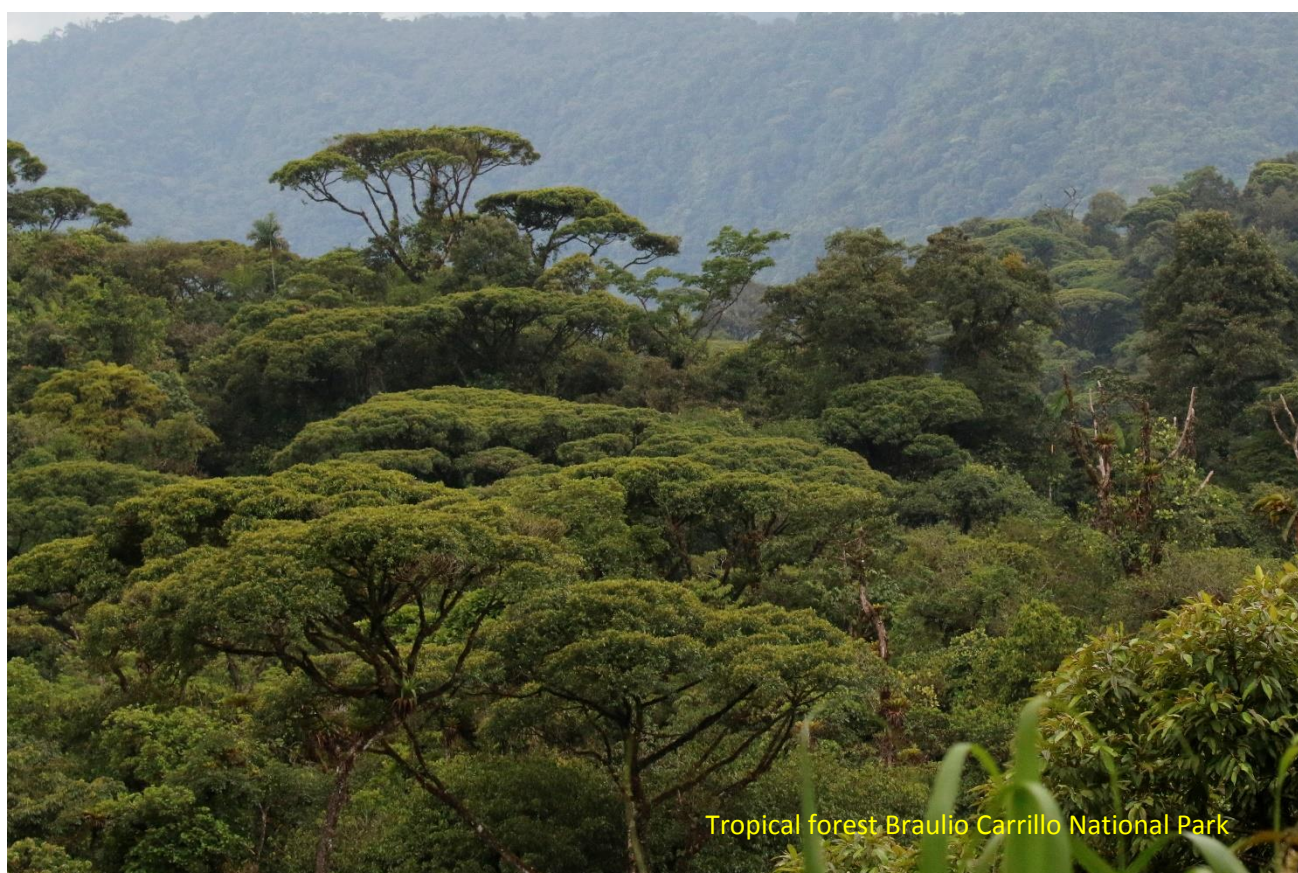


SANDWICH BAY BIRD OBSERVATORY TOURS

COSTA RICA

11th – 26th March 2017



TRIP REPORT

A tour put together and led by John Buckingham, in conjunction with WildBird Tours in Costa Rica, owned by Alfredo Scott who was also our local guide. John and Alfredo had been working together for fifteen years and organised nine previous extremely successful trips before this one. Twenty seven SBBOT members booked the holiday, and based on this excellent response two groups were formed, 15 people departing 11th March led by John and 12 people on 25th March 2017 led by Ken Chapman.

