

Costa Rica

Naturetrek Tour Report

4 - 19 February 2017



Rufous-tailed Jacamar at La Selva



Hoffman's Two-toed Sloth with youngster at La Selva



Yellow-thighed Finch – Savegre



Turquoise-browed Motmot – Tarcoles River

Report and images by Rosie Filipiak



Naturetrek

Mingledown Barn

Wolf's Lane

Chawton

Alton

Hampshire

GU34 3HJ

UK

T: +44 (0)1962 733051

E: info@naturetrek.co.uk

W: www.naturetrek.co.uk

Tour participants: Erick Castro (local guide) & Wilson (driver) with 11 Naturetrek clients

Acknowledgment

Naturetrek is grateful to Rosie Filipiak, a client on this tour, for making available her tour diary and images, which have been used as the basis for an account of this wonderful tour. Whilst Rosie flew to and from Costa Rica via Newark, the majority of the group flew both ways on direct British Airways flights, to and from London Gatwick.

Day 1

Saturday 4th November

I arrived mid-evening into San Jose after my flight from the UK via Newark and it was straight to bed on arriving at the Hotel Bougainvillea in Heredia.

Day 2

Sunday 5th November

At breakfast I met the rest of the Naturetrek group, Erick our birding guide, and Wilson our driver. The first morning we drove over to the Caribbean side and the first stop was at the Cinchona Mirador. There are lots of birdfeeders here and a pair of Emerald Toucanets gave perfect views for the photographers. We also spotted the endemic Coppery-headed Emerald hummingbird, Red-headed Barbet and Silver-throated Tanager.

Then onwards and the next stop was to walk down the valley towards Virgen de Socorro, a bit rainy here but we saw some nice birds including a pair of White Hawks and a large Tiger Rat Snake some five to six feet long. Probably the best bird today was the Buff-rumped Warbler down at the river: with its' bobbing tail, the buff rump showed like flashes of light against its' dark colouring and the gloom in the riverbed. On the way back up we stopped at the La Paz waterfall to look for the Torrent Tyranulet, and it was there together with a Black Phoebe.

We had a very nice lunch in 'Freddo Fresca', including strawberry milkshakes made from fruit that is grown locally in this area, and afterwards we walked through the restaurant's small hummingbird gallery, picking up another couple of hummingbird species including seeing a nice male Magenta-throated Woodstar.

Back to the hotel and some of us took advantage of the time before dinner to walk around the large hotel gardens full of orchids and other flowers, which attract plenty birds including House Wren and Rufous-naped Wren.

Day 3

Monday 6th November

Breakfast was at 6.30am to get off by 7.30am. It was a Monday and the first day back to school after the holidays and the traffic through and around San Jose was very heavy. Finally we broke free and started up the long climb out of the central valley and into the Talamanca Mountains, leaving the urban sprawl behind.

First stop was at the Paraiso del Quetzal. We walked the final 200 metres down to the restaurant, spotting Black-billed Nightingale-Thrush, Golden-browed Chlorophenia and Large-footed Finch on the way. We then spent an

enjoyable half hour watching the hummingbird feeders before lunch, with the Fiery-throated Hummingbird being the big draw.

After lunch we continued the climb into the mountains, eventually turning off towards Hotel Savegre. The road heads steeply downhill into the gorge and we stopped in a couple of places for birding. Some four Swallow-tailed Kites were seen; beautiful birds with their white underparts, forked tail and fast flight. One roadside stop had a good mixed flock going through which provided Ruddy Treecreeper, Spot-crowned Woodcreeper and the striking Flame-coloured Warbler and Collared Redstart.

Down to the bottom of the valley and we followed the course of the Savegre River along to the lodge, where we just had time for a little birding before dark and saw Flame-coloured Tanagers, a Stripe-tailed Hummingbird and a very bold White-throated Mountain-gem.

Day 4

Tuesday 7th November

An early start and we were ready by 5.30am to go back up the entrance road a little way, to an area where Quetzal had been regularly seen. In a small field with horses, just before we started uphill, we stopped as there were about five Black Guans in the field and one drinking from the stream close to the road. Then we continued on, stopping around the next corner to join several other groups on the 'quetzal hunt'. After about an hour of searching, a pair was spotted in the trees close to where we'd seen the Black Guans. The Quetzal were a bit flighty with the male coyly peeking from behind a tree trunk, but the approximately 35 'twitchers' out that morning all got sightings of both male and female Quetzal before they disappeared off into the trees.

