



Costa Rica

A Trove of Tropical Birds—and More

February 22 to March 4, 2019

Optional extension to March 7, 2019

Leaders: Stephanie Mason & Carlos “Charlie” Gomez

For more than 30 years Audubon Naturalist Society members have traveled to Costa Rica on trips we have sponsored. Talk to any and you’ll probably hear similar stories. They’ll talk of this little country’s natural beauty and its friendly, hospitable residents. You’ll hear about great sightings of gorgeous birds, from toucans, parrots, and motmots to the incomparable Resplendent Quetzal, showiest member of the trogon family. Perhaps the conversation will turn to the wonder of seeing monkeys, iguanas, or sloths in the treetops, or tiny red and blue poison-arrow frogs hopping blithely across the forest floor.



Without a doubt, any who have traveled to Costa Rica with ANS will rave about the local guide. Carlos “Charlie” Gómez is an extraordinarily talented naturalist and leader. He can lure secretive birds out of hiding and identify them instantly by call. He knows the scientific names of the orchids. Everywhere he travels in his native country, he’s greeted with admiration and respect. Importantly, he understands what kind of trip ANS members like. He’ll find many birds for the

group, but will take time to point out mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and plants. He’ll put options into the schedule, offering full days for those eager to explore nature almost nonstop, while offering plenty of breaks for those looking for some time for relaxation or reflection. He’s quickly everybody’s friend.

Stephanie Mason brings many extra bonuses to the leadership of this trip. Senior Naturalist for ANS, she has a great knowledge of butterflies, plants, and tropical ecology. She and Charlie have worked together to lead 19 previous ANS trips to Costa Rica. Both have a superb record of delivering fabulous trips.

Our basic itinerary visits a variety of habitats: from classic lowland rainforest at La Selva to moist Caribbean slope at Rancho Naturalista to the vast wetlands of Cano Negro to the lovely cloud forest of Bosque de Paz. The optional extension into the higher Talamanca Mountains takes us to the land of tropical oaks, chilly nights, and the showy Resplendent Quetzal.

Costa Rica is a small Central American country whose natural areas support a dazzling variety of tropical wildlife. Land area is about the same as West Virginia (which is about the same as Vermont & New Hampshire combined), yet the country's bird list is nearly 900 species. Habitats in Costa Rica include mountain forests (the highest peaks are above 12,000 feet), rain forests, dry forests, mangrove swamps, tropical marshes, and coasts on both the Pacific and the Caribbean. The country's great species diversity is one benefit of this great habitat diversity.

It is also a peaceful country with a social democratic system that provides reliable public education, public health, and reliable utilities to all of its citizens. The country's tourism infrastructure is excellent. Our group will stay in comfortable lodges surrounded by excellent natural habitat. All rooms have private hot water bathrooms. Food and water are reliably safe in all tourist areas, and almost all meals are provided throughout the trip. Our group will travel together in a private mini-bus driven by a professional driver, who is also an excellent birder and wildlife spotter.

Our goal is to visit many different habitats and to learn about tropical ecology while searching for birds and other wildlife. Activities will usually begin at or before dawn. Many days our early start will be optional, though you might not want to miss the vibrancy of a tropical morning. Days will be filled with active nature explorations, but there will often be opportunities to skip some activities to relax around the lodges and/or explore on your own.

The following day-to-day itinerary represents an outline of our plans. Details and specifics may be changed at the leaders' discretion for any reason that they determine to be in the best interests of the group. (B, L, and/or D after the date denotes meals included in the trip fee.)

