



Agami Heron © Laura Wolf

## Costa Rica: Migration Along the Caribbean Coast

Discover Costa Rica's extraordinary birdlife and rich natural heritage on this unforgettable 11-day birdwatching tour. Your journey will focus on the country's finest birding locations along the Caribbean slope during peak fall migration. You'll experience the canals of Tortuguero National Park, the trails of Cahuita National Park, and the world-renowned La Selva Biological Research Station. We'll also visit the Keköldi Indigenous Reserve to witness its community-managed Hawk Watch, where thousands of migrating raptors are recorded each day during migration. Led by an expert local guide, we'll explore a remarkable range of habitats in search of endemic species and a dazzling array of Central American specialties, while gaining insight into the inspiring conservation efforts helping to safeguard these birds and their habitats for generations to come.

**Dates:** October 2 – 12, 2026 (11 days)

**Map:** <http://bit.ly/4q3ny69>

**Price:** from \$4,450

**Potential Species:** ~250

### TRIP HIGHLIGHTS

- Explore the waterways of Tortuguero NP by boat searching for Agami Herons, Sungrebes, and Amazon Kingfishers
- Visit the Sea Turtle Conservancy and learn about community-led monitoring of the world's largest Green Sea Turtle population
- Bird the rich biodiversity of La Selva Biological Research Station
- Observe a community-managed Hawk Watch station on indigenous Keköldi land
- Seek out Bare-necked Umbrellabird, Great Green Macaw, and Snowcap



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

## TOUR OVERVIEW

This birding tour explores Costa Rica's Caribbean lowlands and southern coast during the height of southbound migration, when the region plays a vital role in sustaining millions of moving birds. The itinerary highlights raptor migration, migrant passerines, and resident lowland species, linking prime observation points with ecologically-rich forest, wetland, and coastal habitats that serve as essential stopover and wintering areas. Visits to long-established monitoring sites, biological research stations, and community-managed reserves provide deeper insight into migration corridors, habitat connectivity, and the on-the-ground conservation efforts helping to protect birds across the Neotropics. This thoughtfully paced tour maximizes birding while allowing for rest and reflection, the tour offers immersive, unrushed birding alongside a meaningful understanding of why these landscapes matter.

### Day 1: Friday, 2 October 2026

#### Arrival in San José

Welcome to Costa Rica, the country of Pura Vida! Upon arrival at San José's international airport, we transfer about 30-40 minutes to our hotel in the Central Valley. Providing an opportunity to stretch after travel, you can take a walk in the lush hotel grounds, offering an easy introduction to Costa Rican avifauna. Typical species include **Lesson's Motmot**, **Hoffmann's^** and **Lineated Woodpeckers**, **Cinnamon-bellied Saltator**, **Rufous-backed** and **Cabanis's Wrens**, **White-eared Ground-Sparrow^**, **Crimson-fronted Parakeet**, **Brown Jay**, **Chestnut-capped Warbler**, and if you're lucky **Gray-cowled Wood-rail** can be found. Sometimes you can also find **Mottled Owl** in the bamboo thickets. Later, we'll gather for a trip orientation and then enjoy a welcome dinner at the hotel's restaurant. The Central Valley sits at mid-elevation, with mild temperatures and frequent but brief afternoon showers at this time of year.

Accommodation: Hotel Bougainvillea, San José 

### Day 2: Saturday, 3 October 2026

#### Tortuguero and Sea Turtle Conservancy

We begin the day early, traveling northeast over the Central Volcanic range and down to the Caribbean lowlands toward Tortuguero. The route follows a gradual descent from foothill forest into broad wetland plains, a transition that reveals the country's diverse elevation gradient within just a few hours. With breakfast en route, the drive continues through extensive agricultural landscapes dominated by banana plantations before reaching the lowland canal system. Tortuguero is only accessible by boat, and depending on water levels, we may use one of two different boarding docks. The combined drive and boat transfer typically takes 2-3 hours. The boat ride offers productive wildlife viewing, with several species of **egrets** and **herons** along the waterways, **Mangrove Swallows** overhead, and occasional sightings of American Crocodile, Spectacled Caiman, and Spider Monkey along the banks. Upon arrival, we reach our lodge surrounded by flooded forest and blackwater lagoons. After lunch at the lodge's restaurant, we'll visit the Sea Turtle Conservancy, where community-led monitoring and decades of beach protection have made this one of the region's most successful conservation models.



