

## Costa Rica Birds—The Green Season



It is no wonder that for anyone interested in seeing and photographing wildlife, Costa Rica ranks high on their list of places to visit. With over 800 different species of beautiful and photogenic birds, it is a birder's and photographer's delight. November is an excellent time to photograph birds in Costa Rica. It is the transition time between the wet and dry seasons, and the wildlands are green and lush. Now, following the nesting season, both the adults and the young birds of the year pack our lodge bird feeders. Their numbers are further enhanced with many migrating species arriving from North America.



While there is no way to visit the entire country within a 2-week photo tour, we have spent years researching and visiting the locations that provide a broad overview of the exciting nature photography Costa Rica has to offer. From the lush rain forest of the Caribbean Lowlands to the temperate cloud forests of the Central Highlands, we have excellent opportunities to photograph a wonderful array of Neotropical birds using bird feeder “set-ups,” as well as discovering them in the field. Photographer pleasing favorites include toucans, araçaris, a large variety of colorful tanagers, honeycreepers, macaws,

parrots, and a multitude of hummingbirds. We have timed our visit to see and photograph resplendent quetzals—one of the most beautiful birds in the Americas—during its feeding flights among lush fruiting trees. One of the quetzal’s favorite foods is a variety of small avocado found high in the trees in the mountains. Our experienced local guides know all of their favorite foraging haunts for us to capture great images of these spectacular birds.

Despite our trip’s name, to assume that this is strictly a bird photography tour would be doing it a disservice. We also spend time locating and photographing a variety of other rain forest icons like poison dart frogs, red-eyed tree frogs, the fantastically crested emerald basilisk lizard, leaf-cutter ants, giant orange-kneed tarantulas, and even nectar feeding bats—in flight—when conditions permit.

Our time in Costa Rica is divided among five very different eco lodges, each providing a unique set of photogenic species. We spend time in three primary ecosystems, the Caribbean Lowlands, the Central Foothills, and the temperate, epiphyte-laden Central Highlands. All of our lodges have lively bird feeding stations where we “set up” attractive epiphyte-festooned branches to which we draw birds within camera range. We also venture away from each lodge to visit other well-established feeding stations for unique photography targets like wild macaws and king vultures. And of course, we visit the natural feeding areas of the resplendent quetzal. At one lodge we set up our hummingbird stations where it is possible to capture extraordinary images of these fast-moving jewels frozen in flight with completely natural-looking backgrounds. A similar station is used at night for photographing bats in flight. We provide all of the specialty high-speed flash equipment and instruction for these unique shoots. You need only bring your digital SLR camera, a telephoto zoom lens, a tripod, and a locking cable release.



When you choose our **Costa Rica Birds—The Green Season** photo tour you will appreciate our company’s 40 years of experience that make your trip comfortable, safe—and photographically productive!

## Tour Itinerary

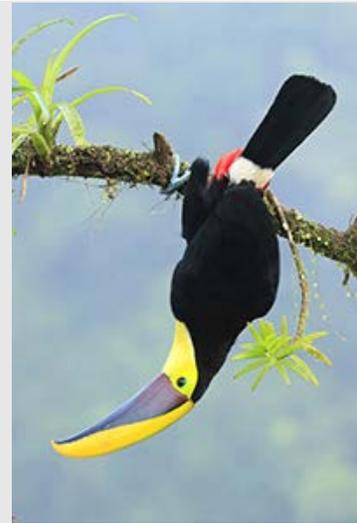
### Day 1 (Nov 10)

Participants fly to San Jose, Costa Rica. Our hotel is located 1 mile from the airport and provides complimentary shuttle service. We meet this evening for dinner and an introduction to the photography adventure ahead. (D)

### Days 2–4

Our drive to our first lodge in the Caribbean Lowlands takes

approximately 3 to 4 hours and brings us near the country's northern border. We spend three days here photographing a wide variety of attractive subjects. This is the warmest and most humid location on the tour, but we are well-rewarded for our mild discomfort. The fruit feeders regularly attract keel-billed toucans, yellow-throated toucans, collared araçaris, Montezuma oropendolas, brown-hooded parrots, red-legged honeycreepers, and more. Our set-up natural perches are often adorned with moss and bromeliads, and are changed daily so they are always fresh for our cameras. Here, we also have specially-constructed photo blinds allowing us the unique opportunity to photograph king vultures. King vultures, by far the most striking of the New World vultures, are much larger and more ornate than the familiar black and turkey vultures. Just a short drive from the lodge we visit some well-stocked fruit feeders where we are likely to see and photograph three species of honeycreeper and a myriad of other small birds. The afternoons allow us the opportunity to photograph a collection of macro subjects, like strawberry poison dart frogs and red-eyed tree frogs, and possibly the beautiful eyelash viper and fer-de-lance—two very venomous denizens of the rain forest. Spider monkeys and coatis frequent our lodge grounds. Here we may have our first opportunity to photograph bats at night as they come to eat nectar from our flowers and feeders. (BLD)



