

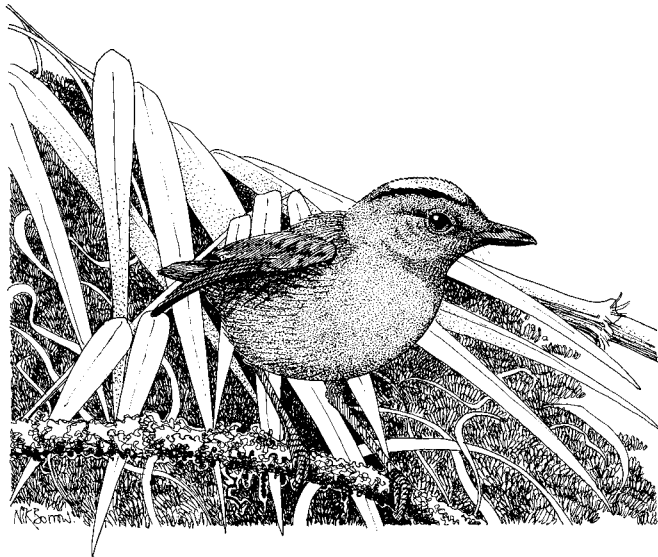
COSTA RICA

Saturday 31st March – Saturday 14th April 2012 (15 days)
Northern Costa Rica Extension to Sunday 22nd April (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 montane and foothill specialities at Irazú Volcano, and the hospitable Rancho Naturalista in the Caribbean slope foothills. Amongst the numerous specialities at these great locations are Buffy-crowned Wood-Partridge, Timberline Wren, Volcano Junco, the lovely Snowcap, Tawny-chested Flycatcher, and Cabanis's Ground-Sparrow.

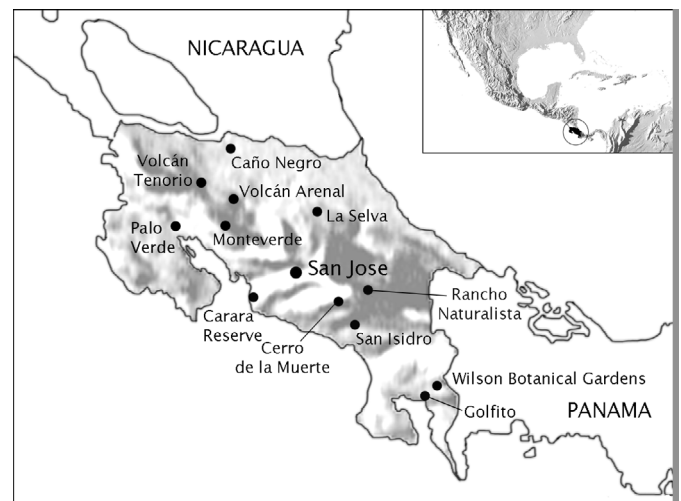
From here we will make our way into the central highlands, reaching the subalpine zone at over 3000m at Cerro de la Muerte. Here we will find many montane specialities, including the incomparable Resplendent Quetzal, Costa Rican Pygmy-Owl, Fiery-throated Hummingbird, Ruddy Treerunner, Buffy Tuftedcheek,

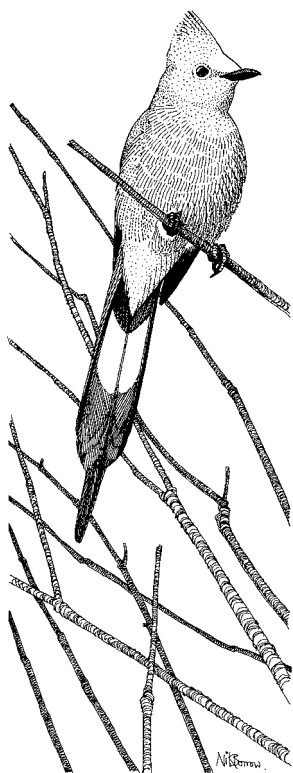
Ochraceous Pewee, Black-capped Flycatcher, Sooty and Mountain Robins, Black-billed Nightingale-Thrush, Long-tailed and Black-and-yellow Silky-flycatchers, Yellow-winged Vireo, Collared Redstart, Flame-throated and Black-cheeked Warblers, the curious Wrenthrush (or *Zeledonia*), which was formerly often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

Next we will visit Las Cruces and the Golfito region in the far southwest, where specialities include White-tailed Emerald, Chiriqui Yellowthroat, White-crested Coquette, the endangered Yellow-billed Cotinga 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.

