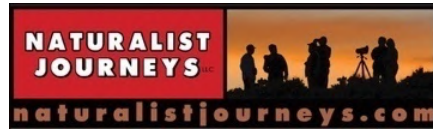


Costa Rica: Monteverde & More

Extension to Selva Verde/Sarapiquí

March 18 – 30, 2025 | Trip Report by Pat Lueders



Naturalist Journeys guide Pat Lueders, local guide Johan Fernandez Ramirez, and participants: Signe, Chuck, Jane, Bob, Wendy, Fred, Barry, Theresa, Anne & Bill



Tues., March 18: Arrivals in San José | Hotel Bougainvillea

The Hotel Bougainvillea was the perfect place for our group to begin their adventure touring the beautiful country of Costa Rica! The expansive garden behind the hotel has spacious paths that wander through native trees and plants, attracting a large number of species of birds and butterflies. Orchids are plentiful in the hotel and throughout the garden. This first afternoon, we gathered to bird the garden to learn the native bird species



and to also find migrants still lingering before their departure. Red-billed Pigeons were spotted at the treetops, and Inca and White-winged Doves were on the lawn. Orange-fronted and Crimson-fronted Parakeets noisily flew over us in groups, and two Brown Jays were found in a fruiting tree. Numerous Clay-colored Thrushes, the National Bird of Costa Rica, were vocalizing and seen in pairs along the paths. Summer Tanagers, Tennessee Warblers, and Blue-gray Tanagers were pointed out, and we heard the loud song of the Melodious Blackbird for the first time. The highlight of the afternoon was a good view of the resident Mottled Owls that roost in the large bamboo near the pool. What a successful introduction to many of the resident bird species!

We convened before dinner to meet Johan, our guide for the tour, to receive some gifts (including Naturalist Journeys water bottles, lens cloths, and baggage tags), to introduce ourselves, and to enjoy a delicious meal in the hotel dining room. We all agreed that we were eager to begin our journey in the morning!

Wed., March 19: Central Pacific Coast

As we boarded our spacious bus in the morning, we met Jorge who would be our driver for the entire tour. We left the bustle of the city, driving to the Central Pacific side of the Continental Divide. Today we would stop at various spots along a quiet road and walk while birding the area. The birds were plentiful! We saw a Ferruginous Pygmy Owl at close range, Black-headed and Gartered Trogons, and a Turquoise-browed Motmot at one stop, as well as Barred Antshrikes, Common Tody-Flycatchers, and Yellow-olive Flat bills - forty species before lunch!

After lunch, we boarded our boat for the Tarcoles River ride. Over 48 species were seen along the river including Double-striped Thick-knees, Collared Plovers, Bare-throated Tiger-Heron and the iconic Boat-billed Heron, a juvenile Common Black Hawk, and four Scarlet Macaws. Our heads were spinning!

After checking into the Cerro Lodge, we convened for delicious pizza and other entrees and reviewed what an exciting first day we had experienced!



Thurs., March 20: Carara National Park | Monteverde

We had a very productive walk along the road to the lodge before breakfast. A Streaked Flycatcher was spotted nest building, and Yellow-naped Amazons and White-crowned Parrots flew over. Masked Tityras were also carrying nesting material, and a Shiny Cowbird was seen at close range. Male and female Rose-throated Becards were in a tree at the hotel entrance. We left after breakfast, and Johan surprised us with two stops on the exit road. First, we had close looks at a sleeping Common Potoo close to the road. We then saw another camouflaged species, a Pacific Screech-Owl, roosting

in a tree cavity. Wow, what a great start!

We crossed the bridge over the Tarcoles River, seeing crocodiles loafing on the sandbar, and arrived at the entrance to the renowned Carara National Park. The beautiful rainforest trail produced a large number of new species including Crested Guan, Purple-crowned Fairy; Black-headed, Gartered, Collared, Northern Black-throated and Slaty-tailed Trogons; a cooperative White-whiskered Puffbird, Keel-billed Toucan, Northern Plain-Xenops, Orange-billed Sparrow, and three wren species. Johan pointed out a striking Green-and-black Poison Dart Frog. What a morning!

We drove north along the coast, stopped for lunch, and settled into the Hotel Montana Monteverde for the next three days.

