

# Limosa

## CLASSIC COSTA RICA TRIP REPORT



*The group enjoyed fantastic views of many of Costa Rica's special birds including Snowy Cotinga, Snowcap, Golden-browed Chlorophonia and Resplendent Quetzal © Herman Venegas*

# CLASSIC COSTA RICA

6-18 February 2025

Leader: Herman Venegas

## Trip Diary

### 6 February

The tour began smoothly with the group arriving at San Jose airport without any issues and everyone was soon transported to the charming Bougainvillea Hotel.

Upon arrival, we swiftly settled in and gathered for a tasty welcome dinner choosing to dine as soon as possible given the long flights from Europe and the effects of the time change.

The dinner provided an excellent opportunity for an engaging meet-and-greet session allowing participants and Herman, Limosa's guide, to break the ice and get to know each other in a relaxed and friendly atmosphere.

After the enjoyable dinner, we discussed the itinerary and plans for the upcoming tour. With excitement in the air, we then retired for the night, ready to embark on our birding adventure the next day.

### 7 February

We started the day with a tasty cup of coffee before heading into the gardens of the Bougainvillea Hotel where we soon found a Lineated Woodpecker chipping away at a wooden arch. This lively sight rather distracted us from watching our first Social Flycatcher of the tour.

Walking through the garden, we then spotted a Mottled Owl perched near the trail which was keeping a keen eye on us.

*Mottled Owl © Herman Venegas*

After a delicious breakfast (which was the first of many we would enjoy during the holiday), we drove up into the central mountain range of Barra Blanca to visit the La Paz Waterfall Garden. Here, we were mesmerised by the hummingbirds



including Black-bellied Hummingbird and Coppery-headed Emerald.

Continuing our journey to the Caribbean lowlands, we stopped at the famous Cinchona feeders where besides toucans and tanagers, we found a Brown-billed Scythebill, a woodcreeper with an extraordinarily long decurved bill.

Later, we stopped on a bridge and successfully spotted an American Dipper. As the day ended, we arrived at La Quinta Inn and were treated to stunning views of a Crimson-collared Tanager at the feeders.

## **8 February**

Another day which started with steaming mugs of Costa Rican coffee, the aroma blending perfectly with the early morning songs of the birds. Just as we were taking our first sips, a Collared Aracari decided to join us, swooping in to snatch some food from the nearby feeder, a sight that truly set the stage for the day !!

Post-coffee, we ventured onto the trails behind the hotel and it wasn't long before we were greeted by a Chestnut-backed Antbird and an ever-active Orange-billed Sparrow, both of which treating us to a great show.

Our next stop was the renowned OTS La Selva, a veritable Eden for birders. Here, we were dazzled by an enchanting Broad-billed Motmot and its equally charismatic cousin, the Rufous Motmot, both with their stunning colours and graceful movements.

The day, however, kept delivering surprises. Near the famous Crested Owl hideout, we marvelled at a White-collared Manakin performing its elusive dance, whilst on the STR trail, vibrant Yellow-throated Toucans and a majestic Slaty-tailed Trogon seemed to be putting on a private show just for us.

A mixed flock then came through with a flurry of activity, introducing us to Fasciated Antshrike, Rufous Mourner, Rufous-winged Woodpecker, Eye-ringed Flatbill and Stripe-breasted Wren. It felt like we had walked into a hidden corner of a birding paradise.

After such a feast for the eyes, it was time to refuel our bodies and following a relaxing lunch break, we were back on the trails at 3pm with renewed energy. Luck was certainly on our side as not one, but two, Great Tinamous made an appearance, strolling nonchalantly across our path just a few metres away as if they were the stars of the show.

Just when we thought the day couldn't get any better, we enjoyed some mesmerising views of a Chestnut-coloured Woodpecker, undoubtedly one of the most beautiful woodpeckers in northern Central America. It was a perfect end to a fantastic day.

