

COSTA RICA 1ST March – 22ND March, 2022

TOUR REPORT

We were celebrating our 50th wedding anniversary and decided to have a Grand Tour of Costa Rica under the guidance of Andi and Gabor from Ecotours Worldwide Travel (www.ecotours-worldwide.com) with whom they had toured Belarus in the past. The main target was birds but we were looking forward to new mammals, butterflies and reptiles.

Andi and Gabor made all the arrangements in Costa Rica leaving us to arrange our flights from the UK.



Day 1 Tuesday 1st March

The British Airways flight from Gatwick was on time and after eleven hours in the air we arrived at St Juan Airport in Costa Rica. The trip through immigration at the airport was seamless but then we could not find Heather's luggage. Eventually after about twenty minutes it, mysteriously, appeared. We think someone had taken it by mistake and then quietly returned it to the baggage hall. We then soon stepped out of the airport arrivals building into the heat of a late Costa Rican afternoon. A short walk along the footpath and we were met by Andi, soon followed by Gabor with the tour vehicle, a four-wheel drive SUV.

Luggage was quickly loaded and then we were off, out of the airport, and then back in again for Gabor to show us our first birds of the tour – a Red-lored Parrot on the departure building roof and a White-winged Dove in a nearby tree.

We then drove through rush hour traffic to Villa Lapas Lodge. To welcome us, in the headlights, on the driveway, was a Common Pauraque. After a quick wash and change it was time for buffet style dinner before settling down for a good night's sleep.



Day 2 Wednesday 2nd March

We got up at 5 am and went out to look for birds at 5.45am and saw 29 species (all new to us) in the garden, around the accommodation and restaurant of the lodge, before breakfast at 7am.

After breakfast we set off, in the tour vehicle, for the Carara National Park. We walked along the forest paths in hot, sunny weather.

Gabor found a Great Tinamou, very close, crouching under some bushes, which stayed still while we observed and took photographs. Gabor told us that it was most unusual to see this species, particularly so close. A number of other new species were also seen / photographed such as Orange-billed Sparrow, White-whiskered Puffbird, Collared Forest-Falcon, Streak-chested Antpitta before we headed back to Villa Lapas for lunch, where further birds, together with a number of various sized Spiny-Tailed Iguanas and Striped Basilisk (Jesus Christ) Lizards were seen from the open sided restaurant.





After lunch we headed for a boat trip in the Mangroves where another good number of new birds were seen including Black-necked Stilt, Anhinga, Roseate Spoonbill, Whimbrel, Willet, Yellow-crowned & Black-crowned Night Herons, Little Blue-Heron and Double-striped Thicknee, as well as very close views of an American Crocodile, resting on the bank.



We then went to the beach to see a beautiful sunset before returning to our accommodation for dinner.



The first day totals were 81 bird species of which all but 2 were new to us, a good selection of mammals and reptiles and a small number of butterflies.



Day 3 Thursday 3rd March

Up at 5.30am and out to wander in the gardens by 6.30am. On the way to breakfast a Coati very kindly posed for photographs while eating its own 'breakfast'.

After breakfast we toured the extensive gardens of the lodge finding close up views of Streak-headed Woodcreeper, Northern Waterthrush, Protonotary Warbler, three species of Woodpecker, Ringed Kingfisher, Boat-billed Flycatcher, numerous Black Iguanas and roosting bats. A total of 46 species of bird were seen in the morning.

Having packed after breakfast, we had lunch and Gabor checked us all out at the reception and we headed south along the Pacific Coast Road to Dominical.



During the journey we stopped to observe and photograph a flock of Scarlet Macaws feeding in Almond trees, beside the road.



We then took a detour to a place where Gabor had found a Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl a few days before our arrival.

Initially the bird was very elusive but eventually it perched in a tree in a garden and Gabor was able to get a photograph with Gordon's camera.

We then headed to the Rio Mar Hotel, where we were to stay for the next four nights.

As Andi and Gabor lived nearby they took the opportunity to go home. (Which they did each evening we were there).

During travelling we stopped on a number of occasions and observed various species of birds.

As it had been very hot and humid we decided that we did not feel like eating so just relaxed in our room.

The total bird list for the day was 58 (Nearly all new to us)

Day 4 Friday 4th March

Up at 5.00am and by 5.30am we were walking in the grounds which were well laid out with plants in flower, providing food for many species of bird.

A trail at the back of the property led to an area where rotten fruit, from the restaurant was dumped in a hole dug in the ground. Gordon approached this as the insects, feeding on the fruit, were attracting a good number of birds. This provided a great photograph opportunity. Unfortunately, some of the insects decided to change their diet to 'meat' and descended on Gordon's bare legs, leaving him with several nasty looking bites which hung around for most of the rest of the holiday.

