

Summary of HMANA's Costa Rica Tour, October 15-24, 2010

Tour Leaders:

Julie Tilden – Monitoring Site Coordinator – HMANA
Phil Brown – NH Audubon Director of Land Management
Daniel Martinez – Kèköldi Hawkwatch Coordinator (Oct 15-21)
Richard Garrigues – Author, Naturalist/Birding Guide (Oct 21-23)
Marco Morales Aguilar (Niño) – Driver and birder extraordinaire

What a trip! A total of **393 bird species** were seen or heard by the group during HMANA's 10 day Costa Rica birding tour. This included **31 raptor sp, 26 hummingbirds, 21 antbird sp, 35 flycatcher sp, 29 warbler sp and 30 tanager sp**. Some species highlights for the trip included **bicolored hawk, ornate hawk eagle, sunbittern, volcano hummingbird, snowcap, scarlet macaw, resplendent quetzal, great potoo**, and so many thousands of **hawks and turkey vultures** migrating.

Other highlights for me and Phil from this trip included all our early morning bird walks, exploring new areas, authentic Costa Rican cuisine, great coffee and sharing so many laughs and memories with such a fun group of people to travel with!

Days 1-4: Caribbean Lowland Rainforest & Kèköldi Hawkwatch

After arriving in Costa Rica's capital, San Jose, our group met at **Hotel Bougainvillea** and started our tour with a walk through the beautiful 10 acres of gardens. It was a perfect introduction to our tour. Here we saw a host of species including **Blue-crowned Motmot, Blue Gray Tanager, Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl, Squirrel Cuckoo, a selection of our familiar neotropical migrants, large flocks of Crimson-fronted Parrots, and, of course, Clay-colored Thrush** – the country's national bird.

Our adventure began as we set off for **Braulio Carrillo National Park** – a mid-elevation rainforest where we saw range-limited species like **Speckled Tanager, Olive-backed Quail-Dove, White-throated Shrike-Tanager, Emerald Tanager, a flyover Ornate Hawk-Eagle**, and a selection of **antbirds** along with diverse mixed-species flocks of **tanagers**. We stopped at the Rio Sucio and watched two **Bat Falcons** eating a bird. Thanks Nino!

We arrived in the Caribbean lowlands at the end of day two and stayed at **El Pizote Lodge** in Puerto Viejo. This was our base for exploring the region for the next two days. There was an incredible diversity of birds on Pizote grounds – well over 100 species in all – from **Kentucky and Mourning Warblers** to **Chestnut-backed Antbird** and a very vocal **Laughing Falcon**, and all the **Swainson's Thrushes!** Some of us explored the grounds at night and early am and were lucky enough to see displaying **Paraque** (almost in hand) and have knee-buckling looks at not one, but 3 **Great Potoos**. Time spent at Pizote also brings to mind the noises of the night, whether it was the **LOUD Chorus Frogs, toads, snickering House Geckos, Howler Monkeys**, and other creatures of the dark forest or bedroom.

Kèköldi Indigenous Reserve

One word....Wow! Our time at Kèköldi was well spent. Mid October offered a chance to see a great mix of raptor and non-raptor migrants passing through the reserve. Probably most abundant were the **Turkey Vultures** passing in hundreds of thousands. **Broad-winged and Swainson's Hawks** were also passing in the thousands, with occasional **Mississippi Kites, Ospreys and Peregrines** mixed in. The counters certainly had their hands full this season!

Among the non-raptor highlights at Kèköldi were **Chimney Swifts** filling the skies and great looks at local resident species like **Keel-billed and Chestnut-mandibled Toucan, Collared Aracari** and **Three-toed Sloth!** Some memorable experiences here included birding the Kèköldi trails and having traditional indigenous meals in the lodge. To top it all off, back at the hotel, some of us watched the migration

overhead while lying on our backs in the warm waters at Playa Negra – which included a single swirling mass of **1,600+ Turkey Vultures**.