We then return to the





Long-tailed Silky-Flycatcher
(Nik Borrow)

mountains for the magnificent cloud forest and lush pastures of the northwestern highlands, staying at both the renowned Monteverde and at remote San Gerardo. Amongst the many special birds here are Highland Tinamou, Black Guan, Buff-fronted and Chiriqui Quail-Doves, 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.

During the optional extension we will visit the dry forests and wetlands of Guanacaste's Nicoya Peninsula for such species as Great Curassow, Thicket Tinamou and Jabiru, and the Cordillera de Guanacaste where both Tody and Keel-billed Motmots occur. We will then enjoy 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. Moving to the Arenal Volcano we will seek additional Caribbean specialties including Black-crested Coquette, Streak-crowned Antvireo and Thicket Antpitta.

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. Snowy Cotinga is relatively straightforward to see here and we even have a good chance of observing the Great Green Macaw.

Birdquest has operated tours to Costa Rica since 1987.

Itinerary

Day 1 The tour begins this evening at San Jose, Costa Rica's capital city situated in the Central Valley, where we will stay overnight.

Day 2 We shall begin our birding near our Central Valley hotel for the shy Cabanis's Ground-Sparrow (split from Prevost's), where we should also see Western Cattle Egret, Red-billed Pigeon, Ruddy Ground-Dove, Inca and White-tipped Doves, Crimson-fronted Parakeet, Squirrel Cuckoo, Groove-billed Ani, Blue-vented Hummingbird (split from Steely-vented), Blue-diademed (split from Blue-crowned) Motmot, Hoffmann's and Lineated Woodpeckers, Tropical Kingbird, Great Kiskadee, Brown Jay, House and Plain Wrens, Clay-coloured Thrush, Palm and Blue-grey Tanagers, Bananaquit, Chestnut-capped Warbler (split from Rufous-capped), Greyish (Middle American) Saltator, White-eared Ground-Sparrow, Melodious Blackbird (a recent invader from Nicaragua), and the ubiquitous Great-tailed Grackle. We shall then travel east of the capital to the upper slopes of the Irazú Volcano.

The chaparral-like paramo here contains dense stands of montane bamboo whilst lower down at treeline the elfin woodlands are surrounded by natural savannas. Many of the birds here are restricted to the mountains of Costa Rica and Panama, with this volcano offering the best chance at some of the more difficult to find of these specialities. Here we will have a good opportunity to see the often shy Buffy-crowned Wood-Partridge, along with the more common Fiery-throated Hummingbird, Timberline Wren, Sooty and Mountain Thrushes, Sooty-capped Bush-Tanager, Slaty Flowerpiercer, Flame-throated Warbler, Yellow-thighed and Large-footed Finches and Volcano Junco. At this time of year the tiny Volcano Hummingbirds can often be seen doing their amazing aerial display flights, and with a little persistence we may be fortunate to see the rare Peg-billed Finch. Should the bamboo be flowering we could also encounter Barred Parakeet, Maroon-chested Ground-Dove and Blue Seed-eater although these species can be very hard to find. Later we shall descend to Rancho Naturalista located on the Caribbean slope. If time permits, we shall have a look for Sunbittern along a nearby river as well as the localized White-throated Flycatcher at a usually reliable stakeout.

Day 3 Mainly catering to birders, hospitable Rancho Naturalista is perched on a hillside overlooking the fertile Tuis river valley. Behind the lodge a fine patch of primary foothill forest hosts two 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 the exquisite Snowcap, undoubtedly one of the most spectacular 'hummers', is regularly seen each morning in the garden. Here we shall wait for this tiny jewel to show itself in all its splendour, and

