



Costa Rica: Northern Route

Explore Costa Rica's incredible bird fauna and other natural wonders on this 10-day tour. You'll visit the outstanding birding hotspots in the northern part of the country, including Caño Negro National Wildlife Refuge, the Abangares River, and La Selva Biological Research Station. Our expert local guide will lead us through diverse landscapes in search of the country and regionally endemic birds, and an array of other Central American gems. We'll also learn how local conservation groups are protecting birds and their habitats for future generations.

Dates: April 14 – 23, 2024 (10 days)

Itinerary: [Map](#)

Cost: from \$2,820 (max. 12 participants)

In-country Guide: Jose Pablo Castillo

Potential Species: ~300

TRIP HIGHLIGHTS

- ✿ Explore waterways in the Caño Negro National Wildlife Refuge; one of the world's most important wetlands.
- ✿ Visit local conservation projects to learn how their work is protecting endemic and threatened species.
- ✿ Bird the rich biodiversity of La Selva Biological Research Station, and habitats on both the Caribbean and Pacific coasts.
- ✿ Seek out Lesser Ground-Cuckoo, Sungrebe, and Snowcap, among other iconic neotropical species.



This program will involve early mornings, moderate-to-high intensity birding, with some rough terrain.

Day 1: Sunday, April 14 **Arrival in San Jose**

Welcome to Costa Rica, the country of Pura Vida, or Pure Life! After a short drive to your hotel, you'll have the chance to experience the lush grounds of the property. **Lesson's Motmot, Hoffmann's^ and Lineated Woodpeckers, Cinnamon-bellied Saltator, Rufous-naped and Cabanis's Wrens, Chestnut-capped Warbler, and Gray-cowled Wood-rail** can often be found around the hotel. If we're lucky we may also find **Mottled Owl** in the bamboo thickets. We'll attend a trip briefing and then enjoy a welcome dinner at the hotel's restaurant.

Overnight: Hotel Bougainvillea

Day 2: Monday, April 15 **Cabanis's Ground-Sparrow and La Ensenada Wildlife Refuge**

Early this morning we will head out with the team from the Cabanisi Project in search of the Costa Rican endemic **Cabanis's Ground-Sparrow*(NT)**. This species is considered near threatened by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) because of habitat loss due to urban sprawl. After observing the species in the wild, we'll attend a presentation to learn more about the conservation status of this unique species in Costa Rica and the efforts to protect it by a local non-profit organization.



Cabanis Ground-Sparrow © Jose Pablo Castillo

Following this introduction to Costa Rican bird conservation we'll head down to the Pacific coast. After lunch en route, we'll have the opportunity to bird around La Ensenada Wildlife Refuge which protects tracts of tropical dry forest as well as mangrove forests and coastal mudflats. The nearby lodge is located on an extensive property which is home to a vast array of species, making La Ensenada a perfect place for birdwatchers and nature lovers. Highlight bird species here are **Lesser Ground-Cuckoo, Scrub Euphonia, Banded Wren, Pacific Screech Owl, White-necked Puffbird, Laughing Falcon, Spot-breasted Oriole, Yellow-naped Parrot(CR), and Black-headed Trogon** among others.

Overnight: La Ensenada Lodge



Black-crested Coquette © Ryan Acandee

Day 3: Tuesday, April 16 **Abangares River Boat Trip**

After breakfast at the lodge, we'll take an early morning boat ride along the Abangares River mangrove estuary to look for resident specialties like **Rufous-necked Wood-Rail, Mangrove Hummingbird*(EN), Mangrove Vireo,** the resident **Yellow (Mangrove) Warbler,** as well as several species of shore-birds. Later in the morning we'll visit nearby salt pans hoping for more shore-birds like **Wilson's Plover, Black Skimmer, Long-billed Curlew** and more.

After a delicious lunch, we'll start our drive towards Bijagua which sits close to the continental divide. Once we arrive at the lodge, we'll have the opportunity to bird around the gardens hoping to see **Black-crested**

Coquette, Collared Aracari, Scarlet-rumped Tanager and others. Thanks to a group of local families who joined forces to protect the land from deforestation, the lodge now protects 175+ acres of primary rainforest adjacent to Tenorio Volcano National Park. With the support of national and international organizations, a private reserve and ecotourism project were established. Today the lodge is 100% owned and operated by a group of local Costa Rican families.

