For spring break 2016, I once again took a group of 13 students to Costa Rica as part of an Iowa State University Study Abroad course. Jim Pease, my co-leader for five trips, decided to step down so I was fortunate to recruit Jim Adelman to co-teach the course. As in previous years, the course objective was to experience as many of the biological life zones as possible during a 9-day trip. We visited three diverse sites (La Selva Biological Station, Las Cruces Biological Station, and Carara National Park) to experience the incredible biological diversity of Costa Rica.

11 March

This was our travel day to Costa Rica. We met on the ISU campus at 10:00 a.m. and took a shuttle to the Des Moines airport, where we arrived at 10:45 a.m. We checked in and boarded our flight to Dallas at 3 p.m. after a 2-hour delay (mechanical issues with the incoming flight). We arrived in Dallas at 5:00 p.m., just in time to watch our connecting flight to San Jose leave the gate without us on board! We missed the flight by less than 15 minutes. We were directed to the American Airlines service counter where we were quickly rebooked on the same flight a day later, booked into a hotel for the night, and given meal vouchers. We ate dinner at the airport (at a Mexican restaurant) before catching a shuttle to the Super 8 Motel in Belmond, Texas at 7 p.m. We arrived shortly and check-in went smoothly. A few of use share some red wine before going to bed at midnight.
12 March

We spent a lovely day in Dallas, Texas. In the morning we just relaxed at our hotel in Belmond before catching an 11:15 a.m. shuttle to the airport. Our flight to San Jose departed on time at 5 p.m. and we arrived at 9:05 p.m. We were expecting to be met by our driver on previous trips, Franklin Parajeles, but instead were greeted by Marvin “Mala noche” Murales, a replacement driver. We soon learned why – Franklin had unexpected hernia surgery earlier that week. We missed his knowledge and good cheer but Marvin was a wonderful driver too. Marvin drove us to Hotel Rincon de San Jose where we spent the night. After a smooth check-in some of us had drinks at the bar (Imperial beer) before calling it a night at around 10 p.m. [partly cloudy, temperature 69-73˚F, winds calm]

13 March

A few of us met around 6 a.m. for a short hike near the hotel before meeting for breakfast at 7 a.m. (pancakes, French toast, toast with jelly, fresh fruit, and orange juice or coffee). Marvin picked us up at 8:30 a.m. and we departed for La Selva Biological Station where we arrived at 11:05 a.m. On the way we passed through Braulio Carillo National Park and then skirted the western edge of the Caribbean lowlands. We saw a few birds including Bare-throated Tiger-Heron, Chestnut-mandibled Toucan, and Montezuma Oropendola plus a cooperative Spectacled Caiman resting in a roadside ditch. At La Selva we quickly checked in and settled into our rooms in the River Station. We had to drag our luggage across the river and some distance down a paved trail, but the house was isolated and a very comfortable place to stay. We then returned to the dining hall for lunch at 11:30 a.m. (rice and beans, chicken, steamed vegetables, fresh fruit, and rolls). After lunch we hiked the main station grounds and the Arboretum Trail. It was hot and muggy but we saw lots of wildlife including Mantled Howler Monkey, Collared Peccary, Ebony Keelback (a large, 5-foot snake), Nobles Rain Frog, Olive Tree Frog, Strawberry Poison Dart Frog, Great Tinamou, Great Curassow, Blue-headed Parrot, Amazon Kingfisher, Collared Aracari, Western Slaty-Antshrike, White-collared Manakin, Ochre-bellied and Boat-billed flycatchers, Cinnamon Becard, and Green Honeycreeper. At 6 p.m. we met for dinner (roast chicken, rice and beans, steamed vegetables, cake, and drinks). After dinner we went on a long night hike along the Camino Circular Cercano (CCC) and Sendero Oriental (SOR) Trails and were joined by a visiting scientist from the University of Arkansas-Little Rock. We had a great hike and found different frog species including Drab Tree Frog plus Yellow-spotted Night Lizard. Back at the River Station a Mottled Owl and a Common Pauraque called well into the night. [clear to partly cloudy, temperature 66-87˚F, winds NW 5-15 mph]

