

# Sunrise Birding LLC **COSTA RICA SPECIAL**

February 3 – 9, 2018  
**TRIP REPORT**  
Report & photos by Frank Mantlik



Photos: Snowcap, Crowned Woodnymph, Montezuma Oropendola, Lesson's Motmot, Resplendent Quetzal



Sunrise Birding LLC

# COSTA RICA

## Quetzal & Hummingbird Special Trip Report

February 3 – 9, 2018

**Leaders: Frank Mantlik & Vernon Campos**

Report and photos by Frank Mantlik

### Highlights and top sightings of the trip as voted by participants

- Seven Resplendent Quetzals
- Snowcap
- Black-crested Coquette
- Ochraceous Pewee
- Lesson's Motmot
- Flame-throated Warbler
- Flame-colored Tanager
- Keel-billed Toucan
- Bay-headed Tanager
- Sunbittern
- Bare-throated Tiger-Heron
- Boat-billed Heron
- Long-tailed Silky-flycatcher
- Chiriqui Quail-Dove
- Dusky Nightjar
- Montezuma Oropendola
- Red-breasted Blackbird
- Wrenthrush
- Volcano Junco
- Hooded Leaf Mantis
- Leaf-cutter Ants
- 19 Species of Hummingbirds
- 33 Regional Endemics
- Birding the Rancho balcony
- Great food and Costa Rican coffee

### Day 1 - Arrival San Jose

This being a travel day, all arrived via flights, with most participants having time to explore the beautiful grounds and gardens of the hotel. Strolling past intensely colored Bougainvillea and dozens of other identified shrubs and trees, birds seen included Hoffman's Woodpecker (at nest), Lesson's Motmot, Rufous-collared Sparrow, and **Clay-colored Thrush** (Costa Rica's national bird). Frank welcomed participants and provided orientation. All got to know each other over a fine dinner and drinks.



### Day 2 - San Jose to Rancho Naturalista

After enjoying the country's fine coffee, Vernon and Frank led the group on an early morning walk in the hotel gardens. The morning light was lovely on Rufous-naped Wrens, Summer and Blue-gray Tanagers, Social Flycatcher, Grayish Saltator, Rufous-capped Warbler, Baltimore Orioles, Melodious Blackbird, Red-billed Pigeon, White-tipped Dove, a pair of Inca Doves, and Lesson's Motmot. Variegated Squirrels were



numerous. After breakfast, while waiting to load the minibus, we saw White-tailed Kite and Yellow-headed Caracara.

Traffic was fairly light as we departed for our first Eco lodge. En route we passed through Cartago, a city that was the first settlement by the Spaniards in the 1600's. Sugar cane was being harvested and trucked to the nearby mill. Farther on we had views of the smoking Turrialba Volcano, and then birded the hydroelectric Birris Reservoir, where we saw Lesser Scaup, Blue-winged Teal, Spotted Sandpipers (without their spots), Northern and Southern Rough-winged Swallows, and Black Phoebe.

By noon we arrived at the famous Rancho Naturalista Lodge, which boasts a birdlist of 450 species. Greeted by Lisa and her entire staff, we enjoyed lunch at the open-air dining area as amazing birds fed at the adjacent feeders. Of note were numerous hummingbirds including the amazing Snowcap, **Black-crested Coquette**, Crowned Woodnymph, Green-breasted Mango, and White-necked Jacobin. Other highlights were Montezuma



