



Majestic Feathers In Costa Rica A birding Expedition with Edwin Ramirez

May 2011

February 10 to 23, 2012

**A bird watching eco-tourism expedition that could be life changing for you!
You are invited to come along!**

Special Points

of Interest:

- Bird watching in the South Pacific Lowlands.
- Rainforest bird walks in both Primary and Secondary Growth.
- Night walks searching for owls, Parauques and Potoo
- Visit the Wilson Botanical Garden for birding among the blooms.
- Spend relaxing time mesmerized by hummingbirds.
- Go birding in the tropical wet forest of the Caribbean Lowlands.
- Explore Mangrove Forest along the Tarcoles River.
- Spend time mesmerized by a multitude of hummingbirds visiting the feeders and flowers at Rancho Naturalista.
- Pursue the Turquoise Cotinga along the Java River
- Enjoy the cool mist of the Cloud forest and breath-taking beauty of the Resplendent Quetzal.
- See flocks of Scarlet Macaw in the Carara National Park.
- Take a nap by the pool.
- Wake up to the sound of Howler Monkeys and the song of the Ferruginous Pygmy-owl.

In 2008, I went on a birding tour to Costa Rica that changed my life. It changed my life because it brought home to me how vital this Central American country is to the birds that migrate to North America each spring to breed and rear their young. You might be thinking that I should have known how important the habitat of Costa Rica is, and intellectually I did, but I have to say that it wasn't until I actually saw for myself the hordes of shorebirds making their way north along the Pacific Coast, the Orchard and Baltimore Orioles munching on tropical fruit, and thrushes foraging in the rainforest that it hit home for me. It really impacted me to see, for instance, a Spotted Sandpiper right next to a Caiman and think, "my gosh I could see that very same sandpiper along the river near my home a couple of months hence." On that day I will tick it off my year list but this time it will be different. I will have the vision of a Spotted Sandpiper nearly beak to snout with a Caiman in my mind, a sight that I had never even thought of before. An image that now communicates to me volumes about this bird's incredible journey.

The spring and fall migration will never be the same for me. Now I know where some of my yard birds and those striking Swainson's Hawks are going and what the habitat is like in their winter homes. It now makes total sense to me why the Bullock's Orioles and the Black-headed Grosbeak devour the orange halves and the grape jelly that I put out for them in May and June. They are used to eating fruit in their tropical winter homes!

I really can't say enough about how much I gained from my trip to Costa Rica and as you might imagine, it wasn't just the 336 birds that we saw and enjoyed. It was far more. I gained a greater sense of the interconnectness of everything; plants, insects, and people. I came away with an expanded awareness of the impact of habitat loss and forest fragmentation on the resident birds, wintering birds and seasonal migrants. Previously, I had little to no knowledge about altitudinal migration and now I do. Besides this, I experienced the breath-taking sight of one of the most sought after altitudinal migrants in the world, the Resplendent Quetzal. I am not kidding, my breath caught in my throat and tears came to my eyes. It sounds a bit hokey but in that instance I knew why this bird was sacred to the Mayan and the Aztec. I thought that I might fall to my knees!

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Yes, Costa Rica is a land populated with jewels with wings, 880 species of them to be exact, and then there are the butterflies, that account for 10 % of all known species in the world. I can't even image how many insect species there are but the bottom line is this, when it comes to diversity and density of flora and fauna this country is a winner and you will have hit a birders dream jackpot when you go on this trip!

Meet Your Guide

Edwin Ramirez is a native of Costa Rica, born and raised on a coffee and tomato farm. From the time he was a youngster he experienced an ever growing interest in the natural world around him. It was not uncommon for Edwin to put aside his coffee-picking basket to pursue a complex and intriguing song coming from the woods to discover the identity of the bird that brought this song to his ears. His love for birds eventually led to big trouble, especially in the instance of releasing his father's prized caged Blue-crowned

& Golden-browed Chlorophonias! But this did not end his love of birds. Edwin's passion for the living planet around him increased and when he got the chance to attend the Universidad Nacional to study for a career as a Tropical Biologist he didn't hesitate. It was during this time period while on a field trip in to San Isidro del General that Edwin met Alexander F. Skutch (yes - the co-author of the "Bible" of birds in Costa Rica, Stiles and Skutch) who introduced him to the art of bird-watching. Edwin refers to Skutch as a "one of a kind maestro", and his inspiration. Skutch became his birding instructor and friend.

Edwin has facilitated birding expeditions for the ABA, Audubon Soc., Elderhostel, Holbrook Travel Inc., and for his own tours.

