

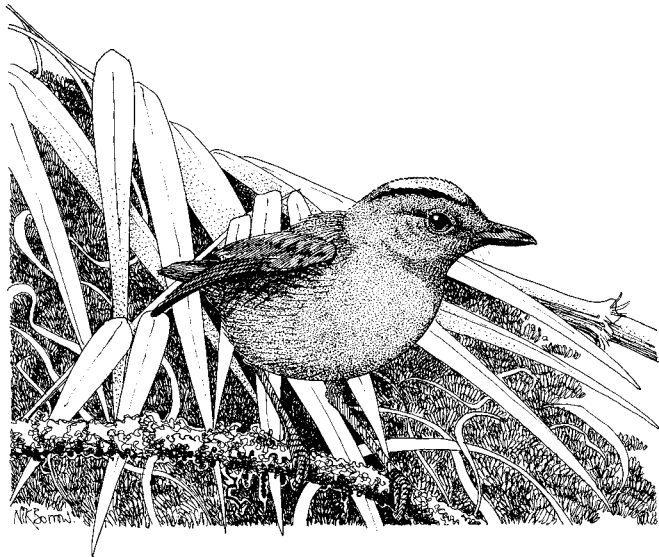
COSTA RICA

Saturday 5th March – Friday 18th March 2011 (14 days)
Northern Costa Rica Post-Tour Extension to Saturday 26th March (8 days)

Leader: Matt Denton

Group Size Limit: 9

Tour Category: Easy for the most part, occasionally Moderate (and see walking note as regards San Gerardo)



Zeledonia or Wrenthrush (Nik Borrow)

Had Christopher Columbus been a birdwatcher, he could not have christened his new found land on his last voyage in 1502 more aptly – Costa Rica or ‘Rich Coast’. Over 870 species of birds have been recorded from this small Central American country, the highest species diversity in an area of this size anywhere on earth. Not only is its avifauna exceedingly rich, but Costa Rica (together with neighbouring western Panama) is one of the greatest centres of avian endemism in the world, with nearly 70 species found nowhere else!

Costa Rica is now well-known as one of the best areas for birding on earth, for a series of stunning wildlife films and the many glowing reports from visitors have made people realize what a treasure house of nature this gem of a country really is. Costa Rica is utterly unlike the preconceived view of Central America. There is no recent history of revolutions, medal-bespattered dictators, political prisoners and masses

of half-starved, landless peasants. Instead Costa Rica is one of the most prosperous countries in Latin America with the highest literacy level in the region, no army (it was abolished as unnecessary in 1949!), stable democratic government, excellent standards of public health and the highest percentage of land area devoted to national parks and reserves of any country in the world.

This beautiful land is an ornithological melting pot where the avifaunas of Central and South America merge. Here we will see Central American species at the southern limits of their range, South American species at their northern limits and numerous species that are endemic to Costa Rica and western Panama.

For the birdwatcher the factor that makes Costa Rica so attractive is not simply its astonishingly rich avifauna, but the fact that it is packed into such a small area. In Costa Rica one could, if one wanted, drive from the

Pacific lowlands up over the central highlands and down to the Caribbean lowlands in a matter of five or six hours, passing through every major habitat zone found in Central America!

This carefully crafted itinerary represents the most comprehensive bird tour of Costa Rica available, producing more of the regional specialities than any other. Superb, relatively easy birding, mostly good accommodations and quite good roads make birding this small but incredibly rich country a real pleasure.

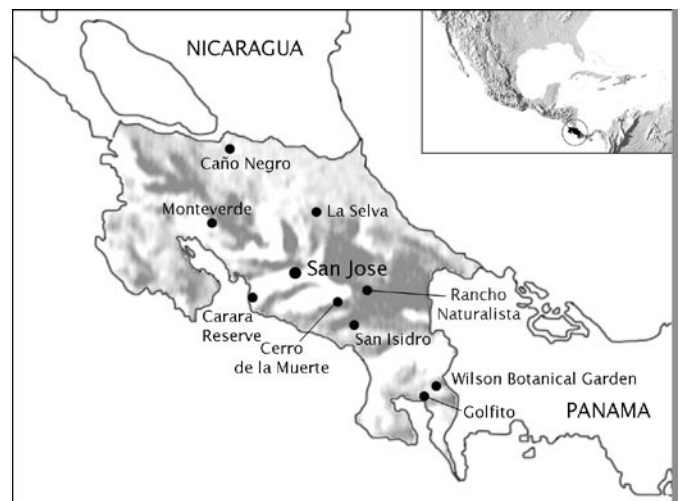
During our travels we shall first explore the central valley around the capital, San Jose, as we look for mid-elevation specialities in the huge Braulio Carrillo National Park, the scenic Tapanti National Park and the hospitable Rancho Naturalista in the Caribbean slope foothills. Amongst the numerous specialities at these great locations are Purplish-backed Quail-Dove, the lovely Snowcap, Lattice-tailed Trogon, Dull-mantled Antbird, Tawny-chested Flycatcher and Cabanis’s Ground-Sparrow.