Back to the lodge for breakfast then back out into the sunshine and we were taken by 4WD up to the top of the Los Robles trail, which is in the oak forest behind the lodge. We walked from about 2,400 metres up to about 2,530 metres, then all the way back downhill to the lodge, seeing some good birds along the way including Spotted Wood-Quail, Collared Trogon, Ornate Hawk-Eagle and Spangle-cheeked Tanager. There were also lots of butterflies seen on this trail.

After lunch and a short rest, it was back out for an afternoon walk down through the gardens, past the biodigester, across the bridge then along the riverside. We got excellent views of a Long-tailed Silky-flycatcher in the gardens, and then a Yellow-thighed Finch showed off for us right next to the path in the forest. But the high point was the Quetzal pair in a small tree barely 20 metres in front of us along the riverside walk. We all got superb views of the birds; very much better than this morning!

Day 5

Wednesday 8th November

An early morning walk through the gardens gave us good sightings of male Volcano Hummingbird and Ruddy-capped Nightingale-Thrush. After breakfast it was off and up the hill, and then we just kept on going up, right into the paramo. Here we were at about 11,000 feet and the vegetation was very different; short shrubs and bushes about four to six feet high and very dry looking. It was very sunny so our pursuit of the Volcano Junco was not in ideal conditions. After about an hour and a bit we were just heading off, having had no success, when our guide heard a Junco and we tried one last time. There was an adult on the ground under a patch of

vegetation, busy feeding a youngster, and as we all stood watching with our binoculars, the two birds just got closer and closer, seemingly oblivious to our presence, until they were out on the road at our feet.

Then it was onwards and down, out of the mountains to the Pacific side. It was a long way down and then a long drive along the road towards Carara, however the road along the coast is very long and straight, so smooth travelling. We bird spotted along the way from the minibus, with a stop by the San Isidro waterworks which had Black-bellied Whistling Duck, Blue-winged Teal, Black-necked Stilt and Southern Lapwing. Other good roadside sightings were Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, Yellow-headed Caracara and a Roadside Hawk catching some prey. Coming into the entrance to the Hotel Villa Lapas we saw a Scarlet Macaw in a tree, and a Fiery-billed Aracari as we checked in. In a quick walk before dark I saw Basilisk Lizards on rocks in the river and a Turnip-tailed Gecko seems to live in my bathroom.

Day 6

Thursday 9th November

We were up early to see a pair of Spectacled Owls leaving their roost in the trees near the dining room. Then we had an hour's birding in the hotel grounds before breakfast where we spotted Gartered and Slaty-tailed Trogons, a Blue-crowned Motmot and Costa Rican Swifts overhead.

After breakfast it was off to Carara National Park and a walk along the trails through the lowland rainforest. We were lucky to come upon an army ant swarm with its attendant antbirds, antshrikes, antthrush and woodcreepers. High in a tree we saw a pair of Scarlet Macaws mating, and we also saw another three Trogon species: Black-headed, Black-throated and Baird's. In a small clearing, we looked across a stream and up into a large tree which had about five Crested Guans in it, also a Black-mandibled Toucan and a family of Spider Monkeys. A second mixed feeding flock moving through the trees had Rose-throated and White-shouldered Becards, and down at ground level we spotted a Great Tinamou, which looked like a big round stone and was so well camouflaged. It was not easy to see until it started to move and feed. Both Blue-capped and Red-capped Manikins were seen, and after a humid but bird-filled morning, it was good to be greeted back at the bus with cold pineapple and mango slices.

Lunch and a short rest, then it was down to Tarcoles to get on the boat for a trip, firstly upriver, then into one of the tidal channels of the mangroves; although this trip is additional, everyone had opted to go on it. There were so many heron species to be seen, alongside other interesting birds such as Muscovy Duck, Green, Ringed and Pygmy Kingfishers, and waders such as Willet, Whimbrel and a pair of Stone-curlew. There were also a lot of American Crocodiles, mostly small but one very large one hauled up on the riverbank. A Turquoise-browed Motmot was spotted in a tree beside the river and White Ibis and Roseate Spoonbills were in the mangrove trees. As dusk was falling we headed back to the dock. Lots of Spotted Sandpipers flew past the boat heading to roost somewhere, and White Ibis flew in the other direction, again heading to their night-time roost. Final birds of the day were the Lesser Nighthawks flying above the mangroves catching insects.

