

COSTA RICA TRIP REPORT

Pacific Circle: Lowland Rainforests, Mangroves, Beaches & Middle & High elevation cloud forests and Paramo

20February-4March 2025

Led by Gabor Orban and Andrea Katona



During this tour we were looking for BIRDS & MAMMALS



BUTTERFLIES & MOTH

REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS



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This tour was put together and lead by **Andrea Katona & Gabor Orban** for a group of birder friends from UK and South Africa, Witwatersrand Bird Club. Participants were: Andy F., Julie H., Mark L. & Cecily S., Diana C., Carol L., Philip & Amanda C. Our super kind driver was Luis.

Andrea and Gabor lived, organized and led tours in Yucatan and other parts of Mexico since 2006 for 13 half years. During the last 6 years their base has been in Costa Rica which they visited first time more than 20 years ago.

Gabor is a birder and zoologist guide while Andrea is mainly specialized in languages and Mayan Culture, but both know a lot about each others field. They believe that Nature & Culture depend on each other, actually matching each other, like them so they led the tour according to their slogan: Nature and Culture hands in hands. This is surely a winning combination! :) Their team was helped also by a knowledgeable local guide at few areas. Group members could learn a lot about local nature, especially birds and mammals, but about actual life of local people. Gabor and Andi shared a lot of stories about Costa Rica, about their adventures at different other parts of Latin America and of course their original home, Hungary as well.

Thursday 20th February 2025

Andi and Gabor started to travel by the help of Luis in the morning from their home at **San Gerardo de Dota in the Talamanca Mountains** to meet with part of the group at the airport hotel and than later pick up Andy, Carol, Philip and Amanda. Some people spent one, other more nights at the airport hotel which offered a good list of birds and butterflies in its flowery, bushy green garden. The first attractive species included **Orange-chinned Parakeets**, a beautiful **Turquoise-browed Motmot**, **Great Kiskadee**, a happily singing **Southern House Wren** and **Tropical Kingbird**. Stunning **Summer Tanager** and **Baltimore Oriole** competed with each others colours, it was hard to decide who should be the winner.



White-winged Dove was common and of course we saw regularly **Turkey** and **Black Vultures** in the air, also during our first travel. We noticed more than a dozen **Western Cattle Egrets** as well on the way towards Tarcoles. At the bridge we looked down to spot the first crocodiles, but we had a better observation days later during a boat tour.



It was about 2 hours 2 reach our first hotel which not only had a lush tropical garden with a small river crossing but also excellent nearby primary and secondary forest with really exciting species. After checking in and refreshing ourselves a bit Gabor and Andi showed us the garden where we started to find the first birds such as **Bare-throated Tiger-heron** and **Spotted Sandpiper** at the river, **Cinnamon Hummingbird** at a nearby bush and **Turquoise-browed Motmot** at a tree. We had our first incredible **Scarlet Macaw** during the tour which were followed by many great observations during several following

days. The garden was a flycatcher heaven so we started to learn distinguishing **Dusky-capped**, **Brown-crested**, **Social**, **Grey-capped**, **Streaked** and **Piratic Flycatchers**, not to mention **Great Kiskadee** and **Boat-billed Flycatchers!** :-)) We learned that **Clay-coloured Thrush** is the national bird and also the story why this one and not a more colourful Quetzal

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or Toucan or Scarlet Macaw. Other notable species were **Northern Water-Thrush, Summer and Blue-grey Tanagers** and a stunning **Red-legged Honeycreeper**. We heard **Yellow-throated Toucan** and **Orange-chinned Parakeets** and at the end of the walk **Common Pauraque**. Just before 6, when it started to be dark we finished our looking around and soon we gathered for our first buffet style dinner and discussed the list plus the plans for tomorrow.

Friday 21st February 2025

We started early morning at 5.45am and within an hour we had 2 dozens of species just in the garden and at the beginning of the forest trail, although some of them like **Great Tinamou, Short-billed Pigeon, Black-headed Trogon** or **Squirrel Cuckoo** we just heard this time, but later on during the tour we saw them all. It was difficult to see but we found a **Blue-throated Goldentail** high on a twig. At the river we had a **Green Kingfisher** and according to its name a **Riverside Wren**. Also this is the habitat for **Northern Waterthrush** and **Buff-rumped Warbler**. We still looked up quickly when another 4 **Scarlet Macaws** appeared and we managed to observe the first seen **Yellow-throated Toucan**. The forest offered **Dusky Antbirds, Chestnut-backed Antbirds** and a lovely **Orange-billed Sparrow**.



Tanagers were represented by **Summer, Scarlet-rumped and Blue-grey Tanagers**.

A pair of **Slaty-tailed Trogon** offered an excellent view with all the characteristic details which we could compare with the previously seen **Gartered Trogon**.

