

The Birds of Las Catalinas

Guanacaste – Costa Rica

by Rich Hoeg



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Las Catalinas Sunsets



Welcome to Las Catalinas ... home to relaxing days, great sunsets followed by fellowship and great meals, but wait ... there's more!

White-Throated Magpie Jay



Walking around Las Catalinas, you may see White-Throated Magpie Jays. These gorgeous birds enjoy fine food! If given an opportunity, these jays will fly over to a restaurant table and grab sugar packets. This bird knows the difference between real sugar and artificial sweetener packets!

White Tipped Dove



Even before the sun comes up, these doves will make their presence known with morning "cooing". Their name "white tipped" will become obvious the first time you watch a White-Tipped Dove fly.



Check Out the Surf!

Waves bring food, and many birds will walk the waves in search of a meal.

In the first image a female **Great Tailed Grackle** has flown down from the tree tops in search of food, while in the second photo a **Spotted Sandpiper** contends with waves while finding food.



Both birds may be found in the continental United States, but are also year round residents in Costa Rica.

Great Kiskadee



The Great Kiskadee is just the first of many flycatchers you may see. Its song sounds like its name, and once the Las Catalinas weather moves from the dry season towards some rain (and a few bugs), this bird will grace the trees.

Social Flycatcher



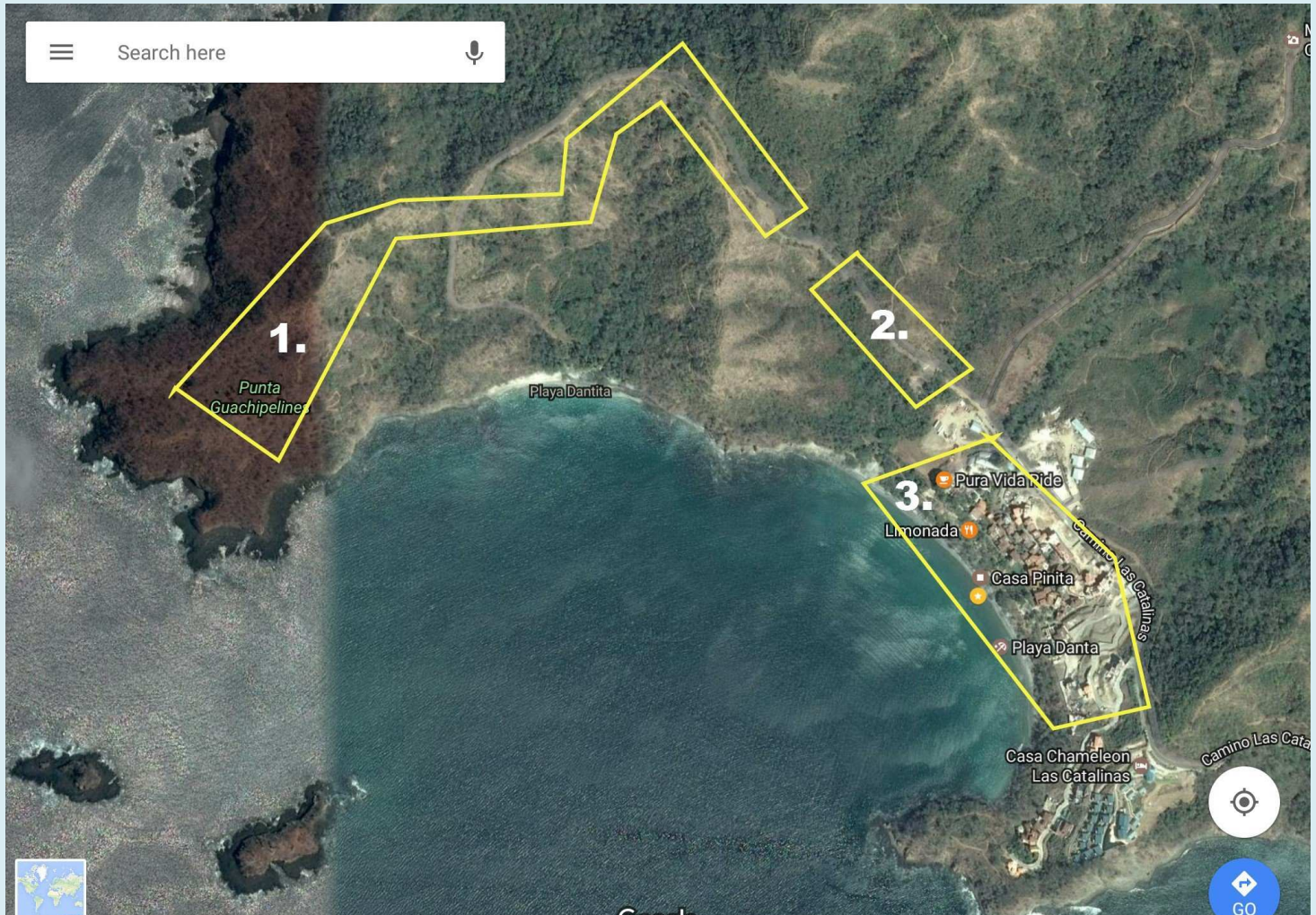
Meet the Social Flycatcher! This bird looks amazingly similar to the Great Kiskadee. Like the kiskadee it loves bugs, and may be distinguished from its bigger cousin by its smaller size and beak without a hook on the end.