we should also see Green and Stripe-throated Hermits, Violet-headed Hummingbird, White-necked Jacobin, Green-breasted Mango, Brown Violetear, Rufous-tailed Hummingbird, Violet-crowned Woodnymph, Bronze-tailed (Red-footed) Plumeleater and Green-crowned Brilliant. Other birds we may well see in the open areas or along the forest trails include Double-toothed Kite, Black and Turkey Vultures, Grey-headed Chachalaca, Short-billed Pigeon, Ruddy Ground-Dove, Grey-chested Dove, White-crowned and Brown-hooded Parrots, Common Pauraque, Dusky-backed (split from Vaux's), White-collared and Chestnut-collared Swifts, Xalapa Trogon (split from Collared), Keel-billed Toucan, Collared Aracari, Golden-olive and Black-cheeked Woodpeckers, Wedge-billed, Cocoa (split from Buff-throated), Spotted and Streak-headed Woodcreepers, Plain Antvireo, Immaculate Antbird, Paltry Tyrannulet, Scale-crested Pygmy-Tyrant, Yellow-bellied Elaenia, Common and Black-headed Tody-Flycatchers, Tropical Pewee, Ochre-bellied, Sulphur-bellied, Piratic, Social, and Grey-capped Flycatchers, Flammulated Attila (split from Bright-rumped), Masked Tityra, Cinnamon Becard, White-collared Manakin, Blue-and-white and Northern and Southern Rough-winged Swallows, White-breasted Wood-Wren, Band-backed, Stripe-breasted and Black-throated Wrens, Tropical Parula, Golden-crowned Warbler, Golden-hooded, Bay-headed, Passerini's (split from Scarlet-rumped) and White-lined Tanagers, Red-throated Ant-Tanager, Black-headed and Buff-throated Saltators, Yellow-faced and Blue-black Grassquits, Variable Seed-eater, Thick-billed (or Lesser) Seed-Finch, Orange-billed and Black-striped Sparrows, Chestnut-capped Brush-Finch, Olive-crowned Yellowthroat, Montezuma Oropendola, Scarlet-rumped and Yellow-



Resplendent Quetzal (Nik Borrow)

billed Caciques and Bronzed Cowbird. During the northern winter period, visitors include Broad-winged Hawk, Olive-sided and Yellow-bellied Flycatchers, Tennessee, Chestnut-sided, Golden-winged and Blackburnian Warblers, and Baltimore Oriole. 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 *lucidus* race of the Sedge Wren, as well as White-tailed Kite and Eastern Meadowlark. In the afternoon we will have time for some initial exploration of the splendid mountain habitat.

Day 4 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

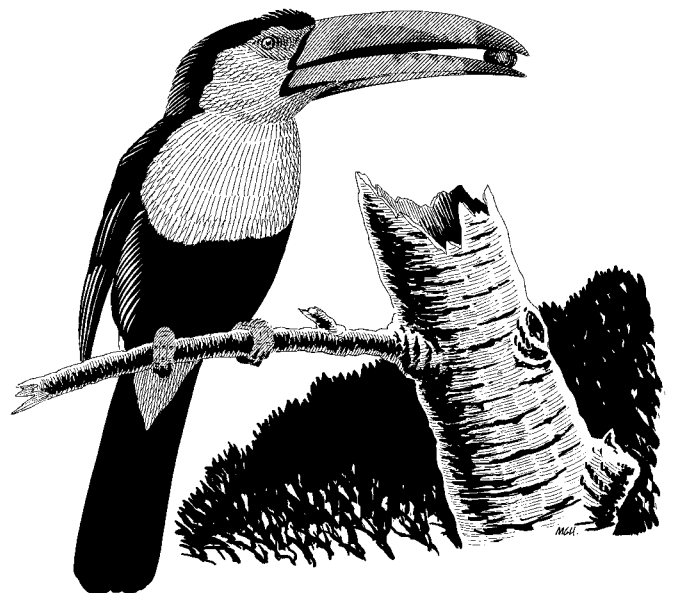
route between the Central Valley and Valle del General to the south. Nowadays the Pan American Highway crosses the mountain at over 3300m and a comfortable lodge ensures that it no longer holds such fears. Here we will be birding the temperate oak forests with their thick bamboo understorey. At these 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), Sulphur-winged Parakeet, Ruddy Treerunner, Buffy Tuftedcheek, the secretive Silvery-fronted Tapaculo, Ochraceous Pewee, Black-capped and Golden-bellied Flycatcher, Black-faced Solitaire, Black-billed Nightingale-Thrush, Long-tailed and Black-and-yellow Silky-flycatchers, Yellow-winged Vireo, Collared Redstart, Black-cheeked Warbler, the curious Wrenthrush (or Zeledonia), which was formerly often placed in a family of its own, Grey-breasted Wood-Wren, Spangle-cheeked Tanager, Black-thighed Grosbeak, and Golden-browed Chlorophonia. With patience we should also see the scarce Silvery-throated Jay or a covey of shy Spotted Wood-Quail. The hummingbird feeders at our hotel provide excellent opportunities for studying Green Violetear, Magnificent, Scintillant and Volcano Hummingbirds, and Grey-tailed Mountain-Gem (split from White-throated). We shall also keep a lookout for Dark