Total Raptors Counted at Kèköldi Hawkwatch, Costa Rica (Oct 17-19, 2010)

Date	Oct 17, 2010	Oct 18, 2010	Oct 19, 2010	Total Counted
Turkey Vulture	14,458	18,504	57,280	90,242
Osprey	15	17	16	48
Mississippi Kite	24	23	5	52
Broad-winged Hawk	16,708	8,023	13,725	38,456
Swainson's Hawk	33,374	5,310	40,207	78,891
Peregrine Falcon	22	113	27	162
Merlin	0	4	1	5
Daily Count Total	64,601	31,994	111,261	207,856

On our last day in this region, we watched Turkey Vultures pour by in the thousands low over Pizote Lodge. A partial leucistic TV with white outer wingtips caught our attention before we got on the bus. We stopped briefly at the **Iguana Farm** for a quick lesson on the project and we witnessed more migration pouring by overhead. We then spent the morning exploring **Cahuita National Park**, walking through the mangrove trails and on beach. We saw a **perched Peregrine Falcon**, had good looks at **Howler Monkeys**, and enjoyed watching a **Two-toed Sloth** at a nearby lunch stop in Cahuita.

A few other favorite Caribbean specialties included **Purple-throated Fruitcrow, Blue Dacnis, Red-breasted Blackbird and Shining Honeycreeper**.

I think we will all remember our departure from the Caribbean slope on day five. As the road paralleled the coastline heading toward Limon, we watched in awe as thousands of raptors swirled above the bus. (Were they on the left or right side of the bus??) These may have been the largest kettles seen on our trip. Come to find out, there were **111,261 raptors** tallied that day by counters at Kèköldi!

Days 5-7: The Highlands – Caribbean Slope Foothills & Mountains

Despite the heavy rain, we received a very warm welcome from the staff at **Rancho Naturalista**. We spent the next two days exploring the trails around the lodge and soaking in the great variety of species like **Snowcap, Bronze-tailed Plumeleteer, Rufous-winged Woodpecker, Immaculate Antbird, Montezuma's Oropendula, and White-ruffed Manakin**. I think everyone really enjoyed kicking back on the back porch, drinking coffee and watching the 10+species of hummingbirds, with a view of smoldering Poas Volcano in the background. On day six we walked up and down the nearby **Tuis River**, as well as nearby rivers in search for riverine specialties. Just when we were ready to call it quits, we saw the elusive **Sunbittern!**

On day seven, we drove to **Volcan Irazú National Park** (3,400m), Costa Rica's second highest peak. On the way there, (thanks to Niño's sharp eyes) we watched four **Resplendant Quetzels** feeding in an avocado tree. We had very productive stops here where we saw many of the quintessential high-elevation specialties including **Volcano Junco, Volcano Hummingbird, Sooty Thrush, Flame-throated Warbler, Yellow-bellied Siskin, Slaty Flowerpiercer, and Timberline Wren** along with a very hungry and bold **Coatamundi** at lunchtime!

Days 8-10: Pacific Coast, Lowland Rainforest & Dry Forest

The last segment of the trip brought us across the country to the lovely Pacific coast, complete with its own unique habitat and species diversity. On day seven, we said goodbye to our fantastic guide, **Daniel Martinez** and picked up another one in **Richard Garrigues** for the last leg of our tour.

Based at the **Cerro Lodge**, we spent two mornings exploring **Carara National Park** at the convergence of two contrasting eco-regions – lowland Pacific rainforest and northern dry forest. Probably one species sums up our time spent on the Pacific Coast – **Scarlet Macaw**. Other contenders as personal highlights in this region included **Golden-crowned Spadebill, Yellow-naped Parrot, Yellow-headed Caracara, Gray-headed Kite, Crane Hawk, Fasciated Tiger Heron, Spectacled Owl, and two Fer-de-Lance snakes right next to the trail in Carara!**

We looked down on large **American Crocodiles** and various **waterbirds** from the **Tarcoles River Bridge** on a somewhat harrowing crossing, but we were also able to relax and enjoy them from the river. The rain held off for our last day of birding as we ventured deep into a mangrove swamp by boat in search of the endemic **Mangrove Hummingbird** and other mangrove specialists like **Rufous-browed Peppershrike, Mangrove Vireo, and Mangrove race of the Yellow Warbler**. We also saw **Common Black Hawk, Boat-billed Heron, Fasciated Tiger-heron, and countless Spotted Sandpipers!** En route back to San Jose, we explored the dry forest and had stunning looks at a **Lesser Ground Cuckoo**, watched a **Purple Gallinule with young**, and enjoyed other treats such as a **Long-tailed Manakin** and a **Crested Bobwhite**, along with a look at the unusual **Tamandua (Banded Anteater)!**

Our trip concluded with a farewell dinner at **Hotel Aeropuerto** in San Jose where we shared some of our favorite stories and species seen.