

Costa Rica

“Classic Costa Rica”

2-15 February 2023 (14 days)

Small group tour with Gary Elton and a local bird guide



Photo 1: A 'must-see' Sunbittern lights up the streamside at Rancho Naturalista with its sunburst display © Wayne Easley

Costa Rica Birding Tours with Limosa Holidays

Taking advantage of the British Airways nonstop flight to San José, our *Classic Costa Rica* birding tour visits a selection of the country's finest wildlife sites including La Selva, Rancho Naturalista, Tapanti, Savegre and Villa Lapas and is simply crammed with great birding.

Join Limosa guide Gary Elton on a journey that will take you from the Caribbean lowlands and cloud-forested volcanoes to the coastal mangroves of the Pacific shore, looking for everything from Sunbittern and Scarlet Macaw to Volcano Junco and Resplendent Quetzal. With over 400 species seen on our most recent tours, this promises to be a bird-filled fortnight of many highlights.

Highlights

- Compact Central American country that is positively brimming with brilliant birding
- 400+ species are possible on a journey from the Caribbean and Pacific coasts to cloud-forested volcanoes
- Great Curassow, Sunbittern, Great Green and Scarlet Macaws, Resplendent Quetzal, Large-footed Finch
- More than 30 species of hummingbird to enjoy, including Fiery-throated and the delightful Snowcap
- Crested and Spectacled Owls amongst up to a dozen species of owls and nightjars
- Forest mammals to look for include two sloths, Mantled Howler, Kinkajou, Tent-making Bat
- Mangrove boat trip on Rio Tarcoles
- Small party size - maximum of 10 participants
- Expertly led by Limosa's Gary Elton and a specialist Costa Rican bird guide

What's Included?

- Limosa Tour Leader
- Expert English-speaking Costa Rican bird guide
- 12 nights' accommodation in Costa Rica, staying at comfortable hotels and lodges
- All main meals (including much that is locally grown)
- Travel by comfortable Toyota Coaster bus
- Boat trip on the Rio Tarcoles
- All excursions, entry fees, tour-based tips (including lodges, driver, local guides) and taxes
- NO hidden extras



Photo 2: Sooty-capped Bush Tanager © tour participants Brian and Linda Miller

Outline Itinerary

Day 1

Nonstop London-San José. Night Hotel Bougainvillea in San José (elevation 1,170m)

Days 2-3

La Paz Waterfall Garden, Cinchona feeders and La Virgen enroute to La Selva. Full day at La Selva. La Quinta (2 nights, elevation 100m)

Days 4-5

Rancho Naturalista with birding stops at Rio San Jose, Old Butterfly Garden and Cope's feeders. Rancho Naturalista Lodge (2 nights, elevation 900m)

Days 6-7

Morning at Rancho Naturalista, transfer to Rio Perlas. Full day in Rio Macho and Tapanti National Park (1300-1600m). Paraiso Orocaiy Lodge (2 nights, 1100m)

Days 8-9

Irazu Volcano National Park (2200-3200m) and highland specialities. Sueños del Bosque (2 nights, elevation 2200m)

Day 10

Transfer to Pacific Coast via the *paramo* (3400m). Hotel Villa Lapas (3 nights, 50m)

Days 11-12

Full days in Carara National Park and Guanacaste with Rio Tarcoles mangrove boat trip.

Day 13

Morning Villa Lapas, afternoon transfer to San José. Overnight flight to London.

Day 14

Arrival London Gatwick

Tour Overview

Straddling the narrow neck of land that links the continents of North and South America, the tiny Republic of Costa Rica is blessed with coastlines on both the Pacific and Caribbean shore, while the volcanic mountains between reach so high they touch the clouds. This remarkable chance of geography has given rise to an outstandingly varied flora and fauna, allowing us to sample the enormous wealth of tropical American birds without the need to travel great distances.

Upwards of 400 species are likely on our two-week birdwatching tour and the birding really is exceptional. Past highlights have included Sunbittern, Spotted Wood Quail, Ornate

Hawk-eagle, Crested Owl, Resplendent Quetzal, Scarlet Macaw, Brown-billed Scythebill and Wrenthrush - not to mention the 30 or more species of jewel-like hummingbirds, a whole rainbow of exotically coloured tanagers and fascinating forest mammals such as the endearing Three-toed Sloth!

From the capital San José, we travel first to the lush rainforests of Costa Rica's Caribbean lowlands, where two nights at bird-rich La Quinta should ensure we start our trip in style. Great Green Macaw, Rufous and Broad-billed Motmots, Yellow-throated and Keel-billed Toucans, Chestnut-coloured Woodpecker and Snowy Cotinga are possible here.

Next, we head to the Talamanca Mountains and two nights at the wonderful Rancho Naturalista. The views westward from the lodge are superb and its network of forest trails, busy feeders and 'hummingbird pools' are the realm of bugling Montezuma Oropendolas, Tawny-throated Leaf-tossers and the enchanting Snowcap. We also have a good chance of finding the highly prized Sunbittern.

From Rancho Naturalista, we continue to the lush pre-montane forests of Tapanti National Park and a two-night stay at Paraiso Oroca Lodge. We shall watch for mixed feeding flocks that can hold Collared Trogon, Prong-billed and Red-headed Barbets and dazzling Spangle-cheeked Tanagers.

Climbing higher, we spend a morning on Irazu Volcano seeking Resplendent Quetzal and the reclusive Wrenthrush, as well as taking in the Crater of Irazu, which is truly spectacular! We spend the next two nights in the highlands which are home to some of Costa Rica's most stunning species, including Long-tailed Silky-flycatcher, Flame-throated Warbler and more chances of the fabulous Resplendent Quetzal.

