

SUMMER COSTA RICA

JULY 7 - 20, 2010

© 2009

Costa Rica is often called the “Switzerland of Central America.” It is a small, stable country with a prosperous middle class, fine educational system, and spectacular highland terrain. For its size, it is one of the richest countries in the world for birds. Each of Costa Rica’s four major regions forms natural distributional boundaries for birds, and we will spend most of our time in two of them. The semi-arid ranch lands of Guanacaste in the northwest are the southern limit for the birds of the Pacific-slope, dry forests of northern Central America. Southwestern Costa Rica, an isolated region once covered by humid forest, forms the northwestern boundary for birds of western South America. In addition, a number of endemic species have evolved in this disjunct forest. The humid Caribbean lowlands and foothills are directly linked to the great lowland forests of South America, with many rainforest birds spilling across the Panama “land bridge” to reach their northern limit here. Most importantly, much of Costa Rica consists of a large highland block dominated by immense volcanoes and rugged cordilleras. The very distinctive bird life here is completely different from that of the lowlands and includes a high number of endemics (birds found nowhere else in the world except adjacent Panama). With extensive highland forest still easily accessible, Costa Rica is the place to see these specialties. In addition, Costa Rica boasts the finest national park system in Latin America, protecting examples of all major habitats with their particular flora and fauna.

Summer Costa Rica was originally conceived to make it possible for teachers to experience this great birding paradise. Tour groups usually crowd the trails in March and April, whereas in July we are often the only birding group on a given trail. Furthermore, the summer months are actually five to ten degrees cooler than in March. Although the rainy season begins in May, our tour is designed to take advantage of the two week “veranillo” that provides a break in the mid-July rainy season. All the areas we visit are very lush and green at this time of year and we rarely encounter any dust on unpaved roads. Generally, only one brief rainfall occurs each afternoon, followed by bird activity almost as intense as at dawn. This means little birding time is actually lost to rain. Another advantage of a summer timetable is not having to search through Neotropical migrants that are now nesting in North America. When one does find a bird alone or in a flock, it will be a Costa Rica resident . . . a bird one usually cannot see in North America. Thus, in summer we see all the great birds listed below and have a much better chance at three specialties.

At Monteverde, many Resplendent Quetzals and Three-wattled Bellbirds have moved out of the dense forest where they nested to feed in scattered tall trees in tree-shaded pastures used for cattle. The beautiful, tiny Snowcap has left high-elevation forest and descended to lowland Caribbean forest where it can usually be found in flowering bushes at La Selva Biological Station.

As we explore Costa Rica, we will search for many of Central America’s most spectacular birds. In addition to the three just mentioned, there are Barred Hawk, Black Guan, Scarlet Macaw, over 30 species of hummingbirds, ten species of trogons, Yellow-eared Toucanet, motmots, Prong-billed and Red-headed barbets, Yellow-billed and Snowy cotingas, manakins, woodcreepers, and ovenbirds galore. Also, Azure-hooded Jay, Black-and-yellow Silky-flycatcher, and nearly 40 members of the spectacular tanager family. The list seems endless!

ONE FINAL WORD: *Costa Rica is blessed with a string of research stations operated by the Organization for Tropical Studies (OTS), a consortium of 63 U.S., Latin American and Australian universities and research institutions. These stations are devoted to basic research in all aspects of tropical biology and are located in key natural areas, often ones that have been preserved as a result of the efforts of the OTS. Fortunately, the OTS allows birders to visit their facilities. Expensive entry fees charged for our use of La Selva Research Station help support the invaluable work of the OTS.*

July 7, Day 1: Arrival in San José, Costa Rica. Upon arrival at Santamaria International Airport (SJO) in San José, Costa Rica and clearing customs and immigrations, you will meet by our local ground operator and transferred to our hotel, the *El Rodeo Country Inn*. Those who arrive early should meet your VENT leaders, Jeri Langham and David Ascanio in the *El Rodeo Hotel Inn* lobby at 7:00 PM and join them for dinner and/or coffee and dessert at the nearby steakhouse. Plans for the next morning will be discussed. If you arrive on a later flight, please have the front desk call Jeri's room, and he will come down to give you all necessary information about the following morning.