Friday, February 22

Our journey begins with the arrival of flights into Costa Rica's international airport, located on the outskirts of San José, Costa Rica's capital. After passing through customs, you will be met by a Costa Rica Expeditions transfer guide, who will take you to the Hotel Bougainvillea, a garden hotel outside of town in the San Jose suburb of Heredia. Those arriving on early flights can enjoy a stroll through the gardens, where one can find butterflies, tropical plants (many labeled) and a number of interesting birds, including

Blue-gray Tanager, Baltimore Oriole, Blue-crowned Motmot, Rufous-tailed Hummingbird, and Tropical Kingbird. (*Overnight at Hotel Bougainvillea*)

The capital city of San José is perched more than 3,000 feet above sea level in a mountain-rimmed area called the Central Valley or, more accurately, the central plateau. Three other major cities are nearby, making this easily the country's most densely populated area. The elevation results in a very comfortable climate. Scenery throughout the central plateau is impressive, as the high peaks of the central volcanic mountain range fill the northern and eastern horizons. The city has a number of nice museums and urban attractions, but it is a busy and crowded city. Our trip includes a short visit to one of the downtown museums. If you would like to spend more time visiting the city, we recommend extending your stay by a day or two at either end of the trip.

Saturday, February 23 (B, D)

We begin the trip with a leisurely day in the central plateau. An optional early-morning bird walk on the grounds will be followed by another optional activity: a visit to either the Costa Rican National Museum of Natural History or the country's Gold Museum, both of which are located in downtown San Jose. A late lunch will be on your own dime back at the Hotel Bougainvillea. You may, however, pass on the morning's museum outing and stay back at the Hotel Bougainvillea to rest and relax in the tropical warmth. Late in the day, we'll meet our Costa Rican guide, Charlie Gómez, for an orientation to the trip and a welcome dinner. (*Overnight at the Hotel Bougainvillea*)

Sunday, February 24 (B, L, D)

This morning we leave the Central Valley and head east, up and over the Continental Divide to our first destination at around 3,000 feet in elevation on the Caribbean slope of the Talamanca Mountains. It rains frequently on the eastern slope of the mountains, and here we'll get our first looks at tropical birds, butterflies and other wildlife amidst the lush forests of this region. We'll arrive at our home for the next two nights, Rancho Naturalista, in time for lunch. After settling in to our rooms, we'll explore the grounds of our lovely lodge, located on 125 acres of untouched and protected rainforest, semi-wooded pasture, and stream valley. (*Overnight at Ranch Naturalista*)



Monday, February 25 (B,L,D)

More than 400 species of birds have been recorded in the diverse habitats around our lodge and we'll spend the day enjoying various trails looking for a variety of them. Rancho's main building provides a great perch for balcony birding, from which one can observe and photograph many species of hummingbirds attracted to feeders. Possible species include: White-necked Jacobin, Green Thorntail, the Violet-headed Hummingbird and Rancho's signature species, the Snowcap

Hummingbird. The lodge's environs are also rich in plant life and other animal life, including butterflies and moths. (*Overnight at Rancho Naturalista*)

Tuesday, February 26, and Wednesday, February 27 (B, L, D)

We pack up after breakfast and head downhill and westward back toward the Central Valley. There, we'll turn to the north and head up and over the Continental Divide yet again before reaching our second destination in the Caribbean lowlands at just several hundred feet above sea level. Our lodge here is Hacienda La Isla, located in the foothills of Braulio Carrillo National Park, one of Costa Rica's most wildlife-rich regions. Much of our time here will be spent exploring the La Selva Biological Field Station, site of hundreds of pioneering studies of the American tropical rainforest. Our Costa Rican guide Charlie Gómez was once station manager of La Selva, and he knows every step of trail here intimately. Plant diversity is mind-boggling, birding is great, and other wildlife is abundant. Likely finds include epiphytic orchids, monkeys, bats, green iguanas, poison arrow frogs, agouti, blue morpho butterflies, toucans, a good assortment of antbirds, and tanagers, flycatchers, including Long-tailed Tyrant, trogons, and many other bird species. The climate is hot here in this lowland rain forest, so we'll want to be out at dawn and take a siesta after lunch. (*Overnights at Hacienda La Isla*)

Thursday, February 28 (B, L, D)

