

Costa Rican Rainforest — It's for the Birds

By Chris Higgins, Margo Malcolm & Jamie Gripich

Staring up into the rainforest canopy, it's almost like looking into a living Impressionist painting. Your eyes are dazzled by the flash of colors, your ears picking up the squawks and screeches of green and blue colored Macaws, orange and green Motmots, and multi-hued Toucans.

You're in Central America's first bird route. Now the 400-plus bird species that inhabit the Sarapiquí region of Costa Rica will have a greater chance of survival, and birders from around the world a chance to see these grand winged masters of the sky.

At roughly the size of West Virginia, Costa Rica has a greater variety of bird species than all of North America. It is home to 5% of all the world's known animal and plant species, including 850 bird species.

The Costa Rican Bird Route consists of 12 birding sites, linking to offer a variety of bird watching opportunities and programs in the San Juan—La Selva Biological Corridor of northeastern Costa Rica.

Birdwatching is the fastest-growing outdoor activity in the U.S., and according to a survey by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 51.3 million Americans report that they watch birds. And more are taking it up all the time.

The first of its kind in Central America, the Bird Route not only gives visitors access to primary rainforest, but also gives land owners access to tourism income and an alternative income to other activities that are not as environmentally sustainable.

Selva Verde Lodge and Rainforest Reserve, a pioneer of the eco-tourism movement in Costa Rica, was founded in 1985 by the current proprietor's mother, who purchased the 500-plus acres to protect and conserve the land.

The Great Green Macaw is an important part of the preservation effort. Fewer than 200 of these birds remain in Costa Rica, as its habitat is being destroyed.



The Great Green Macaw is an endangered species.

At one time, almendo (almond) trees were quite common in Costa Rica, but illegal logging has cut the numbers down severely. This poses a formidable threat to the Green Macaw, which uses the tree for nesting and mating. Protecting the bird's habitat also protects 515 bird, 139 mammal, 135 reptile and 80 amphibian, and countless plant species in the region.

Selva Verde does have one award-winning 600-year-old almond tree, enormous at 177 feet high and 46 feet around. It was already a mature tree when the Spanish came to the Americas in the late 1400s.

Established sites, such as Selva Verde, already offer comfortable accommodation and day trips to remote bird route sites, plantations, volcanoes, caves and waterfalls. For the adventurous there are white water rafting, horseback riding and a treetop zipline tour over the rainforest and river.

The Sarapiquí Conservation Learning Center offers classes in Spanish, Latin dances, crafts, cooking empanadas and other Costa Rican dishes, and opportu-



The Oro Pendula is fond of the lower areas of the rainforest.

nities to help on conservation projects.

The newly created birding sites will offer a more remote experience. Birders will get off the beaten path and be able to explore new areas and meet Costa Ricans not previously part of the tourism industry.

IF YOU GO:

Costa Rican Bird Route
www.costaricanbirdroute.com
 Phone: 608-698-3448
 Selva Verde Lodge
www.selvaverde.com
 Phone: 1-800-451-7111
 E-mail: info@selvaverde.com
 Address: c/o Holbrook Travel
 3540 NW 13th St.
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