

Costa Rica



17th to 24th February, 2006



Friday, 17 th	Buena Vista hotel, Alajuela Km76 Track to Savegre Lodge Savegre Lodge	5:45 – 8:00 11:40 – 14:00 14:00 – 16:00 16:00 – 17:45
Saturday, 18 th	Savegre Lodge	5:45 – 17:45
Sunday, 19 th	Savegre Lodge Cerro de la Muerte Punta Leona	5:45 – 7:40 10:30 – 11:30 15:45 – 18:00
Monday, 20 th	Carara Villas Lapas Tarcoles	6:00 – 11:30 11:40 – 15:00 15:30 – 17:30
Tuesday, 21 st	Orotina La Paz	6:15 – 7:00 9:15 – 17:30
Wednesday, 22 nd	Entrance drive to La Selva Selva Verde lodge	5:45 – 11:15 12:00 – 17:30
Thursday, 23 rd	La Selva Quadabra Gonzalves, Braullio Carillo	5:30 – 11:00 14:00 – 15:45
Friday, 24 th	Buena Vista hotel, Alajuela	5:45 – 11:15

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Introduction

Costa Rica is one of the top world destinations for birders, due mainly to the combination of a high number of bird species (up to 800 depending on which list is looked at), the size of the country being relatively small (yet having a great diversity of ecosystems – it is divided into 6 different ecological zones), and, for a Central American country, being relatively safe to visit. Thus it was that we had to have our own piece of Costa Rican avian action. This wasn't our first trip to the region, since we had previously safely and effectively navigated both Mexico and Trinidad. Both of these destinations share not only similar families to Costa Rica, but also many of the same species. However, there are many more uncommon families and species within the Costa Rican borders, which made it a challenge for us when identifying new birds.

The position and history of birds here is interesting, since millions of years of evolution has apparently married the formerly divided North and South American continents with the isthmus that finally joined at Costa Rica and Panama. This partially explains the diversity of species that the country enjoys – families migrated from both the North and the South, but not all intermingled due to barriers such as the mountain ranges which



form the backbone of the region. Thus while Costa Rica has only 6 true endemics, and many more if the Costa Rica/Panama subzone (the Chiriqui) is considered, the distribution of species and families within the different zones is high. Some North American and Mexican species reach their southern limit in the North of the country (many in the dry North-western Guanacaste area), and even more South American specialities finally end their northern expansion in the Chiriqui area.

Since our budgetary time diet is usually no more than one enjoyable week, we could only plan to visit a sample of the sites on offer. The focus of our trips is more on enjoying the quality of the birds than trying to rack up as large a list as possible, so we planned to spend more time at fewer places than intricate planning and high mileage looking for an extra tick. The week was thus focused around spending two nights each at three bases, with a night each end of the trip near to the airport, at hotels which would offer some additional birding if needed. The three areas we decided to visit were in the mountains at the Savegre Valley, on the Pacific coast near Tarcoles, which is the northern most barrier for some South America family types, and the Caribbean lowlands near to La Selva. We purposely stayed away from the Braullio Carrillo national park since it was reported to have a higher than average likelihood of car crime, being on a good road just out of the capital of San Jose.

Timing and weather

It is likely that superb birding can be experienced at any time of the year. The months of February and March are the drier months of the year, and so this is the period that most trips aim for, including ourselves. Dry season is something of a misnomer, since the term is only relative, and the amount of rain encountered also depends on which ecosystem is visited. We had more rain as the week progressed, but this was more likely to be due to moving between areas than the increase generally of poorer weather. So, we encountered mist and light drizzle as we climbed up towards the higher peaks, dry weather in the Savegre Valley (also cooler and more temperate here), hot and dry at the Pacific coast, and then hot with rain in the Caribbean lowlands. All these weather systems tallied very well with those predicted. The dry season is outside of the breeding season, and although only a handful of the birds change into a more drab non-breeding plumage, there is some dispersal from breeding grounds. Later in the year is probably much better for singing and displaying birds.

Biting insects can be something of an annoyance, without being a major irritation. Mosquitoes were encountered mainly in the forested areas of the lowlands, as well as chiggers, which seemed to prefer grassy lawns. Far from being a threat, we had hoped to see some snakes and spiders. We were warned to take care to avoid being bitten by the former, which are more of a danger in the forests at night, but unfortunately we didn't even get a sniff of one.

Accommodation

Since the time of year we visited was not only the dry season, but also the most popular time for visiting birders, we took the precaution of booking ahead via the internet. We used an agency called 1costaricalink to book all but one of the hotels. Despite most of the bookings being well catered for, ***I cannot recommend the company***, since not only did they fail to pay our money to the last hotel of the trip (and losing our room in the process), but the manager responsible subsequently refused to apologise for the incident, and also to refund the money. It took some effort on my behalf to do this through the credit card company.

The hotels we used were:

Hotel Buena Vista, Alajuela

The flight from the UK landed at Alajuela airport at 22:30, so we used this superb little hotel, which was only 9km from the touchdown, and also offered a free shuttle pickup. Due to a mix up with our booking agents, who had failed to secure the Hotel Bougainvillea, we also returned to the Buena Vista on the last night. Apart from missing the 2 likely Ground-sparrows at the Bougainvillea, the Buena Vista offers at least as good, if not a better, birding experience. It has a small garden to the rear, but the Floridian owner also allows birding on his property which is adjacent, and has some very birdy coffee plantation terraces below. There were quite a few species that we only saw at the Buena Vista, including Blue-crowned Motmot, Steely-vented Hummingbird, Plain-capped Starthroat, Swainson's Thrush, Brown Jay, and Yellow-green Vireo. Another plus in favour of the Buena Vista is that the food is superb.

Savegre Lodge Hotel

There are very few hotels in prime locations in the mountains, and this is one of those. Thus, it probably gets booked up very quickly. It is located at the end of a 10km downward track in the Savegre Valley, and is right in the centre of some excellent mountainous forest. For those who chase birding icons, there are also regular Quetzal sightings within the area, including a group of birds that visit the avocado trees right above some of the chalets. Another speciality of the hotel is the provision of excellent hummingbird feeders, which attract good numbers of some of the mountain specialities.

Hotel Punta Leona

A few kilometres South of Tarcoles, this is a very new family orientated resort. This isn't the sort of place we would have aimed for, but the price was surprisingly reasonable, and it is also in an excellent location for Pacific coast locations such as Carara. Villas Lapas, which are on the opposite side of the road to Tarcoles, are in a much more favourable setting, without the sunseekers and manicuring of the Punta Leona, but are also twice the price. We made do with an afternoon visit to the Villas, including a good buffet, but still found some good trails within the Punta Leona, again with birds that were seen only there, such as Black-throated Trogon and Dot-winged Antwren.

La Quinta, Sarapiquí

We were also lucky with this very hospitable and endearing hotel. Some birds were present at the feeders, but another benefit is the provision of a small frog garden, where some of the local poison dart frogs can be found. The buffet dinners are good, with the added benefit of being served in an open air restaurant. La Selva, which is a must see reserve in this area, is also just 15km away, and the reception can book a guide for La Selva, which is a must if the reserve trails are to be visited. As with all the hotels we frequented, directions given were accurate, and we had no problem in finding them.

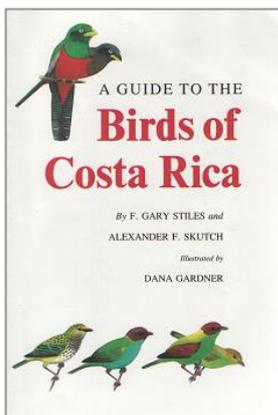
Getting around

We had been forewarned that roads in Costa Rica were very poor, with an attendant lack of road signs. Because of this, we invested in a 4x4, or what was supposed to be a 4x4, since the Toyota Rav4 we booked was actually two wheel drive. We also took a GPS and decent road map. There is no doubt that there are many potholes in the country, and that some roads were little more than rocky gravel tracks, but navigation was much better than expected. We didn't get lost to any major extent at all, even when traversing San José. However, I would still strongly recommend a 4x4, more for the clearance and better suspension than the 4 wheel drive, since I am sure that a normal saloon car would be easily broken.

English is quite widely spoken, particularly in the hotels, but we did come across some folk that spoke only Spanish, including at reserves such as La Selva. We had learned some basic Spanish, and this was not only useful in certain situations, but was also well received by the locals. Electricity, always an essential for charging camera batteries, was also no problem. The US style sockets are used, and all hotel rooms had an ample supply.

The currency in Costa Rica is the colon, and the frightening fact about it is that it takes many colones to equate to other currencies, such as £1 having the equivalent of 1000 colones. The dollar is widely accepted, but it is still useful to have the local currency to hand. The downside is that the currency can only be obtained in Costa Rica itself, so we used the cash machine in the airport. As we travelled around, it became evident that there were also cash machines in the towns, so they were easier to find than originally thought.

References



There is only really one identification book to take – Stiles and Skutch. Despite being a little weighty, which seems to be the norm for Central and South American ID guides, it has good illustrations and species accounts.

We had tried to track down the now out of print 1:200000 map of the San Jose area, since we wanted as much detail for self navigation as possible. However, the 1:330000 scale map by International Travel Maps (www.itmb.com) which we used was more than adequate.

Site guide – "Where to watch birds in Central America, Mexico, and the Caribbean" (Wheatley & Brewer, Princeton Press) gives an overall idea of the main sites within the country.

Sites Visited

Buena Vista Hotel

(Day 1)



We had expected that after a journey that lasted from the doorstep to the Buena Vista Hotel around 27 hours or so, which included not only a stop over at Amsterdam as planned, but also a change of aeroplane at Orlando in the USA for the last leg to San Jose, that we would have been far too tired to have planned anything for the first morning in the country. However, after a virtually sleepless night, and lying awake for about an hour and a half waiting for the sun to rise, we eventually exited the doorstep at about 5:45, where we could just about see the birds that we had heard calling (from the bedroom). First of these were 3 Clay-coloured Robins, feeding on the lawn which also happened to be directly outside of our room.

The rear of the hotel, which is where we were standing, was fairly small, but did overlook the central valley, and much nearer, a couple of coffee plantations directly below. This is where the birding began. The shuttle driver the evening before had mentioned that there wasn't much of a garden to the rear of the hotel, so the birds were limited, but as the morning progressed (up until breakfast at 8:00) we discovered that the potential was much greater than had been expected. The garden itself was more than just a good vantage point, and we notched up Social Flycatcher and Rufous-collared Sparrows in the half light quite quickly. A small collection of Red-billed Pigeons, Tropical Kingbirds and a singing Yellow-bellied Elaenia were here, with Blue-and-white Swallows overhead. The vista below also held plenty of interest, the choice of which were Rufous-naped Wren and the first of a couple of Hoffman's Woodpeckers, with a few Brown Jays to follow later.

With curiosity mounting, we poked our heads through a hole in the hedge, and found the owner's house, who was a very pleasant breakfasting gent hailing originally from Florida. He was more than happy for us to take in the birds of his garden, while he dined on juices and cereal. In the early morning sunshine, this move added yet more species, from very confiding Blue-crowned Motmot, and singing Greyish Saltator along the small avenue which ended at the locked entrance gate, to 3 noisy White-crowned Parrots which landed in a flowering tree behind two equally vociferous dogs confined to a compound. At 8 o'clock, we felt we had to call it a morning, since the car had now been delivered, and there was also the call of breakfast before setting off for the Talamanca Mountains.

K76

After dropping off the delivery driver for the car hire firm in Alajuela, we set off for the mountains. We surprisingly navigated the capital of San Jose quite easily, with only the odd slight unplanned diversion, and this quickly gave way to more open countryside,

where the blue skies began to turn greyer. As we ascended, we came across more and more mist and low cloud. There was a lot less traffic on the road than we had anticipated, so we arrived at the first targeted stop in a couple of hours. At the K76 marker, we turned to the right off the highway opposite a restaurant, and parked the car about 200 metres along a track.



The surrounding area was quite densely vegetated, interspersed with one or two open clearings, and had a main track running through to what we presumed was another restaurant. We spent a couple of hours here, since it proved to be rich in both birds and orchids. Most of the best birds turned up within a very short distance of the car – even as we parked, a couple of blackish ground dwelling passerines tantalised us, eventually showing themselves to be Yellow-thighed Finches (the yellow thighs were not always obvious). We then birded this area for quite some time, and almost immediately had a small group of Ruddy Treerunners, as well as a very confiding Black-and-yellow Silky-flycatcher.