Costa Rica is a small country with a huge amount of unspoilt and varied habitat, about 25% of it protected in the form of National Parks and nature reserves. More than 8,000 plant species and 950 birds have been recorded. The itinerary covered a wide range of habitat types and locations to

enable us to enjoy as much of the huge diversity of vegetation, birds and wildlife as possible within the constraints of a two week tour.

A natural divide of volcanic mountains rising to peaks of 10,000 feet forms the 'spine' of the country with slopes on either side running down to the Caribbean Sea and the Pacific Ocean. The climate is hotter and dryer in the west, especially the north-west along the Pacific coast, and wetter in the east on the Caribbean side, with quite cool weather in the mountains. We visited coastal marshes and mangroves, rivers, lakes and freshwater marsh, rain, cloud, mist and lowland dry forests, high mountain valleys, oak forest and paramo, resulting in a magnificent bird list of 391 species.

TRIP PARTICIPANTS

John Buckingham, Trevor & Jenny Gibb, Richard Hills, Bob & Tessa Hinge, Eugene Hood, Andy & Karen Keen, Mike Maloney, Claire Richards, Gary & Pauline Stewart and John & Tina Warman.

11th MARCH The Group met up at London Gatwick ready for our British Airways flight direct to San Jose, Costa Rica. This is the first time that I have enjoyed a direct flight, having flown via various cities in the United States, where we had generally been pushed around in a rather tense atmosphere and once via Madrid when the Spanish airline 'bumped' us off the flight. This was already a step in the right direction with an expected 11 hour, relaxing and uninterrupted journey. We departed slightly later than our 08.05 schedule and arrived at 14.00 local time slightly later than our expected 13.40.



Alfredo's cousin Milton was there to meet us with Antonio, our driver for the tour. He proved to be excellent at his job - very careful, steady, friendly and helpful. Alfredo had been held up in Panama for 24 hours with problems on his previous tour and we met up with him during the morning of the next day. After only 15 – 20 minutes driving from the airport we arrived at the Aero Porto Hotel, which with its shady gardens is an oasis within the busy city. Time for some garden birdwatching and an introduction to some birds unusual for us, we enjoyed great views of **Lesson's** (once Blue-crowned) **Motmot**, **Crimson-fronted Parakeet**, **White-winged Dove**, **Great-tailed Grackle**, **Blue-grey Tanager**, **Buff-throated Saltator**, **Tennessee and Yellow Warbler**, **Clay-coloured Thrush**, **Rufous-naped Wren**, plus the bonus of a **Variegated Squirrel** and Costa Rica's national flower, an

orchid ***Cattleya skinneri***.

12th MARCH After a garden birding session, an ample breakfast and our first taste of black beans and rice with scrambled egg, Antonio loaded up the coach and we were on our way, climbing out of the Central Valley past colourful gardens of **Hibiscus**, **Oleander**, **Bougainvillea**, **Agapanthus**, **Coral** and **Jacaranda trees** and making for a morning visit to La Paz Waterfall Gardens, situated high on the Caribbean slope. In Alfredo's absence he had arranged an excellent local guide who



Emerald Toucanet

found lots of good birds including a beautiful red and iridescent green **Collared Trogon**, **Keel-billed Toucan**, **black-cheeked Woodpecker**, **Blue and White Swallow**, **Black-faced Solitaire**, **Slate-throated Redstart**, **Spangle-cheeked** and **Passerini's Tanager**, **Common Chlorospingus** and others, with our first taste of tropical rainforest species. The **Waterfall Gardens** are famous for the number of hummingbirds that visit their feeders and we did well with several species including **Black-bellied Hummingbird**, **Green Thorntail**, **Coppery-headed Emerald** and **Green Hermit**.



