



Tico Tours

Costa Rica: Big List Birding

Duration- 19 Days

Expect around 500 species

Costa Rica is well renowned as one of the most accessible and safe birding destinations in Central America. For a very small country (approximately the size of West Virginia) it may be surprising to find out that over 800 species have been recorded here. The key to Costa Rica's rich bird life is diversity. The country is made up of many complex habitats such as lowland wet forests on the Caribbean and south Pacific coasts, lowland dry forests on the north Pacific coast, middle and high elevation rainforest, cloud forest and sub-alpine paramo. The crucial aspect when visiting Costa Rica in search of birds is to visit as many habitats as possible; this tour does just that and the species recorded are testament to it. The tour also offers many excellent photographic opportunities to take home a reminder of what will truly be a great Neotropical experience.

- 1 night Heredia (Bougainvillea)
- 2 nights Cerro de la Muerte area (Rancho Chacons, Savegre)
- 2 nights Golfito area (Buena Vista Cabinas)
- 3 nights Carara area (Villa Lapas)
- 2 nights Palo Verde (Palo Verde)
- 2 nights Monteverde area (Trapp Family Lodge)
- 3 nights La Selva area (Ara Ambigua)
- 2 nights Rancho Naturalista area (Rancho Naturalista)
- 1 night Heredia (Bougainvillea)
- 1 night Plane

This 19-day tour visits lowland wet forest, middle elevation rainforest, cloud forest, sub-alpine paramo, lowland dry forest, rivers, lakes, estuaries and marshes. Each habitat contains a number of specialist species and on this tour we will visit the top birding locations within the country where we will focus our attention on the 3 mainland endemics, Coppery-headed Emerald, Mangrove Hummingbird and Black-cheeked Ant-Tanager and the huge number of range-restricted species present within the country. This tour is timed to coincide with the presence of the many Nearctic migrants that overwinter in the region, thus adding to the many resident species likely to be

seen. This tour should connect with approximately 60 species with a very restricted range, generally referred to as Chiriqui Endemics. These highlights will include Sulphur-winged Parakeet, Fiery-throated Hummingbird, Purple-throated Mountain-gem, Lattice-tailed and Baird's Trogon, Fiery-billed Aracari, Bare-necked Umbrellabird, Silvery-throated Jay, Long-tailed and Black-and-Yellow Silky-Flycatcher, Golden-browed Chlorophonia and Volcano Junco. Other highlights will without doubt include Resplendent Quetzal, Great Green and Scarlet Macaw, Sunbittern, Snowcap, Jaribu Stork, Great Curassow, Great Potoo and Agami Heron. Costa Rica's bird list currently stands at approximately 880 species and whilst we will be manoeuvring around the country we may make some stops to add some of the rarer, recently discovered national species to our tally such as Red-breasted Blackbird, Southern Lapwing, Brown-throated Parakeet, Pearl Kite and Rusty-margined Flycatcher, species that have all colonised from Panama.

Throughout this tour we will fully immerse ourselves in the many families of the Neotropics and we will be likely to observe 14 or 15 members of the Psittacidae family, 9 of the Trogonidae, over 40 of the Trochilidae, over 50 of the Tyrannidae, over 15 of the Troglodytidae, over 20 of the Formicariidae and over 35 of the Thraupidae family. After this tour you will totally appreciate the immense diversity of Costa Rica.

Other than the wonderful birds we will also see a number of interesting mammals, reptiles, amphibians and insects with the highlights including American Crocodile, Green Iguana, Mantled Howler, Capuchin and Spider Monkey, Sloths, and Anteaters. We will also see numerous butterflies (such as Blue Morpho) and moths throughout the country that will be just as interesting as the other wildlife, all in such splendid scenery.

Detailed Itinerary:

Day 1: Arrive in San Jose, Costa Rica during the late afternoon. We then transfer the short distance to our hotel on the outskirts of San Jose for the night. The Hotel Bougainvillea is situated in the peaceful setting of Heredia, away from the city. Its modern accommodations and pleasant temperatures will have us refreshed and ready for birding after a very short time indeed! The hotel grounds will provide us with the perfect setting to start our birding giving excellent views of many common species found throughout the country and also a few species that are generally considered restricted to the Cordillera Central such as Cabanis's¹ and White-eared Ground-Sparrow. Our time birding this evening may well be restricted by the arrival time of our flight, however we will certainly do the gardens justice the following morning. After a long day our beds will be most welcome!

¹ Cabanis's Ground-Sparrow, *Melzone cabanisi* now split as a distinct species from Prevost's Ground-Sparrow, *Melzone biarcuatum* in Stiles & Skutch (1989). There is a geographically large gap and many morphological differences between the two disjunctive populations.

Night Hotel Bougainvillea, Heredia.

Day 2: Leave the city after breakfast for the Savegre area. Before we leave the Hotel Bougainvillea we will continue (or start, depending on the previous days arrival time) birding the gardens where we will get our trip list off to a good start and we will hope to add Cabanis's and White-eared Ground-Sparrow, Blue-crowned Motmot, White-tailed Kite², Red-billed Pigeon, Rufous-tailed Hummingbird, Great Kiskadee, Tropical Kingbird, Yellow-bellied Elaenia, Blue-&-White Swallow, Plain Wren, Blue-grey Tanager and Melodious Blackbird.

After breakfast we leave Bougainvillea and head out into the countryside looking for Roadside Hawk, White-tailed Kite, Turkey and Black Vulture and make our way in the direction of Cerro de la Muerte, the highest peak on the Pan-American Highway at 12,000ft (we will bird at this location on the morning of Day 4). Before we reach the summit we will stop-off at a few roadside birding locations where we stand a good chance of adding Black-&-Yellow Silky-Flycatcher, Fiery-throated Hummingbird, Large-footed Finch and Timberline Wren. After these stops we will drop down 2000 feet in only 9 kilometres into the San Gerado de Dota Valley, our home for the next two nights.

