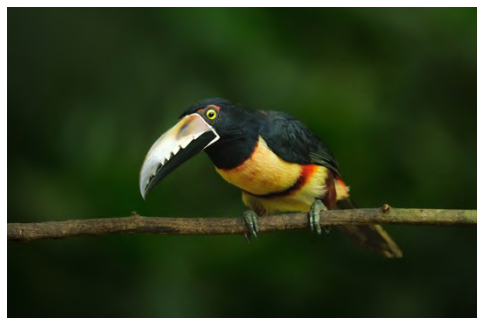


Costa Rica: Birding and Nature | Jan. 5 – 15, 2026 | Trip Report by James Petersen

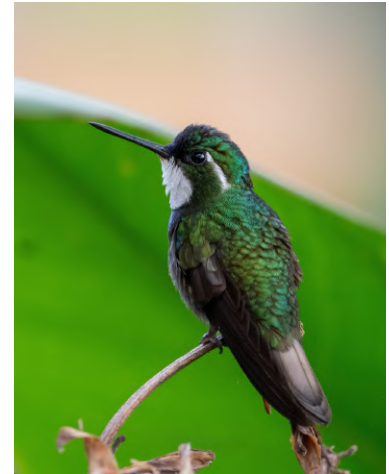


Written by guide James Petersen with local guide Johan and Gustavo, and participants Ed, Rosemary, Kate, Steve, Ross, Ben, Cindy, and Brenda.



Mon., Jan. 5 Hotel Bougainvillea

As everyone had arrived, we all met our guide Johan for the main portion of the trip. Afterwards, we all took a short walk on the grounds of the hotel. Upon entering the gardens, we had a pair of Rufous-collared Sparrows working the edge of the trail behind us. In front of us, perched in a Guanacaste tree, we had a Red-billed Pigeon. When in the scope, everyone could see the deep red hues of the birds, combined with the light-colored beak. While looking at the pigeon, a few other species were spotted; a Palm Tanager flew in and perched near the pigeon while both a Social Flycatcher and Rufous-tailed Hummingbird perched on opposite ends of the park.



During all this, we were greeted with parakeets, a flock of 15 Crimson-fronted Parakeets as well as three smaller Orange-chinned Parakeets.

After admiring the pigeons, we continued onwards, getting scope views of an adult male Ruby-throated Hummingbird as well as one of the many White-winged Doves. In the background, a Cabanis's Wren sang in the distance. Continuing onwards, we slowly worked our way towards the back of the gardens. Here, with some playback, we attracted a small flock of wintering warblers that had gathered in one of the trees. Tennessee Warblers were the dominant bird of the flock, but mixed in were smaller numbers of Chestnut-sided, Northern Yellow and one Chestnut-capped Warbler. There were two immature Summer Tanagers as well that posed for us before flying back into the vegetation.

Once the flock had dispersed, we slowly worked our way back around to the front of the hotel, admiring the many large plants including the tall Fake Mexican Pine trees as well as the rotten smelling Pelican Flower. Towards the front of the hotel, there was a large stand of Golden Bamboo where we stopped to look and found a roosting Mottled Owl—one that's been here for years. It was tucked in the front, but out in the open enough for all to get amazing views of this nocturnal bird. By now, it was getting close to dinner time, so we ventured back, stopping to admire a flock of Blue-and-white Swallows that were overhead. After our walk, we got an awesome introduction of Costa Rica from Johan and did our first of many end-of-the-day checklists before a delicious dinner. Afterwards, everyone parted ways to get ready for tomorrow's birding adventures.

Tues., Jan. 6 Hotel Bougainvillea | Cerro de la Muerte

We started off the morning with a pre-breakfast birding walk on the hotel grounds. Right from the start we had a few Crimson-fronted Parakeets flying overhead in a tight flock. Following the parakeets, a lone Great-tailed Grackle flew overhead. As we slowly worked further into the gardens, we slowly increased our species list. By a larger shrub, we had two Philadelphia Vireos foraging for food. From here, we continued, slowly walking through the manicured gardens. As we turned the corner, Johan, spotted a Bicolored Hawk that had just caught a Red-billed Pigeon. As it flew up and into a short tree, we crept up and got fantastic views of this accipiter, as it looked around, with the pigeon in its talons. After 10 minutes of watching, we slowly walked away to let the raptor enjoy its meal in peace. Back in the open, we were greeted by singing Rufous-backed and Southern House Wrens, as they may have sensed the Bicolored Hawk had left the area. As we continued walking, a large woodpecker was spotted in a far tree. The scope revealed a larger woodpecker with a reddish crest—a Lineated Woodpecker. This woodpecker seemed glued to one spot and let us get closer to the tree to get amazing scope looks. At the same time, a Lesson's Motmot was spotted lurking close to the ground as well. It was hard to pick which to put scopes on, but all got views of both species. By now, 7 o'clock was approaching, so we continued onwards, only to get distracted by White-eared Ground Sparrow. Unlike its name, this bird was perched up in a

tree and giving decent looks as it moved about the tree. We continued onwards, working our way towards the hotel restaurant, only to be distracted one last time, by a Rufous-tailed Hummingbird sitting on its nest! By now it was breakfast time, and we sat down for a delicious breakfast.

After breakfast, we packed up, loaded the vans and left for Savegre Lodge. Johan told us about Costa Rica as the city turned to the countryside and finally up to our first stop of the day, the Cerro de la Muerte, or Mountain of Death, named for all the travelers who had to get through to settle the next valley. Our first stop was a dirt road by a couple of Vervain flowers. These small purple flowers are a magnet for hummingbirds, and they did not disappoint. Within minutes of getting out of the van, we observed multiple Rufous-tailed Hummingbirds trying to defend their flowers. Mixed in were smaller, greenish hummingbirds with a reddish square on their wings, Stripe-tailed Hummingbirds. Closer by, a small hummingbird with a white rump—a Green Thorntail. As we watched this mess of hummingbirds, another species came into view, the regional endemic Copper-headed Emerald. We watched for 10 more minutes as all the hummingbirds competed for the flowers before moving onwards.