Edwin Ramirez does a great job of sharing the history and culture of Costa Rica, knowledge about this eco-system, and he is a wonderful naturalist and just

a great bird guide! You will really enjoy him. He has been guiding throughout Central and South America for 21 years



and he is able to take you places that other tours can't because of his personal connections.

To quote Edwin, "I love the art of Birding and try to make it contagious and fun to any one around me."

You can take my word for it Edwin is a wonderful guide and teacher and you will have the time of your life birding with him!

Kathleen Cameron

February 10 to 23, 2012 Itinerary

- DAY 01 (Feb. 10): Hotel Bougainvillea in San Jose
- DAY 02 (Feb. 11): Villa Lapas Hotel (near the Carara Nat'l Park along the Central Pacific Coast)
- DAY 03 (Feb. 12): Villa Lapas Hotel
- DAY 04 (Feb. 13): Esquinas Rainforest Lodge (South Pacific region of Costa Rica)
- DAY 05 (Feb. 14): Esquinas Rainforest Lodge
- DAY 06 (Feb. 15): Wilson Botanical Gardens (the site of the Las Cruces OTS Bio Station/adjacent to the Panama Border)
- DAY 07 (Feb. 16): Savegre Mountain Hotel (near San Gerardo de Dota in the Talamanca Mountains)
- DAY 08 (Feb. 17): Savegre Mountain Hotel
- DAY 09 (Feb. 18): Rancho Naturalista Lodge (near Turrialba on the Caribbean slope)
- DAY 10 (Feb. 19): Rancho Naturalista Lodge
- DAY 11 (Feb. 20): Selva Verde Lodge (near the La Selva OTS Bio Station, in the Sarapiquí Region)
- DAY 12 (Feb. 21): Selva Verde Lodge
- DAY 13 (Feb. 22): Hotel Bougainvillea
- Day 14 (Feb. 23): Transfers to the airport for flights home

Your First Two Days in Costa Rica

At the orientation meeting on Feb. 10, 2012 you will receive a schedule outlining the daily activities of your tour. Here is the schedule for your first and second days in Costa Rica:

DAY 01: (Feb. 10) Arrive in San Jose. You will be met by a driver at the airport for a group transfer to the Hotel Bougainvillea.

6:00 p.m. Orientation meeting with Edwin Ramirez followed by the welcome dinner.

DAY 02: (Feb. 11)

6:00 (a.m.) Early morning birding on the hotel grounds

7:30 (a.m.) Breakfast

9:00 (a.m.) Board bus and depart for the Villa Lapas Hotel (birding along the way from bus and on side roads)

12:30 (p.m.) Lunch

2:00 (p.m.) Check in to your rooms

2:45 (p.m.) Afternoon birding

7:00 (p.m) Dinner and review of the bird list for the day.

Some Birding Related Information:

We recommend that you familiarize yourself with the birds of Costa Rica. The Birds of Costa Rica by Richard Garrigues and Robert Dean is a great field guide to bring on this trip. The size is right for travel and trail use and the plates and range maps are on the same page. A copy of Stiles and Skutch: A Guide to the Birds of Costa Rica is kept on the bus for reference as well.

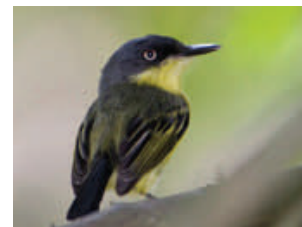
Total Number of Bird Species seen on some past trips:

March 2009: 427

March 12, 2010: 389

March 26, 2010: 395

February 2011: 436



Tour Price for February 10 to 23, 2012

The 14 DAY TOUR INCLUDES: 13 nights of lodging, three meals a day (beginning with the welcome dinner the first night through breakfast on the day of departure), the services of your tour guide, a Toyota Coaster air-conditioned bus with a full time driver, National Park, Reserves, and Botanical Gardens fees, (in other words any entry fees), double-occupancy rooms (2 people and 2 beds per room) for a cost of **\$2,930* per person**. *This amount is based on a minimum of 10 (ten) participants for the tour. If the tour does not have 10 participants either the final cost could be increased to cover the higher per person cost of a smaller group or the tour could be cancelled.

Single Room Supplement: Please add \$700 (the single room supplement) to your total. Your desire to be a single must be requested when you notify Kathleen that you want to reserve a spot on this tour. If you are traveling with us as a single, the primary responsibility for finding a roommate is yours. Through our advertising we will make an effort to find another single of the same sex interested in traveling with us for the same dates and also interested in having a roommate. If a roommate has not been found by the date of the final payment for your tour deadline (November 1, 2011), it will be necessary for you to pay the single room supplement to cover the higher single occupation cost of your lodging.