Overnight: Heliconias Lodge

Day 4: Wednesday, April 17 La Ensenada Wildlife Refuge and Caño Negro

Early this morning we walk the forest trails, part of the lodge's private reserve. Here we have a good chance to find some highly sought after species like **Black-eared Wood-Quail(NT)**, **Canivet's Emerald**, **Crane Hawk**, **Collared-forest Falcon**, **Tody Motmot**, **Gartered Trogon**, and **Ivory-billed Woodcreeper**.

In the afternoon we drive to the Caño Negro area located further east, near the Nicaraguan border. After settling into the lodge, we'll walk around the property's grounds and nearby village which should offer good chances for some species like **Spot-breasted Wren**, **Gray-headed Dove**, **Rufous-winged Woodpecker**, **Great Potoo**, and hopefully **Royal Flycatcher**.

Overnight: Caño Negro Natural Lodge

Day 5: Thursday, April 18 Caño Negro National Wildlife Refuge

Today we'll enjoy two boat rides that will introduce us to the renowned Caño Negro National Wildlife Refuge, an internationally recognized Ramsar Site, protecting one of the most important wetlands in the World. During our tours we hope to find local specialties like **Nicaraguan Grackle^**, **Green-and-rufous Kingfisher**, **Roseate Spoonbill**, **Anhinga**, **Black-cheeked Woodpecker**, **Yellow-tailed Oriole**, **Green Ibis**, **Sungrebe**, and with some extra luck **Agami Heron(VU)**, **Jabiru Stork**, and **Nicaraguan Seed-Finch^**.

Overnight: Caño Negro Natural Lodge



Sungrebe © Jorge Obando



Jabiru Stork © Aardwolf6886



Green-and-Rufous Kingfisher © Becky Matsubara

Day 6: Friday, April 19 Caño Negro National Wildlife Refuge and Caribbean Coast

In the morning we have another boat tour, but this time in a different wetland called Medio Queso. Here we'll look for other local specialties like **Pinnated Bittern**, **Yellow-breasted Crake**, **Black-collared Hawk**, and more. Later in the morning we will continue our journey to the Sarapiquí area, arriving in the afternoon in time to bird around the lodge.

Overnight: Selva Verde Lodge

Day 7: Saturday, April 20 La Selva Biological Reserve

Today we'll meet a local guide who will share with us the history of La Selva Biological Station, one of the most important research facilities in the neotropics. During our visit, our local guide will help us seek out important species of the region like the endangered **Great Green Macaw(CR)**. Other representative species of this lowland rainforest include **Great Tinamou**, **Rufous Motmot**, **Stripe-breasted Wren**, **Pied Puffbird**, **Band-tailed Barbthroat**, **Slaty-tailed Trogon**, and the unique **Snowy Cotinga** among many more.

Overnight: Selva Verde Lodge

Day 8: Sunday, April 21 La Selva Biological Reserve and Braulio Carrillo National Park

A field trip today to Casa de Cope, a local self-taught nature artist. Together with his family, they have created a nature oasis on their small property. The bird feeders are visited by several species of tanager including **Golden-hooded Tanager**, as well as other species like **Shining Honeycreeper**, **Chestnut-headed Oropendola**, **Pale-vented Pigeon**, and **Orange-chinned Parakeet**. We'll also visit nearby properties hoping to see **Crested** and **Spectacled Owls**. In the afternoon we'll stop at Nectar & Pollen Gardens located in the buffer zone of Braulio Carrillo National Park; this site gives us a chance to see hummingbirds like **White-necked Jacobin**, **Green-crowned Brilliant**, **Bronze-tailed Plumeleteer**, **Crowned Woodnymph**, and hopefully **Snowcap** and **White-tipped Sicklebill**.



Snowcap © Andy Reago

Overnight: Selva Verde Lodge



Crimson-collared Tanager © Andy Morffew

Day 9: Monday, April 22 Mirador Cinchona and Alajuela

On our last day we'll stop at Mirador Cinchona to enjoy the spectacular views and check the bird feeders hoping to see **Prong-billed[^]** and **Red-headed Barbets**, **Crimson-collared Tanager**, and more hummingbirds such as the endemic **Coppery-headed Emerald^{*}**, and others like **White-bellied Mountain-gem[^]**, **Black-bellied Hummingbird[^]**, **Violet Sabrewing**, and **Green Thorntail**. We'll also visit Virgen del Socorro Road in search of **White Hawk**, **Tropical Parula**, **Sooty-faced Finch[^]**, and hopefully **Barred Hawk**. After a fantastic final day, we'll journey back to Alajuela and settle into our last hotel. This evening we'll get together for a farewell dinner and reminisce about all the great birds we had seen.