Not far along the road it was time for a tasty lunch of local fayre, sitting on a balcony overlooking a deep forested valley with a massive waterfall. Lunch and views were often set aside however, as local specialities including **Red-headed** and **Prong-billed Barbet**, **Silver-throated Tanager** and **Emerald Toucanet** appeared on the feeders as if by magic. I had visited this famous birdwatchers' café several times before and it had survived a massive earthquake only a few years ago!

On our way to the lower Caribbean slope we stopped several times with great views of raptors including **Swallow-tailed** and **White-tailed Kites**, a distant view of a magnificent **White Hawk** and the ever present **Black** and **Turkey Vultures**. Crossing a bridge over a fast flowing rocky-river we stopped for typical species including **Torrent Tyranulet**, **Black Phoebe** and **Buff-rumped Warbler** all dancing on the rocks in the torrent. This had been a full day with many colourful and special birds and we were now to spend two nights at Selva Verde Lodge, one of the best locations for wildlife enthusiasts and birders in Costa Rica. Accommodation is in nice twin rooms situated in blocks of four and set off from an open polished wood walkway that runs through the whole lodge complex of open forest, clearings and waterways. Our rooms were situated close to the river and with many trees, attracted birds such as **Green** and **Amazon Kingfisher**, **Spotted Sandpiper**, egrets, **Squirrel Cuckoo**, **Pale-billed Woodpecker** and **Grey-capped** and **Social Flycatchers**. A **Bird-eating Snake** was a first for Richard. We marked up our lists for the first time near the bar and enjoyed a nice buffet dinner.

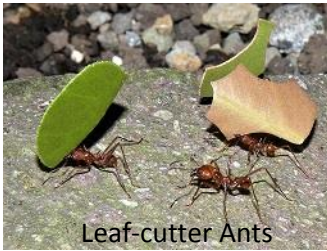
13th MARCH An early start, and as usual coffee was available from dawn in the restaurant with close bird table views of **Orange-billed Sparrows**, **Red-throated Ant-tanager**, **Black-cheeked Woodpecker**, the stars of the show and seen on most days, **Montezuma Oropendolas** and a **White-nosed Coati** all feeding on the fruit. We were taking a packed breakfast so as to get to the La Selva Research Station and Reserve as early as possible. A short stop on the way however, added **White-necked Puffbird**, **Masked Tityra**, **Giant cowbird**, **White-crowned** and **Red-lore Parrot** and with great excitement, **Great-green Macaws** flew over, a very rare species but now well colonised in Costa Rica. A visit to La Selva is never disappointing and today was no exception as we added greatly to our list with some spectacular species. After our packed breakfast and more coffee we split into two groups and set off with our two guides to enjoy some superb birding.



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Great Tinamou was probably the best of many star turns. Tinamous are usually very shy, flightless birds that live in deep

Yellow-throated Toucan



Leaf-cutter Ants

forest cover. (Amazingly we had good sightings of another species later in the trip!) Today however, also added two large birds, **Crested Guan** and **Great Curassow** (both male and female 'strutting their stuff!'), **Vermiculated Screech-owl** sitting deep in the vegetation but highly visible and photographed by most, hummingbirds included **Long-billed Hermit**, **Stripe-throated Hermit** and **Crowned Woodnymph**, plus

Gartered Trogon, **Rufous** and **Broad-billed Motmot**, **Rufous-tailed Jacamar**, three toucans – **Yellow-throated**, **Keel-billed** and **Collared Aracari**, four woodpeckers including **Cinnamon** and **Lineated**, our only **Bat Falcon** of the trip, four woodcreepers, **Rufous Mourner**, **Royal Flycatcher**, **Long-billed Gnatwren**, **Chestnut-sided Warbler** (another USA migrant). **Three and Two-toed Sloths** and **Collared Peccari** put in mammalian appearances and **Leaf-cutter Ants** were everywhere in the forest, following their trails and taking material back to the nest in order to build up the humus on which they grow fungus to feed their young.