After this intense 1 hour walk we had a really big breakfast with loads of choices and travelled shortly to the main entrance of the **Carara National Park**. The aim was to hit the forest trails before larger general groups arrive and also to catch a better bird activity before higher temperature hits us. The strategy worked, with more than 3,5 hours gentle walk we observed 33 species. Below we mention the ones which we could really approach up close. A **Purple-**

were new such as 2 **Great Tinamous** which were really like in a fairy-tale. Gabor pointed out 2 perched **Mealy Parrots** which tried to call louder than the 4 **Scarlet Macaws** flying nearby. **Streak-chested Antpitta** we just heard, but everybody managed to see **Black-hooded Antshrike, Dot-winged Antwren** and **Chestnut-backed Antbird**. Our first **Woodcreepers** were **Wedge-billed and Cocoa**. Apart from the previously seen flycatchers here we found **Sulphur-rumped** as well. **Lesser Greenlet** and **Long-billed Hermit** was new. We also heard many species, including **Blue-black Grosbeaks**.

Other non-feathered species observations included Green-and-Black Poison-Dart-Frogs and an interesting snake which we still have not identified.

Before noon we got really tired so we returned to the parking lot but everybody became immediately energized when a **King Vulture** was discovered by Andi, circling above our heads not too far. Finally we went back to our lovely Villa Lapas, refreshed ourselves and gathered for lunch, which was followed by a well-deserved siesta time. We got together around 3.30pm for another garden and forest birding session. A huge **Crested Guan** and a miniature **Stripe-throated Hermit** was new. Had our first **White Ibis** and the **Green Kingfisher** again. More



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than a dozen **Scarlet Macaws** were seen again. Andi had another great find, **White-whiskered Puffbird** which everybody could see and even photograph very well. Gabor found another very hard bird, **Black-faced Antthrush** which hardly anybody could have glimpse. But we all could compare **Red-crowned and Pale-billed Woodpeckers**. **Buff-throated Saltator** was new and we heard **Great Tinamou** again. We finished birding at dusk, enjoyed some beers and cocktails at the bar and had our second delicious dinner later. It was a great day full with interesting habitats, birds & Mark photographed a good set of butterflies as well.

Saturday 22nd February 2025



This morning we skipped the early morning birding but had breakfast as early as possible so we could leave with a short drive to a nearby place where we boarded on a wide boat. We set on a 2,5 hours long tour with an excellent captain and birder, Juan Carlos. With a leisurely birding we ended up with almost 50 species, some really great observations and large masses of birds. The following is not a complete list but at least the new ones like **Black-bellied Whistling-Duck, Muscovy Duck, Whimbrel, Willet, Ruddy Turnstone**. The few **Least and Spotted Sandpipers** were really outnumbered by about 100 of **Western Sandpipers**.



There were few **Wood Storks** and Barbie-coloured **Roseate Spoonbills**. We watched how a **Neotropical Cormorant** struggled to swallow a catfish. There were herons and egrets wherever we looked, including **Bare-throated Tiger-heron, Yellow-crowned Night-Heron, Little Blue, Tricoloured, Green and Great Blue Heron, plus Snowy Egret**. There were several plover species like **Black-bellied, Semipalmated and Wilson's Plover**. There was a good number of **Laughing and Franklin's Gulls** to compare and dozens of **Royal Terns** as well. There were plenty of **Magnificent Frigatebirds** and **Brown Pelicans** as well. **Ringed Kingfisher and Yellow-headed Caracara** was new and Gabor explained why the latter species appearance is actually not a good sign.



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Unfortunately we just heard **Yellow-naped Amazons** but saw **Scarlet Macaws** again. Apart from Vultures we had hunting **Ospreys** and **Common Black Hawks**. **Northern Tropical Pewee** was new and we search for long to have a great view of a **Mangrove Yellow Warbler**. On the other hand **Mangrove Swallows** were easy since they nested on our boat, so they had a tour with us.

Another local speciality to search was **Mangrove Hummingbird** and although Juan Carlos knew a nest, the chicks already fledged. But we could not miss several **American Crocodiles**, including some huge, fearsome ones and like Osama, plus some **Yellow-eared Turtles**.



After we left the boat we could not stop birding since Gabor found a corner with a great bird activity where we spotted **Rose-throated Becards**. Here in Costa Rica they were without rosy throat, not like the ones in Yucatan Mexico during our previous trip. We also had **Gartered Trogon**, **Turquoise-browed Motmot**, **Crested Guan**, **Yellow-olive Flatbill**, **White-browed Gnatcatcher**, **Rufous-backed Wren**.

It was difficult to leave the huge shopping area without buying a plush sloth or a toucan or something else but finally we went back for lunch which was followed by a

longer siesta time.

Around 4pm we ventured out to a nearby area where Gabor and Andi new where to find the secretive, nocturnal Boat-billed Heron. The tiny roadside spot yielded 2 of these funny looking birds but also **Stripe-headed Sparrow**, **American Pygmy Kingfisher**.

From here we continued to the seaside just at the edge of the village. There were plenty of **Magnificent Frigatebirds** and **Brown Pelicans** here as well, plus Gabor pointed out a **Short-tailed Hawk** in the sky. Here Gabor called out a Mourning Dove which later re-identified as an **Inca Dove**. More likely another 2 flew away before from the roadside as we approached by the bus.



