COSTA RICA

Jewels

Tour Leader: Eric Ripma
January 9-16, 2022
January 9 – La Casona del Cafetal

Once everyone had arrived in Costa Rica by the early afternoon, our group headed to La Casona del Cafetal where we would be staying on the first night. We arrived with less than a couple of hours of light, so we quickly began birding. Before long we were enjoying scope views of Crimson-fronted Parakeets and White-crowned Parrots. Montezuma Oropendolas also entertained us with their bizarre vocalizations. A brief check of the lake that the hotel is located on brought us great looks at Least Grebes, Northern Jacanas, and Yellow-crowned Night-Herons. A great dinner on the back porch of the hotel rounded out a great first day in Costa Rica!

January 10 – Ground Sparrow Spot

This morning we headed to the edge of a coffee plantation to begin our birding. It may seem strange to bird at a coffee plantation, but this is where the Cabanis’s Ground-Sparrow, a Costa Rican endemic, calls home. It was a very birdy morning and before long we were enjoying great views of the Ground-Sparrows. We also enjoyed great looks at Barred Antshrikes, Common Tody-Flycatcher, White-browed Gnatcatcher, and Cabanis’s Wren among many others. After our morning birding we went back to our hotel where we birded the grounds until we were ready for a delicious breakfast.
January 10 – Continued - Tapanti National Park, Savegre Hotel

After breakfast, we took the hour drive to Tapanti National Park to look for more forest species. Our only Purple-throated Mountain-gems of the trip, a flyover Barred Hawk, a Tawny-capped Euphonia, many Slate-throated Redstarts, and our first Spangle-cheeked Tanagers were among the highlights. We arrived at Savegre Mountain Lodge, where we would be staying the next three nights, just before dark. The hummingbirds were swarming the feeders at this time, and we enjoyed point-blank views of Talamanca Hummingbirds, Lesser Violetears, and White-throated Mountain-gems!

January 11 – San Gerardo de Dota Valley

We spent the whole day birding in the San Gerardo de Dota Valley. In the early morning we headed to some wild avocado trees where Resplendent Quetzals had been feeding on recent mornings. It wasn’t long before we heard one and after a short wait, we had great views of a male! Over the next couple hours, we enjoyed spectacular views of multiple males and females. Our only Black Guan of the trip as well as flyover flock of Sulphur-winged Parakeets also entertained the group! Around mid-morning we headed to some trails above Savegre Mountain Lodge that lead through the cloud forest. After a few difficult flocks moving through the overstory we connected with some lower flocks that provided great looks at some
specialties of the area such as Yellow-winged Vireo, Black-faced Solitaire, Black-billed Nightingale-Thrush, Yellow-thighed Brushfinch, Flame-throated and Black-cheeked Warblers, and Collared Redstart among others. In the afternoon we added a handful of species with a walk from Savegre before driving to the Miriam’s Restaurant to watch the feeders. Many hummingbirds including Fiery-throated were swarming the feeders and we saw our first Sooty Thrushes and Large-footed Finches! After a delicious dinner at Miriam’s, we attempted some nocturnal birding but the wind had kicked up too much to have any success.

January 12 – Bosque del Tolomuco, Los Quetzales National Park, Paraiso Quetzal Lodge

After breakfast at Savegre, we headed to Bosque del Tolomuco which would be our lowest elevation visited on the pacific slope. Due to this new habitat, we encountered many birds that we wouldn’t see during the rest of the tour. As soon as we arrived, we were treated to many species using the feeders such as Red-headed Barbet, Red-crowned Woodpecker, Scarlet-rumped, Blue-gray, Speckled, and Silver-throated Tanagers, and Buff-throated Saltators. After getting our fill of the feeders, we walked some of the trails. Others had recently seen a White-crested Coquette, so we walked down to the flowers it had been feeding on. Within a couple minutes, we were watching the beautiful coquette feed within 10 feet of our group! During our short wait for the coquette, we also saw a Cape May Warbler which is a rather uncommon wintering bird in Costa Rica.
January 12 – Continued

After Tolomuco we headed to some paramo (above tree line) habitat where we quickly saw our target, the Volcano Junco! A less-than-cooperative Peg-billed Finch and a few Volcano Hummingbirds were also highlights. After arriving and ordering lunch at Paraiso Quetzal Lodge the whole group enjoyed the clouds of hummingbirds visiting the feeders! We also enjoyed our first views of both Long-tailed and Black-and-yellow Silky-flycatcher. In the late afternoon we birded some more high elevation forest where we located our first Black-capped Flycatchers. We ended the day with a fantastictic dinner close to Savegre.
January 13 – Talamanca Mountains and Rancho Naturalista

This day was largely a day to transfer to our next hotel, Rancho Naturalista. In the morning, we birded along the Providencia Road. The bird activity was rather slow to start the day but we did see our only Barred Becards of the trip and had great views at a Costa Rican Pygmy-Owl! After a few hour drive to Rancho Naturalista and a delicious lunch, we enjoyed a little feeder watching. There were many new birds for our trip including Gray-chested Dove, Violet-headed Hummingbird, Green-breasted Mango, White-necked Jacobin, Crowned Woodnymph, and Orange-billed Sparrow among others. In the late afternoon we walked down to the “pools” which are a series of pools of stagnant water along a creek; it makes for a great place for birds to drink and bathe! The highlight on our visit was a male Snowcap! We also saw Sulphur-rumped Flycatcher, White-ruffed Manakin, Kentucky Warbler, and a couple Red-throated Ant-Tanagers! It was a great afternoon of birding, but it was time to end the day with a great dinner at Rancho.

January 14 – Rancho Naturalista and Rio Plantanillo

We started this morning at the moth light to see what birds might come in to feed on the moths at the start of the day. There weren’t many moths, so there weren’t many birds, but we did see Golden-crowned Warbler, Red-throated Ant-Tanager, Buff-throated Foliage-gleaner, and Orange-billed Sparrow. Some birding around the grounds and edge habitat above the lodge were very productive. Some of the many highlights included
January 14 – Continued

Green Thorntail, Gartered Trogon, White-collared Manakin, Black-crowned and Masked Tityras, Bay Wren, White-vented Euphonias, and Emerald Tanager. The interior of the forest was slow, but we did have good looks at a Plain-brown Woodcreeper. In the afternoon, birding around Rio Plantanillo provided us with unbelievable looks at Sun-bittern as it showed off its spectacular wing pattern while preening. After seeing many other birds, we finally spotted a Fasciated Tiger-Heron along the same stretch the Sun-bitterns had been seen. After a little more birding in the area, we headed back to Rancho for dinner.
January 15 – Rancho Naturalista

Unfortunately, due to covid our plans changed completely at the end of this tour. After one member of our group tested positive for covid, we set up tests for everyone else. Luckily, everyone else tested negative and were able to get home without any delay. So, some of our group birded at Rancho for part of the morning and most of the group was able to get in some last birding in the evening in San Jose.

The last birding in San Jose (both on the evening of the 15th and morning of the 16th) provided some great birds such as Ferruginous Pygmy and Mottled Owls, Crested and Yellow-headed Caracaras, Hoffman’s and Lineated Woodpecker, Yellow-naped Parrot, and Cinnamon-bellied Saltator!