The San Gerado de Dota valley is an area of lush cloud forest with huge oak trees covered in bromeliads and orchids. The Lodge, Savegre is a working fruit and Salmon farm with large swathes of forest, rivers and pastures, resulting in great food and awesome birding. The climate at this location is more reminiscent of northern winters, so bring a jumper!

We will spend the afternoon on arrival walking the lower grounds of the lodge where we will get fantastic close-up views of some incredible Chiriqui species with a rather restricted range such as Grey-tailed Mountain-gem, Scintillant Hummingbird, Flame-throated Warbler, Sulphur-winged Parakeet, Sooty-faced Bush-Tanager and Collared Redstart (known locally as the Amigo de Hombre, or friend of man!) Other species that are restricted to this area in Costa Rica and will form a highlight include Magnificent Hummingbird, Black-thighed Grosbeak, Ruddy-capped Nightingale-Thrush, Tufted and Yellowish Flycatcher, Elegant Euphonia and Ochraceous Wren.

Night Savegre Mountain Lodge.

Day 3: Full day birding in the Savegre grounds. During the morning before breakfast we will walk the trails around the lodge looking for the astounding and mythical Resplendent Quetzal and many other speciality birds that are

² White-tailed Kite, *Elanus leucurus* now split as a distinct species from Black-shouldered Kite, *Elanus caeruleus* of the Old World in Stiles & Skutch (1989).

found it the area. The Resplendent Quetzal is arguably one of the most stunning birds in the world and is consistently voted 'Bird of the Trip' on many tours to this region. At Savegre there is a research station focussing on the Quetzal, making the locating of these species slightly easier. Other species likely to be observed on this morning include Flame-coloured Tanager, Dark Pewee, Volcano Hummingbird, Acorn Woodpecker and Red-tailed Hawk.

After breakfast we will spend much of the day seeking the secretive species found high in the grounds of Savegre that are certainly worth the hike. We will work the cloud forest and highland streams for Costa-Rican Pygmy-Owl, Barred Parakeet, Black Guan, Spot-crowned Woodcreeper, Zeledonia, Silvery-throated Jay, Buffy Tuftedcheek, Barred Becard, Black-billed Nightingale-Thrush, White-winged Tanager, Ruddy Treerunner and some real rarities such as Silvery-fronted Tapaculo, Highland Tinamou, Dusky Nightjar, Buff-fronted and Chiriqui Quail-Dove, Ochraceous Pewee, Buffy-crowned Wood-Partridge, Spotted Wood-Quail and Maroon-chested Ground-Dove.

As we make our way back to our rooms before dinner we will have a final look around the gardens before nightfall when we might find Yellow-bellied Siskin, Long-tailed Silky-Flycatcher and Torrent Tyrannulet.

Night Savegre Mountain Lodge.

Day 4: Early morning start for Cerro de la Muerte then on to the Golfito area. The view from the top of Cerro de la Muerte early morning is usually fantastic, showing off both Chirripo, the highest peak in Costa Rica and also the Pacific Coast, 12,000ft below us! Birds in this windswept paramo environmental zone tend to skulk low and stick to the ground. It shouldn't take us long to locate the dainty Black-billed Nightingale-Thrush, Timberline Wren, Sooty Robin, Large-footed Finch and the main reason for our visit here, Volcano Junco and Peg-billed Finch both species with a very restricted Chiriqui range.

After we have spent some time at the summit we will make our way down to the Pacific Lowlands and the Golfito area, home to many great birds. Along the way there will be many opportunities to stop-off for interesting sightings made from our vehicle, such as at a few café's that offer hummingbird feeders as well as welcome refreshments. These locations may provide Mountain Elaenia, White-tailed Emerald, Green-crowned Brilliant, Violet Sabrewing and Crimson-collared Tanager. As our altitude lowers the birds start to change and the temperature should start to increase once we hit San Isidro el General. Roadside species from this point onwards may include Roadside Hawk, American Swallow-tailed Kite, Yellow-headed Caracara, Yellow-bellied Seedeater, Striped Cuckoo and the rare White-crested Coquette.

We should arrive at our lodgings, Buena Vista Cabinas around mid-afternoon, we will check-in to our rooms and then bird the area immediately around us, targets here will include White-crested Coquette, Smooth-billed Ani, Fork-tailed Flycatcher, Ruddy-breasted Seedeater, Beryl-crowned Hummingbird, Red-lored and Blue-headed Parrot and Pearl Kite.

The night will be spent resting ready for tomorrow's big day of birding for the many regional specialities that the area holds.

Night Buena Vista Cabinas

Day 5: Full day spent birding the Golfito and Esquinas Rainforest area. The town of Golfito is long and narrow and stretched along a thin shoreline that abruptly rises over 1600ft. The town is surrounded by primary rainforest and it is this that we will explore today. The main target during the morning will be the first of three endemics that we should see on this tour, Black-cheeked Ant-Tanager a species that is restricted to the understory of dense lowland forest. Once we have located this wonderful endemic we will focus on the other southern Pacific specialities such as Yellow-billed Cotinga, Golden-crowned Spadebill, Golden-naped Woodpecker, Marbled Wood-Quail, Spot-crowned Euphonia, Smooth-billed Ani, Grey-breasted Crake, Ruddy-breasted Seedeater, Riverside Wren, Fork-tailed Flycatcher, Wattled Jacana, Cherrie's Tanager³ and the vociferous Scarlet Macaw. Other widely distributed species present in this area include Blue-headed Parrot, Rufous-tailed Jacamar, Crested Eagle, Collared Forest-Falcon, Rufous-winged Woodpecker, Blue-crowned and Red-capped Manakin and White Hawk. The area is very good for species new to Costa Rica, those expanding their range north from Panama and we shall be on the lookout for those here, such as Red-breasted Blackbird, Brown-throated Parakeet, Rusty-margined Flycatcher, Southern Lapwing and Pearl Kite.

