

# The Bellbird

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## From the Editor

September and October tell us that fall is here in Costa Rica and Panama. Since we only really have two seasons, autumn doesn't even come close to having the same significance as Vermont or other northern regions with beautiful foliage. But, in Costa Rica and Panama, we see some changes during fall and they have everything to do with birds.

The local bird species are doing their usual thing and chances at seeing most of them differ little from other times of the year. But, regarding migrant species, things start to get exciting. Small numbers of Cerulean Warblers are still passing through, some of the wintering Yellow and Black-and-white Warblers have arrived, and other wood-warbler species begin to show. Most of all, though, this is high time for shorebird migration.

Checking wet fields and even muddy construction sights can turn up interesting finds including Baird's and Pectoral Sandpipers, while the mud flats of the Gulf of Nicoya, the Gulf of Panama, and other estuaries can host thousands of birds along with that outside chance at finding lost oceanic species and vagrants. The end of September is also the best time to look for Buff-breasted Sandpipers, a very rare migrant in Costa Rica and Panama and one that surely passes through each fall migration but one that is also all too easy to miss. The best places to look for it are in open fields near the Pacific Coast.

It can also rain a lot during these first two months of fall but the mornings are usually sunny and full of birds. The ferrys in the Gulf of Nicoya can also be good for seabirds.

*Pat O'Donnell*

## App Updates

Android updates for the [Costa Rica Birds Field Guide app](#) and the [Panama Birds Field Guide app](#) should come out soon and will include all of the recent updates made to the IOS versions. Apart from that, we have several new images and more new sounds that should make it onto the apps in November or December.

## **Birding Tip of the Month**

### **Effective birding of mixed flocks**

With its immense trees and beautiful madness of vegetation, the rainforest is simply bio-majestic. Hidden birds call from the undergrowth, others are picked out way up there in the canopy, and it's typical for a birder to be barraged with a sudden influx of species foraging everywhere. Before we can make full sense of what's going on, and get more looks at that possible Sharpbill, the birds are just as suddenly gone. What happened? Why did they leave, why won't they come back!

We have just had an encounter with a quick moving mixed flock and we are left with feeling an odd mix of elation and frustration. Take a deep breath, keep on birding, and try these tips for the next big mix of birds:

**Patience is key:** When the birds start to appear, stay focused, and keep trying to get looks at anything within binocular reach. Just keep trying and don't worry about the ones that got away. With several dozen birds moving through different levels of profuse vegetation, there will always be some that escape detection. Stay patient and stay on birds until you can see the head. That usually identifies most species.

**Adapt to circumstances:** As in, move with the birds. If the flock kind of races down the trail, do the same (but keep watching for snakes!) and stick with the birds as long as you can. The more you do that, the more you will see, especially if you can catch the birds moving through better light, lower branches, or snacking in a fruiting tree.

**Some especially good sites for mixed flocks:** Multi-species assemblages can happen in almost any habitat in tropical forests but the biggest mixed flocks tend to be in mature rainforest, especially in the foothills and middle elevations. Bird any site that fits this description and you have a fair chance of encountering a wonderful mix of foraging birds. These would be sites like the Pipeline Road, lots of places in the Darien, the Nusugandi area in Panama, and in Costa Rica, any site with good humid forest. Such sites as El Copal, Tapanti, Carara, the road to Manuel Brenes, Arenal, and the foothills of Quebrada Gonzalez can be especially good for mixed flocks.



*You might see a White-vented Euphonia.*

## **Featured Birding Site**

### **Tarcoles, Costa Rica**

The fishing village of Tarcoles might not have much more than a handful of houses and a couple of bars, but it's one heck of a birdy place. It owes its high avian load to a location that blends occasional wetlands with brushy fields, big trees, mangroves, an estuary, and a hop, skip, and jump from the rainforests of Carara National Park. Check out roads around Tarcoles to pick up a healthy bunch of edge and open country species, some dry forest stuff, flyby parrots, raptors, hummingbirds, and more.

On the way to Playa Azul, past the crocodile tour area, this section of the road can have some mangrove specialties, Olivaceous Piculet, some wetland species, and even Crane Hawk. It's a very birdy area overall and always worth a look. Once you get to the beach, you can also take a track to the right to get closer to the mud flats of the Tarcoles River estuary. This varies but is always worth a check as various rarities have turned up here over the years. It's also fun to scan mudflats while being entertained by the calls of Scarlet Macaws and Yellow-naped Parrots.