We found a clearing around the corner from here, which had made way for a procession of pylons, and this proved to be the best spot for birds at this location. New species seemed to be constantly appearing, and in addition to the already regular Treerunners and Yellow-thighed Finches, we added 2 new Hummingbirds to our world lists in the form of female Scintillant and stunning male Fiery-throated. The latter proved to be a problem initially, being ostensibly all dark in most lights, until they eventually turn to show off their iridescent red and yellow throats. While literally standing in this small spot, other birds which appeared included Large-footed Finch, a small collection of wood-warblers (Wilson's, Yellow and Black-throated Green Warbler), and Black-capped Flycatcher. What was at first thought to be Peg-billed Finch proved to be the very similarly plumaged Slaty Flowerpiercer. We did venture a little further down the main track, but only added a couple more Fiery-throated Hummingbirds to our tally, so we returned once again to the clearing, which had also quietened down somewhat. A good diversion on route to Savegre Lodge!

Savegre Lodge and approach road

We found the turning from the main highway to Savegre Lodge very easily (the large sign for the lodge helped enormously). The road to the lodge from here was around 10km long, and almost all downhill. We stopped after around 3km, where we parked on a corner just above a small hamlet. We picked up birds as soon as we left the car, with Long-tailed Silky-flycatchers amongst the first – perhaps not the close views we had hoped for, but enough for identification, and in addition a small yet mobile flock of Sooty-capped Bush-tanagers. A stunning Flame-



throated Warbler was directly above us. Walking down towards the hamlet, we came across our first Sooty Robin, which was unnaturally confiding, more intent on feeding in the road verges only metres away from us than being alarmed by our presence. One or two Large-footed Finches were among the copious Rufous-collared Sparrows. A few small female hummingbirds were either Volcano or Scintillant, but would require more experience or well marked males before we decided on specific identification one way or the other.

Once we had torn ourselves away from the pit stop on the descent to Savegre Lodge, we twisted and turned our way along the remaining 7km of road, which was occasionally dotted with workmen repairing potholes and bits of road that had slid into ravines. The rest of this journey was uneventful, and we pulled over the bridge into the lodge grounds. Even as we were parking the car, it was obvious that this was a Mecca for hummingbirds. There appeared to be feeders throughout the lodge grounds, which is not large in area, but well spaced out with cabins in 2's and 3's looking over small open spaces. The constant loud clicking of hummingbirds was all encompassing, in particular from Green Violet-ears, and tempted us to stow the luggage in haste and head straight to the feeders at the reception. We spent the next two hours wandering around and marvelling at these little birds – most impressive was when we found Magnificent Hummingbird perched alongside the tiny bundle of feathers that is the Scintillant Hummingbird. The hummingbird population here more or less comprises four common species, the one not mentioned already was Grey-tailed Mountain-gem. Spreading a little further through the lodge area, we added Acorn Woodpeckers, Mountain Elaenia, Slaty Flowerpiercers, and yet more Sooty-capped Bush-tanagers to the list. As we passed 5:30pm, the light began to fade, and we called it a day, with the temperatures falling to a much more temperate level.

Savegre Lodge

(Day 2)



After a half decent sleep, and in temperatures which were quite cool, we did of course wake up early, leaving the room for birding at first light. At this time of the day in the mountains, the sky was clear, and the outdoor temperatures bordered on cold. The Green Violet-ears had already begun their own version of a dawn chorus, although only the odd bird appeared at the feeders. We started the morning by exploring the reception area down to the river, and reacquainted ourselves with some of the birds already seen, including the 4 hummingbirds, Tennessee Warblers, Slaty Flowerpiercers, and Sooty-capped Bush-tanagers. We also chanced upon a pair of Torrent Tyrannulets next to the river and the bridge, feeding on the grass adjacent to the water. We were about to stop for breakfast, when we veered off to what appeared a more residential part of the grounds to find a different mix of birds. After Clay-coloured Robin, we picked up our first Mountain Robin, with obvious dark bill and drabber plumage. This was quickly followed by a fine male Flame-coloured Tanager, calling on wires, with a response from another male close by. Almost at the end of this area, we found Ruddy-capped Nightingale-thrush, at first calling but elusive, and then feeding in front of us on the open lawns. Our first trogon of the trip was a fine male Collared Trogon perched above the river, closely followed by a group of Band-tailed Pigeons and a single Collared Whitestart. When we

finally reached reception at 7:30, the hummingbird activity at the feeders had returned to normal.

Following a nourishing breakfast of tomatoes on egg, we gleaned some information from reception as to the possible location of nearby Quetzals, and set off over the bridge from the lodge, picking up our first Swallow-tailed Kite above the peaks as we did so, and Red-tailed Hawk minutes later. The track just down from the lodge was productive for tyrant flycatchers, in the guise of Black-capped, and the more common and confiding Yellowish Flycatcher. We were looking for a track to the left, with a wooden bridge, which was alleged to be the direction for the Quetzals, but first crossed a substantial vehicular wooden bridge, to enter what appeared to be an outdoor recreation area. Black Phoebes kicked off an avian show here, followed by a group of noisy Long-tailed Silky-flycatchers which entertained for some time, with Tufted Flycatcher overhead. One or two Common Bush-tanagers proved more elusive at first as they foraged in the waterside vegetation.



After about 400m, we turned left towards a wooden bridge, which was no more than a felled tree with rails. Just as we were about to cross, we came across a bird party. Amongst this loose group were 2-3 Spangle-cheeked Tanagers, the only ones we were to see during the week, and a single Silver-throated Tanager, which we would see a lot more of as the trip progressed. In addition were Yellow-winged & Philadelphia Vireos, interspersed with various wood warblers. Continuing on over the bridge, the track followed the river on the opposite bank, and we had only progressed about 100m when we were treated to very close Sooty-capped Bush-tanagers, and two active Ruddy Treerunners, demonstrating where their name comes from, feeding and chasing in all directions on the moss covered branches. This activity was all just before the clearing where Quetzals had been reported to be nest building.

Once we were happy that we had located the particular target tree, which did indeed seem to have new shavings from the excavation at its base, we made ourselves comfortable on a discreet rock for half an hour or so to watch and wait. This proved to be fruitless, with no Quetzal on show, and was quite quiet overall for birds, so we continued along the track, which eventually crossed over a rope bridge and an impressive waterfall. This offered an excellent opportunity to bathe steamy feet in the refreshingly cold water. This seemed to be an opportune time to turn around and return for another stake out at the Quetzal site. Again, the target bird failed to show here, but we did pick up Collared Whitestart and Flame-throated Warbler. Approaching the log bridge once again, bird parties continued to cross our path, and these included Black-cheeked Warbler, Spot-crowned Woodcreepers, Yellow-thighed Finches, and a pair of Black-faced

Solitaires. Increasing numbers of Collared Whitestarts seemed to coincide with them being also much more approachable, with one bird almost touchable.

After we exited the waterfall trail, we decided on a little trek up the hill to the village of San Gerardo de Dota, where the terrain was more open. The uphill climb was short and steep, and well used by passing traffic. A species that made this worthwhile, besides the Yellow-faced Grassquits, was Yellow-bellied Siskin, with a singing male following the drabber female. The next move was to descend back down to the waterfall trail, and sit out the absent Quetzal once again. Ever the optimists, we had a fruitless one hour sit, although one of the local guides did mention other sites for the bird, most of which required local knowledge. We did add Black-thighed Grosbeak to the list during our wait, with two and then a later single flying through.

At 4 o'clock, we turned back towards Savegre Lodge, again passing a small collection of Yellow-thighed Finches, Ruddy Treerunner, Rufous-capped Brush-finch, and lone Flame-throated Warbler. Back at the lodge, we decided to follow one of the tips from the guide, when he had told us that, unbelievably, Quetzals made regular appearances just to the rear of our room in trees which included fruiting avocados. We sat this out, along with the collection of other birders who eventually left, until 5:15pm, when a male Resplendent Quetzal flew into the avocado tree directly in front of us. It posed both inside and outside of the canopy for about 5 minutes before leaving. A bellbird had been calling throughout nearby, but proved good to its reputation and kept well hidden.

Savegre Lodge

(Day 3)

Happy but not too satiated by the views of the Quetzal the previous evening, we arose at first light to make the short walk to the rear of the cabin to stake out the bird yet again. It was a little less of a surprise to have a male bird make two appearances, at 6 and 6:30am, unfortunately in still increasing early morning light. During our wait, a single Emerald Toucanet made several visits to pick at the small avocados growing from the canopy, and we were fortunate enough to see a passing flock of Sulphur-winged Parakeets twice. A similar sounding pair of birds was calling from a lone tree on the slope just above us, so I scrambled up to its location – not an easy option at this altitude – to pin down a pair of Boat-billed Flycatchers. We didn't see the Quetzal again, despite waiting around until 7:45am, but other birds did appear for various groups later in the morning, both here and next to the entrance bridge.

Cerro de la Muerte



We were going to head straight up and out of the valley, to make our first stop at the Hotel Georgina, just a little way along the main highway, but the call of the mountain was too strong. After pulling off the road on to one of the tracks to the peak, we parked the car after a short distance, and worked a couple of the paths through the terrain, which mainly consisted of lowish bushes and the odd small copse of trees. The scenery at this altitude is stunning, with the air clear, and even the temperature was still very comfortable to quite hot. First bird that we saw was a Red-tailed Hawk hovering over the peaks. Expecting to find some highland specialities, we were surprised at first to stumble

across Wilson's Warblers and Slaty Flowerpiercers. We ultimately found about half a dozen flying, perching, feeding and battling Hummingbirds, most of which proved to be Volcano, amongst the less prevalent Scintillants. These were our first definite Volcano Hummingbirds, with some of the males showing off their purple gorgets with pride. Only other additions here were a male Magnificent Hummingbird and a small group of Sooty-capped Bush-tanagers.

After we left Cerro de la Muerte, the next stop, which we had been looking forward to due to its potential for hummingbirds, was the Hotel Georgina, only a few kilometres South of the Cerro de la Muerte turn off. Arrival there was a little disappointing, since the feeders were located on the opposite side of the glass windows to our inside seating. We did have numbers of Magnificent Hummingbird and Green Violet-ear, along with smaller counts of Scintillant & lone Fiery-throated Hummingbird, but eyeballing them on the other side of a window while sipping on a vat of coffee wasn't exactly what we had hoped for.

Punta Leona

Most of the rest of the day was spent driving to Punta Leona, a journey which was composed of various either interesting or exasperating parts. The former included the descent from the mountains, unless one of the crawling trucks was met on a series of bends, the latter mainly the 48km of pure stony track and pothole that was the road from Dominical to Quepos. The whole journey must have taken at least 5 hours.



The security and design of the Hotel Punta Leona complex came as something of a surprise. We had booked for economy accommodation, and were stunned to find ourselves within an American biased holiday resort, with many all inclusive features. However, this was lost on us, and within minutes of finding our room, we found what we supposed was one of the mapped walking nature trails within the complex. It seemed to be a private road which was under construction, and the paving stones used for the road were still being laid. As we walked up this road, we initially thought we had missed the trails proper, but as soon as some antbirds appeared in the form of Black-hooded Antshrike and Dot-winged Antbird, our spirits started to lift. The paved road was bounded on both sides by thick woodland, and birds appeared regularly from it. Many were difficult to discern in the canopy, but identification was easier as we continued our climb. This included Yellow-throated Euphonia, Scarlet-thighed Tanager, and the first of a few Panama Flycatchers. It was only when we reached the top of our climb that we agreed this was in fact one of the marked trails, despite it appearing as if it had been designed as an add on road for more accommodation.

The descent was possibly even more interesting, not least due to the appearance of our first handful of Scarlet Macaws – startling in both size and noise as well as colour. It was likely that they were aiming for a roost somewhere in the resort grounds. We also found our first large Woodpeckers – at least 3 Pale-billed at the base of the road. Above us were a couple of Woodcreepers, only one of which could be identified as Streak-headed, as well as single Summer Tanager. Perhaps most impressive of all was a pair of Black-throated Trogons, picked up when the male flew across the road on to a nearby

branch. All in all, this turned out to be a rather good walk, although we were looking forward to leaving the resort first thing in the morning.