Finally we started to drive back to our hotel, but before we crossed the main road again we stopped at a nearby **Scarlet Macaw** nest from which the bird was looking out.

We enjoyed some drinks before and during dinner, also completed the list and discussed next day's program.

Sunday 23rd February 2025

Today we started again early, quarter to 6am and spent almost 3 hours in the garden but more on the forest trails. We saw and heard close to 50 species and again had some really good observations. At the beginning we had **Common Pauraque**. Later **Long-billed Hermit** and the usual **Blue-throated Goldentails**.

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At the beginning of the forest trail the group saw a largish, whitish bird disappearing. Gabor looked in another direction so he guessed perhaps it was a White Ibis? He went into a deeper part of the forest and soon very excitedly came back with the news that among the trees he found a White Hawk perched. Brought the group closer but it was not easy to see the bird among the dense vegetation. Then miracle happened and this beautiful raptor flew out and perched almost literally above our heads! Wow, what a view! We spent a long time with admiring this brave bird, taking photos, even videos.

Later on we had several of the species we

found already before but there were some new ones as well such as **Northern Bentbill**, **Eye-ringed Flatbill**, **Common Tody-Flycatcher**. **Bright-rumped Attila** we just heard but Gabor told the story about its Hungarian connection.

Unfortunately we just heard the incredible call of **Long-tailed Manakin** and also once **Velvety Manakin**. **Blue-black Grosbeak** and **Long-billed Gnatwren** called as well but from a distance.

Saw **Chestnut-sided Warbler** and **Blue-grey Tanagers**, plus several species from previous visits.

The most exciting mammal observation happened when we tested our balance crossing back a side branch of a river. A few lucky people managed to have a glimpse a **Tayra**, which is an elusive large Mustellid of good forests.



Finally we retreated our steps because Gabor said he could hear the distant call of the breakfast. So we had a late breakfast and then crossed the river on the bridge which lead us to another part of the hotel property. We spent a lot of time to watch a sunbathing **Bare-throated Tiger-heron** which gave us a special show with an interesting pose. **Rufous-tailed Hummingbird** was around and Gabor identified a **Double-toothed Kite** in the sky beside the **Black** and **Turkey Vultures**. We enjoyed the view of 2 **Gartered Trogons** and 2 **Yellow-throated Toucans** as well. Added **Social Flycatcher** and **Lesser Greenlet** as well to the list.

We finished birding around 11am so we had another hour to pack, checking out and then have our final lunch at this bird-rich place. We had a hard time to leave this wonderful place and Andi explained that perhaps we were one of the last birding groups here because the place was bought up by Marriott, so they will close it soon and then remodel and reopen just next year. But lot of things will change and prices won't be the same either.

We started our journey South alongside the Pacific coast after 2pm. Since it was Sunday the only road was full with local families travelling from the beach



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back to the towns, so instead of 2 it was about 2,5 hours to reach our next accommodation. The style was completely different here, it was a much smaller place run by a family but the garden and the strategic location proved it right. After checking in we still had a little time to look around in the garden and its vicinity. We had great view of some loud **Red-lored Parrots** and **Riverside Wren**.

For dinner we had pasta with home-made pasta and salad, followed by flan.

Monday 24th February 2025

We asked our hosts, Roman and Bettina to prepare a late breakfast, so we can have an early visit of a nearby birding hotspot.

So today we started early at 6am with a short drive to Hacienda Baru where we made and almost 4 hours long birding in their primary and secondary forest at the edge of a mangrove.

We had almost 50 species of birds and many mammals as well, including **White-nosed Coati, Agouti, Collared Pecari** and **Red-tailed Squirrels**. We tried hard to find Sloth as well, but that happened a bit later.

The long list of birds included many which we saw before but there were a lot new ones as well. One of the really hard one was **White-throated Crake** which was so close that we almost could step on it still most of us could not really get a good glimpse of it. **Fiery-billed Aracaris** and **Crimson-fronted Parakeets** were seen well. **Chiriqui Foliage-gleaner** was a great find.



Andi and Gabor new a few spots where they tried hard to find the breath-taking **Orange-collared Manakin**.

After a while finally everybody had a good view of this little treasure. **Tawny-crowned Greenlet** was just heard and Gabor was sure that same thing will happen with **Black-bellied Wren** but to his great surprise we actually not just could see them but some made pictures as well. **Montezuma Oropendola** was new and we had **White-breasted Wood-Wren** as well. On the way back Gabor found a small ant-swarm which attracted several species which cherry-picked the great moving protein source as they marched. **Gray-**

headed Tanagers, antbirds, antshrikes, Orange-billed Sparrows, Tawny-winged and **Cocoa Woodcreepers** followed the ants. And of course us did the same thing for a while.

Apart from the usual tanagers we saw some **Golden-hooded Tanagers** as well and a few **Morelet's Seedeaters**.