### Days 5–6

After breakfast, we travel to our second Caribbean Lowlands lodge sited on 500 acres of lowland rain forest alongside the Sarapiquí River. Here, several well-stocked bird feeders draw a variety of colorful subjects within close photography range. But birds aren't the only attraction. Colorful poison dart frogs are found throughout the grounds, making wonderful photogenic subjects. Emerald basilisk lizards—iridescent green and sporting its three impressive dorsal



crests—are frequently found here and are very cooperative subjects. After lunch, we head to a farm where wild scarlet macaws and great green macaws come to feed. This property provides opportunities to capture these beautiful birds in flight as well as perched in the nearby trees. The warm, wet climate of the lowlands is the perfect habitat for red-eyed tree frogs—another rain forest icon. In the evenings, we use special lighting techniques to photograph them as they come out to court and feed. The next morning we visit the “macaw property” again taking full advantage of the morning light to capture even more pleasing images. In the afternoon we head to a nearby eco-center that has well-established fruit and hummingbird feeding stations where frequent visitors include red-legged

honeycreepers, green honeycreepers, blue-gray tanagers, crimson-collared tanagers, golden-hooded tanagers, Passerini's tanagers, and a host of others. Along the river, sunbitterns and fasciated tiger-herons are regularly seen. Howler monkeys, agoutis, coatimundis and neotropical river otters are among the interesting mammals we may encounter. (BLD)

### Days 7–8

We gain elevation as we drive to our next lodge in the Central Caribbean Foothills, arriving in time for lunch at our lodge situated at 3,000 feet in the Cordillera de Talamanca. Here, we set up our hummingbird flash stations where everyone gets a chance to rotate/share the equipment to capture these cloud forest jewels frozen in flight. Our set ups overlook well-stocked fruit feeders where there is always the chance to see and photograph blue-crowned motmots, lineated



woodpeckers, golden-hooded tanagers, scarlet-rumped caciques and keel-billed toucans. Toward dusk we relax on the lodge balcony with a drink, enjoying the view and watching the birds fly to their evening roosts. After dinner, we move one of our flash set ups into the forest to photograph nectar bats in flight. And for those who are interested, we are often able to find large orange-kneed tarantulas near to where we set up for bats. The next day we photograph hummingbirds and bats at the stations with our flash equipment. (BLD)

### Days 9–10

We depart after breakfast for the Central Highlands, our final ecosystem. Driving up the winding mountain roads we enter thick cloud forest. The area is home to the superlative resplendent quetzal—one of the world's most spectacular birds! The aptly-named “resplendent” quetzal is like no other bird on earth. The brilliant red and green male has fantastic elongated upper tail coverts forming a feather train that make him three and one half feet long from head to tail. Our first highland lodge is located at nearly 8,700 feet in a habitat with a variety of high-country species, including monotypic and extraordinarily colorful fiery-throated hummingbirds.

This afternoon we take our first trip to a nearby quetzal feeding site. Our guides have full knowledge of all of their active foraging locations in the area—and also know what we are looking for as photographers. The next two mornings are spent visiting the most active and accessible resplendent quetzal feeding areas where we hope to capture this incredible bird perching in moss-covered branches. (BLD)



### Day 11

Following our morning quetzal shoot, we head to our trip's last lodge. Our destination is San Gerardo de Dota where our lodge is located at 7,200 feet in a valley at the edge of mature oak forest and the Savegre River. While quetzals are regularly seen and photographed here, the lodge also has active hummingbird feeders that attract numerous species, including gray-tailed mountain-gems, green violetears, and magnificent and volcano hummingbirds. Many species restricted to the high mountains of Costa Rica and western Panama are also found here, including sulphur-winged parakeets, Costa Rican pygmy owls, black-capped flycatchers, flame-throated warblers and flame-colored tanagers, to name a few. We shoot this afternoon at the gardens and feeders around the lodge property. (BLD)

### Day 12

A 5-minute drive from the lodge delivers us to several hummingbird feeders as well as fruit feeders that attract a large variety of birds. Acorn woodpeckers, long-tailed silky flycatchers, flame-colored tanagers, magnificent and volcano hummingbirds frequent these feeders—providing a wonderful shoot to end our tour. After lunch we load up the bus and head back to our hotel in San Jose. (BLD)

### Day 13 (Nov 22)

Depart for home. (B)

Tia Aöcaä

## Tour Leader

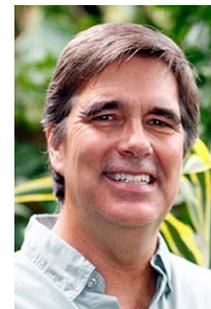
Nov 10 - Nov 22, 2020

Fee: **\$5,895 from San Jose, Costa Rica**

Deposit: **\$800**

Limit: **8**

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**MARK THOMAS**

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