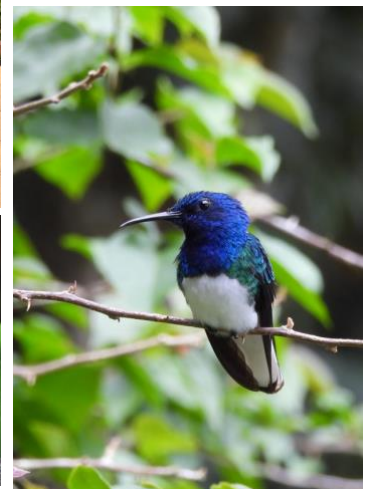


Costa Rica: Birding & Nature | Trip Report

Feb. 22 – Mar. 1, 2023 | by Rick Weiman



With host Rick Weiman, local guide Jose Armando Obando, and participants Amy, Bob, Bonnie, Cecilia, David, Dottie, James, Jo, Livia & Noel



Wed., Feb. 22

Arrivals in Costa Rica

Today was arrival day and most of our group met in the lobby around 3:00, then walked the beautiful, 10-acre garden trails of our Hotel Bougainvillea. One of the highlights was a pair of sleepy Mottled Owls nestled in a dark nook in a large stand of bamboo. Soon after a Lesson's Motmot flew into view and perched for photos. Several Brown Jay's made a fly-by, as did a Montezuma's Oropendola and a Squirrel Cuckoo, and a large flock of Crimson-fronted Parakeets landed in a tall tree that was also occupied by a pair of Crested Caracaras. Other birds seen or heard on the walk were Cabani's Wren, Summer Tanager, a small flock of Vaux's Swifts and several Rufous-tailed Hummingbirds. We took a little break after the walk before meeting in the bar for a celebratory



drink to start the tour, followed by dinner in the hotel restaurant. During a lull in dinner, we completed our first bird list of the trip before heading off to bed. We had a 6:00 AM bird walk in the garden to rest up for.

Thurs., Feb. 23

**Hotel Bougainvillea | Talamanca Mountains | Rio
Savegre Valley | Paradiso de Quetzales | Quetzales
National Park**

After a delicious buffet breakfast at our hotel, our excited group of 10 travelers met Rick and Armando for our early morning bird walk. As we assembled, a White-tailed Kite flew directly overhead, a great and unexpected start to our morning. We then checked on our Mottled Owl roost to share them with late arrivers, David and Dottie, and there they were, sleepily staring back at us. Several new birds made an appearance as we walked the perimeter of the garden including a Lineated Woodpecker, whose call we heard first. We watched a pair of Hoffman's Woodpeckers excavating a nest cavity while two Masked Tityras perched overhead. David and Dottie had not seen the Lesson's Motmot yet, and happily one appeared just minutes before the breakfast bell rang, perching nicely in the early morning sun for us.

After breakfast, we loaded up our beautiful and spacious Skyline bus and met our driver Douglas who would be with us for the entire week. The day was sunny and warm as we made our drive up the Cerro de la Muerte and the Talamanca mountains cloud forest. Before long we had passed through San Jose and were at over 9,000 feet elevation. We arrived at Paradiso de Quetzales, a family run eco-resort with a nice restaurant and gift shop. The hummingbird feeders were a bustle of activity with the main four battling for positions at the feeders being Talamanca, Fiery-throated and the smaller Volcano Hummingbirds, and Lesser Violetear. We hiked the winding mountain trails dotted with flower-laden gardens and saw many new species such as a pair of beautiful Golden-browed Chlorophonia, Mountain Thrush, Sooty Thrush, Long-tailed Silky Flycatcher, Collared Redstart, Large-footed Finch and several Slaty Flowerpiercers searching for nectar. We had a relaxing lunch there and then drove a few more miles to the Trogon Lodge, our home for the next two nights. The lodge is made up of twin cabins spread across beautiful gardens, trout ponds and lushly flowered trails along the Savegre River. After getting situated in our delightful rooms, we met for a bird walk on the property and added Mountain Elaenia,



Torrent Tyrannulet foraging along the river, Ruddy-capped Nightingale-Thrush and a pair of Flame-colored Tanagers to our growing bird list. We met at the bar before dinner for some libations and then completed our species list in a nice, quiet room we had all to ourselves adjacent to the restaurant. Dinner was wonderful and included several desert choices, including the delicious Tres Leches cake.