NIGHT: El Rodeo Country Inn, San Antonio de Belén

July 8-9, Days 2-3: San José to Carara Biological Reserve. Established in 1978, Carara is one of Costa Rica's well-kept secrets. It is located near the Pacific Coast in a transition zone between the dry northwest and the very humid southwest. Today, this 7,600-hectare reserve of tall, humid forest is virtually the only wet/dry transition (mixed) forest remaining in the Pacific lowlands. Almost all of the reserve is original forest.

We'll leave early for Carara, arriving in time to spend a full morning walking forest trails. Besides providing one of the most pleasant forest walks of our entire trip, Carara offers a mix of birds that is both unique and fascinating. This will be our best chance to see Scarlet Macaw, a spectacular symbol of wildness, declining in many parts of its range because of habitat destruction and trapping for the cage-bird industry. With luck, we might locate a lek of colorful Orange-collared Manakins—the displays of these dazzling sprites are among the most entertaining spectacles available to visiting birders. Trogons abound, with Baird's, Slaty-tailed, Black-throated, and Violaceous all possible. Present, too, are many of the southwestern specialty birds, near this northern limit of their ranges, including Fiery-billed Aracari, Yellow-billed Cotinga, Black-hooded Antshrike, and Riverside Wren. Other species of interest include Streak-chested Antpitta, Chestnut-backed Antbird, Dot-winged Antwren, Thrush-like Schiffornis, Stub-tailed and Golden-crowned spadebills, Cherrie's Tanager, Rufous-naped Wren, and many more.

We have two full days in the Pacific Slope paradise. On one or both days we'll visit marshes, mangrove swamps, and tidal flats near the mouth of the Rio Tárcoles, an area teeming with herons, gulls, terns, and shorebirds. We will offer an early-morning boat ride into the mangrove forest around the Tárcoles River Mouth. This will give us a chance to look for Mangrove Vireo, Mangrove Hummingbird, Panama Flycatcher and experience an otherwise inaccessible ecosystem.

NIGHTS: Hotel Villa Lapas, near Carara

July 10, Day 4: Carara to Monteverde. Before breakfast this morning, we will walk a wonderful new trail built by Hotel Villa Lapas that includes five large suspension bridges over deep ravines and valleys. The scenery and birds have been spectacular. After breakfast, we will depart for Monteverde, a three-hour drive that takes us up through denuded foothills to the edge of the forests of the Cordillera de Tilarán. The cloud forests of Costa Rica (and far western Panama) are a major center of endemism in Central America and contain many unique forms not found elsewhere. Birds in the vicinity include Rufous-and-white Wren, Orange-billed Nightingale-Thrush, Mountain Robin, Golden-crowned Warbler, White-naped Brush-Finch, and White-eared Ground-Sparrow.

By the end of the day, we will have experienced the incredible extravaganza at the Hummingbird Gallery, where about seven-eight species, ranging from the huge Violet Sabrewing to the small, endemic Coppery-headed Emerald, will swirl around our heads and sometimes perch on our fingers. The latter is a true Costa Rica endemic, thus found in no other country. A night visit here will thrill you with swirling nectar-eating bats draining what remained in the feeders at dusk.

NIGHT: Hotel Fonda Vela, Monteverde

July 11-12, Days 5-6: Monteverde Cloud Forest Preserve. Monteverde is one of the highlights of any Costa Rica trip. We will spend two days here in the enchanting cloud forest, where great sheets of mist peel off the lush slopes to envelop the epiphyte-laden trees in a blanket of moisture. The profusion of plant life is almost unbelievable. Some of the finest birds of Central America inhabit this unique reserve, and a fine trail system allows easy access to their habitat and good visibility into it. Here we will search for the fabulous Resplendent Quetzal, Barred Hawk, Black Guan, Orange-bellied Trogon, Purple-throated Mountain-gem, Prong-billed Barbet, Blue-throated Toucanet, Streak-breasted Treehunter, Golden-bellied Flycatcher, Azure-hooded Jay, Gray-breasted Wood-Wren, Golden-browed Chlorophonia, Spangle-cheeked Tanager, and more. The incredible calls of displaying Three-wattled Bellbirds are the dominant forest sound, while a beautiful chorus of solitaire and nightingale-thrush songs drift through the undergrowth. We may also be fortunate enough to see or hear a Silvery-fronted Tapaculo or Wrenthrush. The odd Wrenthrush (*Zeledonia*), of uncertain taxonomic affinity and formerly placed in a family of its own, is now regarded as a paruline.

