NORTHERN COSTA RICA BIRDING TOUR

"FROM VOLCANOES TO MANGROVES"

Costa Rica is recognized as one of Central America's premier birding destinations, with an extraordinary range of ecosystems concentrated within a small country. From humid lowland rainforests and tropical dry forests to cool cloud forests and coastal mangroves, the variety of habitats is striking. Within this compact geography, visitors encounter active volcanoes, rugged mountains, and a vast network of protected reserves. With more than 930 bird species recorded, Costa Rica provides exceptional opportunities for discovery. Its strong conservation ethic and welcoming communities add depth and meaning to the journey.

WESTERN FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS
in partnership with **FLYWAY BIRDING TOURS**
Welcome to an exclusive birding program in Costa Rica. This itinerary has been designed to provide exceptional opportunities for observing wildlife, exploring diverse landscapes, and engaging with local conservation initiatives. Costa Rica's remarkable biodiversity, supported by a strong system of national parks and private reserves, makes it an ideal destination for birders and naturalists who want to experience a wide variety of ecosystems within a single journey.

NORTHERN EMERALD TOUCANET

RED-LEGGED HONEYCREEPER

Throughout this program, we will visit regions that highlight Costa Rica's ecological variety through changes in habitat, climate, and elevation. From the volcanic foothills of Arenal to the tropical dry forests of Guanacaste and the cloud forests of Monteverde, each area contributes unique perspectives on birdlife and conservation. The itinerary also connects directly with community projects and foundations that safeguard habitats while promoting sustainable livelihoods. Participants will gain a deeper understanding of how biodiversity, conservation, and local culture intersect in one of the world's most biologically rich countries.

WFO COSTA RICA BIRDING TOUR 2027

Day 1 – Saturday, April 3, 2027 – Heredia

Arrivals at Juan Santamaría International Airport (≈3,000 ft). Early April in the Central Valley is typically late dry season, with daytime temperatures around 78–86 °F and evenings near 65 °F. A short transfer (about 20–40 minutes, traffic dependent) brings the group to Hotel Bougainvillea, whose extensive native gardens provide an immediate, low-effort orientation to local habitats. Paths through flowering hedges, ponds, and mixed plantings allow the group to settle in, check optics, and review field protocols without rushing. The grounds frequently hold familiar Central Valley species—Lesson's Motmot along sheltered edges, Rufous-tailed Hummingbird at flowering shrubs, Hoffmann's Woodpecker and White-eared Ground-Sparrow around the gardens, and Clay-colored Thrush (national bird) in lawns and hedgerows. An evening briefing and welcome dinner outlines the route, safety, and the conservation partners woven into the itinerary.

Overnight at Hotel Bougainvillea – D

Day 2 – Sunday, April 4, 2027 – Alajuela

CABANIS'S GROUND-SPARROW

We begin before breakfast with a short local excursion to search for the endemic Cabanis's Ground-Sparrow, a species confined to shrubby coffee fields and hedgerows around San José and Alajuela. Its tiny range and continuing habitat pressure make it a fitting opening to the tour's conservation themes. Returning to the hotel, we share breakfast and attend a briefing from the Cabanisi Project, whose fieldwork and farmer partnerships are central to the species' survival.

Late morning we drive north toward Arenal (≈3½–4 hours drive). At Jardín Cocora in Cinchona (≈3,800–4,600 ft), a family-run café and garden sustains native plantings and feeders that bring in hummingbirds such as Violet Sabrewing, Green-crowned Brilliant, and the endemic Coppery-headed Emerald, with tanagers and barbets also visiting fruit trays. Continuing to San Luis Park (≈3,600 ft), short trails through premontane forest provide context on corridor value amid an agricultural setting; canopy clearings may yield Blue-throated Toucanet or Red-headed Barbet when fruit is available.

BLUE-AND-GOLD TANAGER

By mid-afternoon we reach Arenal Observatory Lodge (≈2,000 ft) inside Arenal Volcano National Park. An orientation walk introduces the habitat mosaic of secondary forest, pasture edge, and riparian strips. This evening we'll gather for an academic session about the avian diversity and conservation in Costa Rica.

Overnight at Arenal Observatory Lodge – BLD

Day 3 – Monday, April 5, 2027 – Arenal

A full day on the lodge's trail system and surrounding forest. The mix of regenerating woodland, riparian corridors, and open clearings allows for comparisons across habitat types. Conditions typically run 70–80 °F with afternoon showers likely.