Lesson's Motmot © Ryan Candee

## Day 2: Saturday, 3 October 2026 cont.

Birding later in the day we'll hope to see **Montezuma Oropendola**, **Keel-billed Toucan(NT)**, and **Red-lored Amazon** in the canopy. While along the beachside scrub **Bay-breasted Warbler**, **Bank Swallow**, and other passage migrants will be moving through on their way south. Conditions in October are warm and humid, with a short but reliable dry window along the coast. This evening we'll enjoy a delicious dinner and review the bird checklist before retiring to bed.

Accommodation: Evergreen Lodge, Tortuguero



## Day 3: Sunday, 4 October 2026

## Tortuguero National Park &amp; Canal Boat Trip

Today we start with an early morning walk around the lodge grounds to find species active at dawn, including **Scarlet-rumped Cacique**, **Slaty-tailed Tropicbird**, and **Golden-hooded Tanager**. After breakfast, we'll board the boat for our first tour of the day. The morning circuit follows quiet

side channels through flooded forest where **Sungrebe**, **Boat-billed Heron**, and **Northern Jacana** are often seen at close range, and if we're really lucky **Agami Heron(NT)**, while **Green** and **Amazon Kingfishers** work the shaded banks. Mid-day brings a short break and lunch at the lodge before we return to the canals for an afternoon session, focusing on open stretches of water that can produce raptors such as **Common Black Hawk**, migrant swallows moving along the coastal corridor, and additional targets that may include **White-necked Puffbird** and **Green Ibis**. The day concludes with a review of sightings on our bird checklists and final preparation for tomorrow's transfer to our next destination.

Accommodation: Evergreen Lodge, Tortuguero



Bay-breasted Warbler © Bill Majoros



## Day 4: Monday, 5 October 2026

## Tortuguero to South Caribbean Coast

After breakfast we leave the flooded forest and head back by boat to the tour bus we left at the dock. The return boat ride will provide excellent birding with chances for **Anhinga**, **Gray Hawk**, **Bare-throated Tiger-Heron**, and with some luck **Great Potoo** along the way. Once back on land, we stop for lunch en route before continuing by road toward the south Caribbean coast, followed by a 2.5 hours drive to the lodge. The route crosses a mix of banana plantations, forest remnants, and low wetlands before reaching the Gandoca-Manzanillo area, one of the most biologically diverse



White-necked Puffbird © Toby Ross

zones in the country. After checking-in to our hotel, we explore nearby coastal forest and lodge gardens, often finding **Collared Aracari**, **Black-cheeked Woodpecker**, **Tawny-crested Tanager**, and along the adjacent shore we have chances to see passing migrants in large numbers, like **Eastern Kingbirds** and several **swallow** species.

**Day 4: Monday, 5 October 2026 cont.**

October here is typically among the driest months for the region, though short, localized showers remain possible. We'll end this day of travel with dinner and a review of our growing bird list.

Accommodation: Almonds & Corals, Manzanillo

**Day 5: Tuesday, 6 October 2026 Keköldi Hawk Watch and Gandoca–Manzanillo Refuge**

After an early breakfast we depart for the Keköldi Indigenous Reserve, home to one of the top five raptor migration count sites in the Americas, where local monitors run the well-established, community-managed, hawk watch station. Established in 2000, seasonal totals here regularly reach three *million* individual raptors, making it one of the most important migration monitoring locations in the region. Access to the observation tower involves an approximately one mile hike on dirt trails with a gradual, steady climb; the pace is slow and manageable, with time to pause for birding and rest. From the ridge lookout, the morning sky often fills with **Swainson's Hawks**, **Broad-winged Hawks**, **Mississippi Kites**, **Peregrine Falcons** and **Turkey Vultures** riding the thermals in coordinated waves of migration. The surrounding forest adds diversity with species such as **Long-billed Hermit**, **Lattice-tailed Tropicbird**, and **Black-crowned Antshrike**. After lunch we continue to the Gandoca–Manzanillo Refuge, walking flat coastal trails bordered by mixed forest and palms that hold an assortment of **antbirds**, **manakins**, and **tanagers** typical of the southern Caribbean lowlands. We return to the lodge in the late afternoon after experiencing one of the most dynamic migration days of the trip.