We had breakfast at 7.00am and Andi and Gabor picked us up from the hotel car park at 7.30am. From here were watched a pair of Black-crowned Tityra on an electricity pole where there was a possible nesting site.

We then drove to a Cloud Forest and along dirt roads, stopping and various places to walk and view / listen for, the birds. There was not much cloud cover and the sun was fierce but we did have the shade of the trees a lot of the time, and a slight breeze.

The bird list continued to increase with species such as Cocoa Woodcreeper, Gray headed Chacalaca, Swallow-Tailed Kite, Rufous-breasted Wren, Squirrel Cuckoo, Roadside Hawk, Pale-breasted Spinetail and Grove Billed Ani. But perhaps the most

exciting birds were the pair of Elegant or Blue-hooded Euphonias which seemed to have a nest nearby.



Around 1.00pm we left the dirt road and headed for lunch at the Ricar2 restaurant where we had a simple lunch of a very dense Aztec soup and fruit juice. We sat on a veranda overlooking a valley and a Yellow-headed Caracara posed nicely in a nearby tree and a Dusky-capped Flycatcher came very close on a roof just below the veranda.

After lunch we drove along a different dirt road, stopping as before at various locations. More new species were added to our list before we were dropped off at the hotel just before it got dark.

Decided to have a late dinner in the restaurant, which was well presented, generous portions and reasonably priced.

A very full day, producing a total of 67 species of bird, most of them being new to us as well as a few animals and butterflies.

Day 5 Saturday 5th March

Alarm went off as usual at 5.00am and we birdwatched in the gardens, avoiding the trail, until a 7.00am breakfast.

Had seen Fiery-billed Aracari, Chestnut-mandibled/Yellow-throated Toucan, Montezuma Oropendola and Clay-coloured Robin/Thrush amongst many others in the hotel gardens.



Also, this morning a pair of Masked Tityra were investigating the electricity pole as a possible nest site, in the car park, when Andi and Gabor picked us up at 7.30am.

Drove to the Baru Reserve. Here we walked a trail seeing plenty of species of birds, as well as Agouti, Coati and Three-toed Sloth.

On the way back to the entrance Andi and Heather were talking and watching birds in a tree when an Agouti came charging out of the undergrowth, ran between them and disappeared on the other side of the path.

We ate lunch, on the terrace at the restaurant, at the entrance to the reserve from where we were able to watch birds and Black Iguanas as we ate.

After lunch we drove along more dirt roads, and beside a river, where we stopped to 'cool our feet'.

After that we drove on more dirt roads before returning to the hotel just before dark when Andi and Gabor went home.

We had added another good number of new species to our life list including White-shouldered Tanager, Orange-collared Manakin, White-necked Jacobin, Green Honeycreeper and White-collared Swift.

We had dinner in the hotel restaurant, again, this time choosing the Specials Menu which turned out to be a kind of 'Surf and Turf' on skewers. With taxes and service charge, which hadn't been included the previous night, the meal was more expensive than we thought it was going to be. The previous night had been much better value.

A Total of 56 birds for the day, again, with many of them being new to us.

Day 6 Sunday 6th March.

Up at 5.00am as usual and out by 6.00am as sun rose. Went out of front gate and along a dirt road beside a river. No new birds but plenty to see and photograph.

Back to the hotel for breakfast at 7.00am before Andi and Gabor picked us up as usual.



Today we were going to visit the house where Andi and Gabor are living whilst staying in Costa Rica. On the way we followed the river from the hotel towards the Sea (Pacific Ocean).

We stopped just before the river estuary to observe the wildlife and were fortunate in seeing a pair of Neotropical River Otters playing and fishing as well as coming out of the water onto the far bank.



There were also good views of Barn, Northern Rough-winged and Mangrove Swallows, all perching on various parts of a nearby bridge. Whimbrel, Willet and Green Heron also gave good views amongst a good number of other species.

An American Crocodile also showed itself well.

We then visited Andi and Gabor's house which overlooked a valley. From the veranda we were able to view plenty of wildlife, including Raptors and Hirundines.

In a tree, near to the entrance of the property, Andi found a Three-toed Sloth with its baby though it was difficult to see it clearly.

From here we went to another restaurant for lunch which had an aeroplane at the edge of the car park which has been converted to provide bedrooms for guests.