Lunch and birding plus **Green & Black Poison Dart Frog** back at the lodge and little did we know what was to come later in the day when we met 'Cope', an interesting and unusual artist acquaintance of Alfredo and visiting his garden and nearby forest. He showed us three roosting, hard to find species, two of which were photographed, **Crested** and the stunning **Spectacled Owl** and



Yo

Great Potoo, the latter camouflaged and looking like part of the tree, plus some young **Tent-making Bats** hidden in the foliage at knee-height. The light was going when we got back to his garden, where we enjoyed coffee and biscuits with **Grey-cowled Wood-Rail** and **White-necked Jacobin**, Richard was pleased, having now added **Whiptail** and **Eyelash Viper** to his snake list. Some of us bought copies of Cope's very attractive bird prints and we thoroughly enjoyed our dinner thinking back over a very exciting day.

14th MARCH a walk before breakfast, with great views of **Squirrel Cuckoo** and others and then we set off for the Tropical Atlantic lowlands, driving through rolling, green countryside, lakes and grazing land, arriving at Lagarto Lodge in time for lunch and a new venue for me. We soon got our



Golden-hooded Tanager

cases into our rooms and walked across to the lodge balcony overlooking an attractive lake and dense forest on the other side of the valley. We were not going to be disappointed here as several bird feeders were hanging with fruit and located at very close quarters with a number of new species taking advantage of this ample food supply. Naming just a few, we watched and photographed **Brown-hooded Parrots**, **Orange-chinned Parakeet**, **Green Honeycreeper**, **Bananaquit**, **Golden-hooded** and **Summer Tanagers**. The

perches around the feeders had been specially selected to look natural and were covered in bromeliads, mosses and lichens – obviously put up to please the photographers who could show off

their images as looking quite natural! There were several very ardent Chinese photographers using massive telephoto lenses, all clicking, chuckling and chatting away and we soon realised that the management changed the perches every morning – no wonder they were so pleased! We enjoyed a very pleasant lunch on the balcony and then off for a walk with **Muscovy duck**, **Amazon & Ringed Kingfisher** and various herons and egrets around the lake and **Slaty-tailed Trogon** in the forest. We also had the first of several flight views throughout the trip of the rare **King Vulture**, a bird not often encountered. Back to the lodge and another walk for those that wished and terrific views and

photos of circling and then landing **King Vultures** for those that didn't.



The list and then dinner was once again taken on the very pleasant balcony and when most had drifted off to bed, the two Johns came face to face in the fading light with a tiny owl which flew and perched low in a tree. After a few quick photographs it disappeared into the gloaming. It turned out to be a **Central American Pygmy Owl** with lovely rufous markings and one of a relatively small number of

Costa Rican species that Alfredo had never seen. He was pretty upset not to be in the right place at the right time but was rewarded the following morning with a new 'tick' as the bird perched and called in the open for everyone to see! Back to 'the night of the owl' and soon after the last of us got to our rooms, excited and hysterical shouting came from outside the lodge and investigation disclosed a large **Black & White Owl** illuminated by Chinese flashlights. What a beautiful bird and another blissful night's sleep!

15th MARCH dawned bright and sunny with several interesting walks and visits to enjoy. An early walk looking for **Agami Heron** did not prove fruitful but stunning views of a 'sunning' **Rufescent Tiger Heron**, **Green Heron** and a **Crested Caracara** compensated. At breakfast we enjoyed



Shining Honeycreeper

unbeatable views of three toucan species, **Blue Dacnis** and **Black-cowled Oriole** on the feeders, then a trip down the road to the manager's garden, where sitting in the shade we enjoyed a pageant of colourful birds on his feeders. The birds kept coming including **Montezuma Oropendola** (which became one of the common birds of the holiday), **Olive-backed Euphonia**, **Shining** and **Red-legged Honeycreeper**, males and females equally beautiful, **Blue-grey Tanager**, **Wood Thrush** and two nice winter

migrants from the States - **Baltimore Oriole** and **Grey Catbird**, which is reminiscent of a large, long legged and tailed, ground hopping **Blackcap**! Back for lunch, another walk and along the road to

another garden where promises had been made for views of a local speciality. The 'leking' male **Red-capped Manikin** in his striking red and black finery along with his rather drab mate did not disappoint us and a male **White-collared Manikin** was an added bonus.