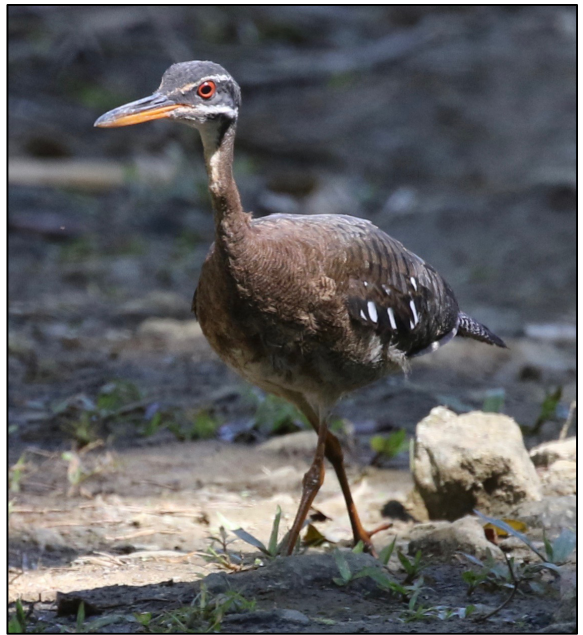
Oropendolas, Gray-headed Chachalacas, and Brown Jays. After some personal time, we enjoyed the varied wildlife from the balcony: Bananaquit, Variegated Squirrel, an amazing green Hooded Leaf Mantis insect, and the ever-present hummingbirds.

We then strolled back down the drive, and were delighted to see lots of great birds including Boat-billed and Ochre-bellied Flycatchers, Tropical Gnatcatcher, Passerini's Tanager, Golden-collared and Emerald Tanagers (don't you just love their names!), Green Honeycreeper, American Redstart, Chestnut-sided Warbler, White-ruffed Manakin, Chestnut-headed Oropendola, Scarlet-fronted Parakeets, Red-billed Pigeon, and two Keel-billed Toucans. The latter are quintessential representative species of the neotropics, and we had terrific scope views. Following a delicious shish-kebob dinner, we recounted our day's sightings, while some followed the score of the football Super Bowl game back home.

### **Day 3 - Rancho Naturalista and Vicinity**

At sunrise, we visited the lighted insect sheet at Rancho. Here we tallied a number of species normally found deep in the forest, including Red-throated Ant-Tanager, Plain Antvireo, Golden-crowned and Kentucky Warblers, Plain-brown and Spotted Woodcreepers, White-breasted Wood-Wren, Buff-throated Foliage-gleaner, and Slaty-capped and Ochre-bellied Flycatchers. During breakfast, birds seen were the usual, plus an uncommon Chiriqui Quail-Dove.

After breakfast we rode the bus to San Antonio and a nearby side road up toward the base of Silence Mountain (El Silencio). We tallied forty-two species during the morning walk. Don had just asked if we would see a **Sunbittern** on the trip. So it came as a big surprise to see one actually slowly walking across the road! Other highlights included Roadside Hawk, Ruddy-tailed Flycatcher, Tropical Parula, Tawny-capped Euphonia, Green Honeycreeper, Masked Tityra, and many Tanagers (Emerald, Golden-hooded, Passerini's, Palm, White-shouldered, and Black-and-yellow).



After lunch with a visiting White-nosed Coati, we enjoyed some personal time to relax, read, or observe and photograph the many colorful birds in the garden. These included Collared Aracari and Black-cheeked



Woodpecker. Shortly after departing by bus, Vernon spotted a Fasciated Tiger-Heron on the river below. We then visited nearby Angostura Reservoir, where we added some water birds to the list, including Northern Jacana, Southern Lapwing, Pied-billed Grebe, Neotropic Cormorant, Little Blue Heron, and Snail Kite.



We then visited new habitat, the farm fields of Hacienda Oriente. It was a pleasant bird walk that netted us a hunting White-tailed Kite, Crested and Yellow-headed Caracaras, striking Eastern and **Red-breasted Meadowlarks**, Gray-crowned Yellowthroat, Variable Seedeater, Giant Cowbird, and Groove-billed Ani.