We were quite tired and hungry by the time we finished the birding circle so we quickly went back to our little hotelito and had an excellent late breakfast followed by a longish siesta which everybody spent in different way. Some just rested, some plunged into the swimming pool and others were resting and watching birds and butterflies at the terrace where the hummingbird feeders attracted some new species such as **White-necked Jacobin, Long-billed Starthroat, Garden Emerald, Crowned Woodnymph** and **Scaly-breasted Hummingbird**. **Purple-crowned Fairy** and **Rufous-tailed Hummingbird** was also around. We had perfect view of **Lesson's Motmot** as well. We found **Yellow-olive Flatbill, Gray-breasted Martin** and **Tennessee Warbler** as well.

Around 2pm we went back to Hacienda Baru and had a late lunch and some drink before we visited another, bit more open trail on the other side of the road. Actually before hitting the trail we found a **3-toed Sloth** which everybody waited so much.

We had different doves and pigeon here, namely **Pale-vented Pigeon, Ruddy Ground-dove, White-tipped Dove** and **White-winged Dove**. We heard **White-necked Puffbird** but we had to wait more to see this species. **Golden-naped Woodpecker** and **Streak-headed Woodcreeper** were great new species. The latter one was identified by its call as well. We saw briefly an **Orange-collared Manakin** and also **Yellow-olive Flatbill**. We could compare **Great-crested Flycatcher** with **Boat-billed** and had saw or heard many of previously

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encountered species as well. After about 2 hours and 2 kilometres behind us we went back to Hacienda Baru from where we drove further South to Dominicalito Beach to enjoy the sunset and the panoramic view of the wild, tropical beach.



Of course we noticed the huge squadrons of **Brown Pelicans** and the noisy groups of **Great-tailed Grackles**, plus few **Black and Turkey Vultures** but the most exciting finding by Gabor was a male **Red-legged Honeycreeper** visiting flowers at the top of a tree.



After this breathtaking view we needed just a great dinner for which Andi and Gabor knew a perfect place nearby. Ricar2 restaurant was surely not a usual one, partly because beside the cars in the parking lot there was a commercial Italian aircraft transformed into a small hotel and in the restaurant there was a swimming pool as well to cool down during hot days. But most importantly they offered great variety of good food and drinks with excellent service. We had a hard time to finish our large portions, however by this time all group members were aware that with Luis and Gabor around no food ended up in waste.

Tuesday 25th February 2025

For a change this time we asked an earlier breakfast and after that we immediately checked out and said goodbye to our hosts and travelled all packed to Uvita where we stopped at the Whale-tour provider company which Andi and Gabor knew for many years. From here after the formalities we drove closer to the entrance of the **Marina Ballena National Park** where we parked. The group split, the majority went on the whale and dolphin watching tour, while

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Andy, Philip, Amanda, Andi and Gabor walked first at the sandy beach and then continued their discovery walk along a shadier trail.

But before we split right at the entrance we watched another **3-toed Sloth** hiding in the dense vegetation. Both groups had great observations at their destinations, so those on the boat encountered twice **Humpback Whales**, once a female with a baby. Also they saw dolphins, pelicans, gulls, **Magnificent Frigatebirds** and even **Cocos Booby**.

Those who were on the trails found dozens of species including several new ones or previously seen ones but with better views than before. **White-necked Puffbird, Tawny-winged Woodcreeper and Cabanis's Wren** all good examples.

We spent a lot of time with a great group of Scarlet Macaws who were not just very loud, but also very active, playing with each other, flying from one branch to another, so it was a real show for sure.

From a small lookout platform we also could directly look down on the Whale-tail form geological formation which was created by different constant currents depositing sand during a long period of time. The whole scenery changed quickly with the tide.

As temperature rose we retreated our steps and at a little confluence of a small river we watched **Whimbrel, Spotted Sandpiper, Willet, White Ibis, Little Blue Heron, Tricolored Heron and Snowy Egret. Ringed Kingfisher** was new as well.

We refreshed ourselves while waiting for the boat group and then when we met exchanged our stories and made a quick decision to travel further South where Andi and Gabor knew a small restaurant with beautiful green surroundings. Although we ordered everything by phone the staff was surprised when we arrived and they were not ready, so we decided to walk first till the beach and at the coastal strip of forest. Temperature and humidity were really high so we hardly could see anything but a female **Velvety Manakin** was a great find and at the beach a lonely **Whimbrel** stood motionless.



After a slow but tasty lunch and some cold drinks we travelled to the nearby hotel which was up on a small hill with incredible panoramic view of the Pacific Ocean and the surrounding lush forested hills. Add to this an infinity pool with a good bar and fantastic colourful birds just around....well, we heard no complaints for sure.

After 4pm Gabor dragged the group to a nearby short but steep trail where birding was not easy but finally we saw **Spot-crowned Euphonia, Bananaquit, White-necked Jacobin, Purple-crowned Fairy** but it was much easier in the garden where we saw several large, colourful species such as **Gray-headed**

Chachalaca, Yellow-throated Toucan, Red-lore Amazon, Scarlet Macaw and displaying **Montezuma Oropendolas**.

We enjoyed the sunset either from or around the pool which was followed by an excellent dinner.