Accommodation: Almonds & Corals, Manzanillo



Hawk Migration © Mario Cordoba



Mississippi Kite © Bill Shreve



Long-billed Hermit © Melissa McMasters

**Day 6: Wednesday, 7 October 2026****Cahuita National Park**

Today we'll spend the morning in Cahuita National Park, exploring a mix of forested areas and open sections within the park rather than focusing on a single trail. This route provides excellent opportunities for close views of **Gray-headed Chachalaca**, **Bay Wren**, **Black-faced Antthrush**, **Cocoa Woodcreeper**, and **Purple-throated Fruitcrow**, with possibilities for **King Vulture** overhead, and **Scarlet Tanager** and **Hooded Warbler** moving through during migration. The trail is flat and well-maintained under the joint management of park staff and local community groups working on coastal habitat conservation.

After a break for lunch, we'll spend the afternoon birding along the nearby Recope Road, a great birding location with lowland Caribbean forest and former shaded cacao farms. It offers excellent viewing of



Graceful Black-throated Trogon © Toby Ross

## Day 6: Wednesday, 7 October 2026 cont.

Graceful **Black-throated Trogon** and local specialities including **Cinnamon Woodpecker**, **Spot-crowned Antvireo**, and the rarely encountered **Slaty-backed Forest-Falcon**. For those who would like a slower afternoon, they can enjoy a relaxing time at the hotel pool and spa. We'll return to the lodge later in the afternoon, have dinner, review the checklist, and prepare for our return north to our next destination.

*Accommodation: Almonds & Corals, Manzanillo*



## Day 7: Thursday, 8 October 2026

**South Caribbean Coast, Sarapiquí, and Veragua Rainforest**

After breakfast, we will travel north this morning (4 hours), leaving the coast for the interior lowlands. En route, we stop at Veragua Rainforest near Siquirres, a private conservation and research center that protects a significant remnant of Caribbean foothill forest. Trails and gardens here offer excellent birding, with possibilities for **Snowcap**<sup>^</sup>, **Broad-billed Motmot**, and **Crested Guan**(NT), as well as very active mixed species flocks. Raptors such as **Black Hawk-Eagle** and **White Hawk** are occasionally encountered. Although never guaranteed, there is also the chance of finding the uncommon **Bare-necked Umbrellabird**(EN)<sup>^</sup> or **Great Jacamar**. After lunch, we continue toward Sarapiquí, arriving by mid-afternoon for a short walk around the lodge grounds. Typical species around the lodge include **Mealy** and **Red-lored Amazon**, **Gartered Violaceous Trogons**, **Yellow-throated Toucan**, **Cinnamon Becard**, and **Chestnut-headed Oropendola**, with **Fasciated Tiger-Heron** sometimes seen along the river. October along this slope often brings alternating sun and light showers, with generally warm and humid conditions.

*Accommodation: Selva Verde Lodge, Sarapiquí*



## Day 8: Friday, 9 October 2026

**Lapa Verde Refuge and Eco Vida Project**

Another early departure after breakfast takes us to the Lapa Verde Refuge, a private property comprising a mix of habitats including primary and secondary rainforest, grassland, marshes, and lagoons, resulting in very high biodiversity. We will learn from one of the refuge staff about the partnership with the Ecovida Foundation, widely recognized for its long-term conservation work focused on the critically endangered **Great Green Macaw**(CR), a species that is recovering after many years of hard work.



Bare-necked Umbrellabird © Mario Cordoba



Snowcap © Andy Reago

The refuge plays a key role in protecting remaining lowland forest, and maintaining habitat connectivity within the refuge is essential to sustaining the San Juan-La Selva corridor, one of the most important biological links between protected areas in northern Costa Rica. Active management here includes forest restoration, nest monitoring, and long-term population tracking aimed at stabilizing and increasing **Great Green Macaw(CR)** numbers.

The site also serves as an important monitoring point for migrating raptors, contributing seasonal data on movements through the Caribbean lowlands. From the refuge's observation tower we scan for migrant raptors

such as **Sharp-shinned** and **Broad-winged Hawks**, while forest edges below often produce **Great Green Macaw(CR)**, **Pied Puffbird**, and **Brown-capped Tyrannulet**.

