

# Tortuguero Integrated Bird Monitoring Project Bird-a-Thon: November 20, 2008

Compiled by Jared Wolfe

The pueblo of Tortuguero began to flood the night before our scheduled bird-a-thon. Our crew was unaware that this particular wet season was destined to shatter all previous precipitation records. The provincial capital city, Puerto Limon, would eventually flood leaving a humanitarian crisis and multitudes of people homeless. Despite the inevitable outcome of the fierce weather, we were poised to bird several locations from foot, kayak, motorboat and bus. In order to ensure a successful birding trip, I had staked out territories of rare or cryptic species over the past several weeks: a Boat-billed Heron roost, White-whiskered Puffbird territory, Great Green Macaw routes, Stripe-breasted Wren, and an area where army ant swarms are often encountered. Army ants provide foraging opportunities for species which consume prey fleeing marauding ant swarms. With a little luck and some ants, we could pick-up a Spotted Antbird, or, with a lot of luck and ants, we could encounter an extremely rare and little understood species, the Rufous-vented Ground Cuckoo.

Coffee, corn flakes and grey skies greeted us at sunrise. We quickly picked-up common resident and migrant species around the dormitory and kitchen area: Common Tody-flycatchers, Lesser Greenlits, and Variable Seedeaters all moved restlessly through the trees. Slogging through inundated trails I heard an Acadian Flycatcher calling incessantly; Great-crested Flycatchers moved a-top the coastal scrub feeding on *Conostegia xalapensis*, a prolific species of plant that produces dark-blue, sugar-rich fruit. Below the flycatcher, a banded Prothonotary Warbler skulked through coastal scrub also feeding on fruit. This particular bird had not moved further south or inland and would be spending its winter here in Tortuguero. I continually wiped rain from my binocular lenses as we entered the National Park.

Mixed-species foraging flocks filled the canopy as we trekked deep into Tortuguero National Park. Within these flocks, resident birds associate with migrants, while all flocking-birds follow 'flock leaders.' 'Nucleus species' or 'flock leaders' typically have acute eyesight; flock members capitalize on their leader's visual acuity in order to avoid aerial predators and other threats. One particular flock was comprised of several migrants, including a Canada Warbler, which was rapidly gleaning insects from foliage. This particular flock was led by a Western Slaty Antshrike. Deep within the park, we eventually laid binoculars on a White-whiskered Puffbird, my friend Kevin's 'life' Bucconid. The avian family Bucconidae is interesting and understudied: predominantly ground nesting, some species are highly social, apparently living in family groups (e.g. White-fronted Nunbird). The exact nature of their social behavior is not understood. After our admirations drove the Puffbird out of sight, we happened upon an army ant swarm. Bicolored and Chestnut-backed Antbirds excitedly darted back and forth, while a Plain-brown Woodcreeper capitalized on escaping insects. I withdrew my iPod and speaker, positioned the playback within the middle of the swarm, and began playing Spotted Antbird calls. Within minutes, a single Spotted Antbird flew into the clearing obviously intrigued by the phantom intruder. Content with our growing species list, we switched our focus from landbirds to water birds; we left the park and entered the pueblo of Tortuguero in order to acquire a canoe.

With only hours before our water taxi was scheduled to depart for Cariari, we entered the complex network of canals south of the Pueblo. Hummingbirds drank nectar from flowers protruding from the canopy, exposed by the fragmentary nature of the waterways in which we traveled. One Boat-billed Heron and an unexpected Yellow-crowned Night-heron awoke from their diurnal slumber to the sound of our chatter. Unable to contain my excitement, I focused everyone's attention on the Purple-crowned Fairy that danced among the *Calathea* blossoms. With only an hour to spare before our taxi's scheduled departure, we returned to the Pueblo.

