their own unique choice. Violet Sabrewing, Montezuma Oropendola, Lesson's Momot, several different trogons, Snowcap hummingbird, and Sunbittern were just some of the favorites. Julia couldn't pick just one, so she went with all the colorful tanagers we saw. Rancho Naturalista was voted unanimously as not only the favorite lodge, but also spending time on the veranda and trails while there was most people's favorite experience of the tour.

Sun., Jan. 12: Selva Verde Lodge | Soda Cinchona Mirador | Departures

Our planned early morning walk got kiboshed by some light rain, but no worries, most of us were happy to sit at the feeder station with our coffee until the 7:00 breakfast bell rang. Many of the same hungry birds were there as the day before and it was a joy to see a line-up of brilliant color represented – the bright blue of the male Blue Dacnis next to the brilliant orange of the male Baltimore Oriole, the red of the Crimson-collared and Scarlet-rumped Tanagers, and the turquoise of a male Green Honeycreeper and so on, just too many to name. A White-tailed Deer strolled through and chomped on some banana peels, exciting the local guides as it is apparently a rare sighting here in Costa Rica. Right before breakfast, a Keel-billed Toucan and four Collared Aracari's joined the party.

We loaded up the van with our luggage, but we were not done yet, as we stopped at a restaurant near Alajuela called Soda Cinchona Miradora. They had a small fruit feeding station and several hummingbird feeders overlooking a picturesque valley and the distant San Fernando waterfall. It was amazingly productive, and we could barely pull ourselves away from the feeders to sip our fresh fruit juices. We added multiple new birds for



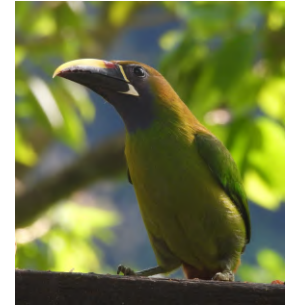
the tour including four Northern Emerald-Toucanets, a Common Chlorospingus, Black-bellied Hummingbirds, three Pronged-billed Barbets, and a White-bellied Mountain-gem. In all, our lunch stop gave us 18 bird species with a surprising 7 new birds for the tour. We then drove up the road for a quick photo stop at the La Paz waterfall before returning to the San Jose airport to say good-bye to our new friends. Seven of the group were sadly heading for home while Robert, Nancy, Kay R. and Rick were continuing on with our guide Johan for the Pacific Coast extension part of the tour. We ended the main segment of the tour with an impressive 235 species of birds either seen or heard by some of the group.

PACIFIC COAST EXTENSION

Sun., Jan. 12: Ensenada Lodge | Gulf of Nicoya | Sunset Tractor Tour

Johan, Rick, Nancy, Robert & Kay continued onward to the Pacific coast of Costa Rica for a 4-day private extension. We said good-bye to Mauricio and switched from the coaster bus to a rented Mercedes Benz van with Johan at the wheel. During our drive west we stopped along the way for lunch and then continued on towards the Ensenada Lodge in Manzanillo directly on the Gulf of Nicoya. Along the way, we spotted several Double-striped Thick-knees - a large shorebird that is active mostly at night - resting in a field. Upon arrival at the lodge, we settled into our cabins and explored the grounds. The Tretti family owns the lodge and the surrounding 800-acre farm that is dedicated to cattle, horses, and also the production of salt. The farm has been reforested by the family from past destructive cattle farming practices and now more than 30% of the farm is forest covered. Near the border of the property on the gulf are sections of mangrove forest as well. A walk down to the overlook resulted in us finding hundreds of shorebirds roosting in the mangrove roots during the high tide - mostly Semipalmated and Western Sandpipers. Magnificent Frigatebirds and Brown Pelicans soared over the gulf while a distant sand bar had over a dozen Little Blue Herons feeding near it.

Around 3:30 we hopped into a large comfortable wagon attached to a tractor and were pulled through the surrounding farmland, past grazing cattle and horses with their obligatory flocks of Western Cattle Egrets, with birding stops along the way. We passed a perched Common Black Hawk and a Laughing Falcon and also flushed a Broad-winged Hawk. Some new birds for the extension were Canivet's Emerald, White-lored Gnatcatcher, a beautiful Turquoise-browed Motmot, and several Brown-crested Flycatchers. We came to the salt pond area where fresh salt is extracted and processed from the surrounding waters. Here were hundreds of shorebirds, herons and egrets, including a Wilson's Plover, many Whimbrel, Black-bellied Plovers, Black-necked Stilts, and