Carara

(Day 4)



About 400m South of the Tarcoles River, we found the entrance to the reserve at around 6am, where the gate to the Riverside Trail was closed (it was in fact closed all morning) – the sign did ask for no entry before 7am. So we entered before 7, and started birding the forest encrusted trail. This is supposed to be the better of the 2 trails (the other is a smaller circular trail from reception), and is about 2-3 km long, ending up alongside the river, which seemed to be freestanding at this point. The first half an hour was hard work, with poor light, dense forest and birds few and far

between, although it was then that we chalked off singing Black-hooded Antshrike and 3 Pale-billed Woodpeckers above us. Progress saw a slight thinning of the forest, and bird life increased as the morning wore on. Some hotspots for birds seemed to be present, one of which had Rufous-tailed Jacamar out in the open, and Dusky Antbird and a pair of Barred Antshrikes nearby. Hummingbirds were common but fleeting, until a superb Long-tailed Hermit fed close and long enough for good views. With Scarlet Macaws overhead, we found small numbers of White-shouldered Tanagers, and feeding with a Pale-billed Woodpecker, a group of Red-legged Honeycreepers hosted a single Scarlet-thighed Dacnis.

The river at the end of the trail seemed almost static, but was an excellent spot for birds. First and most obvious of the critters were some close (and small) Spectacled Caimans, with much larger adults near to the opposite bank, accompanied by a flock of Black-bellied Whistling-ducks. Closer inspection near to them also found Northern Jacana and Bare-throated Tiger-heron. The longer we stayed here, the more birds appeared. Directly in front of us was a roosting flock of 8-10 Boat-billed Herons, belying their nocturnal nature by periodically making the effort to snap at each other before returning to slumbers. Common Tody-flycatchers shared their tree, and reappeared regularly. Perhaps prize of the birds here were the Kingfishers, with Green later on, but perhaps personally the best of a good bunch, an American Pygmy Kingfisher, which eventually landed to fish on branches only a couple of metres from us. The peace was broken by the huge crash of a large tree falling not far from our spot – it seemed to startle not only the animals and birds, but also one of the on looking group, who damaged her leg when in flight. But the birding had to continue, and we unearthed more new species on the return walk, with initially White-winged Becard and Black-capped Tityra amongst Black-hooded Antshrikes, but had also totted up 4 Wrens for the morning by the end, with the prize possibly going to Black-bellied, with a combination of explosive song and skulking nature. Rufous-naped Wren had been calling on and off at the river, but we also encountered a couple of Rufous-bellied Wrens. Rounding off the walk was a stunning Turquoise-browed Motmot, which landed just above the latter pair of Wrens. Back at the car park, we paid our dues of a couple of thousand Colones to the boy in attendance – good value for a superb morning.

Villas Lapas

After a very hearty buffet lunch at the restaurant here, we walked the trail which follows the river upstream. This is quite a nice little resort, certainly a lot more comfortable and birder friendly than Punta Leona, with plenty of Great Kiskadees, Grey-capped & Social Flycatchers populating the many open areas around the accommodation. Amongst these were Black-mandibled Toucan and Passerini's Tanager. The nesting hole of a pair of Hoffman's Woodpeckers was pointed out to us, directly above one of the

chalet blocks. The trail was at the end of the chalet area, and began with a rickety rope bridge over the river. The start of the trail at the other side of the bridge had 4 very vocal but very elusive Riverside Wrens. Quietly meandering their way along the forest floor here were the first (positively identified) Grey-chested Doves. This short curved part of the trail ended in another rope bridge, and it was here that we had what could have been the best find of the site – a juvenile Tiger-heron was slowly and contentedly feeding amongst the boulders of the river, with a female Green Kingfisher on the far bank. The dark bill and habitat seemed to point to Fasciated Tiger-heron, a species more likely to be found on the Caribbean slopes, but more detailed examination of the bill shape pointed to Bare-throated Tiger-heron. We continued over the bridge, and through the dry forest, until this trail terminated again at the river, where we added only Streaked Flycatcher and a second Grey-chested Dove, as well as another Dusky Antbird and Riverside Wren. The return was uneventful, apart from a lone White Ibis standing in the centre of the river back at the chalets, and male Summer Tanager in the trees in front of the accommodation.



Tarcoles

Tarcoles wasn't really what we had expected. We had information to go to Tarcol Lodge, where we could park and look around the mangroves surrounding it. When we arrived, it was locked up, with no sign of life, and the view from the front (normal charge \$2 for non residents) didn't look very promising. We decided to double back, park at the soccer pitch, and search along the shoreline for possible roosting/nesting Nighthawks. When we had parked the car under a tree for shade, we asked a local resident if it would be safe to leave it in broken Spanish – not sure about whether this was the best thing to do, but it was still there when we got back! We hadn't even left the football pitch when we picked up a Ferruginous Pygmy-owl along the perimeter, patiently sitting and totally unconcerned as to our presence. The walk (trudge?) along the beach to the flotsam where the Nighthawks were suspected wasn't particularly pleasant, being at least a mile long in direct heat and on soft sand. We found no Nighthawks, but did have succour in Collared Plover – a new species for us! Not to be outdone, a Peregrine Falcon landed on the sand at the end of the beach, eyeing up a snack of wader. It flew off without one in the end, but left some jittery birds nevertheless. As we walked back, we had our first and only terns (and gulls) of the trip – 3 Royal Terns, one on the waters edge, and 2 fishing, along with a moribund Brown Pelican, plonked on the sand, which probably didn't have a great deal of time to live.



Last call of the day was back to Villas Lapas, since some of the residents had told us of Scarlet Macaws flying in to roost the previous evening. We waited a short time, during which only 2 birds landed on some distant trees in the fading light. However, as we were approaching the car, a Nightjar flew around the car park. We weren't sure of the identification, but it was nice to see.

Orotina

(Day 5)



We set off early from Punta Leona and arrived at the small town of Orotina by about 6:00am. This was to look for the well known and popular Black-and-white Owls. Normally a deep forest species, this misguided pair had taken it upon themselves to reside in the town square of Orotina. Probably more of a challenge than finding the birds was finding the square itself – we had to zigzag through the unmarked streets to find it. Once there, one of the locals was happy to point out one of the birds perched unmoving above us. We admired this for some time, but were also aware of the fact that an equally disturbed Sloth was often to be found here. We didn't

find it, but did stumble across the second of the owls. Owls were not the only birds to be inhabiting an unlikely spot, since we also had White-winged Doves, the first of the trip, Great-tailed Grackles, and Clay-coloured Robins in profusion. There was even a Hoffman's Woodpecker in one of the bare trees. We felt exhausted after such intense birding, so treated ourselves to some coffee and a sizable chunk of banana cake in one of the local cafes.

La Paz



We then made the journey across Alajuela to La Paz waterfall gardens. These are ostensibly a tourist attraction, but are wonderfully laid out, with plenty of man made attractions for non-birders. We hadn't covered the waterfalls by the morning, since this was where a lot of the groups were ultimately heading, and in the afternoon decided on a riverside walk in the opposite direction. In addition to the butterfly garden, orchid garden, and serpentarium, there was also a hummingbird garden, aimed at attracting wild birds.

As soon as we had paid our entrance fee at reception, we were immediately mesmerised by the hummingbirds and tanagers around the feeders directly outside of the main building. Green-crowned Brilliant, Purple-throated Mountain-gem, and Violet Sabrewing quickly fell to the ticker's pencil, with frequent visits from Silver-throated Tanagers, Common Bush-tanagers, and Tennessee Warblers on the adjacent fruit feeders. With a slight drizzle and low cloud all morning, we had to be careful with the cameras, but canopies had been thoughtfully provided at the feeding stations for shelter.

We eventually made our way down to the hummingbird garden, where we spent the rest of the morning (either at the hummingbird feeders or nearby fruit feeders). La Paz is reported to have a list of 24 different hummingbirds, but on our visit, and this may demonstrate seasonal variations, we had 4 regular species, with Black-bellied Hummingbird flitting in and out on occasion, as well as brief Fiery-throated Hummingbird outside of the garden, and Coppery-headed Emerald below the top restaurant. The fruit feeders were often very busy with avian traffic, and I spent most of the morning under an arbour watching Tanagers in the form of Silver-throated, Golden-hooded, Crimson-collared, Blue-grey & Olive. Brief appearances were made by Buff-throated Saltator, Prong-billed & Red-headed Barbet, and Tawny-capped Euphonia. A confiding Ochraceous Wren was feeding more or less at our feet, and at one time crossed the arbour almost through the tripod. Other regulars at the dining table included the ubiquitous Clay-coloured Robin and plenty of Baltimore Orioles.

The intention to only stop off at La Paz for the morning turned into a full day visit, and we were more or less the last people to leave at closing time (5:30pm). In addition to the display from the morning regulars, additional species turned up throughout the rest of the day. First stop was back to the fruit feeders, where a Coati was feeding on the bananas. A Streak-breasted Treehunter was picked out above the feeding station, and seemed to be passing through, when it stopped to preen for some time directly above us. We had planned to visit the waterfalls at some time, but this was the goal of most of the tour parties, so we descended the initial part of the path behind them, and turned upstream instead, alongside some spectacular rapids (and no other people!). There were very few birds here, apart from a group of 3 Slate-throated Whitestarts, but it was an enjoyable walk. On the way back, we passed the trout lake, which was more like a swimming pool (without trout) and found ourselves below reception. The first Passerini's Tanagers were picked up here, along with close Rufous-tailed Hummingbird, Coppery-headed Emerald, and Purple-throated Mountain-gem. After gorging ourselves on the reception hummingbird feeders, we returned to the fruit feeders once more, where birds visiting had subsided to some degree. We staked this spot out until the light began to fade a little at around 4:15pm. Returning to the track below reception, we picked up closer Passerini's Tanagers, along with a scolding Grey-breasted Wood-wren. The light on the Golden-hooded & Blue-grey Tanagers seemed to show the birds off so much more impressively than earlier in the day. The £12 entrance fee for La Paz was more than worth the money, and the quality of the birds eclipsed the many visitors frequenting the gardens.

La Selva entrance drive

(Day 6)

When we arrived at the La Quinta lodge the previous evening, we were informed that you had to book to visit La Selva reserve. This was both to limit the amount of visitors to the reserve, and also a guide was required to walk the trails. However, as an alternative, we were told that the entrance drive between the two security posts could be walked without charge, which is exactly what we did this morning, and it resulted in a superb birding experience. We navigated both security points and parked the car next to the main gate, and almost immediately had Montezuma's Oropendolas and Keel-billed Toucans overhead. The first half an hour, spent near to the main gate, was fairly quiet, with a highlight being singing Black-striped Sparrow. As we exited the green and white gates 100m from here, the birdlife increased many fold. We stopped at one particular spot for around half an hour to study Black-cowled & Yellow-tailed Orioles, along with copious Passerini's Tanagers. Alongside were female Barred & Great Antshrikes, joined by 2 Yellow-billed Caciques. On the opposite side of the track was a very fleeting Tawny-faced Gnatwren. The same spot then offered preening female Violaceous Trogon, our first Black-cheeked Woodpeckers, a pair of Smoky-brown Woodpeckers, and 2 feeding Mealy Parrots. We were about to meander further down the track, when we spotted a Bright-rumped Attila, almost alongside a Boat-billed Flycatcher. Progression along what was probably only a 400m track was slow due to the quality of the birds, until we came upon a couple of star birds in the form of White-collared Manakin and passing Little Hermit. This was present near to the first security gate. It was now 10am, with the earlier drizzle abating to leave broken sunshine, and the bird activity seemed to be quietening down

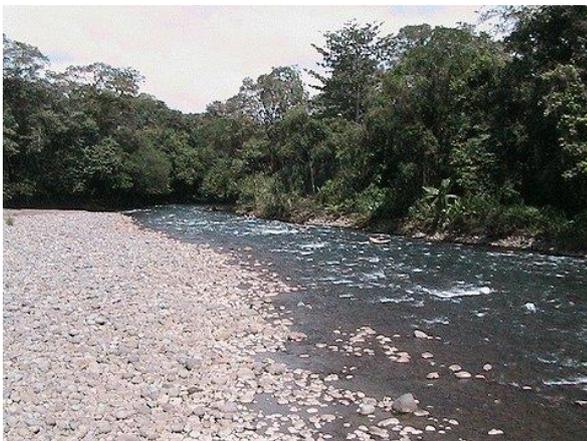
somewhat. The return to the car added another (pair) of White-collared Manakins, feeding alongside a Long-tailed Hermit.



Selva Verde Lodge

This was only 10km from La Selva, and cost us about £6 each for the afternoon, which we at first thought was for entry, but turned out to be the cost of the excellent buffet lunch. The restaurant overlooked the river, which we had checked as soon as we entered the grounds for Sunbittern, without success. Selva Verde offers accommodation, and is set in primary forest, with a stand of secondary forest across the road. There are some good trails through both, but the site is particularly noted for a regular pair of Sunbitterns which have taken up residence on this stretch of the river.

