Inala Nature Tours

TRIP REPORT

Steve Davidson with Vernon | Sep 27, 2025 to Oct 10, 2025

Three-toed Sloth by W. Kottek

Costa Rica

Overview

This tour is Inala's inaugural visit to this incredible Central American country, a 14 day excursion taking in the humid forests of both the Pacific and Caribbean lowlands and slopes, as well as mangrove, riparian and wetland habitats, and the paramo of the Talamanca Mountains - part of the spine of high altitude mountains pushed up by the clashing of the Pacific and Caribbean plates (a very long time ago).

Nestled between Panama and Nicaragua, this tiny country packs a punch in terms of its avifauna, due mostly to the differences in habitat between the Pacific & Caribbean slopes, plus several Central American endemics, the southern extension of several Mexican birds, and the northern extension of several South American birds. In addition to this is the migration of many of the Nearctic songbirds, raptors and shorebirds that make their way through on migration twice a year, both coming south and then heading north. The result is a list of over 950 species recorded in Costa Rica, a country about the same size as Tasmania.

Our tour was a great success. We recorded just under 400 species of bird in 13 days, with highlights being amazing close encounters with **Resplendent Quetzal**, 33 species of hummingbird, brilliant experiences with both **Scarlet** and **Great Green Macaws**, both **Yellow-throated** & **Keel-billed Toucans**, pus **Emerald Toucanet, Collared** and **Fiery-billed Aracari**, an incredible 10 species of owl - all but two being seen in the daytime at their roosts, 10 different woodpeckers, 6 different trogons and an astonishing 38 species of flycatchers! Now these generally aren't the most inspiring birds but the array of different shapes, colours and plumages of these guys was just incredible.

Mammal and reptile highlights were many also, with both **Three-toed** and **Two-toed Sloths** being seen, as well as **Northern Tamandua, White-nose Coati, Central American Agouti, Mantled Howler monkey, White-faced Capuchin Monkey, Central American Spider Monkey, Variegated Squirrel** and **Red-tailed Squirre**l. Best mammal was arguably the little group of impossibly cute and tiny **Honduran White Bats** we were shown at their day roost.

Reptiles included **American Crocodile, Helmeted, Common** and **Brown Basilisks**, the incredible **Emerald Basilisk**, **Green** and **Spinytail Iguanas**, **Central American Ameiva, Cat-eyed Snake** and a very large **Bird-eating Snake**. Frogs featured also, with some nice ones being **Red-eyed Tree Frogs, Harlequin Tree Frog** and **Sabinal Frog.**

Day 1

27.09.25 San Jose

After a welcome to Costa Rica dinner on the evening of the 27th, where our small group met in the restaurant of our plush hotel, it was an early night as we needed to be up early to meet our guide Vernon for a pre-breakfast birding session around the enormous gardens at the rear of the hotel.

Scarlet Macaw by S. Ehrenberg

Day 2

28.09.25 San Jose to Punta Leona (Pacific Lowlands)

At 6am we met in the lobby of the hotel where we were introduced to our guide for the next 2 weeks - Vernon, and also our driver - Juan Carlos. Vernon led us on a walk in the extensive gardens at the rear of the hotel, and almost immediately we realised Vernon knew his stuff when he rattled off a number of bird names in the first five minutes, just by call alone. Birds started coming thick and fast with visuals on the exquisite **Lesson's Motmot, Hoffman's Woodpecker, Buff-throated Saltator, Social Flycatcher, Squirrel Cuckoo, Baltimore Oriole, Blue-grey Tanager, Rose-throated Becard, Rufous-backed Wren, American Redstart** and a lovely **Mottled Owl** at its day roost.

After an excellent buffet breakfast we set off, passing through San Jose and heading west up through and over the Avocado Mountains, before making a stop along a wooded side-road to

explore some drier, deciduous open forest on the Pacific Slope. Here we had **Western Cattle Egret, Common Ground-dove, Northern Tropical Pewee**, a tiny **Pacific Screech Owl** roosting by the roadside, **Turquoise-browed Motmot, Stripe-headed Sparrow, Lesser Greenlet**, incredible **White-throated Magpie-Jays**, a stunning **Black-headed Trogon, Variable Seedeater, Northern Waterthrush, Olive Sparrow, Banded Wren** and a very funky male **Barred Antshrike**. It was a lot of birds but nicely spaced, in a nice setting. The humidity had risen substantially so it felt great to jump back in the van and drive for a bit in the air-conditioning. Some bridge works at the Rio Tarcoles meant we queued for a while before crossing, but some **Black-bellied Whistling-ducks**, a **Groove-billed Ani** and **Great Egret** kept us buoyed, plus the air-conditioning…

Checking in at our lodgings on the coast at Punta Leona took a bit of time, given the nature of this enormous resort town set on the coast and nestled in the dense rainforest, but a party of **Scarlet Macaw** feeding in fruiting Teaks was just incredible and an amazing distraction. We had some fantastic close-up views of these enormous & somewhat breathtaking parrots as they worked their way around the trees. After lunch and a break we took a short walk around the lodge, finding another **Northern Waterthrush**, as well as **Olive-sided Flycatcher, Streak-headed Woodcreeper** and a pair of **Rufous-backed Wren**. As the daylight waned the rain set in again, so we rested up until dinner time.