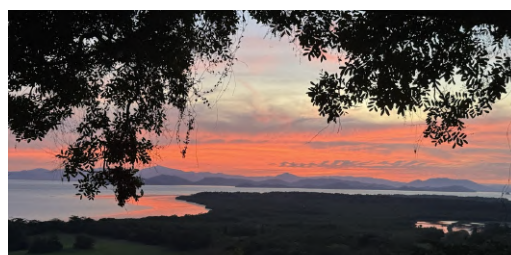
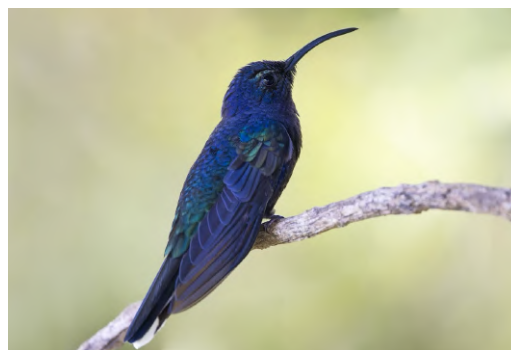
large flocks of sandpipers. Johan had one more surprise in store and the tractor started climbing up a steep winding trail to a beautiful overlook with 360-degree views of the bay and surrounding mangroves, fields, and forest. We enjoyed a beautiful golden pink sunset over the gulf while enjoying wine and cheese and, for some of us, a refreshingly cold Imperial beer. Then it was back to the lodge for our checklist in the dining area followed by another spectacular meal. As we dined, the local house cats sat under our table for scraps while a small Hooded Skunk walked by, fortunately totally ignoring us as it searched for a meal in the grass. During the night a few of us were briefly awakened by the calls of a Pacific Screech Owl.

Mon., Jan. 13: Ensenada Lodge | Mangrove Boat Tour | Tarcoles Birding Lodge

This morning, we arose for an early walk on the property, through fields filled with Brahman cattle and Western Cattle Egrets. We quickly added Inca and Common Ground Doves to our list as well as several Streak-backed and Spot-breasted Orioles. We heard the calls of Ferruginous Pygmy Owls and Long-billed Gnatwrens, and a bit later had one of the diminutive owls in view. We soon had several Rose-throated Becards foraging above us and scope views of perched Crested and Yellow-headed Caracaras. One last new bird for the morning was added when some Scrub Euphonias flew in as we walked back to the lodge.

After breakfast we had time to pack and take a short break. Rick and Kay took advantage of the sunshine and took a dip in the pool while Robert and Nancy walked to the edge of the property and the shaded gazebo overlooking the gulf.

A short time later we walked down a trail to the dock and boarded our boat for a tour of the mangroves surrounding the edge of the gulf. It was low tide, so we had to take a circuitous route into the open gulf to reach the mangroves. During the ride, we passed sandbars loaded with Royal and Sandwich Terns, Laughing Gulls, a pair of Franklin's Gulls, and several Marbled Godwits. On a jetty, Johan spotted two Surf-birds with some Least Sandpipers. Black-bellied Plover, Whimbrels, and Short-billed Dowitchers were other shorebirds we passed by. Once in the mangroves, we slowed the boat down and glided through the calm waters in search of several target birds. Before long we had a pair of Mangrove Hummingbirds calling and perching for nice views, followed by a Mangrove Cuckoo pair that answered Johan's recording and flew across the channel. We also



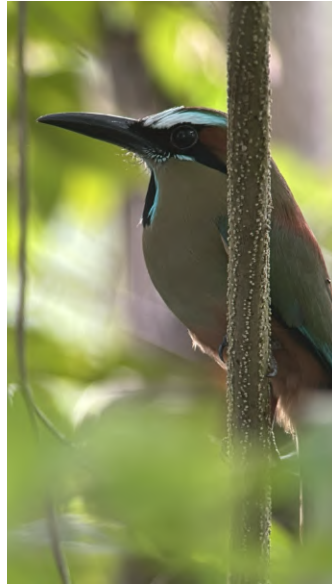
observed a Roseate Spoonbill flying overhead, and many Neotropical Cormorants, herons and egrets, and over 60 Brown Pelicans. We came across a local walking in the mangroves, half-covered in mud, and found out he was hunting for clams. He had quite a haul in his bag, so we purchased some from him as he stood in waist-deep water next to the boat for the transaction. Once back at the lodge, the chef was kind enough to sauté them for us and add them to our lunch menu.