We drove further up and were at another patch of Vervain. This patch had a few new species competing with the resident Rufous-tailed Hummingbirds. Avoiding them, were small, rufous like Scintillant Hummingbirds and Coppery-headed Emeralds. While they flitted about, Long-tailed Silky Flycatchers perched high up in the pines, while a Black Phoebe was spotted lower down on the roof of a nearby house.

From here, we moved on to our next stop, the quetzal lodge for lunch. This lodge had a nice set up of hummingbird feeders, where we watched before lunch, getting close looks at Firey-throated, Volcano and Talamanca Hummingbirds. Mixed in were Lesser Violetears, and stunning White-throated Mountain Gems, while a Mountain Elainea and Long-tailed Silky Flycatchers perched nearby. Afterwards, we walked the trails of the lodge, getting good looks at Black-billed Nightengale Thrushes as they walked across the path. Meanwhile, a Golden-browed Chlorophonia gave good looks for some. Later, while still on the trail, we found a mixed flock that had a Golden-browed Chlorophonia that gave really nice looks to all. Mixed in the flock, was a few regionally endemic Large-footed Finches, Yellow-thighed Brushfinch and Slaty Flowerpiercers. At the end of the walk, we crowded on a nearby deck, getting good looks at both Long-tailed and Black and Yellow Silky-flycatchers, as well as a Black-capped Flycatcher to finish off the after lunch birding. Our last stop of the day was right before the lodge, where we came across a small flock of warblers, getting looks at both a wintering Wilson's and a Black-cheeked Warbler. From here, it was getting close to dinner, so we continued onwards to the Savegre Mountain Lodge, where we had a wonderful diner and prepared for the next morning.

Wed., Jan. 7 San Gerardo de Dota | Savegre Hotel and Trails | Miriam's Restaurant | Cabinas El Queztlal

Today was a special day. We got up at 5am to leave at 5:15 for a very special bird. We arrived at the area right before sunrise, and set about, watching as the forest around us woke up. As the sky lightened, Spotted Wood Quail started their raucous calls from the forest as Rufous-collared Sparrows sang nearby. After a little bit, a



Black Guan was spotted stealthy moving through the upper canopy. After a little more waiting, we heard a distant call, and soon a large green bird with a long tail flew in, a Resplendent Quetzal! We watched as the female first came out in the open, followed by the male! The male followed by putting on a show, perching out in the open for us and then going to join the female as they both perched in the distant tree. After some more watching, he was soon joined by a second female and at one point had all three perched in the same scope view! Once all three flew off, we worked our way back to the bus and back to the lodge for breakfast.

After breakfast, we took a ride up the mountain to a trailhead, that we slowly worked our way down. We wandered the forest, made up of massive Oak Trees, some being as old as 800 years. Hanging on many of these trees were large number of bryophytes. While we made our way down, we came across a few mixed flocks, giving us views of Flame-throated Warblers, while Collared Trogons, Rufous-browed Peppershrikes and Spot-crowned Woodcreepers called from nearby. As we continued our way down, we got good looks at the regionally endemic Collared Redstarts, while a Ruddy-capped Nighthawk Thrush walked across the trail ahead of us. Meanwhile, Yellowish and Tufted Flycatchers flew out for their breakfast in the mid canopy. As we worked our way further down, we came across our first of two mixed flocks, giving us looks at Ruddy Treerunner, Yellow-thighed Brushfinch, and Black-cheeked Warblers as they worked their way past us. Later, we had our second mixed flock, which contained similar species as the first one but also included a stunning Spangle-cheeked Tanager as well as a bright Flame-throated Warbler.

By now, we came out in the road to be picked up by the green jeeps we rode up in, and they drove us back down to the lodge for lunch. After lunch and a siesta, we met up to head to Mirmiam's Restaurant, higher up above the lodge. The restaurant had a fantastic hummingbird feeder set up and we were greeted by a whirl of wings as we got to watch the different hummingbirds come and go. We got fantastic looks at Talamanca and Firey-throated Hummingbirds, while numerous White-throated Mountain Gems buzzed about. The seed part of the feeders was full of Flame-colored Tanagers as well as the dark billed Mountain Thrush and Clay-colored Thrushes. Before we left, we ended up getting fantastic views of a Golden-collared Chlorophonia, while Blue-gray Tanagers came into feed.

On our way back down, we made a stop to scan the roaring creek for dippers. After some searching, an American Dipper was found, and we watched as it quickly flew by. By now, it was getting close to dinner time, and we returned to a fantastic dinner and checklist before going over tomorrow's plans and dispersing for the night.

Thurs., Jan. 8 Savegre Hotel | Los Quetzales NP | Parque de Paraiso | Finca Cristina—Ruinas de Ujarras | Hotel Quetzales—Rancho Naturalista

We got up before breakfast for an early morning bird walk. As we slowly walked the grounds at t



At the Savegre Lodge, we picked up several new species for the trip, including flyover Sulphur-winged Parakeets. Meanwhile, from the forest, a Yellowish Flycatcher was heard. We slowly made our way down the lodge's drive to the flowing creek, where we had another quick encounter with our second and third Resplendent Quetzals. Once along the main street, we slowly worked our way down, next to the creek. The water was swift flowing and perfect for the American Dipper that was spotted and enjoyed by all. Further down, we came across a large mixed flock where everything showed up all at once. It started with a Yellow-winged Vireo, a regional endemic and from there all the birds came out. Soon we had several white-eyed Common Cholorsphingus in the same tree that were soon joined by a second species of Cholorsphingus, Sooty-capped. Everywhere we looked in the tree there were birds. Mixed in were Brown-capped Vireos and a Ruddy Treerunner, a nuthatch like bird. Lower down, a Slaty Flowerpiercer worked the lower flowers for its morning nectar. By now, it was getting closer to breakfast time, so we slowly worked our way back to the lodge, the call notes of the mixed flock fading from our hearing.