#### Day 4 - Rancho Naturalista to Valley of the Quetzal

First light found us eagerly birding from the balcony, like a child on Christmas morning. Avian gifts such as Bicolored Hawk, Rufous Motmot, Bananaquit, Orange-billed Sparrow, Green-breasted Mango and Violet Sabrewing had us “ooo-ing and ahhh-ing”. Added to that were nice views of the stunning Bay-headed and Emerald Tanagers, as well as Bay Wren, Stripe-throated Hermit and Green Thorntail. After a delightful breakfast, we took a group photo and departed Rancho Naturalista.



Next we visited the university campus of CATIE, where we were “welcomed” by tame families of **Northern Jacanas** foraging on the lawns. The pond inhabitants - Green Ibis, Purple Gallinules, Anhinga, and Bare-throated Tiger-Heron - were certainly of a tropical nature. But the “hairdo”-raising antics of a Boat-billed Heron provided the most entertainment. A pair of Hook-billed Kites, an unexpected rarity, were perched in a pond-side tree. A stroll through the campus resulted in wonderful views of Gartered Trogon,

Great Kiskadees, Tropical Kingbirds, and a pair of Band-backed Wrens. Vernon heard a Black-cowled Oriole, which we found in one fruiting tree that also hosted an amazing mixed flock of feeding birds: Scarlet-thighed Dacnis, Yellow-crowned Euphonia, Gray-capped Flycatcher, and Blue-gray, Palm, Bay-headed, and Golden-hooded Tanagers. The latter were in a branch just feet away at eye level! We then drove through the



wonderful Jardin Botanical Garden, where we learned about a variety of plants including various Palms, Coffee, and Achiote (used in making food dye).

We stopped for lunch at a gem of a family restaurant. The food, drink, and hospitality were surpassed only by the views of the terrain. A brief stop at an organic coffee farm, Finca Cristina, included purchasing fresh-roasted beans and viewing our first Silver-throated Tanagers and a stunning Blue Morpho butterfly. A wintering Tennessee Warbler fed on a banana. After a pit stop, we climbed up into the Talamanca Mountains, where lush cloud forest prevails. Recent rainstorms had caused severe landslides, but luckily repairs to the Pan-American Highway allowed us to proceed to our destination.



From an elevation of 9,000 feet, we descended into the Savegre River Valley. A brief stop at Miriam's Cafe to view the feeders resulted in numerous new birds for the trip: **Sooty Thrush**, Flame-colored Tanager, Long-tailed Silky-flycatcher, Acorn Woodpecker, Flame-throated and Townsend's Warblers, Large-footed Finch, and Yellow-thighed Finch which we nick-named "yellow pantaloons". Before long, we were settled in to our luxurious accommodations at Hotel Savegre, where a scrumptious dinner topped off another great day.

### Day 5 - Savegre River Valley

Hot coffee on the hotel balcony mitigated the chilly dawn temperature. Birding here and along the lodge's paths rewarded us with a bevy of new species. A flock of Sulphur-winged Parakeets screamed by. A Stripe-tailed Hummingbird and White-throated Mountain-gems fed on the numerous flowers.

The forest held Collared Redstart (Whitestart), Ruddy-capped Nightingale-Thrush, and a covey of Spotted Wood-Quail. The edge habitat produced Common and Sooty-capped Chlorospingus. A Red-headed Barbet, a **Long-tailed Silky-flycatcher**, a Mountain Elaenia, and some Spangle-cheeked Tanagers all shared the same bush. A hearty, delicious breakfast (complete with gooseberry syrup on pancakes) prepared us for the rest of the day.

A jeep ride up the Los Robles Trail allowed us to bird downslope through the magnificently lush primary cloud-forest. Among the highlights seen were Tufted Flycatcher, Ruddy Pigeon, Black-cheeked Warbler, Black-faced Solitaire, Philadelphia and Brown-capped Vireos, Spot-crowned Woodcreeper, and a pair of Collared





Troglons. With persistence, we found an Ochraceous Pewee, a rare regional endemic in Costa Rica. We watched in awe at an overlook as White-collared and Vaux's Swifts raced through the atmosphere in pursuit of aerial insects. Black and Turkey Vultures glided by, as did a Red-tailed Hawk of the local subspecies.