Overnight: Hotel Robledal

Day 10: Tuesday, April 23 Alajuela

Transfer to the airport for onward travel

LAND PRICE

\$2,820 per person, 12 people traveling
 \$3,120 per person, 10-11 people traveling
 \$3,480 per person, 8-9 people traveling
 \$3,720 per person, 6-7 people traveling

REGISTER

To reserve your place on this trip, please contact:
Toby Ross alighttours@gmail.com or (206) 552-3834
 A \$400 deposit is needed to secure your spot.

THE FINE PRINT

Price includes full-time wildlife guide, accommodation in standard rooms, meals and non-alcoholic drinks, entrance fees and activities as outlined in this itinerary, private transportation (with A/C), arrival and departure transfers, donations to local conservation NGO's, carbon offsets, and a Costa Rica Bird & Wildlife Checklist. The price does not include international flight, travel insurance, alcoholic drinks and gratuities.

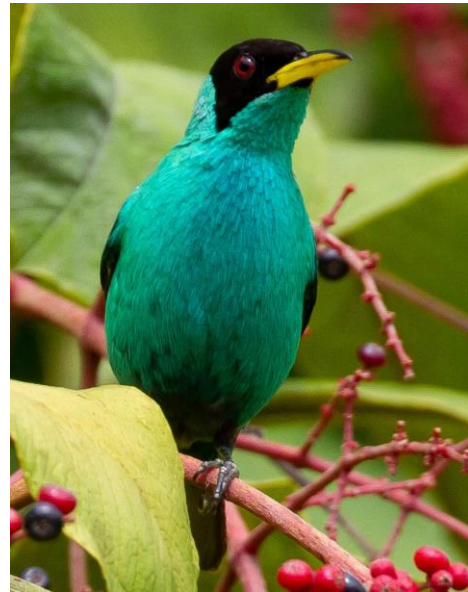
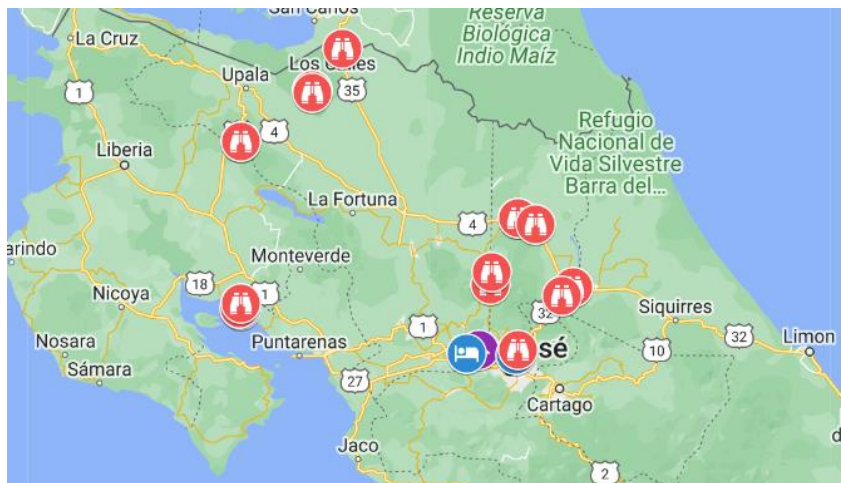
THE FINE PRINT cont.

Cost is based on double occupancy. Single rooms may be available for an additional cost of \$700pp. We will make every effort to match people who request to share with others seeking a roommate. The deadline for **final payment is November 30, 2023**. Deposits are refundable less \$100 cancellation fee up until the deadline. Cancellation after the deadline results in the forfeit of the deposit.

MAP

The map below depicts the locations visited during this program.

Interactive map: bit.ly/43XmvLf



Green Honeycreeper © Toby Ross









Anolis osa lizard © Toby Ross

EXTENSION








For those interested in extending their stay, there is an optional 5-day extension to the cloud forests of Monteverde and the Arenal volcano area where we hope to find **Resplendent Quetzals**, and **Three-wattled Bellbirds**, among many other upper elevation sp. See pages 7 - 10 for further details.