Fri., Feb. 24 Trogon Lodge | Search for the Resplendent Quetzal Savegre Reserve

We met at 6:00 AM and took a short drive up the mountain road from the lodge to search a favorite feeding spot for our target bird for the day, the beautiful Resplendent Quetzal. It was a popular spot as several other tour groups were already there. We waited in the chilly mountain air for a little over an hour, but the birds had other ideas. We did encounter several regionally endemic Black Guans and another pair of Flame-colored Tanagers. After breakfast at the lodge, we visited the Savegre Reserve to hike some trails high above the Savegre Lodge. Before setting out, we saw several new species at the lodge's feeders such as Stripe-tailed Hummingbird and White-throated Mountain Gem. A pair of Silver-throated and Blue-Gray Tanagers flew in to sample the fresh melon at the feeders. It was hard to leave the action at the feeders, but we hopped into two 4x4 vehicles that drove us up the steep hillside a few miles. We then began a three-mile hike through pristine montane forest. The hike was mostly downhill on well groomed trails. We passed a stream and the bird activity quickly picked up.

A family of Ruddy Treerunners were foraging at almost ground level, and we witnessed young birds being fed by their parents. A rare Buffy Tuftedcheek was spotted by Armando and some of the group got quick looks at it high in the oak trees among the epiphytes. Several Yellowish and Tufted Flycatchers posed for our cameras, as did a Black-capped Flycatcher. The calls of Acorn Woodpeckers led us to a pair, and several more were seen further down the trail. Both Slaty-backed and Ruddy-capped Nightingale-Thrushes were spotted, as were Black-throated Green, Wilson's and Black-cheeked Warblers. Several Spangle-cheeked Tanagers and stunning Flame-throated Warblers (both local montane endemics) foraged very close to the group, as did multiple Yellow-thighed Brushfinches, an all-black bird with yellow thighs as the name suggests. When we returned to the lodge, a flock of White-collared Swifts and a Red-tailed Hawk flew overhead signaling it was time for lunch. In the afternoon we had time to ourselves back at Trogon Lodge to hike the beautiful trails along the Savegre River or



just relax in the gardens and soak up the sun. Some of our group again saw the tiny Torrent Tyrannulet feeding on rocks along the river, picking insects off alongside the fast-moving rapids. Another happy hour and a game of pool at the bar was followed by the species list and another delicious dinner at the lodge, ending a very full and rewarding day.

Sat., Feb. 25

Search for the Resplendent Quetzal | Rancho Naturalista

Having failed to see the Quetzal yesterday, we decided another early morning try was needed so we again departed the lodge at 6:00 AM to go to the nearby Casa Monge property where a pair had been reported the day before. After a short, steep hike, we joined another group waiting for the birds to appear. We heard a male calling, and soon it was spotted deep in the forest but obscured by branches. But our patience was rewarded and soon both the beautiful male and female moved into view for all of us to capture pictures and wonderful memories as they flew from branch to branch. The local people realize the importance of the Quetzals to tourism, and many forests have been conserved due to their presence. Our happy, quetzal-infused group headed back to the lodge for breakfast and to load up the bus as we departed Trogon Lodge for our next adventure.