Our time spent in this area will be fully rewarding and being so close to the Panama border we cannot rule out the possibility of a mega-rarity making its journey north!

Night Buena Vista Cabinas

Day 6: We leave the Golfito area early morning and make the journey north along the coastal route to the Carara area and our base at Villa Lapas. This route will take us through some beautiful scenery and en-route we will make a few stops that may produce some interesting sightings such as Crested Owl, Laughing Falcon, Pale-vented Pigeon, Fiery-billed Aracari, Red-crowned Woodpecker, Yellow-crowned Euphonia, Barred Antshrike and Purple-crowned Fairy. As we progress north other species may become evident,

³ Cherrie's Tanager, *Ramphocelus costaricensis* now split as a distinct species from the Pacific slope of the region from what was previously considered the Pacific race of Scarlet-rumped Tanager, *Ramphocelus passerinii* in Stiles & Skutch (1989). The remaining Caribbean form is classed as its own species, Passerini's Tanager, *Ramphocelus passerinii*. See Footnote No. 16.

such as Yellow-headed Caracara, Golden-naped Woodpecker, Chestnut-mandibled Toucan, Masked Tityra, King Vulture, Bat Falcon, Pale-billed Woodpecker and Blue Ground-Dove.

When we reach Dominical, where the Rio Baru enters the Pacific Ocean we will look out to sea for Brown Booby, a species not easily recorded from the shoreline at other locations. Other species possible at this location include Osprey, Mangrove Swallow, Grey-breasted Martin, Magnificent Frigatebird, Brown Pelican and Yellow-throated Euphonia. As we pass through the many sugarcane fields and pastures on our route north between Dominical and Carara we may add Northern Crested Caracara⁴, Roadside Hawk, Inca Dove, Anhinga, White-tailed Kite and Striped Cuckoo.

We will arrive at Hotel Villa Lapas mid afternoon where we will check-in for our three night stay and make our way to the air-conditioned rooms, freshen up after our long journey and if time permits make a start on the birding in and around our hotels grounds. Species we may add here include Fiery-billed Aracari, White Ibis, Grey Hawk, Black-headed and Northern Violaceous Trogon⁵, Yellow-olive Flycatcher and Rose-throated Becard. As the afternoon draws to a close and evening becomes closer we will hear and observe Scarlet Macaws flying north to their nighttime roosts, a sight that was until recently very rare, but thanks to much conservation efforts their population seems to be increasing again.

The food at Villa Lapas is wonderful and we will enjoy our meal and drinks keeping an eye and ear open for Black-&-White Owl and many creatures that appear at night such as Central American Smooth Gecko and Red-eyed Leaf Frog.

Night Hotel Villa Lapas.

Day 7: Full day in Tarcol area including a mangrove boat tour. We will wake early and bird our way to the dining area, have an early breakfast in the presence of White Ibis, Great Kiskadee, Yellow-olive Flycatcher and Cattle Egret. After breakfast we will head off the short distance to Tarcol Lodge and the many habitats within that small area. We will spend time going through the scrub and the mangroves as well as scanning the estuary for the many waterbirds present. Our main target here will be the second endemic we should see on this tour, Mangrove Hummingbird, this hummer is restricted to mangroves where its favourite flower, Pacific Mangrove, *Pelliciera rhizophorae* is abundant.

⁴ Northern Crested Caracara, *Caracara cheriway* now split as a distinct species from Crested Caracara, *Caracara plancus* in Stiles & Skutch (1989). The previous species is now split into three and the one found in this region is the northernmost species.

⁵ Northern Violaceous Trogon, *Trogon caligatus* now split as a distinct species from Violaceous Trogon, *Trogon violaceus* in Stiles and Skutch (1989). Southern populations referred to as Amazonian Violaceous Trogon, *Trogon violaceus*.

Birding the scrub and mangroves can be a very exciting experience, birds are usually abundant and species that are restricted to this habitat that we should observe include Pacific Screech-Owl, Panama Flycatcher, Northern Scrub Flycatcher, Scrub Greenlet, Olivaceous Piculet, Stripe-headed Sparrow, Mangrove Warbler, Mangrove Black-Hawk, Mangrove Vireo, White-necked Puffbird, American Pygmy Kingfisher, Scaly-breasted Hummingbird and Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl. The area can be alive with members of the Psittacidae family such as Scarlet Macaw, Orange-chinned Parakeet and Mealy, White-fronted, Red-lored and Yellow-naped Parrot. What ever we find here it is guaranteed to be special, views of White-throated Magpie-Jay and Turquoise-browed Motmot for example.

We will make our way back towards the lodge as the heat begins to increase, when species such as Steely-vented and Cinnamon Hummingbird, Inca Dove, Ruddy Ground-Dove, Rufous-naped Wren and Melodious Blackbird should be added. From the veranda we will scan the mudflats and surrounding visible mangroves where we will seek Mangrove Warbler, Mangrove Black-Hawk, Wood Stork, Roseate Spoonbill, Wilson's and Collared Plover, Black-necked Stilt, Black Skimmer, Neotropical Cormorant⁶, Anhinga, Crane Hawk, White Ibis, Black-bellied Whistling-Duck, Brown Pelican, Amazon and Ringed Kingfisher and many members of the Ardeidae family. We should get better views of many of these species as we board a small, covered boat owned by one of the residents of Playa Azul, Luis. Luis has been guiding birding groups through 'his' mangroves for a number of years and has made some great discoveries. We will hope for a couple of very sought-after species such as Rufous-necked Wood-Rail and Boat-billed Heron. Other highlights from the boat should include Olivaceous Piculet, American Pygmy Kingfisher, Mangrove Hummingbird, Rufous-browed Peppershrike and Mangrove Warbler. We will get close-up views of Great Blue, Green, Little Blue and Tri-coloured Heron, Yellow-crowned Night-Heron, Bare-throated Tiger-Heron, Snowy and Great Egret and Anhinga.