Wednesday 26th February 2025

Today we started early again at 5.45 and birded till 8am. We heard **Great Tinamou, Slaty-tailed Trogon and Gray-cowled Wood-rail** from a distance. **Northern Black-throated Trogon** was new and we had **Fiery-billed Aracari. Both Mealy and Red-lore Amazons** were very active. We saw both **Black-crowned and Masked Tityra** which offered a good comparison. **Philadelphia Vireo, Spot-crowned Euphonia, Blue Dacnis, Shining Honeycreeper and Melodious Blackbird** were all new. Within a bit more than 2 hours we heard and saw almost 50 species.

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At 8am we had a filling breakfast and soon we had to say goodbye to this beautiful spot where we all could imagine to stay another week! But more exciting habitats and wildlife waited for us, so soon we continued our journey, this time towards **Piedras Blancas National Park**.

Within less than 2 hours we reached our first birding area which was mainly a semi-abandoned agricultural field with watery, marshy patches and a small stream. One of the first things we found were 2 **King Vultures**, one full adult and another immature which we could observe very well. We also saw **Roadside, Gray-lined and Short-tailed Hawks**.



A bit further we watched **Southern Lapwings, Northern Jacana, Little Blue Heron and Great Egret**. A beautiful new species was **Red-breasted Meadowlark and Bronzed Cowbird, plus Blue-black Grassquit**. There were dozens of species around which we had seen before.

Finally we went a bit further to reach our next accommodation, the Esquinas Lodge which has a large private forest just next to the **Piedras Blancas National Park**.

The very first wonderful bird was a female **Great Curassow** which we admired for a while. Later on just next to the reception we found a pair of **Baird's Trogons** at their nest. **Riverside Wren** and **Black-striped Sparrow** hopped around and there were several **Scarlet-rumped Tanagers** as well. Beside the bar **Sac-winged Bats** roosted.

After checking in and having our excellent lunch everybody could enjoy a bit of siesta time during the hottest part of the day. At 4pm we gathered again and spent almost 2 hours on the main lodge road and a bit in the forest plus a small wet area. Most of the species we found this afternoon we had before but this time we found a pair of **Great Curassows** so we could compare male and female. They were so much relaxed that actually they approached the group so even with phones we could make great pictures or videos. Later we saw a **Spectacled Caiman** at a pond. Finally we walked back to the lodge, prepared for dinner which was delicious. We did the birdlist and agreed to start early next morning.



Thursday 27th February 2025

We met at 5.45 and made a short walk in the forest, covering about 2 kms casually during 1,5 hours. We heard both **Great and Little Tinamou**, the latter was new. Saw **Gray-cowled Wood-rail** in the garden. We heard **Rufous-tailed Jacamar** but could not attract it closer. **Blue-headed Parrot** and some **Scarlet Macaws** flew across.



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Several endemic **Black-cheeked Ant-Tanagers** were singing loud from early morning at our rooms and later on in the forest as well but it was difficult to see them. **Ochre-bellied Flycatcher** was new as well. We found a long list of previously seen species as well. There were a few **Variable Seedeaters** which we could compare with **Morelet's Seedeater**.



We returned for breakfast, packed our stuff and drove through the **Piedras Blancas National Park** with a few stops. Birding here was not easy but we found another **White Hawk**, some warblers and tanagers, plus hummingbirds.

A partly new road led us through the hilly and densely forested area and finally we arrived to Golfito. Here at the edge of the mangrove-fringed bay Andi and Gabor knew a small place to stop to check birds around. We had **Pale-vented Pigeon, Whimbrel, Willet, Ruddy Turnstone, Least Sandpiper, Laughing Gull, Frigatebird, White Ibis, Little Blue Heron, Tricoloured Heron, Snowy and Western Cattle Egret**, but we spent the most time with a questionable Sandpiper who was literally mud-bathing in front of us, half submerged in a tiny pool. After lot of consideration we were sure that we found a **Solitary Sandpiper**. Suddenly a **Zone-tailed Hawk** flew across with a chick and the whole nest in its talons chased by loads of **Grackles**. The next moment an **Osprey** landed with a freshly caught fish. So there was a lot of action around, we surely were not bored.



A bit further we stopped at a place where we bought some cold drinks and used the facilities before driving up to the hills. This drive was really scenic, basically from sea level we went up till circa 1200meters elevation. It was quite a change both in terms of vegetation but in climate as well, so from now on it was not so hot and humid as before.

We tried hard to find a **Turquoise Cotinga** during driving but had no luck. We had to arrive in time since at our next base at the **Wilson Botanical Garden** meals were served at fixed times. We arrived in good time and after lunch we could get the rooms as well.

We got together around 1.30pm at the terrace where we were surrounded by birds, many of them were new during the tour. Several **Swallow-tailed Kites** were swooping in the air gracefully. **White-crowned Parrots** and **Crimson-fronted Parakeets** were loud. **Common Tody Flycatcher, Mistletoe Tyrannulet**

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and **Thick-billed Euphonia** were all new. A stunning male **Green Honeycreeper** offered great views while **Silver-throated Tanagers** tried to steal the show. Gabor pointed out a distant **Crested Oropendola** which much later we had in front of us eating bananas. Late afternoon we had a short walk in the garden when we heard **Great Tinamou and Black-faced Antthrush** and found **Gray-headed Chachalaca, Crested Guan, Lesson's Motmot and Bright-rumped Attila**. But perhaps the best new finds were **Rufous-breasted Wrens and Bay-headed Tanagers**. Mammal-wise **Pygmy Squirrel** was an interesting find in the forest beside the omnipresent **Agoutis**.