After breakfast, we loaded up and headed to higher altitudes to bird the misty, large forests of Los Quetzales National Park. Among the damp misty vegetation, we made several stop, with our first stop having a Timberline Wren singing from the thick vegetation. Further down, we were treated to quick looks at some of the higher elevation hummingbirds, Volcano with its steely gray throat and the brighter Firey-throated Hummingbird as well as a few larger Talamanca Hummingbirds. As we slowly walked down the road, a Golden-crowned Chlorophonia called in the distance, as did a Gray-breasted Woodwren and its marvelous clear song. As we got

to the furthest point on the road, we were able to find a few more Flame-throated Warblers, their orange throats bright among the dark misty forest. By now, we turned around and slowly worked our way back to the bus.

Upon getting to the bus, we drove up to the rim of the valley and back down, watching the cloud forest slowly turn back into a regular forest, before entering some dense urban areas. Upon entering the urban areas, we made a few stops, with the first being at the Parque de Paraiso. Here, we had fantastic looks at a Tropical Screech Owl, roosting as it ignored all the commotion of the surrounding park.

Our next two stops were at an old cathedral, where we got to see the grand architecture, although there was a mass going on so we didn't get to see much of the inside. Our next stop was at the Finca Cristina, where we learned about shade grown coffee and got to try some of the local coffee ourselves. The trees above the coffee play an important part in the growth cycle, helping return nitrogen back to the ground. Meanwhile, the Coffee plant has one berry per branch per year and never in the same spot. While there, White-tipped doves were calling their deep bottle like call and Montezuma Oropendolas were in and out of the coffee trees.

Our last stop before lunch, was the Ruinas de Uiaras. Here we got to see the ruins of a Spanish church from the 1600s. While there, we had fantastic looks at Crimson-fronted Parakeets as they nosily squawked in the tall trees overhead. Closer to the ground, we came across a mixed flock of warblers. We were able to get good looks at Chestnut-sided Warblers as well as a Tropical Parula and the larger Brown Jays. On the way back to the bus, a few swallows were perched on the wires overhead, with one of them being a Southern Rough-winged Swallow. By now, lunch was approaching, so we continued onwards to Hotel Quetzales for a fantastic meal.

There were plenty of feeders at the hotel, which distracted us until lunch came. When we pulled in, we were greeted by a small group of large, White-collared Swifts as they cruised the air above us. After lunch was finished, we took a birding walk up a hill, leading to a large waterfall and a few more feeders. At the feeders were 4 species of hummingbirds: a large Violet Sabrewing while the smaller, Green-crowned Brilliants competed for space. Closer by, we had good looks at a foraging Green Hermit, its all-dark green plumage and curved bill giving it away. This species does not visit feeders, so it was a nice bird to see. Over at the seed feeders, we watched both White-naped and Chestnut-capped Brushfinches feed on the ground, while a Scaled Antpitta called way in the distance. On our way back down to the bus, we had Yellow-faced Grassquits working the weedy sides of the road, while Silver-throated and Golden-hooded Tanagers were higher up in the canopy. By now, it was time to head to our next lodge, Rancho Naturalista.

We watched as the urban areas slowly changed back to forest as we arrived at this stunning lodge. They had feeders galore, with the hummingbird feeders quite active. Here, after being shown our rooms, we quickly picked out Crowned Woodnymphs, and the red footed Bronze-tailed Plumeleteer. Below, an Orange-billed Sparrow foraged for seed as well. By now it, was time for a family style dinner and our nightly checklist before getting ready for tomorrow's activities.

Fri., Jan. 9 Mid Montaine Forests | Tayutic River-Lakes

We got up before breakfast to do our birding walk. As we left the lodge, Gray-headed Chachalacas noisily called in the distance while Red-billed Pigeons flew overhead. Meanwhile, from deep in the rainforest, the soft call of a White-tipped Dove was heard, sounding like someone blowing across a half empty soda bottle. As we worked our way down the entrance road, small mixed flocks worked their way through the forest and towards us. Within the flock we had two Black-throated Wrens along the road edge while wintering Tennessee and Blackburnian Warblers worked through the mid-levels of the canopy. We slowly worked our way down to an open field with blooming flowers. Here we had several species of hummingbirds zipping from flower to flower.

We quickly found multiple Rufous-tailed Hummingbirds as well as a Green-breasted Mango. With some more waiting, we finally found one of the most stunning hummingbirds of the trip—a Snowcap. It was working the flowers and it was a male, having the clean white cap with dark body. We watched this special hummingbird for a bit before having to return to the lodge for family style breakfast.

After a delicious breakfast, we went back out for the morning, birding the grounds of Rancho Naturalista. Upon starting our walk, we were greeted with the haunting, whistling call of a Great Tinamou as well as the “hit the foul pole” call of Short-billed Pigeons. As we slowly worked our way back down the road and onto one of the many trails, a Dull-mantled Antbird was heard in the distance. The trail led upslope to an opening in the forest where we were able to get scope views of a Masked Tityra as well as numerous tanagers foraging in one of the close trees. With some work we were able to pick out Bay-headed and Golden-hooded Tanagers as well as a Palm and White-lined Tanagers. Mixed in with the tanagers were some of our wintering eastern warblers with Blackburnian Warblers making an appearance as well as both Olive-backed and Yellow-crowned Euphonias. From here, we worked our way back down, walking past a herd of cattle as some drizzly rain started to pick up. We slowly made our way back to the opening where we had the Snowcap this morning. By the flowering plants was some shelter, so we stood underneath there, watching the rain pick up and hummingbird activity as well. Coming to the flowers were a few larger Stripe-throated Hermits while a Snowcap again made an appearance. Taking shelter in the flowering plants were our wintering Golden-winged Warblers as well as Bananaquits and Golden-hooded Tanagers. Once the rain stopped, we ventured out, but not before a Common Squirrel Cuckoo briefly flew by, perching for some shots before continuing back into the forest. We continued working our way back down the road, ending up at Rancho Bajo. Here we were able to get decent views of Melodious Blackbirds as well as a Yellow-breasted Elania. The star birds here though were the Keel-billed Toucans. After hearing them croaking for what seemed like ages, two flew up and perched in a nearby tree, giving unobstructed views as they sat there and stared at us. After getting our fill of the toucans, we slowly made our way back down to the road and caught the bus back to the lodge for lunch.