As we traversed the footbridge for the first time, we picked up a large hovering kingfisher, and were lucky enough to relocate it when it landed – a female Amazon Kingfisher was perched about 40m down from us along one of the small tributary streams. As we were celebrating this find, one of the lodge guides asked if we wanted to see Sunbittern? The answer was obvious, so he took us back over the bridge to point out a feeding bird slowly making its way around one of the pools adjacent to the river. The guide books don't do justice to this almost mythical bird, and not only did we have good views from the bridge, but he encouraged us to get closer to the bird on the rocks. After snatching his hand off at this suggestion, we camped ourselves much nearer to the oblivious bird, then to find a second to the rear of the pool. One of the birds even showed off the dazzling wing markings as it preened.



After seeing both Sunbittern and Amazon Kingfisher, we agreed that seeing no more birds here would still have

resulted in a successful stop. However, we started on one of the forest trails, ignoring the Wellington boots designed for protection against snake bites, and found a party of birds after about 100m. This was kicked off with Orange-billed Sparrow, feeding in the dark undergrowth, and preceded at least 3 Barred Woodcreepers and Cinnamon Becard. Not to be outshone, a female Masked Tityra put in a brief appearance, with a much more showy pair of Red-throated Ant-tanagers, the male of which was determined to show off directly in front of us. We must have stood in this same spot for around an hour, since the quality of the birds continued. Following Barred Woodcreeper, we also added a pair of Wedge-billed Woodcreepers, with both species sharing the same tree at one time, demonstrating the startling difference in size. The Orange-billed Sparrows (a pair) reappeared, and were now much more confiding.

The trail continued on a curve, where it met up with the river, and we treated ourselves to a refreshingly cold paddle in the waters of the Sarapiquí River. After following a pair of Grey-chested Doves along the trail, we refound the dining area, and a feeding station which had been replenished with bananas. With the light fading, this played host to pairs of Shining & Green Honeycreeper, Olive-backed Euphonia, and a single almost motionless Wood Thrush. After another short visit to the earlier productive spot along the trail, the mosquitoes started to come out in force, indicating a choice time to return to the car. One last look at the feeding tables was a good decision, since on approaching the feeding area, 3 skulking birds flew across the path in front of me. After following the line of rustling leaves and branches, one of the birds finally put in a sub 10 second appearance – a dapper Chestnut-backed Antbird, complete with light blue orbital ring around the eye.

La Selva (Day 7)

The rain had been lashing against the hotel roof through the night, and we had hoped that this would be the end of it, but it continued to fall as we approached La Selva. We were due to be at the reserve for 5:45am, but the security guards weren't aware of our booking, and reception wasn't due to open until 7am, so we wandered the area in what was now a light drizzle. Our guide appeared after 6am, and was thankfully only showing the 3 of us around. We were a little disappointed to be only guided around the reserve for less than 2 hours, when we had expected 3 hours. The expectations of



La Selva had been high, but birds had to be worked for, and we actually only saw 2 new species during these early hours, and both were seen from the reception area – Green Ibis as we set off, and Violet-headed Hummingbird on our return.



We spent 10 minutes exploring the reception area again, picking up many of the species that we had already seen, such as Band-backed Wren, Chestnut-sided Warbler, Masked Tityra, Grey-capped Flycatcher, Great Kiskadee, and Passerini's Tanager. We then started to delve into the secondary forest, hoping to see Jacamar, but we did come across many Black-mandibled & Keel-billed Toucans, and a small group of Collared Aracaris. Once over the river, we picked out Clay-coloured Robin, Wood Thrush, and a couple of White-collared Manakins. We headed for the previous roosting site of Crested Owls,

but all we had here was perched Green Ibis, and fleeting views of a fleeing Rufous Motmot (identified by the guide on call). Back at reception, a pair of Variable Seedeaters were feeding on the lawn – quite tricky in this part of Costa Rica, since they are the all black variety.

Once our guide had departed, we continued to try to pin down the Violet-headed Hummingbird, when a pair of Crested Guans flew in to one of trees adjacent to reception. Looking decidedly prehistoric, they proved to be quite a large bird, showing their only smudge of colour which was a red throat sack. The flowering trees behind reception added White-necked Jacobin to the Costa Rican list. The best part of the morning was when we returned to the secondary forest, when after 100m, we came across a bird party, initiated by Passerini's Tanager, followed by Long-tailed Hermit, and finally a perched Fasciated Antshrike in the dense foliage. 20m further on was a collection of thrushes, which contained at least one Pale-vented Robin – a tailless individual which showed the white vent clearly. Most of the other birds also seemed to have the dark bill of this species, although the vents were difficult to see in the subdued light. A pair of Grey-breasted Wood-rails appeared just behind them.

A little further again, and we saw the first of 3 Plain Xenops, with Streak-headed Woodcreeper close by. This track eventually terminated at the first security gate to the La Selva entrance drive, so we doubled back on ourselves, and stumbled across a stunning female Chestnut-coloured Woodpecker. If not enough, a male Fasciated Antshrike appeared in the same tree, uncharacteristically out in the open almost within touching distance from us. Back at the car park, we added another male Violaceous Trogon to our list. As if in a parting gesture, the fifth White-collared Manakin of the morning was found.



Braulio Carillo



After leaving La Selva, we headed South towards Braulio Carillo national park. We were looking for a place called El Tapir, but the location we found seemed deserted. So we ended up at Quebrada Gonzalves, one of the main entrances to Braulio Carillo, which had the added benefit of security guards at the car park, and paid the \$6 each to walk the rain forest. We navigated the shorter of the two trails (1.6km), which took about an hour. This offered a typical rain forest experience – dense forest with almost constant heavy rain. Birding was also very heavy, with only a single Wood Thrush, a small party of unidentified

passerines, and 2 separate Sulphur-rumped Warblers for our efforts. Back at reception, we spent some time under the canopies watching the surrounding clearing, where we saw a Chestnut-sided Warbler, Olive-backed Euphonia, and a group of Collared Aracaris.

Hotel Buena Vista

(Day 8)

We had planned to spend our last night at the Hotel Bougainvillea, since it was recommended for two Ground-sparrows which are very difficult to pick up anywhere else in the country, so we had booked our room some months earlier. The hotel isn't particularly easy to find, but we managed without any problems, so were annoyed and

disappointed to find that the agency we had used, CostaRicaLink, had failed to pay the hotel to secure our booking, and the hotel was otherwise fully booked.

After some deliberation, we managed to book a room at short notice back at the Buena Vista, and this proved to be very rewarding. We didn't have to return the hire car until noon for an early afternoon flight, so had the full morning to look for birds again at this productive hostelry.

The omens looked good at first light, when we found the first Swainson's Thrush of the trip along the entrance drive to the owner's house, and the Blue-crowned Motmots only seen on the first morning reappeared here as well. With more time to spare than that first morning, we took the opportunity to explore the coffee plantation to the front of the property, and this was where we spent most of our time, since it was very bird rich, and incredibly offered not only birds which we hadn't seen through the week, but also totally new birds to our world lists. Early wins came in the form of a couple of Vireos – singing Yellow-olive and foraging Yellow-throated. Then came the first of 2 new Hummingbirds. A pair of long billed hummers were in flight together, with one subsequently posing for long enough on a branch to clinch Plain-capped Starthroat. While searching for this, one or two Rufous-capped Warblers passed through. Overhead, a very close Zone-tailed Hawk passed over, the first of two sightings for the morning. Last find was the second of the new Hummingbirds – a Steely-vented which showed a marked preference for one of the flowering trees, returning to feed and rest here regularly. It often tussled with one of the resident, and slightly larger, Rufous-tailed Hummingbirds. When at rest, which usually was only for very short periods, the white "socks" could often be discerned.

SPECIES SEEN

Brown Pelican

Pelecanus occidentalis

Only seen on the Pacific coast. ~20 birds were flying adjacent to the coast road on the approach to Punta Leona. A greater concentration of ~50 birds were resting on the sand at the mouth of the Tarcoles river. One or two were also fishing off the shore. One unfortunate moribund individual was looking most unhealthy on the tideline

Anhinga

Anhinga anhinga

Two birds were on the River Tarcoles at Carara

Magnificent Frigatebird

Fregata magnificens

~30 overhead at Tarcoles. There seemed to be an equal mix of smartly plumaged males and the drabber females

Great Blue Heron

Ardea herodias

Singles at 3 locations – Tarcoles, the Tarcoles river at Carara, and on the Sarapiquí river at Selva Verde

Great Egret

Ardea alba

1 at Carara and 2 at Tarcoles

Tricoloured Heron

Egretta tricolor

1 at Carara and 1 at Tarcoles

Little Blue Heron

Egretta caerulea

1 fishing on the River Tarcoles at Carara and 2 on the River Sarapiquí at Selva Verde

Snowy Egret

Egretta thula

Only one seen during the whole week, fishing on the River Tarcoles at Carara

Cattle Egret

Bubulcus ibis

Small groups of birds were seen in cattle fields on the Pacific coast and Caribbean slopes. Up to 50 were seen on any one day

Green Heron

Butorides virescens

3 fishing in the grassy edges of the River Tarcoles at Carara

Boat-billed Heron

Cochlearius cochlearius

This was a species that we had been chasing since visiting Mexico in 2000. We had hoped to see some here, but thought that the best chance would be from a boat trip at Tarcoles. We needn't have worried, since ~8 birds were roosting in a tree directly in front and above us at the edge of the River Tarcoles at Carara. Despite this species being mainly nocturnal, this group of birds was individually sporadically active within the tree – often moving to tell off one of its neighbours



Bare-throated Tiger-Heron

Tigrisoma mexicanum

2 adults were feeding alongside the water's edge on the River Tarcoles at Carara. Initially one was seen on the opposite bank, with a second appearing from the reeds and then feeding in the open, again on the opposite bank, but on a different section of the river. We also picked up a fishing juvenile Tiger-heron amongst the rocks of the river at Villas Lapas. Closer inspection revealed an all dark bill, and the habitat was quoted as being more characteristic of Fasciated rather than the more open waters frequented by Bare-throated Tiger-heron, but the bill shape and geographical distribution favoured the latter species



Least Bittern

Ixobrychus exilis

1 feeding on the grassy edges of the River Tarcoles at Carara

Wood Stork

Mycteria Americana

~8 of these rather unattractive birds were in a roadside pool at Tarcoles

Green Ibis*Mesembrinibis cayennensis*

2 separate birds were seen at La Selva. One was flying over the visitor centre, with the second bird landing on a bare tree from one of the trails. Unfortunately, the light wasn't kind enough to show off the green sheen of the plumage

White Ibis*Eudocimus albus*

The first bird seen was an apparition of white in the centre of the shallow river at Villas Lapas. ~10 birds were seen later in the day at the roadside pool in Tarcoles

Roseate Spoonbill*Platalea ajaja*

~6 birds at the roadside pool, Tarcoles

Black-bellied Whistling-Duck*Dendrocygna autumnalis*

This was the only wildfowl species seen, and can be in large numbers, particularly around the open marshes of the Guanacaste. The only birds we saw were in a group of ~20 on the River Tarcoles at Carara. Amusingly, although perhaps not for the ducks, one or two of the larger spectacled caimans made occasional half-hearted attempts to make them a morning snack, without success!

