A Gartered Trogon at Rancho Naturalista

COSTA RICA
Raptor Migration Spectacular

Tour Leaders: Eric Ripma and Jehudy Carballo
October 11-20, 2023
October 11 – Arrival

After our group convened in the afternoon at Hotel Bougainvillea, we made a short drive to a nearby coffee farm. We were hoping to see the endemic Cabanis’s Ground-Sparrow, but rain moved in before we could give any effort. We headed back to the hotel and enjoyed a great dinner before the rest of our tour would soon begin.

October 12 – Cinchona, Guarumo Lodge, Caribbean Coast

We started our morning by visiting the same coffee farm we had attempted to bird the previous afternoon. The weather was great, and we were successful in locating our first Costa Rican endemic, Cabanis’s Ground-Sparrow! Afterwards, we spent a little time birding the grounds of our hotel. The resident Mottled Owls and a Lesson’s Motmot provided some great views. We had to change our plans for the rest of the day due to a landslide that closed a road on our planned route. So, we headed north out of the San Jose area and visited Soda Cinchona. A quick stop at a waterfall produced our only American Dipper of the trip. Once we arrived at Cinchona, we enjoyed great looks at several species of hummingbirds and tanagers visiting the feeders. A few Coppery-headed Emeralds, another Costa Rican endemic, provided close views and our only Brown Violetear of our trip made an appearance. Red-headed Barbet and Silver-throated and Scarlet-rumped Tanagers provided even more color to the scene.
October 13 – Casa Calateas, Cahuita National Park

As we were loading into the van, a couple of us were talking about sloths, and just then we spotted one overhead; it was great timing! After enjoying views of this Hoffmann’s Two-toed Sloth we took a short drive to the road that leads to Casa Calateas. Some early morning birding along the road resulted in some great birds such as Blue-chested Hummingbird, Brown-hooded and White-crowned Parrots, Purple-throated Fruitcrow, and many others. A Green-and-Black Poison Dart Frog was also enjoyed by our whole group! We continued up to Casa Calateas where we enjoyed a delicious breakfast before more birding on their property.

Afterwards, we drove to Guarumo Lodge for lunch and some more birding. A family of Russet-naped Wood-Rails made a much-appreciated visit as well as our first toucans; a group of Collared Aracari. After enjoying our lunch, we spent some more time watching the feeders. All three Costa Rican honeycreepers (Green, Shining, and Red-legged) were visiting, as well as our only Scaly-breasted Hummingbird of the tour. We still had a long drive ahead of us, so we had to pull ourselves away from the birds. On our way, a stop along the Caribbean coast added a few waterbird species including a Whimbrel to our list. In the early evening we arrived at our lodging where we would be staying for the next three nights.
October 14 – Kekoldi Hawk Watch, Cariblue Beach Resort

We left our hotel early so we would be able to make our hike to the Kekoldi Hawk Watch. A couple of Slaty-tailed Trogons, Broad-billed Motmots, Checker-throated Stipple-throats, White-flanked Antwrens, and Wedge-billed Woodcreepers were among our highlights while birding along the entry road. It was getting later in the morning so we headed to the hawk deck to see if we would have some migration. Unfortunately, migration was a bit slow on this day, but we did see several kettles of raptors and vultures and our only King Vulture of the tour. While watching some of the raptors we enjoyed a few species in the nearby forest including a cooperative Black-striped Woodcreeper, Olive-backed Euphonia, and some Golden-hooded Tanagers. After lunch at Casa Calateas, we headed to Cahuita National Park. The bird activity was a little slow, but it still produced some good looks at Ruddy-tailed Flycatcher, Black-crowned Antshrike, and Red-throated Ant-Tanagers. We headed back to our hotel in the afternoon to cool off and spend some time at the pool and grounds of the hotel. We were hopeful that more raptors would be migrating the following day.
while it was still cool. On our way up to the hawk tower we saw a small kettle of raptors already forming including an Osprey and Mississippi Kites. When we arrived at the hawk tower, a few Broad-winged Hawks were starting to rise and a Northern Harrier winged by; a rather rare migrant for this area. After the next several hours there was a good bit of movement of raptors, swallows, and swifts. Turkey Vultures and Broad-winged Hawks were most numerous with lesser numbers of Mississippi Kites, Osprey, Peregrine Falcon, and Merlin. While enjoying the hawks, a Slaty-tailed Trogon stopped by and spent some time next to the tower! After lunch and the solar eclipse, we made the hike back out. We picked up several new species on our way including our only sighting of Black-chested Jays. We also had a brief sighting of a White-whiskered Puffbird, but it wouldn’t cooperate for the whole group to get looks. We again spent the late afternoon cooling off at our hotel.