After our time on the boat, tide permitting (if it is not we will make time on a subsequent day) we will make our way along the beach which may provide some interesting fare such as Royal, Elegant, Sandwich, American Black or Caspian Tern, Laughing and Franklin's Gull, Magnificent Frigatebird, Brown Pelican, many migrant shorebirds, and some interesting species that inhabit the beach like Lesser Nighthawk, Yellow-headed Caracara, Scrub Greenlet and Grey-crowned Yellowthroat.

As the day comes to a close we will again keep our eyes and ears open for returning Scarlet Macaws and we may even glimpse a Common Pauraque hunting along the road on our return to Hotel Villa Lapas for our much

⁶ Neotropical Cormorant, *Phalacrocorax brasilianus* is a name change from Olivaceous Cormorant, *Phalacrocorax olivaceus* in Stiles & Skutch (1989).

appreciated evening meal. We may take an evening walk on this evening, which can turn up some incredible creatures. Our target will be Black-&-White, Striped and Barn Owl but some further highlights are sure to be the bats and frogs that come out to feed at this time of night.

Night Hotel Villa Lapas.

Day 8: Full day Parque Nacional Carara area. Again an early breakfast will be taken before we head off into this fantastic national park. We will spend the morning birding the area of second-growth forest, we will return to Hotel Villa Lapas for lunch then after a period waiting for the temperature to cool-off we will head back into the primary forest trail.

Parque Nacional Carara is one of the most important forests along the Pacific Coast because it is where the wet forest of the south meets the dry forest of the north. Hence there is a lot of species at the edge of their range. No time will be wasted and straight after breakfast we will be off. As we walk down the relatively open trail we will keep our eyes overhead looking for passing raptors and swifts that may include Lesser Swallow-tailed and Costa Rican Swift⁷. Species low along the trail are likely to include Chestnut-backed and Dusky Antbird, Great Tinamou, Black-faced Ant-Thrush, Blue Ground-Dove, Ruddy Quail-Dove, White-throated Crake, Grey-necked Wood-Rail, Black-hooded Antshrike, and Orange-billed Sparrow. Carara is a 'wren-lovers' paradise, along this trail we should find Rufous-&-White, Black-bellied, Rufous-breasted, Plain and Rufous-naped Wren, they all inhabit slightly different niches and we will take time to understand this. We will be on the lookout for ant swarms and mixed flocks that can produce a fantastic array of species such as Northern Barred⁸, Wedge-billed, Cocoa⁹ and the rare Tawny-winged and Long-tailed Woodcreeper. The flycatchers in this area are also worth the time and effort some of them require to find, the tiny Northern Bentbill, Golden-crowned and Stub-tailed Spadebill, Slate-headed Tody-Tyrant, Southern Beardless-Tyrannulet, Greenish Elaenia and the star of the show Northern Royal Flycatcher.

As we progress along the trail we will look out for Baird's Trogon and Golden-naped Woodpecker, two Chiriqui endemics at the northern-most limit of their range that are both fantastically stunning birds. Other members of their families should also be recorded including Slaty-tailed, Northern Violaceous and Black-throated Trogon and Lineated, Pale-billed and Hoffmann's Woodpecker.

⁷ Costa Rican Swift, *Chaetura fumosa* now split as a distinct species from Band-rumped Swift, *Chaetura spinicauda* in Stiles & Skutch (1989).

⁸ Northern Barred Woodcreeper, *Dendrocolaptes sanctithomae* now split as a distinct species from Barred Woodcreeper, *Dendrocolaptes certhia* in Stiles & Skutch (1989).

⁹ Cocoa Woodcreeper, *Xiphorhynchus susurrans* now split as a distinct species from Buff-throated Woodcreeper, *Xiphorhynchus guttatus* in Stiles & Skutch (1989) however more research needs to be done on this complex.

During lunch back at Hotel Villa Lapas we will keep our eyes fixed on the valley behind us where King Vulture, Zone-tailed and White Hawk are all known to mix with the common Black and Turkey Vultures.

Our afternoon walk will focus on the primary forest zone of the park and we will endeavour to get good views of White-whiskered Puffbird, Black-faced Ant-thrush, Great Tinamou, Long-tailed, Blue-crowned, Red-capped and Orange-collared Manakin, Collared Forest-Falcon, Short-billed Pigeon, Blue-throated Goldentail, Grey-chested Dove, Fiery-billed Aracari, Western Long-billed Hermit¹⁰, Crested Guan, Northern Royal Flycatcher and the very similar looking Sulphur-rumped and Black-tailed Flycatcher, Riverside Wren, Rufous Piha, Green Shrike-Vireo and star of the show Streak-chested Antpitta¹¹. This beautiful old forest is home to many species and it is a privilege to be able to spend time within it.

We should also see many interesting animals within the park such as White-faced Capuchin and Mantled Howler Monkey, Central American Agouti, White-nosed Coati, Green and Spiny-tailed Iguana and Red-eyed Leaf Frog.

Night Hotel Villa Lapas.

Day 9: Leave the Carara area in the morning heading north into the slightly dryer area around Puntarenas then moving on to Parque Nacional Palo Verde. As we leave the Carara area we will notice the species again start to change, White-winged Dove, Cinnamon Hummingbird, White-lored Gnatcatcher and Orange-fronted Parakeet. Stops en-route north again should produce Double-striped Thick-knee, Banded Wren, Long-tailed Manakin and Nutting's Flycatcher. As we reach Palo Verde we will observe a change in habitat.