The plan was to go to the beach to look for sea birds but as it was Sunday the road to the beach was very busy, particularly with motor bikes throwing up clouds of dust. It was hoped to find a Boat-billed Heron beside the road but this proved impossible

with the traffic. We then drove back towards, and past our hotel, following the river and stopped at various points to observe the birds.



We then returned to our hotel just before dark. As we had had a filling lunch we decided to 'skip' dinner and packed ready to leave tomorrow morning.

The temperature over the last few days had been 28 to 36 degrees.

A total of 70 birds for the day, with many of them being new species for us.

Day 7 Monday 7th March

Did not get up until 6.00am today!

After breakfast met up with Andi and Gabor and followed the trail we had walked on the first morning, avoiding the rotten fruit hole. It was good to have the 'experts' with us to point out nesting sites of various birds.

We then drove to the beach at Dominical (Not the one we tried to get to yesterday) and checked out the birds, of which there were plenty, in the trees behind the beach.

We then returned to the Hotel to check out before the midday deadline but arranged to leave our bags behind the reception while we went for lunch at a nearby restaurant. We all had a light meal while watching the wildlife before walking round the grounds.



We then collected our bags and headed to our next accommodation but on the way checked out the road leading to the beach which we had tried yesterday.

This time it was quiet and we were able to see / photograph the Boat-billed Heron as well as Northern Jacana and Purple Gallinule.

We then headed to Ojochal and our accommodation in the Rio Tico Safari Tents, birdwatching en-route.

We were greeted by the Dutch owner and provided with welcome drinks before he kindly carried our heavy bags down, some steep steps, to the Safari tents. (Andi and Gabor travelled with much less baggage than ourselves and therefore took their own luggage!)

The tents had comfortable beds and plenty of space but the lighting was very limited when it got dark.

We drove to a nearby restaurant for dinner, with Gordon trying to photograph Common Pauraque as they sat under the few street lights that were present.

After dinner we returned to the tents and straight to bed as it was not possible to see to read / work on the computer unless we were in the reception area.

A Total of 65 birds for the day, with a lot of them being new species for us.



Day 8 Tuesday 8th March

We had arranged to be out with Andi and Gabor at 6.00am and walked with them down a track from the accommodation before returning for breakfast. Gabor commented on the number of new dwellings that had been built or were being built along this track and it had clearly reduced the number of species of wildlife that could be seen.

After breakfast we drove along the track, past the restaurant where we had dinner last night, to another one, where we booked for dinner tonight.

This restaurant had a large garden and waterfall which provided good wildlife watching opportunities and we spent some time here before driving to a reserve, with forest and access to the beach.

A Common Black-Hawk flew out of the trees onto the beach right in front of us providing a great photographic opportunity as it fed on a small crab or something similar.

We also found another Three-toed Sloth, with a baby, in a tree beside the path back to the entrance which provided better views than the earlier one.

We then had lunch at the restaurant at the entrance to the reserve, under a canopy, which provided a 360-degree view of the wildlife, including Black Iguanas of various sizes, Tanagers, Louisiana and Northern Waterthrush.

After lunch we returned to our accommodation to have a 'siesta' as the weather was very hot again and arranged to meet up at 4.00pm.

As the proposed walk, to an archaeological site, involved some uphill sections Heather decided to stay behind as the heat was starting to tire her.

We walked to the site but did not see much wildlife there and back. A Black-bellied Wren was very elusive with only fleeting glimpses being caught as it moved around the undergrowth.

After dark Gordon tried, once again to get a photograph of a Common Pauraque under the street lights, using a combination of flash and changing camera settings. The results were not brilliant but acceptable as a record of the sighting.

The dinner at the restaurant was very good, and as we had already packed for moving on tomorrow it was straight to bed on our return to the accommodation.

The total of birds for the day was 58, with some of them being new species for us.



Day 9 Wednesday 9th March

We could not have breakfast until 7.30 am as there was a larger group booked in for 6.30am and the accommodation is fairly small, with limited staff, so we got up later.

We walked down to the river where a White necked Jacobin was feeding and a Northern Waterthrush gave us some good views.

The owner of the accommodation, very kindly again, brought our bags up the steep steps from our tent while we were having breakfast.

After breakfast we headed off to Esquinas Lodge in the Piedras Blancas National Park. We stopped at various points along the route, including a marshy area where Gordon spotted a Red-breasted Blackbird singing on a post and a Lesser Yellow-headed Vulture. A Green Kingfisher also gave good views while perching on a wire across a river near to a bridge that we were on.

We also visited the coastal bay of Golfito where we had lunch and birdwatched from the table. We also walked to the beach but the only bird of note was a single Royal Tern.

