Turkey Vultures, Swainson’s Hawks, and a Broad-winged Hawk migrating south

COSTA RICA
Raptor Migration Spectacular

Tour Leaders: Eric Ripma and Jehudy Carballo
October 16-25, 2022
October 16 – Casona del Cafetal, Finca Cristina

After our small group arrived and we made a short drive out of the city to Casona del Cafetal where we would be staying for the night, the birding began! On our walk from the rooms to lunch, we had our first taste of birding in Costa Rica. We had good looks at Yellow-bellied Elaenia, Great Kiskadees, and Social and Gray-capped Flycatchers. During lunch the rain started, so we headed over to Finca Cristina in the afternoon. This organic coffee farm has some of the best tasting coffee and can be quite birdy! We enjoyed drinking and buying coffee, a short tour of the farm, and several birds including some cooperative Gray-headed Chachalaca. After dinner at Casona, it was time to get some rest so we would be ready for the rest of the tour!

October 17 – Casona del Cafetal, Hotel Quelitales, Rancho Naturalista

We started our first full day by birding around the grounds of our hotel. As usual on the first morning of a tour, it was hard to keep up with all the new birds that we were seeing. In several hours of birding we had already seen almost 75 species including some highlights such as Green Ibis, Lineated Woodpecker, Barred Antshrike, Mistletoe Tyrannulet, White-eared Ground-Sparrow, plenty of Montezuma Oropendolas, and White-lined
October 17 – Continued

and Scarlet-rumped Tanagers. In the mid-morning we loaded up our van and made a short drive to Hotel Quelitales. We spent the next couple hours enjoying birding around the hummingbird feeders and blind. Nine hummingbird species were seen including such highlights as Black-bellied Hummingbird and Coppery-headed Emerald. After slowly picking up a number of species, a flock materialized out of the mountains and surrounded us. Slate-throated Redstart, Spotted Barbtail, and White-winged Tanagers started the show and by the end we had added many more tanagers and warblers. After a tasty lunch at Hotel Quelitales, we made our drive to Rancho Naturalista, where we would be staying for the next two nights. Upon arrival, we enjoyed birding from the deck that overlook their feeders. As usual, the White-necked Jacobins and Crowned Woodnymphs dazzled, Orange-billed and Black-striped Sparrows hopped out for good views, and Olive-backed Euphonias visited the fruit. It was a great way to end our first full day!

October 18 – Rancho Naturalista, Rio Platanillo

We started the morning early at Rancho’s moth sheet to see what birds would be attracted by the moths. It was very quiet, but eventually a couple of Red-throated Ant-Tanagers arrived. As we birded around the grounds, we added many new
October 18 – Continued

species including great looks at Rufous Motmot, Collared Aracaris visiting the feed-
ers, White-crowned Parrots, a cooperative Plain Xenops, and Golden-hooded and Bay-headed Tanagers. A visit to some flowers on a different part of the property added great views of Snowcap, a female, Black-crested Coquette, and a Garden Emerald! In the afternoon we visited the Platanillo River where we enjoyed spectacular views of Sunbittern. The Sunbittern is always one of the “favorites” of the trip and it was no different this year. Throughout the afternoon we added several other species including a confid-
ing Bay Wren. In the evening, we all enjoyed another delicious meal at Rancho.

October 19 – Rancho Naturalista, Angostura Reservoir, Caribbean Coast

Before breakfast, we took a short walk around the grounds at Rancho and the birds were quite active. Without walking far, we enjoyed great views of Black-cheeked Woodpecker, White-crowned Parrot, White-collared Manakin, Black-crowned Tityra, and Chestnut-capped and Golden-crowned Warblers. After breakfast, we loaded up the van to make the 4.5 hour drive to Puerto Viejo de Talamanca. Our first stop was at Angostura Reservoir, only about 30 minutes down the road from Rancho. Many new species were seen including the skulky Slaty Spinetail, Olive-crowned Yellowthroat, Amazon Kingfisher, and a large flock of Southern Lapwings. On our drive to the coast, we passed many banana plantations, and Jehudy taught us all about the importance of the banana to not only Costa Rica, but also the world. There is never a dull moment in Costa Rica,
October 19 – Continued

even when you are making a long drive! At lunch we enjoyed great food and great migration! Hundreds of swallows and swifts streamed by overhead and our first migrant raptors (Merlin, Peregrine Falcon, and Broad-winged Hawk) zipped by. After lunch, we stopped at a couple of river mouths along the coast where we added some shorebirds, Magnificent Frigatebirds, and a Brown Booby. Once we arrived at our lodging on the coast, everyone took a well-deserved rest before dinner.