We had a long drive ahead of us to our next lodge at Rancho Naturalista, back over the Cerro de Muerte mountains where we hit 9,800 feet elevation before starting our descent. We stopped along the way at a small, organic coffee farm called Café Cristina, where we sampled brews and purchased some freshly ground local coffee. A large Owl Butterfly was seen perched on their banana feeder. Our next stop was La Casona de Cafetal, which had a lovely restaurant on the shores of Lake Cachi in the beautiful Cachi Valley. We dined outdoors in sunny 70F temperatures trying hard not to focus on the birds in the garden. We could see Great Egrets, Little Blue Heron and a Least Grebe on the lake shore, and Common Tody-Flycatcher, Tropical Parula, Bananaquit, Scarlet-rumped Tanagers and Gray-capped Flycatcher among others in the gardens. Upon arrival at Rancho Naturalista, we had a quick visit to our rooms then headed for the veranda overlooking the garden with its banana and hummingbird feeding stations. White-necked Jacobins, Green-breasted Mango and Crowned Woodnymphs all jockeyed for position at the feeders just a few feet away from us. At the banana stations, Summer, Blue-Gray, Golden-crowned and Scarlet-rumped Tanagers all made an appearance along with Buff-throated Saltators. Several ground-level bird baths in the shaded part of the garden were visited by a Worm-eating Warbler, an Orange-billed Sparrow and a Wilson's Warbler. Other neotropical migrants spotted getting



ready for their journeys north were Blackburnian, Tennessee, Black-and-white and Chestnut-sided Warblers, and an American Redstart. We watched the birds until the dinner bell rang and then enjoyed a delicious family-style Costa Rican meal followed by tallying our growing species list in the comfortable lounge area.

Sun., Feb. 26 Rancho Naturalista

We were back on the veranda at 6:00 AM scanning for birds before breakfast. We added a few new sightings such as Violet-headed Hummingbird, Green Thorntail, Lesson's Motmot, a flock of 15 Gray-headed Chachalacas who made quick work of the remaining bananas, a Black-striped Sparrow and several Brown Jays and Montezuma Oropendolas. After breakfast seven of the group set out to hike the lodge's trails with Armando while Rick stayed on the veranda with Dave, Dottie and Bob, who all felt like relaxing and enjoying the easy birding (Rick did not mind either). Many of the birds seen the previous day reappeared, as did a small flock of Collared Aracaris and pairs of both Masked and Black-crowned Tityras. We watched an Ochre-bellied Flycatcher catching insects as Olive-backed Euphonias and Yellow-faced Grassquits fed in the garden. The hikers returned a few hours later with many new birds as well such as Crested Guan, Zone-tailed Hawk, White-ruffed Manakin, Keel-billed Toucans, a flock of Scarlet-thighed Tanager and a Black-cheeked Woodpecker. After lunch we used the lodge's van to visit another part of the 125-acre property where Snowcap hummingbirds are often seen. We were thrilled to see a brilliant male as well as an immature and a female at this location. Several Groove-billed Ani's flew in as did a Baltimore Oriole and another Black-cheeked Woodpecker. We then took a short drive to the Platanillo River where we found a nesting Sunbittern thanks to excellent directions from Lisa, the lodge manager. A pair of Torrent Tyrannulets were seen feeding their young in a nest next to the bridge, and Blue-and-white and Southern Rough-winged Swallows circled around us. Then it was back on the Rancho Naturalista veranda (or naps, yoga or massages for some) for more birding followed by dinner and the species list. A night walk was a special treat, and we discovered several nocturnal insects including an amazingly camouflaged Walking Stick and a scary looking, but harmless, Tailless Whip-scorpion.



Mon., Feb. 27

Rancho Naturalista | Guyabo National Monument Selva Verde Lodge

Once again most of the group were birding from the veranda at 6:00 AM, and those early birders were rewarded with nice looks at male and female Gartered Trogons that a few late arrivers unfortunately missed. Fresh bananas were on the feeding stations, which meant another visit from around a dozen Gray-headed Chachalacas, several Montezuma Oropendolas and Brown Jay's. The Lesson's Motmot also came in for a bite, as did a pair of Red-throated Ant Tanagers. During breakfast, Rick identified a new bird for the trip, a male White-lined Tanager, and since we were dining outside, all of us got great looks. As the bus was being loaded for our departure, a few of the group spotted another new bird, a Brown-hooded Parrot. It was hard to leave this wonderful place, and as the bus drove away, Lisa and her staff were all outside waving goodbye.