We continued our journey after lunch, arriving around 3.30pm. As it was extremely humid we did not go out for a walk and took the opportunity to sort out some clothes to be laundered by the lodge staff.

A three-course dinner was very good.

The total of birds for the day was 67 with a number of new species.



Day 10 Thursday 10th March

We were up again at 5.00am but had to get dressed by torchlight as the electricity had gone off during the night. By the time we met Andi and Gabor at 5.45am it was daylight and we walked along the roadway by which we had entered the complex checking the trees and bushes on either side. Nothing we had not already seen appeared though we still got good views of the birds present.

During and after breakfast we sat watching a pond area from the restaurant until about 9.00am and then went on a rain forest trail seeing some new species including Charming Hummingbird, Blue-fronted Goldentail and Black-striped Sparrow.

At the end of the walk we sat in the shade near the accommodation swimming pool as the atmosphere during the walk had been very humid.

At midday we had a good three course lunch and watched the pond area again where we saw a Green Heron stalking the margins and a Grey-necked Wood-Rail scurried around catching food.

We had hoped to see a Tayra come to the bananas that had been left out for it but by 3.00pm it had not been seen.

We then went on a shorter walk through the rain forest and out into the open at another pond and a covered platform to observe from. Here there were a good number of dragonflies and damselflies, but they did not perch very long to enable good identification or photographs.

We had good views of a Green Heron, Northern Jacana and a Purple Gallinule.

The weather was not so humid at this time.

On our way back, near to the accommodation buildings, we were surprised by a male Great Curassow walking down the track towards us. It paid no attention to us and walked past us at a very close distance. (Too close for the telephoto lens on Gordon's camera but ideal for Heather's phone camera).

We returned to our rooms before another good three course meal before retiring for the night, having retrieved our well laundered washing.

The days bird total was 57 with another good count of new species.



Day 11 Friday 11th March

We went out into the gardens before breakfast having arranged to meet Andi and Gabor for breakfast at 7.00am.

We wandered around behind the bungalows, near a bird trail area and Gordon found the female Great Curassow wandering amongst the trees completely oblivious to our presence. She headed into a wood store and out the other side, this time providing the opportunity for some good photographs, even on Heather's phone. A number of Crested Guans were also found close to the accommodation buildings and a different pond, where there were two Caiman Crocodiles which came up to a fence preventing them from straying any further.

After breakfast we took a different route to the pond with Damselflies etc. On our way back we encountered a female Great Curassow, coming down the steps from a different trail, again not bothered by our presence. We checked out of our rooms and packed the car ready to leave after lunch.





The next accommodation was Wilson's Botanical Gardens at a higher elevation. We stopped a few times en-route and added a few more species to our list.

The temperature was now around 28 degrees and the air much fresher.

Once we had placed our luggage in our rooms we went out onto the garden terrace. Gabor arranged for fresh bananas to be put on the feeding table. Almost immediately there were Silver-throated Tanager, Violet-crowned Woodnymph, Spot-crowned Euphonia, Green Honeycreeper, Golden-winged Warbler and Yellow-bellied Elaenia coming to the table or the nearby trees. Chairs were available to sit on and watch the birds coming and going (Luxury birdwatching)

The staff were setting up another part of the terrace for a wedding reception that was due to start at 6.30pm.

We ate in the restaurant at 6.00pm and were just leaving as the wedding guests began to arrive and the heavens opened with a very heavy rain storm causing the tables set with food to be hastily carried into the restaurant and us exiting to make room for them.

We sheltered in a porch-way for a short time and then made a dash for our rooms.

The heavy rain continued until about 9.00pm.

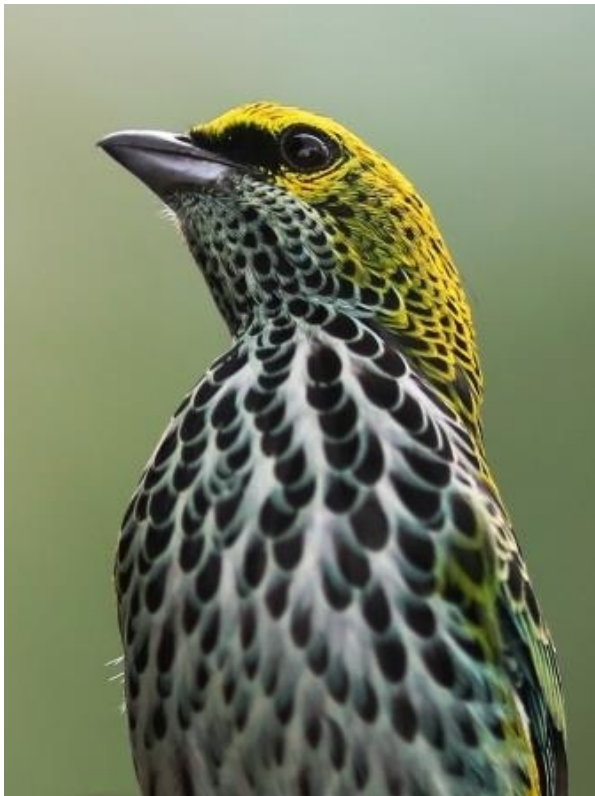
Bird tally for the day was 62.





