

Costa Rica – 2012

By: Nelson Mills

We spent about three weeks in Costa Rica in 2012. The first 12 days were spent with Road Scholars, touring the natural areas of Costa Rica. The last 10 days were spent visiting our Niece and her family in Nosara. We visited Costa Rica in February during the dry season. I think the dry season typically begins in December and lasts until about June. We spent most of our time in the rain forest and I quickly learned that the canopy is huge and blocks a lot of the sunlight. I



shot a lot of my photos at higher ISO settings. One exception was on the rivers. Tours in small river boats are great. There will be lots more sunlight on the rivers than under the canopy of the rain forest, and tons of wildlife.

Tortuguero National Park.

Tortuguero is a remote location in north eastern Costa Rica, on the Caribbean that is only accessible by small plane or boat. It consists of a long narrow beach, a narrow lagoon connected to the sea at one end and fed by a river at the other, and then a large coastal rain forest. Once your there, travel is by boat along the lagoon or through the narrow canals that have been cut through the rain forest. There are several eco lodges on the edge of the rain forest and a small village on the beach side of the lagoon. The beach here is also an important nesting place for the Atlantic Sea Turtle. I think this occurs during October or November, but if you're interested in seeing this, check before you go. Also, there may be some access restrictions during the nesting season. This is a very bio diverse area and well worth the effort to get here. You will need a guide with a boat. All the lodges have them.



Sarapiqui

Sarapiqui is in the northeastern part of Costa Rica about 50 km west of Tortuguero. We stayed at Selva Verde Lodge. This area includes rain forest, pineapple plantations and white water rafting on the Sarapiqui River. Lots of birds to photograph including Montazuma's Oro Pendula. We also photographed howler and white faced monkey's here. This is also where we were able to photograph the very small but colorful poisonous tree frogs. You will need a small light, lots of patience and good listening skills to find and photograph the small creatures.



Arenal Volcano

Arenal is a relatively young volcano that emits gas, ash, and lava on almost a daily basis. However, the summit is frequently in the clouds, so it is rare to get a photograph of the small eruptions. It is even rarer to get a photograph of the lava flows after nightfall. There are numerous hot springs in the area and a wonderful hike at Arenal hanging bridges. There are eight fixed bridges and six hanging bridges on this hike and the hanging bridges frequently place

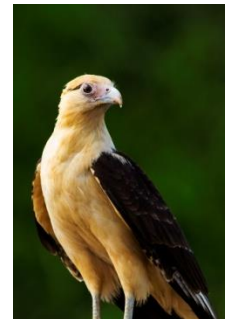


you high in the canopy. Fortuna is a small town with some good restaurants and lots of interesting photographic opportunities. There is also a large lake in the area. Shortly after we left the area a member of the crew of a movie company that was shooting in the area was bitten by a Fer de Lance. A reminder of the warning we received during our introduction to the tour. Be aware of where your hand and feet are at all times.

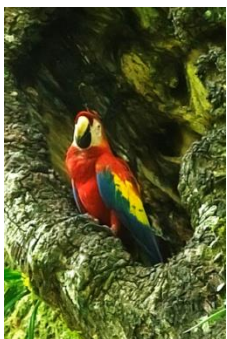


Tarcoles River

The Tarcoles River empties into the Pacific Ocean about 90 km west of San Jose. This area is known for a population of very large Crocodiles. They can be photographed from the bridge over the river, but this is dangerous because the bridge is narrow and the traffic can be heavy. A better option is to take a river boat tour. This gets you close to the large crocs safely, and also provides an opportunity to photograph a large variety of birds. This is where we photographed an anteater in a tree on the grounds of our lodge in Puerta Leona. Also a nesting pair of Scarlet Macaws in another tree at the same lodge.



Carara National Park



Carara National Park is located near the mouth of the Tarcoles River. This is an important nesting area of the Scarlet Macaw. They can be seen nesting in the trees in the park, and flying over the river late in the day. Well worth a visit.

Hacienda Baru

We didn't stay here long, but I wish we had. We attended a talk by the manager of this National Wildlife Refuge, Jack Ewing. When Jack came here he was managing a cattle ranch, and he has been a key player in the conversion from a cattle

ranch to a wildlife refuge. This refuge includes cabins, guided tours, and platforms in the canopy for watching and photographing wildlife.

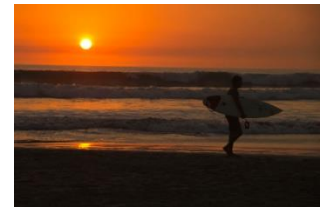
San Gerardo de Dota



Our last stop on the Road Scholars tour was San Gerardo de Dota. This is a small, remote valley on the west slope of Talamanca range. Our lodging here was at about 8000 feet. The valley features cold evenings and warm, pleasant days. The predominate habitats in the area are cloud and oak forests. We encountered a large number of hummingbirds. Large in both numbers and varieties. The major attraction of the area is the Resplendent Quetzal. We didn't see this beautiful bird, but they are in the area. They can be found at various altitudes within the valley depending on their food supply.

Nosara

Nosara is a small coastal town on the pacific coast with a fairly large population of American expats. The habitat here is dry tropical forest. There are three large beaches within easy walking distance. The beach nearest our Niece's home had a large surfing area at the north end, a protected swimming area and easily accessible tide pools at the south end. The beach north of there was a short walk over a sand dune. It is where the local fishermen launch their boats. It also has a nice restaurant and a small commercial area. The



The beach south of our niece is beautiful pink sand and is only accessible at low tide. Away from the beach is forest. I walked at dawn every day and got many good photographs of birds here. I also got my best photos of howler monkeys on one of these walks. Usually the howler monkeys were high in the canopy and on the move looking for food. Difficult to photograph! On one particular morning, I encountered a group of howlers with one, who seemed to be on sentry duty, sitting high in the tree in a small clear area with lots of sunlight. He sat there a long time, alternately interacting with me using poses and glares, and exchanging howls with another group of howlers about a half mile away. Fun morning.