Black-bellied Whistling Duck and White Ibis by W. Kottek

Day 3

29.09.25 Carara National Park & Pacific Lowlands

An incredible day. Another walk around the lodge area before breakfast gave us **Northern Barred-Woodcreeper, Orange-billed Sparrow** (incredibly brightly coloured for a sparrow), **Streaked Flycatcher**, a gobsmacking male **Gartered Trogon**, a trio of different ant-related avians with **Chestnut-backed Antbird, Dusky Antwren** and **Black-hooded Antshrike**, a pair of cute **Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl**, and finally a stunning and ever so tiny hummingbird - **Blue-throated Goldentail**.

Vernon's ability to pick out distant bird calls is amazing, and more of this became apparent after breakfast as we headed to low-lying rainforest and walked a number of trails in Carara National Park. Over several hours we saw some fantastic stuff, with highlights including firstly non-avian critters such as lines of **Leaf-cutter Ants, Green** & **Black Poison Dart Frogs, White-faced Capuchin Monkeys**, a bizarre **Helmeted Basilisk Lizard**, the almost ever-present sound of distant **Howler Monkeys, Central American Whiptail Lizard**, an **Agouti** and a thumping big **Spiny-tailed Iguana**, plus a huge array of butterflies…

Birds included the rare and difficult **Northern Schiffornis** (in the top 10 of hardest to see birds in CR, according to Vernon), equally difficult **Streak-breasted Antpitta**, incredible views of **Red-capped** & **Velvety Manikins**, a pair of **Buff-rumped Warbler, Bright-rumped Attila, Long-billed Gnatwren**, curious-looking **Plain Xenops** with their recurved bill, a lone **White Ibis, Wedge-billed Woodcreeper**, a pair of hefty **Crested Guan**, a spectacular if fleeting **Long-billed Hermit** (another hummer), **Black-throated Trogon, Rufous-tailed Jacamar, Mealy** & **Red-Lored Amazons, Riverside Wren, Rufous** & **White Wren** and a confusing array of ant-prefixed birds like **Slaty Antwren, Dot-winged Antwren** and **Russet Antshrike**…

Black-throated Trogon by W. Kottek

After a well-earned break in the afternoon, we took a drive to a nearby beachside area with mangroves along the road in. A frenetic little session recorded us **Mangrove Yellow Warbler, Prothonotary Warbler, Scaly-breasted Hummingbird**, a female **Green-breasted Mango, Common Tody-Flycatcher** and lots of **Yellow Warbler**. Waterbirds included a massive **Wood Stork, American White Ibis** plus **Neotropic Cormorant** & **Magnificent Frigatebird** at the beach. Almost on dusk our guide Vernon miraculously found a pair of **Black and White Owl** roosting in teak trees. These are seriously handsome owls. And as we drove out a pair of **Common Pauraque** was seen on the road, picked up by their gleaming eyeshine.

Day 4

30.09.25 Tarcoles River Cruise & Pacific Lowlands

An epic day. Our obligatory stroll first thing in the morning before breakfast yielded some incredible birds. Starting with an incredibly attractive **Bare-throated Tiger-Heron** in a rainforest stream, we then quickly added the stunning **Long-tailed Manakin**, briefest of brief glimpses at the super-skulky **Scaly-breasted Wren**, and then in an explosion of colour, both **Fiery-billed Aracari** and **Yellow-billed Toucan** in the one tree, in the sun. Incredible. This was topped - if that is even possible, by a beautiful male **Slaty-tailed Trogon** and a brief **Orange-collared Manakin**. An intense start to the day. After breakfast it was down to the Rio Tarcoles for our cruise, whereupon lots of waterbirds were immediately evident. In an amazing 3 hrs where we saw 63 species, plus a few reptilian critters, the following highlights included: **Black-bellied Whistling-duck, Muscovy Duck** (proper, true wild ones), pink as pink **Roseate Spoonbill**, the incredible **Boat-billed Heron**, both **Black-crowned** & **Yellow-crowned Night-Herons, Tricoloured Heron, Green Heron, Little Blue Heron, Great Blue Heron, Snowy Egret, Wood Stork, Magnificent Frigatebird, Osprey, Laughing Falcon, Yellow-headed Caracara, Common Black Hawk, Hudsonian Whimbrel, Wilson's Plover, Semipalmated Plover, Black-bellied Plover, American Golden Plover** and the gorgeous little **Collared Plover**, **Western** & **Semipalmated Sandpiper, Willet, Short-billed Dowitcher**, loads of **Spotted Sandpiper**, the handsome **Southern Lapwing, Mangrove Hummingbird, Rufous-browed Peppershrike, Cinnamon Becard, Great Crested Flycatcher, Mangrove Swallow** and last but by no means least - a gorgeous **American Pygmy Kingfisher**. Scaly critters included several enormous **American Crocodiles**, the incredible **Common Basilisk** and a **Green Iguana**.