As we enter the national park we will drive along the access road. This may produce Zone-tailed Hawk, Spot-breasted Oriole, Scissor-tailed Flycatcher and Plain-breasted Ground-Dove. After we check into our accommodation at Palo Verde OTS Research Station during the early afternoon we will get to work on some of the species that are restricted to this area such as Streak-backed Oriole, Plain Chachalaca, Banded Wren and Nutting's Flycatcher.

Parque Nacional Palo Verde is along the northeastern bank of the Rio Tempisque. The park contains probably the most important seasonal wetland area in Central America and it is important for concentrations of waterfowl,

¹⁰ Western Long-billed (Long-tailed) Hermit, *Phaethornis longirostris* now split as a distinct species from Long-tailed Hermit, *Phaethornis superciliosus* in Stiles & Skutch (1989) from populations to the south of the region.

¹¹ Streak-chested Antpitta, *Hylopezus perspicillatus* referred to as Spectacled Antpitta, *Hylopezus perspicillatus* in Stiles & Skutch (1989).

shorebirds and waders, especially during January and February. The area of dry tropical forest is also important for flycatchers and orioles.

As is usual with the OTS stations there will probably be many people conducting scientific research on various topics, they are usually very keen to share their results with guests during meal times and this provides a fascinating outlook on the area.

We shall take our evening meal and watch the sun go down over the large marshland, ever watching for owls and other creatures of the night.

Night Palo Verde OTS.

Day 10: Full day Parque Nacional Palo Verde. We will spend the day looking around the trails of Palo Verde, focussing our attention on the species that are generally restricted to this area of the country. Our visit to this area is timed to coincide with the abundance of Nearctic migrants. Highlights should include Fulvous and Black-bellied Whistling-Duck, Masked and Muscovy Duck and American Coot. Waterfowl of a more migratory nature may include Blue-winged and Cinnamon Teal, American Wigeon, Northern Shoveler and Ring-necked Duck. Interesting waders worth a second, and third look include the giant Jaribu Stork and the odd, hobbling Limpkin! Over the marshes we will keep our eyes open for some fantastic raptors, the likes of American Kestrel, Snail Kite, Northern Harrier and Bay-winged Hawk being the pick. We should see many herons and egrets and other species that feed in the marsh habitat, species such as Tri-coloured Heron, Black-crowned Night-Heron, Boat-billed Heron, Roseate Spoonbill, Least and Pinnated Bittern, Sora and Spotted Rail, Yellow-breasted Crake and Glossy Ibis. Exciting rarities in the area include White-faced Whistling-Duck, Violaceous Quail-Dove and Mangrove Cuckoo.

Time will also be spent around the dry forest and on the trail system around the park. Here we shall look for Thicket Tinamou, Double-striped Thick-knee, Spot-breasted and Streak-backed Oriole, Banded Wren, Nutting's and Brown-chested Flycatcher, White-throated Magpie-Jay, Cinnamon Hummingbird, Canivet's Emerald¹², Pale-billed Woodpecker and White-lored Gnatcatcher.

By the end of our stay here we will appreciate just how important this area is for a huge number of species, and all being well we will have seen many of them for ourselves.

Night Palo Verde OTS.

¹² Canivet's Emerald, *Chlorostilbon canivetii*, now split as a distinct species from Fork-tailed Emerald, *Chlorostilbon canivetii* in Stiles & Skutch (1989). Both 'new' species occur in Costa Rica, Canivet's in the north of the country to Mexico and Garden Emerald, *Chlorostilbon assimilis* from the south of the country into Panama.

Day 11: Leave Palo Verde in the morning for an early afternoon arrival at Monteverde. The area of Monteverde is world renowned amongst birders, mainly because it is a great area to observe the Resplendent Quetzal, however the area holds many more jewels and over the next couple of days we shall search for these. After our last week in the lowlands a change in temperature will certainly be appreciated!

As we progress towards our beautiful accommodation at the Trapp Family Lodge we will make a stop early afternoon at Finca Ecologica, a great private farm with 4 trails that can produce some great species. Our targets here will include Chiriqui Quail-Dove, Golden-olive Woodpecker, Long-tailed Manakin, Orange-billed Nightingale-Thrush, Rufous-browed Peppershrike and possible Nearctic migrants Ovenbird and Wood Thrush.

We will progress on towards the Trapp Family Lodge. Situated only a few kilometres from the Monteverde Cloud Forest Reserve this lodge really puts us in a great location for some incredible birds. If time permits in the late afternoon we will make our way over to the world famous 'Hummingbird Gallery' where we should connect with our third and final endemic of the trip, Coppery-headed Emerald. This tiny hummer resides in and beside wet highland forest where males regularly reach the canopy with females often staying lower down. These beautiful glowing hummers will not be the only new species for the trip with further highlights being Magenta-throated Woodstar and Stripe-tailed Hummingbird. Other species at the gallery that we should have connected with during our previous time at high elevation include Purple-throated Mountain-gem, Violet Sabrewing, Green-crowned Brilliant and Green Violet-ear.

We will make our way to the Trapp Family Lodge where we will enjoy the wonderful food and settle into our relaxing rooms with the excitement brewing of what is surely going to be a highlight day to come!

Night Trapp Family Lodge.