After lunch and a bit of down time, we reconvened at 1:30 to head out for the afternoon. Our first stop was the Tayutic River. Here we closely scanned the riverbed, before walking down to a nearby park. As we walked across the open field of the park, a Short-tailed Hawk soared overhead, joined by a Crested Caracara as well. We slowly crept up to the river and were rewarded with stellar looks at not one, but two Sunbitterns!!! These cryptically colored birds are in their own family and have reddish edges to the outer wings in flight. Not an easy bird to get good looks at!

From here, we made our way back to the van and loaded up to head to a large local lake. As we got to the lake, a tree had fallen across the road, so we got out and walked up to its banks. It was an expansive body of water, with reed beds close in and open water in the distance. We set up the scopes and started to scan the open water, picking out Muscovy Ducks as well as two species of egrets (Great and Snowy) along with a far Wood Stork. Closer in the reeds, a few Purple Gallinules poked their heads out or flew quickly across openings while Limpkins screeched in the background, as did the electrocuting sound of White-throated Crakes. Closer in, an Olive-crowned Yellowthroat sang, before fluttering across the road into a smaller batch of reeds. Overhead, lots of Barn Swallows cruised by, mixed in were smaller numbers of Northern Rough-winged Swallows. As we continued walking the banks, a group of Groove-billed Anis flushed into a small tree. We watched as the dinosaur looking birds followed each other in clumsy flight between the trees and the reeds. Behind them was a small opening in the reedbed, where we glimpsed Southern Lapwing and a few Northern Jacanas. By now it was time to work our way back to the vans. On the way back, we birded the other side which was forest edge habitat. Here we came across a Cinnamon Becard, Cocoa Woodcreepers and numerous Montezuma Oropendolas. Back on the reedbed side, a few all dark Thick-billed Seed Finches were spotted, and we got to

watch them flit about the top of the reeds. After we loaded back up into the van, a Roadside Hawk was spotted as we drove out as well as our third Sunbittern of the day!!

Once back at the lodge, a few of us walked out to the hummingbird bathing station, where we had a Crowned Woodnymph make a few passes at the water. A few pools down, an Orange-billed Sparrow bathed, while a Dull-mantled Antbird sang in the distance.

After a delicious dinner, a few of us joined the night walk. We walked up the trail, identifying lots of small spiders and lizards as we went. At the start were some Crowned Tree Frog Tadpoles in a low hanging bryophyte that had a pool of water in it. Further on, we had the first of many Vinegarroons or Whip Scorpions as well as a few Python Millipedes. Wandering spiders were common as were the Leaf Cutter Ants that never stop working. At the furthest point in the walk, an enormous, Red-kneed Tarantula was found hiding under a large rock. On our way back down, we were treated to a Praying Mantis as well as a net catching spider, waiting to spring its net on its next unsuspecting prey. By this time, it was fully dark, and everyone went off after a fantastic day.

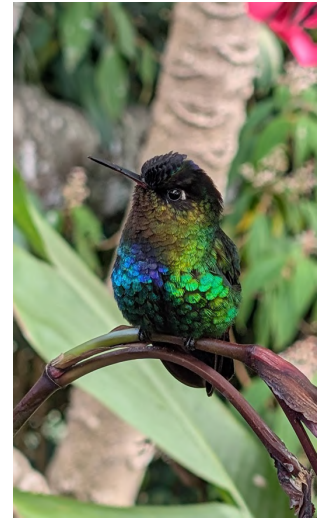
Sat., Jan. 10 Guayabo National Monument | Pierella Ecological Garden

Today was a moving day, so after breakfast, we packed up and headed on the road to our first stop of the day. Our first stop of the day was Guayabo National Park. Here we were given an archeology tour of the past native Americans of the area. This site was inhabited between 1000 BC through 1400 AD and consisted of numerous pyramids and aqueducts that supplied fresh water. It was amazing to realize this was all built by hand. We wandered down the main road, seeing round areas that were the remains of houses. After the tour of the pyramids we had a picnic lunch by one of the nearby picnic tables we continued onwards to our last stop of the day.

After a bit of a drive, we pulled onto the Pierella Ecological Gardens. This garden was established by someone who breeds butterflies for export, taking pressure off the native populations. In addition to his butterfly areas, he had created numerous trails throughout the reserve, allowing us to see quite a few species. Upon getting there, we were greeted with a welcome drink or coffee. We enjoyed and watched the feeders as they were swarming with activity. Multiple Clay-colored Thrushes were chowing down on the fruit with Red-legged and Green Honeycreepers, while a Collared Aracari muscled itself in to grab some fruit as well. Once the drinks were finished, we slowly walked the trails of the Gardens. The owner, a Dutch man, showed us around, starting with a short venture off the trail, one at a time to see several Honduran White Bats that had decided to roost in a low banana leaf. Everyone got great looks as we crept up and were able to get good views courtesy of a mirror that showed them tucked into the leaf without being disturbed. After everyone got looks, we moved on to our next species, a day roosting Black-and-white Owl! This bird gave good scope views as it slept its afternoon away. We continued onwards, working our way over to the butterfly tents, where we were allowed to go in. There were multiple species in the tent, with a few choosing to land on the clients, and some even trying to escape when it was time for us to continue onwards. Back on the trails, we found a Long-tailed Tyrant perched up in a dead tree, its long tail giving it away. On our way back to the entrance, we came across a hermit nest which happened to be of a Long-billed Hermit. It caused some confusion when a Band-tailed Barbthroat was seen nearby, but Johan confirmed it was two different species, just happened to be near a nest.

By now, it was time to continue onwards and to check in at the La Quinta de Sarapiquí lodge. We had one last exciting animal right before dinner, a Fer-de Lance was found crossing one of the paths right before dinner, which caused most to get a fantastic look at this highly venomous snake.

Sun., Jan. 11 La Selva Biological Station | Boat Cruise on Sarapiquí River



After an early breakfast, we loaded up to head to La Selva Biological Station. Upon arriving and checking in, we met our local guide for the morning. We started down one of the trails heading toward the towering rainforest but soon stopped to view a pair of Crested Guans. We were able to watch as they fed together, a female and two immatures. The mom would walk ahead, followed very closely by the two immatures, who seemed to want to stick super close to her. Overhead, Gray-rumped Swifts flew, gathering insects for their morning feast. As we continued, we entered the towering rain forest and slowly started to pick up some forest species. A smallish brown bird was located high in the canopy, a Rufous Mourner. While looking at the Mourner, a Rufous-tailed Jacamar called in the distance, and choose to stay deep in the forest.