16th MARCH our journey today was to be quite a long one, but did include a lake-side stop for **Snowy Cotinga** and **Roadside Hawk**, taking us to the Caribbean foothills and a night at Tram Lodge in the Braulio Carrillio National Park. The tram refers to the aerial tramway that runs through the rainforest canopy for 2.6 kilometres. Luckily this was being refurbished, as it attracts hundreds of visitors to the Park each day, it can be noisy and is of little value to bird watchers. So the Group stayed in the nine very nice chalets in the forest with Alfredo, Antonio and John in a 'hotel' (?) in the nearby town. After lunch in the very large dining room the local guides organised an afternoon and a night walk with new bird species including **Green Ibis**, **Mottled Owl**, **Short-billed Pigeon**, **Violet-headed Hummingbird**, **Spotted Woodcreeper**, **Olive-sided Flycatcher**, **White-breasted Wood-Wren**, **Tropical Gnatcatcher**, **Speckled Tanager** and many other birds,

plus **Tapir** and baby, **Three-toed Sloth**, **Green Iguana**, several frogs, butterflies including a magnificent brilliant blue **Morpho** drifting through the forest, a lichen-like **Stick insect** and a large, bright green **Praying Mantis**.

17th MARCH we did not want to delay the start to our next venue high in the Talamanca Mountains, where a beautiful and almost pristine steep-sided valley with cloud forest, filled with massive **Oak** trees sits at 2,200 metres above sea level. San Gerardo is reckoned to be the best place in Costa Rica to see **Resplendent Quetzal** and we were not to be disappointed. After nine previous visits it was clear that the pressure of eco-tourism has changed this once serene location to one with more people and the accommodation and paraphernalia that they demand. It is still beautiful however and we started our birdwatching both before and during lunch at a tiny valley-side cafe at 9,000 feet serving fresh trout from the cascading river below. Our new local species included the comically named **Large-footed** and **Yellow-thighed Finch**, **Flame-coloured Tanager**,



Acorn Woodpecker

Sooty Thrush, **Volcano Hummingbird** and the characterful **Acorn Woodpecker**. With stops on the way we arrived at Trogon Lodge in a stunning river and forest-side location and with fabulous gardens full of flowers. There were no feeders here but who needs them with new hummingbirds feeding on nectar including **White-throated Mountain-gem**, **Scintillant** and **Lesser Violetear**. **Slaty Flower-piercers** were robbing the plants by biting into the back of the flowers and **American Dipper** was on the torrent. We enjoyed an afternoon walk further up the valley with **White-shouldered Tanager**, beautiful and graceful **Long-tailed Silky-flycatchers** displaying, **Mountain Thrush**, **Blue & White Swallow**

and **Ochre-bellied Flycatcher**. We ended the day with the bird list and very nice food and Chilean wine in the lodge's very pleasant restaurant.



18th MARCH a full day to enjoy, in one of my favourite places anywhere, and the Group were beginning to feel the same about this incredibly beautiful Savegre valley. Firstly, before breakfast a walk along a nature trail through the forest at the end of the road with **Sooty-capped Chlorospingus, Black-throated Green Warbler, Flame-throated Warbler, Collared Redstart, Ruddy-capped Nightingale-Thrush**, the lovely **Black-faced Solitaire** and our second female **Resplendent Quetzal**. Back for breakfast with the usual fresh cooked eggs and off again to find quetzals high above Savegre. The guides here work closely with the local farmers who continuously report back on the quetzals whereabouts, feeding on their **Wild Avocado** trees and giving 'the punters' the best chance of seeing them. So our prolonged hour-long view

of a male **Resplendent Quetzal** was a great experience. We visited their restaurant for a good lunch and where, as everywhere, continuously topped-up cold fruit juices came with the food. Over the lunch break we enjoyed their hummingbird feeders with **Magnificent, Stripe-tailed and Fiery-throated Hummingbirds**. Next we took the road up to the highest point and to open paramo, an altitude habitat of low, bushy vegetation where we 'ticked' the endemic **Volcano Junco**.