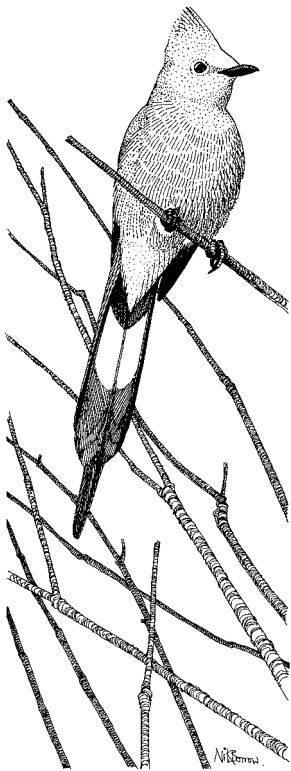
From here we will make our way into the central highlands, reaching the subalpine zone at over 9800ft (3000m) at Cerro de la Muerte. Here we will find many montane specialities, including the incomparable Resplendent Quetzal, Costa Rican Pygmy-Owl, Fiery-

throated Hummingbird, Ruddy Treerunner, Buffy Tuftedcheek, Ochraceous Pewee, Black-capped Flycatcher, Timberline Wren, Sooty and Mountain Robins, Black-billed Nightingale-Thrush, Long-tailed and Black-and-yellow Silky-flycatchers, Yellow-winged Vireo, Collared Redstart, Flame-throated and Black-cheeked Warblers, the curious Zeledonia (or Wrenthrush), which was formerly often placed in a family of its own, Sooty-capped Bush-Tanager, Black-thighed Grosbeak, Slaty Flower-piercer, Large-footed and Yellow-thighed Finches, and Volcano Junco.

Next we will visit Las Cruces and the Golfito region in the far southwest, where specialities include White-tailed Emerald, Chiriqui Yellowthroat and the endemic Black-cheeked Ant-Tanager, stopping en route at Dr Alexander Skutch’s famous ‘garden reserve’ at San Isidro.

Moving northwards, we come to the famous Carara Reserve where we will explore beautiful white sand beaches, mangrove swamps and some of the best remaining areas of lowland rainforest along the Pacific coast. Here, the magnificent Scarlet Macaw is still quite common and we will enjoy the host of other birds, including such stars as Boat-billed Heron at one end of the size spectrum and the endemic Mangrove Hummingbird at the other.





Long-tailed Silky-Flycatcher
(Nik Borrow)

During the optional extension we will visit the magnificent cloud forest and lush pastures of the northwestern highlands, staying at both the renowned Monteverde and at remote Santa Elena. Amongst the many special birds here are Highland Tinamou, Black Guan, Chiriqui Quail-Dove, Ochre-breasted Antpitta, Black-headed and Rufous-breasted Antthrushes, the spectacular Bare-necked Umbrellabird, the strange Three-wattled Bellbird, Rufous-browed Tyrannulet, Blue-and-gold Tanager and White-eared Ground-Sparrow.

Next we will head north to the Nicaraguan border region and the marshy wetlands of Lago Caño Negro where we can find the restricted-range Nicaraguan Grackle and Nicaraguan Seed-Finch, as well as the strange Sungrebe.

Our ultimate port of call on this speciality-rich tour will be the unforgettable, bird-rich

rainforests of the Caribbean lowlands at the Organization of Tropical Studies' reserve at La Selva. Great Tinamou is relatively straightforward to see here and we even have a good chance of observing the impressive Great Curassow.

Birdquest has operated tours to Costa Rica since 1987.

Itinerary

Day 1 The tour begins this evening at San Jose, where we will stay for two nights.

Day 2 Braulio Carrillo National Park and adjacent protected areas preserve a huge tract of country extending from the Caribbean lowlands to the summit of Volcan Barva. Here, although we are still close to San Jose, we could be in a different world. The noise of traffic has vanished, replaced by the exotic sounds of tropical birds and insects. We shall concentrate on the lower foothill elevations, exploring habitats on either side of the park boundary which hold some exciting birds. Amongst the many species we should find are Black, Turkey and King Vultures, Brown-hooded Parrot, Squirrel Cuckoo, White-collared, Chestnut-collared and Grey-rumped Swifts, Violet-headed Hummingbird, the tiny Black-crested Coquette, Green Thorntail, Violet-crowned Woodnymph, Red-footed Plumeleeter, Purple-crowned Fairy, the near-endemic Lattice-tailed Trogon, Collared Aracari, Black-cheeked Woodpecker, Wedge-billed Woodcreeper, Brown-billed Scythebill, Western Woodhaunter (split from Striped), Buff-throated Foliage-gleaner, Russet Antshrike, Streak-crowned Antwren, Checker-throated Antwren, Cinnamon Becard, Tropical Kingbird, Great Kiskadee, Ochre-bellied Flycatcher, Stripe-breasted and House Wrens, White-breasted Wood-Wren, the shy Black-headed Nightingale-Thrush,