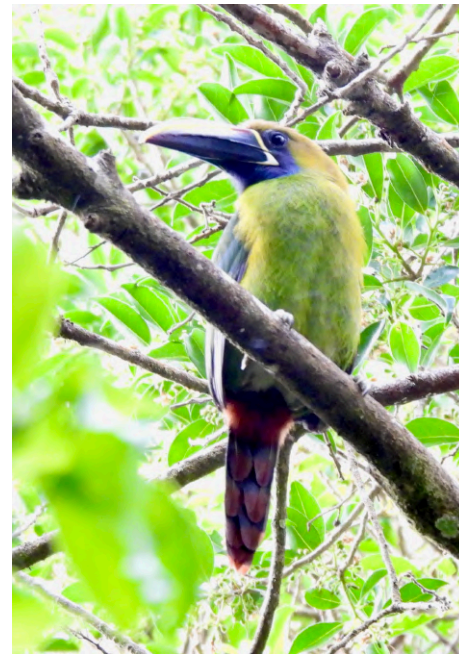
Fri., March 21: Monteverde Cloud Forest Reserve

We left the lodge in a light rain and chilly temperatures to bird at the Monteverde Cloud Forest Reserve. We walked a beautiful trail and stopping to watch a possible nesting hole of the Resplendent Quetzal. We had nice views of a Northern Emerald Toucanet, listened to the melodic calls of the Black-faced Solitaire, and saw the Costa Rican Warbler and two Common Chlorospingus.

After lunch, we visited the Curi-Cancha Reserve and the hummingbird café for close looks at Violet Sabrewings,



Blue-vented Hummingbird, and later, a Green-crowned Brilliant. When we returned to the lodge, Rufous-collared Sparrows and Yellow-faced Grassquits were feeding on the lawn.



Sat., March 22: Santa Elena Cloud Forest Reserve

We awoke to view a lovely rainbow stretched across the sky, hoping that it signaled the end to our rainy weather. The weather did yield and we had great looks at a Prong-billed Barbet, a Barred Becard, and some very active Collared Redstarts. We visited the town of Monteverde for coffee and to do some shopping at their unique stores. Afterward, we had great success seeing a Long-tailed Manakin and a cooperative Northern Emerald-Toucanet to finish this challenging day!

Sun., March 23: Celeste Mountain Lodge

In route to our next lodge, the Celeste Mountain Lodge, we stopped to bird near the salt ponds and had great luck getting scope views of hundreds of Whimbrels, many Black-bellied Plovers, Marbled Godwits, and a variety of shorebirds. Another stop gave us the cute Black-crested Coquette, Blue-throated Goldentail, Common Tody-Flycatcher, and the striking Scarlet-rumped Tanager.

After settling into our rooms, we birded on the lovely grounds, getting quick looks at a White-tipped Sicklebill coming to the heliconia. Many species visited the banana feeders off the dining room including: Black-cowled and Baltimore Orioles; Crimson-collared, Scarlet-rumped, Blue-gray, Summer, and Golden Hooded Tanagers. Male and female Red-legged Honeycreepers were abundant!

After a delicious dinner prepared by the French chef, we did a short night walk and saw a Fer-de-lance, Red-eyed Tree Frogs, and heard a Common Pauraque. What a great ending to such a successful day!

Mon., March 24: Celeste Mountain Lodge | Tenorio National Park

Our early morning walk before breakfast was at the Celeste Trail across the road from the lodge. A vocalizing Rufous-tailed Jacamar could be seen through the branches, a Streak-headed Woodcreeper was close, and a few Carmiol's Tanagers were gathering nesting material.

After watching the lodge's banana feeders during breakfast, we traveled a short distance to the Tenorio Volcano National Park. We hiked the lovely forest trail to the breathtaking waterfall and its turquoise pool. Northern Barred-Woodcreeper, Rufous Mourner, and Lesser Greenlet were seen along the walk. Returning to the lodge, Johan picked a place to stop, and we were lucky to see two tayras run across the road. Inside the forest, we found a cooperative Rufous Motmot and a Wedge-billed Woodcreeper.



Our group was anxious to see a sloth. After lunch, our driver Jorge led us into the garden where he had found a sleeping, Brown-throated Sloth. Many photos were taken of our first sloth of the tour!