Black Vulture*Coragyps atratus*

These were seen on every day, in all habitats, and in good numbers. They were much the more common of the 2 vulture species seen

**Turkey Vulture***Cathartes aura*

Again, seen on every day in all habitats visited, sometimes numbering only single figures, and always in smaller numbers than Black Vulture

Osprey*Pandion haliaetus*

2 seen – 1 coastal bird fishing at the mouth of the River Tarcoles, the other inland over La Selva

Swallow-tailed Kite*Elanoides forficatus*

All the birds seen were either quite distant or from the car, but were nevertheless still spectacular. The first was seen early in the day at Savegre Lodge over the high ridges, with a further 5 later on, again over the higher areas. 2 more were seen from the car, one on the journey from Savegre to Punta Leona, the other in the Braullio Carillo area when exiting the mountains towards San Jose

White-tailed Kite*Elanus leucurus*

Only one bird was seen – a brief glimpse of a hovering individual shortly after leaving the Buena Vista hotel on the first full day

Grey Hawk*Asturina nitida*

Another bird seen only singly. This individual was picked up over one of the trails at Punta Leona, but had the decency to land on an exposed branch for some time directly over our heads

Zone-tailed Hawk*Buteo albonotatus*

Only 1 bird was positively identified, putting in 2 appearances over the gardens of the Buena Vista hotel on the last morning, the first very low and directly overhead. What was possibly another flew past us on the descent to Savegre Lodge on the first full day

Red-tailed Hawk*Buteo jamaicensis*

3 separate birds were seen, 2 in the Savegre Valley, and the third hovering for a considerable time over one of the peaks at Cerro de la Muerte

Crested Caracara*Caracara cheriway*

All birds were seen from the car – 3 on the coastal track South of Punta Leona, 1 at Punta Leona, 3 on the journey from Punta Leona to La Paz, and 1 at La Selva

Peregrine Falcon*Falco peregrinus*

The appearance of a single bird was a bit of a surprise, since it was picked up flying low over the mouth of the River Tarcoles, landing on the sand not far from a group of waders. It must have been eyeing up a snack for some time, but left the way it came, ploverless, after about 10 minutes of eyeing up the menu

Crested Guan*Penelope purpurascens*

2 pairs of these outrageously prehistoric birds were seen at La Selva. The first 2 flew in and landed in a tree over the visitor centre, giving only half decent views, despite their size and proximity. The second brace landed in a tree above on one of the trails through the secondary forest, this time showing more in the open

**Grey-necked Wood-Rail***Aramides cajanea*

This species is reputed to be difficult to see in the open within this area, despite its widespread distribution. The 2 that we saw alongside one of the tracks in the secondary forest obviously were keen on bucking trends

Sunbittern*Eurypyga helias*

This is one of those mythical species that many birders have high on their most wanted lists, and it has usually been on that list for what seems like decades. The reason for this is probably a combination of it being an elusive species, singularly different to any other, and in short quite stunning in plumage, particularly



when it deigns to flash the "suns" on its wings. We were aware of the fact that Selva Verde Lodge had a reputation for producing sightings, but not how accurate those reports actually are. A pair of birds seemed to have chosen this stretch of river for their home, and after a couple of fruitless crossings of the footbridge, one of the local guides pointed out initially one bird, with a second appearing minutes later, on one of the pools in the rocks adjacent to the river. They were more than happy for us to approach quite closely, when we not only gorged on them fishing, but also one preening and displaying the stunning pattern on one of its wings

Northern Jacana*Jacana spinosa*

We have seen a few jacana species around the world, but only one brief juvenile of this species, at Coba in the Mexican Yucatan. The 4 adults and 2 juveniles seen on the River Tarcoles at Carara thus filled in a void. They were initially on the opposite bank, but 2 of the 4 adults and both juveniles eventually landed only a few metres from us

**Black-necked Stilt***Himantopus mexicanus*

1 feeding in the caiman bearing river at Carara

Collared Plover*Charadrius collaris*

We had trudged the couple of kilometres of beach in the heat at Tarcoles in the hope of seeing some of the reputed breeding Lesser Nighthawks. We dipped on them, but were rewarded with our only new species of wader for the trip. After the initially close first Collared Plover, a group of ~30 were seen further up the beach towards the mouth of the river, being eyed up as brunch by a standing Peregrine Falcon

**Whimbrel***Numenius phaeopus*

A single bird of the dark rumped new world subspecies was feeding on the shoreline at Tarcoles

Spotted Sandpiper*Actitis macularia*

3 were on the semi dry river at Villas Lapas lodge

Ruddy Turnstone*Arenaria interpres*

1 on the beach at Tarcoles

Sanderling*Calidris alba*

~20 on the beach at Tarcoles

Royal Tern*Sterna maxima*

One surprise of the trip was seeing no gulls, and Royal Tern was the only tern species seen. A single bird landed in front of us on the return walk along the beach at Tarcoles, with another 2 fishing offshore

Band-tailed Pigeon*Patagioenas fasciata*

2 groups of ~6 birds were around the Savegre Lodge, both landing for some time behind the cabins while waiting for Quetzal to put in an appearance

Red-billed Pigeon*Patagioenas flavirostris*

This was most common around the Buena Vista hotel, with ~5 on the first morning, and ~20 on the last. Only one other bird was seen, at Punta Leona

**Short-billed Pigeon***Patagioenas nigrirostris*

This species and Ruddy Pigeon are almost identical in appearance, which made the birds found calling something of a godsend. There is also a variation in the altitudinal distribution, which made identification less of an impossibility than had been expected. 2 were along the trail at Carara, with another 4 at La Selva

White-winged Dove*Zenaida asiatica*

Only 4 identified/noticed, at Orotina

**Ruddy Ground-Dove***Columbina talpacoti*

These were particularly common on the journey from Savegre to Punta Leona, most of which were along the coast road. Smaller numbers were also seen elsewhere

Inca Dove*Columbina inca*

2 at Buena Vista on the first morning, 1 on the last morning, and 1 at Villas Lapas

Grey-chested Dove*Leptotila cassini*

These birds behave quite differently than expected – very rarely flying, they tend to prefer slowly wading through the leaf litter of the forest floor, being occasionally also seen on grassed areas within the shade of trees. The first ones we saw were an elusive pair beside the track through the forest at Carara. The afternoon of the same day found another 4 in the forests of Villas Lapas in two separate pairs. There was also a pair at Selva Verde, but we had to wait until La Selva to find a pair out in the open, where 2 of the 4 were foraging under the cover of sporadic trees just outside of the main gates

Ruddy Quail-Dove*Geotrygon montana*

These have tended to be a bit of a bogey bird in the past, since they tend to be very elusive forest dwellers, and I have only heard them when in the correct habitat. However, a single bird did show itself in the undergrowth of the forest at Carara, not far from the main track

Scarlet Macaw*Ara macao*

These incredibly noisy, large, and unnaturally bright birds are unfortunately now becoming a speciality of the Tarcoles area, due to population losses elsewhere. The first couple that we saw were coming in to roost within the grounds of Punta Leona on our

first evening, although many more were heard. 3 were subsequently seen flying over the trees in the Tarcoles area, and 2 were presumably making their way to roost late afternoon at Villas Lapas

Sulphur-winged Parakeet *Pyrrhura hoffmanni*

A group of ~15 were seen twice over the rear of the cabins at Savegre Lodge

White-crowned Parrot *Pionus senilis*

This was our first parrot of the trip, when a group of 3 individuals landed noisily in flowering trees to the rear of the owners house at the Buena Vista hotel. A larger group of ~15 returned to this spot on the last morning there. The only other members of this species positively identified were 2 separate birds at La Selva

Mealy Parrot *Amazona farinose*

La Selva was the location for these confiding birds, with a group of 3 on the morning walk along the entrance drive on the first morning in the area, and a fourth bird in La Selva itself the next morning. The 3 birds seen first landed in trees next to the entrance road, happily feeding on fruiting trees in our presence



Squirrel Cuckoo *Piaya cayana*

All 3 birds seen were within foliage – the first at Carara was at the very tip of one of the tallest trees, the second at the top of a lower tree not far from us on the entrance drive to La Selva, and the third in the lower branches of one of the trees near to La Selva main gate on the second morning visit

Groove-billed Ani *Crotophaga sulcirostris*

2 groups of 4 were found, one in sparse bushes in front of the cabins at Villas Lapas, the second group at Tarcoles



Black-and-white Owl *Ciccaba nigrolineata*

One of the strangest sites that we came across was that of a pair of these deep forest dwelling species which had taken up residence in the trees of the small town square at Orotina. The town is on the main road between our stops at Punta Leona and La Paz, so we had to make the detour to see them. All the locals seemed to know not only of their presence, but also which branch of which tree to locate them. One bird was exactly where it should be, the other a few trees distant. The only disappointment we had was not seeing the Sloth which has reputedly also taken up residence in this unlikely spot

Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl *Glaucidium brasilianum*

It's likely that this is perhaps one of the easiest to see owls in the region, due to its wide range and abundance, and also the fact that it is diurnal and confiding. It was something of a surprise that we only came across one individual, in a low bare branch just behind the football field at Tarcoles. We stumbled upon it just before we exited the field to reach the beach on our nighthawkless trudge, and it provided ample compensation



White-collared Swift *Streptoprocne zonaris*

These are a notably large swift, with very long, thin wings, and an obvious collar. They were the only swift species we were happy enough to identify, although some slightly smaller all dark (apparently) birds with slightly broader wings were tentatively

pigeonholed as Chestnut-collared. They were particularly common in the mountains around Savegre, overhead at the Buena Vista hotel, and in the skies over La Selva, where numbers probably easily eclipsed three figures. The only area we didn't notice them was on the Pacific coast

Eastern Long-tailed Hermit *Phaethornis superciliosus*

4 birds were seen, and they are quite spectacular when seen feeding in flight, which all of the birds seen were doing. The long decurved bill and equally long central white tail streamers turn a plain coloured hummer into an event. The first was feeding alongside the track at Carara, the second in more dense foliage next to the entrance road at La Selva, and the last two within the secondary forest of La Selva

Little Hermit *Phaethornis longuemareus*

1 seen briefly flying through while staking out our first White-collared Manakin on the entrance road to La Selva

Violet Sabrewing *Campylopterus hemileucurus*

This hummer is one of those that looks all dark in most lights, but glistens a beautiful violet (not surprisingly when the light hits it). It was also one of the commoner hummingbirds to regularly visit the feeders at La Paz. At least 8 birds were seen here, all of which seemed to be males



White-necked Jacobin *Florisuga mellivora*

Only one seen, on one of the flowering trees adjacent to the restaurant at La Selva

Green Violet-ear *Colibri thalassinus*

This was one of the most common hummers at Savegre Lodge, where they were a constant visitor to the feeders. They are an iridescent shimmering green, and not being the most sociable of birds, often flashed their purple ear tufts at others, both of their own and different species. ~20 were seen on any one day at Savegre, with ~5 visiting the feeders at any one time, and ~15 away from the feeders, mainly within the forest



Green-breasted Mango *Anthracothorax prevostii*

A single female was at La Selva

Violet-headed Hummingbird *Klais guimeti*

Another species seen only once – on a flowering shrub directly in front of reception at La Selva

Fiery-throated Hummingbird *Panterpe insignis*

The best place for this species seemed to be at our mountain stop (K76 on the way from San Jose to Savegre). This small area had at least 3 individuals. They were a little confusing at first, appearing as an all dark bird, but the flash of red on the throat solved the puzzle. Another bird landed briefly on the feeders at the Hotel Georgina on the way out of Savegre, with a further bird at La Selva

Coppery-headed Emerald *Elvira cupreiceps*

Of the 6 endemics to Costa Rica, only this species and Mangrove Hummingbird were on our potentials list, since they are the only ones to inhabit the areas we visited. We missed out on Mangrove, and the Coppery-headed male that was seen took some sorting out, eventually relying on video backup for identification. They are a very small bird, and when seen from the front, as our bird was, are mainly a shimmering, but unstartling green. Looking back, the coppery glow on the crown could be seen in certain lights, as well as the white undertail coverts



Black-bellied Hummingbird *Eupherusa nigriventris*

This species is about the same size as Coppery-headed Emerald, in other words small,

and at least 1-2 males put in regular appearances at the feeders of La Paz. However, as opposed to the other common feeder regulars, the Black-bellied seems to be forever on the move, visiting more than one feeder in a short space of time, not staying for long on any one, and then flying off

Blue-throated Goldentail *Hylocharis eliciae*

1 seen from below along the track at Carara. The most obvious feature is the thick and broad based red bill, quite characteristic of the hummers in this area

Rufous-tailed Hummingbird *Amazilia tzacatl*

This is one of the more widespread hummingbirds throughout Costa Rica, and was seen in virtually every habitat, from coast to mountain. The only day when they weren't seen was the full day at Savegre Lodge (none were seen at this location, although we did see one a little further along at K76). Numbers were never very high (peak of 6 on any one day) – 2 at Buena Vista on the first morning, with 3 on the last morning; 2 at K76; 1 at Punta Leona; 1 at Carara; 1 at Villas Lapas; 4 on the entrance driveway to La Selva; 4 at La Paz; 2 at Selva Verde; and 3 within La Selva



Steely-vented Hummingbird *Saucerottia saucerrottei*

Along with Plain-capped Starthroat, this was one of the 2 hummers only to be seen at the Buena Vista hotel, and both on the last morning of the trip. The first we saw of the bird was a green hummingbird with shining dark blue tail. We eventually had better views, when front on the white "socks" could also be seen. A point of interest is that Stiles & Skutch mentions its preference for coffee plantations – the exact spot where we found the bird!

