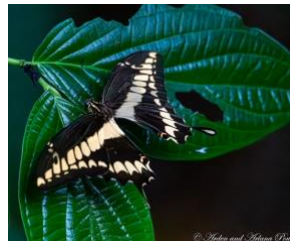


Costa Rica's Caribbean Side

October 9-19, 2023 | Trip Report | by Kent Skaggs



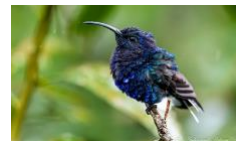
Guides Johan Fernandez and Kent Skaggs, with participants: Arlana & Arden, Jill & John, John, Lars, Millie & Peter and Sally & Jack



Mon., Oct. 9

Arrival in San Jose | Hotel Bougainvillea Gardens

The October visit to Costa Rica highlights the Caribbean side of the country, taking advantage of a brief dry season. Our host company, Horizontes, provided transfers from the airport to Hotel Bougainvillea, where we would be starting our trip. Several members of the group arrived early in order to do some exploring, with some traveling towards the coasts and others staying close to San Jose. Most everyone had ample opportunity to explore the 10 acres of botanical gardens on the premises of the hotel. With an array of tropical trees, shrubs and other flowering plants, the gardens provide excellent habitat for several species of birds. Over 40 species were seen during the course of the day just on the grounds, including Mottled Owl, Blue-vented Hummingbird, White-fronted Parrot, Squirrel Cuckoo, Lesson's Motmot, Social Flycatcher, Rufous-naped Wren, Yellow-green



Vireo and great looks at a very cooperative Rufous-browed Peppershrike. Not a bad start to the trip! Additional wildlife encountered were Variegated Squirrels and a Green Iguana roaming the grounds.

The group gathered in the bar at 6:00 PM for a welcome drink and a chance to get to know each other a bit. We were then joined by our leader/local guide, Johan Fernandez, who gave a presentation on what was in store for the group during the tour. We then moved to the restaurant for dinner before returning to our rooms to prepare for the following day.

Tues., Oct. 10 Travel to Maquenque | Cinchona Waterfall

Travel day! But before we loaded up the bus, the group met at 6:00 AM to take one last walk through the gardens. A lot of the birds we had seen the day before were seen again, with a few new additions including two Yellow-naped Parrots and a male Green-breasted Mango. We finished up our walk, ate breakfast, loaded up the bus, and hit the road.

On route to our next destination we began to climb in elevation. We made a few stops looking for species we weren't likely to encounter elsewhere on our trip. The first location was a little bird feeding station across from the Freddo Fresas restaurant in the town of Poasito in the Alajuela province. Purple-throated Mountain-gem and Violet Sabrewing were seen at the feeders and soaring high above was a dark morph Short-tailed Hawk and some White-collared Swifts. A short distance up the road we stopped again at a bridge that spanned a small stream. Several new species were seen at this stop, including Spot-crowned Woodcreeper, Streak-breasted Treehunter, Gray-breasted Wood-Wren, Long-tailed Silky flycatcher, Yellow-thighed Brushfinch and Slate-throated Redstart. We proceeded a little further up the road stopping just short of the entrance to Poas Volcano National Park. Fiery-throated Hummingbird, Scintillant Hummingbird, Black-and-yellow Silky flycatcher and Flame-throated Warbler were added to our growing list.

From here we continued up the road to where we would be stopping for lunch at Galeria de Colibri y Soda Cinchona, or the Colibri Cafe at Cinchona. This little roadside restaurant certainly is known as a birding destination, but also has beautiful scenery and great food! Upon arrival we checked out the feeding station and hummingbird feeders before sitting down for lunch. Green Hermit, Brown Violetear, Green-crowned Brilliant,



Coppery-headed Emerald, Black-bellied Hummingbird, Red-headed Barbet, Prong-billed Barbet, Northern Emerald Toucanet, Chestnut-capped Brushfinch, Crimson-collared Tanager, Silver-throated Tanager and Buff-

throated Saltator were seen, and all were new for the trip. We continued to enjoy the birds while we ate and also enjoyed a nice rain that had begun to fall shortly before we arrived. The San Fernando waterfall which is directly across from the restaurant took on a milk chocolate hue as the rain flowed in from the surrounding hillsides. As much as we hated to leave, we had to continue to push on to our ultimate destination for the day - Maquenque Ec lodge. As soon as we departed, we began descending into the Caribbean foothills and then eventually into the lowlands, enjoying the scenery along the way. After a few hours, we arrived at the Rio San Carlos, ready to be ferried across. Once across the river, we got checked in and received directions to our bungalows. As we were checking in, one of the groups pointed out that there was a pair of Bat Falcons perched at the top of a dead snag. This was a nice start to our stay at Maquenque. After getting settled in, we returned to the reception/restaurant where we tallied our sightings for the day - 105 species in total. We then enjoyed dinner and went to bed. We were just getting started.