Tawny-faced Gnatwren, Lesser Greenlet, Bananaquit, Green Honeycreeper, Scarlet-thighed Dacnis, Chestnut-headed Oropendola, Tawny-capped Euphonia, Emerald, Speckled, Golden-hooded, Bay-headed, Blue-grey, Carmiol's, White-shouldered, Tawny-crested and Black-and-yellow Tanagers, White-throated Shrike-Tanager, Black-faced Grosbeak, Variable Seedeater and Orange-billed Sparrow. During the northern winter period, visitors include Olive-sided Flycatcher, Tennessee and Chestnut-sided Warblers, and Baltimore Oriole. Closer to bustling San Jose we should see Clay-coloured Robin and the ubiquitous Great-tailed Grackle.

Day 3 After looking for the shy Cabanis's Ground-Sparrow (split from Prevost's) on the outskirts of San Jose, we shall visit Tapanti National Park, which is situated on the southern rim of the mountains which surround the central valley and San Jose. Enjoying spectacular views of the surrounding hills and overlooking the central valley, the unspoilt subtropical forests of Tapanti offer some of the best birding to be found within an hour's drive of the capital. An abundance of moss and bromeliads festoon this bird-rich habitat which is home to a colourful array of tanagers, whilst the flowering shrubbery attracts many hummingbirds. A wide track ensures good views of the mixed bird parties which move rapidly through the tree tops or creep through the dense undergrowth and primitive tree ferns. Either here or in the nearby coffee plantation country we will hope to find the graceful American Swallow-tailed Kite, Double-toothed Kite, Sulphur-winged Parakeet, Vaux's Swift, White-bellied Mountain-Gem, Black-bellied Hummingbird, Collared Trogon, Red-headed and Prong-billed Barbets, Golden-olive Woodpecker, Spotted Woodcreeper, Red-faced Spinetail, Spotted Barbtail, Immaculate Antbird,

the secretive Silvery-fronted Tapaculo, Barred Becard, Black Phoebe, Golden-bellied, Tufted, Dusky-capped, Boat-billed, Piratic, Social, Yellowish and Slaty-capped Flycatchers, Scale-crested Pygmy-Tyrant, Flammulated Attila (split from Bright-rumped), Rufous Mourner, Black Phoebe, Tropical Pewee, Torrent and Mistletoe Tyrannulets, Northern Rough-winged and Blue-and-white Swallows, Azure-hooded Jay, Ochraceous Wren, Grey-breasted Wood-Wren, White-throated Robin, Black-faced Solitaire, Slaty-backed and Orange-billed Nightingale-Thrushes, Brown-capped Vireo, Three-striped Warbler, Tropical Parula, Slate-throated Redstart, Bronzed Cowbird, Golden-browed Chlorophonia, Blue-hooded Euphonia, Silver-throated and Spangle-cheeked Tanagers, Common Bush-Tanager, Yellow-throated and Chestnut-capped Brush-Finches, and Sooty-faced Finch. Migrants from North America during the winter period include Broad-winged Hawk, Swainson's Thrush, and Golden-winged and Blackburnian Warblers. Later we shall drive to the lovely Rancho Naturalista for a three nights stay.

Days 4-5 Mainly catering to birders, Rancho Naturalista is perched on a hillside overlooking the fertile Tuis river valley. Behind the lodge a fine patch of primary foothill forest hosts some of Costa Rica's most localized birds. Early in the morning the near-endemic Tawny-chested Flycatcher advertises its presence with its characteristic song, whilst in nearby gullies we shall look for the secretive Dull-mantled Antbird. Two of our main target species are the exquisite Snowcap, undoubtedly one of the most spectacular 'hummers', and the elusive Purplish-backed Quail-Dove. At a set of hummingbird feeders conveniently placed at the forest edge we shall wait