Purple-throated Mountain-gem *Lampornis calolaema*

The Mountain-gems at La Paz all proved to be of this species, as opposed to the Grey-tailed in the mountains. They were not the most regular hummingbirds to the feeders, but could often be picked up on branches in the surrounding vegetation. In all, we probably saw 3 males and 1 female



Grey-tailed Mountain-gem *Lampornis cinereicauda*

These were the Mountain-gems of the mountains, with regular sightings on the feeders at Savegre Lodge. Both females and males were seen in equal numbers, with a minimum of 4 of each sex, all being seen in the vicinity of the hotel

Green-crowned Brilliant *Heliodoxa jacula*

This species was the most common visitor to the feeders at La Paz. The vast majority were males, and probably numbered at least 20. They were also very confiding, not appearing to notice our presence



Magnificent Hummingbird *Eugenes fulgens*

While the Green-crowned Brilliant was the most common hummingbird to the feeders at

La Paz, the equivalent at Savegre Lodge was the Magnificent Hummingbird. Again, most that appeared were males, with at least 20 on any one day. An extra bird was on Cerro de la Muerte, and 1 male amongst the equally large Green-crowned Brilliants of La Paz

Plain-capped Starthroat *Heliomaster constantii*

The first we saw of Starthroat were two birds with very long straight bills tussling in the air within the coffee plantation of the Buena Vista hotel. One landed briefly, but didn't show many characters apart from the long bill. Subsequent observations also revealed the purple throat and plainish head. This species was surprisingly only seen in the grounds of the Buena Vista

Scintillant Hummingbird *Selasphorus scintilla*

Of the four regular hummingbirds to the feeders at Savegre Lodge, the Scintillant was far and away the smallest. We had expected Volcano Hummingbirds also here, but as far as we could make out, all the smaller hummers were Scintillant. Most were females, and it took some time to pin down one or two wonderful little males with shining scarlet moustaches. The first birds were a couple of females at the K76 stop in the mountains, with a subsequent 12+ at Savegre Lodge. 3 were also amongst the more common Volcano Hummingbirds on Cerro de la Muerte



Volcano Hummingbird *Selasphorus flammula*

After "missing out" on Volcano Hummingbird at Savegre Lodge, where they were more or less expected, it was a pleasure to catch up with this superb little bird on our way out from Savegre, when we stopped off for a sortie on Cerro de la Muerte. At least 10 birds were performing superbly, with a possible lek at one point, and showing the lilac throats characteristic of the form present in this area

Violaceous Trogon *Trogon violaceus*

The female of this particular trogon can cause confusion with male of Black-headed, and we fell into this trap at La Selva (as did one of the guides - shame on him!). We eventually decided that we had seen 2 females - one at the reception area, and one on the drive track between checkpoints, before we saw a male just outside of the main gate



Collared Trogon *Trogon collaris*

A male was seen briefly around the grounds of Savegre Lodge on the first full morning at the hotel



Black-throated Trogon *Trogon rufus*

A pair flew in over our heads and landed nearby along one of the tracks at Punta Leona. The male stayed for some time, moving to a nearby branch. We found a third bird quite high up along the track at Carara

Resplendent Quetzal*Pharomachrus mocinno*

Many birders would consider this one of the Holy Grails of birds, certainly when visiting Central and North-western South America, and we were keen to include ourselves on this list. Thus it was that we were given the location of a currently nest building bird (reputedly doing so for the last week) within the forest, and spent at least 2 hours staking out the site from a comfortable distance. We even checked that there were shavings below the hole, indicating current hole making activity. After more than 2 hours – no Quetzal. So it was a great surprise to us that, on the same evening at around 5:15pm, after over an hours waiting (all other prospective Quetzal watchers had left for the bar!), we watched our first Quetzal fly into an avocado tree in front of our viewpoint. And this only about 30 metres from the doorstep of our cabin at Savegre Lodge. The predictability of this bird (or another equally stunning male) was proved when we dined on another in the same tree at 6:00am the next morning. We left satiated – at least 3 birds were seen at the same spot later in the morning, with an additional sighting at the hotel entrance by the bridge!

**Ringed Kingfisher***Ceryle torquatus*

A single bird was seen briefly on the main river at Selva Verde from the foot bridge

Amazon Kingfisher*Chloroceryle amazon*

We first picked up this female hovering over the fast flowing river at Selva Verde lodge from the bridge. We followed it to a perch over a small tributary much nearer to the hotel, and were both surprised and delighted to be looking at a new species of Kingfisher, which was a smart bottle green on the back, with similar coloured slash across a white underside, and obvious crest on the crown

Green Kingfisher*Chloroceryle americana*

We have built up better and better views of this species over the years, from a flash in front of our moving boat in Trinidad's Caroni Swamp, to 2 birds along the waters edge at Bentsen in Texas, USA, last year, and culminating in a pristine female perched only metres away over the River Tarcoles at Carara. There were also an additional 2 birds seen on the same day, on the river at Villas Lapas and at Tarcoles

**American Pygmy Kingfisher***Chloroceryle aenea*

Possibly my bird of the trip. This tiny and endearing bird was first picked up flying on to a single stick of a perch on the opposite side of the river at Carara. It was then seen to fly over to our side of the river, landing only about 20 metres away. Not content with this, it flew even closer, landing on a perch for some time which was only about 10 metres from us, seemingly unconcerned with our presence

Turquoise-browed Motmot*Eumomota superciliosa*

One seen over the track through the forest at Carara

Blue-crowned Motmot*Momotus momota*

This is another of the reasonable list of species that was only seen at the Buena Vista hotel. Our first bird, on the first morning sortie around the hotel grounds, was very approachable. On our return at the end of the week, the single bird had become a pair, with a third (separated by the absence of racquets) spotted from the coffee plantation



Rufous-tailed Jacamar*Galbula ruficauda*

This is yet another of species which we seem to have been chasing for some time. Our patience was rewarded with a perched pair in front of us on the riverside walk at Carara. They were more than worth the wait! A third bird was seen briefly on the return walk from the river at the same location later in the morning

**Red-headed Barbet***Eubucco bourcierii*

2 females and a brief male at the fruit feeders of La Paz were quite exhilarating – a chocolate box bird, but very welcome

Prong-billed Barbet*Semnornis frantzii*

As opposed to the paint box Red-headed Barbet, the Prong-billed Barbet is more of a birder's bird. The colours are reminiscent of the smart Hawfinch of Europe, with an added extra touch in the novel shape of the bill. 2 infrequently returned to the fruit feeders at La Paz

**Emerald Toucanet***Aulacorhynchus prasinus*

Only one bird was seen. It returned at reasonably regular intervals to the avocado tree behind the cabins of Savegre Lodge while waiting for Quetzal to put in an appearance

**Collared Aracari***Pteroglossus torquatus*

5 were seen outside the main gate of La Selva on the first visit, with ~8 within La Selva itself during the guided tour. In addition, ~5 flew in to the trees at the entrance of Quebrada Gonzalves at the Braullio Carrillo national park

**Keel-billed Toucan***Ramphastos sulfuratus*

All birds seen were either around the reception area of La Selva, or flying in loose lines over the Sarapiquí River (from the bridge at La Selva). At least 25 were present

Black-mandibled Toucan*Ramphastos ambiguous*

The first bird of this species was a singleton in front of the cabins at Villas Lapas. The main concentration was at La Selva, amongst the larger numbers of Keel-billed Toucans – at least 15 here

Acorn Woodpecker*Melanerpes formicivorus*

These were only seen at Savegre Lodge and the surrounding forests, where they were quite regular. The greatest concentration was 5-6 birds amongst the cabins of the lodge on the morning of the first full day. ~10 were seen in total that day, with 2 on both the day before and the day after

Black-cheeked Woodpecker*Melanerpes pucherani*

These were only seen around the Sarapiquí area. 6 were at various points along the drive to La Selva, between the two security huts. 4 were the seen on the afternoon at Selva Verde lodge, with another 4 at La Selva on the following morning


Hoffmann's Woodpecker
Melanerpes hoffmannii

These were more or less the most widespread of the woodpeckers, although we didn't see them in all lowland localities as expected. First was a single bird on a bare tree in the coffee plantation below the Buena Vista hotel. A nesting pair with hole directly above some of the cabins were at Villas Lapas, with an extra 2 over the main road at Tarcoles. Most unexpected was the single bird in the town square at Orotina, and we ended up with at least 3 separate birds from the Buena Vista on the last morning

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker
Sphyrapicus varius

A single bird was outside of the entrance to La Paz

Smoky-brown Woodpecker
Veniliornis fumigatus

2 pairs of birds were seen, both along the entrance drive to La Selva. The first were studied for some time, since they were hacking away on the bark of a slender tree, not far in from the road


Chestnut-coloured Woodpecker
Celeus castaneus

This was arguably the most stunning of the woodpeckers seen, not just due to its admirable chestnut and golden plumage, but also its prolonged hammering on what was no more than a slender twig only metres from us

Pale-billed Woodpecker
Campephilus guatemalensis

These are the largest of the woodpeckers seen, and are somewhat comical in appearance. They were usually in groups of 2-3, which may have included at least in part some young birds. They weren't difficult to pick up, since they were either noisily knocking on trees overhead, or showing themselves quite clearly on trunks lower down. First 3 were in a group at Punta Leona, with a subsequent 7 at Carara (3 separate groups of 3, 2, and 2), and another pair at La Selva, along the approach driveway


Ruddy Treerunner
Margarornis rubiginosus

After the first bird seen from a little distance at the stop near K76 on the journey into the mountains, this species subsequently proved quite easy to catch up with. All the birds following that first sighting were in the Savegre area, with another ~11 on the first afternoon, with a further 6 during the full day at the lodge

Plain Xenops
Xenops minutes

By far the most common of the two Xenops species encountered. A pair and a separate singleton were at Carara, 1 alongside the approach road to La Selva, and another 4 in the La Selva area on the second morning visit

Streaked Xenops
Xenops rutilans

1 in the woodland at Punta Leona

Streak-breasted Treehunter
Thripadectes rufobrunneus

A single bird initially appeared above the lower fruit feeder (next to the orchid house) at

La Paz. It was followed a few metres to the other side of the feeder, where it was relocated preening directly above us for some time



Wedge-billed Woodcreeper

Glyphorhynchus spirurus

2 birds were in the woodland on the entrance drive to La Selva, with a third bird in the secondary forest of La Selva itself on the next morning

Northern Barred Woodcreeper

Dendrocolaptes sanctithomae

This is the largest of the woodcreepers that we saw, and is a very smart and eye-catching bird. The first sight of it was often a ruddy brown flash of wings as it landed, and then a chase to try to get good views before it disappeared round to the opposite side of the trunk. The bars on the back were difficult to see in most lights, but those on the throat and breast were more easily seen if the bird deigned to pose for any length of time. ~10 were in the grounds of the Selva Verde lodge, with another 2 at La Selva



Streak-headed Woodcreeper

Lepidocolaptes souleyetii

Small numbers were seen throughout the week, with probably more unidentified birds escaping our lists, due to the pitfalls of woodcreeper identification. 2 initial light-billed Woodcreepers at Savegre proved to be Spot-crowned, with Streak-headed at Punta Leona (1), Carara (1), and La Selva (2)

Spot-crowned Woodcreeper

Lepidocolaptes affinis

This species is very similar to Streak-headed, and despite the books seeming to indicate that the markings on the head are more defined and spotted, in practice this distinction is almost impossible to make. We thus had to resort to distribution for our identification, since this species tends to favour the higher altitudes such as at Savegre, with Streak-headed more of a lowland bird



Fasciated Antshrike

Cymbilaimus lineatus

This was amongst the most stunning birds that we encountered, partly due to its remarkable striped plumage with red eye, and also because it appeared atypically right out in the open in front of us, lower in the same tree as a Chestnut-coloured Woodpecker moments earlier. Our first sighting of this or a nearby bird was much more typical, sitting motionless deep in the cover of foliage

Great Antshrike

Taraba major

Separate male and female birds briefly in foliage along the entrance drive to La Selva

Black-hooded Antshrike

Thamnophilus bridgesi

2 males were picked up on or near to the ground in the woodland at Punta Leona, with one of the birds perching for some time more or less in the open. We then found a singing male, again near to the track and in the open, at Carara, with a subsequent female later in the morning. Another female was in the forest at Villas Lapas



Barred Antshrike*Thamnophilus doliatus*

2 females and a male were seen all too briefly at Carara, with a similar sighting of a female near to the Great Antshrikes along the entrance drive to La Selva

Dot-winged Antwren*Microrhophias quixensis*

These are an eye-catching little antbird, and seem to be constantly on the move. A male and smartly plumaged pair of females were picked up flying across one of the trails at Punta Leona, and were pinned down for a short time before they continued on their way

Dusky Antbird*Cercomacra tyrannina*

2 of these fairly secretive birds were seen, both trying to hide in the foliage of trees – 1 at Carara, and the second in the forest at Villas Lapas