At 6pm we gathered to have dinner and we also discussed the species list. During the evening and partly during the night we had heavy rain.

Friday 28th February 2025



We had early breakfast and then gathered at the terrace where we met with Jeisson who was born and raised here, so knew a lot about the botanical garden and most of the living creatures in it. He also shared his extensive knowledge about the history of Wilsons and the garden itself and during a 3-hour-long circle he pointed out many interesting species, including close to 50 birds.

Already from the restaurant we saw spectacular birds such as **Scaled Pigeons, Blue-headed Parrots, White-crowned Parrots, Crimson-fronted Parakeets, Crested Oropendolas, Fiery-billed Aracaris** and **Crested Guans**. What an incredible

crowd!

Great variety of tanagers were around as well and Scarlet-thighed Dacnis was new. **Long-billed Starthroat** visited a nearby bush and **Charming Hummingbird** gathered nectar from the flowering tree competing with **Rufous-tailed Hummingbird**.

Jeisson took us to a nearby tree where on the top like little devil, a male **White-crested Coquette** looked down at us. What an incredible little bird! Later during the walk he pointed out the tiny nest which the female visited from time to time.

Vaux's Swifts and Swallow-tailed Kites were criss-crossing the sky above us. We found **Gartered Trogon** and **Lesson's Motmot** as well. **Yellow-**



bellied Elaenia, Common Chlorospingus and **Rufous-collared Sparrow** was new. We



really enjoyed a good number of **Golden-hooded Tanagers** as well. Jeisson also showed us a **Flat-nosed Anolis**.

Later we continued without Jeisson and still found some new birds like **Ruddy Pigeon, Yellow-bellied Flycatcher and Black-and-White Warbler**.

Mark was not bored either, the garden attracted several new butterfly species as well.

When temperature started to rise and we got tired we finished the circle and we met again for lunch.

After a bit of siesta time we asked Luis to drive up to a nearby ridge where we wanted to show a rare, unique bird, **Black-chested Jay**. Jeisson said the road is much better than last year. Well, neither him nor us could imagine that recently a landslide and the last night's additional rain made it impossible to drive up. Luis heroically drove through the muddiest part but at the steep slope it was not possible to continue. For safety reasons we left the vehicle, let him turn back empty and then we got in again to struggle back. As an alternative we birded alongside the road which yielded **Crested Guan, Yellow-throated Toucan, White-crowned Parrot** and plenty

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of **Crimson-fronted Parakeets**, but 2 new species as well, **Orange-billed Nightingale-Thrush** and **Chestnut-capped Warbler**. **Vaux's Swifts** and **Swallow-tailed Kites** were present in good numbers here as well.

From here we drove back to the garden and Gabor offered another hour birding for those who still had some energy left. We visited the really tall lookout tower. Mark lead us back on a forest shortcut. Apart from the usual birds we heard **Barred Forest Falcon** and **White-throated Spadebill**. But we also saw some new species, namely **Olivaceous Woodcreeper** and **Golden-winged Warbler**.

This was another great day full with so many interesting observations.

Saturday 1st March 2025



Today we started with an early breakfast and we decided to spend the rest of the time with enjoying the terrace and the omnipresent birds here till our 9am departure from this excellent area. Needless to say that we had again dozens of species around.

First Gabor heard and then gradually attracted closer a **Collared Trogon**. Heard again **Barred Forest Falcon**. We could compare **Crested and Yellow-headed Caracara** as well. **Wedge-billed Woodcreeper** was new as well. At the terrace we had 8 Tanager species including a new one, **Speckled Tanager**. **Green Honeycreeper**, **Baltimore Oriole**, **Buff-throated Saltator** added even more colour to the crowd.

What a farewell morning!

Finally at 9am we had to leave and started a scenic drive on the ridge of the mountains, several times alongside mountain rivers and different sections of the international **La Amistad/Friendship National Park**, shared by Panama and Costa Rica.

It was about 3 hours drive including a restroom stop to reach a panoramic site with a restaurant which not just offered excellent food and juices but also hummingbird and fruit feeders. What is more it was at a good elevation with around 1600meters which offered several species which were not possible much lower or much higher. So we had several **Green-crowned Brilliant** and learned how to distinguish males, females and immature individuals. Also we had a rarely seen **Brown Violetear**, plus **White-throated Mountain-**

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gem, **Snowy-bellied Hummingbird**, **Rufous-tailed Hummingbird**, **Volcano Hummingbird** and large **Violet Sabrewings**.



There were a few **Gray-headed Chachalacas**, **Red-crowned Woodpecker**, **Great-tailed Grackle** and **Streaked Saltator**, which we missed at **Wilson's Botanical Garden**. Apart from the usual **Black** and **Turkey Vultures** we had excellent views of **Crested Caracara** and **Swallow-tailed Kite**.