Howler Monkey



Looking skyward may reward you with the sight of many birds, but Howler Monkeys often grace the crowns of the trees as they enjoy feasting on the salad they find high above. Their call will quickly explain their name ... which sounds like a hoarse loud holler.

Las Catalinas Birding Regions



Where are the best places to bird in Las Catalinas? Region 1 is a 4.5 mile loop (hike or bike) from Pura Vida Ride. Regions 2 and 3 are easy walks which include the dirt road just beyond the rust colored gate at the mountain bike trailhead, and the Las Catalinas grounds.

Brown Pelican



In the evening, on area beaches you will often see Brown Pelicans fishing for their supper.

Homo Sapiens



The Brown Pelican often has fishing competition! Costa Ricans will often surf fish near dusk if the tide and other conditions are right!

Orange Fronted Parakeet



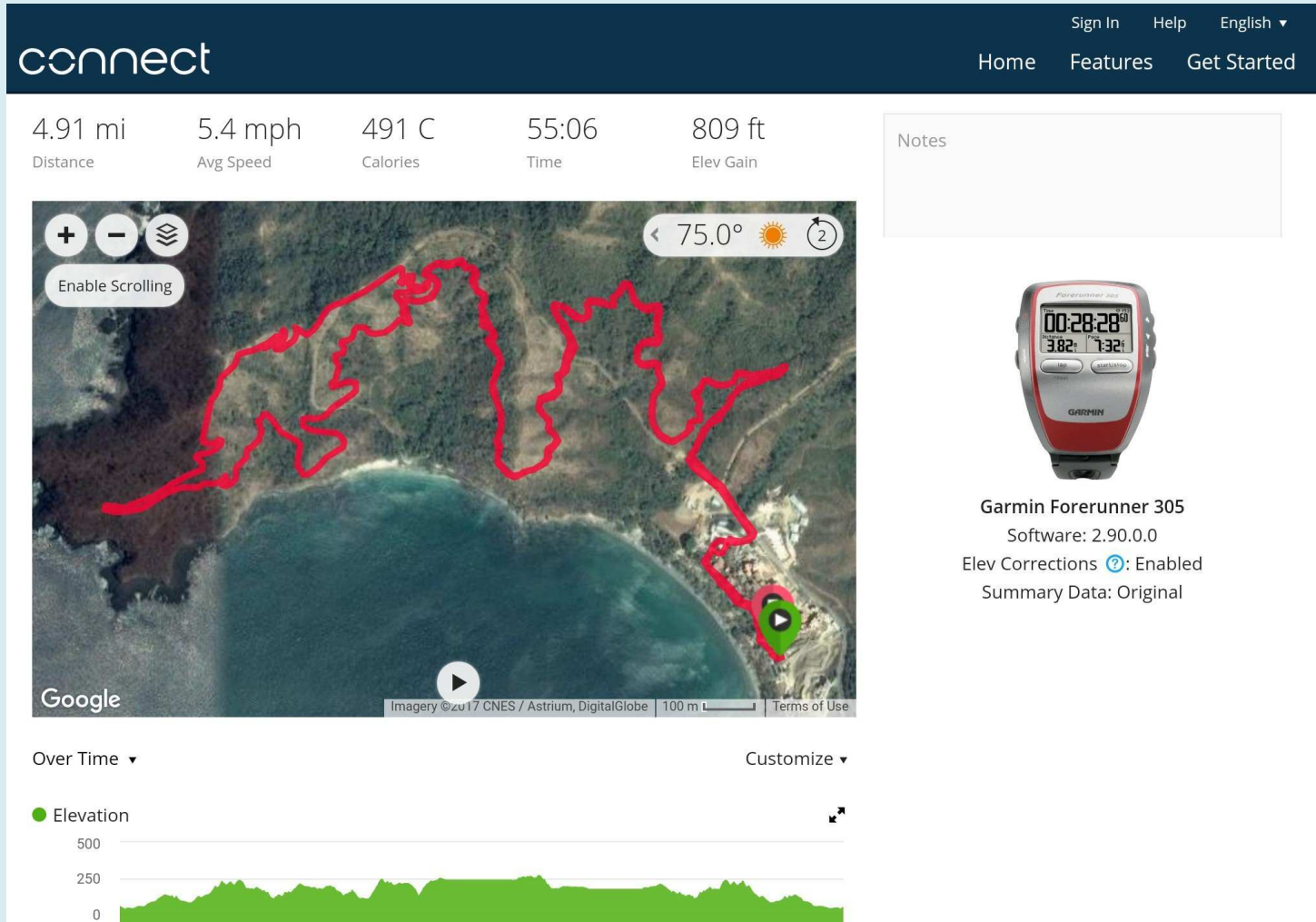
Invariably you will hear squawking in the tree canopies above you. Orange Fronted Parakeets travel in large flocks, and feast on nuts and seeds they find.

White-Fronted Parrot



If you see what appears to be a parakeet, but only larger, you may be watching a White-Fronted Parrot. These birds, unlike the parakeets do not travel in large flocks. The male may be distinguished by its scarlet wing bars which are not present on the female.

Mountain Bike Birding (or hiking)