We will return to the lodge for lunch, and then explore Selva Verde's extensive trails and gardens, where the mix of mature forest and second growth supports **Collared Aracari**, **Yellow-crowned Euphonia<sup>^</sup>**, **Crimson-collared**, **Summer**, and **Scarlet-rumped Tanagers**, **Red-throated Ant-Tanager**, **White-collared Manakin**, and both **Slaty-tailed** and **Gartered Violaceous Trogons**, as well as a host of **hummingbird** species like **Rufous-tailed Hummingbird**, **Long-billed Starthroat** and both **Stripe-throated** and **Long-billed Hermits**. Established in 1985, the lodge remains one of Costa Rica's early examples of tourism directly supporting land conservation and community engagement.

Accommodation: Selva Verde Lodge, Sarapiquí



#### Day 9: Saturday, 10 October 2026 La Selva Biological Research Station

Today we start at sunrise for an early entry to La Selva Biological Station, a research station managed by the Organization for Tropical Studies. This 1,500 ha reserve protects a critical portion of Caribbean lowland rainforest and is widely regarded as one of the most important birding and research sites in Central America, with decades of continuous biological study. The station serves as one of the world's best-studied tropical research sites and researchers publish more than 200 scientific papers each year based on their work at the station.

Birding follows a network of wide trails and access roads that cut through primary forest, allowing opportunities for **Great Curassow(VU)**, **Great Tinamou**, **Rufous Motmot**, and **Chestnut-colored Woodpecker**. Fruiting trees attract **Snowy Cotinga**, **Red-capped Manakin**, and **Orange-billed Sparrow**, while more familiar migrants such as **Swainson's Thrush** and **Baltimore Oriole** move through the canopy. Lunch and a mid-day break is built into the schedule before we continue into the afternoon around the property, focusing on open areas and river margins.



Great Green Macaw © Hans Norelius



Orange-billed Sparrow © Andy Reago

**Day 9:** Saturday, 10 October 2026 *cont.*

After a great day in the field, we'll head back to the lodge to relax, review our growing bird checklist, and enjoy a buffet dinner.

*Accommodation:* Selva Verde Lodge, Sarapiquí

**Day 10:** Sunday, 11 October 2026      **Central Highlands and Poás**

We depart Sarapiquí after breakfast, climbing gradually into the Central Highlands through changing elevations and vegetation zones. Our first stop is Poás Volcano National Park, where cloud forest meets open páramo scrub and a different suite of highland bird species appears. The mix of hummingbirds here often includes **Fiery-throated Hummingbird**<sup>^</sup>, **Volcano Hummingbird**<sup>^</sup>, and **Purple-throated Mountain-gem**<sup>^</sup>, with **Black Guan**<sup>^</sup> and **Sooty Thrush**<sup>^</sup> working the forest edge. Continuing downslope to Cinchona, we stop at a few roadside viewpoints and local feeders that support small family-run businesses that offer close views of **Prong-billed**<sup>^</sup> and **Red-headed Barbets**, **Violet Sabrewing**, and the Costa Rica endemic **Coppery-headed Emerald**<sup>\*</sup>. Timing and light are managed carefully along this route to balance birding and travel before returning to the Central Valley by late afternoon. This evening we'll review the bird checklist for the last time, have a great meal, and discuss the highlights of our amazing tour of the Caribbean Coast and the wonders of bird migration.

*Accommodation:* Hotel Robledal, Alajuela



Volcano Hummingbird © Chris Jimenez



Violet Sabrewing © Becky Matsubara



Firey-throated Hummingbird © Toby Ross

**Day 11:** Monday, 12 October 2026**Departure**

Transfer to the airport for onward travel.

**LAND PRICE**

\$4,450 per person - 9-10 people traveling  
\$4,900 per person - 7-8 people traveling  
\$5,300 per person - 5-6 people traveling

**REGISTER**

To reserve your place on this trip, please contact:  
**Toby Ross** [alighttours@gmail.com](mailto:alighttours@gmail.com) or (206) 552-3834  
A \$600 deposit is needed to secure your spot.