Mark as usual looked for butterflies but also found a new species for the tour, **Yellow-faced Grassquit**.

After getting full with great food, drink and birding experiences about 1,5 hours later we continued our drive uphill. Half an hour later we stopped at around 3000-meters ASL which means we gained another 1400-meters elevation! This was another favourite birding place of Andi and Gabor partly because of the lush cloud forest vegetation, partly because it offers a flat, easy terrain which is extremely rare in the mountains.

We spent just half an hour here so we could not build up a long list but almost anything we found was new! We had several **Sooty Thrushes** and a **Mountain Thrush**, several lovely

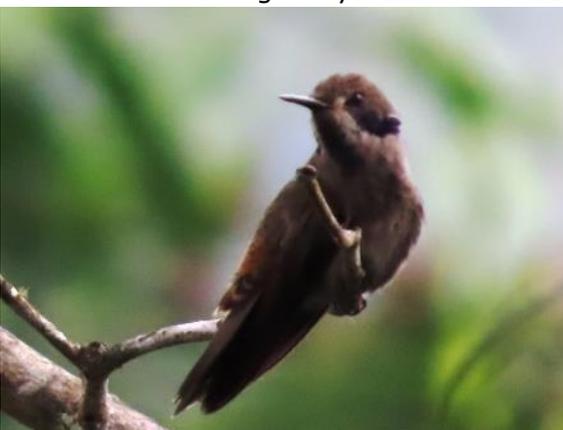
Long-tailed Silky-Flycatchers and a few **Yellow-thighed Brushfinches**. This time we saw **Volcano Hummingbird** not on a feeder but on mountain flowers and also found a **Mountain Elaenia**. But perhaps the biggest surprise was that Gabor could lure out a very cooperative **Timberline Wren** which was happily sit out and sang a song in front of us, eye-level.

It was also interesting to see a semi-abandoned little settlement with a church, school buildings and sport fields. Soon we passed the cloudy **Cerro de La Muerte** with its highest point but we planned to return here later. Now we continued to the **Savegre Valley** which is the seasonal home of Gabor and Andi and was our base for the last 3 nights. As we left the old Interamericana road and descended in this picturesque mountain valley we stopped at Miriam's Restaurant. Donna Miriam and family is a good friend of Gabor and Andi and they are neighbours.

The family-owned restaurant not just offers excellent, traditional food but they have extensive feeder systems so there is always a good crowd of birds around.



The hummingbird feeders attracted Lesser Violetears, Talamanca Hummingbirds, Fiery-throated Hummingbirds, White-throated Mountain-gem and Volcano Hummingbirds. There were several noisy **Acorn Woodpeckers** and one **Hairy Woodpecker**. It was a perfect place to compare **Clay-colored, Mountain** and **Sooty Thrushes**. We heard a **Bat Falcon** and a **Golden-browed Chlorophonia** as well. Both were seen on following days. We learned to distinguish **Common and Sooty-capped Chlorospingus**.



Chlorospingus.

Rufous-collared Sparrows and **Large-footed Finches** hopped around and with great luck we found **Spotted Wood-Quails** as well.

Flame-colored Tanagers were common and we had **Baltimore Oriole, Tennessee Warbler and Wilson's Warbler** as well.

We spent an hour here with this birding bonanza and then rolled a little bit further down till the Dantica Lodge which was our home for the last 3 nights.

Some of the group members got a room close to the restaurant while others had theirs deep in the forest but with what a view and surroundings! Luckily young and strong guys helped with the luggage. The

rooms, decoration and style was simply unique, unforgettable.

We gathered again for dinner which was excellent. Today's list was again a long one.

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Sunday 2nd March 2025

Those who started early before breakfast could hear **Costa Rican Pygmy-Owl** and spot 2 **Bat Falcons** as well. **Dark Pewee** was found by Carol and also **Spotted Wood-Quail**.



After breakfast we descended further down in the valley where at another favourite site of Andi and Gabor we birded alongside the road. Here **Collared Redstart, Black-cheeked Warbler and Flame-throated Warbler** were all new, plus we heard the metallic, almost surreal call of **Black-faced Solitaire**.

We searched **Resplendant Quetzal** as well which was found later on by a local friend, Carlos with whom we planned a half day birding next day. This amazing male Quetzal we managed to follow for quite a while and luckily it moved alongside the road, once perched really up close. It was a superb experience to watch this enigmatic, really unique bird, especially so close.

We also heard **Rufous-browed Peppershrike** and saw some of the last day's birds as well.

Later on we drove even further down where about at 2000 meters elevation we started an about 2,5 hours long birding at a lovely riverside trail in dense mountain forest.

We saw and heard 30 species at this lovely walk out of which we just mention mainly the new ones such as **Spot-crowned Woodcreeper, Ruddy Treerunner, Tufted and Yellowish Flycatcher**.

We all had an upclose view of a **Collared Trogon**. A group of **Sulphur-winged Parakeets** flew above us a few times and once Gabor managed to find them in a large distance feeding in the canopy.