Morning hours along interior trails may reveal White-ruffed Manakin in display, while fruiting trees attract mixed flocks of tanagers. Forest edges and wet openings sometimes produce Collared Aracari and other edge-tolerant species, while flowering shrubs near the lodge bring in hummingbirds such as Violet-headed Hummingbird and Bronze-tailed Plumeleteer. By late afternoon, observation decks overlooking the valley provide a vantage for oropendolas, toucans, and raptors moving to roost. The day concludes with a review linking these observations to the broader Caribbean-slope assemblage and the role of Arenal's forest corridor in connecting lowland and mid-elevation communities.

Overnight at Arenal Observatory Lodge – BLD

Day 4 – Tuesday, April 6, 2027 – Guanacaste

We depart Arenal after breakfast and make a scheduled stop at Bogarín Trails on the outskirts of La Fortuna, a community initiative that restored pasture into a network of wetlands, second growth, and mixed gardens. This compact reserve shows how local stewardship can transform degraded land into habitat that supports both birds and ecotourism. Level trails pass ponds and shrubby thickets where patient searching can reveal secretive species such as White-throated Crake, while perches along open corridors are often used by Rufous-tailed Jacamar. Small waterways attract Green Kingfisher, and in the right season leks of White-collared Manakin may be active near the trail edges.

Continuing west, the drive into Guanacaste takes about 4 hours total, with landscapes shifting from humid foothills to increasingly dry savannas. By mid-afternoon we arrive at Hacienda Guachipelín Lodge (≈2,000 ft) on the lower slopes of Rincón de la Vieja. The contrast with Arenal is immediate: the deciduous canopy is more open, the air hotter (often mid-80s to low 90s °F), and the bird community distinct. A late walk around the lodge grounds provides first encounters with dry-forest specialists, from the conspicuous White-throated Magpie-Jay moving in noisy groups through the canopy to Turquoise-browed Motmot perched on fence posts and cutbanks. Dense scrub around the lodge edges may hold Banded Wren, while open clearings and scattered trees are favored by Streak-backed Oriole.

Overnight at Hacienda Guachipelín Lodge – BLD

Day 5 – Wednesday, April 7, 2027 – Guanacaste

We spend the day exploring Rincón de la Vieja National Park, one of the most important strongholds of tropical dry forest in Mesoamerica. Trails wind through deciduous woodland, gallery forest, and volcanic clearings, offering insight into how seasonality shapes both vegetation and birdlife. Terrain can be uneven with exposed roots and rocks, and conditions are typically hot and sunny (75–85 °F), so steady pacing and water breaks are essential.

The forest interior provides a good chance to find Elegant Trogon perched quietly in the mid-story, while thick understory supports the elusive Lesser Ground-Cuckoo, more often heard than seen. Flowering trees may draw Plain-capped Starthroat, and the presence of fruiting figs or other canopy trees can concentrate manakins and orioles. Open patches along the trail may hold Nutting's Flycatcher and Olive Sparrow, while overhead patrols by Gray Hawk and Roadside Hawk are regular. The day's walk illustrates the ecological contrasts between humid and dry forest, emphasizing the importance of protected areas like Rincón in maintaining species that persist nowhere else in Costa Rica at scale.

In the late afternoon we return to the lodge for a slower-paced exploration of its trails. As the heat softens toward evening, activity picks up around hedgerows and clearings, rounding out our first full immersion in Guanacaste's bird community.

Overnight at Hacienda Guachipelín Lodge – BLD

Day 6 – Thursday, April 8, 2027 – Guanacaste

An early departure takes us north to Santa Rosa National Park, a cornerstone of the Guanacaste Conservation Area and one of the largest remaining tracts of tropical dry forest in Central America. The park protects both deciduous forest and open savanna habitats, offering an instructive look at ecosystems that once stretched widely across the region but are now heavily fragmented. April here is hot and dry, often reaching 90–95 °F by midday; trails can be exposed and dusty. Morning birding along interior forest paths highlights species adapted to the deciduous canopy. Dawn often brings the deep calls of Thicket Tinamou, while open country may reveal Double-striped Thick-knee standing quietly in grassy clearings. Along shaded edges we may encounter Stripe-headed Sparrow and Lesser Ground-Cuckoo, while flowering trees can attract Long-tailed Manakin or hummingbirds such as Canivet's Emerald. Raptors may include Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl showing predator presence across different habitats.