Day 12 Saturday 12th March,

Sat on our balcony, overlooking a valley as the sun came up. Number of good birds seen either in the tree tops or on the roofs of adjoining lodges. Had an early breakfast at 6.30am before starting a guided walk with one of the staff from the botanical gardens.



Jason was very knowledgeable with regards to wildlife in general and, as would be expected, very knowledgeable about the wildlife 'on his patch'.

He pointed out a number of new species, for us, including a male White-crested Coquette. We had already seen the female building her nest which Jason told us was her fourth attempt.

The guided walk lasted almost three hours and then Gabor took us to a tower hide where we were able to look into the tree canopy and find Scarlet-tighted Dacnis.

The temperature was more reasonable at about 24 degrees.

We then returned to the restaurant for lunch before going out to the feeders on the terrace where a good number of small birds were seen.

Later in the afternoon we took another walk around the gardens searching for particular Hummingbirds but we were unable to find any. Fortunately, we had already seen Rufous-tailed and Snowy-bellied Hummingbirds, Violet-crowned Woodnymph and Violet Sabrewing. We had Blue-headed Parrot, Fiery-billed Aracari, Common Tody Flycatcher, Streaked Saltator and many more.

After dinner we repacked our bags, bringing warm clothing to the top as we were heading to a much higher elevation, and cooler climate, in the morning.

Total list of birds for the day was 72.



Day13 Sunday 13th March

After breakfast at 6.30am we loaded the car and set off for the higher elevation area at San Gerado De Dota.

Although the temperature was getting cooler as we travelled it was not unlike a pleasant English Winter's Day.

We stopped at a roadside café which overlooked a valley and where there were feeders for humming birds on the veranda. This provided close up views of a number of birds including Violet Sabrewing, Green-crowned Brilliant, Snowy-bellied and Charming Hummingbirds, plus White-throated Mountain-Gem.

Good views were also obtained, across the valley of Swallow-tailed Kite, Northern Crested Caracara, Costa Rican Swift and White-collared Swift.

We then drove to a dirt track where we walked a little way, with trees and bushes on either side. Long-tailed Silky-Flycatcher and Sooty Robin (Thrush) were new birds here. A large flock of migrating raptors was seen very high in the sky.



We had brought a packed lunch with us and ate this while we continued to observe the sky and bushes. It had started to drizzle and this turned into heavier rain as we drove higher.

We parked up again and walked along a rough track but the birds did not show themselves in the rain and we returned to the car and headed to our next accommodation.

This was 'bungalow' with a central lounge and a bedroom off either side with plate glass, floor to ceiling, windows overlooking a valley. We were shared this accommodation with Andi and Gabor, having one of the en-suite bedrooms each.

We left our bags in our rooms and then drove a short distance along the road to a restaurant which had a terrace with hummingbird feeders. Again, we were able to watch / photograph Hummingbirds at close quarters. There was also a feeder on which rice was placed just beyond the terrace. This attracted a number of birds, including various Tanagers, Warblers and Woodpeckers.

We stayed here for dinner and then Gabor tried to find a Dusky Nightjar, but although we heard one none appeared for us.

We returned to the accommodation and settled down for the night.

At total of 65 birds for the day with another good number of new ones for us.





Day 14 Monday 14th March

Went out about 6.00am wearing a number of thin layers of clothing as it was quite cold. Gabor drove us to a farm / private garden in our quest to see Resplendent Quetzal.



The lady owner charges 6USD per person to enter her land. We set ourselves up on a hill overlooking a forest. The lady has also planted trees that bear the birds favourite fruit, aguacatillo.

After about half an hour of waiting Heather spotted the tail streamers of a male Quetzal in the forest and after it short while it flew on to a bare branch where it was clearly visible and able to be photographed. He remained there for a few minutes before flying off and being replaced by a female Quetzal. She was also very co-operative in relation to being viewed and photographed.

We then returned to our hotel for breakfast.