As we walked slowly onwards, after crossing a bridge, we came across a swarm of Army Ants. We watched as thousands of these small ants swarmed across the path, continuing for at least 15 minutes. They were still swarming as we left to head back for a different trail. On our way back, we came across a small mixed flock. Within the mixed flock was a Black-crowned Antshrike that gave good views as well as a few species of woodcreepers such as Northern Barred and Plain Brown. From below us, a Stripe-breasted Wren called from the thick understory, as a Black-faced Grosbeak worked its way down the edge of the stream, darting in and out of view.

Further down the trail, a Broad-billed was found, and all flocked to the scope to see this orange headed Motmot as it sat quietly in the shade. From here, we continued onwards, down a different trail that walked through a clearing with one side boarded by forest. Above us, an Osprey flew overhead, the first one of the trip, while a White-ringed Flycatcher called and was soon located high up in the canopy. This gave us a chance to talk over identification tips, as the White-ringed looks very similar to a Great Kiskadee—White-ringed having a broader white eye stripe. We continued down this new trail, only to get distracted by a group of Collared Peccaries that were foraging nearby. After some watching they laid down in the grass, content with the warm morning sun. As we continued down the trail, we reentered the rainforest. It didn't take long to find the next wildlife encounter, with a few truly massive ants being found. The ant was carefully guided onto a stick for all to see—a Bullet Ant. With some more looking, a few more of these large ants were found climbing the nearby trees. We didn't go too much further when our guide for the station pointed out a bright yellow snake wrapped around a distant log. It turned into an Eyelash Viper; a highly venomous snake found mostly in the trees here in the rainforest—such a treat to see.

By now, it was time to start working our way back to the entrance. It didn't take long for us to stop again, by one of the trees we passed earlier that was absolutely dripping with a large mixed flock. It was all the birds all at



once. In the flock we had wintering Golden-winged Warbler and Yellow-throated Vireo. They were right next to Palm, Bay-headed and Silver-throated Tanagers. Nearby, a few dacnis made an appearance both Blue and Scarlet-thighed. Not to be out done, two species of manakin were also in the tree, both female Red-capped and White-ruffed. The males were harder to see, but they also made a brief appearance within this mixed flock. By the time we had to depart the mixed flock, we had 14-15 different species within this flock. By now, it was time to head out and for a delicious lunch before our afternoon activity.

Our afternoon activity was a boat trip on the Sarapiquí River. As we pushed off from the dock, Mangrove Swallows whizzed low over the water, while Boat-billed Flycatchers had their creaking call from the more interior parts of the forest. We slowly cruised down the river, picking up Tropical Kingbirds, as well as five small Green Kingfishers. Later along the river one giant Amazon Kingfisher was seen perched on a tree branch in the water. As we continued upriver, we scanned the sides, finding a Bare-throated Tiger Heron sitting quietly, it allowed amazingly close looks as it watched us go by. The forest was interspersed with sandbars that families had come out to for the afternoon, and they watched us float by. Further up the river, a large black lump with a yellow bill saw us coming and flew/ran back into the forest, a Great Curassow. An uncommon bird for the area. By this time, we had to turn around, but once turned around, two White-fronted Nunbirds were spotted, giving good looks as they perched for us on the edge of the forest. Further down, a large silhouette of a raptor was spotted. With some maneuvering, we were able to observe it—a perched Ornate Hawk-Eagle. The boats were maneuvered to see this huge, magnificent raptor perched back in the canopy. Further down, we had a few Southern Rough-winged Swallows mixed in with the more numerous Mangrove Swallows. As we pulled up to the dock, we disembarked for one final birding stop of the day.

Our last stop was the side of the road, where we were lucky enough to not only have fantastic looks at wild Great Green Macaws, but also the more uncommon Scarlet Macaws. It was quite a sight to see these large birds come flying in and screeching at each other. After the macaws flew off we walked down a nearby road, seeing 15 Chestnut-headed Oropendolas fly overhead. This stop was topped off with a final bird, a nice look at a perched Bat Falcon, as the sun fell in the sky. By now, it was time to head back, and have a delicious dinner after a fantastic, wildlife filled day. At dinner, we went over everyone's favorite moments of the trip. Ed's was the American Dipper, while Rosemary's was seeing the Scarlet Macaws and the Butterfly Garden. Kate's were the motmots, Blue-gray Tanager and seeing all the exotic birds in the wild and meeting everyone. Steve enjoyed spending time with Ross, introducing him to birding. Ross really enjoyed the butterfly gardens, quetzal, Scarlet Macaws and Lesson's Motmot. While Ben really enjoyed the quetzal mourning. Cindy enjoyed the quetzal stake out, exclaiming that whole day was Resplendent! Brenda enjoyed the American Dipper and the Common



Pauraque calling outside her room while at the hotel Bougainvillea. Meanwhile, James enjoyed the Honduran White Bats and the Black-and-white Owl, while Johan enjoyed the Ornate Hawk-Eagle.

Mon., Jan. 12 La Quinta de Sarapiquí | Mirador San Fernando Area | Tarcoles Boat Tour

The last day of the main tour started with a birding walk at the La Quinta de Sarapiquí lodge. As we set out along the trails, we were greeted by the blowing over an empty bottle-like call of White-tipped Doves. We slowly got out into the forest, and we came across a few small roving mixed flocks. The mixed flocks included White-browed Gnatcatcher, Yellow-throated Euphonia and a Tennessee Warbler. In the back Johan spotted a perched-up hummingbird, which turned into a greenish Scaly-breasted Hummingbird. Once the mixed flock moved on, we moved on, slowly working our way to a small body of water in the back. Upon getting to the body of water, it didn't take long to find a small, slender rail-like bird working the edge of the pond. This was a Russet-naped Woodrail. We watched as it slowly worked the opposite side of the bank until Johan called us over to view a Bright-rumped Attila perched above us. We got good views of this chunky flycatcher with some breast streaking. We slowly worked our way down to an open area, where the call of a Chestnut-backed Antbird sounded. With a little patience, the antbird came out in the open for us, its chestnut back and blue eye ring obvious. While this was going on, a Gray Hawk called in the distance, as did a Fasciated Antshrike. With them staying hidden, it was getting time to head back for breakfast until we were distracted by another Bright-rumped Attila. Unlike earlier this one was foraging on the ground point blank, allowing us to get stupendous looks as this chunky flycatcher. It even perched up at eye level, allowing us to view its distinctive lemon-yellow rump that gives it its name!! By now, we headed back to breakfast.