On our way back to the hotel for lunch a quick stop at a roadside lagoon had a **Northern Jacana** on its nest of four eggs, just beautiful…A mid-afternoon drive up a nearby mountain

road to some rainforest produced **Ochre-bellied Flycatcher**, an incredible **Green Honeycreeper**, two female **Red-legged Honeycreepers, Lesser Greenlet** and **Red-eyed Pigeon**. Along a very steep trail just into the rainforest we managed to track down a singing **Black-faced Ant-thrush**, as well as **Bicoloured Antbird** and a **Chiriqui foliage-gleaner**. Nearby ridge-top trees produced a trio of gorgeous **Golden-collared Tanagers, Yellow-throated Euphonia**, another **Yellow-throated Toucan** and a **Chestnut-sided Warbler**. After dark we drove to the nearby town of Jacó to look for owls that sit on roadside wires and in fields looking for rats & mice; we were ultimately successful with at least 3 **American Barn Owl** and a lovely **Striped Owl**.

L-R: Roseate Spoonbill, Boat-billed Heron, Yellow-throated Toucan by S. Ehrenberg

Day 5

01.10.25 Pacific Lowlands to Talamanca Mountains

A brilliant day. Given it was largely a travel day we didn't have opportunities for long walks or sessions, however several stops along the way produced some great results for the group. Our usual pre-breakfast walk was incredible, with a covey of **Marbled Wood-Quail, Grey-cowled Wood-Rail,** an imperious-looking **Pale-billed Woodpecker, Northern Bentbill, White-tipped Dove, Rufous-breasted Wren, Greenish Elaenia** and **Stripe-throated Hermit** all showing beautifully.

Packing bags, checking out, saying goodbye to this wonderful place and hitting the road, we traveled south-east along the coast, stopping in a couple of places for **Double-striped Thick-knee, Cliff Swallow, Morelet's Seedeater, Roadside Hawk, Boat-billed Flycatcher, Shining Honeycreeper, Red-crowned Woodpecker, Purple-crowned Fairy** and a large flock of 50+ **White-collared Swifts**. We then turned inland and headed up the range, making it to San Isidro for lunch. Birds were here too, including our first cute little **Bananaquit**, as well as **Palm Tanager, Thick-billed Euphonia** and **Baltimore Oriole**.

Moving higher up into the Talamanca Mountains, another stop was made at a small cafe on the roadside with much cooler air, good coffee, a beautiful garden and loads of hummingbirds, with the following seen - **Green-crowned Brilliant, Violet Sabrewing, White-tailed Emerald, Stripe-tailed Hummingbird, Snowy-bellied Hummingbird** and **Rufous-tailed Hummingbird**, as well as other crackers like **Costa Rican Brushfinch, Scarlet-rumped** & **Silver-throated Tanagers** and a **Yellowish Elaenia** with its strange split crest. We forged on, climbing higher and higher up the range before topping out at around 11000 feet, then turning off the highway and dramatically dropping into the Savegre Valley and down to roughly (2200m, 6000ft), where our amazing accommodation awaited.

Blue-gray Tanager by S. Ehrenberg

Day 6

02.10.25 Savegre Valley

An astonishing day. The Savegre Valley is world-renowned as a reliable site to find the incredible Resplendent Quetzal, and we had all day and the following morning, if need be, to track one down. At first light the group was already on the side of a hill in the rainforest, ready for action. Our first bird was a hulking **Large-footed Finch**, followed by **Ruddy-capped Nightingale-Thrush**, a party of **Black Guan** on an adjacent open hillside, **Ochraceous Wren, Mountain Thrush, Spot-crowned Woodcreeper** and the very cute **Collared Redstart**. An **Emerald Toucanet** was spotted in a fruiting avocado and whilst we were all admiring this someone spotted it. Boom. There it was, a male **Resplendent Quetzal** in all his finery, on an open branch for all the world to see… an incredible moment. The green plumes on the wings and the long tail plumes blow in the breeze, and are supposed to resemble the copious moss on every branch blowing in the wind, thereby camouflaging the

bird even further than what it already is; indeed the quetzal sits very quietly and very still for extended periods. Which made our find this morning just that extra bit special…

Also in this spot was a pair of **Black-faced Solitaire**, as well as the impossibly pretty **Golden-browed Chlorophonia, Sooty-capped Chlorospingus, Mountain Elaenia** and a flock of **Barred Parakeet** hurtling past, high overhead.

We took breakfast back at the lodge, with birds like **Acorn Woodpecker, Scintillant Hummingbird** (world's 3rd smallest hummer), the stunning and immaculate **Long-tailed Silky-Flycatcher, Collared Trogon** and **Slaty Flowerpiercer** slowing our progress. Eventually we jumped into a jeep to be driven high up a mountain road where we were dropped off, making our way back down along forest trails. The birding was fairly intense, although measured, with birds coming in a steady flow but not overwhelming. **Collared Redstart, Black-billed Nightingale-thrush, Ruddy Pigeon, Black-capped Flycatcher, Yellow-winged & Brown-capped Vireos, Flame-throated Warbler** and **Black-throated Green Warbler** started proceedings. Along a narrow trail we stopped for a mixed feeding flock, featuring **Ruddy Treerunner, Yellowish Flycatcher**, a hefty **Buffy Tuftedcheek** (cool, if somewhat clunky name) the stunning **Elegant Euphonia**, really cute **Tufted Flycatchers, Acorn Woodpecker** and more **Sooty-capped Chlorospingus** - which are abundant and seem to bind these bird waves together.