Afternoon thunderstorms produced torrential rain showers; luckily, our taxi had clear plastic windows somewhat conducive to wildlife viewing. Herons, egrets and a laughing falcon rewarded our tenacity. After several nautical hours, locals and a small group of birders spilled off the boat, onto a muddy embankment and into an idling bus bound for Cariari. More species were identified from the speeding bus: Red-breasted Blackbirds roosted on fence posts and White-crowned Parrots relaxed on a snag. Cariari brought pastries, coffee and quality second-growth bird communities behind the bus station. "All we need is a fruiting tree, which should not be hard to find" I told my weary crew, because fruit masts are often synchronized when exposed to weeks of heavy precipitation. Our tree was found, full of fruit and brilliant bird species: Golden-Hooded Tanager, Painted Bunting and a striking male Barred Antshrike. After several hours of birding, the Cariari bus station patch was exhausted and so were we. Our descent from Brauillo Carillo into the Central Valley and San Jose was masked in darkness. Latin buses were not designed for lanky Caucasians; despite this innate discomfort, I tallied our day's bounty by headlamp: 114 species. Not bad. After we piled out of the taxi and into our hostel, I tallied our means of transportation: 1 canoe, 1 boat, 1 bus, 1 taxi. Not bad. In the smoky hostel courtyard, a mixed species flock was forming comprised of Europeans, Americans and Latins. Above the perpetual noise associated with tales of travels, flooding, beer drinking, and laughter, I could hear the resident Rufous-collared Sparrow singing one last ballad before he and I retired for the evening. Species number: 115. Not bad.

<b>Species</b>	<b>Location</b>
Acadian Flycatcher	Tortuguero (CCC, Pueblo)
Amazon Kingfisher	Canal (Water Taxi, Kayak) (Water Taxi)
American Redstart	Tortuguero (CCC, Pueblo)
American Pygmy Kingfisher	Canal (Water Taxi, Kayak) (Water Taxi)
Anhinga	Canal (Water Taxi, Kayak) (Water Taxi)
Baltimore Oriole	Tortuguero (CCC, Pueblo)
Bare-throated Tiger-heron	Canal (Water Taxi, Kayak) (Water Taxi)
Barn Swallow	Tortuguero (CCC, Pueblo)
Barred Antshrike	Tortuguero Nat'l Park
Barred Woodcreeper	Tortuguero (CCC, Pueblo)
Bat falcon	Canal (Water Taxi, Kayak) (Water Taxi)
Bay Wren	Tortuguero Nat'l Park
Bicolored Antbird	Tortuguero Nat'l Park
Black Vulture	Tortuguero (CCC, Pueblo)
Black-cowled Oriole	Tortuguero (CCC, Pueblo)
Blue-gray Tanager	Tortuguero (CCC, Pueblo)
Boat-billed Flycatcher	Tortuguero (CCC, Pueblo)
Boat-billed Heron	Canal (Water Taxi, Kayak) (Water Taxi)
Brown Pelican	Beach
Buff-throated Saltator	Tortuguero (CCC, Pueblo)
Canada Warbler	Tortuguero (CCC, Pueblo)
Cattle Egret	Canal (Water Taxi, Kayak) (Water Taxi)
Chestnut-backed Antbird	Tortuguero Nat'l Park
Chestnut-mandibled Toucan	Tortuguero Nat'l Park
Chestnut-sided Warbler	Tortuguero (CCC, Pueblo)
Chimney Swift	Tortuguero (CCC, Pueblo)
Cinnamon Teal	Canal (Water Taxi, Kayak) (Water Taxi)
Clay-colored Robin	Tortuguero (CCC, Pueblo)
Collared Aracari	Tortuguero Nat'l Park
Common Tody-flycatcher	Tortuguero (CCC, Pueblo)
Crested Caracara	Canal (Water Taxi, Kayak) (Water Taxi)
Crimson-fronted Parakeet	Cariari Bus Station
Eastern Wood-Pewee	Tortuguero (CCC, Pueblo)
Eye-ringed Flatbill	Tortuguero Nat'l Park
Golden-hooded Tanager	Cariari Bus Station
Gray-breasted Martin	Tortuguero (CCC, Pueblo)
Gray-crowned Yellowthroat	Cariari Bus Station
Great Blue Heron	Canal (Water Taxi, Kayak) (Water Taxi)
Great Curassow	Tortuguero Nat'l Park
Great Egret	Canal (Water Taxi, Kayak) (Water Taxi)