14 March

This was our only full day at La Selva Biological Station. A few of us woke early and birded around the bridge and main buildings until breakfast at 7 a.m. (rice, beans, fried eggs, fresh fruit, and orange juice). Some of the wildlife we saw (or heard) before breakfast included Mottled
Clockwise from top left: Silver-throated Tanager, Passerini’s Tanager, Bare-throated Tiger-Heron, Crested Guan, Black-hooded Antshrike, and Gartered Trogon.
Owl, Keel-billed Toucan, White-collared Swift, and Dusky-faced Tanager. We had a guided hike scheduled to 8 a.m. and split into two groups. My group of seven was led by Janier, a young but extremely knowledgeable guide who knew birds, plants, insects, and just about everything natural history. We hiked the Flaminea 4 Trail first, then crossed the bridge and hiked the river trail before returning to the dining hall at 11 a.m. We had a lot of fun following a troop of ten Mantled Howler Monkeys and ended up seeing three Hoffman’s Two-toed Sloths and a nice roosting group of Lesser Sac-winged Bats (many of which were banded). Birds seen on our hike included Great Tinamou, Gray-headed Kite, Great Curassow, Great Green Macaw (a lone flyover), Rufous-tailed Jacamar, Wedge-billed Woodcreeper, White-collared Manakin, and Orange-billed Sparrow. We also saw a nice variety of herptiles including Marine Toad, Litter Frog, Dink Frog, Black River Turtle, Fer-de-lance, Helmet-headed Iguana, Brown Blunt-headed Vine Snake, and Salmon-bellied Racer. We had some free time before lunch at noon (rice and beans, pork loin, potatoes, steamed vegetables, tiramisu, and juice).

In the afternoon we took a short drive outside the preserve to visit some agricultural fields to the north. We arrived at 3:30 p.m. in the hope that we would see the Great Green Macaws returning to the forest; a pair obligingly arrived at 4:10 p.m. but did not stop and perch for good looks. Other birds included Orange-chinned Parakeet, Golden-hooded Tanager, and Red-legged Honeycreeper. We stayed until 4:45 p.m. after which we returned to La Selva. We had a little time to relax before dinner at 6 p.m. (steak, rice and beans, steamed vegetables, cookies, and drinks). A nice night hike after dinner produced Red-eyed Tree Frog, Olive Tree Frog, Scarlet-webbed Tree Frog, and Masked Tree Frog and we finally called it quits at 10 p.m. [mostly clear, temperature 52-87˚F, winds NW 5-15 mph]

15 March

This was our long travel day to Las Cruces Biological Station near the Panama border. We packed up early and transported our luggage from the River Cabin to the dining hall. Some of us birded the main residence area before breakfast and saw Crested Guan, Masked Tityra, Gray-capped Flycatcher, and Bay Wren. Breakfast was at 6:30 a.m. and consisted of rice and beans, scrambled eggs, fresh fruit, French toast, fruit juice, and coffee. Marvin was anxious to show us a snake he had caught in his cabin, so we went to see it right after breakfast. Much to our surprise it was a baby Fer-de-lance! In the trees above his cabin some of us were lucky to glimpse a Snowy Cotinga. We then picked up our sack lunches, loaded the bus, and departed right on time at 8 a.m. Soon after we turned east on the highway outside La Selva we found a stunned Costa Rican Coral Snake lying near the side of the road. We looked at it briefly before moving it off the road. The drive to San Jose was uneventful and we saw few wildlife. It took us about an hour to navigate through San Jose and Heredia before climbing up the Talamancas. At noon we stopped for a 1-hour stop in páramo habitat. Some of the group hiked up to the outcrop for great views of the surrounding area while others hiked along the lower trail. The weather was cool and sunny with some approaching clouds from the west. Birds seen here included Volcano
Clockwise from top left: Strawberry Poison-dart Frog, Black River Turtle, Green Iguana, Red-eyed Treefrog, American Crocodile, and Green Climbing Toad.
Hummingbird, Timberline Wren, Black-billed Nightingale-Thrush, Sooty Robin, Black-cheeked and Wilson’s warblers, Large-footed Finch, and Volcano Junco.

We resumed our drive southwest and finally arrived at Las Cruces Biological Station at 4:30 p.m. Rodolfo Flores, the station biologist (and a 1991 Botany grad from ISU!), met us and gave a brief introduction to our group. The student’s shared four large bunk rooms (with a total of 19 beds) while Jim, Kevin, and I had a nice cabin along the edge of the garden. We got settled in our rooms and had a little time to explore the gardens before dinner. Some of the wildlife seen included several Agoutis plus Smoky-brown Woodpecker, Cerulean Warbler, Black-striped Sparrow, and Silver-throated Tanager. Meals at Las Cruces are served family style, unlike the buffet style at other OTS sites. Dinner was baked chicken, rice and beans, steamed zucchini, tossed salad, and fruit juice. After dinner most of us relaxed, but several students went on a short night hike and found many frogs. [clear to partly cloudy, temperature 62-88˚F, winds E 5-15 mph]