Many of the birds found in the Las Catalinas region will not be seen unless one ventures forth onto the trails via bike or hike. The best birding time by far is shortly after sunrise. Here is Garmin data which lets you know the exact distances and climbs for Region #1.



Biking / Hiking Region #1

Inspecting the author's bike closely you will discover a camera case hung from the front handlebars, and a monopod tied to the frame ... a true birding bicycle!



No pain, no gain! Make certain you take plenty of water, but in addition to birds not seen down by town, the views from up atop the hills overlooking the Pacific are fantastic.

Black Headed Trogon



This bird needs to be seen in bright daylight to be appreciated. Thankfully, sunshine in large quantities is found at Las Catalinas! A bird which at first glance appears black becomes a gorgeous metallic blue.

Black Headed Trogon



Another view of the Black Headed Trogon which now shows off its orange breast.

Turquoise-Browed Mot Mot



Another of the more beautiful birds you will find at Las Catalinas is the Turquoise-Browed Mot Mot. Pay particular attention to the steep banks next to the road in Region #2 as the Mot Mot digs out nest holes in the ground, but needs a steep enough slope to keep away predators.

Turquoise-Browed Mot Mot



A loving pair of Mot Mots guarding near their nest hole.

Streak-Backed Oriole Nest Building



You may find this bird building a nest on the very end of tree branches. It weaves a totally enclosed nest out of straw and grasses. The location at the extreme end of branches protects its young from predators.