Along the way we all had our first tapaculo experience, with a **Silvery-fronted Tapaculo** doing its best to remain concealed despite our best efforts to entice it out of dense cover. Tapaculos throughout Central & South America are renowned for being amongst the hardest birds on the planet to get a look at. This was no different, with our bird scuttling about like a mouse, yelling at us from a mere three metres away. We were luckily afforded a couple of very brief silhouetted views. Further along the trail we lucked out again when we came across a small feeding flock consisting of **Black-cheeked Warblers**, a pair of very cool **Yellow-thighed Brush-Finch** and a smashing pair of **Wrenthrush** - another difficult and rare skulker, but also extremely cute. **Elegant Euphonia** and **Western Tanager** rounded out what had been a fantastic walk through ancient primary rainforest.

After lunch and a short break, there was a change of scene with a visit to a local cafe, where a plethora of birds was coming in to feeders and fruit tables. It was a case of not knowing where to look, with stonkers like **Spotted Wood-Quail, Buff-fronted Quail-Dove, Acorn Woodpecker, Fiery-throated** & **Talamanca Hummingbirds, White-throated Mountain-gem, Large-footed Finch** and **Flame-coloured Tanagers** - the males being bright orange and the females golden yellow, both offset by black & white wing bars. The cafe had been closed upon our arrival but the lovely folk there were happy to open for us and made us galvanising, strong, black coffee…

We mooched about for a bit after that until dusk fell; at a roadside stop in open forest there were a number of **Sooty Thrush** clucking away as they went to roost, before the first of several **Dusky Nightjar** started calling distantly. Eventually one nightjar was close enough that we may have had a chance to see it, however an owl started calling very close by and Vernon went into action, gesticulating wildly and happily proclaiming it was an **Unspotted Saw-Whet Owl**, possibly one of the more difficult birds in Costa Rica to see. Some careful manoeuvres took place before we all managed crippling views of this most attractive, tiny and decidedly cat-like owl. A brilliant way to end a most amazing day…

Unspotted Saw-Whet Owl by W. Kottek

Day 7

03.10.25 Savegre Valley, Talamanca Mountains to Turrialba County

A breathtakingly good day. Our usual pre-breakfast stroll took in the beautiful mountain stream at the road edge below our lodge, where almost straight away a pair of **Torrent Tyrannulet** was in evidence, with a nearby **Louisiana Waterthrush** also utilising the river edge, and a Black Phoebe on the road edge. A flock of **Sulphur-winged Parakeets** was unfortunately too distant for decent views. **Black and White, Chestnut-sided** & **Blackburnian Warblers** foraged through alder trees, and a pair of **Crested Caracara** perched way up on a hillside tree; normally found at much lower elevations and perhaps a sign of climate change in action. Apparently larger toucans like Yellow-billed & Keel-billed Toucans are also moving into higher altitudes, potentially creating problems for the quetzals that are susceptible to the nest raiding activities of toucans. Speaking of quetzal - there was

another male **Resplendent Quetzal** found perched in an avocado tree right above our accommodation as we were checking out, a nice reinforcement if we needed it, of our first sighting the day prior.

Climbing out of the valley once again, we pulled in at a mountain trail that took us to 3350m, more or less above the tree line in a habitat called the paramo. There are some special birds here, found in very few other places in Costa Rica. At our first stop lots of **Sooty Thrush** were present, as well as a **Volcano Hummingbird**. A pair of **Timberline Wren** called from deep in cover, but they eventually popped up for a second or two to give us reasonably satisfactory views. A little further along the track a **Volcano Junco** appeared and offered up extended looks of this altitude specialist, which was very convenient indeed given this was our only chance.

Then it was on to a local Lodge, where more hummingbird feeders beckoned, and lunch as well. The star bird here was a pair of **Black & Yellow Silky-Flycatcher**, in addition to heaps of hummingbirds, **Yellow-thighed Brushfinch** and **Slaty Flowerpiercer**. After lunch there was some drive time, with a quick stop at a city park in Cartago, where Vernon had another trick up his sleeve with yet another roosting owl species. In this incredibly busy park and kids playground there was a pair of really cute and not at all disgruntled **Tropical Screech Owl**, just sitting in a dense fig tree merely 5m above the ground, unbeknownst to the constant stream of public coming and going underneath. Amazing. And to add to it there was an **American Barn Owl** roosting in a palm across the road in a church yard, as well as squadrons of vociferous **Crimson-fronted Parakeets** coming and going.