Day 12: Full day Monteverde area. We will enter the Cloud Forest Reserve after another visit to the Hummingbird Gallery where we will hope to gain further sightings of those hummers mentioned above, including the endemic Coppery-headed Emerald. As we enter the reserve we will check for fruiting trees that may give up the likes of Black-faced Solitaire, Orange-bellied Trogon, Resplendent Quetzal, Black Guan, White-throated and Mountain Thrush, Black-& Yellow Silky-Flycatcher, Golden-browed Chlorophonia and Three-wattled Bellbird. Walking through the epiphyte laden forest we will listen out for mixed flocks moving through, these may result in Ruddy Treerunner, Spotted Barbtail, Spotted Woodcreeper, Prong-billed Barbet, Eye-ringed Flatbill, Lineated Foliage-gleaner, Slaty-backed Nightingale-Thrush and Common Bush-Tanager. We will also focus on some of the more difficult

species in the area such as Silvery-fronted Tapaculo, Azure-hooded Jay, Highland Tinamou, Barred Forest-Falcon, Grey-throated Leaf-tosser, Black-breasted Wood-Quail, Immaculate Antbird, Buff-fronted Quail-Dove, Bare-shanked Screech-Owl, Blue-throated Toucanet¹³, White-throated Spadebill, Chestnut-capped Brush-Finch, Tawny-capped Euphonia and White-eared Ground-Sparrow.

During the afternoon we may also visit the nearby Santa Elena Reserve where our main target will be the Highland Tinamou, Tawny-throated Leaf-tosser, Silvery-fronted Tapaculo, Three-wattled Bellbird and Black-faced Solitaire.

We shall return to the lodge for our evening meal after what is sure to have been a day to remember!

Night Trapp Family Lodge.

Day 13: We leave the Trapp Family Lodge at Monteverde and head for the Caribbean lowlands for the first time. Our target is the La Selva area, visiting Volcan and Lake Arenal en-route. As we drive out of the Monteverde area we will be on the constant lookout for interesting raptors cruising overhead, Zone-tailed, Short-tailed and Barred Hawk, American Swallow-tailed Kite and King Vulture all being possibilities. When we reach Lake Arenal we should find the giant Ringed Kingfisher, Keel-billed Toucan, Broad-billed Motmot, Yellow Tyrannulet, Nightingale Wren, Greyish Saltator and the swamp-loving Grey-crowned Yellowthroat.

This stop, not only providing some great new birds will also provide us with stunning views of Costa Rica's most active volcano, Volcan Arenal, a definite highlight that should provide great photographic opportunities.

After spending some time in this area our journey will continue towards our destination near Puerto Viejo de Sarapiquí in the Caribbean lowlands. Our base for this tour will be Ara Ambigua, a great location set only a couple of kilometres from the La Selva Biological Reserve, this small lodge has private facilities and the ceiling fan is a welcome relief from the humidity. Many great and localised species are also found here and on arrival after check-in we will look for some of these around the gardens, the main targets around the grounds include White-ringed Flycatcher, Long-billed Starthroat and Pale-vented Pigeon. If time permits we may also spend some time looking around the nearby area for further interesting species such as Keel-billed and Chestnut-mandibled Toucan, Olive-throated Parakeet, Red-footed Plumeleteer, White-throated and Uniform Crake, Bat Falcon and Shining Honeycreeper.

¹³ Blue-throated Toucanet, *Aulacorhynchus caeruleogularis* now split as a distinct species from Emerald Toucanet, *Aulacorhynchus prasinus* in Stiles & Skutch (1989). The previous Emerald Toucanet complex has now been split into 7 species.

As the name of our lodge suggests this location is a good one for observing a relatively rare and patchily distributed species within the country and a definite highlight Great Green Macaw. As with the Scarlet Macaws on the Pacific Coast we will listen out for their calls giving away their presence. Like the Scarlet Macaw, Great Green Macaws are stunningly beautiful birds and well worth a good look!

We will enjoy a beautiful home-cooked meal in the restaurant, a great mix of local and international cuisine whatever takes your fancy.

Night Ara Ambigua Lodge.

Day 14: Full day La Selva area. We will wake early to make full use of the day in this great birding location. We will focus our attention first on the entrance road leading up to the reserve and then secondly within the reserve itself.

As we walk in along the incredibly bird rich entrance road we will search for Long-tailed Tyrant, Pink-billed Seed-Finch, Pied Puffbird, Snowy Cotinga, Black-cowled and Yellow-tailed Oriole, Striped Cuckoo, Fasciated and Great Antshrike, Grey-rumped Swift, Shining Honeycreeper and Rufous Motmot. Other fine species include Cinnamon and Chestnut-coloured Woodpecker, Red-throated Ant-Tanager, Slaty-tailed Trogon, Chestnut-mandibled Toucan, Grey Hawk, Yellow Tyrannulet, 'Canebreak' Plain Wren, Bronzy Hermit and Black-faced Grosbeak.

The Biological Reserve is an awesome place for birds, plants and animals. We will meet our local guide at the OTS research station who will guide us around this beautiful place showing us some of the many highlights that are present in the area. Around the research station we should also find some great birds. On the flowering plants we shall look for Black-crested Coquette, Blue-chested Hummingbird and Shining Honeycreepers. Fruiting trees may produce Snowy Cotinga, Plain-coloured and Dusky-faced Tanager, Chestnut-mandibled Toucan and Collared Aracari. This area is full of birds and it will be hard to tear ourselves away at first, until we remember what is likely to be lurking within the forest!

As we cross the Rio Sarapiquí, looking for Spectacled Caiman and Green Iguana we will walk through the laboratory area, fascinating in itself, we should see Yellow-margined Flycatcher, Olive-backed Euphonia and Squirrel Cuckoo. Walking into the forest we will be on the lookout for Great Curassow, Slaty-breasted Tinamou, Black-striped Woodcreeper, Purple-throated Fruitcrow, Bare-necked Umbrellabird, Streak-crowned Antvireo, Olive-backed Quail-Dove, Brown-capped Tyrannulet, Black-capped Pygmy-Tyrant (at 6.5cm the smallest passerine in the world), Great Potoo, Rufous and Broad-billed Motmot, Slate-coloured Grosbeak and Green Shrike-Vireo. Non-avian highlights may include Basilisk Lizard, Strawberry Poison-Dart Frog, Central American Agouti, Golden Orb Spider, Tarantulas and an array

of Ants. It is the latter that we will show a lot of interest in because it is these that may lead us to some major birds, Ocellated and Bare-faced Antbirds being two of them.