After pausing in the high elevation *paramo* to try for the localised Volcano Junco and Timberline Wren, we begin our descent of the Pacific slope. Our tour concludes amid the lowland forests of Costa Rica's Pacific coast, with three nights at Hotel Villa Lapas. From the raucous bellowing of Mantled Howlers at dawn to the evening roost flights of Scarlet Macaws, our stay here will provide many special memories. It is also from here that we shall take in the special birds of Costa Rica's dry northwest, known as Guanacaste, and enjoy a boat trip along the mangrove-lined channels of the Rio Tarcoles.

Limosa has been operating birding tours to Costa Rica for well over 20 years now and our 2022 trip will be guided by Gary Elton. Combining breath-taking birding and scenery with accommodation at some of the country's best wildlife lodges, and with the convenience of British Airways nonstop service between London and San José, our *Classic Costa Rica* tour is one Neotropical experience not to be missed!

Daily Itinerary

Day 1

FLY LONDON TO SAN JOSÉ

Our two-week birdwatching tour to Costa Rica begins with a morning departure from London Gatwick to San José, capital of Costa Rica. We will be met on arrival in San José by our local guide and transfer directly to the comfortable Hotel Bougainvillea. *Night San José*

Day 2

TO LA QUINTA, VIA LA PAZ HUMMINGBIRD GARDEN, CINCHONA FEEDERS AND LA VIRGEN

A walk first thing in the beautiful grounds of our hotel offers a great introduction to our Classic Costa Rica tour. We should see our first tropical birds in the form of Crimson-fronted Parakeet, Rufous-tailed Hummingbird, Lesson's Motmot, Great Kiskadee, Rufous-naped Wren, Blue-grey Tanager, Greyish Saltator, Rufous-collared Sparrow and White-eared Ground Sparrow.

After breakfast, we set off on a scenic journey through coffee plantations and highland forest patches on the slopes of first the Barva Volcano and then Poas Volcano before arriving to La Paz Waterfall Garden for a hummingbird overload!

The fruit feeders at La Paz (and those at nearby Cinchona) can hold Silver-throated, Crimson-collared and Scarlet-rumped Tanagers along with Common Bush Tanager, but the buzzing of hummingbirds below will soon beckon us down to the feeders. An incredible variety of hummingbird species can be seen at close range here, among them such delights as Green Hermit, Green Thorntail, Violet Sabrewing, the local Magenta-throated Woodstar, both White-bellied and Purple-throated Mountaingems, the endemic Coppery-headed Emerald and the unique, Black-bellied Hummingbird to name but a few. Other birds to watch for in the area include Sooty-faced Finch and Black-cowled Oriole, while on the forest trails we may run into roving feeding flocks comprising the likes of Red-faced Spinetail, Spotted Barbtail, Spotted Woodcreeper, Slaty-backed Nightingale-thrush and gorgeous Bay-headed and Spangle-cheeked Tanagers among many others.

After an excellent buffet lunch, we continue downslope to the Cinchona Feeders, where we have a chance to view many more species at close range. Possibilities here include Blue-throated Toucanet, both Prong-billed and Red-headed Barbets, several species of colourful tanagers, Baltimore Oriole, and several of the 'hummers' found at La Paz.

We stop next at La Virgen del Socorro, a forested valley in the Caribbean foothills. We will search for mixed flocks which could hold Collared Trogon, Russet Antshrike and Speckled Tanager while a Torrent Tyrannulet or American Dipper is always possible on the rocks of the rushing river below. Raptors present include Swallow-tailed Kite, and both White and Barred Hawks.

In the late afternoon, we shall make our way to La Quinta Country Inn, our comfortable lodgings for the next two nights. In the evening, we can listen out for Spectacled Owls around the lodge. *Night La Quinta Country Inn*

Day 3

LA SELVA - CARIBBEAN LOWLAND BIRDING AT ITS BEST

This day in the Caribbean lowlands promises to be one of the best days of the tour, filled with an abundance of tropical wildlife sightings. We will want to make an early start to take in one of the best birding sites in the New World tropics: La Selva Biological Station.

La Selva protects some of the best lowland rainforest in Costa Rica. As we walk the forest trails the likes of Great Tinamou, Snowy Cotinga and Rufous and Broad-billed Motmots await.

