Scaled Antpitta

COSTA RICA

Jewels

Tour Leaders: Eric Ripma and Jehudy Carballo
January 7-15, 2023
January 7 – Hotel Bougainvillea,

After the first half of the group arrived we spent some time birding the gardens at Hotel Bougainvillea. This is always a good way to start a trip and start to learn some of the common Costa Rican birds. In addition to the Boat-billed and Social Flycatchers (somehow there were no Great Kiskadees!), Clay-colored Thrushes, and Rufous-tailed Hummingbirds we saw Rufous-naped Wrens, Blue-gray Tanagers, Cinnamon-bellied Saltators and much more!

After a delicious dinner, the rest of the group arrived. We were all ready to start birding Costa Rica!

January 8 – Ground Sparrow Spot, Hotel Bougainvillea, Nectar and Pollen Reserve, Guarumo Lodge, Rio Platanillo

After some coffee and a light breakfast, we made a short drive to a coffee farm to look for the endemic Cabanis’s Ground Sparrow. It didn’t take long before we were watching one of these special sparrows! A Lesson’s Motmot also posed for our group and allowed close views. We headed back to the hotel grounds to spend a short time birding before breakfast and were not disappointed. The resident Mottled Owls were enjoyed by all.
After breakfast and packing, we drove out of the city to Nectar and Pollen Reserve. This reserve is on the edge of Braulio Carrillo National Park, making for some great birding potential. Raptors stole the show with King Vulture, Black Hawk-Eagle, White, Broad-winged, and Short-tailed Hawks, and Bat Falcon all providing great looks. Seven species of hummingbirds including our only Broze-tailed Plumeleteer and Blue-chested Hummingbirds, Rufous and Broad-billed Motmots, Rufous-winged and Smoky-brown Woodpeckers, and Chestnut-headed and Montezuma Oropendolas helped make for a great visit. Next, we stopped at Guarumo Lodge for a delicious lunch and some great birds. Green, Red-legged, and Shining Honeycreepers dazzled with their beautiful colors while our first toucans, both Keel-billed and Yellow-throated and Collared Aracari, visited the nearby fruit feeders. After lunch, a Russet-naped Wood-Rail made a brief foray into the open; we all had great views!

It was time to start our drive to our next lodge, Arte de Plumas, but we had a birding stop to make before arriving. A quick stop at the Rio Platanillo produced exactly what we were hoping for; a Sunbittern. This species is coveted by many birders visiting the tropics and for good reason. After several minutes we had great views of this spectacular bird. Once we arrived at our lodge, we enjoyed the last bits of daylight by watching the hummingbirds coming in for a last drink before nightfall.
January 9 – Rancho Naturalista, Arte de Plumas

The first half of our day was spent on the grounds of Rancho Naturalista. As usual, the species list was long and included some great highlights. Birding before breakfast was busy and we enjoyed great views of Red-throated Ant-Tanager, Scarlet-thighed Dacnis, and a Gartered Trogon. After breakfast, we hiked up the pasture where we ran into a large flock of tanagers, warblers, and others. Luckily the flock kept us in the area for a while, since a Lovely Cotinga eventually perched out in the open! The cotinga was distant, but the views through the scope were great.

Before lunch, we headed down the hill to Rancho Bajo to watch hummingbirds coming into their garden. Not long after we arrived, the star of the show, the Snowcap made an appearance. For the rest of our visit, both male and female Snowcaps visited the flowers and put on a show for our whole group. Our only Garden Emerald and Black-crested Coquette of the tour also came to feed on the flowers.

The rain began after lunch, so we changed our birding plans for the afternoon. Luckily we did, because the rain didn’t let up much through the rest of the day. We stayed dry and birded from the deck at Arte de Plumas. Flock after flock of tanagers made for a great afternoon and we ended up seeing almost 60 species just while birding from the deck! Some of the highlights included Gray Hawk, five species of euphonias, both Chestnut-headed and Montezuma Oropendolas, and nine species of tanagers including many Silver-throateds, White-lined, Emerald, and Speckled. It was a great afternoon!
January 10 – El Copal Reserve, Angostura Reservoir

Our morning began with an early morning drive to El Copal Reserve. Of course, on the way, we added a few more birds with the highlight being a pair of Red-breasted Meadowlarks. Upon our arrival, we enjoyed flocks of Black-faced Grosbeaks, Ashy-throated Chlorospingus, and tanagers moving through the open areas. After enjoying some of these flocks we began our hike through the forest. The forest birds proved rather difficult, but we did hear and get a glimpse of Yellow-eared Toucanets, and a Violaceous Quail-Dove flew right by our heads before perching in some thick vegetation along the side of the trail. After lunch, we enjoyed our only Black-and-yellow Tanagers and had great looks at Tawny-capped Euphonia and Speckled Tanager.
In the afternoon, we visited Angostura Reservoir which provided a completely different suite of species. Ringed and Amazon Kingfishers put on a show, Northern Jacanas flashed their beautiful yellow wings, and Groove-billed Anis perched in the open. Many other waterbirds were seen, but the White-throated Crakes, Slaty Spinetails, and Olive-crowned Yellowthroats stayed hidden while making their presence known by vocalizing. On the way back to our lodge, a small flock of Gray-headed Chachalacas made for a great end to our birding day.