CONSERVATION CONNECTIONS

Your trip to Costa Rica will support conservation and sustainable development in a number of ways:

-  Employ expertly trained and knowledgeable Costa Rican wildlife guides.
-  Support the actions of a local non-profit organization that is helping conserve the endemic Cabanis's Ground-Sparrow and visit one of their field sites to observe the species in the wild.
-  Learn how the La Selva Biological Research Station became a world-renowned center for tropical biology research, producing 100s of scientific papers every year. You'll support this institution through entrance fees and donations to ensure students and scientists can continue their research.
-  Support local economies by creating a demand for expert wildlife guides, high quality lodging, restaurants, and staff, demonstrating that birds literally do mean business.
-  Alight Tours will offset the CO₂ from your air travel and in-country ground transportation across a portfolio of forest, biodiversity, clean energy, and blue carbon projects – this fee is included in the cost of this program.
-  Alight Tours will donate 3% of all profits from this trip to an in-country NGO that works to conserve birds, wildlife and the habitats they depend on.

KEY

-  Locally owned accommodation – so the money we spend on hotels and lodges remains in-country
-  Habitat surrounding hotel/lodge suitable for birding
-  Our stay directly contributes to conservation and/or supports sustainable community initiatives
-  Bird feeders located on the property
-  Internet available
-  Laundry service available
-  Swimming pool on site

* Endemic – a species only found in Costa Rica and nowhere else

^ Regional Endemic – endemic to Costa Rica plus neighboring Nicaragua and/or Panama

NT – Near Threatened – IUCN classification: nearly threatened with extinction

VU – Vulnerable – IUCN classification: a species that faces a high risk of extinction in the wild

EN – Endangered – IUCN classification: faces a very high risk of extinction

CR – Critically Endangered – IUCN classification: faces an extremely high risk of extinction

CARBON OFFSET

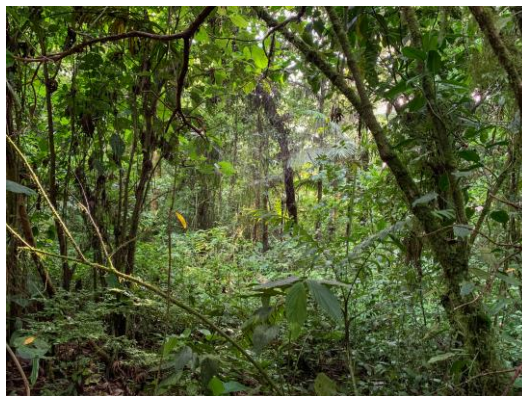
Climate change threatens all life on the planet, as well as the very destinations that ecotourism relies on. Tourism is responsible for roughly [8% of the world's carbon emissions](#), making it a significant contributor to climate change. A single return flight from Seattle to San Jose, Costa Rica produces about 1.5 metric tons of carbon emissions per passenger. That's **over a quarter** of the [amount of carbon](#) that the **average person worldwide produces per year** – just from one round trip flight.

Every time we fly on a plane, stay in a hotel, or ride in a car, carbon emissions are being generated. While there are many ways that you can and should minimize your carbon footprint while traveling (e.g. turning off the air conditioner and lights when not in your room), no matter how sustainable our travel habits are, certain CO₂ emissions are unavoidable. That's where carbon offsetting comes in. By calculating your carbon footprint, you can pay a small amount to an organization that supports a portfolio of forest, biodiversity, clean energy, and blue carbon projects that focus on capturing carbon and locking it away in the environment where it belongs.

Alight Tours is committed to reducing the negative impact its tourism activities have on the environment. We are partnering with Sustainable Travel International to offset all the carbon emissions every passenger has on every Alight Tours trip.



White-faced Capuchin © Toby Ross



Costa Rican rainforest © Toby Ross



Fiery-throated Hummingbird © Toby Ross



Three-wattled Bellbird © Jorge Obando

Costa Rica: Rainforest Extension

EXTENSION

Continue our exploration of Costa Rica, taking in the must-see birding locations of Monteverde and Arenal National Park. We'll seek out iconic species like the Resplendent Quetzal, Three-wattled Bellbird, and Bare-crowned Antbird. National Geographic describes Monteverde as one of the most biodiverse places on the planet; home to over 400 bird species - roughly half of all bird sp. in Costa Rica. We will also observe a bird banding session with the Monteverde Conservation Foundation. The magnificent Arenal Observatory Lodge will be our home for 2 nights, the only lodge within Arenal National Park. Originally built as a research station for scientists at the Smithsonian Institute, it now protects 865 acres of secondary forest containing over 500 species of bird.

