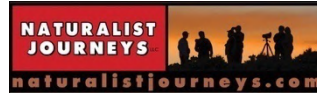
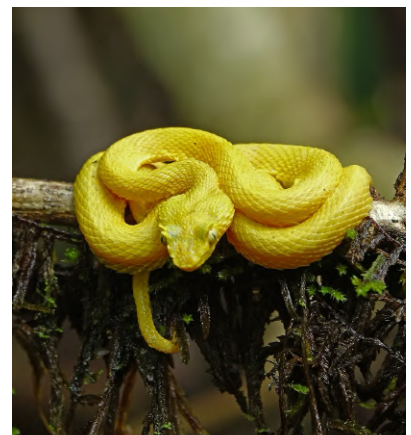
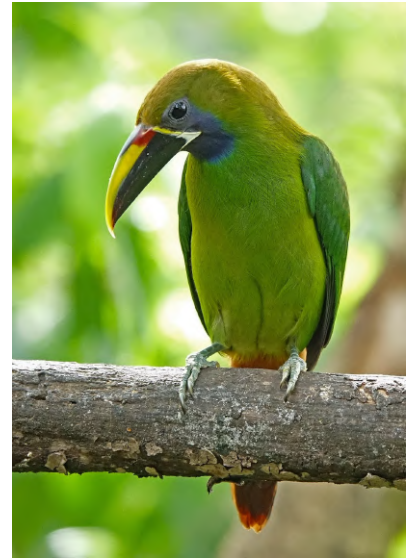


# Costa Rica: Birding and Nature | Feb. 4 -11, 2025 Trip Report | by Kelly Vandenneuvel



**Guided by Kelly Vandenneuvel and local Costa Rican expert guide Johan Fernandez, along with fellow travelers: Tom, Sherry, Gordon, Jane, Cindy, Pat, Doug, Laurie and Ann**



## **Tuesday, February 4: Arrivals in San José | Hotel Bougainvillea**

Welcome to Costa Rica - the most bird-rich country in the new world, with nearly half (900 out of 2,000) of all bird species in North America, utilizing its critical geography and habitat diversity at some point of their lives. This trip sampled as many of these habitats as possible with multi-day explorations in high elevation (over 7000 ft.) cloud forests, mid-elevation mountain valleys, and the Caribbean lowland rainforests.

Travelers arrived in San José, Costa Rica on various dates and times before the start of our trip together. On their first night of the trip at Hotel Bougainvillea in San Jose, Costa Rica, everyone met for a welcome dinner at





the Vitrales Restaurant and enjoyed local food while talking about the overview of the week ahead with our local guide, Johan Fernandez. Hotel Bougainvillea, itself, is a wonderful birding destination famous for its garden residents: Lesson's Motmots, Mottled Owls, Social Flycatchers and Brown Jays.

### **Wednesday, February 5: Cerro de la Muerte | Paraíso de Quetzales | Savegre Valley**

After some early morning birding on Wednesday on the grounds of Hotel Bougainvillea, our group hit the road to start our birding adventure together. We drove to Cerro de la Muerte (Mountain of Death), stopping at Paraíso de Quetzales (a family-run cloud forest reserve, restaurant and lodge located at an elevation of about 5,000 feet at an area known as Palo Verde) where we saw many species of hummingbirds including the Volcano, Rufous-tailed, White-throated Mountain-gem and more. We then enjoyed a delicious lunch at the restaurant featuring local-caught trout and incredible homemade sauces. After lunch, we did some nearby birding in search of the Resplendent Quetzal and other cloud forest birds at Kilometer 71 - a well-known birding spot. From there, we descended into the stunning Savegre River Valley and then on to the Savegre Hotel and Natural Reserve which were our accommodations for this evening and the next. Our group enjoyed a welcome drink while doing our first species check list together before sitting down to a wonderful dinner.

