

# The Bellbird

## Volume I, Issue 4

### From the Editor

October is here and for most birders up north, the bulk of passerine migration is coming to an end. Sure, sparrows and some other small birds are still on the move (along with raptors and waterfowl) but in southern Central America, migration is at its peak. Birds have been arriving from the north since August but never in the numbers that we see in October. This is when most of the wood-warblers, vireos, thrushes, swallows, and everything else pass through, and the best place to witness the migration show is on the Caribbean coast.

Migration also happens in other places but nothing like the constant river of Chimney swifts, flock after flock of Eastern Kingbirds, thousands of swallows, and kettles of Mississippi Kites, and Broad-winged and Swainson's Hawks that we see at this time of year. It's an exciting time for local birders but even visiting birders would enjoy the amazing migration on the Caribbean. Visit Panama and you can bear witness to the birds right around the Canal Zone. Not to mention, there's also plenty of toucans, parrots, manakins, wrens, flycatchers, and other resident species to look at.

If visiting Panama and Costa Rica during the low season, take advantage of the migration show in October!

*Pat O'Donnell*

### App Updates

The new versions of the [Costa Rica Birds Field Guide app](#) and the [Panama Birds Field Guide app](#) are now available for IOS! We are also working on the Android versions and those should be available soon.

Some notes about this big update:

This next main update puts every species on the country list onto each respective app. Although we don't have images for some species, we thought it would be better to still include every species on the checklist to include information, range maps, and (frequently) vocalizations. Species for which images are lacking are shown with a question mark icon. These are new additions to the app and not birds that were on

previous versions. We hope to eventually include images for all bird species. However, this doesn't mean that we haven't included images and sounds for more species. This is what we can expect with the new versions:

- Images for nearly 800 species on the Costa Rica app, more than 830 for the Panama app.
- Vocalizations for more than 600 species, and range maps, and information for every species.
- Notes can be taken and emailed.
- Similar species feature allows for easy comparison of birds that can be tough to identify.
- IUCN status shown for threatened species.
- Regional endemics noted.
- Versatile search function include searching by name.
- Descriptions of regions and habitats in the "App Tips".

## **Birding Tip of the Month**

### **Study bird families**

It's easier to learn about birds when we allocate information to different categories, especially when more than 900 species are involved. This is why it's easier to study the birds of Costa Rica, Panama, and other areas by learning them first by family. Instead of going through and memorizing every single bird, start by learning about the families so you can know that you are looking at a becard, manakin, or antbird when those birds come into focus.

Shape is always an essential aspect of bird identification and an easy way to quickly place a bird into its avian family. Even similar families like vireos and wood-warblers can be separated by shape (in this case by the difference in head and bill shapes). It's of course much easier for distinctive bird families like woodpeckers, hummingbirds, and hawks.

Speaking of the shape of the bill, this tends to be a good means of identifying birds by family. Not always, but quite often. This is why it's usually worth it to focus on the head of the bird first before other parts of the body. Often, with a good look at the head, we can identify the bird to species in addition to identifying it as a wren, woodcreeper, or blackbird.

To study birds by family on our apps, touch the "Family" page to see birds placed in

their families with those families arranged in taxonomic order. To see birds from one family, we can also use the search filter to only see the toucans, woodpeckers, or other avian families.

## Featured Birding Site

### Myriam's Quetzals, Dota Valley, Costa Rica

The Dota Valley is famous among birders as a place to see the Resplendent Quetzal. Although many stay at the wonderful Savegre Lodge, it's not the only place to go birding in the high mountains of Costa Rica. The beautiful forested valley on the drive in can be excellent for many species, and one of the nicest places for a stop is Myriam's Diner.

Officially known as "[Myriam's Quetzals](#)", this gem of a site is a great place to stop for a delicious home-cooked meal, and always has birds out back. Although quetzals are unusual around the diner (they can be seen in other parts of the valley), feeders just behind the place bring in Acorn Woodpecker, Flame-colored Tanager, Yellow-thighed Finch, Large-footed Finch, Sooty-capped Chlorospingus, and other species. Meanwhile, near the feeders, bushes and trees are visited by Flame-throated Warbler, Yellow-bellied Siskin, Long-tailed Silky-Flycatcher, and other species. The photography opportunities are excellent!