Volcano Junco by W. Kottek

Sometime in the afternoon we finally pulled into our accommodation for the next two nights. Our cabins and adjacent restaurant were set against a backdrop of mountainous rainforest, with lush gardens on the property and a rainforest stream trickling through, fed by a gorgeous waterfall at the rear of the property cascading down the mountain. After checking

in and a short break, a late afternoon walk gave us our first **Green-fronted Lancebill** and another **Louisiana Waterthrush**. However, the hoped-for star of the show failed to materialise. We'd need to try again the next evening…

Day 8

04.10.25 Les Qualitales Hotel & El Copal Lodge

A stunning day… This morning we left quite quickly after breakfast in order to drive for about an hour to a private lodge set in hillside forest on the opposite side of the mountain to Les Qualitales Hotel. There are bird feeders there as well as copious flowering shrubs on the grounds that attract hummingbirds. As soon as we pulled into the property and parked, we saw our first incredible **Snowcap** (a tiny, coppery-magenta coloured hummingbird with a pure white cap), followed by **Green Thorntail, Brown Violetear** and **Violet-headed Hummingbird**. Not to mention the incredible **Violet Sabrewing** and a single **Blue-throated Goldentail**. We settled in and got comfortable on the wide, wrap-around deck of the lodge, with its 270° views of the property and forest, and a large feeding table on one side. Various birds observed throughout the morning included **Black-cheeked Woodpecker, Western Wood Pewee, Mistletoe Tyrannulet**, a pair of **Masked Tityra, Tropical Parula**, a garrulous group of **Black-faced Grosbeak** and a huge group of **White-collared Swift** overhead. The feeding table had a few visitors including some stunning **Speckled Tanagers, Scarlet-thighed Dacnis, Green Honeycreeper**, **Bay-headed Tanager** and a gorgeous **Emerald Tanager**.

After some lunch things quieted down substantially, with little action during the heat of the day, and nothing much new coming in. Big clouds had been building up and it was thought by Vernon if it rained a bit we'd get a big upsurge in bird feeding activity.

Some thunder rumbled and the rain finally started, light at first and soon becoming more steady. And it was like a switch had been flicked, because all of a sudden birds started appearing en masse, calling and foraging like crazy. And then the initial part of the wave hit, with **Tawny-crested** & **White-shouldered Tanagers** rushing through first like Speedy Gonzaleses, dragging everything with them. They were gone within minutes, but a steady procession of new birds followed at a more leisurely pace. **Emerald, Golden-hooded, Bay-headed, Silver-throated, Blue-Grey** & **Palm Tanagers** all foraged in the treetops in front of us, as well as various gorgeous Euphonias, with **Yellow-crowned, White-vented, Olive-backed** and **Tawny-capped Euphonias** all showing beautifully. Best of all perhaps was a stunning **Black & Yellow Tanager** that came through late, perched for a few seconds and moved on. What a stunner. Migrant warblers moving south from North America included

Canada, Tennessee, Blackburnian, Chestnut-sided and a very confiding **Mourning Warbler**. Flycatchers were represented by **Slaty-capped Flycatcher, Black-headed Tody-Flycatcher, Mistletoe Tyrannulet** and the chonky **Boat-billed Flycatcher**. The list goes on…

It was an amazing final session there, but sadly it was about that time, so back in the van it was, and the relatively long journey back to our hotel. A late dash up to the waterfall once we were back gave us not only a new hummer with **White-bellied Mountain-Gem**, but also the same stake-out as the evening prior, that ultimately came up trumps with the local resident **Scaled Antpitta** (normally an exceedingly difficult bird to find) giving us a brilliant showing in the last rays of light…

Speckled Tanager by S. Ehrenberg

Day 9

05.10.25 Turrialba County to Sarapiqui County

A travel day. Our usual morning walk before breakfast produced some quality birds once again, with species ranging from **Streaked Xenops, Spotted Barbtail, Scale-crested Pygmy-Tyrant, Montezuma Oropendola, Lesser Goldfinch** and a beautiful **Sunbittern** foraging in a pond down below the hotel.

With some distance to cover, our team set off after breakfast, dropping out of the higher altitudes through Cartago and down to the considerably warmer Caribbean lowlands, stopping sometime late morning at another secret location the indefatigable Vernon had for us. Sure enough, at a bridge over a rocky river crossing, we saw our first **Fasciated Tiger-**

Heron, as well as a very sleepy **Three-toed Sloth**, and at a forest lodge a little further on, the local guide there showed us a magnificent **Great Potoo** at its day roost, wow what a bizarre bird. From then it was on to lunch at a fabulous cafe perched over a river, accompanied by a **Black-cowled Oriole, Grey-capped Flycatchers, Plain-coloured Tanagers** and a breathtaking male **White-necked Jacobin**.