As the afternoon draws to a close we will look off the bridge for Short-tailed Nighthawk and Great Potoo two species that regularly hunt along the river. After spending a day in this intense place we will leave feeling totally impressed by the diversity of the ecosystem we have walked within.

On returning to Ara Ambigua lodge we will freshen up and enjoy yet another fine home-cooked meal and reflect on a great day.

Night Ara Ambigua Lodge.

Day 15: La Selva environs and La Virgin del Socorro. After a short pre-breakfast walk around Ara Ambigua and the Selva Verde area that may produce Sunbittern and Fasciated Tiger-Heron, we will travel the short distance to La Virgin del Socorro, an area of lower middle-elevation forest that contains some fantastic birds, the most impressive being Ornate Hawk-Eagle, Barred and White Hawk, Scale-crested Pygmy-Tyrant, Sooty-faced Finch, Emerald and Crimson-collared Tanager, Torrent Tyrannulet, American Dipper, Buff-fronted Foliage-gleaner, Black-faced and Rufous-breasted Ant-Thrush, Black-crowned Antpitta and what would certainly steal the limelight, Lanceolated Monklet. A species that is very difficult to track down!

In the afternoon we will head back to Puerto Viejo de Sarapiquí and namely El Gavilan Lodge where species here may include Snowy Cotinga, Spectacled Owl, Green Ibis, Mangrove Swallow, Long-tailed Tyrant, Rufous-tailed Jacamar and Plain-coloured Tanager. If time permits we will continue along the same road to a set of flooded fields where some fantastic species have recently been found, our targets here will include Green Ibis, Red-breasted Blackbird, Muscovy Duck, Bat Falcon, Pinnated and Little Bittern and Giant Cowbird.

We will return to Ara Ambigua for our last night at this location and prepare for an early start the following morning.

Night Ara Ambigua.

Day 16: Early morning start for Rancho Naturalista, we will visit Parque Nacional Braulio Carrillo en-route. We will leave Ara Ambigua for the last time on this tour and head towards Parque Nacional Braulio Carrillo. We will make another brief stop at the set of fields visited on the previous afternoon where we will focus on gaining views of the secretive Green Ibis, Pinnated Bittern and Red-breasted Blackbird. Further along the road we will check out a stretch of river that usually holds a pair of Fasciated Tiger-Heron.

We will climb higher than previous days and reach the Quebrada Gonzalez Trail within the park. Target species here will include Ornate Hawk-Eagle, Russet Antshrike, Tawny-crested Tanager, Lattice-tailed Trogon, Tawny-faced Gnatwren, White-throated Shrike-Tanager, Black-&-Yellow Tanager, Ashy-throated Bush-Tanager, Green Shrike-Vireo, Western Woodhaunter¹⁴, Masked Tityra, White-breasted Wood-Wren and Black-crowned Antpitta. With White-whiskered Puffbird, Black-crested Coquette, Sharpbill and Lanceolated Monklet also recorded occasionally.

After lunch in the park we will progress to our next location, Rancho Naturalista, set at mid-elevation on the Caribbean Slope, our journey may produce views of White-crowned Parrot, Crimson-fronted Parakeet and American Swallow-tailed Kite.

On arrival at Rancho we will drop our bags into our rooms and head down the short distance to the 'Hummingbird Pools' where we will sit in amazement as we watch Violet-crowned Woodnymph, Green and Stripe-throated Hermit¹⁵, Purple-crowned Fairy and the star of the show, the tiny Snowcap with its glowing white cap shining below us as they all bathe in the pools. Other species that occasionally turn up at the pools include Great Tinamou, Tawny-throated Leaf-tosser and White-tipped Sicklebill.

After that memorable occasional we will freshen up and make our way to the dining room where we are guaranteed of a feast of fine home cooked food, a highlight on any tour in its own right!

Night Rancho Naturalista.

Day 17: Full day Rancho Naturalista and Rio Tuis valley. We will wake early and make our way to the balcony where we will collect a welcome cup of tea or coffee and let the birds come to us for once! Rancho is one of my favourite locations in the country and having spent three consecutive summers as the resident guide here I have had some fantastic sightings from the balcony, forest and surrounding areas, the highlights including Lanceolated Monklet, Blue-&-Gold Tanager and White-throated Flycatcher.

While we enjoy our refreshments we will get fantastic views of Montezuma and Chestnut-headed Oropendola, White-crowned Parrot, Brown Jay, Grey-headed Chachalaca and beautiful Collared Aracari. We will also gain superb views of some wonderful tanagers such as Blue-grey, Palm, White-lined, Golden-hooded, Crimson-collared and the stunning Passerini's Tanager¹⁶.

¹⁴ Western Woodhaunter, *Hyloctistes virgatus* now split as a distinct species from Eastern Woodhaunter, *Hyloctistes subulatus* referred to as Striped Foliage-gleaner, *Hyloctistes subulatus* in Stiles & Skutch (1989), with Western being trans-Andean and Eastern being cis-Andean populations.

¹⁵ Stripe-throated Hermit, *Phaethornis striigularis* now split as a distinct species from the more southerly Little Hermit, *Phaethornis longuemareus* in Stiles & Skutch (1989).