Resplendent Quetzal (Nik Borrow)

for this tiny jewel to show itself in all its splendour, and we should also see visiting Band-tailed Barbthroat, Green and Stripe-throated Hermits, White-necked Jacobin, Green-breasted Mango, Brown Violetear, Rufous-tailed Hummingbird and Green-crowned Brilliant. Other birds we may well see in the open areas or along the forest trails include Western Cattle Egret, Grey-headed Chachalaca, White-throated Crane, Red-billed and Short-billed Pigeons, Ruddy Ground-Dove, White-tipped and Grey-chested Doves, Crimson-fronted Parakeet, White-crowned Parrot, Groove-billed Ani, Mottled Owl, Common Pauraque, Black-throated and Northern Violaceous Trogons, Rufous and Broad-billed Motmots, Rufous-tailed Jacamar, Keel-billed Toucan, Hoffmann's and Lineated Woodpeckers, Plain-

brown, Olivaceous, Northern Barred, Cocoa (split from Buff-throated) and Streak-headed Woodcreepers, Slaty Spinetail, Plain Xenops, the ground-living Tawny-throated Leaf-tosser, Plain Antvireo, Dusky and Spotted Antbirds, White-winged Becard, Masked and Black-crowned Tityras, White-ruffed, White-collared and White-crowned Manakins, Sulphur-bellied, Grey-capped and Olive-striped Flycatchers, White-throated Spadebill, Common Tody-Flycatcher, Yellow-bellied Elaenia, Southern Rough-winged Swallow, Brown Jay, Plain and Whistling Wrens, the near-endemic Black-throated Wren, Tawny-crowned Greenlet, Golden-crowned and Chestnut-capped Warblers, Montezuma Oropendola, Scarlet-rumped and Yellow-billed Cacicques, Melodious Blackbird (a recent invader from Nicaragua), Palm, Passerini's (split from Scarlet-rumped), Crimson-collared and White-lined Tanagers, Black-headed and Buff-throated Saltators, Yellow-faced and Blue-black Grassquits, and Black-striped Sparrow. If we are fortunate we will even encounter the unobtrusive Grey-headed Manakin or a party of Ashy-throated Bush-Tanagers.

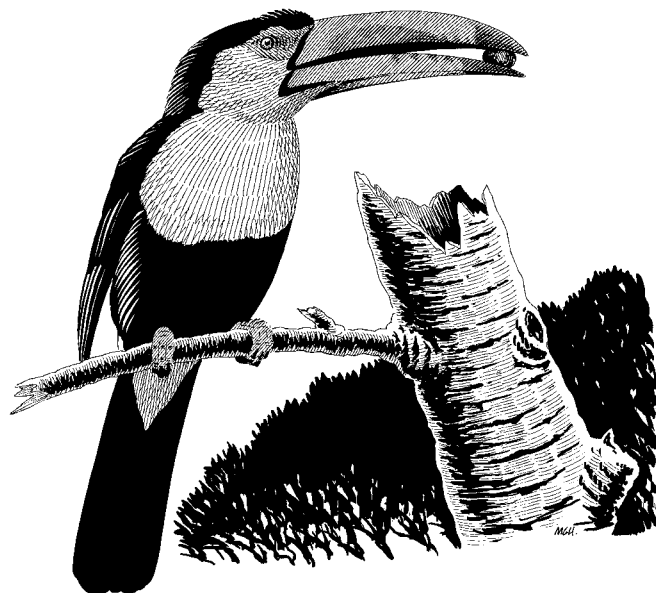
During our stay we will make a trip to 'Silent Mountain' to look for the stunning and rarely-seen Lovely Cotinga at one of the few known sites for this beautiful bird. With luck we will also see the strange Sharpbill (a species sometimes treated as a monotypic family) and Red-fronted Parrotlet. A steep uphill hike on stony and, in part, very muddy ground is involved, so this will be very much an optional excursion for those who want to try for these special birds.

Day 6 After some final birding at Rancho Naturalista we shall drive up into the Cordillera de Talamanca for a two nights stay at Cerro de la Muerte, stopping along the way in some wet meadows

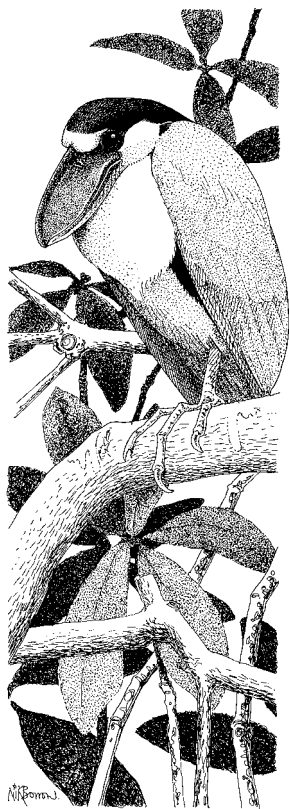
to search for the localized White-throated Flycatcher and *lucidus* race of the Sedge Wren, as well as White-tailed Kite and Eastern Meadowlark.