After breakfast, we packed up and loaded the van, heading up to the Galeria de Colibri y Soda Cinchona for a stop. Here we walked into and were treated to an fantastic feeder scene full of birds. Right away we had large Collared Aracaris stalking around the feeder while both Prong-billed and Red-headed Barbets took turns. The Prong-billed were greenish colored while Red-headed were decked out in bright red heads and bright yellow beaks. Meanwhile, Clay-colored Thrushes were at the feeders while several tanager species brought more color. Both Blue-gray and Scarlet-rumped flashed in the feeder while deeper dark and red Crimson-collared Tanagers were more sporadic. We had plenty of time at the feeder, but Johan decided we had time for one last stop, before we would split from the main tour to head to the extension. A 5 minute drive down a road brought us to a forested area where we got out and found a perched Broad-winged Hawk. As we worked our way down the road, a small flock of birds appeared, which included a bright Slate-throated Redstart as it foraged around both



Ochre-bellied Flycatchers, Black-faced Grosbeaks and Golden-winged Warblers. Meanwhile, overhead, a compact Barred Hawk soared.

We continued down the bend in the road and were greeted by a flock of greenish Carmiol's Tanagers mixed in with some Rose-breasted Grosbeaks. By now it was time to head back to the restaurant. When back at the restaurant, we met our guide for the extension, Gustavo. We gave our goodbyes to those who were returning to San Jose, and we soon set out for the Pacific side of Costa Rica. We had a quick stop at a magnificent waterfall that had an American Dipper at the bottom of it. We continued onwards to our lunch spot, which had a fantastic overlook of the Pacific Ocean. At our lunch spot, we had a traditional Costa Rican lunch of a casado. This goes back from when the husbands worked in the fields and the wives would pack their lunch, consisting of rice, beans, a protein, a fresh salad and a fried plantain. It was delicious and after finishing, we continued the drive down to our boat landing at the Tarcoles River.

Our boat tour of the Tarcoles River was full of birds. Even from the dock, we were greeted with the common Mangrove Swallow, the tiny green swallow with a white rump, skimming by the water's surface. On the opposite bank were a handful of Black-necked Stilts. As we cruised upriver first, we had multiple Ospreys perched in the trees while Groove-billed Anis flushed from the riverbank, flying in groups like tiny dinosaurs. Once we finished upriver, we slowly cruised back down, taking in the expansive mudflats. Here we were rewarded with great looks at both Wood Storks and Roseate Spoonbills, our only ones of the trip. As we worked our way out into the river mouth, we started seeing squadrons of pelicans flying in for the evening. It was v after v of them, eventually totaling up to over 300 birds. On the riverbank, we saw our first American Crocodile of the trip, one that was at least 7-8 feet long. We watched as it loafed on the riverbank and yawned before going back to sleep. Along the shoreline scattered Spotted Sandpipers ran about. Within them, we were able to find multiple, Black-bellied Plovers, Semipalmated Plovers and a single, long-billed Wilson's Plover. From here, we slowly cruised over to a stand of dense mangroves, when a Crab-eating Raccoon was spotted foraging on the edge, soon a second one was spotted with the White Ibis and various sandpipers. Upon getting into the mangroves, we came across a tiny American Pygmy Kingfisher. In the same area we had great looks at both a Mangrove Warbler and a quick look at a Prothonotary Warbler. A little further into the mangroves, we had great views of a Boat-billed Heron, and a small flycatcher caused some confusion until it was identified as a Northern Tropical Pewee. On our way back, we were greeted with numerous flyover Scarlet Macaws. As we reached the dock, a Common Black Hawk was perched overhead in a tree. By now, the sun was setting, and we continued onwards towards our night's accommodations, Cerro Lodge. After checking in and some down time, we reconvened for a delicious dinner, where some got a bread bowl full of pasta while others got large pizzas. All the food was delicious.



Afterwards, we did our nightly checklist and then spit up after a beautiful day both in the forest and on the water.

Tues., Jan. 13 Cerro Lodge | PN Carara (Sendero Laguna Meandrica) | Drive to Ensenada Lodge

We started the day with an early breakfast, where we were greeted by a Clay-colored Thrush and a few White-throated Magpie Jays as they flew past us. After finishing breakfast, we drove out to Carrara PN and after checking in took the Sendero Laguna Meandrica trail. This used to be a cattle farm but was bought and left to grow. As we started the trail, the “hit the foul pole” call of a Short-billed Pigeon rang out from the surrounding forest. Further into the forest, more birds started singing from the dense vegetation, with Rufous-tailed Jacamar calling as well. As we continued into the jungle, a small brown and white bird was spotted perched upon a lengthwise stick, a White-whiskered Puffbird. We watched as it sat motionless, allowing all to get fantastic views of it as well as some digiscoped pictures of the bird. As we continued, we came to a small flock of birds, where everything happened all at once. Suddenly, we had a female Black-hooded Antshrike right next to us, and the all black male above us. A little further up the trail, we had a Chestnut-backed Antbird come out for us, letting all get good looks at its chestnut back and blueish eyeing before it disappeared into the thick brush. A little further up, a grayish Dusky Antshrike made an appearance in a flock that also included a Lesser Greenlet and Philadelphia Vireo, as well as both Black-bellied and Rufous-breasted Wrens. The birds seemed to be right above us and it was hard to focus on a bird before another part of the flock showed up. We watched the flock as it passed over us and grew quiet again, before turning around to start to head back. On the way back, we found another White-whiskered Puffbird perched motionless, allowing for more good looks.