Not Included In the price of your tour:

Airfare to and from the U.S. to San Jose, Costa Rica. If there are several people in your party you may be able to arrange for discounts with the airlines. *Please do not make non-refundable airline reservations early in the event that the tour does not have the minimum number of participants and is cancelled.

Alcoholic beverages and soft drinks.

Airport Tax of \$26 USD paid at the airport on the day of departure (required by Costa Rica).

Small gratuities are optional and not an obligation, but in Costa Rica are greatly appreciated for hotel staff, additional guides at OTS stations, Solimar guide, and boat man on the Tarcoles River.

Health Insurance, Medical Evacuation Coverage or Travel Cancellation /Trip Interruption Coverage

Any items not expressly detailed in the written Trip Conditions and Waiver form.

It is customary for Costa Rican bird tour participants to tip their full-time bus driver and full-time tour/bird guide at the end of the tour. While this isn't mandatory, you will likely find that these individuals have gone above and beyond your expectations, adding great additional value to your experience. The recommended amounts are \$8 to \$10 a day for your bus driver and \$10 to \$12 a day for your tour/bird guide, per participant. Of course, the amount to tip (or not) is entirely up to you.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION

Please contact Majestic Feathers/Kathleen Cameron by no later than September 1, 2011 to reserve a place on the February 10 to 23, 2012 tour. These tours have filled rapidly in the past, so contact us sooner if you decide you wish to participate. After you confirm your participation, you will receive three forms, via email, to complete, sign and submit with your first deposit. These forms are: sign up info, health and safety, trip conditions, responsibility statement and waiver of liability and hold harmless agreement and release.

The initial deposit of \$1,465.00 per participant must be received by October 1, 2011.

Final payments of all remaining tour fees must be received by November 1, 2011.

Please do not make non-refundable airline reservations early in the event that the tour does not have the minimum number of participants and is cancelled.

For entry into Costa Rica, a U.S. citizen must present a valid Passport that will not expire for at least 30 days after arrival. If you carry a Passport from another country, please visit www.costarica-embassy.org for additional information.

Concerning Vaccinations: please visit the CDC's website: <http://wwwn.cdc.gov/travel/destinationCostaRica.aspx#vaccines>

Participants must be in good health, mobile and able to participate in 4 to 7 hours of physical activity per day, the equivalent of walking up to five miles at a 2.5-mph pace over uneven ground.



Our Audubon group took Majestic Feathers' 14-day birding expedition that covered most parts of the country. Adjectives don't do this tour justice. The accommodations were clean and comfortable, set in places where birds were outside the windows. The food was excellent, with enough variety to satisfy different tastes and needs. Best of all was our guide, Edwin Ramirez. His knowledge of the birds, animals, country, and plants, was remarkable. Of the 880 birds to be seen in Costa Rica, we saw almost half in a two-week trip. Some were fleeting glimpses, but most were satisfying looks.

The nesting Resplendent Quetzals were my biggest thrill, but the Jabirus weren't far behind. I'm sure each participant would have a different "favorite" on their list.

I cannot recommend this group highly enough. They don't have a 20-year history. What they DO have is an outstanding operation, in which almost every detail has been addressed. They have a commitment to excellence and to environmental stewardship which results in satisfied customers who will return. *J. Alonso, Spokane, WA*

More Information to Come Your Way:

Shortly after your initial deposit has been received, you will receive additional information from Majestic Feathers regarding packing recommendations, carry-on luggage information, in-country travel, care for camera equipment in the tropics, clothing recommendations, time, currency, electricity, phones, etc.

**We are so excited about your February 2012 tour with Edwin Ramirez in Costa Rica!
Pura Vida!**

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to ask!

**Contact: Kathleen Cameron cell 208-721-0687
majesticfeathers@cox.net or majesticfeathers@gmail.com**



The Life Zones and Habitat That You Will Be Birding On Your Tour

Tropical Dry Deciduous Forest: You will bird this habitat while you are at the Villa Lapas Hotel. At Carara Nat'l Park near Villa Lapas, Scarlet Macaw and several trogon species can be found.

Lower Montane Rainforest and Moist Forest: This is the habitat at the Wilson Botanical Gardens. Keep your eyes peeled for the Scale-crested Pygmy-Tyrant, Olivaceous Piculet and as many as ten tanager species in this habitat.

Premontane Tropical Wet, Rain and Moist Forest: This is the habitat at Braulio Carrillo Nat'l Park and you will spend part of a day birding here in hopes of spotting; Black-crowned Antpitta, Ornate Hawk Eagle and Lattice-tailed Trogon, to name of few of the 500 species possible.