Day 7

Friday 10th November

In our walk before breakfast through the hotel grounds and along beside the river, we saw Riverside Wren, Golden-hooded Tanager, Piratic Flycatcher and Masked Tityra, amongst others. I just had enough time before we had to leave to find the Painted Buntings which others had seen outside one of the cabins the day before.

Then it was off, heading along the coast to La Ensenada. En route we saw Laughing Falcon, Inca Dove and White-lored Gnatcatcher. It was also very noticeable how much the vegetation changed along the way to very dry forest. We arrived at La Ensenada in time for lunch and it wasn't long before the White-throated Magpie-Jays turned up, looking to pinch some food from the lunch table.

After lunch we had time for a rest but I explored a little. The Royal Terns lined up along the little jetty at the beach were very photogenic, and scrutiny of my photograph later showed there was one lone Sandwich Tern amongst them. I could hear a Howler Monkey calling and eventually found it high in a large tree, intent on now dozing the afternoon away.

But for us no such leisure and it was off to the Salinas. These working salt pans attract the waders when the tide comes in, and we saw Semi-palmated and Wilson's Plovers, Western and Semi-palmated Sandpipers, Whimbrel, Willet and Stilts. We also saw Lesser Yellowlegs and Stilt Sandpiper, and a number of Wood Storks flew over. A short walk through the mangroves to the fields and Tropical Kingbirds seemed to be on every tree, but we also saw a lovely male Rose-breasted Grosbeak, White-collared Seedeaters and a Green-breasted Mango feeding on a flowering tree. On the drive back in to the hotel there was a Stripe-headed Sparrow on a fence.

Day 8

Saturday 11th November

It was a 5.30am start and off in the boat along the coast to the mangroves. Half way along, a sandbank held a large flock of Black Skimmers as well as Royal Tern and Laughing Gull. Into the mangroves and as the tide continued to go out, herons and other waders were appearing to feed on the mud. New waders for today were Grey Plover and Dowitcher. Small birds in the mangrove trees included Mangrove Vireo and American Redstart, and as we left the mangroves we passed a large tree festooned with Frigatebirds.

The tide was well out by now so it was a beach landing for us from the boat, just in time for breakfast. It was very hot but we had a short walk after breakfast, finally catching a glimpse of the Ferruginous Pygmy Owl that had been calling and a nice pair of White-necked Puffbird up in a tree at the edge of one of the hacienda's fields.

After lunch it was off to Solimar hacienda. This is a huge cattle ranch which has a controlled water system which means some areas are always flooded to keep grass available for the cattle, but this also has the bonus of attracting large numbers of birds. The Solimar guide first showed us a Pacific Screech Owl dozing the day away in a tree. It was so well camouflaged against the trunk it was tucked against that even though it was only some 10 feet up, it took a while to actually see it. Then off around the hacienda with our minibus stopping regularly, we soon added several heron species including Boat-billed Heron, also Limpkin, Collared Plover, Snail Kite and White-tailed Kite. We were shown a Jabiru nest high in a tree with three well-grown youngsters in it, and a couple of fields away an adult pair of Jabiru. Heading back to the main ranch buildings we saw American Kestrel and Eastern Meadowlark. We also spotted a couple of Coatis and, trotting through a field by the exit road, a pair of Coyote.

Day 9

Sunday 12th November

A pre-breakfast walk at La Ensenada and we saw a Lineated Woodpecker (a nice change from the almost ubiquitous Hoffman's Woodpecker), Scrub Euphonia, Banded Wren and a Squirrel Cuckoo, amongst others.

After breakfast it was off to Monteverde. En route we did a little birding, notably spotting a Lesser Nighthawk roosting in a roadside tree. The road climbs up out of the flat lowlands and you get good views back down all the way to the coast.