NIGHTS: Hotel Fonda Vela, Monteverde

July 13, Day 7: Monteverde to Arenal Observatory Lodge. A final morning in the Monteverde area allows us to pick up anything we may have missed. After breakfast at Hotel Fonda Vela, we will depart on a 5.5-hour drive down the mountain to the town of Tilarán and ride around Lake Arenal to Arenal Observatory Lodge near La Fortuna. We will bird along the way. Most rooms at Arenal Observatory Lodge face the huge Arenal Volcano cinder cone. It usually erupts several times each day. If the cone is not enclosed by clouds, the daytime eruptions create a large plume of ash that rises dramatically into the sky. The real attraction is at night, however. At that time orange-glowing molten rocks that have been spewed out roll down the cinder cone. It is an unforgettable experience. Our two nights at this wonderful lodge maximize our chances of seeing a nighttime eruption.

NIGHT: Arenal Observatory Lodge, La Fortuna

July 14, Day 8: Arenal Observatory Lodge and Lake Arenal. Early-morning and late-afternoon bird activity along the road bordering Arenal Lake is quite enjoyable, and the trails in the large patch of rainforest next to the lodge offer interesting birding during the day. If anyone wants to try horseback riding, horses can be rented here for any number of hours. The group will spend the morning and afternoon in forests near the Arenal Observatory Lodge.

NIGHT: Arenal Observatory Lodge, La Fortuna

July 15, Day 9: Arenal Observatory Lodge to Selva Verde Lodge via La Virgen del Socorro. After an early breakfast, we will bird our way south along the Caribbean slope to La Virgen del Socorro, one of Costa Rica's most productive birding locations. We will visit a small restaurant above La Virgen del Socorro that will provide us with another hummingbird experience that rivals the Hummingbird Gallery at Monteverde. After lunch at a restaurant near La Paz Waterfall Gardens, we will return to La Virgen del Socorro for an afternoon of searching for middle-elevation specialty birds. Our goal is to reach Selva Verde Lodge by dinner. This lodge built a bridge across the Sarapiquí River where in late afternoon in 1998, we saw 27 Great Green Macaws--more than all previous tours put together! In the last few years, a pair of Sunbitterns have established a territory near the bridge. The grounds of the Selva Verde Lodge are excellent for birding, especially near the fruit feeders set up around the buildings. Come see for yourself!

NIGHT: Selva Verde Lodge, Puerto Viejo

July 16-17, Days 10-11: La Selva Biological Research Station. Today, we bird the lowlands of northeastern Costa Rica, which contain undisturbed tracts of tall rainforest. Most of our time will be spent at La Selva Biological Research Station run, by the Organization for Tropical Studies (OTS). This area's diverse habitats include virgin forest, tall second-growth forest, over-grown plantations, and successional thickets. The avifauna is large, and just a few of the birds that we may see or hear include Great, Slaty-breasted and Little tinamous; Semiplumbeous Hawk; Black-and-white, Crested (very rare), and Spectacled owls; Slaty-tailed Trogon; Amazon Kingfisher; Broad-billed and Rufous motmots; White-whiskered Puffbird; Chestnut-colored and Cinnamon woodpeckers; Black-striped Woodcreeper; Western Slaty Antshrike; Chestnut-backed Antbird; Red-capped and White-collared manakins; Long-tailed Tyrant; Stripe-breasted and Black-throated wrens; Shining Honeycreeper; Montezuma and Chestnut-headed oropendolas; Scarlet-rumped and Yellow-billed caciques; Dusky-faced Tanager; Orange-billed Sparrow; and many more. Rarities that we will pursue include Lattice-tailed Trogon and forest raptors. Always desired is an encounter with an army ant swarm and attendant "professional" followers—Ocellated, Bicolored, and Spotted antbirds, along with Northern Barred and Plain-brown woodcreepers.

NIGHTS: Selva Verde Lodge, Puerto Viejo

July 18, Day 12: Braulio Carrillo National Park and Rainforest Aerial Tram. Today we will have a full day to explore this park and an adjacent 1,100-acre private reserve. Both are not far from Selva Verde, so we will devote all day to the unforgettable 90-minute Aerial Tram ride and portions of the preserve. The tram ride enables us to traverse all levels of a Caribbean foothill rainforest canopy and walk the rainforest trails on this privately owned property.