After another delicious meal and a short siesta, we drove to a different habitat with a river and open savanna. Standing on the bridge above the river, we couldn't believe our luck when a Sunbittern flew under it and landed on the rocks, lingering for great views, and even flying over the water to show off its magnificent wing pattern. Wow! To add to this memorable outing, we looked up to see a soaring King Vulture! We saw many new species including Olive-crowned Yellowthroat, Green Honeycreepers, and worked hard for a quick glimpse of a vocalizing White-throated Crake. Two Yellow-throated Toucans were feeding at treetop. We were very excited after dinner to add these sightings to our trip checklist!

Tues., March 25: Caño Negro

Before we moved on to the next lodging at Caño Negro, we returned to the Celeste Trail for our early morning walk. We added great looks at a Dull-mantled Antbird, two Buff-rumped Warblers, and a Blue-black Grosbeak.

After a delightful stay at the Celeste Mountain Lodge, we left and returned to yesterday afternoon's location, seeing a flock of White-collared Swifts, a Ringed Kingfisher, Gray-capped and Piratic Flycatchers, and Variable Seedeaters.

After lunch, we stopped for a good sighting of a pair of White-throated Magpie-Jays. When we arrived at the lodge, as we walked to our rooms, a family of Central American Spider Monkeys was in the trees above the rooms, one with a small baby. After a short break, we drove near the lodge to bird around some ponds along the river, finding Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks, Wood Storks, lovely Roseate Spoonbills, Yellow-crowned Night Heron, Amazon and American Pygmy Kingfishers, a pair of Spot-breasted Wrens, and a Purple Gallinule. We settled into our new rooms anticipating an exciting day tomorrow!





Wed., March 26: Caño Negro National Wildlife Refuge | Lago Caño Negro

We had a lovely day for our two boat trips on the river. Sixty species were seen on the morning tour including: Russet-naped Wood-Rail, Northern Jacana on the bank, numerous Anhingas, Green Ibises, Bare-throated Tiger-Herons, Boat-billed Herons, Ringed, Amazon, Green and American Pygmy Kingfishers, and a Mangrove Yellow Warbler. Exciting highlights were a Snowy Cotinga at the top of a tree, good looks at a Nicaraguan Grackle, and a breathtaking emergence of hundreds of roosting Swainson's Hawks, starting their migration north.

After lunch we returned to the river, this time cruising the opposite direction to an open marsh habitat. Fifty-three species were seen including great looks at a diving Sungrebe, Semipalmated Plovers, Southern Lapwings, Pectoral Sandpipers, a low soaring Lesser Yellow-headed Vulture, an Osprey, and a perched Black-collared Hawk. What a truly wonderful day on the water! At dinner, we sadly bid farewell to Jane and Bob, members of the group that would not be going on the extension, and reminisced about our wonderful time together.

Extension to Selva Verde/Sarapiquí

Thur., March 27: Road to Selva Verde/Sarapiquí | Pierella Ecological Garden

Those of us on the extension departed after breakfast, with great birding planned along the way to Sarapiquí. We left Caño Negro on a lengthy dirt road only a few miles from the country's border with Nicaragua. Always on alert, Johan spotted a Nicaraguan Seed-Finch perched on a wire near the vehicle. When we reached the major highway, we drove slowly and stopped when sighting a distant flock of wading birds, eventually finding a Jabiru with many Great Egrets and Wood Storks for scope views. Numerous Crested Caracaras were sitting on newly cut fields looking for insects. On our next stop, two Jabirus were soaring above us with Wood Storks for a nice size comparison. Orchard Orioles and Black-crowned Tityra were in a nearby tree. Our next stop was an expansive wetland hoping for Pinnated Bittern. A German couple tipped us off that they had just seen two further up the road. Three were feeding in the field, allowing for great scope views of this rare species. As we were waiting, we had close looks at Green-breasted Mangos and Yellow-bellied Elaenias. What a successful morning!

We stopped for lunch at a busy café with delicious ice cream for dessert. We then visited the Pierella Ecological Garden - a family project started in 1995 on land previously used as cattle land. Planted with host- plants for butterflies and birds, the garden has grown into a beautiful rainforest with an enormous amount of biodiversity. Our tour began near the hummingbird feeders where we saw our first White-necked Jacobins of the trip.



Coming to the bananas was a pair of Red-throated Ant-Tanagers, Olive-backed Euphonia, and Golden-hooded Tanager. Our young and enthusiastic guide gave us a tour of the property, pointing out Long-nose Proboscis Bats roosting on a wall, Common Tent-making Bats, Honduran White Bats curled up under a leaf, and a Pygmy Round-ear Bat in a hollowed-out termite nest. We visited the butterfly tents learning the lifecycle of a butterfly from egg to flying beauty. At the end of this fascinating tour, he pointed out a roosting Common Pauraque very well camouflaged in the grass.