Pewee in the nearby treetops. Some of the more widespread species we should encounter here include Band-tailed and Ruddy Pigeons, American Swallow-tailed Kite, Acorn and Hairy Woodpeckers, Spot-crowned Woodcreeper, Torrent Tyrannulet, Mountain Elaenia, Tufted and Yellowish Flycatchers, Black Phoebe, Brown-capped Vireo, Ochraceous Wren, Ruddy-capped Nightingale-Thrush, Slate-throated Redstart, Silver-throated and Flame-coloured Tanagers and Rufous-collared Sparrow. During the northern winter period, Black-throated Green and Wilson's Warblers are present. A nighttime excursion may reveal a Bare-shanked Screech-Owl or a Dusky Nightjar.

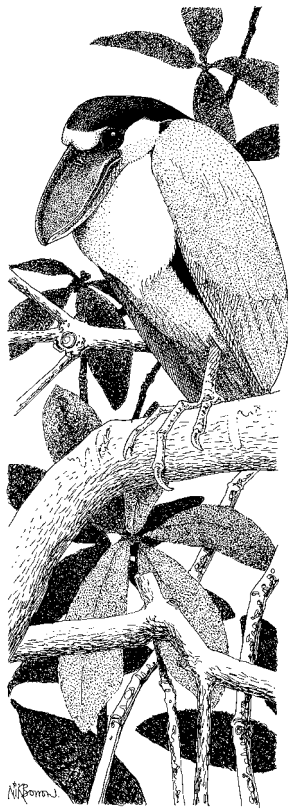
Day 5 After some final birding at Cerro de la Muerte we shall descend to the San Isidro area for an overnight stay.

Day 6 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 Great Tinamou,

Orange-chinned Parakeet, Charming (or Beryl-crowned) Hummingbird, Purple-crowned Fairy, Baird's Trogon, the near-endemic Fiery-billed Aracari, Olivaceous Piculet, Golden-naped Woodpecker, Plain-brown Woodcreeper, Plain Xenops, Russet Antshrike, Yellow Tyrannulet, Northern Bentbill, Golden-crowned Spadebill, Slate-headed Tody-Flycatcher, Yellow-olive, Dusky-capped and Boat-billed Flycatcher, White-winged Becard, the near-endemic Orange-collared Manakin, the threatened Turquoise Cotinga, Rufous Piha, Tawny-crowned and Lesser Greenlets, Rufous-breasted Wren, Orange-billed Nightingale-Thrush, White-shouldered Tanager, Green, Shining and Red-legged Honeycreepers, Blue Dacnis and Buff-rumped Warbler. If the *Vochysia* trees are flowering, our concerted effort to find the elusive, near-endemic White-crested Coquette should result in good views. 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, Smooth-billed Ani, Striped Cuckoo, Red-crowned Woodpecker, Bran-coloured



Keel-billed Toucan (Michael Hodgson)



Boat-billed Heron (Nik Borrow)

and Fork-tailed Flycatchers, Lesser Elaenia, Yellow-throated Brush-Finch, 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 7 The pleasant Wilson garden 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. Some of the additional species we might find here are Marbled Wood-Quail, Ruddy Foliage-gleaner and Elegant Euphonia. Two of the specialities of the area are the near-endemic Chiriqui Yellowthroat, which can regularly be found around some nearby marshy ponds, and the Costa Rican form of Black-headed Brush-Finch, a localized denizen of the forest edge. Later we will head for the Golfito region for an overnight stay.