Created in 1978, Braulio Carrillo National Park encompasses a huge band of wet Caribbean foothill forest. In 1987, the road was finally completed, and the park opened to the public. Now birders have access to some of the country's rarest, least known and most restricted species in this fabulous area of steep forested slopes, cloud-filled valleys, and plunging waterfalls. In the lower part of the park, one might see Green-fronted Lancebill, Snowcap, Yellow-eared Toucanet, Rufous-winged Woodpecker, Immaculate Antbird, White-ruffed Manakin, Rufous-browed Tyrannulet, and Tawny-capped Euphonia. We will also search for an absolutely stellar line-up of tanagers, such as Emerald, Silver-throated, Speckled, Spangle-cheeked, Blue-and-gold, Black-and-yellow, Olive, and Tawny-crested, as well as White-throated Shrike-Tanager.

Many other birds also occur, but for various reasons, the chances of seeing them are vanishingly small. Nevertheless, just being where they occur and knowing that one of them could turn up is exciting. This remarkable group includes Tiny Hawk, Violaceous Quail-Dove, Rufous-vented Ground-Cuckoo, Black-crowned Antpitta, and Bare-necked Umbrellabird.

NIGHT: Selva Verde Lodge, Puerto Viejo

July 19, Day 13: Sarapiquí to San José via La Virgen del Socorro and Volcan Poás. En route to San José, we will return to the subtropical foothill forest near La Virgen. This is one of the wettest forest types in Central America and is the home of many special birds not found above or below this zone. The birds here roam in mixed flocks, and among the species that we may encounter are Red-headed Barbet, Spotted Woodcreeper, Spotted Barbtail, Russet Antshrike, Tawny-capped Euphonia, Scarlet-thighed Dacnis, Emerald Tanager, and Sooty-faced Finch. Foothill rarities like Black-crested Coquette and Lanceolated Monklet also have been seen here. For every walk along this unpaved road, the bird activity is different. We will again stop at the two little restaurants where the endemic Coppery-headed Emerald and rare Green Thorntail are usually present, but we have also seen Brown and Green violet-ears, White-bellied (rare) and Purple-throated mountain-gems, the huge Violet Sabrewing, Black-bellied Hummingbird (rare), Violet-crowned Woodnymph, and Green-crowned Brilliant. Red-headed and Prong-billed barbets often come to the fruit feeders here along with Blue-throated Toucanet and various tanager species.

After a “typico lunch” and a superb, icy fresh strawberry drink, we will drive up to the Volcán Poás visitor center. If it is not raining when we reach the top, we will hike the trail to the Volcán Poás overlook, hoping to get a view of the crater and seeing such high mountain specialties as Fiery-throated Hummingbird, Large-footed and Yellow-thighed finch, Black-billed Nightingale-Thrush, Black-and-yellow Silky-Flycatcher, and others mentioned for the high elevations at Monteverde. The Volcán Poás crater is usually engulfed in fog and not visible, but with luck we may see the most acidic lake in the world (pH of zero). There is a wonderful trail through elfin forest that we will also walk. Sometimes the rare and skulky Wrenthrush (*Zeledonia*) can be found here.

NIGHT: El Rodeo Country Inn, San Antonio de Belén

July 20, Day 14: Departure for home. The tour ends this morning with an early transfer to the San José airport in time for flights departing between 8-10:00 a.m. Transfers for flights departing at other times can be arranged in advance at an additional charge.

EXTRA ARRANGEMENTS: Should you wish to make arrangements to arrive early or extend your stay, please contact the VENT office at least two months prior to your departure date. We can very easily make hotel arrangements and often at our group rate, if we receive your request with enough advance time.

TOUR SIZE: This tour will be limited to 14 participants.