*A Yellow-thighed Finch on the feeder at Myriam's, one of many regional endemics in this area.*

Down at the lower cabins, trails are also available that head through primary high elevation rainforest. Most of the high elevation species are possible including chances at quail-doves, Costa Rican Pygmy-Owl, Buffy Tuftedcheek, Green-fronted Lancebill, and others.



*Keep an eye out for Costa Rican Pygmy-Owl!*

Speaking of owls, this area is also one of the only reliable sites for Unspotted Saw-whet Owl in Costa Rica and elsewhere. It isn't common but is heard and seen with regularity on the road in front of the diner and down near the cabins. More common night birds include Dusky Nightjar and Bare-shanked Screech-Owl.

Whether staying at one of Myriam's cabins or elsewhere in the valley, a stop at this birder friendly spot is much recommended. Watch for it on the left around 2 to 3 kilometers from the junction of the Dota valley road with the highway.

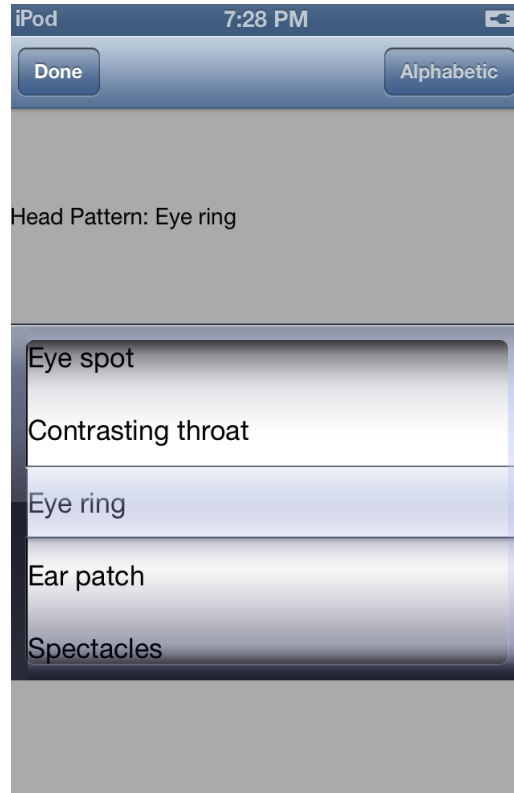
## App Tips

### Similar species

Check out the new similar species function to compare species that can be tough to separate. When looking at information for a species, just touch the "similar species" icon and a list of similar species will show up. If a species doesn't show the similar species icon, then we figured that its field marks were enough for straightforward identification.

### Search for species by field mark

Use the search filters to only show birds with certain field marks. For example, if you see a bird with an eye ring but aren't sure what it is, touch "Filter", scroll to "Eye ring", pick that and then touch "Done". This will show all of the birds with an eye ring. Use other search filters to whittle down the possibilities.



### Study bird sounds

With vocalizations for more than 600 species, the apps are an excellent means of studying bird sounds, especially because one can play the sound and look at an image of the bird at the same time. The "similar species" function also makes it easier to compare sounds of species that resemble each other.

## Three FAQs and Concerns

**Why do some species lack photos?** Some species, like Tawny-faced Quail, aren't just difficult to see, they are even more difficult to photograph. Others are likewise very tough to take pictures of. That said, we are always working on obtaining the images of the remaining species in addition to the 800 plus species already pictured on the apps (including such rare birds as Solitary, Harpy, and Crested Eagles, Maroon-chested Ground-Dove, Slaty-backed Forest-falcon, and others).

**Where's the checklist?** Since both apps now include every species on the checklist for their respective country, the app itself acts as a checklist. To see bird families in taxonomic order, touch the "family" page. Check off species as seen, heard, and make notes in the "Notes" area for each species. These notes can also be emailed.

**Are updates free?** Yes, as long as you have already purchased the app and are updating through the store of purchase.

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