16 March

Today we explored Las Cruces Biological Station. Some of us hiked through the garden before breakfast and enjoyed many Agoutis plus birds that included Little Tinamou, Gray-headed Chachalaca, many Swallow-tailed Kites, Blue-headed Parrot, Purple-crowned Fairy, Rufous-browed Peppershrike, Streaked Saltator, and Black-striped Sparrow. Breakfast at 6 a.m. was pancakes, rice with beans, fresh fruit, orange juice, and coffee. We returned to our cabin for 30 minutes and enjoyed good looks at a Violet Sabrewing and Swainson’s Thrush. At 8 a.m. we met Rodolfo for a guided hike. He shared with us the history of the garden and property and led us on a short tour of the site. We learned a lot about the plants and how the Wilson’s had built the area up from a barren pasture when they purchased it in 1962; it was acquired by OTS in 1973. The gardens were full of birds and we saw Silver-throated, Speckled, and Bay-headed tanagers, Scarlet-thighed Dacnis, Streaked Saltator, and Spot-crowned Euphonia. A bonus was a medium-sized Fer-de-lance, which Rodolfo had some staff relocate to an area with fewer visitors. The hike ended with a trek into the second growth forest and a climb up the canopy tower. The view from the tower was spectacular, enhanced by the many Swallow-tailed Kits flying by at eye level or below! Our hike ended at 11 a.m. and we had some free time before lunch at noon (pork, rice and beans, a steamed vegetable medley, tossed salad, juice, and rice pudding for dessert). After lunch we remained on the dining hall deck and listened to three more student presentations before letting the students have some free time. Many of them adjourned to their cabins while some returned to the canopy tower. We relaxed until about 3:30 p.m. and then birded the gardens again where we saw more of the same birds plus Smoky-brown Woodpecker, Tropical Pewee, and Yellow-throated Vireo. Dinner at 6 p.m. was baked fish, rice and beans, cooked cabbage, tossed salad, fresh pineapple, and some red wine we had purchased. After dinner we went on a short night hike around the main garden and along the Jungle Trail. There was some light drizzle and we found a small land crab plus Hourglass Tree Frog, Masked Tree
Clockwise from top left: Northern Ghost Bat, Helmet-headed Iguana, Salmon-bellied Racer, Hourglass Tree Frog, Fer-de-lance, and White-faced Capuchin.
Frog, Green Climbing Toad, and several Rain Frogs. [partly cloudy, temperature 64-77˚F, winds W 5-10 mph]

17 March

This was our second and final full day at Las Cruces. We birded for a few minutes before breakfast and saw single Tennessee and Blackburnian warblers in addition to the usual species. Breakfast consisted of rice and beans, fried cheese (that squeaked as you chewed!), fresh fruit, and orange juice or coffee. At 7 a.m. we departed on a long morning hike into the old growth forest. Our plan was to hike through the gardens and take the Rio Bravo and Ridge trails as far as possible. We passed through second growth forest initially, then after crossing the Java River we entered primary forest. It was fun to briefly see two small groups (4 and 2) of White-faced Capuchins, although the looks were brief. The birding was rather slow, although on the way out we encountered a nice mixed-species flock. Some of the birds seen included Roadside Hawk, Fiery-billed Aracari, Ruddy Woodcreeper, Bicolored and Dusky antbirds, Slaty Antwren, Rufous Piha, Long-billed Gnatwren, Scale-crowned Pygmy-Tyrant, Orange-collared Manakin, Red-crowned Ant-Tanager, and Speckled Tanager. We ended up hiking about 5 miles and returned to the dining hall just before noon. Lunch was thinly cut steaks with rice, red beans, cooked cabbage, tossed salad, and fresh fruit.

The group opted to take it easy in the afternoon, in part because of the long morning hike. We relaxed and caught up on email before hiking the main garden starting at 4:45 p.m. Birding was slow but we saw Common Tody-Flycatcher, Green Honeycreeper, and Stripe-headed Sparrow. Dinner was at 6 p.m. and consisted of meat lasagna with toasted bread, steamed broccoli, rice, and fresh pineapple and watermelon. After dinner we left on another night hike and ended up circling the main garden. We found Cat-eyed Snake, Brown Blunt-headed Vine Snake, Masked Tree Frog, and a Green Climbing Toad before quitting at 8:45 p.m. Back at our cabin we were treated to a calling Black-and-white Owl, although we never could coax the bird to show itself. [partly to mostly cloudy, temperature 67-79˚F, winds SW 5-10 mph]