TOUR LEADERS: David Ascanio

David Ascanio, a Venezuelan birder and naturalist, has spent the last 25 years guiding birding tours throughout his native country, Trinidad and Tobago, Suriname, the Amazon River, Guyana, the Dominican Republic, the Lesser Antilles, Chile, and Panama. He is especially interested in bird vocalizations, and has a private library containing sounds of more than 70% of all the birds of Venezuela, including some which are the only ones known to science. David speaks excellent English and combines superb birding skills with an astonishing command of bird vocalizations. He has published a book for children about the songs of the birds of Venezuela, and has coauthored the description of a new species, the River Island Spinetail. David has also published various manuscripts about the birds of the *llanos* (plains), as well as the pan-tepui endemic species for which he has become an authority. He is an excellent communicator, has a great sense of humor, and is tireless in helping others find birds and wildlife. These traits have made him the most popular naturalist/guide in his country. David is currently writing the species accounts for a forthcoming field guide to the birds of Venezuela.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS: The fee for the tour is **\$4280** per person in double occupancy from San José, Costa Rica. This includes all meals from Breakfast on Day 2 to Dinner on Day 13, accommodations as stated in the itinerary, ground transportation during the tour, gratuities, and guide services provided by the tour leaders. It does not include airfare from your home to San José and return, airport departure taxes, alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, phone calls, laundry, or items of a personal nature. Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registration, a small-party supplement may have to be charged.

The single supplement for this tour is **\$470**. You will be charged a single supplement if you desire single accommodations, or if you prefer to share but have no roommate and we cannot provide one for you.

EXCHANGE RATE SURCHARGES: In the erratic global financial markets of today, it is difficult to predict foreign currency exchange rates over the long term or at the time of operation of a tour or cruise departure. Tour prices are based upon the rate of exchange at the time of itinerary publication. If exchange rates change drastically, it may be necessary to implement a surcharge. If a surcharge is necessary, every effort will be made to minimize the amount. In many cases, these additional foreign exchange rate surcharges are passed to VENT by its vendors and suppliers.

FUEL AND FUEL SURCHARGES: In the uncertain, often volatile oil market of late, it is difficult – if not impossible – to predict fuel costs over the long term, and more specifically, at the time of operation of this departure. Our prices are based upon the prevailing fuel rates at the time of itinerary publication. While we will do everything possible to maintain our prices, if the fuel rates increase significantly, it may be necessary to institute a fuel surcharge.

TOUR REGISTRATION: To register for this tour, please contact the VENT office. The deposit for this tour is \$500 per person. If you prefer to pay your deposit by check, your tour space will be held for 10 days to allow time for the VENT office to receive your deposit and completed registration form. If you prefer to pay your deposit using a credit card, your deposit must be made with MasterCard or Visa at the time of registration. The VENT registration form should then be completed, signed, and returned to the VENT office. Full payment of the tour fee is due 120 days prior to the tour departure date.

CANCELLATION POLICY: Cancellation penalties and refunds are based on the following schedule: if cancellation is made 120 days or more before the tour departure date, a cancellation fee of \$250 per person will be charged unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months, in which case the cancellation fee will be \$100 per person. If cancellation is made fewer than 120 days before departure date, no refund is available. This policy and fee schedule also applies to pre-trip and post-trip extensions. *We strongly recommend the purchase of trip cancellation insurance for your protection.*

<u>If you cancel:</u>	<u>Your refund will be:</u>
120 days or more before departure date	Your deposit minus \$250*
Fewer than 120 days before departure date	No refund available

*Unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months, in which case the cancellation fee will be \$100 per person.

TRIP INSURANCE: A brochure and application form for optional coverage for baggage, illness, and trip cancellation can be obtained through the VENT office. **We strongly recommend that you purchase trip cancellation insurance as soon as possible to protect yourself against losses due to accidents or illness.** VENT recommends *Travel Insured International* as our preferred insurance provider. Check with your insurance agent regarding coverage you may presently have via other insurance policies that may cover illness during your trip. **Waiver for pre-existing conditions is available; however, stipulations apply, usually requiring the purchase of the insurance soon after registering.** Optional expanded insurance coverage is available and includes items such as work-related cancellation, medical upgrade, and a “Cancel for Any Reason” clause among others. Contact *Travel Insured International* prior to registration for details. Not all insurance providers provide the same levels of coverage. If you purchase insurance through a company other than *Travel Insured International*, please be advised that rules and stipulations may be different.

Medical insurance which covers you for emergency evacuation/repatriation during the trip is also recommended for this tour. This coverage is included in the Worldwide Trip Protector plan offered by *Travel Insured International*. A good website for information and acquisition of emergency evacuation/repatriation insurance is: www.insuremytrip.com.

Victor Emanuel Nature Tours is not a participant in the California Travel Consumer Restitution Fund. California law requires certain sellers of travel to have a trust account or bond. This business has a bond issued by Travelers in the amount of \$50,000. CST #2014998-50.