Day 7 Cerro de la Muerte or the 'Mountain of Death' was so named because of the many people who died of cold whilst crossing it en route between the Central Valley and Valle del General to the south. Nowadays the Pan American Highway crosses the mountain at over 10,800ft (3300m) and a comfortable lodge ensures that it no longer holds such fears. Here we will be birding the temperate oak forests with their thick bamboo understorey, and the chaparral-like paramo above the treeline. At these altitudes many of the birds seem remarkably tame, and whilst the number of species is not great, most are confined to the high mountains of Costa Rica and adjacent Panama. Here lives one of the world's most spectacular birds, the Resplendent Quetzal. This is one of the few places where these wonderful birds can be seen without difficulty and we will be able to watch in fascination as they fly from tree to tree with their incredibly elongated uppertail coverts dancing along behind them. We

shall also concentrate our efforts on finding such birds as Costa Rican Pygmy-Owl (split from Andean), Fiery-throated Hummingbird, Ruddy Treerunner, Buffy Tuftedcheek, Ochraceous Pewee, Black-capped Flycatcher, Timberline Wren, Sooty and Mountain Robins, Black-billed Nightingale-Thrush, Long-tailed and Black-and-yellow Silky-flycatchers, Yellow-winged Vireo, Collared Redstart, Flame-throated and Black-cheeked Warblers, the curious Zeledonia (or Wrenthrush), which was formerly often placed in a family of its own, Sooty-capped Bush-Tanager, Black-thighed Grosbeak, Slaty Flower-piercer, Large-footed and Yellow-thighed Finches, and Volcano Junco. If we are fortunate we will come across the scarce Silvery-throated Jay. Should the bamboo be flowering we could also encounter Barred Parakeet and the strange Peg-billed Finch, although these species can be very hard to find. The hummingbird feeders at our hotel provide excellent opportunities for studying Green Violetear, Magnificent, Scintillant and Volcano Hummingbirds, and Grey-tailed Mountain-Gem. We shall also keep a lookout for Dark Pewee in the



Keel-billed Toucan (Michael Hodgson)



Boat-billed Heron (Nik Borrow)

nearby treetops. Some of the more widespread species we should encounter here include Band-tailed and Ruddy Pigeons, Acorn and Hairy Woodpeckers, Spot-crowned Woodcreeper, Mountain Elaenia, Ruddy-capped Nightingale-Thrush, Flame-coloured Tanager and Rufous-collared Sparrow. During the northern winter period, Black-throated Green and Wilson's Warblers are present. A night time excursion may reveal a Bare-shanked Screech-Owl or a Dusky Nightjar.

Day 8 After spending most of the day on Cerro de la Muerte we shall descend to the San Isidro area for an overnight stay.

Day 9 In the morning we will make a visit to the famous private reserve of Dr Alexander Skutch, who is one of the world's leading authorities on neotropical birds. A wide variety of birds can be seen in his 'garden' and in the forest along the entrance road. Some of the

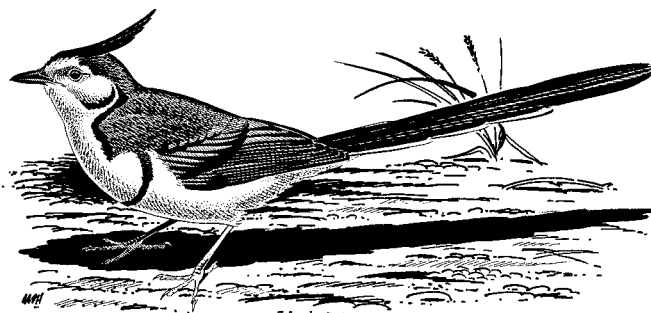
species we expect to find here are Orange-chinned Parakeet, Charming (or Beryl-crowned) Hummingbird, Baird's Trogon, Blue-crowned Motmot, the near-endemic Fiery-billed Aracari, Olivaceous Piculet, Golden-naped Woodpecker, the near-endemic Orange-collared Manakin, the threatened Turquoise Cotinga, Rufous Piha, Slate-headed Tody-Flycatcher, Yellow-olive Flycatcher, Rufous-breasted Wren, Shining and Red-legged Honeycreepers, and Blue Dacnis. If the *Vosychia* trees are in flower we may find the elusive, near-endemic White-crested Coquette. We shall also explore fields, scrub and open country where we should find such species as Pearl Kite, Roadside Hawk, Laughing Falcon, Yellow-headed Caracara, Scaled Pigeon, Inca Dove, Smooth-billed Ani, Striped Cuckoo, Red-crowned Woodpecker, Fork-tailed Flycatcher, Lesser Elaenia, Cherrie's Tanager (split from Scarlet-rumped) and Streaked Saltator. Later we shall continue southwards to the Wilson Botanical Gardens near Las Cruces for an overnight stay.