Wed., Oct. 11 Maquenque Eco Lodge and Trails | Tropical Night Walk

Most of the group was up early for the 6:00 AM bird walk. This would become our typical routine each day for those who wanted to participate. Our walk started in foggy conditions on a trail that circled a small lake near our accommodations. The fog made it more difficult to see birds, but it didn't prevent their songs and calls from being heard. As we walked, we encountered about 100 Black-bellied Whistling Ducks in a wet meadow adjacent to the lake and a perched Roadside Hawk scanning that same meadow. Bronzy Hermit and Scaly-breasted Hummingbird were seen near the trail and Purple Gallinule, Northern Jacana and Bare-throated Tiger Heron were seen around the lakeshore.

After breakfast, the group headed into the rainforest to see what we could find. The start of the trail paralleled some water, and we found a few birds expected in this habitat. Boat-billed Heron, Green Ibis and an Amazon Kingfisher all provided us with good looks, as did a Green Basilisk. As the trail turned away from the water and deeper into the forest, we found a Strawberry Poison Dart Frog and a couple of Gartered Trogons. We heard a Chestnut-backed Antbird singing nearby, but it remained out of sight. Johan also pointed out a distant sound



that was the song of a Slaty-breasted Tinamou. We retraced our steps back out of the forest and onto the wider trails on the grounds. We had a brief stop near the reception area and started to head down a trail when Johan called for everyone to quickly get around a corner in order to see something that was on the trail. That something was a Baird's Tapir! This seldom seen mammal emerged out of the shadows of the forest, paused briefly on the path and then disappeared back into the forest. A great unexpected treat for the group to see! A little further down the trail we received another treat in the form of a male White-collared Manakin perched on a branch right along the side of the trail. It was very cooperative and allowed the group excellent views. Several other birds were seen during the remainder of the walk, including an Olivaceous Piculet. We retired for a brief siesta before having lunch.

After eating lunch and taking another siesta, we gathered near the bungalows where most of the group was staying to see what was there. As it turned out, there was quite a bit of bird life. Yellow-bellied Elaenia, Mistletoe Tyrannulet and Long-tailed Tyrant were a few of the flycatchers observed, along with several tanagers highlighted by a Golden-hooded Tanager. Blue Dacnis and several warblers were also seen before we took a stroll towards the east end of the lake. Along the way we encountered a Stripe-throated Hermit, a Collared Aracari and three Scarlet Macaws. Several other species were seen as well before we stopped to get freshened up for dinner. The group gathered at 6:30 PM to go over the daily bird/wildlife sightings, followed by dinner. Afterward, some of the group joined Johan on a night walk where we encountered four Common Pauraque, several species of frogs, several well-camouflaged Spectacled Caimans, and an excellent view of the Milky Way.

Thurs., Oct. 12 Maquenque Eco Lodge | San Carlos River Boat Tour

The group went on the pre-breakfast walk where we saw a lot of species seen the day before but a few new ones too: Long-billed Hermit, Long-billed Starthroat and Cinnamon Becard. We returned for breakfast and then got ready for a guided boat tour on the San Carlos River.

We boarded the boat and set off down the river, escorted by a family of Mangrove Swallows. The San Carlos River at Maquenque is very broad and turbid and drains into the San Juan River bordering Nicaragua. As we went downstream, it didn't take long before we saw our first American Crocodile which are relatively common. A short time later we had two Gray-headed Kites, one adult and one juvenile, fly across the river and perch in a



tree—a new species for the trip. As we continued down the river, when our guide or the boat's Captain would spot something along shore, we would head over for a closer look. A Boat-billed Heron was staying cool in the shade at one location and Proboscis Bats were seen roosting on a leaning tree trunk at another. As we continued downstream, three Wood Storks took flight and began rising upward on a thermal.

As we neared the border with Nicaragua, we made a brief stop near the town of Boca San Carlos where the group stretched their legs a bit and had the option of purchasing a refreshing drink. Back on the boat, the captain proceeded to take us back upstream at a quicker pace in order to get us back in time for lunch. Overall, a very relaxing morning on the river, with lots of wildlife seen.