October 15 – Cariblue Beach Resort, Caribbean Coast, Apache’s Restaurant, Rancho Naturalista

We started our morning on the grounds of our hotel drinking coffee and watching the birds around the pool area. It was quite birdy throughout the morning, and we never made it too far. Keel-billed and Yellow-throated Toucans, Black-cheeked Woodpecker, Long-tailed Tyrants, and quite a few migrants made an appearance. After a little while
we noticed a sloth in a nearby tree. This time it was a Brown-throated Three-toed Sloth! We had great views of this sloth as it scratched, yawned, and went back to sleep. After the uncooperative White-whiskered Puffbird from the day before, it was nice for the whole group to get great looks at one. Once we started walking around the grounds a bit more, we added more species such as our only Prothonotary Warbler, a point-blank Black-crowned Antshrike, and a couple Orange-chinned Parakeets. Afterwards, we began our drive to our next lodge, Rancho Naturalista. On the way, we made a few stops along the coast and picked up a number of shorebirds including a couple of Collared Plovers, Black-bellied and Semipalmated Plovers, and Short-billed Dowitcher. We also saw several Magnificent Frigatebirds, Olive-throated Parakeets, and Common Black...
Hawk. We stopped for lunch on our way to Rancho at a restaurant with a great view of the surrounding mountains. Lunch was great and we picked up a few new birds including our only Crested Guans, a flock of Gray-headed Chachalacas, and a few Plain-colored Tanagers. As we were getting close to our next destination, it started to rain, so we skipped our stop and headed to Rancho. We spent the late afternoon birding from the balcony of Rancho and picked up many new species for the trip. The hummingbird feeders attracted 8 species of hummingbirds including a Bronze-tailed Plumeleteer, our only one of the trip. The water feature attracted a Golden-crowned and a Chestnut-capped Warbler while the trees hosted a number of tanagers and warblers including our first Bay-headed Tanager.
October 16 – Rancho Naturalista, Angostura Reservoir

We spent our whole morning birding on the grounds of Rancho Naturalista. Birding was very active right around the lodge area, and we didn’t make it far before breakfast. Black-cheeked Woodpecker, Brown-hooded and White-crowned Parrots, Plain Xenops, Chestnut-headed Oropendola, and Golden-crowned Warbler were among the highlights.

After breakfast we took a longer walk around the grounds and picked up quite a few new species including brief looks at a Lovely Cotinga, Yellow-olive Flatbill, and Black-cowled Oriole. Some very vocal Black-headed Saltators showed off well and we had our first good looks at Gray-capped Flycatchers. Next, we headed down the hill to Rancho Bajo to watch their porterweed flowers. A single Violet-headed Hummingbird and a brief, Black-crested Coquette were the highlights.

After lunch at Rancho, we stopped by the Rio Platanillo, but the water levels were high and there were no Sunbitterns to be seen. We decided to head to Angostura Reservoir and as we were headed down the entrance road, there they were, two Sunbitterns! Despite a lot of construction, we added many species of waterbirds while birding around the reservoir. Southern Lapwings, Northern Jacana, Green Ibis, and Solitary and Pectoral Sandpipers all showed well! Afterwards, we headed back to Rancho for the night.
La Marta we quickly found a Snowcap! The first part of our walk at La Marta was unusually quiet, but we eventually came across a flock. The first bird we saw was the uncommon Rufous-browed Tyrannulet and then came a flock of Black-and-yellow Tanagers! Other species we saw included Speckled, Golden-hooded, Bay-headed, Emerald, and Silver-throated Tanagers. While eating lunch in the reserve a Double-toothed Kite flew in and perched in a tree overhead! After lunch, we continued driving towards our next lodge, Hotel Quelitales. We arrived in time to have some coffee in their dining area and spend the afternoon around their upper feeding area. We were able to watch a couple of Green-fronted Lancebills in their unique habitat, next to a waterfall. Our first Black-bellied Hummingbird also provided nice looks. Late in the afternoon, Jose (the owner of the hotel) was able to call in a Scaled Antpitta! It was a great way to end the day.