Tropical deciduous dry forests have a long, pronounced dry season and a short, intense wet season. Drought-deciduous trees open the canopy in the dry months while hardy trees, thorny shrubs, and grasses persist; globally these forests are among the most threatened tropical biomes—heavily cleared, highly fragmented, and underrepresented in protected areas.

In the afternoon we continue west to the coastal zone near Puerto Soley on Bahía Salinas. Here mangroves and mudflats contrast sharply with the dry interior, holding a different bird community: Mangrove Rail in shaded mangroves, Royal Tern and Magnificent Frigatebird along the shoreline, and different species of herons in tidal channels.
By late day we return inland to the lodge, closing a loop that shows the tight juxtaposition of dry forest and coastal ecosystems in northwestern Costa Rica.

Overnight at Hacienda Guachipelín Lodge – BLD

BLACK-HEADED TROGON

Day 7 – Friday, April 9, 2027 – Puntarenas

We depart Guanacaste and begin our ascent toward Monteverde, with a planned mid-morning stop at Lomas de Barbudal Biological Reserve (~600 ft). This smaller protected area offers a valuable reminder of how secondary reserves buffer the larger Guanacaste complex, preserving seasonal dry forest amid heavy agricultural pressure. Its flowering trees and more intimate scale often provide closer views than Santa Rosa. We may find Black-headed Trogon along open tracks, Brown-crested Flycatcher foraging in the canopy, and pockets of taller second growth supporting Long-tailed Manakin at traditional display sites.
After lunch en route, the road climbs into the Tilarán highlands, with cooler air and increasing mist as we near Monteverde (≈4,600 ft). Temperatures here usually run 60–70 °F, dropping further in the evenings, and conditions can shift quickly between sun and low cloud. Arrival at Hotel Fonda Vela is mid- to late afternoon, leaving time for a short walk around the property. Forest edges and gardens here provide an initial introduction to cloud-forest birdlife, from Slate-throated Redstart and Golden-crowned Warbler in hedgerows to hummingbirds such as Green-crowned Brilliant and Violet Sabrewing working flowering shrubs. This shift in both climate and bird community sets the stage for the following days' exploration of mid- and high-elevation forest.

Overnight at Hotel Fonda Vela – BLD

Day 8 – Saturday, April 10, 2027 – Puntarenas

The morning is dedicated to Curi-Cancha Reserve, a mid-elevation cloud-forest property where reforested pasture blends into mature woodland. At ~5,000 ft, conditions are cool (60–70 °F) with mist common in the afternoons. Fruit-bearing laurel and avocado trees draw in canopy specialists, including the seasonal presence of Three-wattled Bellbird, whose resonant calls carry through the valley. Interior trails host Prong-billed Barbet and mixed flocks moving along mossy trunks, while quieter edges are favored by Spangle-cheeked Tanager and other highland endemics. Gardens near the entrance concentrate nectar sources that attract hummingbirds typical of this elevation, offering prolonged study opportunities.

RESPLENDENT QUETZAL

After lunch, the afternoon is spent in Bajo del Tigre, part of the Children's Eternal Rainforest. Its transitional forest on the Pacific slope holds a different character: drier slopes, dense tangles, and second growth that add variety to the assemblage. Trails here may produce ground-foraging insectivores like Tawny-throated Leaftosser, while mid-story foragers such as Ruddy Treerunner work bark and lichen. Brushy openings near the reserve boundary sometimes reveal secretive sparrows, providing a good comparison with the core cloud-forest species of the morning.

Overnight at Hotel Fonda Vela – BLD

Day 9 – Sunday, April 11, 2027 – Puntarenas

We begin with a morning session hosted by the Costa Rica Conservation Foundation, observing a standardized banding demonstration. This provides structured encounters with mid-elevation passerines, allowing participants to examine molt, plumage, and other features rarely appreciated in the field. The session also introduces the Foundation's role in reforestation and monitoring projects, placing individual bird encounters in the context of regional conservation. After lunch, the group enters the Monteverde Reserve, where cooler and wetter conditions (55–65 °F, frequent mist) define one of the country's most famous cloud-forest tracts. The interior trails here are often filled with the ethereal song of Black-faced Solitaire, emblematic of the high-elevation understory. Mixed flocks moving through mossy trunks and bromeliad-laden branches may include species such as Spotted Barbtail or Olivaceous Woodcreeper, each adapted to probing for insects in damp substrates. The day concludes with an extended stop at the Hummingbird Gallery, where feeders and natural plantings concentrate a suite of highland hummingbirds unique to this elevation, providing a final opportunity to observe their identification features at close range and compare notes from the day's forest encounters.