18 March

Today we departed from Las Cruces and traveled west to our last destination at Carara. We were up early to pack and then met for breakfast at 6:30 a.m. (pancakes, rice, potato rounds, fresh fruit, and juice or coffee). Some birding in the main gardens before breakfast turned up a lot of bird activity, but nothing new. We then loaded the bus, paused for a brief group photograph, and then departed for the Pacific Coast. Our first stretch of the long drive was to cross the Talamanca Mountains, drop into the Pacific Coastal Plain, and then turn north to La Gamba where we arrived at 9 a.m. We saw a few birds along the way including Yellow-headed Caracara, Gray Hawk, Smooth-billed Ani, and White-collared Swift. We exited Highway 2 at La Gamba to stretch our legs and look for wildlife during a 1-hour walk along a gravel lane. The weather was hot and muggy but we managed to find Short-billed Pigeon, Red-crowned, Red-
rumped, and Lineated woodpeckers, Piratic Flycatcher, White-lined Tanager, and Red-breasted Blackbird. We resumed our drive at 10 a.m. and reached Uvita at 11:30 a.m.; we saw few wildlife along this stretch of road. From here we continued on to Quepos, where we arrived at 12:10 p.m. From here we turned south off the highway towards Manuel Antonio and a much-needed lunch stop. We had a nice lunch at a restaurant in town and each ordered off the menu. After lunch we walked and drove around town for more than an hour before we finally located a group of five Central American Squirrel Monkeys, in addition to the more numerous White-faced Capuchins. During a quick stop at a beach access, a local pointed out a sleeping Northern Tamandua overhead, our first of the trip. Birds seen during this time include Magnificent Frigatebird, Brown Booby, Golden-naped Woodpecker, and Black-hooded Antshrike. At 3 p.m. we resumed our drive and finally arrived at Hotel Villa Lapas at 4:45 p.m.; birding remained slow in the mid-day heat. It took nearly an hour to unload and get settled into our room, after which we met for a buffet dinner (many options – the food was delicious!). A quick walk on the hotel grounds produced a Pacific Screech-Owl (calling after dusk) and Stripe-throated Hermit, but little else. Many of us relaxed at the bar after dinner before calling it a day. [clear to partly cloudy, temperature 65-97˚F, winds W 5-10 mph]

19 March

This was our only full day in the Carara area and we made the most of it! We began by birding the Hotel Villa Lapas grounds before breakfast and saw Scarlet Macaw, Long-billed Hermit, Pale-billed Woodpecker, Bicolored Antbird, and Painted Bunting. Breakfast was buffet style and offered many selections plus plenty of fresh fruit options. We left the hotel at 7:30 a.m. for Carara National Park, where we purchased park entry passes at the park office. We drove a short distance north and hiked the lagoon trail until 10:30 a.m. Although it was already hot and muggy we saw plenty of wildlife. Highlights were our first White-nosed Coati, Howler Monkeys, a small troop of White-faced Capuchins, and many birds including Little Tinamou, Plumbeous Kite, Scarlet Macaws, Steely-vented Hummingbird, Turquoise-browed Motmot (many!), Tawny-winged and Long-tailed woodcreepers, Northern Barred-Woodcreeper, Black-hooded Antshrike, Orange-collared Manakin, Green Shrike-Vireo, Thick-billed Euphonia, and Blue Dacnis. The guard in the parking lot was kind enough to show us a roosting Northern Ghost Bat that had found a daytime refuge under a palm frond. Next, we returned to the park office and hiked the paved Universal Trail and a bit of the Quebrada Bonita Trail until noon. The forest was rather quiet in the mid-day heat, but we still managed to see Scarlet Macaws (including a nest) and Orange-billed Sparrow. At noon we drove north and stopped at the bridge over the Tarcoles River to view 30+ basking American Crocodiles. We ate lunch (traditional platters with either beef, chicken, fish, or pork and a fresh blended mango drink) at a small restaurant on the west side of the bridge and it was delicious.