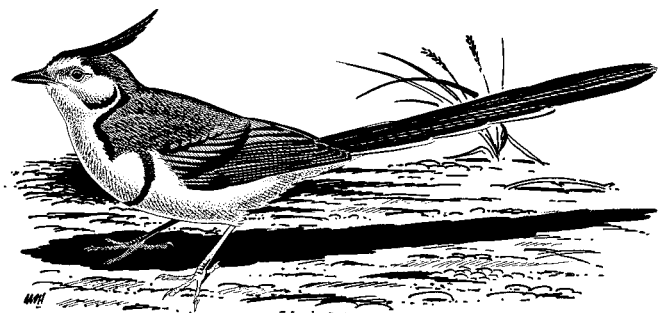
Recent deforestation has created a corridor of open country that has allowed a variety of colonizing species to invade the area. These include Southern Lapwing, Brown-throated Parakeet, Veraguan Mango, Red-rumped Woodpecker, Pale-breasted Spinetail, Yellow-crowned Tyrannulet, Rusty-margined Flycatcher, Red-breasted Blackbird and Crested Oropendola. By late afternoon we will arrive at Esquinas Rainforest Lodge for a two nights stay.

Day 8 Esquinas Rainforest Lodge is found within the Piedras Blancas National Park, which together with the wilderness area of Corcovado National Park, provides some of the last remaining habitat for many of the south Pacific slope endemics. The star bird of the area and the great prize of 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). Two fairly common near-endemic specialities of the area are Black-hooded Antshrike and Spot-crowned Euphonia, and we will make a special trip to a reliable site for the stunning Yellow-billed Cotinga. Our lodge is a good site for the elusive Uniform Crake, and uncommon Bronzy Hermit often visits the rich tropical gardens of Esquinas. Other birds we could well find in the area include King Vulture, Grey-necked Wood-Rail, Blue Ground-Dove, Blue-headed Parrot, Costa Rican Swift (split from Band-rumped), Band-tailed Barbthroat, Long-billed Hermit, Chestnut-mandibled Toucan, Rufous-winged Woodpecker, Black-striped and Tawny-winged Woodcreepers, Bicoloured Antbird, Black-crowned Tityra, Blue-crowned Manakin, Riverside and Black-bellied Wrens, Yellow-crowned Euphonia and Blue-black Grosbeak.

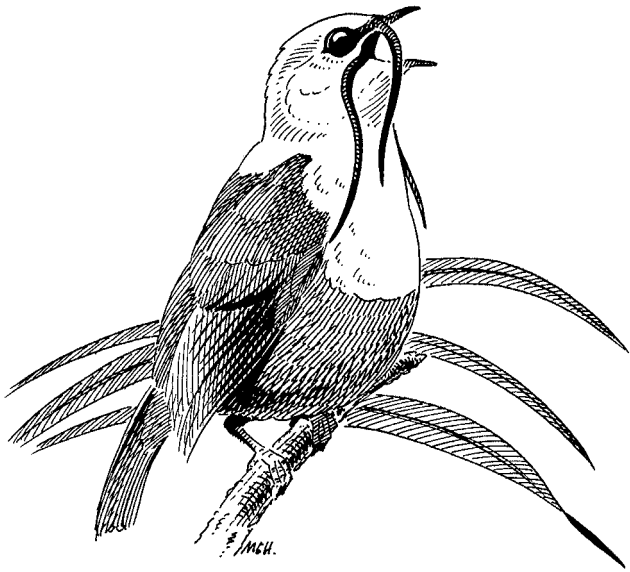
Days 9-10 After some final birding in the southern lowlands, we will drive northwards to Carara Reserve for a two nights stay. Before Carara Reserve was opened up to visitors, ornithologists were compelled to organise full-scale expeditions in order to reach Pacific-coast lowland rainforest. Now it is 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, Mealy Parrot, Slaty-tailed and Black-headed Trogons, White-whiskered Puffbird, Pale-billed Woodpecker, Scaly-throated Leaf-tosser, Olivaceous, Northern Barred and Long-tailed Woodcreepers, Dot-winged Antwren, Chestnut-backed Antbird, Black-faced Antthrush, the lovely Spectacled Antpitta, the smart Red-capped Manakin, Greenish Elaenia, Stub-tailed Spadebill, Streaked and Northern Royal Flycatchers, Rufous Mourner, Rose-throated Becard, Rufous-naped and Rufous-and-white Wrens, and Long-billed Gnatwren. 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, Red-lored and Yellow-naped Parrots, Pacific Screech-Owl, Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl, Lesser Nighthawk, 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, 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, Neotropical 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,



White-throated Magpie-Jay (Michael Hodgson)



Three-wattled Bellbird (Michael Hodgson)

ridged bill create a strange, almost prehistoric appearance. A search of the mangroves should reveal Plumbeous Kite, 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 11 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 night at Monteverde itself, followed by two nights at the San Gerardo field station in the Santa Elena reserve, and a final night at Monteverde). 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. With patience we should see the shy Lesser Ground-Cuckoo, and if we are in luck we will also come across Spot-bellied Bobwhite.