Back for lunch, then a break before going for a walk back into the forest, but this time on a newly constructed trail. We walked around the lake trail first where we saw two Southern Lapwings in the wet meadow where the Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks were hanging out. We moved on and were soon at the junction of the new trail. Once on it we saw six Olive-throated Parakeets perched in a distant tree and a little further up the trail we came across a pair of White-shouldered Tanagers. As we proceeded further into the forest, we could hear the song of a Slaty-breasted Tinamou again, but this time much closer. We also heard a Chestnut-backed Antbird singing, but this time we were able to get great looks of this secretive bird as well. Johan heard another bird, a Broad-billed Motmot, and was able to locate it and get it in the scope. As we headed back on the trail, we added another new bird in a Rufous-winged Woodpecker. As we wrapped up our walk, several Broad-winged Hawks were seen flying low over the forest, presumably looking for a place to roost for the night. After a break to freshen up, we gathered again to tally what was seen during the day and enjoy our last dinner at Maquenque as we would be leaving for our next destination in the morning. It had been a wonderful start to the trip, but it was time to see more of the Caribbean side of Costa Rica.

Fri., Oct. 13 Frogs Heaven | Selva Verde Lodge

Travel day! It was breakfast, some birding around the reception area, then ferried across the river to get back on the bus. We settled in and enjoyed watching the countryside roll by. It wasn't long before we entered the Sarapiquí region near Puerto Viejo, where we stopped for lunch and then continued on to Frogs Heaven. Upon arrival we were greeted by Jaime, a long-time friend of Johan's who would be our guide. Jaime led us on a trail into a patch of forest that only 10 years ago had been farm ground, cleared of trees. Now there was lots of vegetation including lots of sizable trees standing 30 to 50 feet tall. Frogs Heaven was established to create habitat for native frogs; Jaime showed us a couple of species in Green-and-black Poison Dart Frog and Red-eyed



Tree Frog. It's also become great habitat for numerous bird species, with White-whiskered Puffbird and Cinnamon Woodpecker being added to our growing list.

Once we finished up at Frogs Heaven, we headed to a location not far away to try to find Great Green Macaws. We didn't find the Great Green but did see a couple of Scarlet Macaws perched in a tree. Then it was on to Selva Verde Lodge which is where we would be staying for the next couple of nights. We checked in and relaxed a bit before gathering for the daily bird/wildlife list, eating dinner and then heading off to bed.

Sat., Oct. 14 La Selva Biological Station | Sarapiquí River Boat Tour

We started the day with our pre-breakfast walk around the grounds at Selva Verde Lodge where we added a few new bird species - Neotropic Cormorant and Black Phoebe along the Sarapiquí River and Rufous Motmot along one of the trails. Back for breakfast.

After breakfast we headed to the La Selva Biological Station. Upon arrival we were greeted by a La Selva staff person, Octavio Ruiz, who would be our guide. Shortly after starting our walk, we found a Plain brown Woodcreeper at the beginning of a suspension bridge across the Puerto Viejo River. Once across to the other side, the bird activity really picked up. A couple of Double-toothed Kites were seen soaring high above the forest as well as several Gray-rumped Swifts flying just above the forest canopy. In a small group of trees amid several buildings of the research station, we encountered a mixed flock of birds that included Rufous Mourner, White-ringed Flycatcher and Scarlet-thighed Dacnis. A Bronze-tailed Plumeleteer was seen in this area too and not far away a Pied Puffbird was heard vocalizing and eventually seen high up in a treetop. From here we proceeded down a trail through mature forest. With towering trees and lush green vegetation extending from the canopy to the floor of the forest, it became apparent that finding birds could be a bit of a challenge. Fortunately for us, we came across army ants on a foraging raid just off of the trail. As we watched the ants methodically move across the forest floor searching for prey, antbirds waited patiently for the ants to flush prey items for them to devour. Chestnut-backed and Spotted Antbirds were seen first. Then Octavio caught a glimpse of an Ocellated Antbird, a much sought-after species by birders. Only fleeting glimpses were had as this bird hid in the shadows patiently waiting for its next meal. Eventually it hopped up onto a branch at eye level, pausing long enough to