Streak-Backed Oriole Nest Building



The author found this Oriole in birding region #2 as the dry season ended. During this weather transition period (late April to early May) as rain again wets the forest, birds will be busy mating and provide great views as the leaves are not yet totally out.

Black Vulture



One advantage to hiking or biking the trails is you are often able to obtain the unique perspective of hill tops to look down upon birds such as this Black Vulture on its nest!

Other Birds of Las Catalinas



Blue Grosbeak

The Blue Grosbeak is a rare bird for this region, and will not be found other than on the trails. This bird ranges all the way from Costa Rica to southwestern Minnesota!



Crested Caracara

This bird is actually a tropical falcon version of a vulture, and is also known as the Mexican Eagle. The author found this Caracara enjoying some carrion near the mountain bike trails.



Cinnamon Hummingbird

A visit to the rain forest will yield more hummingbirds, but in Las Catalinas you will may find the Cinnamon Bird!

Squirrel Cuckoo



As you near the tops of the mountain bike trails, look for flashes of brown in the trees. You may spot a Cuckoo!

Variegated Squirrel



The scourge of bird lovers and bird feeders everywhere also exists in Costa Rica. Instead of the Gray Squirrel, if you watch the trees in town, you may see this rascal!

White Necked Puffbird



Seeing the White-Necked Puffbird lets one know ... you're not in Kansas anymore, Dorothy! This bird will remain motionless for long periods of time, lulling its prey into forgetting its presence.

Rufous-Naped Wren



This wren will normally be found near the ground as it ambushes insects.

Tropical Kingbird



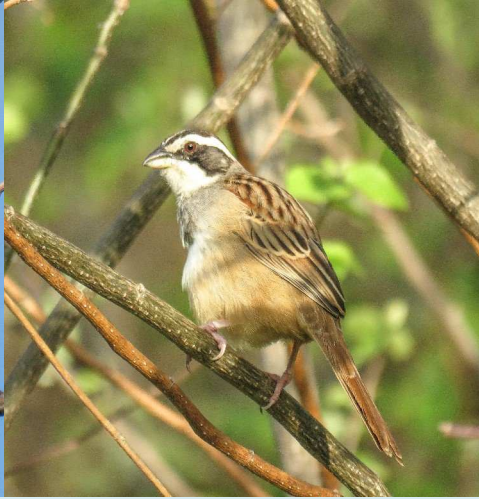
Not your Father's kingbird! You are most likely to see this bird out on the bike trails.

Miscellaneous Las Catalinas Birds



White-Lored Gnatcatcher

This bird will be found on the trails, and will constantly be in motion as it hops from branch to branch in search of insects. It will remind you of a warbler.



Stripe Headed Sparrow

This sparrow may be found right in town, generally down low as it looks for seeds and small insects.



Magnificent Frigate Bird

Early in the morning Frigate Birds and Pelicans will take off from their island rookery which is viewable from the shore of Las Catalinas. The frigate bird will then use morning thermals to soar increasingly higher.

Red-Crowned Woodpecker



Find nuts and small insects, and you will find this bird which will remind you of the North American Flickers. This woodpecker will often be found eating the same nuts as the Orange Fronted Parakeet.

Las Catalinas Flycatchers



Olive Sided Flycatcher

Flies = Flycatchers!

Look on the tops of trees as these provide perfect ambush spots to swoop down and catch flies. Flycatchers love dead branches as it lets them see more prey.



Brown Crested Flycatcher

Flies = Flycatchers!

Once the rains come at the end of April and the beginning of May and flies will hatch, and the flycatchers will appear.




Great Crested Flycatcher

Flies = Flycatchers!

Look for dead branches and you will find flycatchers. These perches provide good ambush spots for hunting.



A dramatic sunset over the ocean. The sky is filled with vibrant orange, red, and blue clouds. In the foreground, a dark, forested hillside is silhouetted against the bright sky. The water in the foreground is dark and calm. The overall mood is serene and beautiful.