We then loaded up the van and drove south for our next adventure in the town of Tarcoles. During the drive, we spotted a Black-headed Trogon, more Double-striped Thick Knees, and a male Blue Grosbeak. We arrived at the Tarcoles Birding Hotel in the late afternoon and checked into our spacious rooms and home for the next 2 nights. This lodge had only been built a few years ago so everything in the rooms seemed brand new. Kay and Rick decided to head to the look-out tower that had a view of the forested valley and the Pacific Ocean in the distance. There were White-throated Capuchin Monkeys in the trees, several Hoffman's Woodpeckers, and a Little Tinamou calling loudly from the forest. Below us, several Stripe-headed Sparrows popped up and a Yellow-naped Amazon flew by, adding three new birds and a new mammal to our checklist. Up the hill, in the main dining area, we enjoyed a cold Imperial while completing our checklist, followed by dinner and then retiring to our air-conditioned cabins as a Common Pauraque called, thankfully only briefly.

Tues., Jan. 14: Carara National Park | Crocodile Boat Tour at Guanacillo Mangroves

Before breakfast, most of the group took a short drive for some roadside birding. Shortly after stepping outside of the van, Johan spotted a lone Firey-billed Aracari high up in a tree - an exciting way to start our day. We quickly added Orange-fronted Parakeets, a Yellow-olive Flatbill, Brown-crested, Dusky-capped, Streaked Flycatchers, and a Prothonotary Warbler. As we walked up the road, a pair of Scarlet Macaws (another target bird of the extension) flew into a nearby tree and we watched them feeding on nuts as their colors shined brilliantly in the early morning sunshine.

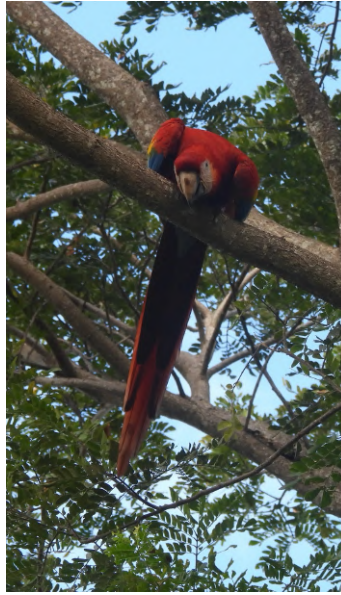
During breakfast at the lodge, we had some more excitement as some capuchin monkeys and a White-nosed Coati showed up at the feeder station, followed by four large White-throated Magpie Jays in search of fresh



watermelon. Our day of adventure was only getting started as we then drove to Carara National Park which, in the Huetar indigenous language, means "River of lizards". Originally, what is now Carara National Park was La Gran Hacienda Coyolar, one of the largest concentrations of privately owned land that Costa Rica has ever had. It was initially established as Carara Biological Reserve in April 1978 by executive decree and then in 1998, its management category was changed to National Park. The park has the only transitional forest in the Central Pacific area, which translates into a high diversity of flora and fauna, as species typical of dry and humid forests converge.

In the parking lot, a local guide shared a perched Rufous-tailed Jacamar with us and a sleeping Lesser Nighthawk on the branch of a tall tree. We walked on the paved forest trails surrounded by giant Ficus and Wild Cashew trees and added several new bird species to the list. We had good views of a small lek of Blue-throated Goldentail hummingbirds, a single Charming Hummingbird, and a Purple-crowned Fairy feeding on red flowers in the canopy. Several Scarlet Macaws flew overhead as a Great Tinamou loudly called from deep in the dark forest. A few life birds for all of the group popped into view including a stunning male Orange-collared Manakin and a diminutive Golden-crowned Spadebill. One of our final birds of the walk, near a troop of capuchin monkeys, was a lone Gray-headed Tanager. Johan explained to us that some birds follow the monkeys hoping to snag insects that are flushed by the troop. Near the exit, a Lesson's Motmot was perched on a rock resulting in some crisp, colorful pictures digiscoped by Johan for us to share.

After leaving the park, we stopped at a seafood restaurant across from the ocean for lunch and had a delicious meal of fresh local fish, including mahi mahi and tuna. We had one more adventure planned so we drove to the Tarcoles River area for a scheduled boat tour of the Guanacillo mangroves and the river. We had a little time to kill before our departure time, so we did some roadside birding and the group had really good looks at another new bird, a male and female Barred Antshrike. We had the twenty-seat boat to ourselves, and our captain and Johan quickly started finding birds for us including many gulls, terns, cormorants, and shorebirds previously observed. We counted eight species of herons and egrets, including a very close encounter with a Bare-throated Tiger-Heron hunting along the riverbank. The tour was dubbed a crocodile tour and, true to its name, several 8-10 feet long crocs swam close to our boat, a little too close if you'd asked some of us. Additional birds out of the 45 species we observed on the boat ride were Green Kingfishers, Anhingas, Roseate Spoonbills, White Ibis,



Wood Storks, several Ospreys, and a Peregrine Falcon feeding on a branch. Another exciting find was the mangrove race of the Yellow Warbler as we spotted a male with its red head showing nicely, and also a Southern Lapwing, another new one for the list. Heading back to the dock from the mangroves, we were welcomed by dozens of frigatebirds and pelicans gliding elegantly over us as they flew towards their nighttime roosts. After visiting the gift shop for some last-minute presents, we were soon back at the lodge for a shower, our species checklist and dinner, and then a rewarding night's sleep after another full day.