Day 10 This morning we will explore the pleasant Wilson gardens and excellent trail network that leads into the adjacent forest. This is a very birdy spot, with a host of flycatchers, warblers and tanagers, including many North American migrants, but we will be concentrating on the near-endemic White-tailed Emerald. Two other specialities of the area are the near-endemic Chiriqui Yellowthroat, which can regularly be found around some nearby marshy ponds, and Black-headed Brush-Finch, a localized denizen of the forest edge. Later we will head for the Golfito region for an overnight stay. Recent deforestation has created a corridor of open country that has allowed Brown-throated Parakeets, Pale-breasted Spinetails and Red-breasted Blackbirds to invade the area.

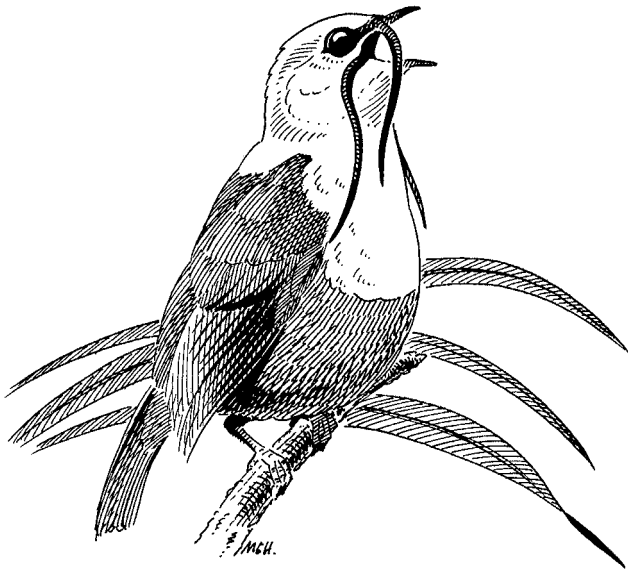
Day 11 The Golfito region borders the Golfo Dulce in southwestern Costa Rica. The great prize this morning will be the very localized Black-cheeked Ant-Tanager, one of just a handful of species entirely endemic to Costa Rica (most of the regional endemics are shared with Panama). We can also expect to see two near-endemic specialities: Black-hooded Antshrike and Spot-crowned Euphonia. Other birds we could well find at this locality include Costa Rican Swift (split from Band-rumped), Long-billed Hermit, Chestnut-mandibled Toucan, Rufous-winged Woodpecker, Black-striped Woodcreeper, Bicoloured Antbird, Blue-crowned Manakin, Riverside Wren, Yellow-crowned Euphonia and Blue-black Grosbeak. Later we will drive northwards to Carara Reserve for a three nights stay.

Days 12-13 Before Carara Reserve was opened up to visitors, ornithologists were compelled to organise full-scale expeditions in order to reach Pacific-coast lowland rainforest. Now it is possible to walk into this endangered Central American habitat from a newly built tarmac road. Many of the region's special birds can be found here including the magnificent Scarlet Macaw. These raucous, gaudy, long-tailed parrots are the park's star attraction as they fly effortlessly amongst the large fruiting trees or flap slowly across to the nearby mangroves where they roost. By slowly

walking along the excellent trail system we may well find birds such as Collared Forest-Falcon, Crested Guan, Blue Ground-Dove, Mealy Parrot, Slaty-tailed and Black-headed Trogons, White-whiskered Puffbird, Pale-billed Woodpecker, Tawny-winged and Long-tailed Woodcreepers, Dot-winged Antwren, Chestnut-backed Antbird, Black-faced Antthrush, the lovely Spectacled Antpitta, Rose-throated Becard, the smart Red-capped Manakin, Northern Bentbill, Streaked and Northern Royal Flycatchers, Greenish Elaenia, Stub-tailed Spadebill, Rufous-naped and Rufous-and-white Wrens, and Long-billed Gnatwren. If we are very fortunate we will even see the stunning Yellow-billed Cotinga. Mammals are not conspicuous, but we should encounter Mantled Howler and White-nosed Coati. Along the forest edge, or in nearby open country, we will expect to encounter Grey and Short-tailed Hawks, Northern Crested-Caracara, Pale-vented Pigeon, Orange-chinned Parakeet, Red-lore and Yellow-naped Parrots, Pacific Screech-Owl, Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl, Lesser Nighthawk, Steely-vented Hummingbird, Turquoise-browed Motmot, White-necked Puffbird, Barred Antshrike, Brown-crested Flycatcher, Grey-breasted Martin, White-throated Magpie-Jay, Tropical Gnatcatcher, Scrub Greenlet, Grey-crowned Yellowthroat,



White-throated Magpie-Jay (Michael Hodgson)



Three-wattled Bellbird (Michael Hodgson)

Scrub Euphonia, Blue Grosbeak and Stripe-headed Sparrow.