¹⁶ Passerini's Tanager, *Ramphocelus passerinii* now split as a distinct species from the Caribbean slope of the region from what was previously considered the Caribbean race of Scarlet-rumped Tanager,

Other birds passing through the garden should include Slaty Spinetail, Black-throated Wren, Rufous-capped Warbler, White-throated Crake and Little Tinamou. We must not fail to remember the large numbers of hummingbirds that will be frequenting the feeders less than an arms length away, highlights are sure to include Green Thorntail, White-necked Jacobin, Green-breasted Mango, Violet-crowned Woodnymph and Rufous-tailed Hummingbird. Many high quality birds, all before breakfast.

After breakfast we shall move into the forest, making a large circuit around the property where main targets will include Tawny-chested Flycatcher, White-crowned, White-ruffed and White-collared Manakin, Thrushlike Schiffornis, Purplish-backed Quail-Dove, Grey-headed Piprites¹⁷, Immaculate, Spotted and Dull-mantled Antbird, Olive Tanager, Brown-billed Scythebill and Black-headed Nightingale-Thrush. We will search for mixed feeding flocks, the make-up of which may include Plain Brown, Northern Barred, Spotted, Wedge-billed and Olivaceous Woodcreeper, Buff-throated Foliage-gleaner, Slaty-capped, Ochre-bellied and Olive-striped Flycatcher, Cinnamon, Black-&-White and White-winged Becard, Ashy-throated Bush-Tanager, Tawny-crowned Greenlet, Golden-crowned Warbler, Slaty and Checker-throated Antwren, Scarlet-thighed Dacnis and Rufous-tailed Jacamar. Whilst in the forest we will spend some time sat at the 'Hummingbird Feeders' where our main quarry will be Snowcap, Brown Violet-ear, Stripe-throated and Green Hermit, Violet-crowned Woodnymph and Green-crowned Brilliant. The star of the show is likely to be the Snowcap that will fly and perch very close to us, giving all a lifetimes memory.

After lunch we will take the short journey down to the Rio Tuis valley where our main targets will be Lanceolated Monklet, and Sunbittern, both known to breed in the area. Other species that we should see in this area include Amazon Kingfisher, American Dipper, Buff-rumped Warbler, Barred Hawk, Sulphur-winged Parakeet, American Swallow-tailed Kite, Lesser Swallow-tailed Swift, Red-fronted Parrotlet and Olive-crowned Yellowthroat.

Later, back at the ranch we will again enter the forest, aiming for Great Tinamou, Ruddy and Purplish-backed Quail-Dove, Smoky-brown, Golden-olive and Rufous-winged Woodpecker and Purple-crowned Fairy.

More home-cooked food will be consumed and we will listen out for Mottled Owl and Common Pauraque two species that are occasionally present along the driveway after dark.

Night Rancho Naturalista.

Ramphocelus passerinii in Stiles & Skutch (1989). The remaining Pacific form is classed as its own species, Cherrie's Tanager, *Ramphocelus costaricensis*. See Footnote No. 3.

¹⁷ Grey-headed Piprities, *Piprities griseiceps* referred to Grey-headed Manakin, *Piprites griseiceps* in Stiles & Skutch (1989).

Day 18: Early departure from Rancho heading back to San Jose via Parque Nacional Tapanti. We will take a very early breakfast and get on our way to Tapanti as it starts to get light. We will add many by now familiar species en-route, but a few stops along the way may produce some interesting species such as Bat Falcon, Black-bellied Whistling-Duck, Osprey, Killdear, Pied-billed Grebe and White-collared Seedeater. On arrival at Parque Nacional Tapanti we are certain of some good birds. The area around the headquarters is often highly productive and we should encounter Collared Trogon, Yellow-winged and Brown-capped Vireo, Tropical Parula, Golden-bellied Flycatcher, Red-headed and Prong-billed Barbet, Silver-throated and Spangle-cheeked Tanager. Other species recorded from this sector of the reserve include White-winged Tanager, Black and Ornate Hawk-Eagle, Azure-hooded Jay and Barred Hawk.

We will head higher into the forest area where we should come across Black-faced Solitaire, Slaty-backed Nightingale-Thrush, Hook-billed Kite, Grey-breasted Wood-Wren, Chestnut-capped Brush-Finch, Buffy Tuftedcheek, Red-faced Spinetail, Golden-browed Chlorophonia, Yellowish and Tufted Flycatcher, Dark Pewee, Ochre-breasted Antpitta, Streaked Xenops, Ochraceous Pewee, Silvery-fronted Tapaculo and Spotted Barbtail. Hummers here may include Green-fronted Lancebill, White-bellied Mountain-gem, Scintillant and Black-bellied Hummingbird, Green Hermit and Green Violet-ear.

As we drive back towards the city we shall make a few birding stops along the way, our main targets here will include White-throated Flycatcher, Masked Duck, Orange-billed Nightingale-Thrush, Steely-vented Hummingbird and Sedge Wren. Other species possible in these areas include White-tailed Kite, American Coot, Common Gallinule and Mourning Dove.

We should arrive at the Hotel Bougainvillea in Heredia late afternoon, make our way to our rooms and enjoy a few drinks together on the last night of what is sure to have been a successful tour. We will go through our lists and make sure everyone is up-to-date and then call it a night! However we will still have a few hours in the morning to see some more interesting species.

Night Hotel Bougainvillea, Heredia.

Day 19: Morning birding around San Jose environs, afternoon flight home. We will wake early for one last time and work the gardens around the Hotel Bougainvillea, getting views of Cabanis's and White-eared Ground-Sparrow. We will breakfast then drive the short distance onto the slopes of Volcan Barva where we will search for Bare-shanked Screech-Owl, Long-tailed Silky-Flycatcher, Mountain Elaenia, Blue-throated Toucanet, Black Guan, Blue-crowned Motmot, Violet Sabrewing and Spot-fronted and White-chinned Swift amongst others.

Unfortunately on returning to the hotel we will have to pack up our bags and head off for the airport to connect with our flights home. On the way to the airport we will reflect on the tour and look forward to our next visit to this wonderful country.