After lunch at Monteverde it was off to the cloudforest reserve and half an hour spent enthralled by the hummers feeding at the 'hummingbird gallery'. The Violet Sabrewings are quite pushy, chasing the smaller Green-crowned Brilliants away from their perches and the feeders too. The birds seem oblivious to people so close to them and on occasions you find one hovering looking at you from just inches away. There was also an Olingo, a mammal similar to a Kinkajou, just by the feeders. We walked back down the road from the 'gallery' with the cloudforest birds making us work hard, but we did manage to see Townsend's Warbler, Slate-throated Redstart, Red-faced Spinetail and Ochraceous Wren, and from the minibus as we left the reserve, roadside views of a pair of Blue-crowned Motmot.

Day 10

Monday 13th November

We spent three to four hours in the morning walking the trails at Monteverde cloudforest reserve. The birds seemed very elusive, but twice we came upon mixed flocks feeding on army ants. In these small flocks were Chestnut-capped Brush-Finch, Three-striped Warbler, Slaty Antwren, Grey-breasted Woodwren, Red-faced Spinetail, Slaty-backed Nightingale-Thrush and a pair of very beautiful Slaty-throated Redstart. We also saw Ochraceous Wren and Scale-crested Pygmy-Tyrant.

After lunch a shorter trip back to the Monteverde cloudforest added a few more species to this morning's tally: Tufted Flycatcher, Spotted Barbtail, Smoky-brown Woodpecker and an Orange-bellied Trogon which is clearly such a different colour from the Gartered that it deserves its separate species status.

Day 11

Tuesday 14th November

This morning was a travelling one, so we started off early and did some birding en route, adding Yellow-bellied Elaenia, Black-cowled Oriole and roadside views of Broad-tailed Hawk. Out of the hills and it was round Lake Arenal, which was created in the 1970s to provide hydro power for Costa Rica. As we approached the far end of the dam, we stopped to look at an Ornate Hawk-Eagle, and then stopped again just over the dam where there were Howler Monkeys in the trees, and a Great Potoo roosting in a tree, seemingly oblivious to the HGV and bus pit-stop below. Along by Arenal NP we stopped to view three Tropical Screech Owls some 10 feet up a tree, and as we entered the gate of the Arenal Observatory Lodge, the gateman showed us a False Fer-de-Lance snake.

After lunch there was a short wait before our rooms were ready, but there was plenty to occupy us. The fruit had just been put out on the birdfeeder – think large and hauled up 15 feet above the ground! No little birds were allowed, it seemed, as a flock of Montezuma Oropendolas took control. The small birds, Passerini's, Emerald and Golden-headed Tanagers, did have their own table, which also accommodated Red-legged and Green Honeycreepers and a Black-striped Sparrow.

By this time the clouds had drifted past sufficiently to give us a clear view to the top of Arenal volcano. It was tough to tear ourselves away, but we went off for some birding along the road around the lake. We added Pied-billed Grebe, seen on the water, and Grey-crowned Yellowthroat in the grasses at the lake edge. We saw quite a

few other birds in the rough roadside vegetation including Mourning Warbler, White-ruffed Manakin, Great Antshrike and Thick-billed Finch. On the drive back up to the lodge, dusk had fallen and we caught a pair of Parake in the headlights.

Day 12

Wednesday 15th November

Another early start and a scan of the birdfeeders from the viewing area revealed that again fruit had been put up and the Oropendolas were making the most of it. But on the low down feeder were three female Great Curassows and the black and white male put in an appearance too.

Then it was off for a walk through the grounds and down the waterfall trail. Feeding on the garden flowers we saw four new hummers: Crowned Woodnymph, Black-crested Coquette, Purple-crowned Fairy and Brown Violetear. In the forest vegetation we managed a brief view of a Rufous Motmot and a Song Wren, which was making a nest in a patch of moss in a small tree. A troupe of White-nosed Coatis were also in the gardens, initially up a tree feeding but later down on the ground close by the path.

After breakfast it was off to our next destination and en route we added Northern Rough-winged Swallow and Tropical Mockingbird. Arriving at Selva Verde Lodge, it was lunch first then some birding in the gardens on our way to the minibus for the afternoon outing. There were Chestnut-mandibled Toucans and Collared Aracaris in the trees, and up by the carpark, Wilson our driver had found us the first Sloth of the trip, right above where the group minibus was parked.