Emerald Basilisk by W. Kottek

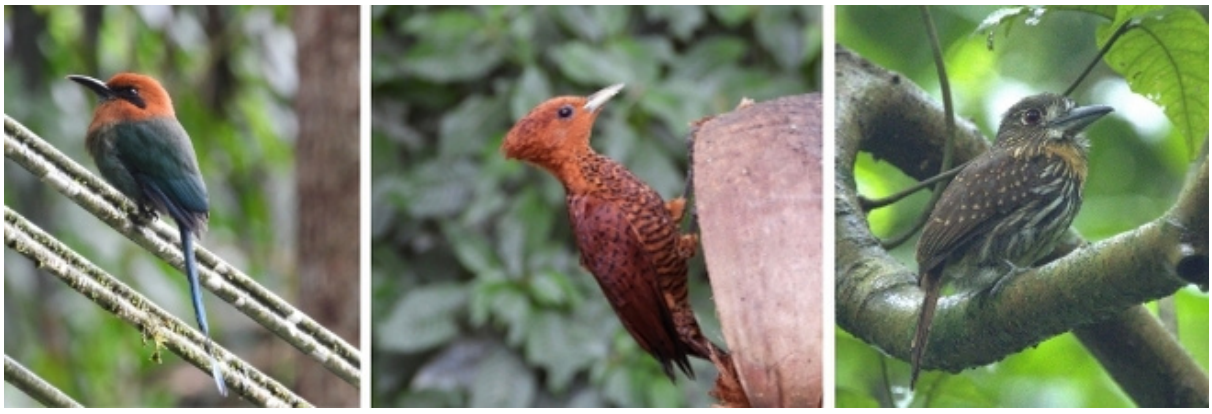
We then dropped in to a friend of Vernon's - Copé, for coffee and empanadas and to sit at his fabulous feeders, beautifully positioned over a small stream. **Pale-vented Pigeon, Russet-naped Wood-Rail, Collared Aracari, Chestnut-headed Oropendola, Green** & **Red-legged Honeycreepers**, another new hummer in the shape of the brilliantly named **Bronze-tailed Plumeleteer**, and more **White-necked Jacobins**. An **Emerald Basilisk** was also in residence; a truly bizarre but beautiful lizard. By now it had started raining, and on the final drive to our accommodation it absolutely smashed down, with water all over the road and in the fields, however unscathed we arrived at our fabulous base for the next 3 nights.

Day 10

06.10.25 La Selva Biological Reserve

A very early, pre-dawn breakfast preceded the drive to the fabulous La Selva Biological Reserve, a world-famous location where scientists, researchers and students alike go to study the amazing biodiversity within this vast area of lowland rainforest. We commenced

birding along the entrance road that leads up to the security gates, finding **Broad-billed Motmot**, a pair of **Crested Guan** with chick, **Chestnut-coloured Woodpecker, Brown-hooded** & **White-crowned Parrots, Squirrel Cuckoo, Gartered Trogon** and a tantalising glimpse of a female **Snowy Cotinga**. Once inside the reserve the momentum merely kicked up a notch, with **Keel-billed Toucan, Grey-rumped Swift, Lesser Swallow-tailed Swift, Cinnamon Woodpecker, Scarlet-rumped Cacique, Olive-throated Parrot, White-tipped Dove, Pale-vented Pigeon, Rufous Motmot, White-whiskered Puffbird,** an amazingly confiding and super cute **Spotted Antbird, Bay** & **Stripe-breasted Wren, Grey-breasted Wood-Wren**, **Rufous Motmot**, a trio of **Olive-backed Quail-Dove** and **Red-throated Ant-tanager**. Hawks were passing high overhead on their southern migration, with hundreds of what appeared to be mostly **Broad-winged Hawks** and **Turkey Vultures**, with good numbers of **Mississippi Kite** and a few likely **Swainson's Hawks** and **Merlin** as well. Bird of the morning though probably had to go to the two enormous and spectacular **Great Green Macaws** we saw wheeling through the canopy. Awe-inspiring birds. We also had another encounter with a **Three-toed Sloth**, this time a much more wide-awake individual that was making some moves through its tree, albeit excruciatingly slowly…



L-R: Broad-billed Motmot, Cinnamon Woodpecker by W. Kottek, White-whiskered Puffbird by S. Ehrenberg

Back at the lodge for lunch, there were more hawks passing overhead and some clear **Swainson's Hawks** were noted. Late afternoon and a short bus ride to a nearby area of cut-over scrub and cleared land produced some amazing birds, with top billing going to an amazing encounter with a **Collared Forest-Falcon** that flew in and landed close by, just beautiful. There was also **Bat Falcon** here, as well as more migrating raptors, with over 500 **Turkey Vultures**, 85+ **Mississippi Kite** and 30+ **Broad-winged Hawk** passing slowly high overhead. In the scrub we had **Rufous-tailed Jacamar, Blue-black Grassquit**, the unusual-looking **Long-tailed Tyrant, Black-crowned Tityra, Orange-chinned Parakeet** at their nest in an old arboreal termite mound, a pair of sexually dimorphic **Barred Antshrike**, more **Great Green Macaw** flying past, **Yellow-bellied Elaenia** and **Ruddy Ground-dove**. Another drive to a similar patch of second-growth habitat, late in the day, produced for us a

handsome and chunky **Great Antshrike**. After dinner, a bit of frog-spotting gave us some cute **Red-eyed Tree Frogs, Harlequin Tree Frog, Sabinal Frog** and a big old **Cane Toad**. There was also a little **Cat-eyed Snake** in the pond, just chilling.

Day 11

07.10.25 Sarapiqui County

Today, under the guidance of Vernon's local friend Copé, we took a slightly different tack and searched for quality over quantity, with Copé hopping on board the bus to show us some special owls of the area. First stop was down a maze of back roads to a small farm holding where Copé's brother allowed us on to his property to view his resident pair of **Crested Owls**. Amazing! We then drove a short distance to another site where a short walk netted us a fabulous pair of **Spectacled Owl**, deep in their day roost. Spectacular. A **Black Hawk-Eagle** soaring overhead was also a welcome addition.