Chestnut-backed Antbird*Myrmeciza exsul*

This bird was an end of the day addition to the list. I was returning for one last look at one of the feeders at Selva Verde, when I saw a couple of birds dart across the path, from and to deep foliage. The birds were calling, and the branches moving slightly just before dusk, when one of these dapper chestnut and black birds, with an obvious blue eye "ring", showed itself in the open for seconds before moving on to yet more cover. Although only this one bird was identified for sure, the two other shadows seen were probably also of this species

White-collared Manakin*Manacus candei*

We had hoped to see some Manakins on the trip, and despite this being the only species seen, the individuals found put in worthy appearances. The first bird was located near to the first gate on the entrance road to La Selva. It had a penchant for some of the flowering plants in one particular spot, and returned here for at least an hour. Another male was seen more briefly back towards the second entrance gate, in the company of an even briefer female. The next morning, during the sortie around the tracks of La Selva, 5 males were chanced upon

**Southern Beardless-Tyrannulet***Camptostoma obsoletum*

1 along the trails in Punta Leona

Yellow-bellied Elaenia*Elaenia flavogaster*

These birds were only seen at the Hotel Buena Vista. Four were there on the last morning, and the one seen on the first morning may well have been one of these

Mountain Elaenia*Elaenia frantzii*

Only seen on higher ground at Savegre Lodge. 3 were seen on the first afternoon, and 5 on the full day there, including some in the grounds of the hotel

Torrent Tyrannulet*Serpophaga cinerea*

The presence of a pair of these around the bridge at the entrance to Savegre Lodge was a pleasant surprise. Only one was evident while we were watching, with the second only making a brief appearance. A third bird was seen briefly alongside the river further into the forest

**Common Tody-Flycatcher***Todirostrum cinereum*

2 were around the spot where we observed the River Tarcoles at the end of the track at Carara. At least one was present close to off and on most of the time while we were there

Sulphur-rumped Flycatcher*Myiobius sulphureipygius*

2 separate birds were seen well in the rain forest of Braullio Carillo. They were the only birds of note during our trek of around 1.6km. They are very similar to Black-tailed Flycatcher, with the possibility of them being a superspecies, and one of the best identification factors is distribution

Tufted Flycatcher*Mitrephanes phaeocercus*

This is an endearing little flycatcher, and as the full day at Savegre went on, the 15 or so birds that we saw seemed to become more confiding. They appeared at first to be a

canopy dweller, with most views being accompanied by a stiff neck, but it transpired that some fed from branches down to eye level. Only one other bird was seen away from Savegre, at La Paz, in the forest to the rear of the main part of the gardens

Yellowish Flycatcher

Empidonax flavescens

This species was impossible to miss in the forest around Savegre Lodge, since they tended to feed on the lower branches, and were also very confiding. Probably about 5 birds were seen, all at very close quarters



Black-capped Flycatcher

Empidonax atriceps

The first 2 birds seen were a little distant, flycatching around the higher branches in the clearing off K76. The third and last bird was very much closer, only a metre or so away at eye level on the edge of the forest at Savegre

Black Phoebe

Sayornis nigricans

Only one pair was seen, in a clearing next to a small "boating lake" at a recreation area just downstream from the Savegre Lodge. A point of interest is that the local race is all black, in comparison to the western USA birds I have seen in the past which have obvious white undertail coverts and belly



Bright-rumped Attila

Attila spadiceus

A very confiding bird was followed as it foraged along the edge of the entrance drive to La Selva

Dusky-capped Flycatcher

Muscicapa tberculifer

2 outside the main entrance gate to La Selva

Panama Flycatcher

Myiarchus panamensis

4 were at Punta Leona, and 2 at Selva Verde

Great Kiskadee

Pitangus sulphuratus

Seen regularly on most days in small numbers: 2-3 at the Hotel Buena Vista; 4 at Punta Leona; 4 at Villas Lapas; 2 at Carara; ~6 at La Selva; and 4 at Selva Verde lodge



Boat-billed Flycatcher

Megarynchus pitangua

Seen only at 2 locations - 2 were above the cabins at Savegre Lodge, and 3 along the entrance drive to La Selva

Social Flycatcher

Myiozetetes similis

As with Great Kiskadee, seen regularly in small numbers throughout the week: 3 at Hotel

Buena Vista (one of the first birds seen on the first morning); 3 at Savegre Lodge; 6 at Villas Lapas; 2 at La Selva; and 2 at La Quinta lodge, Sarapiquí

Grey-capped Flycatcher

Myiozetetes granadensis

This species is of a similar size to Social Flycatcher, and was usually in association with it, so they had to be checked carefully for identification. Most were at Villas Lapas (4, all with Social Flycatchers), and a fifth was at La Selva

Streaked Flycatcher

Myiodynastes maculates

Only seen at Villas Lapas, a pair was along the track through the forest, directly overhead, with a third bird further on



Tropical Kingbird

Tyrannus melancholicus

Very common, seen every day in all habitats. Not too many were checked for Western Kingbird, which apparently can also be seen. Numbers weren't high, perhaps barely reaching double figures on any one day, but they were always quite evident when present, perching out in the open

Cinnamon Becard

Pachyramphus cinnamomeus

1-2 birds were along the circular forest trail, not high above our heads, but always busily foraging between bare branches

White-winged Becard

Pachyramphus polychopterus

1 male seen briefly flying over the trail at Carara

Masked Tityra

Tityra semifasciata

3 birds were seen, but all were brief views (no more than 10 seconds at any one time): single males were at Selva Verde lodge and Buena Vista Hotel on the last morning, with a lone female along the entrance drive to La Selva

Black-crowned Tityra

Tityra inquisitor

2 were seen, both males, with one in the canopy at Carara, and the other barely closer and all too brief in trees opposite the White-collared Manakin stakeout along the entrance drive to La Selva

Blue-and-white Swallow

Notiochelidon cyanoleuca

Very common in the Valle Central over and around the Buena Vista hotel, with perhaps even greater numbers in the mountains around Savegre Lodge. Strangely, they were not seen at all on the Pacific Coast or Sarapiquí, where they seemed to be replaced by Rough-winged Swallows



Northern Rough-winged Swallow

Stelgidopteryx serripennis

Those identified specifically (can be tricky when not seen well due to similarity with Southern Roughwings) seemed much more common than the latter species. Small numbers were at Carara, 2 at La Quinta, Sarapiquí, 4 at La Selva, and ~10 over Buena Vista

Southern Rough-winged Swallow

Stelgidopteryx ruficollis

Only 2 specifically identified, at La Selva

Black-and-yellow Silky-flycatcher

Phainoptila melanoxantha

Only one was seen, on the first full day, at the pull off at K76 while travelling from Alajuela to Savegre. It was also one of the first birds to be seen – after parking the car out of sight, we walked about 20 metres, and this bird appeared for a short time to feed on a low bush at the side of a track. And that was it – no more to be seen during the trip!

**Long-tailed Silky-flycatcher***Ptilogonys caudatus*

I couldn't decide whether these were a chocolate box bird, or a birders' bird. Whichever it was, we were pleased to see them, and they eventually put on a little bit of a show. The first two were seen poorly when we stopped off at the 3km point on the descent to Savegre Lodge. However, the clearing next to the "boating lake" just downstream from Savegre Lodge was the best spot for them. ~12 birds were noisily flying to and fro here, many of them in trees near to where we stood

Band-backed Wren*Campylorhynchus zonatus*

As with many of the wrens in Costa Rica, this species is both large and beautifully marked. There were two pairs along the entrance drive to La Selva, and both pairs seemed to be nest building. One of the pairs was probably seen twice on successive days, near to the second security gate, with another lone bird in one of the trees behind the restaurant at La Selva

Rufous-naped Wren*Campylorhynchus rufinucha*

A single bird was seen amongst the coffee plants below the Hotel Buena Vista on the first morning, and a subsequent pair were above our heads at the edge of the River Tarcoles at Carara

Black-bellied Wren*Thryothorus fasciatoventris*

This was probably the most elusive of all the wrens seen. On the return along the Riverside Trail at Carara, we heard an explosive song from a nearby bush. A bird subsequently flew across the trail, unidentified, and continued to sing sporadically. We eventually saw the bird for what must have been seconds – a classic skulking wren, with outstanding voice, and matching elusive nature

Rufous-breasted Wren*Thryothorus rutilus*

A pair were seen briefly at Carara

Riverside Wren*Thryothorus semibadius*

These were difficult to pin down for different reasons than the Black-bellied Wren. After crossing the first rope bridge across the river at Villas Lapas, we picked up some of these birds in bushes at the base of the bridge. They were very active in the reasonably thick foliage, and we counted at least 5 separate individuals. However, they were constantly on the move, and so not easily viewed with any ease.

Rufous-and-white Wren*Thryothorus rufalbus*

A single bird was at Carara

House Wren*Troglodytes aedon*

2 separate birds at the Buena Vista Hotel (presumably one of these birds was the one seen on the return visit on the last morning), 1 on the journey from Savegre to Punta Leona, and 1 at La Selva

Ochraceous Wren*Troglodytes ochraceus*

Only 2 birds were seen – 1 at Savegre, in the woodlands during the full days birding there, and 1 at La Paz. The latter bird frequented the area around one of the fruit feeders, and appeared regularly. At one point, it almost hopped over my feet while crossing from one side of the arbour to the other, which was one of the entrances to the hummingbird garden

**Grey-breasted Wood-Wren***Henicorhina leucophrys*

For a small wren, this has a huge voice, and this is how the single bird seen at La Paz

was first picked up. It was seen for a short time below the restaurant, and appeared a little closer in the bushes around the upper feeders later in the day

Black-faced Solitaire *Myadestes melanops*

A pair of birds was in the forest of Savegre

Slaty-backed Nightingale-Thrush *Catharus fuscater*

The bird seen at La Paz appeared at the base of the fruit feeders for a short time, and at first bore some resemblance to Sooty Robin. It was only there for a short time, and unfortunately didn't reappear

Black-billed Nightingale-Thrush *Catharus gracilirostris*

A single bird landed close to briefly at the clearing just off the K76 marker on the way to Savegre

Ruddy-capped Nightingale-Thrush *Catharus frantzii*

A nice surprise – probably around 5 birds frequented Savegre Lodge, mainly in the vicinity of the private housing above the reception. After being pleased with pinning down the first two in bushes, other birds were much more confiding, feeding on the lawns only metres away from us

Swainson's Thrush *Catharus ustulatus*

The only bird seen was at the Buena Vista hotel on the last morning

Wood Thrush *Catharus mustelina*

Singles at Selva Verde lodge, La Selva, and the forest trail of Braullio Carillo at Quebrada Gonzalves



Sooty Robin *Turdus nigrescens*

The first bird found was in the small hamlet 3km into the descent to Savegre Lodge, and fed quite happily alongside the edge of the road while we watched on. A second bird was also at the side of the road, seen from the car as we exited the hamlet, continuing on our way. On the return journey two days later, 2 more birds were seen from the car at the same place

Mountain Robin *Turdus plebejus*

After disturbing the odd Clay-coloured Robin at Savegre Lodge, we realised that Mountain Robins were amongst them, with the main identification factor being the black bill – the plumage colour wasn't as distinctive as we had expected. In all, about 4 birds were around the lodge, with another couple seen in the forest



Clay-coloured Robin *Turdus grayi*

Very common – seen on every day in every locality, with a maximum of 30+ birds on any one day



Pale-vented Thrush *Turdus obsoletus*

A small group of thrushes was chanced upon along the trail in the secondary forest at La Selva. The pale under tail coverts were not nearly as obvious as expected, so it was

fortunate that this group contained a tailless bird, which clinched the species. The other birds weren't studied to any depth following the discovery of this bird, since there were other distractions such as Wood-rail and Fasciated Antshrike to observe at the same time!