*Chestnut-coloured Woodpecker © Herman Venegas*



## 9 February

To maximize on our birding opportunities, we opted for an early start along one of the local roads near the lodge. As we navigated in the dark, we encountered a medium-large Fer-de-Lance crossing the road, which paused just long enough for us to get a good look at it.



On reaching our birding location, we found a White-fronted Nunbird, one of the standout species in this part of the Neotropics. A little later, we were treated to the sight of an Olive-throated Parakeet perching in the same tree as where a Snowy Cotinga was displaying. Our early morning walk concluded with a sighting of the elusive Bright-rumped Attila.

*Snowy Cotinga © Herman Venegas*

After enjoying a hearty breakfast, we set out for the renowned Rancho Naturalista, making several stops along the way. At the Police

Station Road, we were rewarded with fantastic views through the scope of Great Green Macaw, Bat Falcon and Cinnamon Woodpecker.

Next, we visited a long-time friend of Limosa, "Cope," who has been graciously hosting us at his home for many years. His feeders were as impressive as ever, attracting around 36 species, many of which were new to us.

We then checked out a roosting Spectacled Owl, always a highlight for Limosa clients and a particular favourite of Herman, who has a special fondness for owls.

*Spectacled Owl © Herman Venegas*

Time flew by as we enjoyed ourselves, and soon it was time to move towards our final destination, Rancho Naturalista, which was a two-hour drive away. Arriving at this fantastic lodge always feels like coming home during our trips and we wrapped up the day on the balcony. Whilst this started off slowly, it gradually picked up as species began to emerge and we spotted Crowned Woodnymph, Green-breasted Mango, Stripe-throated Hermit and, best of all, the unmistakable Snowcap.



The day concluded with a delightful dinner, leaving us eager to see what tomorrow would bring.

### **10 February**

As the first rays of dawn light began to appear, the hummingbirds were the first species to appear. While many of the species were now familiar, we were delighted to also spot some new ones including Violet-headed Hummingbird and Stripe-throated Hermit.



A bit later, a Lesson's Motmot made an appearance at the feeders, capturing everyone's attention. A Black-striped Sparrow then attempted to steal the spotlight but a Golden-browed Chlorophonia quickly became the star of the show, captivating everyone with its stunning plumage. The show continued until lunchtime and, by then, we had added many new, colourful and attractive species to our list.

*Golden-browed Chlorophonia © Herman Venegas*

By midday, the bird activity had slowed down a bit but, nevertheless, we still managed to see some incredible species, including White-browed Gnatcatcher, Green Thorntail, Black-and-white Warbler and a Merlin.

## 11 February

The day began with the sounds of birds singing as we enjoyed a cup of coffee and views of a Snowcap from the balcony at Rancho Naturalista. It felt like the start of another great day !!

*Snowcap © Herman Venegas*

As we walked down to Lisa's Garden, we were surprised by a Tayra, a large weasel-like animal, and a White-nosed Coati, a cute relative of the Raccoon of North America. It was a fantastic start to our morning.

At Lisa's Garden, we spotted White-lined Tanager and Yellow-bellied Elaenia, both birds which were new to our trip although, unfortunately, the hoped for Black-crested Coquette did not appear.



Next, we headed to the town of Platanillo, known for its heliconias, where we saw birds like Cinnamon-bellied Saltator, Buff-rumped Warbler and, most importantly, the spectacular Sunbittern, with its rainbow-coloured wings.

*Sunbittern © Herman Venegas*

Along the river, we also found a Dull-mantled Antbird which was just two metres away and this close-up encounter was another highlight of our day.

Back at Rancho Naturalista, we decided to give the Black-crested Coquette another try and after a patient 30-minute wait, one of the group excitedly called out "I've got it!" and there it was, a beautiful male which performed nicely for us. It was a perfect ending to our morning.