AIR INFORMATION: Victor Emanuel Travel is a full-service travel agency and wholly owned subsidiary of Victor Emanuel Nature Tours (VENT). Victor Emanuel Travel will be happy to make any domestic or international air travel arrangements from your home and return. Please feel free to call the VENT office to confirm your air arrangements.

BAGGAGE: We request tour participants to limit their baggage to one medium-sized suitcase and one carry-on, if possible, as space in the vehicle will be limited. As a precaution, we strongly recommend that you pack your documents, medications, change of clothes, your binoculars, and toiletry items in the bag you plan to carry on the plane. When checking in for your first flight from your hometown, we suggest you check your suitcase through to San José, especially if you are on the same airline all the way. Otherwise, it might be a good idea to check it only to Miami and then make sure it gets on the right airline to San José. If you elect to do this, it is your responsibility to re-check your bags to San José. You may wish to allow extra connection time for rechecking your bag.

CLIMATE: Expect quite hot (lowlands) to fairly cool (highlands) temperatures. Mornings will usually be clear, with clouds building by midday and normally some rain in the afternoon. Bird activity after the rain is almost as good as at dawn.

CLOTHING: As is the case for all of our tropical tours, lightweight field clothing is the norm for Costa Rica tours. **PLEASE BRING ONLY NEUTRAL-COLORED CLOTHING (GREEN/BROWN/TAN); AVOID WHITES, REDS, PINK, BABY BLUES, YELLOWS, OR OTHER BRIGHT COLORS.** Two long-sleeved shirts, a hat, sunglasses, and a strong sunscreen are also recommended for protection from the sun. Please be sure to have a pair of good hiking boots or comfortable walking shoes, a second pair of lightweight shoes, and calf-high rubber boots for wet and muddy areas. Generally, weather will be warm (75 to 90 degrees), but it can get quite cool (40 degrees) at several locales, so a warm sweater and/or jacket is essential, and even gloves may sometimes be needed. Dress will be **casual** throughout. Some hotels have a swimming pool, and at times we are near the ocean, so you may wish to bring a bathing suit.

DOCUMENTS: A passport valid for at least six months beyond your planned departure from Costa Rica is required. Visas are not required for entry by U.S. citizens. Non-U.S. citizens should check with their consulate/embassy for instructions. You will be issued a tourist card by the airline on which you travel. Although no vaccinations are required for entry into Costa Rica, you may be asked to present proof of a current yellow fever vaccination if you have traveled recently in other countries within Latin America or Africa.

EQUIPMENT: You should pack a pair of binoculars that are in good repair, along with a belt pack or day pack (for carrying books, sunscreen, extra film, etc.). As a precaution, it is a good idea to pack your binoculars, a change of clothing, toiletry items, medications and travel documents in your airline carry-on bag. Your leaders will have a spotting scope with them. If you have a scope, feel free to bring it. Please bring a **flashlight, plastic cup or glass** (for coffee and/or drinks), **water bottle** or canteen (for hikes), **washcloth, alarm clock**, a small folding **umbrella** and a **rain jacket/pants** (Gortex) or raincoat (Jeri recommends Gortex for this trip). The umbrella and rain jacket/pants will protect you, your binoculars, and eyeglasses when it rains. Not all hotels supply shampoo. Your leaders will have **Leica** and **Kowa** spotting scopes with them. If you have a scope, feel free to bring it.

HEALTH: If you are taking prescription medication or over-the-counter medicine, be sure to bring an ample supply that will allow you to get through the tour safely. Remember to pack all medication in your carry-on baggage, preferably in original containers or packaging. As airline baggage restrictions can change without warning, please check with your airline for procedures for packing medication.

At this time, the U.S. Health Department is recommending anti-malarial medication for visitors to Costa Rica. This is available by prescription only. Please consult your physician as necessary. As standard travel precautions, you should always be up to date with tetanus shots, and strongly consider inoculations against Hepatitis types A and B.

In addition to your physician, a good source of general health information for travelers is the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta. The CDC operates a 24-hour recorded Travelers' Information Line 877-FYI-TRIP (394-8747) or you can check their website at www.cdc.gov/travel. Canadian citizens should check the website of the Public Health Agency of Canada: www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/new_e.html (click on travel health).