October 20 – Casa Calateas, Cahuita National Park

On this morning, we departed early so we would have time to bird on the way to Casa Calateas where we were hoping to witness a big raptor migration day. After a slow start to the morning, the birding picked up and we enjoyed great views of many species including Purple-throated Fruitcrow, Pale-billed Woodpecker, Blue Dacnis, and Plain-brown Woodcreeper. After some delicious pancakes at Casa Calateas, we noticed a large kettle of raptors passing overhead - it was time to get to the deck to watch some migration! Over the next few hours, we enjoyed 75,000+ raptors migrate by this viewpoint. The flight consisted of 10’s of thousands Turkey Vultures and Broad-winged Hawks, thousands of Swainson's Hawks, and lesser numbers of Mississippi Kites, Peregrine Falcons, Merlins and singles of Sharp-shinned, Cooper's, and Short-tailed Hawks. Even a Wood Stork decided to join the show at one point. It's hard to describe the scale of the migration at this site. It’s something you have to see, to appreciate fully!
October 20 – Continued

In the afternoon we visited Cahuita National Park which protects great lowland rainforest habitats and a portion of the coast. The birds were very active as soon as we arrived. Bay-breasted Warblers dominated the flocks, another sign of the number of birds that use this area as a migration corridor. Highlights included a cooperative Band-tailed Barbthroat, Chestnut-backed Antbirds, Ruddy-tailed Flycatcher, Brown-capped Tyrannulet, and great looks at Shining Honeycreepers. The day was over, but the memories of the migration will persist. If you haven't had a chance to experience the raptor migration in this area, it's definitely worth your time!
October 21 – Cariblue Beach Resort, Kekoldi, Casa Calateas

Our original plan was to spend most of the day at the Kekoldi Hawkwatch, but due to the difficult hike to get to the hawk platform, some of the group opted to go back to Casa Calateas. Both sites were spectacular with thousands upon thousands of raptors migrating past again. It’s hard to imagine there were any more raptors left to migrate by, but I’m sure many more thousands migrated past throughout the rest of the fall. Other highlights on this morning were a troop of White-faced Capuchins, a pair of Slaty-tailed Trogons, and a Double-toothed Kite that perched in front of the hawk deck for most the morning.
October 21 – Continued

In the afternoon, we spent time birding along the road to Casa Calateas. We didn’t make it far since there were so many birds in the forest and many raptors migrating overhead. Red-lored and Mealy Parrots and our only Olive-throated Parakeets were keeping us company as hundreds of Turkey Vultures and Broad-winged and Swainson’s Hawks glided past. We also saw our only Plain-colored Tanagers of the whole trip.

October 22 – Cariblue Beach Resort, Caribbean Coast, Guarumo Lodge

Most of this day was set to be a travel day, ending with the arrival at Arenal Observatory Lodge. Of course, we had several stops planned to pick up some birds as we made our drive across Costa Rica. We spent the early morning birding around the grounds of our hotel and picked up some new species. A flock of Great Green Macaws flew over, a pair of Gray-cowled Wood-Rails strolled across the lawn while vocalizing, and a flock each of Dusky-faced Tanagers and Tawny-crested Tanagers provided great looks.
October 22 – Continued

After breakfast and packing up the vehicle, we headed up the coast and stopped at a couple of spots along the coast to scan the beach and open water. Good views of our only Collared Plover in addition to eight other shorebird species made for some great stops. After a few more hours of driving north we stopped for lunch at Guarumo Lodge. This relatively new location has delicious, Caribbean style meals, in addition to great bird feeders. Our first Scaly-breasted Hummingbirds, a Cinnamon Woodpecker feeding on ants, and our only Gray-cheeked Thrush were among the highlights. We made it to Arenal without incident and in time to get settled in before having dinner at the lodge.