When we set off, after breakfast, we were able to remove one layer of clothing.

Gabor drove to a forest trail, and on the way, we stopped at a piece of land with ornamental gates which had apparently been earmarked for a hotel. Gabor pointed out a tree, at the back of the land, with a nest hole. He had found this nest hole a few weeks ago and thought that it had been abandoned but when we looked closely we could see the tail streamers of a male Quetzal hanging out of the hole, so it was hoped that this was the location of another breeding pair.

We then walked the forest trail. The weather had warmed up and there was no wind and what sky we could see was clear.

In the forest Andi found another male Quetzal which was very easy to see and photograph and then a female also appeared and was very easy to see.





There were also a good number of other species of birds to be seen. The trail walk lasted about 3.5 hours with a long list of birds like Yellowish Flycatcher, Yellow-tighted Finch, Ruddy-capped Nightingale-thrush, Ochraceous Wren, Torrent Tyrannulet. Later we drove to a restaurant for lunch which had good gardens for birdwatching. After lunch we walked round the gardens and we found a pair of Golden-browed Chlorophonia.



We then drove back to our accommodation and walked in the forested gardens. Here, Gabor, found a pair of Spotted Wood-Quail.

Before it got dark we returned to the restaurant where we had watched the Hummingbirds and had dinner yesterday.

We picked up a couple of new species here before it got dark and we adjourned inside for another good meal. Then back to the accommodation for the night.

Total bird list for the day was 45 with some great new ones.

Day 15 Tuesday 15th March

Up at 5.00am and finished packing ready to move off later today. Went out about 6.00am to try and find a Costa Rican Pygmy Owl that Gabor and Andi had seen on a previous visit here, but did not find it.

After breakfast we were told where it had been seen bathing in a bird bath earlier in the morning. We headed to this location but again did not see it but did hear it calling. We did, however, have good views of Large-footed Finch and Acorn Woodpecker amongst a number of other birds.



We then set off on a long drive down from the mountains and across to the Caribbean side of the country and the La Selva Biological Station. There was some heavy traffic en-route and the weather was soon back to hot and humid.

Stopped for a late lunch at a restaurant which had recently changed hands. The new, Spanish, owners had carried out a lot of maintenance on the garden and trails. This provided good habitat for a lot of species.



After walking round the gardens and trails, viewing a number of species that we had already seen we continued our journey to La Selva Biological Station.

On the journey we had seen a number of new birds, including Variable Seedeater which we had seen on the Pacific side but now we could add the Caribbean race. The same applied to Scarlet-rumped Tanager's.

The accommodated was in a student type room, but with a double bed, which was very comfortable.

The reception and dining room were some distance from our rooms so Gabor drove us to dinner. Good views of Common Pauraque were again obtained as they sat under the few 'street' lights beside the road.

After dinner we went back to our room for a comfortable night's sleep.

Total bird count for the day was 48.

Day 16 Wednesday 16th March

Gabor guided us round the gardens on a couple of trails. There were a number of other tours being taken round by guides from the Centre but we were able to go at our own pace and direction under Andi and Gabor's expert knowledge of the area and species present. This was much to our preference.

One of the guides, who Gabor had spoken to earlier called us back to his group to show us a Viper coiled up on the side of a tree. Easily missed as it looked like a piece of the trunk.

Purple-throated Fruit-Crow, Turquoise-browed and Broad-billed Motmot were easily seen and photographed as were a good number of other species. Other wildlife including Pecari, American Whip-tailed Lizard and Bullet Ant were also seen.

Lunch was taken in the restaurant, overlooking a number of trees and bushes which provided a good habitat for birds.

There were a couple of showers of rain during lunch, but we dodged these before driving back to our rooms.

Around 3.30 pm we went out again as it was now cooler than it was at lunch time.

We walked a different trail from the rooms but there were not so many birds about.

We went back to our rooms before driving to the restaurant for dinner, and on the way back Gordon was able to get some more photographs of the Common Pauraque under the 'street' lights.

Heather had arranged for some laundry to be washed and this had been returned by the time we got back after dinner.

Day list had accrued 64 birds.

Day 17 Thursday 17th March

We were up at 5.00am as usual and out at 6.00am. Gabor pointed out a Broad-billed Motmot that was showing well in the trees behind their room.

Walked a new trail from the rooms before returning to collecting the car and driving to breakfast. Not much birdlife about this morning.

After breakfast we walked a trail that took us to a marshy area which floods during the rainy seasons. Andi spotted a Black and Green Poison Dart Frog which, though small, was easily photographed. Still there was not much new birdlife about. And we returned by the same trail in time for lunch. There were not many birds in the trees and bushes near the restaurant either so we decided to take the afternoon off, particularly as it was very hot and humid.