INSECT PROTECTION: Chiggers and other insects can be a problem in some areas. We recommend use of lotion (small plastic squeeze bottles) and a pump-style container of insect repellent that has at least 30% DEET. Topsy gel is useful in reducing irritation from chigger or nettle stings (some cortisone creams are now available without a prescription). Jeri uses a combination sunscreen/insect repellent; several brands are available.

A Note About Chiggers: This tour visits areas where chiggers are known to occur. Chiggers are tiny parasitic mites found in most warm weather areas of the southern United States and the world's tropics. They are especially numerous in grassy areas, where, in the immature stage, they attach themselves to other animals or humans who make contact with the grass as they pass by. Chiggers do not suck blood and the majority of the world's species do not carry disease. They do feed on bodily fluids, however, through a process in which a digestive enzyme is produced by the chigger which essentially liquefies the skin around the area where the chigger is attached. The chigger is not usually attached to the skin for more than a few hours before it either falls off or is knocked off. Our bodies respond by producing a hardened area as a defense against the chigger's digestive enzyme. Though the chigger may be long gone, it is the presence of the hardened area, and the body's natural process of reabsorbing it that typically causes intense itching, often lasting for a week or more. Chiggers like to attach themselves to areas of thin skin, like around the ankles, beltline, undergarment lines, knees, and elbows. Chiggers can be avoided by following these procedures:

- Avoid walking, or standing in particular, in areas dominated by grass. These areas are where one is most likely to encounter chiggers.
- Tuck your pants into your socks to avoid direct skin-to-grass contact. Chiggers can find their way through clothing, but this is a standard and effective prevention technique commonly employed by many.
- Apply a cream-style insect repellent, such as "Cutters" to your body from the waist down BEFORE putting on your clothing.
- Spray your pants and socks with a spray repellent such as "Cutters" or "Off." Repellents with high concentrations of DEET (70-100%) are most effective. You do not need to apply these to you skin, only to clothing. (Be careful as DEET will damage plastics and lens coatings). Repel Permanone is an odorless aerosol insecticide that offers perhaps the best defense against chiggers. It is available at various outdoor stores and can easily be found online. It should only be applied to clothes and allowed to dry before you dress. Never apply Permanone directly to the skin. Permethrin is known to be a highly toxic chemical to insects. It is the active ingredient in Permanone, but is present in a small amount (0.5%).
- Powdered sulfur applied to waist, bottoms of pants, sock and boots is also effective at repelling chiggers. However, be warned that clothes will retain the sulfur odor for several washings.
- Shower at the end of each day in the field. Use a washcloth to vigorously rub your legs, feet, and ankles.

By following these methods, you should be able to avoid all chigger bites, as well as tick bites. If, however, you are bitten by chiggers anyway, you can reduce or eliminate the symptoms by applying benzocaine or hydrocortisone creams, calamine lotion, After Bite, or any number of anti-itch products.

MISC:

- Laundry facilities are available at all the hotels we visit.
- The AC voltage in Costa Rica is 120 (compatible with U.S. voltage), although at some lodges you may need an adapter for polarized plugs (those with one prong larger than the other).
- Departure Tax: US \$26 or equivalent in Costa Rican Colon (as of March 2009; subject to change).

SUGGESTED READING: Our website, www.ventbird.com offers an affiliated online store that carries a wide variety of items for birding and nature lovers, including over 6,000 books. A portion of the sales from this store benefits the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. You may also visit such other online stores such as www.amazon.com, and for those out-of-print or hard-to-find titles, www.abebooks.com or www.buteobooks.com which specializes in ornithology books.

Field Guides:

- Garrigues, Richard, and Robert Dean. *The Birds of Costa Rica: A Field Guide*. Distribuidores Zona Tropical, 2007. Jeri's recommended guide for this tour.
- Leenders, Twan. *A Guide to Amphibians and Reptiles of Costa Rica*. Distribuidores Zona Tropical, 2001. Jeri's copy will be available to you during the tour.
- Ridgely, Robert S. *A Guide to the Birds of Panama*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992 (2nd ed.). Edition expanded to include Costa Rica and still excellent for use here.
- Stiles, Gary, and Alexander Skutch. *A Guide to the Birds of Costa Rica*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990. The first field guide specifically for Costa Rica. It is still good for information not included in the new Garrigues & Dean field guide.
- Wainwright, Mark. *The Natural History of Costa Rican Mammals*. Distribuidores Zona Tropical, 2002. New Edition expanded to include Costa Rica and because the plates are better than in the Costa Rica guide, it is excellent for use here.