We set off for Starkey Road and our first stop there gave us another Two-toed Sloth, this time a female with a small youngster. But the best birds of the day just had to be the Great Green Macaws. We saw a pair flying between the tall wild almond trees on which they feed and use for nesting, and they perched long enough for us to get the telescope on them. They rather eclipsed the Bat Falcon we had seen earlier in another wild almond tree.

Day 13

Thursday 16th November

A short pre-breakfast walk and we saw another new hummer, the Bronze-tailed Plumeleteer. After breakfast it was off to La Selva Biological Station, where we got good views of another Two-toed Sloth with its baby lying on top of it. We also spotted a Snowy Cotinga high in a tree and a pair of Short-billed Pigeons. A Rufous-tailed Jacamar was in the trees at the side of the drive and a Parake flew up from the forest edge. We took the trail into the secondary growth, seeing Slaty-tailed Trogon, Pied Puffbird and Vermiculated Screech Owl amongst others. Scanning an area of trees behind the carports we saw a Broad-billed Motmot, Dusky-faced Tanager, Eyring Flatbill and Bay Wren. Then it was back to the lodge for lunch and a short rest.

In the afternoon we went back to La Selva and did a walk along the narrow 'Camino Experimental Sur' where we were lucky to see Olive-backed Quail-Dove, Semi-plumbeous Hawk and a bird I thought I'd never see in my life; an Umbrellabird. Then we went along the 'Camino de Tres Rios' and had a nice sighting of a Great Tinamou, and also added Ochre-bellied Flycatcher and Shining Honeycreeper to our list.

Day 14

Friday 17th November

An early start with a quick breakfast, then approximately 45 minutes down the road to El Tapir, an abandoned flower garden, which is especially good for hummingbirds. We were not disappointed and had great views of male and female Snowcap, Crowned Woodnymph and Green Thorntail.

Then it was on to Braulio Carrillo NP and a walk along the 'Sendero Las Palmas'. A Grey-headed Kite passed overhead and we found a mixed flock of small birds which included Black and Yellow Tanagers, Brown-billed Scythbill and Streak-crowned Antvireo. We then walked the 'Sendero El Ceiba'. Again it was difficult to spot birds, but as we came to the end of the trail, just at the roadside there was another mixed foraging flock which included Tawny-crested Tanager, White-shouldered Tanager and Russet Antshrike.

Lunch at a local restaurant was followed by a visit to a local artist's garden where feeders attract many birds. We saw both Long-billed and Stripe-throated Hermits, White-tipped Sicklebill, Greyish Saltator and Grey-necked Wood-Rail, amongst others. Then along to a patch of secondary forest where we were shown two roosting Crested Owls and a nesting White-crowned Parrot. An excellent way to end our final full day's birding in Costa Rica!

Day 15

Saturday 18th November

Just time for a quick birding walk before breakfast and we added the final three birds to the group list: Pale-billed Woodpecker, Black-crowned Tityra and Yellow Tyrannulet – to bring the group list up to 403 birds seen.

As my flight was first thing the next morning, I had the afternoon in the Hotel Buena Vista gardens and found Barred Antshrike, Blue-crowned Motmot and Red-billed Pigeon. By about 4.30pm the massed grey clouds finally gave way to a tropical downpour, really the only heavy rain I experienced over the whole two weeks, so I headed back inside. My own total for the trip stands at 396, considerably more than I had expected and some really special birds seen.

Most of the remaining members of the group started their overnight flight back to Gatwick today.

Day 16

Sunday 19th November

Those flying back to London Gatwick landed in the morning and another Naturetrek adventure came to an end.

Receive our e-newsletter

Join the Naturetrek e-mailing list and be the first to hear about new tours, additional departures and new dates, tour reports and special offers. Visit www.naturetrek.co.uk to sign up.

Naturetrek Facebook

We are delighted to launch the Naturetrek Facebook page so that participants of Naturetrek tours can remain in touch after the holiday and share photos, comments and future travel plans.

Setting up a personal profile at www.facebook.com is quick, free and easy. The [Naturetrek Facebook page](#) is now live; do please pay us a visit!

Species Lists

Birds (✓=recorded but not counted; H = heard only)