October 17 – Rancho Naturalista, La Marta, Hotel Quelitales

We started this morning by birding around Rancho. Activity was quite high, and we had recorded almost 90 species before breakfast. As we walked down the road, our only Smoky-brown Woodpecker showed off well, a Black-crowned Tityra provided great scope views, and a White-winged Becard foraged nearby. When we got a little further down the road, a pair of Black-cowled Orioles were seen, a Cinnamon Becard gave great views, and a Gartered Trogon perched in the open! After breakfast, we made our drive to La Marta Wildlife Refuge. Along the way, we stopped at a roadside pasture where we had great looks at Red-breasted Meadowlark and Groove-billed Anis. Once we arrived at
October 18 – Hotel Quelitales, Finca Cristina

We spent the first half of the day birding the grounds of Hotel Quelitales. Throughout the morning we recorded 16 species of hummingbirds including the near-endemic, White-bellied Mountain-gem, a male Snowcap, our only Stripe-tailed Hummingbird, and a couple of Black-bellied Hummingbirds! While birding around the upper feeders we managed good looks at the tiny Black-headed Tody-Flycatcher, a singing Slaty-backed Nightingale-Thrush, a couple of Sooty-faced Finches, an adult male Golden-winged Warbler, and our only Slate-throated Redstart. Lower down the hill we had great looks at Mistletoe Tyrannulet, a pair of Yellow-bellied Elaenias, and a single Lesser Elaenia. Around lunch time we headed to a nearby cafe where we enjoyed a great lunch and great looks at Crimson-fronted Parakeets. Our afternoon was spent at Finca Cristina where we took a tour of their organic, bird-friendly, coffee farm. As always, we had a cup of their delicious coffee, learned a lot about coffee production, and we purchased a few bags to take home! After dinner back at Hotel Quelitales, we headed back to our rooms for the night; we only had one more full day of birding left!
October 19 – Irazu Volcano

After an early departure from Hotel Quelitales and about an hour drive, we arrived at our first birding location of the day on the slopes of the Irazu Volcano. It was only a couple minutes before our target arrived, the Resplendent Quetzal. This is one of the most spectacular birds in the world and it’s always a treat to see. This one didn’t have the long “tail streamers”, but within a couple minutes another individual arrived that did! We spent the next hour birding from this same location and the quetzals were present the whole time. Many other highlights passed through while we were here including a large flock of Band-tailed Pigeons, several Volcano Hummingbirds, Acorn Woodpeckers, Black-capped Flycatchers, Yellow-winged Vireo, Black-and-yellow Silky-flycatcher, Flame-throated Warbler, and Slaty Flowerpiercer! From here we headed into the National Park. The views were spectacular and we added a handful of new species such as Volcano Junco, Timberline Wren, Large-footed Finch, Black-billed Nightingale-Thrush, and Sooty-capped Chlorospingus. After lunch, we hiked the trail at Noche Buena. Here we picked up our only Black-cheeked Warblers, more Fiery-throated and Talamanca Hummingbirds, and Mountain Elaenia. It was time to head back to Hotel Bougainvillea for our last night in Costa Rica, but we still had the next morning to see if we could pick up any extra species in the gardens.
October 20 – Hotel Bougainvillea

Before breakfast and packing for our flights, we spent some time on the grounds of Bougainvillea. Right after we started walking, we heard a Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl and after a short search we found a pair! As we were watching the owls, a pair of Yellow-headed Caracaras started making a racket and we all had nice views of this new species for the trip. And we finally managed to get views of a Lineated Woodpecker after we had heard them at many stops along our route. It was a great way to end our trip!

All in all, we recorded 320 species of birds, a couple species of sloths, two species of Poison Dart Frogs, and many different butterflies. The wildlife, company, and delicious meals made for a great and memorable trip!