We had enough time to take another branch of the trail, that allowed us to walk past a roped off tree, the Sandbox tree, one with toxic milky sap that can be dangerous. A little bit in front of us, we heard a high-pitched screeching call, and watched as a troupe of White-faced Capuchin Monkeys worked their way towards us. We watched as the distant leaf movements showed that they were moving towards us and within a few minutes we all had good views of the monkeys as they slowly moved through the forest. By now it was time to go back to pack up and check out of Cerro Lodge.

Once on the road, we slowly made our way north to Ensenada Lodge. On the way there, we stopped for a delicious lunch where many got fruit smoothies that were extremely good. Continuing onwards, we watched as the forest turned from more of a wet forest to a dry deciduous forest. We made a few stops over some farm fields, watching a large group of 100 Barn, Northern Rough Wing and Cliff Swallows forage over an open field. In



the field itself, we watched as a distant Scissor-tailed Flycatchers perched on some low dead branches, presumably enjoying the bugs just as much as the swallows. Further on, we stopped by a Salmon Wood tree, where Gustavo explained how people respect the nature here, the tree he was pointing out was large and worth a few thousand dollars, but no one would cut it as it was valuable as a wildlife tree. Underneath that tree two Double-striped Thick-knees were spotted. One of them weirdly resting on its knees in the shade.

Continuing onwards, we came across a few Southern Lapwings hanging out in a field with Cattle Egrets and cattle. Gustavo explained the lapwings used to be rare but with a range expansion, they were now uncommon to common in the right areas. Further onwards, we came across a few bold black and white Stripe-headed Sparrows foraging next to the road. They allowed us good close looks as they played hide and seek in the roadside vegetation. By now, we had arrived at La Ensenada Lodge and clients had some free time before dinner. We all met a little before dinner, allowing us to go over the birds seen that day and tomorrow's plans before a delicious dinner and dessert cooked by the staff. By now, it was getting late so all ventured off to their rooms after a beautiful day of wildlife and bird encounters.

Wed., Jan. 14 Ensenada Lodge | Gulf of Nicoya Boat Trip

A few of us were able to shake off sleep enough to get up before breakfast and do some birding on the grounds of the lodge. We slowly worked the road area in front of the lodge, working out to the connecting road. As we walked, Yellow-naped Amazons called overhead, while a bright Streak-backed Oriole foraged in one of the bare tree branches, its bright plumage gleaming in the sun. From the distance, the non-stop tooting of a far away Ferruginous Pygmy Owl was heard. As we worked our way up the drive, more birds seemed to come awake, with both Social and Great Kiskadee flycatchers waking up. While a small group of six Groove-billed Anis was found, still huddled together from the preceding night. Upon getting to the connecting road, the tooting of the Pygmy Owl got louder, and we worked our way back to look for it. It did not take us long to find the little brown blob, perched on a low hanging bare branch. We got nice scope views of this owl, watching it turn this way and that, getting looks at both its golden eyes and the false black eyes on the back of its head. By now, 7 o'clock had hit and we worked our way back to breakfast. As we were getting ready to sit down for breakfast, Gustavo was able to locate one of the perched Pacific Screech Owls that lived in the surrounding palm trees. That was a big hit as a several clients went over there to grab a look at this small gray owl. They were also rewarded with looks at a nearby Black-headed Trogon as it hung out by a fruiting tree as well. Finally, we all reconvened for a delicious breakfast of fruit, eggs, rice and beans and pancakes. After breakfast, we walked down to the dock for our boat trip to the mangroves in the Gulf of Nicoya.



Upon departing, we headed into open water, getting looks at several large Magnificent Frigatebirds as they soared effortlessly overhead. Meanwhile, the Brown Pelicans stayed lower, flying to get their morning breakfast while Little Blue Herons and Snowy Egrets flew overhead moving from their sleeping rookeries to their morning routines. We watched as the sight of mangroves became bigger and bigger before we were in the mangroves.

They were primarily made up of Red Mangroves, and they provide an important habitat for migrating and local birds. As we motored around, we scanned the nearby mudflats, picking up small flocks of our wintering shorebirds, with the majority being Short-billed Dowitchers. Mixed in were smaller numbers of Willet, Black-bellied Plovers and Hudsonian Whimbrels. There seemed to be Spotted Sandpipers everywhere we looked. We tried a couple mangrove areas for a Mangrove Cuckoo, the first two being quiet, but our boatman spotting a perched Lesser Nighthawk for all to see. The third time was the charm though. With the boat stopped, we could hear the deep call of it as it ventured closer to us. Although it never came out in the open, we got to see bits and pieces of it through the dense mangrove leaves. This being a shy bird, we felt lucky to even get a chance to view this species. From here, we continued scanning the mudflats for more shorebirds, eventually finding three Ruddy Turnstones among the more common Whimbrel and Dowitchers. As we turned around to head back, we came across a spit of land where 23 Royal Terns were loafing, their orange bills diagnostic. On the way back, we had good looks at another uncommon Reddish Egret perched high on a dead stump. By the time we got back the heat was building, so everyone got some free time in before lunch.

After a delicious lunch and another siesta, we reconvened at 3:00 PM to go on a tractor ride of the surrounding area. As the tractor left, and turned on the main road, we got great looks at a troop of Mantled Howler Monkeys, clearly still in their siesta mode for the afternoon. As we continued onwards and into the lodge's grounds, we came across two Inca Doves perched in the dense brush bordering a field. Meanwhile, overhead, Red-billed Pigeons appeared, it had been a while since we had seen one. The tractor continued, as we slowly made our way to the salt flats. At the salt flats, we were explained that the owners have been doing this since they bought the property, using the wet season to flood the squares and then let the dry season evaporate the water, leaving salt behind. The salt is then harvested and sold, mainly for horse feed. As the water evaporates, it leaves the perfect habitat for wading birds. We stopped and scanned the expansive area, picking up multiple Black-necked Stilts, White Ibis, Short-billed Dowitchers and a few Whimbrels. In the back, a few ducks were spotted, turning into the first Blue-winged Teals of the trip. To the right of them, Gustavo found an immature Bare-throated Tiger Heron; very much looking like a bittern with the immature brownish striped plumage. Nearby was a foraging Yellow-crowned Night Heron as well.