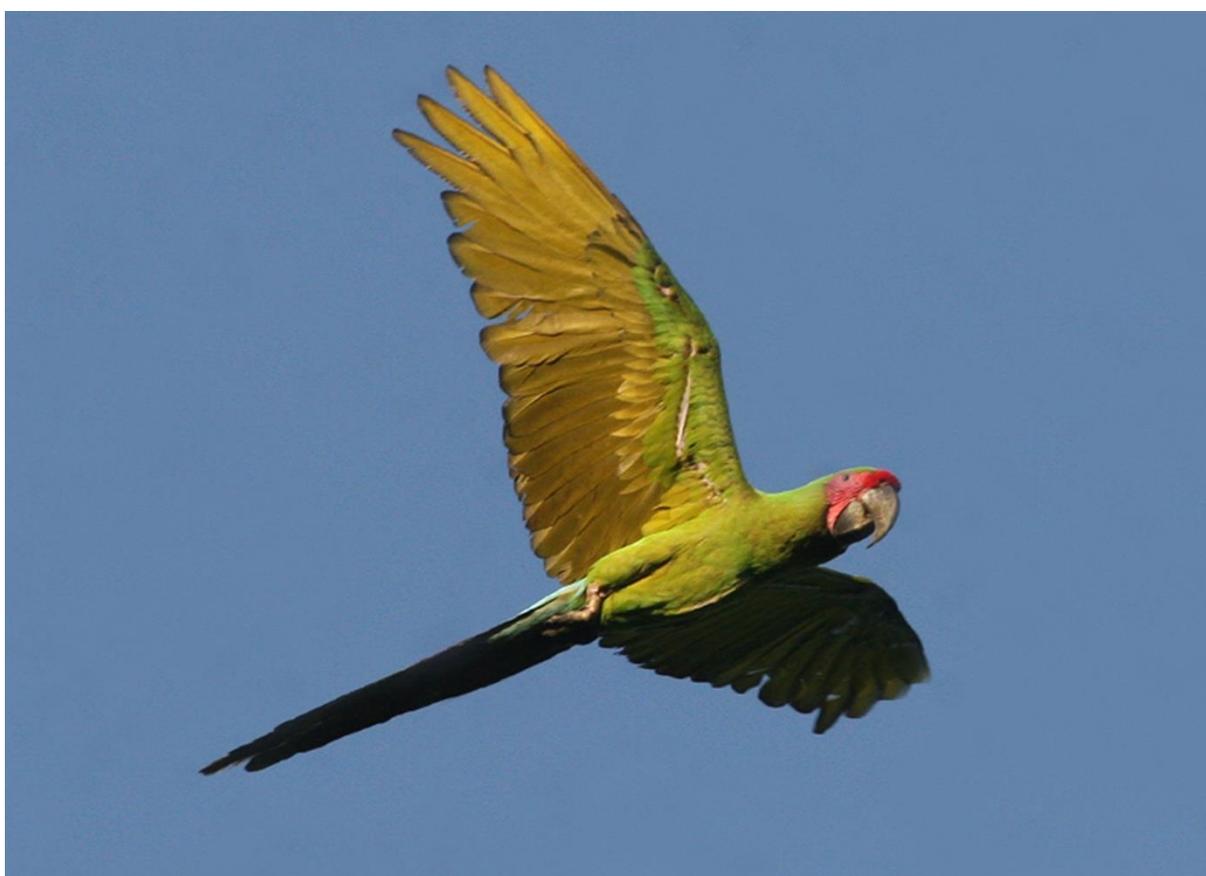


Photo 3: Great Green Macaw © Kevin Easley

Collared Aracari, Keel-billed and Yellow-throated Toucans call from the tops of prominent trees as cacophonous groups of Northern Mealy and Red-lored Amazons wing past overhead. Great Green Macaws have been increasing in numbers in the area and we hope to get views of this most impressive member of the parrot family.

As we watch and listen for an array of forest tinamous, trogons, motmots, woodpeckers and woodcreepers, with patience other avian treasures will be revealed to us, perhaps a

cryptically marked Vermiculated Screech Owl roosting motionless in the vine tangles of the mid-canopy; a White-necked Puffbird perched out on a sunlit branch, or a Rufous-tailed Jacamar hawking insects from a looping liana.

Mammals are well represented at La Selva with Hoffmann's Two-toed and Brown-throated (Three-toed) Sloths, Central American White-throated Capuchin, Mantled Howler, Central American Spider Monkey, Collared Peccary and Central American Agouti all possible. We might also spot the dragon-like Green Basilisk Lizard, the huge Green Iguana, and the diminutive Strawberry Poison Dart Frog.

We return for a second night at our comfortable lodge, where another excellent dinner awaits us. The air-conditioning will feel especially welcome this evening after a long but satisfying day in the field. *Night La Quinta Country Inn*

Day 4

TO RANCHO NATURALISTA VIA RIO SAN JOSE, OLD BUTTERFLY GARDEN AND COPE'S FEEDERS

After a brief walk around the garden of La Quinta, we will load up for a memorable day of birding near Guapiles before transferring to Rancho Naturalista. Our first scheduled stop will be at Rio San Jose on a side road running parallel to this rocky river. Here we hope to find Fasciated Tiger-Heron as it hunts motionless from the rocks.

Other species of note here may include Amazon and Ringed Kingfishers, Cinnamon Woodpecker, Buff-rumped Warbler and Scarlet-rumped Cacique.

Leaving the Caribbean lowlands this morning, we climb up into the foothills and pay a visit to the Old Butterfly Garden for more exceptional hummingbird viewing. The hummers just can't seem to resist the large patch of Vervain flowers and we should be rewarded by excellent views of such jewels as Crowned Woodnymph, Violet-headed Hummingbird, the stunning, Black-crested Coquette and the incomparable Snowcap. The surrounding forest can be terrific for mixed flocks, among them many species of colourful tanagers including Golden-hooded, Black-and-yellow, Emerald, Speckled and Bay-headed.

Our next stop is at Cope's, another wonderful feeding station which should produce close views of yet more hummingbirds including chances of both Long-billed and Stripe-throated Hermits, Bronze-tailed Plumeleteer and, with luck, the unique White-tipped Sicklebill. Other notable species attracted to the feeders and small pond include Russet-naped Wood Rails, Green and American Pygmy Kingfishers, Wood Thrush, Crimson-collared Tanager, Red-legged and Green Honeycreepers, and both Chestnut-headed and Montezuma Oropendolas to name but a few. A walk in a nearby forest patch might reveal lekking White-collared Manakins, a sleeping Honduran White Bat, roosting Spectacled Owl and sometimes the wonderful Crested Owl. While another spot has been excellent of late for roosting Great Potoo, the largest member of this bizarre family.