Our next stop was the archeological site, Guyabo National Monument, where we walked the trails and learned about the history of the indigenous people that once lived there. The site was discovered when the area was being cleared for coffee plantations in the late 1800s. At its peak, around 10,000 people lived in this ancient city. It's believed that the first settlers came to these parts around 1,000 BC, creating a bustling city by 800 AD. As to why they disappeared, it is still not known. Birds were there too, and we had a nice scope looks at a calling Broad-billed Motmot and a perched Broad-winged Hawk. A large Crested Guan was spotted high in a cecropia tree as a soaring Roadside Hawk flew overhead. Other new birds we tallied were Scale-crested Pygmy-Tyrant, Yellow-olive Flycatcher and a pair of calling Bay Wrens. We enjoyed a box lunch from Rancho Naturalista in the park, and then departed Guyabo for a long drive to the Caribbean lowlands and our next stop at the Selva Verde Lodge, with its 500 acres of preserved tropical forest. After our late afternoon orientation, some of us visited the swimming pool while others rested or walked the well-marked forest trails before our buffet dinner.

Tues., Feb. 28

Selva Verde Lodge | La Selva Biological Station Sarapiquí River Tour

This morning was another early one as we birded the Selva Verde Lodge grounds starting at 6:00 AM. Before long we had our first good views of toucans in the cecropia trees above us. Several Keel-billed Toucans flew in and didn't seem to mind when a pair of Yellow-throated Toucans joined them. A male Black-throated Trogon perched on a vine, and Armando and Cecilia got quick looks at a Rufous Motmot before it disappeared into the



shadows of the forest. On a riverside trail, a Little Blue Heron flushed, and Noel photographed a perched Black Phoebe. The fruit feeding station by the restaurant gave us close looks at several tanager species, a Long-billed Hermit and more Montezuma Oropendolas. After a delicious buffet breakfast, we departed for a 20-minute ride to the La Selva Biological Station where we would spend the entire morning. La Selva is operated by The Organization for Tropical Studies (OTS) promoting education, conservation, ecotourism and research. Scientists and students from all over the world visit La Selva very year to work on projects related to biodiversity, forest dynamics, nutrient cycling, native species reforestation and carbon sequestering. It's known as one of the world's most important sites for tropical ecosystem research, holding over 450 bird species and 70 species of bats.

We were excited to explore it's 1,600 acres of tropical forest, and upon our arrival we met one of the local reserve guides and immediately began birding the garden trails. New birds were everywhere and before long we had all three honeycreepers in sight: Green, Shining and Red-legged. Blue was the color of the day as a Blue Cotinga male and female were spotted high in a tree, as were Blue and Scarlet-thighed Dacnis and several Blue-gray Tanagers. We crossed the Sarapaqui River on a footbridge and within a few feet had a perched Rufous-tailed Jacamar and a pair of Broad-billed Motmots. After we crossed the river, James spotted a King Vulture soaring with several Black Vultures, and a Squirrel Cuckoo popped up for good looks. Some other new birds for the list were Cinnamon Becard, Plain Xenops and Fasciated and Black-crowned Antshrikes. Just as we were finishing our walk, a dozen or more Collared Peccaries crossed the road in front of us. Our local guide then somehow found a small, worm-sized Adorned Graceful Brown Snake in the leaf litter, and a yellow, venomous Eyelash Pit Viper, coiled high in a tree. Then we returned to the lodge for lunch and a short rest. Our next big adventure was a boat trip on the Sarapaqui River with Captain Jose. The skies were cloudy as we arrived, but fortunately the rain stayed away. Prior to boarding we saw our first sloth of the trip in a large tree by the dock, a Hoffman's Two-toed Sloth. Armando spotted one of our North American migrants, a stunning Yellow-throated Vireo, as we boarded for a three-hour tour. Speckled Caimans and Black River Turtles rested on the riverbanks, and an American Crocodile was seen lounging on a mud flat. Several Spotted Sandpipers and Louisiana Waterthrushes bobbed their tails on the shoreline, constantly flying ahead of the boat. A lone male Mantled Howler Monkey rustled in the treetops, our first sighting of one as we had only heard them calling back at our lodge.