As the light was fading the Broad-billed Motmot sat on a branch close to our terrace. Fortunately, the light was still good enough for a reasonable photograph.

After dinner we re-packed our bags ready to move on tomorrow.

Despite it being very quiet at times the day list still totalled 56.

Day 18 Friday 18th March

Up at 5.00am and out by 6.00am and drove to the parking area near the restaurant. We birdwatched around the buildings and came across a male Crested Guan wandering round the paths.

We then walked a trail towards the point where we had stopped yesterday morning. Mourning Warbler, Keel-billed Toucan were amongst a number of other birds seen.

We then made our way on to a trail to look for White Tent-making Bats roosting in banana leaves. Gabor had seen them there three weeks ago, but they were not there this time so we returned to the restaurant for breakfast.

After breakfast we headed for the main river bridge on the complex and found a troop of Howler monkeys. These were the first we had seen though we had heard them nearly every day.

We followed some steep paths which we had not explored before. A Green Macaw was sighted as well as Chestnut-headed Oropendola, King Vulture and Double-toothed Kite and a Grey-lined Hawk, together with other birds.



It was hot and humid again, even under the shade of the trees, so we returned to our rooms for a shower before packing the car with our luggage.

After lunch we drove to Heliconias Lodge at Bijagua, via Volcan Tenorio.

After checking in we went for a short walk in the gardens and along part of a trail in the hope of seeing a Crested Owl.

Unfortunately, we did not find it and returned to our rooms before going for dinner.

After dinner we sat on the veranda in the hope of seeing a Black and White Owl in the tree's opposite. We had been told it can usually be seen between 8 and 9 pm but it did not show up so we adjourned into the room.

Around 9.15pm Gordon heard something calling which he thought was the Owl (Later Gabor told us that in fact it was the Geckos) so he went out onto the veranda and saw the owl in the trees, as predicted, illuminated by a floodlight.

We watched the Owl flying down into the unlit area and back to its perch for some time and with the aid of the floodlight and the camera flash Gordon was able to obtain some good photographs. Eventually the Owl flew off and did not return.

Total of birds for the day was 55.



Day 19 Saturday 19th March

Got up at 5.00am to rain but it had stopped as we met up with Andi and Gabor at 6.00am.

Gabor took us on a one kilometre trail which was muddy, slippery and steep in parts and not much was seen and it also started to rain again.

We returned to the restaurant for a lingering breakfast and then, as it was still raining, returned to our rooms.

After a while the rain eased and Andi and Gabor called to say they were going to have another go at finding the Crested Owl.

Soon Gabor was back to say that he had found an ant-swarm where a good number of birds were feeding. There were three species of Antbirds, Spotted, Bicolored and Chestnut-backed and a White-breasted Wood-Wren feeding on the ants. There were several of each species.

Gabor then found the Crested Owl roosting in a tree, on the slope of a hill. We were able to get very close and take 'close up' photographs with the zoom lens.

It then started to rain heavily again and after taking shelter, and the rain easing we returned to the restaurant for lunch, as it was almost 1.00pm.

Heather had hurt her back, the day before and was suffering a bit so she stayed behind in the afternoon while Andi, Gabor and Gordon walked a trail containing three hanging bridges, giving good views of the forest canopy. Not many birds were seen though Gabor identified a number present by their song or calls.

Before dinner we were told where to see a Three-toed Sloth with its baby out in the open, just near to the restaurant. The tree they were in had no leaves so this was the best photographic opportunity and a wonderful chance just to watch the animal move slowly around the branches.

After dinner we repacked our bags ready to move on again tomorrow. It was raining heavily again so did not wait to see if the Black and White Owl reappeared.

Bird list for the day totalled 38.

Day 20 Sunday 20th March

Out by 6.00am and went out to birdwatch in the gardens. Found a tree with several species feeding on fruits including Yellow-throated Euphonia, Palm Tanager, Golden-hooded Tanager and Blue-Gray Tanager.

We then returned to the trail where we had seen the Crested Owl and when we reached the tree in which we had seen it we were rewarded with the site of two Crested Owls sitting side by side on a low branch.



On the way back along the trail a troop of Spider Monkeys and then White-faced Capuchin monkeys came swinging and climbing through the trees.

A Wood Thrush also put in an appearance at fairly close quarters. And a good photograph was obtained. We then went for breakfast as it started to rain again.

The car was packed between the showers of rain and we left at 10.00am

heading for the Bay of Nicoya.