Reluctantly tearing ourselves away from the excitements at Cope's, we continue to reach the famous Rancho Naturalista, which will be our home for the next two nights. Set at an elevation of 900m in the Talamanca Mountains, Rancho Naturalista has been a firm favourite with participants on all our recent Costa Rica tours. On a clear day, the views westward from the lodge are superb and we can relax with a welcome chilled beer whilst watching animated White-necked Jacobins and Green-breasted Mangos buzzing to within arm's reach on the veranda as the sun sets over the distant volcanic peaks of Irazu and Turrialba. *Night Rancho Naturalista*

Day 5

RANCHO NATURALISTA

Early mornings at Rancho begin with the local 'alarm clocks' of bugling Montezuma Oropendolas and squawking Grey-headed Chachalacas calling excitedly outside our rooms. With coffee served on the balcony pre-dawn to begin our day, we will soon be making the short walk over to the bug light. In the dim light, we will start to make out different woodcreepers, with Cocoa, Spotted and Plain-brown all possible; the normally skulking White-breasted Wood Wren seems unconcerned by our presence, while a Red-throated Ant Tanager swallows down a scaly moth for breakfast. Buff-throated Foliage-gleaner, Plain Antvireo and Golden-crowned Warblers are regular customers to the 'insect buffet', and the very localised Tawny-chested Flycatcher is always a possibility.

Back on the balcony, and with spectacular views of the valley as a backdrop, we shall thrill to an incredible variety of birds at the lodge's feeders. Brilliant Orange-billed Sparrows join wonderful Scarlet-rumped Tanagers for this impressive feeding frenzy, while flowering hedges are attractive to hummingbirds, bringing further chances of the wine-coloured Snowcap and delightful Black-crested Coquette.

After breakfast, we shall spend the morning walking some of Rancho's wonderful trails, watching for the likes of Gartered Trogon, the uncommon Brown-billed Scythebill, Dull-mantled Antbird, Rufous Mourner and a host of colourful tanagers. Nearby, we may find Chequer-throated Stipplethroat and Scale-crested Pygmy Tyrant, plus a trio of 'must-see' manakins: White-collared, White-crowned and White-ruffed.

Mid-afternoon, we plan to pay a visit to nearby Casa Turiri, on the shores of the man-made Lake Angostura. Having scanned the lily pads for wetland birds such as Limpkin, Snail Kite, and Purple Gallinule, we shall check the adjacent fields for Southern Lapwing and Tropical Mockingbird, Eastern and Red-breasted Meadowlarks, and both Giant and Bronzed Cowbirds to name a few.



Photo 4: Snowcap © Kevin Easley

The late afternoon will be reserved for a visit to Rancho's famous 'Hummingbird Pools'. As we sit quietly, we should be treated to dazzling views of delightful Crowned Woodnymphs and Purple-crowned Fairies as they bathe on the wing. With luck, perhaps a furtive Tawny-throated Leaf-tosser or Kentucky Warbler might also make an appearance.

Remarkably, we could encounter a dozen or more varieties of hummingbird at Rancho. And when our eyes grow weary of trying to keep pace with the ceaseless activity of these avian jewels, we can turn our attention to the surrounding trees and hedges for less frenetic fare such as Stripe-breasted Wren, Masked Tityra, migrant

warblers, tanagers, euphonias...the list of possibilities here seems boundless! At night, a resident pair of Mottled Owls can sometimes be spotlighted, while Common Pauragues can be found hawking for insects along the entrance road below. *Night Rancho Naturalista.*

Day 6

MORNING RANCHO NATURALISTA, TRANSFER TO PARAISO OROCAI LODGE

We shall begin our final morning at Rancho by driving a short distance to a rocky river to look for the resident Sunbitterns. Here we should be treated to excellent views of this unique and beautiful species as it forages beside the water. With any luck, we will also see one in flight, revealing the amazing 'sunbursts' on the wing from which the species derives its name.

In a nearby valley, we shall search for tanager flocks, which can hold an astounding number of colourful species, from Emerald and Speckled to Bay-headed and Black-and-yellow. An open area on the way back to the lodge is a good spot to try for the localised White-throated Flycatcher along with White-tailed Kite, Grey-crowned Yellowthroat, and a nice selection of seedeaters.

After lunch at Rancho, we will transfer west, making a couple of birding stops along the way. The first will be at Rio Birris, which usually holds Least Grebe, ducks, and shorebirds, while the second will be near Ujarras, where amongst the plantations of coffee and chayote (a type of squash) we hope to encounter Orange-billed Nightingale-thrush and the endemic Cabanis's Ground Sparrow. Our hotel for the next two nights, Paraiso Orocai Lodge, offers views of the Orosi valley and Turrialba and Irazu volcanoes *Night Paraiso Orocai Lodge*

Day 7

RIO MACHO AND TAPANTI NATIONAL PARK

An early morning visit to the Rio Macho area can be very productive. This forested area is accessed via a road leading to a waterworks facility. With good middle elevation forest on either side, we will search out mixed flocks of the area which can hold Blue-throated Toucanet, Golden-olive and Smoky-brown Woodpeckers, Scaly-throated Foliage-gleaner, Red-faced Spinetail, the stunning White-winged Tanager, Tawny-capped Euphonia and the oh so glorious Golden-browed Chlorophonia to name a few. We shall also listen out for the call of the secretive Zeledon's Antbird, a bird we will have to coax out to view!

Continuing up the valley, we will arrive at Tapanti, one of the most scenic of Costa Rica's national parks. With an altitudinal range between 1300 and 1600 metres on the country's Caribbean slope, the habitat of wet pre-montane forest holds many specialities we will be searching for today.

