

Costa Rica 2009. Introduction

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Last Updated Tuesday, 15 December 2009

Vast rainforests on the Osa Peninsula, haunting cloud forests in the heights of the Cordilleras, steamy lowland forests in the Caribbean slope, this excellent trip notched up an amazing variety of species, including most of the regional endemics, along with 26 species of hummingbird, eight species of trogon and no less than 27 tanagers. With all four monkeys, plus Northern Tamandua, Tayra and Two-toed Sloth, nineteen species of mammal were also recorded, plus a healthy dose of amphibians and reptiles!

Most birders visit Costa Rica during the northern winter, i.e. from December through to March. Not only is it the 'dry' season, a very relative term, but also the country is jam-packed with North American migrants, thereby guaranteeing even more species - and umpteen headaches with Empidonax flycatchers and their allies! However, I chose to visit from late August to September, a slight gamble as there was a real possibility to lose days to torrential rain. As it turned out, I was fortunate with the weather - basically three weeks of near constant sun, the only rain limited to occasional late afternoons or during the night. In addition, though numbers were never high, an impressive range of North American migrants were also noted, including a smatter of waders on the Pacific coast, a good variety of warblers, including Blackburnian Warbler, American Redstarts and several Black-and-White Warblers, plus early Common Nighthawks and Chuck-will's-widow. As I had previously visited Costa Rica - for four weeks way back in summer 1991 - my goal here was simply to enjoy my three weeks of Neotropical birding. Naturally, however, there were a few targets, primarily amongst them to see Snowcap and Black-and-White Owl, both species I had missed on my previous trip. Having amassed 403 species on the 1991 trip, I naturally hoped to equal that total on this trip, regardless that it was actually a week shorter in duration. The Report For convenience, I have divided this report into two parts: the southern loop, then the more frequently-travelled northern circuit. With my itinerary including the superb Corcovado National Park on the Osa Peninsula, both the Pacific and Caribbean coasts and all of the most important national parks in the country, this trip utilized just about every transport means imaginable to squeeze all the sites into the three weeks. Part One. The Southern Loop. From hitch-hiking and bus to light aircraft and ferry, plus ever so many kilometres on foot, the first leg of the trip took me to the southern Pacific lowlands to tackle Corcovado, one of the most extensive rainforests left in all Costa Rica. Totally amazing, totally knackered. Next came a stop in the Central Highlands, enjoying the endemic-rich cloud forests of the Cerro de la Muerte region, before dropping back to San Jose. Click here to read more. Part Two. The Northern Circuit. With the luxury of a rented car, the next segment of the trip was a loop from La Selva in the Caribbean lowlands, past Arenal Volcano, across to Palo Verde in the hot, relatively arid north-west and thereafter up to the highland forests at Monteverde. It was then back to the Pacific coastline for a couple of superb days at the Carara National Park, before looping back through the Central Valley for a final few days at Braulio Carrillo, then the Caribbean coast and finally the delightful San Gerardo to mop up on remaining highland specialities.