General introduction to the tropics:

- Forsythe, Adrian, and Ken Miyata. *Tropical Nature*. New York: Scribner, 1987. Paperback available. Excellent chapters, very readable and informative, written for the layperson and highly recommended.
- Forsythe, Adrian, *Portraits of the Rainforest*. With photos by Michael and Pat Fogden. Camden East, ONT: Camden House, 1990. Stunning photos and a superb text by one of the best nature writers in the business. Highly recommended.
- Kricher, John C. *A Neotropical Companion*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999 (2nd ed.). Good introduction to the tropics; recommended reading.

Further reading:

- DeVries, Philip. *The Butterflies of Costa Rica & Their Natural History*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997. Lovely field guide to butterflies; a must if this is one of your special interests.
- Janzen, Daniel H. (ed.). *Costa Rican Natural History*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983. An encyclopedia that contains a wealth of information on the plants and animals of Costa Rica, especially those that have been studied in the field; also has chapters on geology and soils, agriculture, etc. Recommended as a technical reference book. Jeri will bring his copy.
- Perry, Donald. *Life Above the Jungle Floor*. Simon & Schuster, 1986. A popular book that tells much about life in the tropical rainforest, especially in the little-known canopy.
- Reid, Fiona A. *A Field Guide to the Mammals of Central America and Southeast Mexico*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998. Jeri will bring his copy.
- Skutch, Alexander F. *A Bird Watcher's Adventures in Tropical America*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1977. Fun reading from an eminent ornithologist resident in Costa Rica.
- Skutch, Alexander F. *A Naturalist in Costa Rica*. Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1971. Good general background in the tropics from a prolific and very readable author. Reprinted in 1992; try www.abebooks.com.

Magazine articles:

- Graham, Frank. "Alexander Skutch and the Appreciative Mind." *Audubon*, (March 1979): 82-117.
- "Costa Rica: Free of the Volcano's Veil." *National Geographic*, (July 1965): 125.
- "Nature's Living, Jumping Jewels." *National Geographic*, (July 1973): 130.
- "Costa Rica Steers the Middle Course." *National Geographic*, (July 1981): 570.
- Powell, George V. "The Site Guide: Monteverde Cloud Forest Preserve, Costa Rica." *American Birds*, Vol. 31, No. 2 (March 1977).

TIPPING: Tipping (restaurants, porters, drivers, local guides) is included on VENT tours. However, if you feel one or both of your VENT leaders or any local guides have given you exceptional service, it is entirely appropriate to tip. We emphasize that such tips are not expected and are entirely optional.

RESPONSIBILITY: Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Inc. (VENT) and/or its Agents act only as agents for the passenger in regard to travel, whether by railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, or airplane and assume no liability for injury, damage, loss, accident, delay, or irregularity which may be occasioned either by reason of defect in any vehicle or for any reason whatsoever, or through the acts or default of any company or person engaged in conveying the passenger or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. VENT and its agents can accept no responsibility for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in air or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, or other causes. All such losses or expenses will have to be borne by the passenger, as tour rates provide for arrangements only for the time stated. The right is reserved to substitute hotels of similar category for those indicated and to make any changes in the itinerary where deemed necessary or caused by changes in air schedules. The right is reserved to cancel any tour prior to departure, in which case full refund will constitute full settlement to the passenger. The right is reserved to substitute leaders on any tour. Where this is necessary, notification will be given to tour members. No refund will be made for any unused portion of the tour unless arrangements are made in sufficient time to avoid penalties. The prices of the tours are based on tariffs and exchange rates in effect August 11, 2009 and are subject to adjustment in the event of any change therein. The right is reserved to decline to accept or to retain any person as a member of any tour. Baggage is at owner's risk entirely. The airlines concerned and their agents and affiliates are not to be held responsible for any act, omission, or event during the time passengers are not on board their aircraft. The passenger ticket in use by said airlines, when issued, shall constitute the sole contract between the airlines and the purchaser of these tickets and/or passenger. The services of any I.A.T.A.N. carrier may be used for these tours, and transportation within the United States may be provided by any member carrier of the Airline Reporting Corporation.