Near the entrance to the park, Green-fronted Lancebill can sometimes be seen hawking insects



Photo 5: Fiery-billed Araçari © Kevin Easley

along the stream, while White-bellied Mountaingem and Black-bellied Hummingbird prefer the flowering vines and trees nearby. Mixed species flocks are a regular highlight at Tapanti and often include the stunning Red-headed Barbet, along with its larger but less colourful cousin the Prong-billed Barbet. The dazzling Spangle-cheeked Tanager, Spotted Barbtail, Ochraceous Wren and Black-eared Warbler also regularly travel with the busy flocks.

Riverside specialists could include American Dipper and Torrent Tyrannulet, while the understory conceals Slaty-backed Nightingale-thrush and Chestnut-capped Brushfinch. If we are fortunate to enjoy a sunny day in these mist-laden mountains, we will be on the lookout for soaring birds of prey such as Barred Hawk and both Black and Ornate Hawk-Eagles.

After dinner, for those with energy to spare, we may try some 'owling' in hopes of coaxing a Bare-shanked Screech Owl or Mottled Owl to appear. *Second night at Paraiso Orocaiy Lodge.*

Day 8**IRAZU VOLCANO TO TALAMANCA HIGHLANDS AND SUENOS DEL BOSQUE**

Leaving Paraiso Orocaiy, we head to the Irazu Volcano National Park for our first taste of highland birding in Costa Rica (2200m-3200m). Special birds abound here, many of which can only be seen in the highlands of Costa Rica and western Panama. On entering the oak montane forest, we shall set our sights on finding what is considered Costa Rica's, if not the New World's, most beautiful bird: the Resplendent Quetzal.

While searching for the main prize, we will no doubt run into many species indicative of this zone including Acorn Woodpecker, Black-capped Flycatcher, Flame-throated Warbler, Sooty Thrush, Sooty-capped Bush tanager and Large-footed Finch. We shall also make a special effort to find the secretive Wrenthrush (or Zeledonia), now a monotypic family. Above the tree line, we will search for Timberline Wren and Volcano Junco, both species being resident here in the patches of miniature bamboo. Venturing into the park itself will allow us to walk a short distance to the crater viewpoint, a spectacular scene, clouds permitting.....

After lunch, we will make the descent from Irazu Volcano into Cartago, only to climb right back up via the Pan American Highway to the Cordillera Talamanca. We plan to make several birding stops hoping to add species such as Long-tailed Silky-Flycatcher, Flame-coloured Tanager and Yellow-thighed Finch, while nearby hummingbird feeders may draw our attention to Talamanca and Volcano Hummingbirds, White-throated Mountaingem and Lesser Violetear, although it is the aptly named Fiery-throated Hummingbird that usually steals the show!

Further down this beautiful valley, we will arrive at our tucked away mountain retreat located beside the Rio Savegre, for a two-night stay. Dinners are always delicious here with fresh trout being the speciality of the area. *Night at Sueños del Bosque.*

Day 9**SAVEGRE VALLEY AND HIGHLAND SPECIALITIES**

The Savegre Valley is situated at an elevation of 2200m. Birds often seem especially tame here, with Northern Tufted Flycatcher, Slaty Flowerpiercer and the sociable Acorn Woodpecker common in the forests, while Blue-throated Toucanet, Collared Whitestart and Flame-throated Warbler are amongst the most stunning of all Costa Rica's species. There are yet more 'hummers' to enjoy here, from sparkling Lesser Violetears and White-throated Mountaingems to Volcano, Scintillant and Striped-tailed Hummingbirds. A walk in the nearby forest has previously produced excellent views of the secretive Spotted Wood Quail and there is always a chance to spot a Black Guan in the fruiting trees.

After we have birded the productive grounds of the lodge, we may take an open-air ride by 4WD vehicle up a steep track to reach the Los Robles and Quebrada Trails. Amongst the many

birds to look for here amidst the primary oak cloud forest are Costa Rican Pygmy Owl, Spot-crowned Woodcreeper, Ruddy Treerunner, Buffy Tuftedcheek, Black-faced Solitaire, and Black-cheeked Warbler. It is in this valley that we will have another opportunity for the crown jewel of Central American birds - the exquisite Resplendent Quetzal. February marks the beginning of the breeding season for this remarkable bird and we will no doubt be left pondering as to how the males manage to enter their nest hole and incubate the eggs, while



Photo 6: The exquisite Resplendent Quetzal is one of our main targets on this tour © Kevin Easley

keeping their extraordinary tail hanging outside, looking for all the world like a fern growing on the side of a tree!

In the afternoon, we will continue birding this most scenic area, with possible rewards being Sulphur-winged Parakeet, Lineated Foliage-gleaner, Golden-winged Warbler, Black-thighed Grosbeak, Yellow-bellied Siskin and many others. As night falls, we will make a special effort to find another of the localised Chiriqui highland endemics, the Dusky Nightjar, before returning to spend a second night at our peaceful lodge. *Night at Sueños del Bosque.*

Day 10

THE PARAMO TO VILLA LAPAS

Leaving Sueños del Bosque, we will drive south up to high altitude, where the windswept *paramo* (at 3400m above sea level) is home to high level specialities such as Sooty Thrush, Timberline Wren, Volcano Junco and Volcano Hummingbird.

Heading down the slope, we may stop to check hummingbird feeders, banana feeders and garden flowers for possibilities including Long-billed Starthroat, the localised White-tailed Emerald, impressive White-crested Coquette and Snowy-bellied Hummingbird. Banana feeders can attract Red-crowned Woodpecker, Red-headed Barbet, Scarlet-rumped (Cherrie's race), Silver-throated and Speckled Tanagers and both White-naped and Chestnut-capped Brushfinches. Two attractive birds to look for in the mistletoe berries are Elegant Euphonia and Golden-browed Chlorophonia, along with the more subtle charms of the aptly named Mistletoe Tyrannulet. Swallow-tailed Kites can often be seen here as they gracefully glide over the hills.