Days 12-14 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), Prong-billed Barbet, Blue-throated Toucanet (split from Emerald), Smoky-brown Woodpecker, the secretive Grey-throated Leaf-tosser, Red-faced Spinetail, Spotted Barbtail, Brown-billed Scythebill, Slaty Antwren, Eye-ringed Flatbill, White-throated Spadebill, Azure-hooded Jay, Slaty-backed Nightingale-Thrush, Three-striped Warbler, Common Bush-Tanager, Sooty-faced Finch, and Yellow-throated Euphonia. In the lower areas at Monteverde we will look for Chiriqui Quail-Dove, Salvin's Emerald (split from Canivet's), 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, Barred Hawk, Purplish-backed Quail-Dove, White-bellied Mountain-Gem, Red-headed Barbet, Ochre-breasted Antpitta, Black-headed and Rufous-breasted Anthruses, Rufous-browed Tyrannulet, Barred Becard, Blue-and-gold Tanager, Scarlet-thighed Dacnis, Chestnut-headed Oropendola, and Tawny-capped Euphonia, all of which we should find during our stay. There will even be time to relax in the hammocks of the station balcony enjoying the scenic view of the nearby Arenal Volcano.

Day 15 You will be transferred to San Jose airport where the tour ends in the late morning.

Northern Costa Rica Post-Tour Extension Itinerary

Day 15 After some final birding at Monteverde we will continue our exploration of Guanacaste province with an overnight stay at the Organization for Tropical Studies Biological Station located within Palo Verde National Park. Located along the floodplain of the Tempisque River, this well-known Ramsar wetland of global importance will provide a spectacle of large numbers of waterbirds and passerines including such species as Harris's and Crane Hawks, Snail Kite, Jabiru, Black-bellied and Fulvous Whistling-Ducks, Limpkin, Glossy Ibis, Plain-breasted Ground-Dove, Plain-capped Starthroat, Red-winged Blackbird and White-collared Seedeater. We will also explore the well-



Bare-necked Umbrellabird
(Nik Borrow)

preserved dry forest for Thicket Tinamou, Mangrove Cuckoo and Spot-breasted Oriole. A pair of Great Curassows is seen fairly regularly near the park's research station, and if we are very fortunate we may also find the lovely Elegant Trogon. Here the dry forest landscape of rolling hills highlighted by the brilliant colours of flowering trees will provide a marked contrast from our rainforest birding. At this time of year the creeks and waterholes around the station attract a wide variety of wildlife including peccaries, armadillo, coatis, agoutis, deer and monkeys. Streak-backed Orioles and White-throated Magpie-Jays frequent the station grounds and later in the evening we will hope to spotlight a Pacific Screech-Owl. This evening we will no doubt enjoy a spectacular sunset over the Río Tempisque.

Day 16 After some final birding at Palo Verde, a relatively short drive takes us across the Cordillera de

Guanacaste's continental divide onto the Caribbean slope of the dormant Tenorio Volcano and the humid forests of the beautiful Celeste River for an overnight stay. We will arrive in time for some initial exploration.

Day 17 The foothill forest of the Volcán Tenorio National Park is home to an exciting array of species including Tody Motmot, Yellow-eared Toucanet, Western Woodhaunter (split from Striped), Buff-throated Foliage-gleaner, Checker-throated Antwren, Dull-mantled Antbird, White-ruffed Manakin, the shy Black-headed Nightingale-Thrush, Tawny-faced Gnatwren, White-throated Shrike-Tanager and Black-faced Grosbeak. During our birding we will be keenly observant for the growls of Spotted, Bicoloured and Ocellated Antbirds attending a swarm of raiding army ants. With luck the king of the aforementioned spectacle, the rarely seen Rufous-vented Ground-Cuckoo, will also be following the swarm, though we would be very fortunate to observe this reclusive forest floor dweller. We will also search here for the rarely seen Slaty-backed Forest-Falcon, a species that has recently been recorded here. An evening excursion should yield both Mottled and the spectacular Crested Owls. Later in the day we will be heading into ornithologically little known territory not far from the border with Nicaragua. Our destination is a remote but comfortable lodge at Caño Negro, where we shall overnight. This evening we will likely see both Great and Common Potoos, and should have luck in finding Black-and-White Owl.