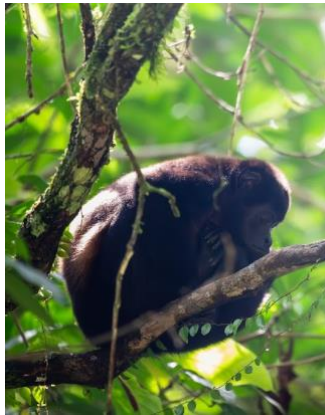
get a good look of this beautiful bird. A Bicolored Antbird showed up as well, bringing our total number of antbirds to four. A Stripe-breasted Wren and a White-breasted Wood-Wren were also seen taking advantage of the bounty the ants were providing. We eventually moved on from the army ants and found an adult Great Tinamou with two youngsters just a little further down the trail. The birds had been great at La Selva, but it was time to return to Selva Verde Lodge for lunch.

The group took a brief siesta after lunch before heading to a location nearby for a boat tour on the Sarapiquí River. Upon arrival we boarded the boat and immediately headed upstream, noting that there were some ominous clouds looming nearby. We soon saw an Anhinga perched on a snag in the middle of the river along with a few Spotted Sandpipers. A little further upstream we found a couple of Boat-billed Flycatchers perched in some overhanging branches. It was at this point that it started to rain. It was light so we continued up the river. A Snowy Egret, a Green Heron, a couple of Lineated Woodpeckers and a couple of Northern Waterthrushes were seen before the skies opened up. We waited for a bit hoping the rain would let up enough to continue, but it wasn't to be. We turned around and headed back to the dock. Our boat tour had been cut short, but it was still nice to get out on the water for a bit. We headed back to Selva Verde Lodge where it was still raining once we arrived. We took a break to dry off and rest a bit before we gathered to do the species tally for the day. Then dinner and to bed. We would be moving on in the morning.

Sunday., Oct. 15 To the Caribbean Coast

Travel day! But first, a last look around the grounds at Selva Verde Lodge on our pre-breakfast walk. We added White-crowned Parrot to the list and got additional good looks at birds already seen. Breakfast, load up and back on the road.

A quick stop near La Selva Biological Station was rewarded with a pair of Great Green Macaws. After a little while on the road, the group stopped at the residence of Jose Perez, who goes by Cope, to view birds at his feeders. White-necked Jacobin and Chestnut-headed Oropendola were seen for the first time and great views of Bronze-tailed Plumeleteer and Russet-naped Wood-Rails were had as well. When the group was finished at the feeders, it was off to look for a few other species on a piece of property not far away. We saw a Great Potoo and two Crested Owls and heard a Slaty-tailed Trogon, rounding out a very productive visit. A big thank you to Cope for his hospitality and all of the great birds! Back on the road, the group headed for Limon to eat lunch and then continue down the road to Puerto Viejo and Caribblue Beach Resort. Arriving midafternoon, the group had free time to catch up on some rest, visit one of the resort pools, get a massage or take a walk down to the beach. Later we gathered at the resort's restaurant to tally our sightings for the day and have dinner.



Mon., Oct. 16 **Migrating Raptors**

Some of the group started the day with the pre-breakfast walk, exploring the grounds of the resort and venturing down to the beach to see what was along the shore. A Peregrine Falcon was seen flying along the beach along with several swallows of various types. After breakfast, the group headed for Casa Calateas which is a rural lodge situated in the lush hills above Cahuita. The group was dropped off to walk the entrance road up to the lodge which was surrounded by old secondary growth forest. Lots of birds were seen and heard, with Purple-throated Fruitcrow, Great Crested Flycatcher and Scarlet Tanager being seen for the first time.

After a brief bathroom break at the lodge, it was up a trail to a raptor viewing platform. Once there, Turkey Vultures were seen in the distance as well as some hawks. The birds were a bit distant at first, but then a 'stream' developed closer to the platform, providing a better look at the other species migrating through. Osprey, Mississippi Kites, Broad-winged Hawks and Swainson's Hawks were all seen. We stayed on the platform for about an hour before returning to the lodge for lunch. Then it was back down the entrance road to where the bus was waiting to take us back to the resort. Once we were back at the resort, it was time for a siesta before gathering again for the species list and dinner. Then back to our rooms to get packed and get some shut eye. We were on the road again in the morning.