We continue descending into San Isidro before going over the last hills to the Pacific coast. Our final birding stop may be on the coast at Playa Hermosa where we will look for Double-

striped Thick-knee, Bare-throated Tiger Heron, Common Black Hawk, Bat Falcon, the impressive Scissor-tailed Flycatcher and, what will hopefully be the first of, many Scarlet Macaws.

Our destination this evening is Hotel Villa Lapas which is nestled in a forested lowland valley along the Tarcolitos River. This comfortable hotel will make the ideal base for our final three nights in Costa Rica, allowing us to explore this diverse region of the Central Pacific coast.
Night Hotel Villa Lapas

Days 11 - 12

VILLA LAPAS, CARARA NATIONAL PARK, GUANACASTE AND RIO TARCOLES BOAT TRIP

As we gather outside our rooms, the early morning comes alive with tropical sounds as Gartered and Slaty-tailed Trogons, Lesson's Motmots, Yellow-throated Toucan, Pale-billed Woodpecker, Cocoa Woodcreeper, Chestnut-backed Antbird, Streaked Flycatcher and other species join in a spectacular dawn chorus.

After breakfast, we will visit Carara National Park which is just a few minutes away from our hotel. Birding the trail near the Rio Tarcoles, we should encounter many new species, from Black-hooded and Barred Antshrikes to Dot-winged Antwren, Northern Royal Flycatcher and Orange-collared Manakin. In the more humid forest, Great Tinamou, Black-faced Antthrush, Streak-chested Antpitta, Rufous Piha, Riverside Wren and others await.

The afternoon may find us huddled down in the forest watching many colourful species come for their daily bath. Whilst striking Red-capped Manakins regularly steal the show, handsome Blue-crowned Manakins will be vying for our attention as well! Sulphur-rumped Myiobius, Green Honeycreeper and migrant North American warblers are also likely to make an appearance at this popular bathing site.

The Carara area is also an excellent spot for owls and on one evening, we may try our luck with Striped Owl and Pacific Screech Owl, while the tiny Ferruginous Pygmy Owl is a diurnal hunter to be looked for during daylight hours.

Our lodge also lies close to the southern limit of the dry Guanacaste zone, just north of the Rio Tarcoles and the change in both the vegetation and birdlife is remarkable, with the rainforests south of the river giving way to a much drier zone to the north. In the fields and thorn forests of this more arid habitat, we will search for Double-striped Thick-knee, Lesser Ground Cuckoo, Cinnamon Hummingbird, the glorious Turquoise-browed Motmot, Black-headed Trogon, White-fronted and Yellow-naped Amazons, Orange-fronted Parakeet, the superb Long-tailed Manakin, raucous White-throated Magpie-jays, groups of Stripe-headed Sparrows, and Blue Grosbeak.

Midday while in the Carara area will see us back at the lodge for a buffet lunch and a welcome air-conditioned siesta, or you might opt instead for a dip in the pool.

Setting off for the mouth of the Rio Tarcoles, we shall devote our final full afternoon in Costa Rica with a boat trip to search for the many mangrove specialities of the area. The endemic and highly localized Mangrove Hummingbird can often be found, along with 'Mangrove' Common Black Hawk, Mangrove Warbler and Mangrove Vireo.

Up to five species of kingfisher are possible along the river, including the diminutive American Pygmy Kingfisher and the larger and more robust Ringed Kingfisher.

Waterbirds should be plentiful, with roosting Boat-billed Heron, Bare-throated Tiger Heron, and Tricolored Heron, Lesser and Greater Yellowlegs, Wilson's and Semipalmated Plovers, Willet and Black-necked Stilt to watch for. The beautiful Purple Gallinule and yellow-winged Northern Jacana are also often seen along the edges of the river.

If the tide is right, the estuary at the mouth of the Rio Tarcoles can be a great spot to find roosting terns and waders. As Magnificent Frigatebirds and Brown Pelicans cruise overhead, and we watch our last pairs of Scarlet Macaws fly by to their roost, it is a reminder that we too must soon be flying away. *Two further nights Hotel Villa Lapas*

Day 13

PACIFIC COAST TO SAN JOSÉ, FLY LONDON

We should have time for some final birding with King Vulture, Zone-tailed Hawk, Golden-naped Woodpecker, Fiery-billed Aracari, Long-tailed Manakin and Northern Royal Flycatcher amongst the possibilities.

After lunch, we load up our bus one last time and transfer from the Pacific coast into Costa Rica's bustling Central Valley. Arriving at San José Airport, we bid a reluctant farewell to our Costa Rican guide and driver and check-in for our overnight flight home.

Day 14

ARRIVAL IN LONDON

Morning arrival at London Gatwick, where our 'Classic' birding tour to Costa Rica concludes.

Trip Information

Group Size Max 10 participants and 2 leaders

Birds 400-450 species

Mammals 10-20 species. We usually encounter a good variety of forest mammals. Possibilities include up to 3 species of Neotropical monkeys, two sloths, White-nosed Coati, Collared Peccary, Central American Agouti and Tent-making Bats.

Accommodation 12 nights' accommodation in Costa Rica, staying at good hotels and lodges. All rooms have private facilities.

Meals All main meals are included in the tour price (and with drinking water provided during the day), commencing with dinner in San José on Day 1 and concluding with lunch on Day 13. Food is good to excellent, with much that is locally grown, including the coffee.