After lunch, we set off for the Orosi Valley. We made stops at Casa Turrere and Finca Oriente, where we saw Red-breasted Meadowlark, Northern Jacana, Southern Lapwing, Snail Kite and White-tailed Kite.

We arrived at Casona del Cafetal at around 5pm, where new birds awaited us with the late afternoon highlights including Short-tailed Hawk, Black-headed Saltator and Tropical Parula.

The day concluded with a delightful dinner at Casona del Cafetal, filled with memories of what had been an amazing birdwatching day.



*White-tailed Kite and Keel-billed Toucan © Herman Venegas*

## **12 February**

The sixth day of our tour began with a wonderful start right in the hotel grounds as before breakfast, we were treated to excellent views of White-eared Ground Sparrow and White-winged Becard. Joining them was a Short-tailed Hawk, along with a vibrant array of migratory warblers such as Black-and-white Warbler, Tennessee Warbler and American Redstart. All this was enjoyed with serene lake views as a backdrop, making for a delightful morning.

As the late morning approached, we ventured to Rio Macho, a spot not far from La Casona del Cafetal. Both Bay-headed Tanager and Brown-capped Vireo were found, however, the activity was then sparse for a while until we encountered a mixed flock of birds. The most notable species were Spangle-cheeked Tanager, Speckled Tanager, White-winged Tanager, Red-faced Spinetail, Yellowish Flycatcher (a common yet attractive species) and Wedge-billed Woodcreeper. We concluded our morning birding at around 12:40, with some slight drizzle attempting to dampen our spirits.

After a satisfying lunch and a much-needed rest, we departed for Hotel Quelitales, full of anticipation for the afternoon's birding adventures. Our visit began with sightings of Green Ibis and another Sunbittern as we made our way to the waterfall trail, where we spotted White-bellied Mountain-gem, a species which is endemic to Costa Rica and Panama.

Our main target for the day, however, was Scaled Antpitta and as we waited patiently, we were entertained by a Green-fronted Lancebill catching insects from its perch, displaying its impressive long straight bill, iridescent green forehead and bronzy nape.

Suddenly, Juan Carlos, our driver, pointed down the path, indicating the presence of the antpitta and, sure enough, there it was, a beautiful adult with a creamy moustache and pale rust-coloured underparts and we were able to enjoy watching it for over five minutes.

*Scaled Antpitta © Herman Venegas*

As we began our walk back to the lodge, a Short-tailed Nighthawk started flying in circles above us, almost as if greeting us. To top off the day and as a final highlight, a Black Guan appeared in a tree ahead of us and as the lighting was dim, we used a flashlight to appreciate its striking blue beak.



The day concluded with a delightful dinner and, for many, a glass of red wine, marking the end of another fantastic day of birding.

### **13 February**

The sun peeked over the horizon as our day began at Ujarrás and we set off to look for Cabanis's Wren. It didn't take long to spot it, flitting among the leaves, and not far away, a



Cabanis's Ground Sparrow, a Costa Rican endemic, perched confidently on a piece of wood by the roadside, whilst, in the distance, a Roadside Hawk stood proudly, basking in the morning light.

*Cabanis's Ground Sparrow © Herman Venegas*

Our journey then took us to the highlands of Savegre Valley, with a much-anticipated stop at Paraiso Park. Stepping out of the vehicle, we quickly found a Barn Owl which we watched through the telescope as it groomed itself serenely, with a Tropical Screech-Owl then seen perched above a playground.



*Barn Owl and Tropical Screech Owl © Herman Venegas*

Lunch at Paraiso Quetzal Lodge was a delightful pause and the air buzzed with activity as Talamanca Hummingbirds and Lesser Violetears zipped by. We marvelled at Volcano Hummingbirds and White-throated Mountain-gems, whilst Fiery-throated Hummingbird,

with its dazzling colours, was a sight to behold.

In the lodge grounds, we were treated to views of Long-tailed Silky-Flycatcher, Spotted Wood-Quail, and the elusive Buffy-crowned Wood Partridge.