Any of the temporary wetlands or small inlets can also host American Pygmy and Green Kingfishers, as well as hidden Boat-billed Herons.



*Olivaceous Piculet*

As with any birdy place, the birding is best in the morning, and even more so in Tarcoles because it can get pretty hot after 9 am. Bring plenty of drinking water, don't be afraid to use that AC, and take it easy during mid-day with cold drinks and fresh seafood at local restaurants.

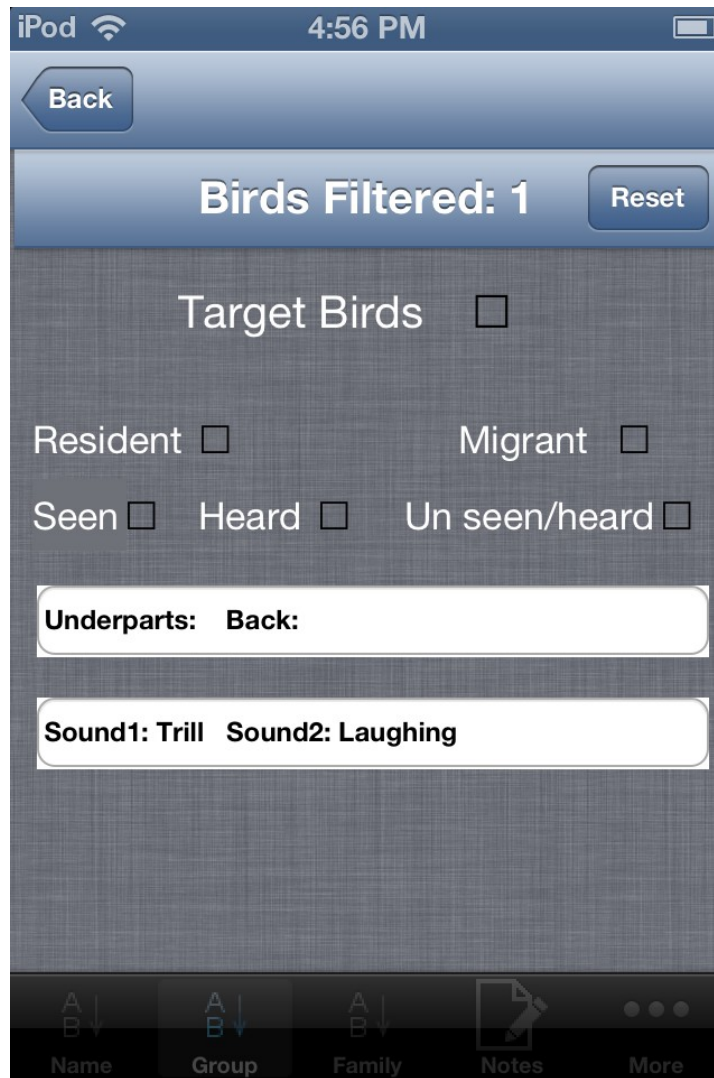
**How to get there:** If coming from Carara, head towards Jaco (take a left upon leaving the national park) and watch for the signed entrance to Tarcoles on the right, just a couple kilometers after the national park HQ. Drive in on this road and then take a right, go through the village and keep on until the crocodile tour area. Take a left there to go to Playa Azul. Bird anywhere along the way where there are wetlands or other habitats.

### **App Tips**

#### **Make a target list**

Do you have some birds you want to see more than others? Or, even some you would like to study? Just go through the birds on the app and touch the target icon. This will mark them as "target species" that can be brought up by using the filter and touching

"Target Birds". Touch "Back" and the app will then only show your target birds until the filter is reset. Try filtering target species by region and you can also see which species are targets for highland sites, while birding on the Caribbean slope, or other regions.



### **Have fun with the apps on the plane**

Whether it's a long plane ride or not, our field guide apps are perfect for time on the plane. Instead of reading a mystery novel or sudokuing, browse the species you plan on seeing, brush up on hundreds of bird songs, compare similar species, make target lists, and make notes for various species.

### **FAQs and Concerns**

#### **Why don't Android and IOS updates come out at the same time?**

We wish they could but since both require totally different coding, each requires a

different set of changes and solutions that can take up a substantial amount of time. So, we usually update the IOS apps first, and then work on those same updates for Android.

**Will the apps show changes in taxonomy?**

Yes, our apps mostly follow the AOU lists and we will show the most recent changes in names, splits, and lumps in the next update.

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