

Trip Overview

HMANA's Birding and Raptor Migration Tour through Costa Rica October, 2010

Days 1-4: Caribbean Lowland Rainforest & Kèköldi Hawkwatch

After arriving in Costa Rica's capital, San Jose, relax and enjoy yourself at the Hotel Bougainvillea. Here you can explore 10 acres of gardens and trails and observe a wide diversity of bird species such as Cinnamon Hummingbird, Blue-crowned Motmot, White-eared Ground-sparrow, and Clay-colored Thrush – the country's national bird. If you have some time, you may wish to tour a local coffee plantation or visit the Central Market.

Our adventure begins on Day 2 as we head towards the Caribbean coast. On the way, we'll stop at Braulio Carrillo National Park – a mid-elevation rainforest that harbors range-limited species like Yellow-eared Toucanet, Ashy-throated Bush-tanager, and Purplish-backed Quail-dove, along with diverse mixed-species flocks of tanagers. On Days 3-5, we'll immerse ourselves in the Caribbean lowlands of Talamanca – the most biologically and culturally diverse in all of Costa Rica. The culture is a unique melting pot of indigenous Bri-Bri, Afro-Caribbean, and Ticos (Costa Ricans) along with a host of Western cultures, all of which is evident in the food and music of this region. The area harbors pristine National Parks, beautiful beaches, and a truly relaxed atmosphere. Here, we'll primarily focus our attention on one of the premier raptor-migration site in the world, Kèköldi, as well as the surrounding Kèköldi Indigenous Reserve. During our stay in the Caribbean lowlands, we make sure to experience the great variety and numbers of the local resident birds of the region, including large groups of migrating passerines. Some other target birds here include Snowy Cotinga, Black-chested Jay, Purple-throated Fruitcrow and Shining Honeycreeper.

Days 5-7: The Highlands – Caribbean Slope Foothills & Mountains

We'll arrive at Rancho Naturalista, an eco-lodge located within the Caribbean lowland forest foothills, in the evening of Day 5. We'll relax at this all-inclusive 'birder's paradise' for several days and soak in the great variety of species right on its grounds (the list of birds seen in the area is astounding!). Between 10 and 15 species of hummingbirds regularly visit the feeders while many species of tanagers come to fruit feeders from the lodge. Target species in and around the grounds include Snowcap, Green Thorntail, Bronze-tailed Plumeleteer, Rufous-winged Woodpecker, Immaculate Antbird, and White-ruffed Manakin. At the nearby Tuis River, we'll search for riverine species like Torrent Tyrannulet, American Dipper, Sunbittern, as well as the rare Lanceolated Monklet.

One day, we'll travel to over 3,400 meters (11,154 feet) atop nearby Volcan Irazú, the highest in Costa Rica. Among magnificent views of the volcanic craters and both oceans (weather dependent), we'll see high-elevation specialties including Volcano Junco, Volcano Hummingbird, Sooty Thrush, Timberline Wren, and quite possibly, the elusive Resplendent Quetzal, for which Costa Rica is famous.

Days 8-10: Pacific Coast, Lowland Rainforest & Dry Forest

Our last segment of the trip will bring us fully across the country to the lovely Pacific coast, complete with its own unique habitat and species diversity. No classic Costa Rican itinerary is complete without a trip to Carara National Park. Here, the convergence two contrasting eco-regions – lowland Pacific rainforest and dry forest – results in a diversity of bird species like nowhere else in Central America. In addition to hosting a large number of area specialties like Orange-collared Manakin and Baird’s Trogon, Carara is the easiest place around to find another Costa Rican specialty – the attractive, and raucous, Scarlet Macaw. We’ll stare down at large crocodiles from a bridge (also a great place to view raptors like Yellow-headed Caracara, Zone-tailed Hawk, and Gray Hawk) and venture deep into a mangrove swamp by boat in search of some endemic species like Mangrove Hummingbird, as well as the more widespread American Pygmy Kingfisher and Boat-billed Heron.

On Day 9, we’ll enjoy a farewell dinner back in San José at Hotel Aeropuerto, before catching flights home the following day or continuing on to other destinations.