Tawny-faced Gnatwren *Microbates cinereiventris*

A single bird was seen well on the entrance drive to La Selva

Tropical Gnatcatcher *Polioptila plumbea*

One bird at K76

Brown Jay *Cyanocorax morio*

The only location that these were seen (and heard) was at the Hotel Buena Vista, where they occasionally passed noisily through the coffee plantation. ~8 were seen on the last morning, with only 3 on the first morning

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*

Almost a clean slate, with the trip House Sparrow-less until the last afternoon, when a single hanger on flew from the petrol station forecourt as we were about to leave (just North of San Jose)

Yellow-throated Vireo *Vireo flavifrons*

1-2 birds were picked up in the bushes below the coffee plantation (which were actually the upper boundary of the road outside) next to Buena Vista Hotel. One was tracked as it foraged upwards in the coffee plants, and was eventually seen feeding quite close to



Yellow-winged Vireo *Vireo carmioli*

These were chanced upon reasonably regularly on the full day's birding at the Savegre Lodge, with ~6 birds seen

Philadelphia Vireo *Vireo philadelphicus*

1 in the forest at Savegre Lodge

Yellow-green Vireo *Vireo flavoviridis*

1-2 birds were singing in the coffee plantation at the Hotel Buena Vista on the last morning

Lesser Greenlet *Hylophilus decurtatus*

Punta Leona (2); La Selva entrance driveway (1); La Selva reserve (~6)

Yellow-bellied Siskin *Carduelis xanthogastra*

After a female picked up on a low bush in the village of San Gerardo de Dota (just down from Savegre Lodge), a male was found singing from the top of a swaying bush

Tennessee Warbler *Vermivora peregrine*

The most common wood warbler encountered. They were particularly abundant at La Paz (~25) where many would come to the fruit feeders. ~10 were at the Hotel Buena Vista on the first morning, 2 on the first afternoon and 3 on the first morning at Savegre Lodge, and ~6 at La Selva



Flame-throated Warbler *Parula gutturalis*

These were only seen in the Mountains, with an initial bird at the track opposite K76, and 3 at Savegre Lodge (1 on the first afternoon, and 2 within the forest on the second day)

Yellow Warbler *Dendroica petechia*

2 at K76, and 1 in the forest at Savegre Lodge

Chestnut-sided Warbler *Dendroica pensylvanica*

All those seen were in the lime green capped, grey-bodied livery of non breeding plumage: Carara (3); Villas Lapas (1); La Selva entrance drive (2); Selva Verde Lodge (1); La Selva (4); Braulio Carrillo (1); Buena Vista (1)

Black-throated Green Warbler *Dendroica virens*

K76 (2); Savegre Lodge (2 first afternoon, ~5 on the full day); Punta Leona (1); Carara (2 females); Buena Vista Hotel (1 female)

Louisiana Waterthrush *Seiurus motacilla*

4 Waterthrushes were seen along the track at Carara, but views weren't sufficient to identify specifically. The fifth bird, striding from rock to rock in front of us beside the Sarapiquí River at Selva Verde Lodge, had the splayed hind supercilium and poorer under striping of this species

Grey-crowned Yellowthroat *Geothlypis poliocephala*

A single male was amongst the mangroves of Tarcoles

Wilson's Warbler *Wilsonia pusilla*

Quite common in the mountains (1 at K76, 4 at Savegre Lodge, and 1 at the Hotel Georgina) and Punta Leona (3)

Slate-throated Whitestart *Myioborus miniatus*

3 birds were picked out just below the canopy at La Paz. They were in the forest to the rear of the main gardens, where we walked upstream of the waterfalls

Collared Whitestart *Myioborus torquatus*

5 separate birds were seen on the full days birding at Savegre Lodge. The first was studied for some time from a little distance, but the second was anything but shy, performing admirably right in front of us for 15 minutes or so, totally unconcerned by our proximity

**Rufous-capped Warbler** *Basileuterus rufifrons*

This was another of those species only seen at the Hotel Buena Vista. After having picked up the first views of Plain-capped Starthroat within the coffee plantation only moments before, an active Rufous-capped Warbler moved swiftly between bushes before disappearing

Black-cheeked Warbler *Basileuterus melanogenys*

3 very mobile birds were encountered in the forest at Savegre Lodge, between the wooden footbridge and Quetzal stake out site

Bananaquit *Coereba flaveola*

Not as common as expected, the grey throated form of this widespread species was only found in the vicinity of La Selva (~10), apart from a loner appearing on the fruit feeders of La Paz

Common Bush-Tanager *Chlorospingus ophthalmicus*

Seen at 2 locations – Savegre and La Paz. The first of five birds at Savegre was elusive at first, in bushes alongside the "boating lake" just downstream of Savegre Lodge. It eventually deigned to show in the open. At La Paz, Common Bush-tanager was a regular at the fruit feeders, where it was unusual not to see them in small flocks. ~20 were here in total

**Sooty-capped Bush-Tanager** *Chlorospingus pileatus*

This seems to be even more of a highland specialist than the Common Bush-tanager, and was only seen in the mountains of the Talamanca range. After ~20 passed through at the K76 clearing, we subsequently saw ~10 on both days at Savegre Lodge, and another 3 on the slopes of Cerro de la Muerte

White-shouldered Tanager

Tachyphonus luctuosus

Only seen in two small parties at Carara, with a total of around 4 males and 2 females

Red-throated Ant-Tanager

Habia fuscicauda

2 pairs were in along the circular forest trail at Selva Verde lodge, and a third pair within the secondary forest at La Selva. The first pair found at the former was particularly confiding, with the male spending some time preening at eye level not far from our gaze



Summer Tanager

Piranga rubra

All but one seen were males: Villas Lapas (1 male); La Paz (single of male and female at the fruit feeder separately); Selva Verde (2 males); Buena Vista Hotel (1 male on the last morning)

Flame-coloured Tanager

Piranga bidentata

2 males were at Savegre Lodge, both singing, one of which was directly overhead for some time on wires

Passerini's Tanager

Ramphocelus passerinii

All seen were of the Caribbean slope subspecies (usually only discerned due to location and plumage of the females). They were seen at La Paz (3 males and 1 female), La Selva entrance drive (~20), Selva Verde lodge (4), and La Selva (20+)



Blue-grey Tanager

Thraupis episcopus

Buena Vista Hotel (~20 on the first morning, ~10 on the last morning); Savegre Lodge (1); Villas Lapas (2); La Paz (25+); La Selva entrance drive (2); La Selva (4)

Palm Tanager

Thraupis palmarum

K76 (1); La Paz (1); La Selva entrance drive (~10); La Selva (1)

Yellow-throated Euphonia

Euphonia hirundinacea

3 birds were seen all too briefly – a pair at the top of one of the trails at Punta Leona, and a male at Carara

Olive-backed Euphonia

Euphonia gouldi

2 males and a female were regular visitors to the fruit feeders at Selva Verde lodge, with another female at the Quebrada Gonzalves entrance to Braullio Carillo national park

Tawny-capped Euphonia

Euphonia annae

Only seen at La Paz, where 2 males and a female were regular visitors to the fruit feeders



Silver-throated Tanager*Tangara icterocephala*

This became a common sight at La Paz, where it was one of the most frequent visitors to the fruit feeders. In all at least 30 birds were seen here. They were seen in much lower numbers elsewhere, with 1 at Savegre Lodge, 2 at Selva Verde, and 2 at La Selva

Golden-hooded Tanager*Tangara larvata*

This is another species which we only saw on the Caribbean slopes of the Sarapiquí area, and numbers were nowhere near as high as Silver-throated Tanager. The first we saw of the species were 2 birds in the trees in front of the parked car as we arrived at La Paz. We then waited some time before 3 separate pairs of birds were seen in the gardens, 2 pairs at separate feeders, and another feeding on bushes. 2 were seen the following day along the La Selva entrance drive, with 2 at La Selva proper, and even 3 on the feeders of the La Quinta lodge

**Spangle-cheeked Tanager***Tangara dowii*

We were quite fortunate to catch up with this species, since only 2 birds were seen (together) passing through the forest of Savegre Lodge in a small feeding party, which also contained our first Silver-throated Tanager

Scarlet-thighed Dacnis*Dacnis venusta*

2 birds were seen – one in a flowering tree with honeycreepers at Punta Leona, and a second, again with a collection of honeycreepers, at Carara

Green Honeycreeper*Chlorophanes spiza*

A pair began visiting one of the fruit feeders at Selva Verde in the fading light, and a second pair were in one of the flowering trees adjacent to the restaurant of La Selva

**Shining Honeycreeper***Cyanerpes lucidus*

This was the most common of the two purple (coloured) honeycreepers encountered, with the yellow legs making them easy to identify: Punta Leona (2); Selva Verde (a pair visiting one of the fruit feeders together); La Selva (female)

**Red-legged Honeycreeper***Cyanerpes cyaneus*

Only 2 males were seen, in small feeding party along the Riverside Trail at Carara

Variable Seedeater*Sporophila corvine*

The variant of this species present at La Selva is the all black (male), with the only white a notch on the wing. This makes identification that little bit more difficult since it bares resemblance to other seedeaters and like finches. Thankfully, the 3 males and 2 females present were confiding enough for good views

**Yellow-faced Grassquit***Tiaris olivacea*

4 were seen at Savegre Lodge, with 2 in the lodge area, and another 2 in the village of San Gerardo de Dota

Slaty Flowerpiercer*Diglossa plumbea*

Despite being relatively common, these birds are constantly on the move when feeding, and tend to keep to the depths of the foliage. This may have been one of the reasons (as well as inexperience) why the first bird at K76 was misidentified as the very similar Peg-billed Finch. Reasonable views of some of the birds were eventually had: K76 (1-2 males); Savegre Lodge (~ males/females); Cerro de la Muerte (4); La Paz (separate singles of a male and a female)

**Yellow-thighed Finch***Pselliophorus tibialis*

These were regularly seen on the mountains, and were the first birds we saw as we pulled up to park the car at the clearing of K76: K76 (~15); Savegre Lodge (3 on the first afternoon, ~10 on the full day); La Paz (4 visiting the fruit feeders)

Large-footed Finch*Pezopetes capitalis*

3 were seen for a short time at K76, with 2 slightly more confiding birds at Savegre Lodge the next day

**Chestnut-capped Brush-Finch***Buarremon brunneinucha*

2 of these birds were seen in the forests of Savegre Lodge, but they had to be worked for, since they are very elusive. They were initially heard at ground level, but were under dense cover. A further 2 were seen visiting the fruit feeders briefly at La Paz, and again they were on the ground

Orange-billed Sparrow*Arremon aurantiirostris*

We had missed this striking sparrow at Carara, where the guide of a passing birding group was trying to refind an elusive bird for his patrons. However, superb views of 2 ground feeders were had along the circular trail of Selva Verde

**Black-striped Sparrow***Arremonops conirostris*

2 birds were singing near to the main entrance gate of La Selva just after parking the car on the first morning visit to the area



Rufous-collared Sparrow*Zonotrichia capensis*

Very common in most areas, and this was the second species to be seen on the first morning at the Buena Vista Hotel. ~40 were seen during the whole of that first day, with ~50 at Savegre Lodge, 5 at La Paz, and another 6 at the Hotel Buena Vista on the last morning

**Greyish Saltator***Saltator coerulescens*

One singing at the Hotel Buena Vista on the first morning

Buff-throated Saltator*Saltator maximus*

La Paz (3); La Selva entrance drive (~6); Selva Verde (2); La Selva (2)

**Black-thighed Grosbeak***Pheucticus tibialis*

3 of these stunningly plumaged birds flew past us while staking out the Quetzal nest hole in the forest at Savegre Lodge

Rose-breasted Grosbeak*Pheucticus ludovicianus*

After quite distant views of 2 birds at Hotel Buena Vista in the first morning, 2 pairs of much closer birds visited the fruit feeders at La Paz

**Great-tailed Grackle***Quiscalus mexicanus*

Seen throughout the week, in all areas apart from the mountains around Savegre Lodge, but in slightly lower numbers than expected, being between ~10-20 birds each day

Yellow-tailed Oriole*Icterus mesomelas*

After a single bird calling from the tops of the trees, a feeding party of these, Black-cowled Oriole, and Passerini's Tanagers was chanced upon not far into the walk along the La Selva entrance drive. The 2 Yellow-tailed Orioles in the party became the most confiding, feeding on the kernels of the flowering plants in the open

**Baltimore Oriole***Icterus galbula*

Very common - seen on every day and in all habitats: Buena Vista Hotel (4 on the first morning, 6 on the last); Savegre Lodge (3 on the first afternoon, 5 on the second, 2

females only on the last morning there); Villas Lapas (2); La Paz (10+ males, 5+ females); Selva Verde (2 males); La Selva (1 male, 2 females)

Black-cowled Oriole

Icterus prothemelas

2 were in with the feeding party of Yellow-tailed Orioles and Passerini's Tanagers on the entrance drive to La Selva, and although reasonable views were had, they were more flighty than the latter Orioles

Yellow-billed Cacique

Amblycercus holosericeus

2 flew across the La Selva entrance drive

Montezuma Oropendola

Gymnostinops Montezuma

Common in the La Selva area, where we saw ~18 on the first morning, mainly around the main entrance, and ~20 in the reserve proper the next morning

TOTAL SPECIES = 223