

The Bellbird

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From the Editor

It's still the wet season in Costa Rica but the weather is definitely changing. In much of the country, it doesn't rain as much as it did a few months ago and just about every day begins with a beautiful, sunny morning. Sometime after lunch, the skies cloud over and it does rain but even that "scheduled rain" seems to be diminishing. On the Caribbean slope, as is expected for this time of year, it can rain any time of the day but even there, there hasn't been constant precipitation.

For the birder, this change in the weather translates to good birding in the mornings and a chance to study the field guide app and mark observations in the late afternoon. However, even with light rain, quite a few birds can still be quite active so you might want to keep watching from the shelter of the lodge.

On the waterbird front, a lot of birds are around, and the current El Nino effect has probably been responsible for sightings of several rare species for Costa Rica on the Pacific coast. See our take on this month's featured site for an easy means of looking for some of those pelagic species.

Pat O'Donnell

App Updates

The new versions of the [Costa Rica Birds Field Guide app](#) and the [Panama Birds Field Guide app](#) have been available for IOS for a bit more than a month, and we are very close to releasing the updated Android versions. Since the Android versions require completely different coding, it takes a bit longer to make them.

Next month, we also hope to make another brief update that adds a few images and makes a few small improvements.

Birding Tip of the Month

Watch the trees

No, we don't mean taking botanical walks (although those would be very interesting), but learning how to recognize trees that attract certain types of birds. If you can do this, you will have a higher chance of finding frugivores, including the rare ones. This is one of the main ways of finding a Resplendent Quetzal and is a big help when looking for cotingas.

In general, just keeping an eye out for fruiting trees will probably result in sightings of more birds. In addition to tanagers and trogons, fruiting trees can also attract pigeons, parakeets, manakins, and several flycatchers. Motmots might even take part in the bonanza of food along with guans and other species. Some trees are more popular than others but it's always worth it to wait by any tree that has a profusion of berries or other fruits. Wait a half an hour to see if birds show up. If none make an appearance, then the fruits of that particular tree probably aren't on the menu.

Some of the fruiting tree species that are especially good for birds are figs, Melastomes, Schefflera, cecropias, and Lauraceous species. I'm no tree expert but these descriptions might help:

- **Figs- popular with most frugivores.**
 - Medium to very large trees.
 - Plain, dark green, waxy leaves with a prominent vein down the center of the leaf.
 - Small reddish fruits.
 - Buttress roots, branches often encase another tree.

- **Melastomes- especially popular with tanagers although many other birds can also show.**
 - Medium-sized trees, some are bushes.
 - Distinctive leaves with four or so veins "cross-hatched" with several other veins.
 - Small bunches of fruits that can be white, purple, or other colors.

- **Schefflera- can attract a fair variety of bird species.**
 - Medium to tall trees at forest edge and second growth.
 - Long, narrow, pointed palmate leaves, looks a bit like a hand with many narrow fingers.
 - Very small fruits.

- **Cecropia- not as popular as other trees mentioned but can still see visits from tanagers and several other birds.**
 - Medium to tall, commonly seen trees of edge and second growth.

- Distinctive leaves are shaped rather like a hand.
 - Odd, bean-like structures hang down and are fed on by birds.
 - Straight pale, segmented trunk.
- **Lauraceous trees- One of the most important trees to recognize, produces nutritious fruits eaten by trogons, toucans, guans, and cotingas.**
 - Tall trees with rather small, dark green leaves.
 - More easily recognized by fairly large green or purple fruits, each at the end of a noticeable stem.
 - When these are fruiting, they can produce large numbers of fruits and are the trees to watch and wait for cotingas.

Featured Birding Site

The Puntarenas-Paquera ferry, Costa Rica

Although you won't find Puntarenas and the ferry on most birding itineraries for Costa Rica, this can be a fun, easy trip to look for a few pelagic species. The pelagic birding isn't exactly incredible, nor will there be any chumming or chasing of storm-petrels, but it's easy to do and can still turn up some nice birds. Also, since the gulf is one of the most important estuaries in Central America, it seems a likely place to attract rarities. The rarest species I saw was what appeared to be a Sooty Shearwater in November, 2009. When I saw the dark brown, medium-sized shearwater, I didn't realize how rare that species was for Costa Rica (formerly regular), and since it was perched, I now wonder if it may have even been a Short-tailed or Christmas Shearwater. Reports of Waved Albatross and other pelagic species further out in the gulf have also been recorded.

Start out by watching from the vicinity of the lighthouse in Puntarenas. This is best, easiest sea-watching spot in Costa Rica because it affords a view of a strait that connects the inner and outer Gulfs of Nicoya. At times, storm-petrels and even shearwaters can come surprisingly close to shore while boobies and terns often forage just offshore.



Brown Booby foraging just offshore.

The ferry departs several times during the day but the best sightings seem to be associated with the ferry in the late afternoon. Try to be the first on board to pick a spot on the top deck, right at the front, as this provides the best view. The trip is usually smooth enough to use a scope. Typically, Black Tern is the most common species, and some trips can reveal flocks that number in the thousands. Those tern flocks should be carefully checked for Galapagos Shearwater, Brown Noddy, and storm-petrels although the shearwater and the storm-petrel can also be seen on their own (often in quick flight).



*Black Terns in flight, Galapagos Shearwater on the water, and Black Tuna off to the left.
From the ferry in September.*

The most frequently seen storm-petrel species are Black, Least, and Wedge-rumped although Leach's and even Band-rumped probably have also rarely occurred, and White-faced and Wilson's might also be possible.

In the drift lines, watch for Bridled Tern and phalaropes (Red-necked is most frequent). At other times, keep an eye out for occasional Red-billed Tropicbird, and Sabine's and Franklin's Gulls. Brown Booby is common, Blue-footed is regular, and Red-footed also shows up from time to time.



Blue-footed Booby seen from the ferry.

When I bird from the ferry, I usually take the 9 a.m. from Puntarenas (the second in the morning), and return on the 11:00 a.m. ferry from Paquera. As soon as I depart the ferry in Paquera, I go right back in, buy a return ticket, and am the first to get back on. The birding is often slower on the return trip but it's worth it to just keep looking. Since it costs \$25 to take the car on the ferry, I just park it at a place called "Franks Cabinas" (\$8 for the day), and get a pedestrian ticket (\$2 each way). I bring drinks and snacks and enjoy an easy, fun morning of seawatching.

Tickets for the ferry are sold in the Musmanni bakery in front of the ferry dock (at the north side of the tip in Puntarenas). If taking a car, get there early or stay at Frank's Cabinas (one block north of the Musmanni bakery, on the right side of the road). See the ferry schedule at this link: <http://nicoyapeninsula.com/general/boat.php>

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.

Browse species by family



If you would rather see birds arranged by family, use the family page. Families are arranged in taxonomic order and can be quickly accessed by touching the name on the right side of the screen.

Listening to bird sounds

Some devices have limitations when it comes to low-pitched sounds. If these sounds don't seem to show on the speakers of your device, listen with ear phones. This will make it easier to enjoy the vocalizations of 600 plus species. Study sounds while looking at the images to learn vocalizations before your trip.

Three FAQs and Concerns

Can I contribute photos for the app? Although we are already working with several contributors, if you would like to contribute images of species not pictured on our apps, yes, please contact us at support@birdingfieldguides.com

Will apps be available for other countries? Yes, we hope so. Probably not for the USA because more than one very good birding app is available for North America.

Do I have to pay again for the app? Some people erase the app, or would like to download it on a different device. You don't have to pay again as long as the same account that was used to purchase the app is used to download it.

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