January 11 – Hotel Quelitales, Suenos del Bosque Lodge

We had an early start on this morning, but it was well worth it when we got to Hotel Quelitales and Jose (the owner) called in a Scaled Antpitta! This difficult-to-see species spent most of the morning nearby where we enjoyed fabulous views. Throughout the morning we saw many specialties coming to the feeders including White-bellied Mountain-gem, Coppery-headed Emerald, Black-bellied Hummingbird, and Sooty-faced Finch. Large flocks of tanagers and warblers moved through the trees and added some stunning species to our list such as Golden-winged Warbler, Slate-throated Redstart, dozens of Silver-throated Tanagers, and Scarlet-thighed Dacnis. At lunch, we enjoyed a delicious meal while watching a King Vulture enjoying a meal of his own! After a quick stop at Finca Cristina to buy coffee, we started our drive to our next destination, the Savegre Valley. Some brief birding after checking into our rooms introduced us to some of the new birds, we would be watching over the next couple days.
January 12 – Savegre Valley

Our morning started off at a wild avocado tree. One of the most sought-after birds in the world, the Resplendent Quetzal, feeds on these avocados. Within several minutes, we heard one call and before long, we were watching a dazzling male. Over the course of the next hour, we watched both males and females feeding, chasing, and vocalizing.

After breakfast, we loaded into 4X4 vehicles and headed up the mountain to the trails above Savegre Lodge. The warbler flocks moved through in large numbers, and we spotted many new birds. Collared Redstarts, and Flame-throated and Black-cheeked Warblers were among the highlights. An Ochraceous Pewee, a rare and difficult to find species, even allowed for good scope views!

After a great lunch at Alma de Arbol, we headed up their road to Batsu Gardens. The birding and views were spectacular. Large-footed Finches, and White-naped and Yellow-thighed Brushfinches fed below the feeders as Silver-throated, Flame-colored, and Blue-gray Tanagers came to the bananas. Six species of hummingbirds made regular visits as well and included Talamanca, Volcano, and Scintillant Hummingbirds, and White-throated Mountain-gems.
January 13 – Los Cusingos, Aracari Birding Deck, Mirador Valle del General, Communication Towers

After an early morning drive to the city of San Isidro de El General, a quick coffee and breakfast, and an unsuccessful stop for Turquoise Cotinga, we arrived at Los Cusingos, the former home of Alexander Skutch. Skutch was one of the foremost ornithologists on neotropical birds and wrote what some consider to be the best field guide to the birds of Costa Rica. Now, this property is a preserve, and the birding can be great along the trails and in the gardens. A flock of tanagers and several Golden-naped Woodpeckers was a good start to our walk. Within a few minutes of putting bananas out we had a pair of Spot-crowned Euphonias visiting. And, we finally had luck with seeing wrens when we had great views of Rufous-breasted and Riverside Wrens. Golden-crowned Spadebill and Ruddy-tailed Flycatcher both showed well right before we ran into an ant swarm! We enjoyed watching a Roadside Hawk, a flock of Gray-headed Tanagers, and a Bicolored Antbird feeding on the prey flushed by the ants. It was a birdy morning!

Afterwards, we enjoyed a delicious home cooked lunch at the Aracari Birding Deck. Some nice birds also visited including Fiery-billed Aracari and Streaked Saltator. On our way back to Savegre, we stopped at Mirador Valle del General where we saw our only Gray-cowled Wood-Rail, Snowy-bellied Hummingbird and White-tailed Emerald.
Our last stop of the day was above treeline where we were looking for Volcano Junco. It was cold and the wind was howling. The juncos weren’t cooperating, but we did see our first Black-capped Flycatchers and Sooty Thrush. Hearing a junco chipping gave us hope, but the bird stayed well-hidden and we didn’t get a view. As we were driving out, a bird hopped up on the side of the road; the junco! Everyone got great looks at this range-restricted specialty.

January 14 – Suenos del Bosque, Paraiso Quetzal, Hotel Bougainvillea

This morning we had a more relaxed start and spent time birding on the grounds of our lodge. On our early walk before breakfast, we enjoyed great views of Long-tailed Silky-flycatchers, Yellow-winged Vireo, and Black Guan. After breakfast, we hiked further on the trails and enjoyed our first perched views of a flock of Sulphur-winged Parakeets and an obliging Fasciated Tiger-Heron. It was time to drive back to Hotel Bougainvillea and stop at Paraiso Quetzal for lunch and some final birding. As usual, the hummingbirds stole the show, especially the stunning Fiery-throated Hummingbird. A pair of Golden-browed Chlorophonia was also much appreciated by our group. We made the rest of the drive to Hotel Bougainvillea in time to spend a short while birding the grounds before a great last dinner of our tour.
January 15 - Hotel Bougainvillea

Half of our group departed early, but the other half spent some time birding in the gardens on this morning. A few new birds including a Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Rufous-naped Wrens, and Chestnut-capped Warblers made for a great sendoff from Costa Rica!