As the day drew to a close, we made one last stop at a known spot for Resplendent Quetzal where we enjoyed a breathtaking male with its vibrant feathers shimmering in the sunlight. It was the undoubted highlight of the day, even for Limosa guide Herman who couldn't take his eyes off the magnificent bird even if he has seen it many times before.

We ended our day at Hotel Sueños Del Bosque, where we drifted off to sleep with dreams of more birding wonders to come.



*Resplendent Quetzal © Herman Venegas*

## **14 February**

Our day started with a cool morning in the highlands of Costa Rica, but we were highly encouraged by the expectation of a new set of birds. As the sun slowly rose, we were greeted by the sight of a male Scintillant Hummingbird near our hotel along with a Yellow-winged Vireo.

After enjoying a good breakfast, we headed for the trails of Hotel Savegre where our destination was the Oak Trail and here we enjoyed the vibrant colours of Sulphur-winged Parakeets, Flame-throated Warblers and Black-faced Solitaire.

The trail was bustling with activity, as we sighted numerous warblers and flycatchers, including Black-capped Flycatcher.

Returning down the trail, we found a pair of Resplendent Quetzals, whose iridescent feathers shimmered in the sunlight. Another highlight was a Streak-breasted Treehunter with the bird emerging from a tunnel in a bank along the trail, a truly memorable moment for the group.

In the afternoon, we explored the "La Catarata trail", where we were lucky enough to see an immature Fasciated Tiger Heron, a rarity in the area.

When it began to rain, we continued and were rewarded with sightings of Red-faced Spinetail and Ruddy Treerunner, however, the downpour continued adding a dramatic ending to the day's experiences.

We concluded the day with a delicious dinner at the Sueños del Bosque Hotel which was the perfect end to an unforgettable birdwatching adventure in the highlands of Costa Rica.

## **15 February**

The Savegre Valley greeted us with its usual morning chill, but we bravely ventured onto the trails despite the dim light. The highlights of our morning included spotting a Silvery-fronted Tapaculo, an Ochraceous Wren and a Scintillant Hummingbird.

After breakfast, we set off for new adventures with our first stop being at the renowned "Miriam's Café". Although we didn't see any new species, we got better views of Fiery-throated Hummingbird and Acorn Woodpecker, the subspecies here in Costa Rica having a distinctive ruby chest.

On our way to "Cerro de la Muerte", we spotted a Sooty Thrush and at the highest point of the mountain, we were thrilled to find a Volcano Junco without even leaving the vehicle. With no other targets to look for in this area of the paramo, we headed down for the one-and-a-half-hour trip to Pérez Zeledón.

Here, our main objective was to see Turquoise Cotinga and upon arrival, a male cotinga was perched at the top of a leafy tree, allowing us to observe it through the telescope for a short period before it disappeared. After waiting for 20 minutes, we were delighted when it

reappeared and it was fantastic to be able to watch this magnificent bird again for an extended period.

Lunch was light yet delicious, and during our meal, we also spotted a Thick-billed Euphonia, a Streaked Flycatcher and Red-crowned Woodpecker.

We arrived at Hotel Villa Lapas slightly damp from the heavy rains but despite the weather, managed to walk for an hour before being caught in a heavy downpour. Dinner was briefly interrupted by a lightning strike that caused a power outage, but the electricity was quickly restored, and we enjoyed the rest of our evening without further disruptions.

## 16 February

Despite a slightly damp start, we had soon spotted Blue-throated Goldentail and Blue-black Grosbeak with their vibrant colours lifting our spirits and the promise of another day full of birding adventure.

After a tasty breakfast, we headed to Carara National Park where we were greeted by a White-whiskered Puffbird and Ruddy Quail-Dove - what a great start!

As we started our walk along the Pacific Rainforest trails, the park was alive with the sounds of birds and we added several new species to our list including Golden-crowned Spadebill, Dot-winged Antwren, Ruddy-tailed Flycatcher and Black-hooded Antshrike, as well as seeing several other species of antbirds and woodcreepers.

