The Bellbird

Volume II, Issue 4 July/August, 2016

From the Editor

This is the official low season in Costa Rica and Panama on account of the rainy weather but it's really not that bad, and actually, this is also when we get a two week break from the rain. A brief pair of dry weather weeks happens in July and acts as a welcome break from the afternoon downpours. The school kids get two weeks off, local people head to the beaches, and birders can also take advantage of the clear skies and see more resident birds.

There aren't any wintering birds right now so everything you see is a tropical resident species probably not present in your home town (unless you happen to live between the Tropics of Cancer and Capricorn). Since many birds are also nesting or raising young, we also see more juvenile birds. This can result in some tricky identification issues but can also make it easier to see quail-doves and other shy birds. Raptors also take advantage of the young, inexperienced birds in a different, less friendly way.

This, in turn, might make it a bit easier to see more raptor species, including shy ones that stick to the forest because they could be more active. Since they are always a challenge to see, that might be more conjecture than what is actually happening but we do get the feeling that this is the case. So, if you happen to be birding around here during the next two months, keep an eye out for odd-looking juveniles and more raptor sightings.

Pat O'Donnell

App Updates

Get ready for the next updates for our <u>Costa Rica Birds Field Guide app</u> and the <u>Panama Birds Field Guide app</u>. These will include more images and edited vocalizations with more calls to improve bird identification as well as other edits that clarify status for many species. However, the biggest changes will come in the form of search filter additions that allow you to:

- -Mark target species.
- -All species that are seen/heard or not seen.

-Migrants or residents.

It will now also be easy to see which species are already seen (or not) right on the main front screens along with other features designed to provide more functions and improve the overall birding experience.

Birding Tip of the Month

How to Look for Shy, Rainforest Raptors

No matter where we happen to go birding, there are always a set of common species that are hard to miss, and uncommon and rare birds that require more effort. There is also a subset of those rare species that are such a challenge to find that we start to wonder if they actually exist. These tend to be nocturnal birds and species of dense forest that occur in low density populations. Some raptors fall into this latter category because, instead of soaring or coming out into the open, prefer to stay hidden in dense vegetation. In Costa Rica and Panama, the shy raptors that evade our binocular view with regularity are the forest-falcons, Tiny Hawk, and Crested and Harpy Eagles. Here are a few tips to see them more often (or at least once!):

Think like the bird and you might see it: Maybe not, but it's worth a try! One important thing to know about these tough raptors is that they hunt by ambushing prey within the forest. This means that they have to quietly move through the forest and keep to cover so they can take prey by surprise. In essence, they act a lot like cats and that doesn't help in finding them but it at least lets us know why we see them so infrequently. It also means that you might actually have a better chance of seeing one by just watching and waiting in good habitat for an extended period of time.

Habitat: As with any birds, knowing where to look is vital. Although a few of these tough ones will live in second growth and patchy forest, the best place to look is high quality, mature rainforest. The eagles won't live anywhere else, and mature forest will support the healthiest populations of forest-falcons and Tiny Hawk.

Where and when to watch: Away from nesting sites, the best chances at seeing the large eagles and Tiny Hawk happen when we can scan the canopy of good

forest during the early morning hours. Knowing where they have been recorded also helps, <u>eBird</u> being the best place to check. As for forest-falcons, use the field guide apps to study their calls and then listen for them at dawn and dusk. They frequently vocalize at these times of the day and this is when they can be located. Otherwise, they might show up at an antswarm, or attack lekking birds.



A lucky view of a Tiny Hawk.

Featured Birding Site

Virgen del Socorro, Costa Rica

This classic site was affected by the Cinchona earthquake of 2009 but it's still a worthwhile place to look for middle elevation species. Located on the road between the Waterfall Gardens and Sarapiqui and in the buffer zone of a national park, this site is easy to reach and it takes around an hour and 45 minutes to get there from the San Jose area. However, once you reach the road that goes into the forested canyon, you will need clearance and four wheel drive.

Birding can start above the canyon along the main road wherever you can pull off the road (no guard rails, be careful!). This is a good way to scan for White Hawk, Barred Hawk, Bat Falcon, Short-tailed Hawk, and occasional hawk-eagles. Other raptors are also possible and Solitary Eagle has been seen there in the past. It doesn't live at the site any more but who knows when one might wander over from the extensive forests of Braulio Carrillo National Park? This is also a good spot to scan for swifts.

The best birding is in the canyon itself and can be done along the rough road. Many middle elevation species live there including Sooty-faced Finch, Collared Trogon, Zeledon's Antbird, Brown-billed Scythebill, and other species. These can be encountered at various sites along the road but mostly down by the bridge and on the other side of the canyon. Nice mixed flocks of tanagers and other species also occur, and flowering trees can attract White-bellied Mountain-Gem, Black-crested Coquette, Brown Violetear, Green Thorntail, and other species.



Crimson-collared Tanager is also common at this site.

As the road ascends out of the canyon on the other side, this is the best place to look for Rufous-browed Tyrannulet, a warbler-like flycatcher usually seen in the canopy. The best way to find it is to learn its call, and the same can be said for Black-headed Tody-Flycatcher. Lanceolated Monklet can also show up in the canyon but it is very rare and unexpected.

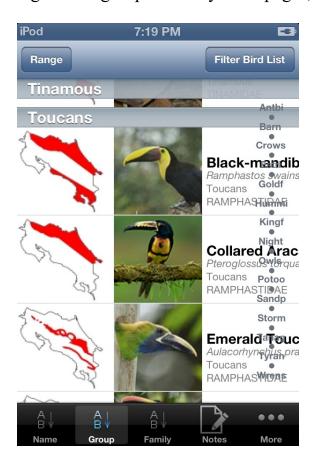
If you follow the road to the point where you can take a right towards Albergue del Socorro, taking that right eventually leads to a very nice area of forest that can have antbirds, White-crowned Manakin, and other deep forest species, including occasional sightings of Lovely Cotinga and Black and white Hawk-Eagle. Umbrellabird probably also occurs there from time to time.

How to get there: Take the road to and past the Waterfall Gardens, and continue past the Cafe Colibri at Cinchona. About 5 minutes after the cafe, watch for the entrance road on the right. This is just before you descend to a fairly long bridge over a river.

App Tips

Study birds by group

Studying birds by group or family is a good way to become familiar with families that do not occur at the home birding patch. Families and avian groups can be studied on our field guide apps by checking out the group or family main pages, or filtering for group.



Play around with the filters

This is another way to study birds or just become familiar with the avian sights and sounds of Costa Rica and Panama. Filter for birds that "trill", for "red" birds, by size, or make various combinations and see what shows up.

FAQs and Concerns

How can I record a singing bird?

- -Touch "More".
- -Which Bird is It?
- -Follow the simple instructions.

-If you like, touch the note icon in the lower left part of the screen to send us a message along with the recording.

What to expect in the free updates?

More images, sounds, and anything else we can do to make the apps more useful for bird identification and learning about the birds we hope you encounter.

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