Dates: April 22 – 27, 2024 (5 days)

Itinerary: [Map](#)

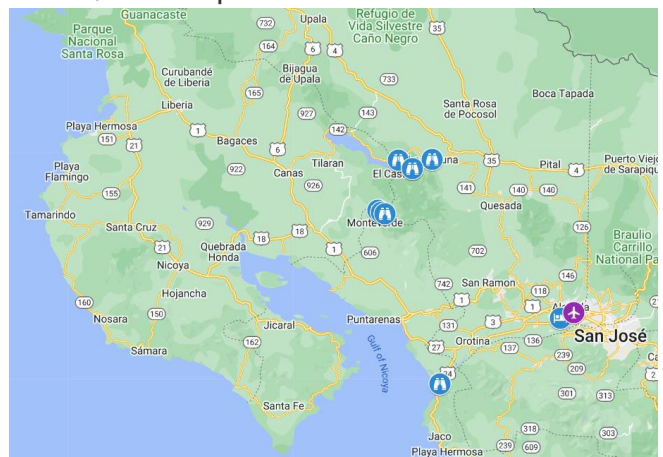
Cost: from \$1,320

In-country Guide: Jose Pablo Castillo

Potential Species: ~150



This program will involve early mornings, moderate-to-high intensity birding, with some rough terrain.









Day 1: Monday, April 22 **Bogarin Trails and Arenal**

After breakfast we'll say goodbye to our friends ending the tour here, and depart in our own vehicle towards the Arenal area. Along the way we'll stop at Bogarin Trails, a locally owned private reserve very close to La Fortuna and the Arenal Volcano. Here you'll look for **Keel-billed Motmot(VU)**, **White-throated** and **Uniform Crakes**, **Boat-billed Heron**, and **White-collared Manakin**, among other species. Following lunch at a local restaurant, we'll continue birding along La Peninsula Road hoping to see rare and uncommon species like **White-fronted Nunbird** and **Bare-crowned Antbird**. You will arrive at the prestigious Arenal Observatory Lodge later in the afternoon and settle in before dinner.










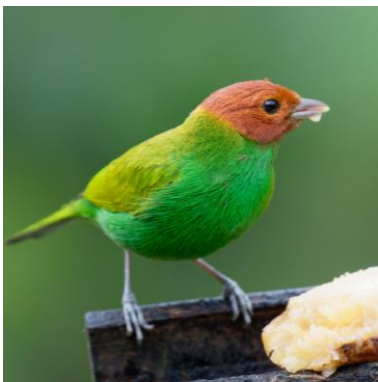
White-fronted Nunbird © Tim Lenz

Overnight: Arenal Observatory Lodge       

Day 2: Tuesday, April 23 **Arenal**

Today will be spent exploring the lodge's trails and gardens. The lodge has an impressive list of over 500 bird species recorded over the years. We'll be looking for sought after and difficult to find species such as **Bare-necked Umbrellabird(EN)^**, **Sharpbill**, and the extremely elusive **Rufous-vented Ground-Cuckoo(VU)**. We'll also be searching for "easier" targets like **Black-crested Coquette**, **Rufous-winged**, **Emerald** and **Bay-headed Tanagers**, **Great Curassow(VU)**, **Red-legged** and **Green Honeycreepers** which are regular visitors to the fruit feeders set up across from the lodge's restaurant.

Overnight: Arenal Observatory Lodge       



Bay-headed Tanager © Toby Ross



Great Curassow female © Toby Ross



Emerald Tanager © Mario Cordoba

Day 3: Wednesday, April 24 **Monteverde**

Departure after breakfast for Monteverde area, upon arrival we'll visit one of the local private reserves. We'll be looking for the iconic **Three-wattled Bellbird(VU)** as the primary target species, but we can find other representative birds like **Black-breasted Wood-Quail^**, **Highland Tinamou**, **Black Guan^**, **Purple-throated Mountain-Gem^**, **Coppery-headed Emerald***, **Prong-billed Barbet^**, **Northern Emerald Toucanet**, **Azure-hooded Jay**, **Ochraceous Wren^**, **Silvery-fronted Tapaculo^**, **Black-faced Solitaire^**, **Costa Rican Warbler^**. Cala Lodge is owned by a young Costa Rican couple who are focused on operating in the most sustainable way while ensuring their guests have a comfortable and relaxing stay.