19th MARCH Breakfast and along to Savegre Lodge and four-wheel drive jeeps up the valley-side and a lovely walk back down through the forest with **Lesser Goldfinch, Chestnut-capped Brushfinch, Wren-thrush, Black-cheeked and Wilson's Warbler, Ruddy Tree-runner, Dark Pewee, Tufted Flycatcher** and **Spotted Wood-Quail**, beautiful trees, **Tree Ferns** and butterflies including **Morphos**. A very nice lunch at Savegre and we drove for the afternoon down the Pacific slope and on to the central Pacific coast with a couple of stops on the way, the last of which was to look over a seasonal freshwater wetland. This gave us the opportunity to catch our first glimpse of some



Crested Caracara - Juvenile

water species, **Black-bellied Whistling Duck, Great Blue Heron, Wood Stork, White Ibis**, the incredibly coloured pink and orange **Roseate Spoonbill** and **Black-necked Stilt**. We crossed the Tarcoles River with views of Carara National Park and arrived at Villa Lapas, our lodge for the next two nights, as the



light was beginning to fade and in good time for a shower and dinner.

20th MARCH Villa Lapas is a very nice lodge with good rooms and a small swimming pool, enjoyed by several of the group at some time during the stay. It is situated in a forested valley with a river flowing down to the sea, and a full day to explore the Carara National Park and nearby coast and mangroves. Before breakfast a walk towards the local beach across fields and grassland where we had close-up views of a young **Crested Caracara** but we saw **Yellow-headed Caracara** as

well and this is a local speciality. We also saw **Yellow-billed Cacique**, **Red-winged Blackbird**, both members of the more recently evolved '*icterid*' or *American oriole* family. We were now in the world of **Cherrie's Tanager**, having left the Caribbean side of the country behind and the identical males of **Passerini's**. It is only in the females that the difference is distinguishable, those of Cherrie's being much brighter. Other birds on the menu were **Streaked Flycatcher**, **Paltry Tyrannulet**, **Yellow-naped Parrot** and several flights of **Scarlet Macaws**, the Carara Forest being one of their major strongholds.

After a good breakfast in a pleasant open-sided dining room adjacent to the river we set off for the moist Carara Forest just a few miles down the road. We wanted to get in as early as possible to maximise our chance of species in this National Park, known for its large bird populations. We



pulled into the car park and while Alfredo bought our tickets from the office, two **trogons** appeared with fine views of a new one for the list, **Black-headed** and **Gartered Trogon** nearby, with a big **Rufous-naped Wren** near the coach. We entered the forest and didn't stop seeing birds – first a lek of **Orange-collared Manikins**, and then two ant swarms with a number of bird species, many new for the list, taking advantage of the invertebrates dislodged by the ants - **Dot-winged Antwren**, **Chestnut-backed** and **Bicoloured Antbird**, **Black-faced Ant-thrush**, **Barred** and **Black-hooded Ant-shrike**, **Northern-barred Woodcreeper** and **Grey-headed Tanager** were all feasting. We added **Northern Bentbill**, **Panama Flycatcher**, **Tawny-winged Woodcreeper**, **Laughing Falcon** and **White-faced Capuchin Monkeys** were fun to watch.



Common Black Hawk

A ten minute drive back to the lodge for lunch after a very exciting morning at a place that had stood up to its reputation! It wasn't long before we were out again for one of the most pleasant and rewarding ways of spending an afternoon in Costa Rica – a quiet covered-boat ride down the Tarcoles River towards the sea, past sand banks full of birds and into the mangrove channels – brilliant! Our boatman was excellent, pointing out some good birds and getting us

extremely close to them with some great additions to the list - **Magnificent Frigatebird, Neotropic Cormorant, Anhinga, Brown Pelican, Tricoloured Heron, Black and Yellow-crowned Night Heron**, the strange frog-catching **Boat-billed Heron, Osprey, Common Black Hawk** (once called Mangrove Hawk), **Semi-palmated Plover** (with partially webbed feet), **Willet** and **Whimbrel, Royal Tern, Belted and American Pygmy Kingfisher** (almost touching it) and three new passerines – **American Redstart, Northern Waterthrush** and a very beautiful, bright yellow **Prothonotary Warbler** (bathing alongside its brilliant reflection. Not surprisingly our bird list for the day was 109 species!