Montane and Upper Montane Tropical Wet and Rain Forests (cloud forest) : The dominate forest habitat at the Savegre Mountain Hotel and surrounding area is cloud forest. The gem of this region is the Resplendent Quetzal.

Tropical Moist Forests: During your trip, anytime we cross the Continental Divide, we bird fragments of Tropical Moist Forest scattered amid Dry Deciduous Forest. Birds commonly found here are; Orange-Fronted Parakeets, White-Fronted Parrots, Long-tailed Manakin, Rufous and White Wren, Keel-billed Toucan and White-throated Magpie-Jay.

Subalpine Paramo (above timberline): Spectacular views await you while birding on Cerro de la Muerte, the highest point in Costa Rica. This rugged habitat is known as alpine tundra and distinctive plant communities have evolved here in response to abundant sunlight and the cool wet climate. This is the only chance on the tour to find the Volcano Junco.

Tropical Wet Forests and Tropical Rain Forest: These dominate the habitat near the Esquinas Rainforest Lodge and Selva Verde. The Esquinas Rainforest Lodge is visited regularly by birders seeking to add the Black-faced Antthrush to their life list. In the surrounding area, while at Selva Verde, you will be watching for the Great Green Macaw. At the La Selva OTS bio station on past tours, as many as 106 bird species have been seen in 6 hours of birding.

Riparian Habitat and Mangrove Forest: While staying at the Villa Lapas Hotel, you will take a boat trip on the Tarcoles River to explore this wetland environment. Mangrove Warbler, Mangrove Vireo, Boat-billed Heron, and Roseate Spoonbills are often the highlights of this outing.

A portion of the proceeds from your tour will be donated to forest restoration in the La Paz River cloud forest

A Brief Description of the History of this Restoration Foundation

by Edwin Ramirez

The La Paz Cloud Forest is located in the county of San Ramón (province of Alajuela) approximately one hour and 30 minutes Northwest from Costa Rica's main international airport. Here beautiful remnants of the original forest that once covered all of the uppermost portions of the Tilarán Mountain Range thrive and resist the ever-increasing pressures that humans continue to put on this delicate and fragile mosaic of ecosystems.

My very first visit to this magical place was 30 years ago when a friend of mine invited me to come along and help him round up and herd some cattle. As we started to pierce and cut through this evergreen realm of trees covered with bowl-shaped bromeliads and the yellow, white and purple-colored flowers of different orchids, many creeks and a river of crystal clear waters flowed around us. The voices and songs of birds followed me as I walked up and down the slopes. Almost instantly a big part of me bonded with the habitat of this heavenly spot, Si La Paz de San Ramón, where the Sunbittern nests and displays, and the wild aguacatillos (avocados) get dispersed by the Quetzales. This is my idea of paradise, where moisture charged alisios (trade winds) bathe the ridges atop the continental divide, and the rain shadow swings back and forth towards the depths of el Río La Paz.

Over the course of the next 20 years I hiked, camped, and birded this precious corner of Costa Rica. Then 10 years ago I realized that something was keeping me awake at night, a small voice inside me telling me to preserve and restore this place that I loved so much. The next morning, I took the public bus to the end of the paved road and started my walk on the mud and gravel sections of the valley and began to carefully look for a piece of land I liked. To my eyes, each parcel of land looked beautiful in its own way. The parcels of land had been given to the people of La Paz de San Ramon by the Costarican Agrarian Institute when the homesteading act was put in place in the early 1950's. The parcels were to be farmed in order to be owned by the farmers. The forest had been cut down for crops of sugar cane, strawberries, and pastures for cattle. The farmers that had turned land from forest to fields and pastures had poor results since the true vocation of this soil is to sustain areas of diverse native forest.

I am happy to say the I was able to purchase my first small chunk of land that urged repair. And then second and third parcels became available. I have restored forest on my own land quite well, but then I realized that I couldn't and should not buy all the land that needed protection. Instead it would be much more meaningful if many other people joined me in this forest and river conservation/restoration project. This is when the Foundation for the Bio-Cultural Conservation and Restoration of Finca La Paz was born. The short name for the foundation is Elvira Foundation.

The members of this group include friends, neighbors, and family members. We all cooperate in order to talk to farmers and convince them to let us plant some native trees in a section or two on their plot of land. We have our own tree nurseries. To date we have been able to restore nearly 100 acres returning it to native forest.

Perhaps the greatest reward of all has been to see a pair of Resplendent Quetzales (the most beautiful bird in the Americas) come and pluck wild avocados from a tree I planted some seven years ago.

On some Majestic Feathers Costa Rica trips we will visit the restoration project and may even have the opportunity to plant some trees!