Wed., Jan. 15: Tarcoles Birding Lodge | Bajamar | Back to San Jose

Our last day of the tour was upon us, but we still had some birding on the agenda before heading back to San Jose. We did another early morning roadside birding trip and walk near the lodge and kept adding new birds at every stop. The first was a large (for a hummingbird) Scaly-breasted Hummingbird that perched for scope views. Next, Rick spotted a Collared Forest-Falcon on a branch which we all got quick looks at before it flew off into the field and out of sight. We had more good looks at a male Gartered Trogon and another Turquoise-browed Motmot, and then a Lineated Woodpecker landed in a tree very close to us.

We then returned for breakfast and birding at the feeder stations with more monkeys, our favorite coati, and tanagers and orioles. A pair of Scarlet Macaws landed in an almond tree near the dining area and Nancy got her best look at them of the tour. And who could forget the Clay-colored Thrush, Costa Rica's national bird, and a bird seen almost every day of the tour.

On the way towards San Jose, we made a detour to a lagoon in the vicinity of Bajamar and while we did not add any new birds, we had more good views of spoonbills, herons, sandpipers, and a dozen Blue-winged Teals. Johan wanted to make one final stop in a forested area near the lagoon for two species we missed. He played his favorite owl recording to lure them closer to us and before long we had several new Olive Sparrows in focus in our binoculars, a Yellow-throated Vireo, and our last two birds of the tour (both also new), a Northern-Scrub Flycatcher and an immature male Long-tailed Manakin.

After a lunch stop at a local restaurant overlooking a valley with soaring vultures, we were dropped off at our San Jose hotel by Johan and said our goodbyes to him and thanked him for a wonderful tour. The group rested



in the afternoon and then enjoyed a final dinner and checklist tally together in the hotel dining room. We went around the table and listed our favorite birds of the Pacific coast region and once again we all selected different ones. Rick picked Turquoise-browed Motmot, Nancy's was Laughing Falcon, Robert voted for Scarlet Macaw, and Kay went with the Fiery-billed Aracari. All excellent choices! The extension ended up with 146 species of birds, with an amazing 82 species that were not observed on the main tour; a testament to the different habitat types present in Costa Rica. In total, including the January 5 birding morning at Hotel Bougainvillea with the early arriving clients, the entire tour totaled 319 species of birds. Not too shabby.

The next morning, after breakfast, we departed for the airport for flights home, hoping to experience another Naturalist Journeys tour together in the near future. That's all folks, see you next time!

Photos: Group (Rick Weiman - RW), Talamanca Hummingbird (Damon Noe - DN), Golden-browed Chlorophonia (RW), Three-toed Sloth (DN), Yellow-throated Toucan (DN), Bananaquit (DN), Resplendent Quetzal (DN), Fiery-throated Hummingbird (Jennifer Bulava - JB), Lesser Violetear (DN), Flame-Colored Tanager (DN), Stream Scenic (JB), Group Birding (JB), Blue-gray Tanager (DN), Acorn Woodpecker (JB), Collared Aracari (Suratha Elango - SE), Black-cheeked Woodpecker (RW), Gartered Trogon (DN), Sun Bittern (DN), Tayra (RW), Keel-billed Toucan (DN), Mantled Howler Monkey (DN), Golden-hooded tanager (DN), Green Honeycreeper (DN), Laughing Falcon (DN), Broad-billed Motmot (DN), Hoffman's Two-toed Sloth (DN), White-wiskered Puffbird (DN), Group suspension bridge (SE), Shining Honeycreeper (RW), Black River turtle (DN), Slaty-tailed trogon (DN), Red-eyed Tree Frog (SE), Crimson-collard Tanager (DN), Green Honeycreeper female (DN), Northern Emerald-Toucanet (RW), Silver-throated Tanager (DN), Violet Sabrewing (DN), Extension group (RW), Double-striped Thick-knee (RW), Turquoise-browed Motmot (RW), Group (RW), White-throated Magpie-Jay (RW), American Crocodile (RW), Baltimore Oriole (RW), Kay & Rick (RW), Chestnut-coloured Woodpecker (RW)