

## FOREWORD

To the dweller in a northern land eager to know the rich bird life of tropical America, I recommend Costa Rica. Readily accessible from the United States, Canada, or Europe, this small Central American republic supports an abundant representation of the great, exclusively New World families—tyrant flycatchers, hummingbirds, antbirds, ovenbirds, and woodcreepers—all poorly represented or absent north of Mexico.

Among the most exciting neotropical specialties are toucans, jacamars, puffbirds, and guans. With them are more familiar cosmopolitan families, including finches, sparrows, thrushes, swallows, swifts, woodpeckers, cuckoos, and others. Less strange to a visitor from the north are wintering migrants: wood warblers, vireos, orioles, and flycatchers. They are really neotropical birds returning to their ancestral homes to escape winter's snow and ice. There are also a few migrants from the south, such as the Swallow-tailed Kite, Yellow-green Vireo, and pesky Piratic Flycatcher.

Amid the rainforested Caribbean lowlands, the birder will find the richest representation of the great South American bird families, including species like the White-fronted Nunbird, Keel-billed Toucan, Lattice-tailed Trogon, and Dusky-faced Tanager.

Costa Rica's southern Pacific lowlands support a unique avifauna that it shares with western Panama. Here live such fascinating birds as the Fiery-billed Aracari, Turquoise Cotinga, Golden-naped Woodpecker, and Riverside Wren. In sharp contrast to the southern half of Costa Rica's Pacific side, the northern half has a prolonged severe dry season. Many birds range along the arid western side of Middle America from Mexico to central Costa Rica. Notable among them are the White-throated Magpie-Jay, Long-tailed Manakin, Turquoise-browed Motmot, and Banded Wren.

Isolated by the lowlands of the Isthmus of Panama and the Costa Rica-Nicaragua border, high mountains support endemic birds, including the Scintillant Hummingbird, Timberline Wren, Flame-throated Warbler, Volcano Junco, and the southern race of the Resplendent Quetzal.

All this great diversity of birds is found in a country the size of West Virginia. Good roads and comfortable lodges make them readily accessible to tourists, who nearly everywhere find helpful Costa Ricans who speak English. For an introduction to the rich neotropical avifauna, Costa Rica offers many advantages.

By their abundance, visibility, beautiful plumage, melodious songs, and endearing ways, especially as they faithfully attend their young in carefully con-



Dr. Alexander F. Skutch, left, welcomes a visitor, Dr. Walter Breckenridge, to his home, Los Cusingos, in 1995.

structured nests, birds rightfully claim much of the attention of almost everyone attracted to nature. But if we permitted them to absorb all our attention, we would miss much of nature's beauty and interest. Indeed, birds often direct our attention to flowering plants, lovely butterflies, other insects, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and more obscure creatures that we might otherwise fail to notice. In this book, you will find accurate accounts of a liberal selection of a richly endowed tropical country's vast diversity of organisms. This field guide should interest not only visitors from other countries but also many who live in Costa Rica.

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