Late morning Vernon took us to yet another wonderful property. Formerly a cattle farm, the reserve has been lovingly replanted over a 20-yr period and is now a lush rainforest garden with ponds, creek, butterfly house, insect house and a butterfly breeding facility where chrysalises of several Costa Rican butterflies species are sold to collections around the world. Our young guide Joseph oozed enthusiasm and was proud to show us around the property. There was another roosting **Spectacled Owl** here, allowing good phot ops, as well as a female **Blue-black Grosbeak**, a gorgeous male **White-collared Manikin, Chestnut-coloured Woodpecker** at the feeders, **Crimson-collared Tanager**, a group of garrulous **Grey-necked Chachalaca** and another **American Pygmy Kingfisher**. Our guide had a nifty trick whereby he threw butterflies to a resident **Rufous-tailed Jacamar**; twice the butterflies were caught with ease by the jacamar, to be consumed nearby while we watched in amazement. There were some cool non-avian critters here too, with a **Bird-eating Snake** slithering its way through the canopy, several **Mantled Howler Monkeys**, myriad different butterflies in the butterfly house and a collection of crazy, huge and elaborate caterpillars, scorpions and enormous cockroaches in the insect collection, all alive no less. Possibly best had to go to the little encampment of **Honduran White Bats** that Joseph knew the exact location of. He took us to the banana leaf they were roosting under, and we all took turns having a look at these amazing and tiny, pure white bats.

Late in the afternoon we went on a tour of a local chocolate producing business, and were shown the whole process of growing, procuring and refining the seeds of the Cacao tree, as well as being given several taste tests and some absolutely superb hot chocolate, made from cacao on the property. It was a great way to end the day.

L-R: Crimson-collared Tanager, Green Honeycreeper, Red-legged Honeycreeper by S. Ehrenberg

Day 12

08.10.25 Sarapiqui County to Caño Negro, Alajuela County

After an early coffee Vernon took us on a short drive to a country backroad with forest edge and small open fields. Lots of birds were out and about here and we saw **Eastern Kingbird, Black-crowned Tityra, Brown-hooded, Orange-chinned** and **Olive-throated Parrots, Mealy Amazon**, several **Keel-billed** & **Yellow-throated Toucans**, a single **Fasciated Antshrike** and then a pair of **Black-crowned Antshrike**, better looks at **Black-faced Grosbeaks**, a cute pair of **Buff-rumped Warbler** singing away and flashing their bright rumps like torches in the undergrowth, and just as we turned around to come back - a breathtaking hummingbird called a **Crowned Woodnymph**, what a stunning bird.

Leaving our wonderful home of 3 nights, our intrepid party headed northwest, traveling for some time before a stop at a supermarket and a random **American Barn Owl** roosting within, and then on to Los Chiles to look along the riverfront and have lunch. It was hot, but new birds offered themselves up with **Anhinga, Snail Kite** and an **Amazon Kingfisher**. There was also **Tricoloured Heron, Yellow-crowned Night Heron** and a very cute **Common Tody-Flycatcher**. After lunch it was on to some grassy open country with **Blue-black Grassquit, Variable** & **Morelet's Seedeaters** and a thumping great **Nicaraguan Seed-finch** with his enormous honker.

Along the same road we came to Medio Queso Wetlands, a huge open marsh on both sides of the road. We slowly walked along and observed some amazing birds here. **Roseate Spoonbill, American White Ibis, Black-collared Hawk**, a pair of gorgeous **Green Kingfisher**, as well as **Ringed Kingfisher** and another **Amazon Kingfisher**, **Thick-billed Seed-finch, Purple Gallinule, Green-breasted Mango,** our first **Northern Beardless-**

Tyrannulet and a whopping **Pinnated Bittern** that flushed and landed in the open for superb views…

Snail Kite by W. Kottek

What a hotspot. But then it got better, as it was time to get onto a boat to cruise around the wetlands, finding amazing views of perched **Snail Kite**, as well as **Purple Gallinule** feeding young, countless **Northern Jacana** and **Anhinga**, hundreds of different swallows migrating through of 4 different species, both **Olive-crowned** & **Grey-crowned Yellowthroats**, and an **Orchard Oriole**. A slow drive along a particularly pot-holed road preceded the arrival at our next accommodation, yet another outstanding establishment on the edge of Rio Frio and the Ramsar listed wetlands at Caño Negro Wildlife Refuge. More open boat cruises beckoned on the morrow…

Day 13

09.10.15 Caño Negro Wildlife Refuge

A restful and peaceful sleep in our beautiful accommodation preceded early coffee and then the short trip to the dock to board our cruise for the morning. A **Grey-headed Dove** - a regional specialty, was first bird of the day. Out on the water it was misty at first, but this soon cleared to a beautiful morning, with **Amazon** and **Ringed Kingfishers** seemingly at every turn. **Bare-throated Tiger-Heron, Green Ibis, Anhinga, Boat-billed Heron, Black-bellied Whistling-Duck** and **Spotted Sandpiper** showed well. In the thick and overhanging wooded edges we saw **Roadside** and **Broad-winged Hawks, Red-lored Amazon, White-winged Becard, White-browed Gnatcatcher, Prothonotary Warbler** and a male **Pied Puffbird** high in a dead tree. Somewhat more grisly was at the sight of several **Black Vultures** sitting,

hunch-shouldered in trees, watching over a dead caiman in the water. Not sure what they were waiting for, maybe for it to become more ripe…