Overnight: Cala Lodge    

Day 4: Thursday, April 25 **Monteverde**

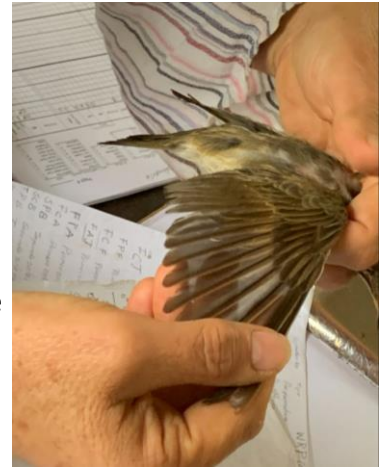
This morning we will observe a bird banding session with the Monteverde Conservation Foundation. The Foundation is dedicated to the protection and restoration of habitat for endangered species, with the range restricted **Three-wattled Bellbird**(VU) as its flagship species. We will also visit a reforestation project and attend a brief talk on the conservation work of the Foundation.



Resplendent Quetzal © Jorge Obando

Monteverde was originally founded by Quaker families who moved there from Alabama in the 1950's, seeking a peaceful place to live and carry on with their lives. As part of their vision, they protected the high-elevation cloud forest, forest that later became the reserves found in the area today. In the afternoon we'll spend a few hours exploring another reserve hoping to see other local specialties like **Resplendent Quetzal**(NT), **Ornate Hawk-Eagle**(NT), **White-fronted Parrot**, **White-eared Ground-Sparrow**, **Long-tailed Manakin**, **Elegant Euphonia**, and **Chiriqui Quail-Dove**^.

Overnight: Cala Lodge



Bird-banding in Monteverde © Toby Ross

Day 5: Friday, April 26 **Carara National Park**

After an early breakfast we'll head to Carara National Park located in the central Pacific region. Carara is one of Costa Rica's most important national parks due to its geographic location, protecting the last remnant of north-south transitional forest. The park sits right along the convergence zone between the dry north Pacific and the very wet south Pacific region. Here we will look for **Slaty-tailed Trogon**, **Streak-chested Antpitta**, **Rufous Piha**, and **Rufous-and-White Wren**. The park is also home to the second largest population of **Scarlet Macaw** in the country.

Later in the day we'll explore some of the nearby Tropical Dry Forest areas in search of **Scrub Euphonia**, **Ruddy Quail-Dove**, **Red-capped Manakin**, **Stripe-headed Sparrow**, **Turquoise-browed Motmot**, **Ferruginous Pygmy Owl** and more. We'll then return to Alajuela in the late afternoon and check in to the final hotel of the trip. This evening we'll enjoy a farewell dinner and review our amazing birding adventure.

Overnight: Hotel Robledal

Day 6: Saturday, April 27 **Alajuela**

Transfer to the airport for onward travel



Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl © Becky Matsubara

LAND PRICE

\$1,320 per person, 12 people traveling
 \$1,380 per person, 10-11 people traveling
 \$1,550 per person, 8-9 people traveling
 \$1,660 per person, 6-7 people traveling

REGISTER








To reserve your place on this extension, please contact:
Toby Ross alighttours@gmail.com or (206) 552-3834
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THE FINE PRINT

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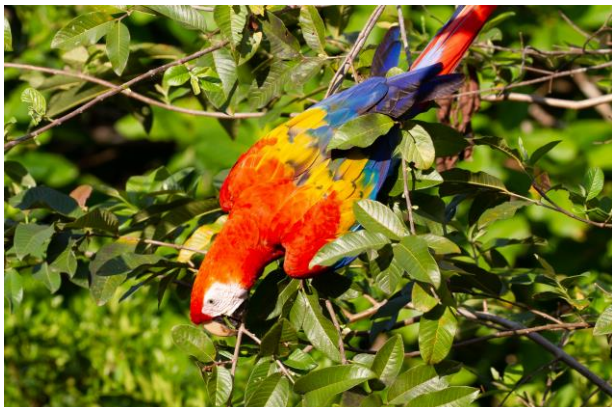
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EN – Endangered – IUCN classification: a species that faces a very high risk of extinction in the wild

This program is presented in partnership with Crescentia Expeditions, a small Costa Rican owned and operated travel company.



Scarlet Macaw © Toby Ross