21st MARCH With a fairly short drive north along the coast to Abangaritos, there was time for another great walk in Carara. Not before pre-breakfast in the lodge forest and grounds with additions including two very striking birds – **Painted Bunting** and **Fiery-billed Aracari**. **Brown**



Painted Bunting

Booby, Franklin's Gull and Caspian and Gull-billed Terns were seen from the beach, three **Double-striped Thick-Knees** on the fields, a nesting pair of **Scarlet Macaws** were high at the entrance to their tree hole in Carara and we had to stop to admire the huge **American Crocodiles** from the Tarcoles River Bridge. La Ensenada is situated near the village of Abangaritos overlooking the beautiful Gulf of Nicoya on the north Pacific coast. It is a working ranch with gardens running down to the sea, including a swimming-pool, grassland, dry forest, mangroves,

saltpans and a fresh water lake. Great habitats for birds and we visited the saltpans briefly on the way to the lodge. Here we found some of the first real numbers of waders of the trip including **American Oystercatcher, Wilson's phalarope, Southern Lapwing, Black-bellied Plover, Lesser Yellowlegs and Western and Stilt Sandpiper**. We enjoyed lunch watched by a pair of **White-throated Magpie-Jays**, overlooking the sea in a shady dining room. It was very hot here but there was plenty of cold fruit juice.



We set off for a walk to the lake and some open forest. Another group (French!) showed us a roosting **Pacific Screech Owl** and within minutes we had found our EIGHTH owl of the holiday, a **Ferruginous Pygmy Owl!** During the walk we added **White-whiskered Puffbird**, **Costa Rican Swift** and **Bronzy Hermit**. At the lake there were several **Blue-winged Teal** plus egrets, herons and close views of waders, especially groups of **Stilt Sandpipers** and **Western Sandpipers**. That was quite a few habitats visited in one day and **Mantled**

Howler Monkeys were busy for most of the night.



22nd MARCH this was to be another day of more than a hundred bird species – a total of 116! A short pre-breakfast walk from the lodge added more new birds including **Eastern Meadowlark**, **White-lored Gnatcatcher**, **Yellow-throated Vireo**, **Scissor-tailed Flycatcher** and **Plain-breasted Ground Dove**. Back for breakfast with views of the sea and noisy **White-fronted Parrots** feeding with **Streak-backed Orioles** on the blossom outside. A second visit was planned for this morning to the saltpans, timed to coincide with the high tide and more waders. It was hot by now and after many visits over the years looking for new waders on the exposed Ensenada pans, I opted out in favour of the swimming pool with Karen and Richard plus photographs of **Howler Monkeys** and terns and some waders from the shade of the mangroves. I was obviously a little sceptical about

when they set off was, 'I bet you see Skimmers!' (I had seen them often but never got satisfactory photos – however the decision had been made.) Some of the new birds on the list for the saltpans were **Black Skimmer** (about 300 and photographs to prove it), **Short-billed Dowitcher**, **Marbled Godwit**, **Wilson's**, **Collared** and **Snowy Plover**.



The afternoon visit to the freshwater Solimar Wetlands, about an hour's drive away, was a must and this proved to be one of the best visits ever to this unique location. Shallow flooded fields and lagoons stretched continuously on either side of the track. We had hardly started our safari when we came across two close target birds, and several of each – **Jabiru** and **Limpkin**, two birds with unusually short names for Costa Rica but of immense importance, especially the rare **Jabiru**. The birds then did not stop coming and we were in and out of the coach like 'jack-in-

the-boxes'. **Harris's Hawk, Snail Kite**, hunting **Osprey**, (American) **Purple Gallinule** (ours called Purple Swamphen), hundreds of **Northern Jacanas**, both adults and young, **Glossy Ibis, Anhinga** plus hundreds, possibly thousands of egrets, herons, ducks, ibises and storks, almost as far as the eye could see. The scene was enriched by a golden-orange sunset, we were shown a roosting **Lesser Nighthawk** and as it got dark, a hunting **Common Pauraque**, a second 'nightjar' species. Not many British Birders visit this unique place and I think that everyone agreed – 'WOW'.