## THE FINE PRINT

**WHAT'S INCLUDED:** Price includes full-time wildlife guide, accommodation in standard rooms, all meals and non-alcoholic drinks, park entrance fees, and activities outlined in this itinerary, private transportation (with A/C), arrival and departure airport transfers, donations to local conservation organizations, and a Costa Rica Bird & Wildlife Checklist.

**WHAT'S NOT INCLUDED:** The price does not include international flights, travel visas, travel insurance, alcoholic drinks, gratuities, and camera permits (if required).

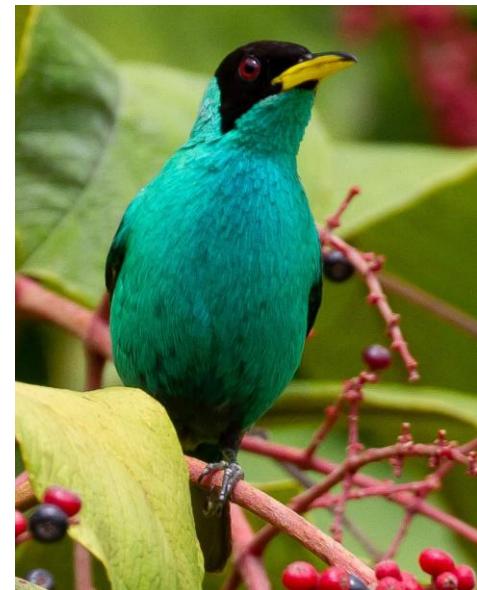
**GRATUITIES:** If you prefer, the tour leader can take care of all tips and gratuities during this tour at an additional cost. Please speak to your tour leader for further details.

**PAYMENTS:** A deposit of \$600 is required to reserve your place on this tour. **The deadline for final payment is July 1, 2026.** If the trip has not met the minimum number of travelers (5) by the deadline (July 1, 2026), you will be refunded 100% of your deposit and the trip will be canceled. If you cancel your participation in the trip before the final payment deadline, there is a \$150 cancellation fee that will be deducted from your deposit, and the remainder will be refunded. If you cancel after the July 1, 2026 deadline, you will forfeit 100% of your deposit and any trip-related costs that have already been expended by Alight Tours and any travel partners. Alight Tours will not be held responsible for any lost expenses or fees paid by the traveler should the trip not depart; these include, but are not limited to flights, additional hotel bookings, travel visas, and travel insurance. It is therefore advised that you purchase insurance that will cover the cost of trip cancellation.

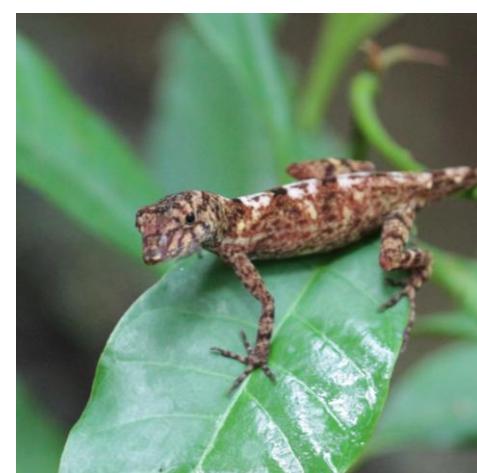
**SINGLE TRAVELERS:** Price is based on double occupancy. Single rooms may be available for an additional cost of \$800pp. We will make every effort to match people who request to share with others seeking a roommate.

**NOTE:** Specific locations and activities detailed in this itinerary are subject to change based on field conditions, wildlife movements, and local logistics. If changes are required, a like-for-like alternative will be arranged.