En-route Andi spotted a Scarlet Macaw, in a tree hole, which was accompanied by another Macaw which was blue and yellow. Gabor said that the blue and yellow macaw does not live in Costa Rica so it was thought it might have been an escape that had paired up with the Scarlet one.

We arrived at Nicoya at lunchtime so put our bags in our rooms and then had lunch.

This location is a farm where they have diversified in to wildlife tourism.

The weather was very hot but with a dry, rather than humid feel.

A troop of Howler monkeys were in the trees above our lodge / rooms and a White-throated Magpie Jay was very obliging regarding photographs at the restaurant.

We went out at 3.00pm and drove to nearby salt pans. There were hundreds of waders, some species that are common in England but others, such as Least, Semi-palmated and Western Sandpiper were all new to us.

We then drove on another trail before leaving the car to walk to the top of a hill to watch the sunset over the ocean. Unfortunately, Heathers' back and hip pain had returned and as the trail became steeper the nearer we got to the top we decided to turn back and returned to our rooms for a shower before dinner.

After dinner another guest showed us where an Armadillo was sheltering under a bush. Gordon got a brief glimpse of it but Heather did not see it.

Bird list for the day totalled 73 plus three species of monkey.

Day 21 Monday 21st March

Heather had a very uncomfortable night as her hip / back were still painful so the 5.00am alarm was turned off. Unfortunately, at 4.30am someone came on a motorbike to move a tractor and boat trailer.



The Howler monkeys in the trees above us were not amused and express their 'anger' at being woken early with a lot of loud roaring and howling. Hence we were woken earlier than normal.

Heather remained in bed when Gordon met up with Andi and Gabor to go for a walk on another trail.

A Pacific Screech Owl was found roosting in a tree near the restaurant and a Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl was also seen though it was illusive.

The walk produced some new birds including Streak-backed Oriole, Sandwich Tern, Laughing Gull and better views / numbers of Royal Tern.

Heather woke at 6.30pm and felt better so went on to the veranda of the room and watched the Howler Monkeys. When she stepped off the veranda, and walked under the trees, to photograph the monkeys with her phone they took exception to this and peed and pooped in her direction.

Andi, Gabor and Gordon returned to the rooms and then all went for a very good breakfast.

We checked out and headed for the Airport Hotel at St Juan. Gabor joked "No birds between here and the hotel" so that we would not be tempted to stop on our journey, on busy roads, which was slow in parts due to heavy traffic.

When held up in stationary traffic Gordon spotted a Bat Falcon sitting in a roadside tree. Unfortunately, Heather was on the wrong side of the car to see it before the traffic moved on again.

We arrived at the airport hotel around 11.30am and Andi checked us in before we thanked them for a wonderful trip and said our goodbyes.

Andi and Gabor then had a long drive back to their house before preparing for their next guests in a few days' time.

We did not feel like lunch so relaxed in our room and checked in for our flight tomorrow, the receptionist kindly printed our boarding passes.

We went to the hotel restaurant for dinner. The restaurant also had an on-site brewery so Gordon was able to try some locally brewed, real ale and chat with the lady brewer, and compare notes with his own home brewed beer.

The day list of birds totalled 34, all but the Bat Falcon being at Nicoya.



Day 22 Tuesday 22nd March

After a fairly, good night's sleep we went out into the hotel gardens. These were not as large as we had experienced at previous locations but still produced a good number of birds for the size of the area, including a Streak-backed Oriole, which Heather had not seen yesterday.

Total of birds for the morning was 14

After breakfast we checked our bags were ready for the flight home, and checked out of our room by midday, before being picked up by minibus and taken to the airport.

At the airport we found that our flight was already delayed by an hour and this increased as the afternoon passed

We purchased an expensive snack in the airport and eventually boarded the plane just before 7.00pm but we were then further delayed when a passenger did not board the plane and we had to wait for her luggage to be removed from the hold. We eventually took off at 7.30pm and arrived back at London Gatwick at 11.30am, about one and a half hours later than originally scheduled, so not too bad in the end.

We were through immigration and baggage claim and in a taxi heading for the hotel where we had left our car in forty minutes.

We collected the car and drove home, in Norfolk, arriving at 3.30pm.

This had been a wonderful holiday with two very professional, knowledgeable and experienced guides who did their utmost to address our needs and wishes.

A total of 352 species of birds had been seen or heard (nearly all seen), with new birds on all but the last day, 32 Reptiles, mammals and insects were recorded. A small number of butterflies were identified and a good number of Damselflies and Dragonflies were also seen but not identified.