Emerald Tanagers

23rd MARCH it would be a wrench to leave this bird-rich area, but just time for a walk before breakfast to take in more dry forest and the lake, with new birds to add, including two brief views of the secretive **Thicket Tinamou, Green-breasted Mango** and **Semi-palmated Sandpiper**, plus our first anteater, the **Northern Tamandua**. We left promptly for our long drive to Arenal Volcano, having lunch on the way, a stop with great views of **Swallow-tailed Kites, Short-tailed and Zone-tailed Hawks**.

We arrived at the very nice Observatory Lodge in the first rain of the trip and with the volcano shrouded in mist. Before we got to our accommodation in the 2,000 acre grounds Alfredo suggested a search for our two target hummingbirds, and in just a few minutes **Purple-crowned Fairy** and **Black-crested Coquette** were on the list. Luxurious accommodation was available for paying guests and with cases in rooms, time to explore. Outside the dining room was a huge veranda apparently facing Arenal (still in the mist) and nearby bird feeders. The feeders produced two new species for me (pretty good at the end of my tenth visit to the country) and photographs of striking **Emerald Tanagers** and dainty **Yellow-throated Euphonias**. A tasty dinner from a good a la carte menu with excellent steaks and huge banana splits from the sweet section.

24th MARCH we had already visited some spectacular forests with many tree and plant species, sometimes with **Kapoks** reaching up to an amazing 180 feet into and above the forest canopy. These emergent giants often have huge buttress roots to support them, and with them tree species with stilt or prop roots, long, new, vertical roots growing each year to enable the tree to 'walk' or certainly move into newly formed areas of light where others have fallen. The tropical rain forests in the high rainfall areas around Arenal are some of the most spectacular in the country with between 50-100 tree species and receiving 60"-100" of rain each year.

The hanging bridges or aerial walkways through the forest here enable visitors to experience the forests from above, and this we certainly did, adding more new birds during our last full day. **Plain and Streak-crowned Ant-vireo, Buff-fronted Foliage-gleaner, Scale-crested Pygmy-Tyrant, Eastern Wood-Pewee, Sulphur-rumped Flycatcher, Yellow-green Vireo, Scarlet-thighed Dacnis** and **White-vented Euphonia** were the last to be added to our spectacular list.

A final thought is to list the birds seen on every, or almost every day throughout the holiday and perhaps only a few already mentioned:

CATTLE EGRET – a bird associated with the large areas of grassland throughout the country and the importance of grazing animals to the economy. Brahmin cattle from India are widespread and obviously well suited to the Costa Rican climate.

BLACK & TURKEY VULTURES – with such great animal and invertebrate diversity, presumably a huge food supply.

RED-BILLED PIGEON – seen in a variety of habitats.

GROOVE-BILLED ANI – successful, sociable birds, related to cuckoos and co-operative breeders, living in groups with a dominant male and female and all birds contributing to the breeding cycle.

TROPICAL KINGBIRD, GREAT KISKADEE & SOCIAL FLYCATCHER are all medium to large Tyrant Flycatchers that can be seen on exposed perches mostly in rural areas.

CLAY-COLOURED THRUSH – Costa Rica's national bird and found in rural and urban habitats.

BLUE-GREY TANAGER – obviously the most widespread of this mostly colourful family.

MONTEZUMA OROPENDOLA – found in areas of mature trees and on bird feeders.

GREAT-TAILED GRACKLE – a bird that lives close to man.

25th MARCH our last day and with a four hour drive to the airport for our 12.45 check-in, there was really no time to stop for birds, but a well-appreciated comfort stop was made half way and before crossing the divide and dropping down into the Central Valley. In no time at all we were there, unloading the cases and with sad farewells to Alfredo and Antonio our excellent guide and driver we moved into the airport to the British Airways desks that were already open and with no queue. The two of them just had time to have some lunch before meeting our next group, arriving on the aircraft that we would fly home on!

26th MARCH after our overnight flight, a slightly late arrival at London Gatwick, following a highly successful and enjoyable holiday with many thanks to the whole group for a happy time and good company. 27 members of the Observatory thoroughly enjoyed the two trips and it was therefore extremely worthwhile organising.

King Vultures at Lagarto Lodge