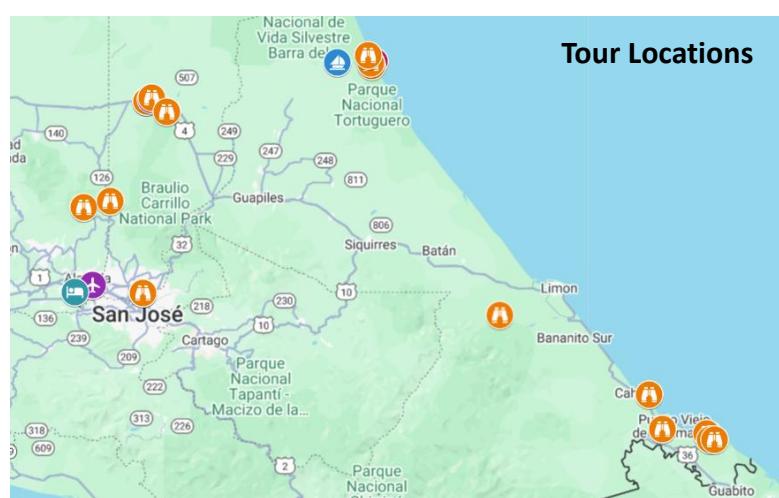
**MAP:** The map on the right shows the locations of accommodation, activities, and birding sites visited during this tour. An interactive map can be found at this [HERE](#).



Green Honeycreeper © Toby Ross



Anolis osa lizard © Toby Ross

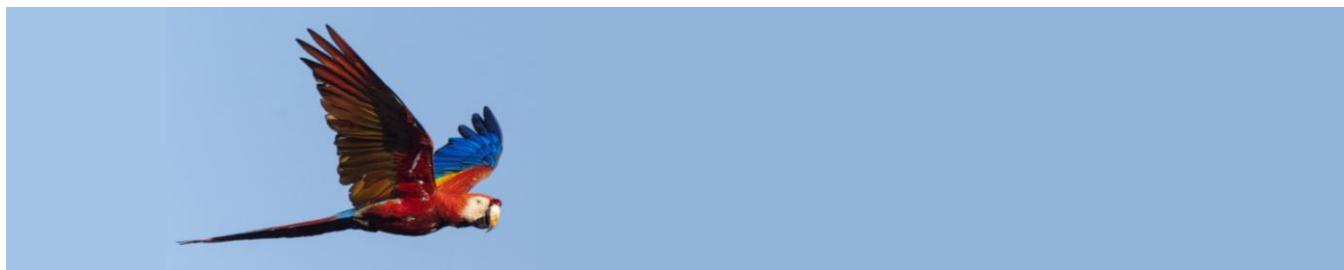


## CARBON OFFSET

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. Every time we fly, stay in a hotel, or ride in a car, carbon emissions are being generated. A single return flight from Seattle to San Jose, Costa Rica produces about 1.5 metric tons of carbon emissions per passenger. That's nearly a third of the [amount of carbon](#) that the average person worldwide produces per year (4.7 t) – just from one round trip flight.

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 CO<sub>2</sub> 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 CO<sub>2</sub> and locking it away in the environment where it belongs.

Alight Tours is committed to minimizing the environmental impacts of its tourism activities and is partnering with [Sustainable Travel International](#) to offset all in-country CO<sub>2</sub> emissions for every passenger on every Alight Tours trip.



Scarlet Macaw © Roland Kilcher

## 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 bird and wildlife guides.
- Support indigenous communities at the forefront of conservation science, where locally-led monitoring of migratory birds plays a key role in safeguarding a globally important Neotropical migration hotspot.
- Engage with Sea Turtle Conservancy staff to learn how community-based beach protection is safeguarding nesting Green Sea Turtles.
- Explore the history and impact of La Selva Biological Research Station, a cornerstone of tropical research, where entrance fees and visitor contributions directly sustain conservation science and the next generation of biologists.
- Help sustain local communities by supporting expert wildlife guides, drivers, and responsible tourism businesses, demonstrating that protecting birds and ecosystems delivers meaningful economic benefits.
- Alight Tours will offset the CO<sub>2</sub> from your in-country ground transportation across a portfolio of forest, biodiversity, clean energy, and blue carbon projects.
- Alight Tours will donate 3% of all profits from this trip to an in-country non-profit organization that works to conserve birds, wildlife, and the habitats they depend on.



White-faced Capuchin © Toby Ross



Costa Rican rainforest © Toby Ross



Jabiru © Aardwolf6886

## KEY

-  Locally owned accommodation – so the money we spend on accommodation 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
-  Ceiling or floor fan in room
-  Air conditioning in room
-  Restaurant on site
-  Spa and/or gym facilities available (usually at additional cost)

\* 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



Sungrebe © Jorge Obando



Tortuguero © Michiel Van Balen