October 23 – Arenal Observatory Lodge, Peninsula Road, Papa’s Place

We spent this morning birding the grounds at Arenal Observatory Lodge. Crested Guans and Great Curassows entertained around the feeders, a large troop of White-nosed Coatis approached closely, and many species of warblers and tanagers entertained. The gardens provided close views of Long-billed Starthroat, Violet-headed Hummingbird, and the diminutive Blue-throated Goldentail. Over the course of the morning, we racked up over 100 species. After lunch and a short break, we left the grounds to bird along the nearby, Peninsula Road. White-throated Magpie-Jays showed well and both
October 23 – Continued

Broad-billed and Keel-billed Motmots were seen well. After enjoying the motmots, we noticed a small flock of ant specialists following some army ants that were on the move. Birding this flock was quite exciting and we had looks at Great Antshrike, Bare-crowned, Bicolored, and Spotted Antbirds, Spotted Woodcreeper, and a couple Buff-rumped Warblers. Once we had our fill, we made a short drive to a private residence where we would be having dinner. It was late afternoon by the time we arrived, so bird activity was a little slow, but the tree frogs were starting to get active in their ponds. We all enjoyed watching the enigmatic, Red-eyed Tree Frogs and a delicious dinner before heading back to the lodge for the night.

October 24 – Arenal Observatory Lodge, Virgen del Socorro, Soda Cinchona, Santa Barbara, Hotel Bougainvillea

We spent the early morning birding the grounds at Arenal Observatory Lodge. Woodpeckers made a great showing, and we had views of Black-cheeked, Hoffman's, Smoky-brown, Pale-billed, and Golden-olive. After breakfast, we started our last drive of the tour, back towards the airport where we would be staying for the night. On our way out of Arenal, we stopped and had great views of Rufous-tailed Jacamars and our only good looks at Purple-crowned Fairy. Our first stop on the drive was at Virgen del Socorro. After some searching, we ran into a couple of small flocks that contained some highlights...
October 24 – Continued

such as White-ruffed Manakin, Tufted Flycatcher, Black-faced Solitaire, Common Chlorospingus, and a few species of tanagers. We also had brief views of an American Dipper and Torrent Tyrannulet along the river, but neither showed well. It was time to move on to Soda Cinchona where we would spend some time watching the feeders and having lunch. We saw our first male Coppery-headed Emerald, an endemic of Costa Rica, among six hummingbird species, but the fruit feeders were even busier. Red-headed and Prong-billed Barbets, Northern Emerald-Toucanet, and Silver-throated Tanagers put on a great show! After lunch, we birded some higher elevation forest and came across a great foraging flock. The flock started with a Slaty Flowerpiercer, and before long we were enjoying views of Black Guan, Purple-throated Mountain-gem, Prong-billed Barbet, Mountain Elaenia, Yellow-winged Vireo, Black-and-yellow Silky-flycatcher, Golden-browed Chlorophonia, Yellow-thighed Brushfinch, and Flame-throated Warbler. A little way down the trail we added Ruddy-capped Nightingale-Thrush and Black-cheeked Warbler. The birding was fantastic! Before too long, we needed to continue our drive to Hotel Bougainvillea. Upon arrival, we had a little time to walk around the grounds before sunset. As soon as we walked out the back door, we added a group of four Yellow-naped Parrots, a roosting Mottled Owl, and as the sun was setting a pair of Lesser Nighthawks passed overhead. It was time for our final dinner and to reminisce about all the amazing birds we had seen and all the fantastic (and generously portioned) meals we had enjoyed!
October 25 – Hotel Bougainvillea

A few from our group spent some time birding the grounds of the hotel on this morning. Several species were added to our trip list including White-fronted Parrot, Lesson’s Motmot, and Rufous-naped Wren.

At the end of the trip, we had recorded 338 species along with many other wildlife highlights such as Brown-throated Three-toed Sloth, Hoffman’s Two-toed Sloth (great views of it feeding just feet away!), a few species of monkeys, and several Red-eyed Tree Frogs. There is never a dull moment when birding in Costa Rica!