Walking and Altitude Costa Rica is a mountainous country, so all visitors should expect some trails to be steeper in parts, but these are always taken slowly, with frequent stops to bird. As one would expect, rainforest trails can sometimes be muddy and slippery underfoot, so sturdy waterproof walking shoes or boots with good grip are essential.

The walking effort is mostly easy but can be moderate at times due to the terrain and/or altitude at a few spots. At Savegre, we shall be birding at elevations of between 2000-2750m, plus a couple of hours only spent at higher elevation in the *paramo* zone around 3400m, and at Irazu Volcano (2200m-3200m]. Our birding at Villa Lapas and Selva Verde is at or near sea level.

Weather Tropical to temperate climate, according to altitude. Our February tours run during Costa Rica's 'dry season' but please note rainfall can (and does) occur year-round in the mountains and rainforests! It can be cool and misty at times, especially in the mountains and cloud forest but is generally hotter and sunnier on the coast (10-30C/50-86F).

Birding in Costa Rica is outstanding year-round, but we are frequently asked about the 'best time' to visit the country, particularly by those anxious to avoid Central America's 'rainy season'. To help you decide, our local agents in San José have provided the following climatic summary:

"We have two dry seasons and two rainy seasons in Costa Rica. The two dry seasons can also be separated into two categories: 'Major Dry Season' (*verano*) – mid January through April; 'Medium Dry Season' (*veranito* or 'little summer') – mid July through Aug. The two rainy seasons can be separated into two categories: 'Major Rainy Season' – mid September-October (except in the far southeast); 'Medium Rainy Season' – mid May through mid-July. As with weather patterns anywhere, these 'seasons' may vary slightly from year to year, but they basically hold true."

Ground Transport By comfortable Toyota Coaster (minicoach) with air-conditioning. (A minibus may be used in the event of a small group).

Boat Trips Our tour price includes the cost of a river trip on the Rio Grande de Tarcoles, in a boat that is large enough to accommodate our whole group. The boat trip usually lasts 2-3 hours.

Insects There is currently no malaria risk in any of the areas visited on our tour.

Photos Excellent photographic opportunities in more open habitats, especially at feeders around the lodges, birds, other wildlife, and scenic shots. Tricky in the forest due to low light levels.

Tour Cost

2022 (14 days): £3995

Deposit: £1200 Single Supp: £895

Cost includes:

- Limosa Tour Leader
- Expert English-speaking Costa Rican guide
- 12 nights' accommodation in Costa Rica
- All main meals and drinking water provided
- All local travel by Coaster bus with local driver
- Boat trip on the Rio Tarcoles
- All excursions, entry fees to parks, tour-based tips (including lodges, driver, local guides) and taxes
- Limosa checklist of birds
- NO hidden extras

Cost excludes

International flights, insurance, airport snacks/meals, drinks and other items of a personal nature.

About Your Guide

Gary Elton: Gary is a principal Limosa guide who lives in Norfolk, dividing his time between guiding for Limosa and working at Holme Bird Observatory on the Norfolk coast.

A former Herts Bird Club committee member and warden of a local nature reserve in north London (where he lived and birded for over 35 years), he is a qualified ringer with a particular fascination for studying bird migration.

Gary's extensive repertoire of overseas tours for us includes Cyprus, Greece, Spain, Estonia, Iceland, Gambia, Borneo, Sri Lanka, Florida, Mexico and Panama. He not infrequently pops up on TV wildlife programmes, having featured on everything from *Springwatch* to *Bill Bailey's Birdwatching Bonanza*. Gary is good fun, easy going and has an infectious enthusiasm.

Local guide Gary will be assisted throughout the tour by an experienced, English-speaking Costa Rican bird tour guide working for our specialist local agents in Costa Rica.

What You Say...

"... the best birding trip we have ever been on."

JH, Classic Costa Rica tour

"We had a wonderful time in Costa Rica. For us it was a great balance of birding, adventure, fun and discovery... We had unmatched views of some thrilling birds... This was our best birding holiday!"

JC & DH, Classic Costa Rica tour

"Our second trip with Limosa to Costa Rica; even better than the first! All the accommodation was first class - good food and safe water. Overall, the trip was excellent, and the group and leaders gelled well. Good fun!"

CA, Classic Costa Rica tour

"What a fantastic trip! I know we have left Costa Rica a little late in our neotropical experiences, but it truly was a brilliant birdwatching experience. The guides, lodges, staff, food, and transportation (including flights) were all first class - I was reluctant to get on the plane to come home... Thank you for yet another wonderful Limosa holiday!"

A&JB, Classic Costa Rica tour

"An excellent holiday covering a good range of habitats, which far exceeded my expectations in terms of accommodation and quantity of birds seen. My personal list was 425 species, mostly seen well, with good views of those I most wanted to see, including an impressive 38 hummingbird species."

SG, Classic Costa Rica tour

Financial Security

Limosa Holidays (which is a division of Birds and Wildlife Limited) has financial failure insurance provided by Travel Vault which fully protects you should Birds and Wildlife Limited cease trading.

All passenger bookings are fully insured including the initial deposit and balance payments. The policy also includes repatriation, arising from the cancellation or curtailment of your travel arrangements in the unlikely event of the insolvency of Birds and Wildlife Limited.

For full details please see <https://limosaholidays.co.uk/about/financial-protection/>

How to book

Check availability on our website or with our office. We are happy to hold a provisional reservation for up to 7 days. After this, we require a booking form and deposit to confirm your place on a tour.

Book online, by phone or by post

You can book and pay the deposit simply and securely via our website using the “Book this Tour” button on the relevant tour page. Telephone bookings must be confirmed in writing by completion of a booking form (available to download from our website) and emailed or posted to us.