### **Thursday, February 6: Rio Savegre Valley | Montane Cloud Forests | Resplendent Quetzals**

In the very early morning, part of our group went out early in hopes of finding the Resplendent Quetzal, and we were not disappointed. We walked along local roads and along the Savegre River enjoying an excellent view of the beautiful Talamanca Range. After a filling buffet breakfast, we visited the nearby Savegre Reserve to hike some trails high above the Savegre Lodge. We hopped into two 4x4 vehicles that drove us a few miles up the steep hillside for our hike down. After lunch, some of our group went back up to the ridgeline above our hotel and saw a couple of Resplendent Quetzals preparing to build a nest and everyone was very excited to see these splendid birds so close. We completed the afternoon with a visit to Miriam's Quetzal Cafe where we watched dozens of birds at the feeders off of the veranda including a Spot-Crowned Woodcreeper, Wood and Clay Colored Thrushes, a Flamed-colored Tanager, at least three Torrent Tyrannulets foraging on exposed rocks in the river, and a variety of warblers. After completing our checklists, we had another delicious dinner served at our restaurant at the Savegre Hotel.



## **Friday, February 7: Turrialba | Café Cristina Coffee Plantation | Pierella Garden | Rancho Naturalista**

After another lovely buffet breakfast at Hotel Savegre, we loaded up the van, and set out for a full day of driving, birding, and other adventures. We drove back through the mountains toward Turrialba. We then drove through the city of Paraiso where we stopped at a park and saw a Tropical Screech-owl roosting in a tree and a Barn Owl in another. We continued a short distance to the coffee plantation, Café Cristina. The owner taught us all about the challenges of growing organic coffee and let us sample some of her delicious brew. Next stop was La Casona del Cafetal located in the Cachí Valley by beautiful Lake Cachí. After a wonderful lunch on the patio overlooking the lake, where we saw a Green Heron, a Ringed Kingfisher, Great and Snowy Egrets, and a Pied-billed Grebe, we did some birding on the grounds and saw many more birds including Muscovy Ducks, a Bare-throated Tiger-Heron, a Yellow-throated Toucan, and Crimson-fronted Parakeets, just to name a few. We then drove a distance until we reached Pierella Garden, a Cocoa and Butterfly Farm. We were greeted by the owners and staff who served us passion fruit juice and coffee. We then walked the grounds where we saw a variety of amazing birds and so many butterflies! Plus, we saw a Three-toed Sloth, Pygmy Long-eared Bats, and a Strawberry Poison Dart Frog. Moving on, as evening approached, we arrived at Rancho Naturalista, our lodge where we would stay for two nights.

## **Saturday, February 8: Rancho Naturalista Grounds | Mid-Montane Forests**

Waking up at Rancho Naturalista was quite the treat! Just steps from our accommodations is a large veranda where so many birds and mammals can be seen. We saw a Lesson's Motmot, a Collared Aracari, Chachalacas, Brown Jays, Red-Billed Pigeons, Montezuma Oropendolas, as well as a couple of different mammals: Central American Agoutis and a common Raccoon. After a delicious breakfast, we hiked up a nearby hill and birded the grounds of the lodge. We saw more species of birds including Golden-hooded Tanagers, Scarlet-thighed Dacnis, a Streak-headed Woodcreeper, a Masked Tityra along with a few large cows. Later in the afternoon, we took a drive to a nearby lake, Lago La Angostura, where we saw a variety of shorebirds and ducks including a Neotropic Cormorant, a Wood Stork, herons including a Fasciated Tiger-Heron, Snowy and Great Egrets, and a Sunbittern in the nearby foliage. We also spotted a Crested Owl tucked away in a nearby tree, thanks to Johan. We enjoyed another nice homemade dinner from the friendly staff at Rancho Naturalista and talked about the incredible variety of birds and mammals we have seen so far on this trip.