We will also explore the mangrove-fringed Tárcoles estuary by boat. The area attracts many waterbirds, typically including Brown Pelican, Neotropic Cormorant, Anhinga, Magnificent Frigatebird, Great and Snowy Egrets, Great Blue, Little Blue, Tricoloured and Green Herons, Yellow-crowned Night-Heron, Bare-throated Tiger-Heron, Wood Stork, White Ibis, Roseate Spoonbill, Black-bellied Whistling-Duck, Northern Jacana, Black-necked Stilt, Semipalmated, Wilson's and Collared Plovers, Lesser Yellowlegs, Willet, Spotted and Western Sandpipers, Laughing Gull, Royal Tern, Ringed, Amazon and Green Kingfishers, and Mangrove Swallow. One of the main attractions is the strange Boat-billed Heron, whose huge eyes and massive, ridged bill create a strange, almost prehistoric appearance. A search of the mangroves should reveal Common Black-Hawk, the threatened endemic Mangrove Hummingbird, American Pygmy Kingfisher, Panama Flycatcher, Northern Scrub-Flycatcher, Mangrove Vireo

and Mangrove Warbler. During the winter period, migrants from North America include Yellow Warbler, Northern Waterthrush and American Redstart.

Day 14 You will be transferred to San Jose where the tour ends around midday.

Northern Costa Rica Post-Tour Extension Itinerary

Day 14 Today we will drive through the Pacific lowlands before climbing into the northwestern highlands of Costa Rica for a four nights stay in the Monteverde area (spending the first two nights at Monteverde itself and the last two nights at the San Gerardo field station in the Santa Elena reserve). We will stop in dry country and mangrove areas en route to search for Double-striped Thick-knee, Common Ground-Dove, Orange-fronted Parakeet, White-fronted Parrot, Cinnamon Hummingbird, Northern Beardless Tyrannulet, Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, Banded Wren, White-lored Gnatcatcher, Yellow-green Vireo and Olive Sparrow. If we are in luck we will also come across Spot-bellied Bobwhite or Lesser Ground-Cuckoo. We will also visit one of the

villages along the way where we will look for the lethargic Hoffman's Two-toed Sloth and roosting Black-and-white Owls in the village square!

Days 15-17 During the 1950s a group of Quakers, disillusioned with some aspects of life in the United States, came to Costa Rica. They settled at Monteverde, initiating the dairy farming which is a prominent feature of the area today. Realizing the importance of a stable watershed for the local economy, they ensured that the forests on the surrounding hills remained intact. We owe these far-sighted pioneers a great debt of gratitude, for today this magnificent area is protected by two major reserves, the world-renowned Monteverde Cloud Forest Preserve and the Santa Elena Reserve. A large and varied bird community inhabits the epiphyte-laden cloudforests in these protected areas which straddle the continental divide. Lower down on the Pacific slope there is a more pronounced dry season and here the cloudforest is replaced by semi-humid evergreen forest, home to a different set of birds. Sometimes the mornings at Monteverde are gloriously clear and one can see the forested ridges extending away into the distance. Three-wattled Bellbirds utter their deafening calls from exposed perches in the canopy, Lineated Foliage-gleaners and Streak-breasted Treehunters search the moss and bromeliad-encrusted branches, whilst at some strategically positioned feeders we will have wonderful opportunities for prolonged views of a multitude of iridescent hummingbirds including Violet Sabrewing, Coppery-headed Emerald (endemic to Costa Rica), Purple-throated Mountain-Gem, Magenta-throated Woodstar and Stripe-tailed Hummingbird. Monteverde offers cloud forest birding at its best, although we shall doubtless have to work hard to find some of the more retiring

inhabitants of the area, and the local Resplendent Quetzals are no longer as easy to see as they once were. By quietly walking along the maze of trails we may find Black Guan, Black-breasted Wood-Quail, Buff-fronted Quail-Dove, 'Orange-bellied Trogon' (nowadays regarded as a colour morph of Collared), Blue-throated Toucanet (split from Emerald), Smoky-brown Woodpecker, the secretive Grey-throated Leaf-tosser, Slaty Antwren, Eye-ringed Flatbill and Yellow-throated Euphonia, and we will also have the opportunity to catch up on anything we missed at Tapanti. In the lower areas at Monteverde we will look for Chiriqui Quail-Dove, Salvin's Emerald, Ruddy Woodcreeper, the superb Long-tailed Manakin and the smart White-eared Ground-Sparrow. From Monteverde proper we will hike down to the San Gerardo field station in the Santa Elena reserve, which takes about one and a half hours, and spend two nights in this delightful spot. (Our luggage will be transported for us, and anyone who would find the walk tiring can arrange in advance to be transported by motorized tricycle bike.) Our main target here is the fantastic Bare-necked Umbrellabird, which we have a very good chance of seeing. Other specialities of the area include Highland Tinamou, Ochre-breasted Antpitta, Black-headed and Rufous-breasted Antthrushes, Rufous-browed Tyrannulet and Blue-and-gold Tanager, all of which we should find during our stay.

