

The Bellbird

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From the Editor

This time of year brings a change of seasons to many places around the globe. Costa Rica and Panama are no exception and experience the change with more rain and breeding birds. The migrants are gone until fall, and the only species that remain are tropical residents. Although you won't see wintering wood-warblers, Baltimore Orioles, and other birds that nest up north, you will see plenty of local birds busy with singing and raising broods.

This time of year is also good for savings on hotels, rental vehicles, and other activities. Not to mention, there are also fewer tourists overall on the trails and beaches, and in the national parks. If visiting Costa Rica and Panama during May and June, take advantage of the lower prices and bird activity to see more birds. Although cloudy weather can present challenges to bird photography inside the forest, the upside comes in the form of more bird activity throughout the day.

While birding in Costa Rica and Panama at this time of the year, use our apps to become familiar with and study bird vocalizations.

Pat O'Donnell

App Updates

The latest updates for the [Costa Rica Birds Field Guide app](#) and the [Panama Birds Field Guide app](#) have become available for IOS and Android. Thanks to Ned Brinkley and regional editors at North American Birds, the full versions now show images of more than 850 species. Some of the recent additions include Buff-breasted Sandpiper, Spotted Rail, Slaty-breasted Tinamou, and Red-rumped Woodpecker. Various vocalizations have also been improved, and we are working hard to show images for more than 900 species on both apps.

Additional images have also been included in the recent updates of our Basic apps for Costa Rica and Panama. These basic versions are good study guides for common and

spectacular bird species, are available for just \$2.99, and showcase:

- 350 plus species including common birds and some spectacular, key species.
- Vocalizations for most of these birds.
- Range maps and information for every species on the app.
- Easy search filter and search by name function, and other features available on the full versions.

Birding Tip of the Month

How to see puffbirds

The puffbirds are one of those neotropical families that catch any birder's attention. These odd, stocky birds of tropical forests are totally unfamiliar to birders from up north. It's hard to even know what to expect because there is just nothing like them in the temperate zone. This makes it that much more challenging to find them even in places where we know that they occur.

Although the most reliable way to see any puffbird is with an experienced, local guide, here are a few tips:

- **Not very active:** With the exception of nunbirds foraging with a mixed flock, puffbirds spend most of their time sitting and waiting for prey to appear. That semi-immobile behavior helps them avoid predators, surprise their prey, and save energy. It doesn't help birders see them but when we do find one, it can usually be studied through a scope for long periods of time.

To have a better chance at finding these sitting birds, pay close and careful attention to the vegetation inside the forest (for White-whiskered Puffbird), and scan tree-tops in riparian zones and at the edge of the forest (to see White-throated Puffbird).

- **Know their calls:** Puffbird species do vocalize, especially in the morning, and this is by far, the easiest way to find them. Use our apps to study their calls and listen for them during the early morning chorus.
- **White-necked Puffbird:** Check treetops in rainforest and riparian zones in dry forest. Canopy towers are ideal for this species,
- **Black-breasted Puffbird:** Look for it in the same way as the White-necked but only in central and eastern Panama.

- **Pied Puffbird:** Watch for this tanager-sized puffbird in treetops at the edge of the forest and semi-open areas.
- **White-whiskered Puffbird:** This species is a bird of the understory. Watch for it inside rainforest. Listen for the high-pitched insect-like calls.



- **Lanceolated Monklet:** A very difficult bird to see in Costa Rica and Panama, the monklet hides in plain sight. It doesn't seem to vocalize that often and is usually found along very humid forested rivers and canyons in the foothill zone.
- **Grey-cheeked Nunlet:** This little puffbird also occurs in the understory. It vocalizes quite often and this is the easiest way to locate one.
- **White-fronted Nunbird:** A bird of the subcanopy in primary rainforest, its more active and vocal behavior makes it easier to see than other members of its family.

Featured Birding Site

Cerro Lodge, Costa Rica

Carara National Park is one of the top birding sites in Costa Rica and Central America. A meeting place of ecosystems, this national park also provides access to beautiful lowland rainforest. That said, the birding site featured in this issue is not actually Carara but a

place where many birders stay when visiting the park.

Just seven kilometers from the park entrance, Cerro Lodge is an excellent base for exploring the forests of Carara and the surrounding, very birdy vicinity. Cerro is situated in patchy tropical dry forest just north of the Tarcoles River, and appears to be on a locale flyway used by birds that migrate to and from the mangroves at the river mouth. For this reason, a morning of birding from the balcony can yield looks at flyby Muscovy Duck and other waterbirds, several parrots and parakeets, Scarlet Macaws (that sometimes feed in Beach Almond trees right at the lodge), raptors, doves, and a good variety of dry forest species.



The reforested area around the cabins and the feeders also attract a good number of birds including Turquoise-browed Motmot, Stripe-headed Sparrow, Gartered and Black-headed Trogons, Rose-throated Becard, Collared Forest-falcon, hummingbirds, and White-necked Puffbird among other species.

If you feel like expanding your birding away from the lodge, try the road in front of the lodge. Head downhill and you reach a floodplain with a small seasonal marsh, fields that can have Laughing Falcon, Double-striped Thick-Knee, and several species of open country. Go the other direction and you can find many dry forest birds. Crane Hawk, Gray-headed Kite, and even Yellow-billed Cotinga can also show up anywhere along this road.

At night, Black and white Owl sometimes uses the lights by the pool and near the cabins to forage for bats and beetles, and Pacific Screech-Owl is regular.

With air conditioning in the rooms, pool, and good food, this lodge is also a good choice for birding trips with non-birding family members.

For more information about Cerro Lodge, see their website:
<http://www.hotelcerrolodge.com/>

How to get there: From the highway between San Jose and Caldera, take the exit for Tarcoles and Jaco. Drive about 15 minutes and watch for signs to Guacalillo (but don't take that turn off). Shortly after, the road will curve to the right and go down hill. As soon as the road curves to the right, put on the blinker to take a right and turn into the dirt road on the right. There is a small guard hut near the entrance of that road and there should be a sign for Cerro Lodge. This turn off comes up very quickly just after the road curves right so be ready for it.

App Tips

Search by stratum

Although we often use a search filter to look for a feature on the head, wing, or something else to help with identification, the level of the forest used by the bird in question can also help put a name on it. Search by "stratum" to only show birds that use the understory, canopy, and so on.



Listen to songs of similar species

Sometimes, it's easier to identify a bird by the sound it makes than its appearance. This is especially true for tyrant-flycatchers. Use the similar species function on the app to show species that look like each other, then listen to their vocalizations.

Three FAQs and Concerns

Editing notes

At this time, only text can be edited in a note. Do this by touching "Notes", touching the note in question, and then touching the text area. The touch key board will appear and text can be typed. Touch "Done" to complete the edit. Time, date, "seen", nor "heard" can be edited in an existing note. However, a note can be deleted and a new one made. We hope to enable more editing of notes in a future update.

How much do updates cost?

Updates have always been free of charge and will continue like so. Make sure to get the latest update for more images, sounds, and to eliminate bugs.

What is the difference between the Basic and Full versions?

The main difference is with the number of species featured. While the Basic Costa Rica app shows 360 plus species, the full version has:

- Information and range maps for 900 plus species (all species on the Costa Rica list).
- Vocalizations for 600 plus of those.
- Images for 850 plus species.

The Basic Panama app shows around 370 species, whereas the full version has:

- Information and range maps for 980 plus species (all species on the Panama list).
- Vocalizations for more than 620.
- Images for more than 880 species.

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