We checked into the Selva Verde Lodge; established to preserve land for an ecolodge for birders.

Fri., March 28: La Selva Biological Station | Sarapiquí River

Our early morning walk at the lodge and along the river was very productive - finding our first Black Phoebes, a perched Gray Hawk, and Black-headed Tody-Flycatchers. After a delicious breakfast, we drove to the La Selva Biological Station, one of the world's leading institutions in the study of tropical biology. We saw many students preparing to start their day's adventures. Our young guide explained the geography of the country before we birded the area - seeing over 60 species in one morning. In the open area at the entrance, we spotted nesting Cinnamon Becards, beautiful Black-cowled Orioles, Scarlet Tanagers, Plain-colored Tanagers, Scarlet-thighed Dacnis, and good looks at Black-faced Grosbeaks. Our first Long-tailed Tyrant was seen through the scope at the top of a tree. As we walked the forest trail, our guide found a Fer-de-lance snake after it had a quick encounter with an Agouti. Scope views of a Semiplumbeous Hawk were exciting and, nearby, we saw a Plain-brown and a Cocoa Woodcreeper. After crossing the river on a hanging bridge, our guide pointed out a Hoffmann's Two-toed Sloth giving us good scope views. To the group's delight, another forest path revealed a trail of army ants and great looks at Bicolored and Ocellated Antbirds! Diminutive Strawberry Poison Dart Frogs were found on some leaves. Upon our return, many enjoyed purchasing items in their well-stocked gift store.

After lunch, we boarded our boat for the Sarapiquí River tour. We had quick glances at an adult Sungrebe feeding near the bank. As light rain showers began, we experienced an unusual sight - a gathering of at least 12 Yellow-throated Toucans in a tree along the river. Mangrove Swallows were active hunting insects and a Northern Waterthrush worked along the shore.

As we returned to the lodge, we stopped in a treed area to find a pair of Scarlet Macaws and luckily spotted a Great Green Macaw, a critically endangered parrot, getting scope views before it flew by us displaying its beautiful colors. In addition, a Bat Falcon was seen perched on a distant tree.



As we worked on our checklist after a delicious dinner, we marveled at what a successful day we had enjoyed!

Sat., March 29: Cinchona Waterfalls & Hummingbirds | Bougainvillea Hotel

For our last day of the tour, our early morning walk produced our first Fasciated Tiger-Heron standing in the river, good looks at our first Broad-billed Motmot in the same view with a Rufous Motmot for nice comparisons, and a Scaly-breasted Hummingbird.

As we drove towards the Bougainvillea Hotel, Johan spotted a Laughing Falcon along the road for all to see. We stopped along a country road and had scope views of a White Hawk feeding on its breakfast. A Barred Hawk and a Swallow-tailed Kite were soaring in the thermals. Good looks were had at a Black-striped Woodcreeper and a Crowned Woodnymph, as well as a Purple-crowned Fairy.

Our lunch stop was the renowned Colibri Café, known for its feeders and lovely view of a forest waterfall. After we watched a pair of Northern Emerald-Toucanets, a female Red-headed Barbet made a quick appearance, but two Silver-throated Tanagers lingered for all to enjoy.

We made one last successful stop near town at a café with hummingbird feeders and a lovely garden. We successfully saw a Scintillant Hummingbird, a Purple-throated Mountain-gem and a Lesser Violetear to boost our number of hummingbirds seen for the tour at the amazing total of 23!

Sadly, upon arrival we said farewell to Johan, our fantastic and hard-working guide, and Jorge, our masterful driver, thanking them for a memorable two weeks we would never forget! As we would be dispersing in the morning, we enjoyed our last dinner together at the hotel and fondly bid farewell to one another, hoping our paths might cross in the future.

Sun., March 30: Departures

Our flock dispersed today.

Photo Credits: Group, Red-billed Pigeon, Clay-colored Thrush, Turquoise-browed Motmot, Boat Ride, Monteverde Sign, Group in the Rain, Northern Emerald Toucanet, Celeste Mountain Lodge, Waterfall (Pat Lueders), American Pygmy Kingfisher, Caiman (Chuck Blair), La Selva, Silver-throated Tanager, Group (Pat Lueders)