Las Catalinas ... an outdoor lifestyle!

Addendum: El Viejo Wetlands - Green Iguana



A great jaunt to see more wildlife is a visit to the El Viejo Wetlands. The drive from Las Catalinas takes about 80 minutes and the Hacienda from where you start a boat tour on the River Tempisque is 16.5 kilometers by dirt road from the town of Filadelfia. A four wheel drive vehicle is not needed.

Bare-Throated Tiger Heron



This is one seriously big heron! Folks from North American may be familiar with Great Blue Herons, which would look small next to this waterbird. Fish beware!



**Turquoise-Browed
Mot Mot**

**Little Blue Heron
(immature)**



If you visit during spring look for these birds busily occupied at nest building, or rather digging . Mot Mots dig their nests in the side of steep hills or river banks ... necessary to prevent predators from eating their young.

The young Heron is looking for breakfast!

Crested Guan



If you hear a loud crashing in the tree tops, look up for this bird. As its preferred diet is fruit, trees of this kind are more likely to yield a sighting. Almost as large as a turkey, it is a hard bird to find as it is often hunted for food. Thus, it is not interested in hanging around humans!

Black Necked Stilt & Green Heron

Both of these birds you might see in the United States, but not all birds migrate back north.

The wetlands are rich in food, and many herons & shorebirds remain in Costa Rica all year.



River Tempisque



This is a typical river scene after the dry season has ended. Boat tours start at 9 am, but if you arrange your tour privately ... arrive by 8 am. Ask your guide if you may start the boat tour ASAP. You will see more wildlife because of fewer boats on the river (birds are more active early in the morning).

Tri-Colored Heron



The El Viejo wetlands are famous for herons. Scan any mud flats or river banks that might provide good ambush spots for fish, and you will likely see herons ... like this Tri-Colored Heron.

Groove-Billed Ani



At the end of your boat tour, make certain you walk the Hacienda grounds, not just the area next to the gift shop and restaurant. You will find other "non wetland" birds like this Ani, lots of green iguana, and other wildlife!



Index

Bare-Throated Tiger Heron - page 35	Great Crested Flycatcher - page 31
Biking / Hiking Region #1 - page 15	Great Kiskadee - page 6
Black Headed Trogon - page 16, 17	Great Tailed Grackle - page 5
Black Necked Stilt - page 38	Green Heron - page 38
Black Vulture - page 22	Groove-Billed Ani - page 41
Blue Grosbeak - page 23	Homo Sapiens - page 11
Brown Crested Flycatcher 31	Howler Monkey - page 8
Brown Pelican - page 10	Las Catalinas Birding Regions - page 9
Cinnamon Hummingbird - page 23	Las Catalinas Surf - page 32
Crested Caracara - page 23	Las Catalinas Sunsets - page 2, 33
Crested Guan - page 37	Little Blue Heron - page 36
El Viejo Wetlands - page 34	Magnificent Frigate Bird - page 29
Green Iguana - page 34	Mtn. Bike Birding (or hiking) - page 14

Olive Sided Flycatcher - page 31
Orange Fronted Parakeet - page 12
Red-Crowned Woodpecker - page 30
River Tempisque - page 39
Rufous Naped Wren - page 27
Spotted Sandpiper - page 5
Social Flycatcher - page 7
Squirrel Cuckoo - page 24
Streak Backed Oriole - page 20, 21
Stripe Headed Sparrow - page 29
Tri-Colored Heron - page 40
Tropical Kingbird - page 28
Turquoise-Browed Mot Mot - page 18,
... continued: 19, 36
Variegated Squirrel - page 25
White Fronted Parrot - page 13
White Lored Gnatcatcher - page 29
White Necked Puffbird - page 26
White Throated Magpie Jay - page 3
White Tipped Dove - page 4

Facing Page: Sunrise Aurora!

About the Author: Rich Hoeg lives in northern Minnesota and loves to capture the beauty of the natural world including the Northern Lights.

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