More new birds appeared as we traversed our way upstream including Amazon, Green and Ringed Kingfishers, and several Bare-throated Tiger-Herons. A Snowy Egret and Anhinga were familiar birds that also called the river home, as did the diminutive Sungrebe that quickly scampered out of view of our binoculars. Rick spotted a pair of Slaty-tailed Trogons, and as we were watching them, a Black-throated Trogon flew in and perched near them on a vine. It was an amazing boat ride not without some excitement as Captain Jose expertly navigated some small areas of rapids. A moment for the photographers occurred when a brilliantly colored Emerald Basilisk Lizard ran into view and posed on a log, seemingly enjoying the attention. One of our favorite new birds was a Buff-rumped Warbler, seen feeding along the shoreline out in the open for us to clearly enjoy. On the ride, both Mangrove and Southern Rough-winged Swallows strafed the river's surface for insects, often plopping in for a quick bath while still in flight. We had our farewell dinner at the lodge and then completed our species list in an outdoor common area. Though tired from the long and exciting day, we mustered up enough energy for a short night walk with Armando on the lodge property. There was a small pond by the restaurant, and we quickly found Red-eyed Tree Frogs calling and amplexing on several large-leafed plants. In all we saw about eight, including an egg mass under a leaf over the pond. As the tadpoles develop, they wriggle out of the eggs and drop into the pond from high above it. On the way back to our rooms, several Strawberry Poison Dart Frogs could be heard calling and we then found several of the tiny frogs in the foliage, as well as a larger brown Leaf Litter Toad.

Wed., Mar. 1 Departures

After another filling breakfast, we loaded up the tour bus and said our goodbyes to Selva Verde. We planned to make a few stops on our way to the airport, and several new birds were spotted out the window of the bus, including a pair of Scarlet Macaws and a Swallow-tailed Kite. We visited La Paz, a scenic waterfall where we took lots of photos and noticed two hawks circling above us with Black Vultures that turned out to be Barred Hawks, adding another very special new bird to our list. We stopped at a local restaurant, Soda Cinchona Mirador, near Alajuela for some fresh coffee. They had a small fruit feeding station and several hummingbird feeders overlooking the valley where we sat for a while. It was amazingly productive, with seven new birds observed in 15 minutes! A Northern Emerald-Toucanet flew in and paused for pictures, as did a Prong-billed Barbet and a Yellow-billed Cacique. Below the feeders in the leaf litter were several Common Chlorospingus and a Chestnut-capped Brushfinch. The hummingbird feeders were swarming with Violet Sabrewings, Costa Rica's largest



hummingbird, and Green-crowned Brilliants. We could have spent the whole morning there, but sadly it was time to move on. For some of us this was the final day of our tour as Rick, Amy, James and Bonnie were dropped off at the San Jose airport, saying goodbye to our new friends and guide Armando who were now heading to the Pacific side of Costa Rica for their four-day trip extension.

Photo Credits: Group Photo (Rick Weiman - RW), Resplendent Quetzal (Noel Capestany - NC), White-necked Jacobin (RW), Black-faced Grosbeak (RW), Summer Tanager (RW), Golden-browed Chlorophonia (RW), Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl (Cecilia Capestany - CC), Lesser Violetear (NC), Lesson's Motmot (RW), Mottled Owl (RW), Rufous-tailed Hummingbird (NC), Fiery-throated Hummingbird (NC), Yellowish Flycatcher (James Echmalian - JE), Slaty Flowerpiercer (JE), By the Waterfall! (RW), Coffee Bag (JE), La Casona del Caftan (JE), Crowned Woodnymph (RW), Montezuma Oropendola (RW), White-necked Jacobin & Crowned Woodnymph perched (JE), Gray-capped Flycatcher (RW), New Friends (RW), Variegated Squirrel (RW), Agouti (RW), Snowcap male (NC), Snowcap female (NC), Gorgeous View (RW), Rufous-tailed Jacamar (RW), Emerald Basilisk Lizard (RW), River Crocodile (RW), Sarapiquí Bridge (RW), Fasciated Antshrike (NC), Emerald Toucanet (RW), Birders (RW), Group Photo (RW), Turquoise-browed Motmot (NC)