After breakfast, we begin a drive north towards Nicaragua, crossing the fertile agricultural San Carlos Plains. Just a few miles before the border, we turn west from the main road and head to the village of Caño Negro. This last bit of the drive crosses seasonally-flooded fields that can be loaded with herons, egrets, jacanas, and other birds. We will arrive at the Natural Lodge Caño Negro in time for lunch. This more western-styled lodge is right at the edge of the village and a short distance from the Caño Negro National Wildlife Refuge. The climate is hot, but the rooms are comfortable and air-conditioned. The Caño Negro Refuge features a seasonally-flooded lake and many interconnected waterways along the Rio Frio. It's the second largest freshwater wetland in the country, however at this time of year—the dry season--it will be smaller and shallower. Late this afternoon, we'll explore part of the Refuge by boat. (*Overnight at the Lodge Caño Negro.*)

Friday, March 1 (B, L, D)

This morning we're out very early for a second boat ride through the refuge. (For one boat trip, we'll head upriver into vast, shallow marshes; the other trip will us down into deeply forested waterways.) If water levels permit, we'll also venture into the lake itself. There's a great variety of wildlife to be seen from the boat, including green iguana, white-faced capuchin monkey, spectacled caiman, and a great variety of birds. Three species that are rare in Costa Rica occur here: Black-collared Hawk, Nicaraguan Grackle, and Jabiru. With luck we'll spot one or two of these, but we're sure to see many other species. Possibilities include Green Ibis, Gray-necked Wood-Rail, Boat-billed Heron, and American Pygmy-Kingfisher. After lunch we'll stroll around the town of Caño Negro and down a few dead-end streets, great places to see songbirds and the quiet pace of a remote Costa Rican village. (*Overnight at the Lodge Caño Negro.*)

Saturday, March 2 (B, L, D) and Sunday, March 3 (B,L,D)

We leave the hot and humid richness of the Cano Negro wetlands this morning. After breakfast, we head southward and upward toward the crest of the mountains, stopping shy of the summit at a lovely, isolated lodge called Bosque de Paz, which means “Forest of Peace.” We’ll nearly fill this small, 12-room lodge, which is surrounded by mountain forest and sits adjacent to two National Parks. The elevation here is about 5000 feet, temperatures are cool, and the flora and fauna are exceptionally rich. There are lovely gardens at the lodge, including one featuring orchids, and bird feeders are all around, luring hummingbirds and seed eaters. This is a very rich elevation for hummingbirds – we could see six or more species here, including Purple-throated Mountain-Gem, Violet Sabrewing, Volcano Hummingbird, and Green-crowned Brilliant. Little Torrent Tyrannulets flit over the creek, and big Black Guans barge onto the bird feeders, dwarfing the various songbirds. The forest trails are home to many, many birds. There’s a slight chance to see the Resplendent Quetzal here, called by some the most beautiful bird in the world, however chances are much better on our higher elevation optional extension. Other rare and secretive birds lurk in the forests of Bosque de Paz, including the Silvery-fronted Tapaculo, Peg-billed Finch, Streak-breasted Treehunter, and Black-banded Woodcreeper. We are also likely to see several forest-dwelling mammals here, including coati, paca, and agouti. (*Overnights at Bosque de Paz.*)



Monday, March 4 (B only if leaving today; B, L, D if going on the extension)

Today we say goodbye to our hosts at Bosque de Paz. Those who are staying for the optional extension will depart after breakfast with the leaders and head for the higher elevations and Toucanet Lodge, where we’ll arrive in time for a late lunch. Those who are flying home today will

have several options: if you have an early afternoon flight, you will likely be dropped off at the airport by the group going on the extension. If you have a late afternoon or evening flight, you will be picked up from Bosque de Paz by a different vehicle and taken to the airport separately. If you prefer early morning flights, you can be taken to a hotel near the airport to stay overnight on the 4th, and then get to the airport by the hotel’s shuttle on the 5th. (**NOTE:** do not buy/book airline tickets until we send you the TRIP IS ON letter and give you more instructions on advisable flight times based on our itinerary. And know that whatever time you’re booked to fly out, you’ll be picked up in order to arrive at the airport no less than 3 hours before your flight.)