Day 18 This morning we will travel by boat along the Río Frío and into the marshy expanses of 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. After some final birding at Caño Negro we will transfer to Arenal Volcano for a two nights stay. Costa Rica's most active volcano has a perfect conical shape and depending on the weather usually allows breathtaking views. In certain years, ash columns and underground rumbling occur with nightly spectacles of glowing rocks tumbling down the slope from the volcano's explosive eruptions. In the afternoon we will begin our birding along the usually productive road that skirts the scenic lake at the foot of the volcano for species such as White Hawk, Fasciated Tiger-Heron, Broad-billed Motmot, Bare-crowned Antbird, Bay

Wren and Black-cowled Oriole.

Day 19 The protected forests surrounding the volcano are widely known for their abundant birdlife and other wildlife. Our lodge here offers the most stunning views of the volcano and its birdy gardens and forest trails hold an enticing collection of specialities. Flowering hedges around the lodge attract a variety of hummers including the amazing Black-crested Coquette and Green Thorntail whilst fruit feeders are visited by an assortment of woodpeckers, oropendolas, saltators, and such attractive tanagers as Emerald and Crimson-collared. From the forest trails of our lodge and at the nearby 'hanging bridges' private reserve we should find such species as Semiplumbeous Hawk, White-fronted Nunbird, the localized Keel-billed Motmot, Streak-crowned Antvireo, Carmiol's, Tawny-crested, Rufous-winged and Black-and-yellow Tanagers and Olive-backed Euphonia. With some patience and luck we should also see the shy and aptly named Thicket Antpitta, and if fruiting trees are bearing ripe fruit at the time of our visit we may well see the much-desired Lovely Cotinga.

Day 20 After some final birding at Arenal we will transfer to La Selva for a



Tody Motmot (Nik Borrow)

three nights stay. En route we will take a short detour onto the lower slopes of the Poás Volcano for the exquisite Black-bellied Hummingbird.

Days 21-22 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 new accommodation at the station is comfortable and allows us to be 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 and fruiting trees act as a magnet for many different species of hummingbird and tanagers. 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 Little and Slaty-breasted Tinamous, Grey-headed Kite, Olive-backed Quail-Dove, Olive-throated Parakeet, Guatemalan Screech-Owl, Short-tailed Nighthawk, Grey-rumped Swift, Blue-chested Hummingbird, Pied Puffbird, Chestnut-coloured Woodpecker, Great, Fasciated and Western Slaty Antshrikes, the handsome Snowy Cotinga, Purple-throated Fruitcrow, Black-capped Pygmy-Tyrant, Long-tailed Tyrant, White-ringed and Yellow-margined Flycatchers, Plain-coloured and Dusky-faced Tanagers and Yellow-tailed Oriole. We will also be able to enjoy the awe-inspiring Great Curassow and

with some luck the shy Agami Heron, the endangered Great Green Macaw, and the scarce Spot-fronted Swift. Mammals are elusive, but we will 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 riverbanks.

During our stay we will also make a visit to the nearby Braulio Carrillo National Park to see the near-endemic Lattice-tailed Trogon.

Day 23 We will transfer to San Jose airport where the tour ends in the late morning.

Accommodation & Road

Transport: The hotels/lodges are mostly of normal Birdquest standard, but at San Gerardo we shall stay at a comfortable but fairly simple research station serving tasty food with warm hospitality. At the modern biological station of La Selva we will use the newly constructed cabins with private bathrooms. 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. 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.

Important: Please see the Walking paragraph and let us know at the time of booking if you need quad bike transportation in either direction at San Gerardo.

Part-Tour Option: Subject to space being available, it is possible to take just the Northern Costa Rica section of the tour. Please contact us for further information.