Whilst the afternoon brought a bit of wind, this turned out to be quite advantageous for spotting birds of prey and we were thrilled to observe both Common Black Hawk and Zone-tailed Hawk. The highlight, however, was a majestic Black Hawk-Eagle which stared at us with its almost demonic red-orange eyes. The intensity of its gaze was both intimidating and awe-inspiring.



*Black Hawk-Eagle © Herman Venegas*

As the day drew to a close, we were treated to the sight of a Turquoise-browed Motmot at our hotel. This beautiful bird, with its long tail and striking colours, sat near us for a long time, providing a perfect end to our day.

For dinner, we indulged in a special meal featuring Chicken Rice and refried beans, complemented by a glass of exquisite Chilean wine. A fitting end to a day filled with nature's wonders.

## 17 February

We started the day with a Scarlet Macaw flying over our heads and a few minutes later found a Rufous-and-white Wren, a species with a fabulous voice which was once mentioned by Sir David Attenborough in one of his documentaries.

The birds kept coming and by the end of the walk we had seen around 20 species, which was not bad before a well-deserved breakfast.

Juan Carlos, our driver, then drove us to an area known as Camino a Guácimo in the Dry Forest where we were able to look for species such as Black-headed Trogon and Orange-fronted Parakeet, as well as Stripe-headed Sparrow.

*Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl © Herman Venegas*

At one point, we briefly saw a Common Pauraque that appeared to be attempting to escape from something. Initially, we found nothing until a fantastic Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl was spotted on a fence next to the road



and it seemed possible that this had been attempting to prey on the Common Pauraque.

As the day turned hotter, we continued exploring the surroundings and before finishing the morning had found a pair of White-lored Gnatcatchers which gave us a fascinating show.

The afternoon started with a White-throated Magpie-Jay, which perched not far from us. Later, a Blue-black Grosbeak was seen on top of a bush whilst right underneath, a couple of wrens were found, one was Cabanis's Wren and the other Banded Wren, with both on the same branch calling and displaying.

Later still, we enjoyed an Indigo Bunting before dusk and then it was time to head back to the hotel.

## 18 February

Our final day of the trip began with the delightful aroma of Costa Rican coffee and an assortment of local pastries, a perfect start to the day ahead.

The boat ride at Tarcoles River, renowned as one of the best birding experiences in Central America, was the highlight of our morning, and on reaching the dock, we were greeted by a

Common Black Hawk perched nearby, providing us with splendid views despite the low light conditions.

Over the next three hours, we were privileged to observe more than 70 bird species and whilst some were familiar to us, others were new and unique to the region with our more notable sightings including Mangrove Hummingbird, American Pygmy Kingfisher, Mangrove Vireo, Mangrove Warbler, Roseate Spoonbill, Double-Striped Thick-knee and Yellow-naped Amazon. We also enjoyed views of various sandpipers, as well as herons, frigatebirds, pelicans and terns.

When we arrived back at the hotel, we learnt that there was a strike across the country which had been called by the transport union.

We would have loved to stay a little longer, but everybody agreed to leave a little earlier for the airport.

Stopping for drinks, we took the opportunity to go over the checklist whilst also monitoring the local news for the traffic conditions, even though we were only 20 minutes away from the airport.

With some spare time, we decided to visit the Robledal Gardens where we spotted a Spot-breasted Oriole stealing nectar from the local Erythrinas, large trees with vibrant orange flowers.

It was then time to head for the airport which, fortunately, we reached without any major issues, albeit we did have to do some extra touring around in the vehicle due to the ongoing protests.

Despite the slightly tricky end to the trip, it had been a fantastic tour with an impressive total of 394 species, with many highlights including Black-crested Coquette, Snowcap, Resplendent Quetzal and Moustached Antpitta.