After the salt ponds, we continued onwards to the lagoon. On the way there, we passed a tree of gourds, a Calabash tree. This tree was used in the past to make drinking bottles, as the gourds were dried, and the flesh removed for it. Perched nearby was one of the three Common Black Hawks seen that day. Near the Calabash tree Gustavo finally spotted our first Turquoise-browed Motmot. This bird was perched low and the greenish plumage with turquoise brow really popped in the afternoon sunlight. After 10 minutes of watching him, we continued onwards to the lagoon.

The lagoon was full of bird activity. As we pulled up, we had a large flock of Mangrove Swallows flying. We watched as multiple would come down, skimming the water either for a drink or for bathing. With the amount of rain they had in the wet season, this lagoon was mostly freshwater. But Gustavo explained as the dry season would continue, it would slowly turn to brackish water. To our right, an American Crocodile floated in the water, while Red-winged Blackbirds announced their presence with their “Konkaree” calls and chasing each other into the reeds. Over the water and by the reedbeds, an Anhinga perched while a Little Blue Heron flew past.

As sunset was approaching, we continued onwards, leaving the lagoon and working our way up to a vantage point to watch the sunset. On the way there, we came across a pair of Southern Lapwings as well as two Yellow-headed Caracaras. Both these birds were newcomers to the area 10-15 years ago and are now relatively common. The afternoon wore on as we slowly chugged up a massive bluff and finally made it to the top to be greeted by an expansive overlook to watch the setting sun. Nearby, we were treated to a tray of refreshments, allowing us to thoroughly sit and enjoy the setting sun over the Gulf of Nicoya. We stayed up there watching as the sun turned the horizon reddish orange, enjoying the last rays of the setting sun before slowly working our way back down to the lodge for a fantastic dinner. After dinner, we sat and worked our way through the checklist before heading back to the rooms after a fantastic day!

Thurs., Jan. 15 Ensenada Lodge Area

Our last full day of the extension. We got up early, meeting at 6:00 am to beat the heat and drove to our last morning of the tour. We parked and slowly made our way up to an overlook of one of the many lagoons. As we walked up, a Coati was observed nearby. In the back, a high-pitched whistle was heard and located from a bare tree above us. Up in the top perched a small black and white bird—a White-necked Puffbird. Nearby, the duller female was located in a tree.

As we caught up to the rest of the group, we came to the overlook of a local lagoon. The nearby tree with flower blossoms was full of life. Both an adult and immature Green-breasted Mango fed on the blossoms, giving all good looks as they took turns feeding and perching for us. The immature was a bit less cooperative, but showed well, its dark stripe and white sides showing in the morning sunlight. While that was going on, the harsh chatter came from orioles nearby. They flew into the flowering bush, feeding on the flowers as well. The first few that



came in were an immature and an adult Streak-backed Oriole—named for their streaky back. They were glowing in the morning sunlight. We then turned our attention to the lagoon, where Red-winged Blackbirds called from the far shoreline and both Little Blue and Tricolored Herons flew back and forth. Heard in the dense brush next to us came the low guttural call of a hidden Boat-billed Heron, while a Green Heron flew out for us briefly. While this was going on, overhead flew multiple species of parrots and parakeets. The most common being a flock of chattering Orange-fronted Parakeets, followed by Orange-chinned Parakeets and White-fronted Amazons. Lastly, a few larger Yellow-naped Amazons flew over, their larger silhouettes giving them away. After they finished flying over, a few more orioles came back to the flower tree. One of them with black spots on its breast, a Spot-breasted Oriole. We had the good fortune of being able to observe both Streak-backed and Spot-breasted in the same binocular field before they went their separate ways on the tree. At the same time, over the lagoon, a large flock of Mangrove Swallows had gotten up and flew close to the water, dipping their breasts in the water and flying off, a treat to see. By now, it was getting close to breakfast time, so we slowly made our way back to the van, walking past a bunch of cattle with the occupying Cattle Egrets.

After a delicious breakfast, we packed up and started the journey back to San Jose. We had a few stops along the way to make, but we watched as the dry deciduous forest gave way to more wet rainforest as we got closer to San Jose. We made a quick stop for people to go get local coffee to bring home and continued onwards to lunch with a view, which was fantastic. After lunch, we continued onwards, driving the winding mountain roads, with a quick stop as Gustavo observed a perched raptor near a pull out. A quick look showed a small raptor, which upon closer inspection, showed a reddish bared chest and a brown stripe down the middle of the throat. A Double-toothed Kite!

Upon arriving in San Jose, we had the last stop of the trip to a famous ice cream store—the best ice cream in Costa Rica. The ice cream was very good. Upon arriving in San Jose, we got checked in to the Hotel Bougainvillea and had some down time before our final farewell dinner and checklist. The dinner was fantastic, with some getting fish, while others got pork chops or pasta. Served with the typical fruit juices that have been commonplace throughout the trip. After the final checklist review, we looked at all the species we had seen, 308 of them along with 13 mammal species, 11 insect species and 11 reptiles and amphibians as well. As the day closed, the adjective that was decided would describe the day was Pura Vida, as this was the last day of the tour.

Photos: Group (Johan Fernández - JF), Red-legged Honeycreeper (JF), Collared Aracari (Steve Wagner - SW), Resplendent Quetzal (JP), White-throated Mountain Gem (JP), Golden-browed Cholorphonia (JP), Fiery-throated Hummingbird (Kate Howard - KH), Keel-billed Toucan (SW), Sunbittern (JF), Red-eyed Treefrog (Ross Wagner - RW), Chestnut-colored Woodpecker (SW), Yellow Eyelash Pit Viper (BW), Emerald Toucanet (Brenda Inskeep - BI), Red-headed Barbet (SW), Scenic (JP), Coatimundis (RW), Crimson-collared Tanager (SW), Scarlet Macaw (SW), White-whiskered Puffbird (JP)