<b>Species</b>	<b>Location</b>
Great Kiskadee	Tortuguero (CCC, Pueblo)
Great-crested Flycatcher	Tortuguero (CCC, Pueblo)
Great-tailed Grackle	Tortuguero (CCC, Pueblo)
Green Heron	Canal (Water Taxi, Kayak) (Water Taxi)
Green Ibis	Canal (Water Taxi, Kayak) (Water Taxi)
Green Kingfisher	Canal (Water Taxi, Kayak) (Water Taxi)
Gray-Cheeked Thrush	Tortuguero (CCC, Pueblo)
Groove-billed Ani	Canal (Water Taxi, Kayak) (Water Taxi)
House Wren	Tortuguero (CCC, Pueblo)
Keel-billed Toucan	Tortuguero Nat'l Park
Laughing Falcon	Canal (Water Taxi, Kayak) (Water Taxi)
Laughing Gull	Beach
Lesser Greenlit	Tortuguero (CCC, Pueblo)
Little Blue Heron	Canal (Water Taxi, Kayak) (Water Taxi)
Long-billed Hermit	Tortuguero Nat'l Park
Mangrove Swallow	Canal (Water Taxi, Kayak) (Water Taxi)
Mealy Parrot	Tortuguero Nat'l Park
Montezuma Oropendula	Canal (Water Taxi, Kayak) (Water Taxi)
Northern Jacana	Canal (Water Taxi, Kayak) (Water Taxi)
Northern Waterthrush	Tortuguero (CCC, Pueblo)
Olivaceous Cormorant	Beach
Olive-backed Euphonia	Tortuguero Nat'l Park
Painted Bunting	Cariari Bus Station
Pale-billed Woodpecker	Tortuguero Nat'l Park
Pale-vented Pigeon	Tortuguero (CCC, Pueblo)
Palm Tanager	Tortuguero (CCC, Pueblo)
Passerini's Tanager	Tortuguero (CCC, Pueblo)
Peregrine Falcon	Tortuguero (CCC, Pueblo)
Prothonotary Warbler	Tortuguero (CCC, Pueblo)
Purple-crowned Fairy	Tortuguero Nat'l Park
Purple-throated Fruitcrow	Tortuguero Nat'l Park
Red-billed Pigeon	Tortuguero Nat'l Park
Red-breasted Blackbird	Cariari Bus Station
Red-eyed Vireo	Tortuguero (CCC, Pueblo)
Red-legged Honeycreeper	Canal (Water Taxi, Kayak) (Water Taxi)
Ruddy Ground-dove	Tortuguero (CCC, Pueblo)
Ruddy Pigeon	Tortuguero Nat'l Park
Rufous-collared Sparrow	San Jose
Sanderling	Beach
Slaty-tailed Trogon	Tortuguero Nat'l Park
Snowy Egret	Canal (Water Taxi, Kayak) (Water Taxi)
Social Flycatcher	Tortuguero (CCC, Pueblo)

<b>Species</b>	<b>Location</b>
Southern Rough-winged Swallow	Tortuguero (CCC, Pueblo)
Spotted Antbird	Beach
Spotted Sandpiper	Beach
Spotted Woodcreeper	Tortuguero Nat'l Park
Squirrel Cuckoo	Tortuguero Nat'l Park
Streak-headed Brushfinch	Tortuguero (CCC, Pueblo)
Streak-headed Woodcreeper	Tortuguero (CCC, Pueblo)
Stripe-breasted Wren	Tortuguero Nat'l Park
Stripe-throated Hermit	Tortuguero Nat'l Park
Summer Tanager	Tortuguero (CCC, Pueblo)
Sungrebe	Tortuguero Nat'l Park
Swainson's Thrush	Tortuguero Nat'l Park
Thick-billed Seed eater	Tortuguero Nat'l Park
Traill's Flycatcher	Tortuguero (CCC, Pueblo)
Tropical Kingbird	Tortuguero (CCC, Pueblo)
Tropical Pewee	Cariari Bus Station
Turkey Vulture	Tortuguero (CCC, Pueblo)
Variable Seed eater	Tortuguero (CCC, Pueblo)
Veery	Tortuguero Nat'l Park
Western Slaty Antshrike	Tortuguero Nat'l Park
Whimbrel	Beach
White-breasted Woodwren	Tortuguero Nat'l Park
White-colored Manakin	Tortuguero Nat'l Park
White-tipped Dove	Cariari Bus Station
White-whiskered Puffbird	Tortuguero Nat'l Park
Wilson's Warbler	Tortuguero (CCC, Pueblo)
Woodthrush	Tortuguero Nat'l Park
Yellow Warbler	Tortuguero (CCC, Pueblo)
Yellow-bellied Elaenia	Tortuguero (CCC, Pueblo)
Yellow-crowned Night-heron	Tortuguero Nat'l Park
Yellow-margined Flycatcher	Tortuguero Nat'l Park
Rock Dove	Cariari Bus Station
Plain-brown Woodcreeper	Tortuguero Nat'l Park