The buffet lunch was followed by personal time for rest, reading, birding, hiking, or a massage. Great views were had of Slaty Flowerpiercer, as well as **Talamanca** (formerly Magnificent), Volcano, and Scintillant **Hummingbirds**. A jaunt up the forested valley road by minibus was very successful, as we found difficult-to-

see species such as Wrenthrush and Black Guan. But we also thrilled at seeing our first Resplendent Quetzal, a male, perched and in flight. WOW!!! It is considered by some to be the most beautiful bird in the world. The Quetzal was deemed divine by the ancient Aztecs and Mayans, who considered it the "god of the air" and as a symbol of goodness and light, as well as a symbol of liberty. A stop at Miriam's found us sipping hot cocoa as we viewed amazing birds at close range amid lush forested slopes. This is the way to bird! The birding day concluded with terrific views (and sounds) of two Dusky Nightjars as darkness enveloped us. What an eventful day this was!

### Day 6 - Savegre / Cerro de la Muerte / Los Quetzales National Park

An early morning walk on the hotel property, road, and nearby Cataract Trail resulted in several new trip bird species, including Band-tailed Pigeon, Chestnut-capped Brushfinch, Gray-breasted Wood-Wren, Yellowish Flycatcher, and Louisiana Waterthrush. Following breakfast, it was back in the bus, with a brief stop that afforded



even better views of a male Resplendent Quetzal. Bonus birds here were Rufous-browed Peppershrike, Yellow-winged Vireo, and Black-capped Flycatcher.

Next we drove up the fog-shrouded Pan-Am Highway to Cerro de la Muerte (elevation 11,400 feet). Visiting this stunted-vegetation *paramo* habitat was a highlight of the trip. Specialty birds searched for, and seen, were Timberline Wren, **Volcano Junco**, Volcano Hummingbird, and Peg-billed Finch. The dramatic wind-swept clouds, chilly temperatures, and thin air made this a memorable excursion. Lunch at the Paraiso Quetzales Lodge





allowed us to observe and photograph a variety of hummers including Lesser Violetear, and Talamanca and Fiery-throated Hummingbirds. A Swallow-tailed Kite sailed by.

Afterwards we visited an area of Los Quetzales National Park, on a road toward Providencia. The forest was nice, but birds were few...until Suzanne spotted a male Resplendent Quetzal sitting on a branch at eye level. While obtaining scope views from the road, suddenly the bird flew right, followed by at least five more Quetzals! Seeing them all in flight through the forest was just amazing, with their long green tails flowing behind. We enjoyed scope views for about a half hour. We theorized that this "flock" consisted of adult and immature males that were pursuing one or more females.

We returned to the lodge late afternoon, allowing time to bird the gardens and freshen up, before all gathered for happy hour in the bar. At our last dinner together, several chatted with the Belgian chef, who was very personable and even shared a recipe or two. The day's events and sightings were recounted, and then each person announced their favorite birds and other sightings of the trip. Many commented on how wonderful a tour this has been, and how great a group as well. The leadership by Vernon and Frank was much appreciated.





## Day 7 - Valley of the Quetzal to San Jose

With somewhat milder temperatures, the group rendezvoused early for coffee and one last pre-breakfast bird walk. Highlights were a Dark Pewee (new for the trip), a close covey of six Spotted Wood-Quail, and Frank found a Scintillant Hummingbird's nest with three tiny white eggs. After one last terrific breakfast, we checked out and bid farewell to the Savegre River Valley for the return drive to San Jose. Traffic was lighter than expected, fortunately, and all were delivered to their respective hotels or to the airport for flights home.

We thank all for choosing Sunrise Birding, and hope to meet again on another wonderful birding tour!



Photos: Birders at Catie, Acorn Woodpecker, Golden-hooded Tanager.