## **Sunday, February 9: Guayabo National Monument | Sarapiquí | Selva Verde Lodge**

After a delicious breakfast at Rancho Naturalista with the staff waving to us as we departed, we set out for a big travel day as we continued on our journey, driving to the Caribbean lowland rain forests. Enroute, we visited the Guayabo National Monument to learn about its history and do some birding on the grounds. The site is an archeological marvel that was discovered when the area was being cleared for coffee and cattle plantations in the late 1800's. At its peak, around 10,000 people lived in this ancient city. It is believed that the first settlers came here around 1000 BC and had created a bustling city by 800 AD. As to why they all disappeared, it is still not known. While on our guided tour, we saw several birds including a Gray Hawk, a Broad-winged Hawk, a Yellow-throated Toucan, and more. After a picnic lunch, we continued on to Selva Verde Lodge where we would spend the next two nights. We arrived close to dark, so we headed to dinner shortly after our arrival. Dinner was served buffet style and the options were amazing. All of the meals on this trip were excellent and dinner at Selva Verde Lodge was no exception.

## **Monday, February 10: La Selva Biological Station | Sarapiquí River Boat Tour**

After breakfast at Selva Verde Lodge, we went to the La Selva Biological Station, which has a rich history dating back to the 1950s. The station offers guided nature walks, research opportunities and educational programs to visitors from around the world. La Selva is home to an incredible diversity of plant and animal species, including over 2,000 species of plants, 125 species of mammals, and 470 species of birds. A staff naturalist took us for a guided walk around the grounds and we saw many great birds and reptiles. There was a Fer-de-lance Snake in a tree just outside of the entry to the biological station. Some of us were able to view it at a distance through the scope. We also saw two yellow Eyelash Vipers on our walk through the jungle. Some of the birds we saw included a Golden-winged Warbler, a Canada Warbler, a Slaty-tailed Trogon, and a Crested Owl just to name a few. Later in the afternoon, we took an amazing river boat trip on the Sarapiquí River where we saw a variety of shorebirds, herons, an Osprey, and a large Green Iguana. Back at the lodge, we took a short break before gathering to do one last species checklist and have dinner as a group, as the tour would be coming to an end the next day for most of us. It had been a wonderful seven days with great scenery, accommodations, food, and views of a great diversity of wildlife, particularly birds.



## Tuesday, February 11: Selva Verde Lodge | Cinchona Cafe | Departures and Extension

Today was a big travel day as we departed from Selva Verde Lodge and drove to the airport in San José to drop off those who were not on the extension, which included myself. We gathered for breakfast then loaded onto the bus to drive back up the winding road leading out of the Savegre Valley. Once we were back on the Pan-American Highway, we settled in and watched the countryside roll by, recounting all the things we had seen and experienced during the past week. On the way, we stopped at a small cafe called Cinchona where we enjoyed a hot beverage and snack together as we watched a variety of birds on their feeders, including Northern Emerald-Toucanets, a Common Chlorospingus, Black-bellied Hummingbirds, Prong-billed Barbets, and White-bellied Mountain-gems. Once we arrived at the airport, we said our good-byes. Tom, Sherry, Cindy, Pat, Gordon and Jane stayed on for the extension while the rest headed back home. It was a wonderful trip, and so nice to make new friends who we will hopefully see again on another Naturalist Journey's adventure together.

*Photos: Group Photo (Kelly Vandenneuvel - KV), Northern Emerald Toucanet (Douglas Moore - DM), Eyelash Viper (DM), Summer Tanager (DM), Violet Sabrewing (DM), Turquoise-browed Motmot (Jane Rosinski - JR), Lesson's Motmot (DM), Zebra Longwing (DM), Squirrel Cuckoo (JR), Mixed Hummingbirds at red hot poker (DM), Fiery-throated Hummingbird (DM), Long-tailed Silky-flycatcher (DM), Southern Yellowish Flycatcher (KV), Resplendent Quetzal (DM), Collared Aracari (DM), Gartered Trogon (DM), Red-legged Honeycreeper (Anne Brereton - AB), Brown-throated Three-toed Sloth (DM), Sobralia rosea (DM), Green Iguana (DM), Group Dinner (KV), Silver-throated Tanager (DM), Crimson-collared Tanager (DM), Scarlet Macaw (JR)*