Tues., Oct. 17 **Caribbean Coast | Rancho Naturalista**

Travel day! Breakfast, load up and hit the road back up the coast. A short distance away from our destination, the group stopped along the Tuis River to look for a special bird - the Sunbittern. After searching for about 20 minutes the group was rewarded as a Sunbittern was located. Then on to Rancho Naturalista. The group arrived a little before noon, just in time for lunch. After a great meal, we got settled into our accommodations and took a brief rest before exploring the grounds a little bit. The group gathered midafternoon and headed down a trail to a location where hummingbirds and other bird species come to bathe in small pools along a small stream. Hummingbird species seen were Purple-crowned Fairy, Crowned Woodnymph, Snowcap and Rufous-tailed Hummingbird. Other bird species showed up as well, but it was the hummingbirds that were the main draw.



Very cool! We returned to our accommodations to rest up a bit. Then eat dinner, tally species and off to bed as it would be another early start in the morning.

Wed., Oct. 18 Rancho Naturalista Grounds | Tuis River

The pre-breakfast walk this morning was a bit earlier and started with sitting, not walking as the night before a moth/insect light had been turned on. As the insects are drawn to the light, a lot land on a set of vertical sheets that have been installed in order to better observe them. The insects that gather at the station during the night in turn attract insect eating birds come morning. Brown Jays have caught on to this and were one of the first birds to arrive. A Buff-throated Foliage-gleaner and some Red-crowned Ant-Tanagers showed up too, but with the jays around, the group decided to move on and see what else could be found before breakfast. Violet-headed Hummingbird, Golden-olive Woodpecker, Black-crowned Tityra, White-winged Becard, Black-cowled Oriole and Golden-crowned Warbler were all seen. Breakfast was served at 7:00 AM and then it was back out to explore some more trails on the property. One trail climbed up a hillside and ultimately led to a Guava plantation, with other areas explored being the entry road itself and another road that led to a residence on the grounds. Over 80 species were seen/heard on the grounds of Rancho Naturalista this morning, including several new ones such as Green Thorntail, Black-crested Coquette, Garden Emerald, Lovely Cotinga, Black-headed Tody-Flycatcher, Tawny-capped Euphonia and Golden-winged Warbler.

Lunch was served at noon and then the group took a break until midafternoon when some returned to the Tuis River to try and get an extended look at the Sunbittern seen the day before and others returned to the hummingbird bathing pools. Both groups were rewarded for their efforts with the Sunbittern being seen again and a Sulphur-rumped Flycatcher seen at the bathing pools, which was new for the trip. We gathered at 6:00 PM for our last dinner, did our final bird/wildlife tally and then headed to our rooms to pack up and get some rest for our early departure back to San Jose in the morning.

Thurs., Oct. 19 Departures

Breakfast, load up and hit the road. There was one last quick stop at a wetland on the way back where the final three bird species were added to the list - Limpkin, White-tailed Kite and Snail Kite. The route back to San Jose went through some coffee and sugarcane plantations with the landscape rolling up and down allowing for a wider view of the countryside. The scenery was lush and beautiful and a nice last impression to take back home.

Once back in San Jose, some were dropped off at the airport while others stayed one more night before flying out the next day. The trip had come to an end, but new friends had been made. Here's hoping our paths cross again on another adventure with Naturalist Journeys.

A BIG THANK YOU TO JOHAN FOR PUTTING US ON SOME GREAT BIRDS AND TO ALEJANDRO FOR GETTING US TO ALL OF OUR DESTINATIONS SAFELY!

Photo Credits: Group Photo (Kent Skaggs - KS), Collared Aracari (KS), Golden-hooded Tanager (Arden Powell - AP), Silver-throated Tanager (AP), Giant Swallowtail (AP), Crimson-collared Tanager (AP), Green Honeycreeper (AP), Hotel Bougainvillea view (KS), Emerald Toucanet (AP), Violet Sabrewing (AP), White-collared Manakin (AP), Prong-billed Barbet (KS), Spectacled Caiman (AP), Maquenque Eco Lodge (KS), Moth (KS), Bananaquit (AP), Bronzy Hermit (AP), Group (KS), Boat-billed Heron (KS), Red-legged Honeycreeper (AP), Northern Jacana (KS), Green Honeycreeper (AP), Pied Puffbird (KS), Rufous Mourner (KS), Rufous Motmot (KS), Green Iguana (AP), La Selva Biological Station (KS), Violet-headed Hummingbird (AP), Cattle Egrets in flight (AP), Rancho Naturalista (KS), Chestnut-sided Warbler (AP), Howler monkey (AP), Coati (AP), View from Rancho Naturalista (KS), Black-cowled Oriole (KS), Crowned Woodnymph (KS), Sara Longing Butterfly (KS), Red-throated Ant-tanager (AP),