Andi found a **Black Guan** which we all witnessed drinking from the fast running mountain river. At another section we all managed to see both the lovely **Torrent Tyrannulet** and **American Dipper**. Hummingbird included **Lesser Violetear, Green-crowned Brilliant, Volcano Hummingbird and Violet Sabrewing. Gray-breasted Wood-Wren and Ruddy-capped Nightingale-Thrush** were new, also **Black-throated Green Warbler**. Unfortunately not everybody could see **Rose-breasted Grosbeak** but we all enjoyed the view of one of the nicest Tanagers, **Spangle-cheeked Tanager**.



We finished birding after 12.30pm and were ready to rest and have a great lunch and some refreshments.

All this was offered by a nearby Kahawa restaurant. What is more, after lunch we could wonder around a bit in their beautiful garden where we saw **Flame-colored Tanagers and Flame-throated Warblers, Mountain Elaenia** and with quite a lot of difficulties we saw a **Northern Emerald Toucanet** as well.

From here we decided to drive up back to the Miriam's Restaurant but stopped at the lodge for those who wanted to enjoy their panoramic rooms.

At the restaurant it was another possibility to admire the birds at the busy feeders and later on we gathered for dinner as well.

After finishing the list we also discussed the plan for next day.

Monday 3rd March 2025

This was our last full day birding during the holiday, so we decided to visit 2 completely different areas. The first one was a parallel valley with the Savegre Valley where we spent the

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day before which crossed **Los Quetzales National Park** and the second one was the top of the mountain, **Cerro de la Muerte**.



For the morning Andi and Gabor asked their friend, Carlos to help find some more rarities. He did a great job and with the combined forces of the group we could find several interesting species. The strategy was that we drove step by step down, stopping at suitable spots, walking down while birding and ask Luis to pick us up later. With this method we meandered down about 10 kilometres and found 24 species. Ruddy Pigeon, Black-capped Flycatcher and Black-billed Nightingale-Thrush were new. We saw again a Resplendant Quetzal and also Collared Trogon. A group of White-collared Swifts flew across. Ochraceous Pewee was found as well. Unfortunately Black-faced Solitaire we heard several times, sometimes pretty close, but only Carlos had a good view when he walked up to his car. Yellow-bellied Siskin we saw just shortly but the two main targets, Black-and-yellow Silky-flycatcher and Golden-browed Chlorophonia we all could see amazingly

well. Both species were represented by male individuals, full colours.

During birding we bumped into 3 birders in a car with whom Andi and Gabor started to talk and soon it turned out they were Hungarian twitchers. What a small World!

At noon we said goodbyes to Carlos and drove back to a traditional Soda = small Costa Rican restaurant where we ordered from a simple menu. It was clear that it is not a place heavily visited by foreign groups since the menu was just in Spanish. But the food and drinks were great and not a small portion either.

From here we drove up to the **Cerro de la Muerte** all the way up till the communication towers from where we walked around a bit. First we searched **Peg-billed Finch** and **Volcano Junco** which after a while we both found. We also went out to a rocky viewpoint with an ever-changing cloudy view of the surroundings. Philip pointed out a **Red-tailed Hawk** and we had **Mountain Elaenia** as well. We lost Mark not the first time but luckily found him again.

At a final side trail for most of the group it was getting too much partly because of the previous rains, partly because perhaps the elevation.

Still we had **Black-capped Flycatcher**, **Talamanca Hummingbird**, **Volcano Hummingbird**, **Timberline Wren** and other previously seen species.



Finally we drove back to the Dantica Lodge so everybody could enjoy a bit more the lovely room and its amazing surroundings. The farewell dinner caused a great surprise since it turned out that Philip and Amanda smuggled a bottle of wine all the way from South Africa. What is more, it was wrapped in a nice paper so was not possible to see what type of wine was it. So Philip told the story that it was from a famous winery and it got a very high rank. We had to taste and figure it out. Although Gabor smelled and tasted it and reminded him very much to a certain type he did not dare to guess that it was a Hungarian origin Hárslevelű =

Lindenleaf!! Wow, what a surprise!

Gabor talked a lot about the 36 wine regions in Hungary and why the famous Californian Napa Valley wine originates from Hungary.

Andi and Gabor expressed they wish that once they can show their original home country as well to the group where beside the long list of birds they could offer the best Hungarian wines and tasty food as well.

We all tried to summarize the tour but it was impossible to mention all the highlights.

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Tuesday 4th March 2025

Last morning after breakfast and before leaving we still heard Resplendant Quetzal and Rufous-browed Peppershrike. Many other previously seen birds were around but when packing was finished Gabor and Andi had to say goodbyes to the group.



Luis patiently drove through the hills and later crossed Carthago and San Jose but still giving a last shopping possibility before arriving to the airport.



During the way Philip found his 250th species on the tour, **White-tailed Kite** which was followed by **House Sparrow** at the airport. A few lucky people had to wait just a few hours but for others it was long wait until the departure. Carol setup the record with the longest travel for sure.

Andi and Gabor surely will dream about to have the same group once either for a Northern Costa Rica circle or to their Kondor Ecolodge in Hungary. They hope it is not just their dreams



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