Day 18 After some final birding at Monteverde we will drive across the continental divide and descend into the Caribbean slope lowlands. We will be heading into ornithologically little known territory not far from the border with Nicaragua. Our destination is a remote lodge at Caño Negro, where we shall overnight. This afternoon we will travel by boat along the Rio Frio and into the marshy expanses of



Bare-necked Umbrellabird
(Nik Borrow)

Lago Caño Negro. Our prime target will be the Nicaraguan Grackle, which inhabits the reedy vegetation and is only found in southern Nicaragua and northernmost Costa Rica. More spectacular, however, will be the sheer variety of kingfishers and the large numbers of Spectacled Caiman. No fewer than five species of kingfisher occur here, and we have a good chance of seeing all of them, including Belted and American Pygmy. This is also a great trip for seeing the strange Sungrebe, either resting on a sloping riverside branch or swimming stealthily along

the river margins. Back on land, we will be looking in particular for the restricted-range Nicaraguan Seed-Finch, while other new birds may well include Lesser Yellow-headed Vulture, Grey-headed Dove and Spot-breasted Wren.

Day 19 After some final birding at Caño Negro we will transfer to La Selva for a three nights stay.

Days 20-21 La Selva is the most accessible tract of humid lowland rainforest on the Caribbean slope of Costa Rica. Most of this superb reserve is primary forest, whilst other parts consist of secondary growth, swamp forest, river margins, former plantations and abandoned pasture. The area is now maintained as a natural laboratory by the Organization for Tropical Studies and an excellent network of trails allows access to every habitat. The accommodation at the research station at La Selva is pleasantly rustic but this minor shortcoming is more than made up for by being right in the middle of prime habitat. Over 400 species have been recorded from the area and a great many of the birds we will encounter will not have been seen earlier in our travels. Rainforest birding is always extremely rewarding, but one must cultivate patience and keep a vigilant watch from ground-level to the canopy high above our heads. The easiest birding is to be had around the clearing where the research station is situated. Here the flowering trees act as a magnet for many different species of hummingbird. As

we walk the trails we will hear the plaintive whistles of ground-dwelling tinamous, whilst after a quiet period we may suddenly be surrounded by strange calls and have to play hide and seek with an antbird flock amongst the tangled vegetation. Overhead in the canopy gaudy tanagers, honeycreepers and cotingas are attracted to flowering and fruiting trees. Amongst the superb selection of birds we expect to find here are Great and Slaty-breasted Tinamous, Grey-headed and Plumbeous Kites, Crane and Semiplumbeous Hawks, Olive-backed Quail-Dove, Olive-throated Parakeet, Guatemalan Screech-Owl, Short-tailed Nighthawk, Blue-chested Hummingbird, Pied Puffbird, Chestnut-coloured Woodpecker, Great, Fasciated and Western Slaty Antshrikes, Ocellated Antbird, the handsome Snowy Cotinga, Purple-throated Fruitcrow, Black-headed Tody-Flycatcher, Black-capped Pygmy-Tyrant, Yellow Tyrannulet, Long-tailed Tyrant, White-ringed and Yellow-margined Flycatchers, Band-backed and Bay Wrens, Olive-crowned Yellowthroat, Buff-rumped Warbler, Black-cowled and Yellow-tailed Orioles, Olive-backed Euphonia, Plain-coloured and Dusky-faced Tanagers, Red-throated Ant-Tanager, Greyish Saltator, and Thick-billed (or Lesser) and Pink-billed Seed-Finches. We also have a good chance of coming across the awe-inspiring Great Curassow. Mammals are elusive, but we should see Collared Peccary and Central American Agouti and may be lucky enough to see a sloth or a noisy troupe

of Central American Spider Monkeys, whilst caimans sometimes bask on the river banks.

Day 22 After some final birding at La Selva we will return to San Jose where the extension ends this afternoon.

Accommodation & Road

Transport: The hotels/lodges are mostly of normal Birdquest standard, but at San Gerardo and at La Selva we shall stay at comfortable but fairly simple research stations. Bathroom facilities are sometimes shared at La Selva. Road transport is by small coach and roads are mostly good.

Walking: The walking effort is mostly easy, but there are a few moderate walks. There will be one optional short but strenuous uphill hike near Rancho Naturalista for Lovely Cotinga. Later in the tour, participants may either walk to and from San Gerardo, which is a moderately hard hike on the way back (uphill), or pre-arrange to be transported by 'quad bike' (please request this when booking).

Climate: At low altitudes it is generally hot, but at higher altitudes conditions range from warm to cool (even cold at the highest levels). Periods of sunny weather alternate with overcast spells. There is regular rainfall on the Caribbean slope, but elsewhere rainfall is less frequent and more irregular. It will be rather humid at times.

Bird Photography:

Opportunities are worthwhile.