After the cruise it was back for a delicious breakfast, after which a call came through that a sloth was stuck on a road near the ranger station. So it was a very quick bus ride to the spot, where indeed a small male **Three-toed Sloth** was more or less caught out in the open crossing from one line of trees to the next. The ranger had taken up a vigil to make sure no town dogs caught wind of this, as the sloth would be highly vulnerable to attack. It was just amazing to see such a bizarre yet totally endearing animal up so close. The insect fauna that lives in their fur has to be seen to be believed; apparently also there is a moth species that is entirely dependent on sloth fur for its entire life cycle!

A walk along a wooded creek line back in town was amazing given the number of birds that came through in a mixed feeding flock. **Spot-breasted Wren**, a pair of very cute **Yellow Tyrannulet, Barred Antshrike, Dusky-capped Flycatcher, Blue Dacnis, Mistletoe Tyrannulet, Lesser Greenlet**, crisp and very striking **Black-and-white Warbler**, a female, very orange-legged **White-collared Manakin** and **Common Tody-flycatcher** were features of the flock. The heat had kicked in big time, so it was back to the rooms for a break, lunch and then boarding our second cruise of the day out on Rio Frio and the wetlands.

Gartered Trogon by W. Kottek

The temperature had dropped nicely after a lunchtime thunderstorm, so it was really comfortable out on the water, with **Grey-headed Dove, Pale-vented Pigeon** and **White-winged Dove** representing the columbiforms well, **Russet-naped Wood-Rail** preening on the river edge was a great photo op, **Southern Lapwing, Grey Hawk**, a magnificent **Great Blue Heron**, a pair of **Pacific Screech-Owl** roosting on a low branch over the water, **Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher, Southern House Wren**, oodles of jacanas, kingfishers and migrating swallows, and finally late in the day as the rain was starting again and it was getting dark, Vernon's persistence paid off when a tiny, weeny little **Yellow-breasted Crake**

broke cover from its bed of floating vegetation and showed beautifully for us, right next to the boat. What a coup…

Day 14

10.10.25 Caño Negro to hotel Robledal, Alajuela

Sadly, this was our last day on tour, yet our usual walk before breakfast still yielded new birds for us in the shape of pair of **Black-striped Sparrow** and a lovely **Golden-olive Woodpecker**, with a **Black-cheeked Woodpecker** in the same tree and a **Hoffman's Woodpecker** nearby. **Roadside Hawk, Black-headed Trogon, Back-crowned Tityra, Grey-breasted Martin, Spot-breasted Wren, Melodious Blackbird** and **Golden-hooded Tanager** all showed nicely too. Packing up and leaving, we started the long and slow road out of there back toward Los Chiles, stopping at a couple of places along the way in open marshland country for a big party of the highly range-restricted **Nicaraguan Grackle** on the roadside, the last of the three tricky bird to get in this area (Grey-headed Dove and Spot-breasted Wren the other two). And on a bit further there was a pair of enormous **Jabiru** in wet marshes just off the road, fantastic birds and a big target.

Some driving time ensued thereafter, before the bus turned off the main road and started wending its way up the road along the slopes of Volcano Barva, stopping in some misty conditions at a roadside cafe where we had cafè negro and tortillas, and watched their hummingbird feeders for a while. **Black-bellied Hummingbird** was a new one for the group, and there were also **Green Hermit, Brown Violetear, Green-crowned Brilliant** and **Violet Sabrewing** present. A brief **Chestnut-capped Brushfinch** down in the undergrowth gave views to a few of us.

Then it was onto the famous and rather garish La Paz Waterfall Gardens for lunch and to check out their hummingbird feeders. Which was duly done after our buffet lunch (with a bunch of other tourist punters), and a solid 40-minute session gave us no less than nine hummingbird species! Best of all being the tiny **Coppery-headed Emerald** - one of very few species endemic to Costa Rica, as well as the stunning **Purple-throated Mountain-gem**, **Talamanca Hummingbird** (not seen since 3rd Oct), **Green Thorntail**, **Brown Violetear** and lots of **Violet Sabrewings** dominating proceedings. A small party of **Common Chlorospingus** was the only other thing of note, before we set off again, climbing to the highest point of the range before swapping form the Caribbean slope and over to the Pacific Slope once again.

From then on it was literally and figuratively downhill, as we slowly made our way to the Hotel Robledal for our last night and the end of this utterly amazing tour. I'd like to extend my thanks to my guests on tour with me for your company, good conversation, lots of laughs and an incredible experience, plus the amazing and dogged work put in by our guide Vernon, both for his exceptional ID skills but also his demeanour and good humour, and the exceedingly patient and skilful driving by our driver, Juan Carlos.

L-R: Honduran White Bat by S. Davidson, Sign with air plants, Collared Aracari by W. Kottek

On behalf of Inala - thanks for touring with us