Optional Extension: March 4 –7, 2019

(*High Elevation*: *Our lodge on this extension is at about 6400 feet, and during our stay there we will visit areas above that elevation up to 11,000 feet at the tropical alpine paramo zone. If you have a heart or respiratory condition or feel uncomfortable/ill at high altitude, this extension is probably not for you. Please consult with your doctor.*)

Monday, March 4, through Wednesday, March 6 (B,L,D)

For those continuing on the optional extension, we ascend into the Talamanca Mountains, following the Pan-American Highway south from San José. We'll head up to the Toucanet Lodge, located at about 6400 feet on the Pacific slope just outside the tiny village of Copey de Dota. This small eco-lodge, located in a quiet, rural (dairy, vegetable, and coffee) region, will provide us with opportunities to see highland wildlife, including the Resplendent Quetzal, considered one of the world's most beautiful birds. We'll walk the local, gravel road, which follows the Rio Pedragoso, to search for other birds of this habitat such as Collared Redstart, Rufous-browed Peppershrike, Scintillant and Volcano Hummingbirds, Silvery-throated Jays, and Long-tailed Silky-Flycatcher. A night walk may turn up a Bare-shanked Screech-Owl and nocturnal mammals, but it's sure to give us some great opportunities for star-gazing, if skies are clear.

The plant community here might remind you of the mountains of the temperate zone, with tropical oaks and cousins of our blueberries, azaleas, and sunflowers. It will be chilly at this elevation, and at night you'll need a blanket. At some point during our visit here, assuming the weather cooperates, we'll drive to the very highest point of the Pan-American Highway, more than 11,000 ft. above sea level, for a look at the tropical alpine meadow habitat called *paramo*. Here we can search for Timberline Wren, Volcano Junco, Large-footed Finch, Flame-throated Warbler, and Fiery-throated Hummingbird. We'll marvel at the native bamboos that dominate the treeless landscape. From here at the *Bellavista* Peak on the *Cerro de la Muerte*, it's possible to see both the Pacific coast and the Caribbean Sea on a perfectly clear day, though it's usually cloudy at this lofty elevation. (The Cerro de la Muerte stop is a tentative one, and will depend on the weather, timing, and other factors as determined by the leaders.) Mid-morning on Wednesday, March 6, we'll head back to the Central Valley and spend our overnight at Hotel Trapp. (*Two nights at Toucanet Lodge and our last night back at Hotel Trapp.*)

Thursday, March 7 (B): Our extended journey concludes with transfers to the airport for flights home. You may need to leave the hotel as much as 3½ hours prior to your departure time, so consider that when you make your flight reservations once you have received our Trip is On. Letter. If you have a mid-day flight or afternoon flight, you can spend the morning in the Hotel Trapp's grounds or swimming in their small pool.

Leadership team: This will be their 20th year of working together to introduce ANS travelers to the tropical wonders of Costa Rica.

Stephanie Mason is Senior Naturalist for the Audubon Naturalist Society (ANS). This will be her 22nd trip to Costa Rica and her 20th co-leading a trip here with Charlie Gómez. She leads many adult classes and field excursions for ANS, both in the mid-Atlantic and farther afield (Nova Scotia, Yellowstone, Galapagos Islands, Ecuador, Rocky Mountain National Park, South Florida). She has taught classes in the Graduate School USA Natural History Field Studies Program., and she retreats to the Colorado Rockies each August since 1998 to conduct a long-term butterfly survey.



Carlos “Charlie” Gómez (*on the left*) is one of Costa Rica’s most highly regarded naturalist guides. He has led tours for birding groups for more than 30 years, mostly in his home country of Costa Rica, but also in Panama and South America. Before guiding, he worked as the Station Manager of the La Selva Field Station, the cornerstone facility of the Organization for Tropical Studies, a consortium of 64 Universities in the U.S., Latin America, and Australia (We will visit La Selva during our trip). He also worked as field assistant to ornithologist Gary Stiles, principal author of *A Guide to the Birds of Costa Rica*. He is an expert birder, and an exceptionally skilled all-around naturalist.

Marco Antonio “Nino” Morales (*on the right*) possesses the eyes of a hawk which he puts to expert use as the safe and experienced driver of our bus—and as a wildlife spotter/birder extraordinaire. He and Charlie are inseparable as a pair of Costa Rica Expeditions’ remarkable (and good humored!) guides.