COPPERY-HEADED EMERALD

Overnight at Hotel Fonda Vela – BLD

Day 10 – Monday, April 12, 2027 – Alajuela

We descend for about 2.5 hours from the highlands to the Pacific lowlands for a morning Tárcoles River tour at sea level. April here is hot and humid, with daytime highs of 85–95 °F, and conditions vary with the tides. The river's mangroves and mudflats are among the most productive wetlands in Central America and provide an excellent case study of estuarine ecology and its importance for migratory and resident waterbirds. Along shaded banks, Boat-billed Heron and Yellow-crowned Night-Heron often remain visible at traditional roosts, while open channels attract Roseate Spoonbill, Tricolored Heron, and other waders. Raptors such as Common Black Hawk patrol mangrove edges, and it is common to see Scarlet Macaw flying overhead as they move between coastal forest and mangrove roosts.

The Tárcoles River drains into the Gulf of Nicoya and supports one of Costa Rica's most extensive mangrove systems. These mangroves stabilize shorelines, filter water, and serve as nurseries for marine life. They also provide a natural buffer against storms and sea-level rise, protecting coastal communities. The river basin is ecologically rich but faces mounting pressures from agriculture, deforestation, and urban growth.

American Crocodiles are frequently observed from the boats, underlining the broader ecological significance of the river system.
After the tour we continue inland to the Central Valley (≈1.5–2 hours) and check into Hotel Robledal, located in a semi-rural setting on the outskirts of Alajuela. Before the farewell dinner, we visit nearby industrial and urban restoration sites, where small wetlands, retention ponds, and native plantings are maintained in partnership with the private sector. These pilot projects illustrate how even heavily modified areas can contribute to conservation when designed with ecological function in mind. Typical birds here include Southern Lapwing using open grass and Gray-crowned Yellowthroat in shrubby margins, along with seasonal movements of swifts and swallows exploiting thermal currents above built structures. The day closes with a final review of the route and its conservation themes.

Overnight at Hotel Robledal – BLD

THREE-WATTLED BELLBIRD

Day 11 – Tuesday, April 13, 2027 – Alajuela

Timed transfers to the international airport. A closing briefing highlights how the itinerary connected diverse ecosystems—from Central Valley farmlands to volcanic foothills, tropical dry forest, and highland cloud reserves—and how each stop reinforced the role of local families, community projects, and national parks in protecting Costa Rica's biodiversity.

B

The Central Valley of Costa Rica is a vibrant region that is home to a rich variety of bird species. This area's diverse habitats, ranging from urban gardens and agricultural lands to montane forests, attract a plethora of birdlife. Notable species include the Lesson's Motmot, Clay-colored Thrush (Costa Rica's national bird), Rufous-tailed Hummingbird, and more. Birders can also spot several species of tanagers, warblers, and orioles, making the Central Valley a prime spot for both resident and migratory birds.

CLAY-COLORED THRUSH

Tour Difficulty and Conditions

This itinerary is considered moderate in physical demand. Daily activities include walks of 1–3 miles on established trails, some with uneven footing, roots, or rocks. Heat and humidity are common in the lowlands, where daytime temperatures range from 85–95 °F, while the cloud forests of Monteverde are cooler (55–70 °F) and often misty. Elevations range from sea level to about 5,600 ft, with moderate ascents and descents during the trip. Early starts are necessary to maximize bird activity, and weather can shift quickly, with showers possible at any time of year. No strenuous hikes are included, but steady footing, reasonable mobility, and the ability to manage hot and humid conditions are essential for participation.

WFO COSTA RICA BIRDING TOUR 2027

Included in the program:
- Professional Naturalist & Birding Guide services .
- Coach transportation throughout the program
- All meals indicated with B (Breakfast), L (lunch) and D (Dinner)
- All lodging in standard double occupancy (single supplement available at extra cost).
- All entrance fees and excursions.
- Updated Costa Rica bird check-list.
- Purified Water.
- Donations to WFO and local conservation group.
- Gratuities.

Not included in the program:
- Airline ticket - Travel insurance

Alcoholic beverages - Personal expenses

PRICE PER PERSON
DOUBLE $4700
SINGLE $5850

DATES:
APRIL 3 - 13 2027

GROUP SIZE:
10 BIRDERS

REGISTRATION:
contact@westernÿeldornithologits.org