Please be sure to read our booking conditions and general information prior to booking. Links to this can be found from the footer on every page of our website.

When to book

Early booking is advised as all our tours have small group sizes and so they can fill very quickly; indeed, occasionally this can happen before we have even uploaded details to the website.

The number of single rooms is sometimes limited, and these are often taken quickly so we encourage you to plan ahead if you would like one.

When a trip becomes a ‘guaranteed departure’ early on, this also means that everyone can book flights which is advantageous for all.

Last-minute bookings

We inevitably receive a few unexpected cancellations over the course of a season, so it is always worth enquiring about availability on any tour – even at short notice.

Payments

- **Deposit:** the amount of booking deposit per person is shown alongside every tour. We accept deposit payments by electronic bank transfer (please ask for our bank details), UK

debit/credit cards and cheques (made payable to *Birds and Wildlife Ltd* and drawn on a UK bank in GB£ sterling)

- **Balance:** full payment of the tour balance is due no later than 12 weeks prior to departure or 20 weeks in the case of certain tours and cruises. We will send you an invoice before the balance is due. We accept payments of balances by electronic bank transfer or cheque.
- **Payment by overseas customers:** These must be in GB£ Sterling and made by electronic bank transfer (please ask for our bank details).
- We do not accept cheques on US banks in US\$ or cheques in Euros or Eurocheque. For customers living outside of the UK and the European Economic Area, we can accept balance payments by Visa and MasterCard credit cards but with an additional charge of 3% to help offset credit card company charges.

Late booking payments: for us to guarantee hotel rooms etc, full payment is required at the time of booking (i.e., bookings made within 12 weeks of departure).

Passports and Visas

For UK passport holders your passport must be valid for at least 6 months beyond the last day of the tour.

Current entry requirements for UK citizens travelling abroad can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice>

Health and Vaccinations

For full and up to date information on vaccines visit <https://travelhealthpro.org.uk/countries> and select your destination country.

General information on travel vaccinations and a travel health checklist is also available on the NHS 'Fit for Travel' website. You may then wish to contact your health adviser or pharmacy for advice on other preventive measures and managing any pre-existing medical conditions while you are abroad.

Your safety and travel advice

An unavoidable aspect of travelling abroad is the risk it may pose to your safety and security. The best advice on current risks is provided by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO).

To assess and protect against any risks in your chosen destination, we strongly advise that you refer to the relevant FCDO travel advice both prior to booking and regularly before you travel. This information can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice>.

"Travel aware" is a travel safety campaign run by the FCDO and another useful resource and details can be found at <https://travelaware.campaign.gov.uk>.

Travel Insurance

Good travel insurance is essential before setting off on any overseas trip. In common with all responsible tour operators, it is a condition of booking that all clients are fully and adequately insured before travelling with us.

Be aware that some destinations may require you to produce proof of comprehensive travel insurance (e.g., a valid insurance certificate) at Immigration on arrival in the country, so you should carry your documentation with you.

Your travel insurance should cover against cancellation, curtailment, missed departure, delay, personal accident, death, loss of baggage and valuables (see note below), personal liability and legal expenses.

Most importantly, your insurance must cover you fully in respect of medical care and repatriation should you become too ill to continue with the tour, including the cost of emergency evacuation by helicopter or air ambulance should this be necessary.

Note that passenger liability insurance covering the transportation that we hire, particularly in less developed countries, may be inadequate; it is, therefore important that your insurance cover includes sufficient provision for your dependents in the event of an accident.

We recommend that you obtain travel insurance as soon as possible after booking your holiday to ensure you are fully protected in the event of unexpected cancellation prior to departure. You must inform your insurers of any pre-existing medical conditions (including those of persons not necessarily travelling but upon whom your holiday may depend) that may require treatment during a period of overseas travel or might cause you to cancel the trip.

Once you have arranged your insurance, please be sure to send us the following essential details: name and contact details of your insurance provider, your policy number, expiry date and your insurers 24hr emergency assistance number.

Important things to note about insurance

Travel insurance does not normally provide sufficient cover for valuable optical equipment, which is often best protected under your own household insurance policy. If in doubt, ask your insurers for advice prior to travel.

Most travel insurance policies limit the amount of cover, typically up to a maximum tour cost of £5000 per person. If the tour you are booking exceeds this amount, additional cover can usually be provided upon payment of an additional premium. We recommend all travellers check their individual policy limit to ensure the full cost of their holiday is covered.

Arranging your insurance

Due to UK government legislation, we are not allowed to offer or recommend travel related insurance. Premiums can vary widely according to your age, needs, health, choice of destination and other factors, while many people nowadays have annual travel insurance cover.

General Information

www.limosaholidays.co.uk

Our website gives easy access to detailed tour itineraries (tour info packs), trip reports, trip photos and the latest Limosa News.

Special diets and other requests

We pass on all such requests to the hotels and other suppliers, and do our best to ensure (but, of course, cannot guarantee) that your needs will be met. Please be sure to tell us about these (in as much detail as possible) at the time of booking, to allow good time to make the necessary arrangements.

Smoking and vaping

Almost all our clients prefer a smoke-free environment. For the enjoyment and comfort of all, we ask that smokers refrain from smoking in proximity to the group and respect our no smoking policy in the vehicle, at mealtimes and when watching wildlife.

Any questions?

If you have any questions, please email us at tours@limosaholidays.co.uk or call the office and we will do our best to assist you.

Our office is open 09:00-17:00 Monday to Friday. In the event we are unable to take your call, please leave a message on our answerphone (24 hrs) and we will contact you as soon as we can.

Thank you for your interest in our tours. We do hope that you will be able to join us.

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