After lunch we drove to the small town of Carara and walked along the beach for half an hour. It was a sad experience because of all the trash, a result of a hurricane several years earlier combined with littering in the Tarcoles River. We saw many Brown Pelicans and Magnificent
Clockwise from top left: Drab Treefrog, Rufous-naped Wren, spider, Olive Tree Frog, Pale-vented Pigeon, and Swallow-tailed Kite.
Frigatebirds plus Brown Booby, Black-bellied Plover, Willet, Sanderling, and Royal Tern. We were scheduled for a boat ride with Crocodile Tours at 2 p.m., but the boats were running behind and we finally left at 3 p.m. The nice breeze and increasing cloud cover combined with the covered boats made for a surprisingly cool experience. The wildlife was awesome, highlighted by the many waterbirds – Boat-billed Heron, Wood Stork, Roseate Spoonbill, Purple Gallinule, Double-striped Thick-knee, Northern Jacana, Black-bellied and Semipalmated plovers, Black-necked Stilt, Willet, Sanderling, Ruddy Turnstone, Semipalmated, Western, and Least sandpipers, and Laughing Gull. Other birds included White-tailed Kite, Mangrove Black-Hawk, Peregrine Falcon, Red-lored Parrot, Ringed, Belted, and Green kingfishers, and Prothonotary Warbler. We finished the trip at 5:15 p.m. and quickly returned to the hotel. Dinner at 6 p.m. was another delicious buffet, after which most of the group hung around the bar until bedtime. [clear then becoming cloudy, temperature 68-92°F, winds SW 5-10 mph]

20 March

This was our last day in Costa Rica and our travel day home. We spent the morning at Hotel Villa Lapas, leaving at 8:30 a.m. for the airport. The highlights included a Greater Grison crossing the stream just below the hotel, several Black-and-green Poison Dart Frogs, a Reticulated Night Lizard, and birds that included Red-lored Parrot, Steely-vented Hummingbird, Bicolored Antbird, Yellow Tyrannulet, Spot-breasted Wren, and Scrub Euphonia. Breakfast was the buffet, which was once again delicious. Our flight to Dallas departed at 1:15 p.m. and the connection went fine but with a 1 hour delay; we arrived in Des Moines at 2 a.m. A bus shuttled us back to Ames by 3:15 a.m., making for a very long day! [clear, temperature 76-90°F, winds calm]

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**Mammals (12 species)**

- Hoffman’s Two-toed Sloth
- Long-nosed Bat
- Lesser Sac-winged Bat
- *Myotis* sp.
- White-faced Capuchin
- Mantled Howler Monkey
- Central American Squirrel Monkey
- Greater Grison
- Variegated Squirrel
- Central American Agouti
- Collared Peccary
- White-nosed Coati

**Birds (257 species)**

- Great Tinamou
- Little Tinamou
- Brown Pelican
- Brown Booby
- Neotropic Cormorant
- Anhinga
- Magnificent Frigatebird
- Great Blue Heron
- Great Egret
- Tricolored Heron
- Little Blue Heron
- Snowy Egret
- Cattle Egret
- Green Heron
- Yellow-crowned Night-Heron
- Boat-billed Heron
- Bare-throated Tiger-Heron
- Wood Stork
- White Ibis
- Roseate Spoonbill
- Sunbittern
- Blue-winged Teal
- Black Vulture
- Turkey Vulture
- Osprey
- Gray-headed Kite
- Swallow-tailed Kite
- White-tailed Kite
- Mississippi Kite
- Plumbeous Kite
- Mangrove Black-Hawk
- Gray Hawk
- Roadside Hawk
- Broad-winged Hawk
- Swainson's Hawk
- Red-tailed Hawk
- Crested Caracara
- Yellow-headed Caracara
- Peregrine Falcon
- Gray-headed Chachalaca
- Crested Guan
- Great Curassow
- Purple Gallinule
- Northern Jacana
- Black-necked Stilt
- Double-striped Thick-knee
- Black-bellied Plover
- Semipalmated Plover
- Whimbrel
- Spotted Sandpiper
- Willet
- Ruddy Turnstone
- Sanderling
- Semipalmated Sandpiper
- Western Sandpiper
- Least Sandpiper
- Laughing Gull
- Royal Tern
- Rock Pigeon
- Pale-vented Pigeon
- Red-billed Pigeon
- Short-billed Pigeon
- White-winged Dove
- Common Ground-Dove
- Ruddy Ground-Dove
- Inca Dove
- White-tipped Dove
- Gray-cheeked Dove
- Brown-headed Parrot
- Great Green Macaw
- Scarlet Macaw
- Crimson-fronted Parakeet
- Orange-chinned Parakeet
- Blue-headed Parrot
- Brown-hooded Parrot
- White-crowned Parrot
- White-fronted Parrot
- Red-lored Parrot
- Mealy Parrot
- Squirrel Cuckoo
- Smooth-billed Ani
- Groove-billed Ani
- Pacific Screech-Owl
- Vermiculated Screech-Owl
- Mottled Owl
- Black-and-white Owl
- Lesser Nighthawk
- Common Pauraque
- White-collared Swift
- Costa Rican Swift
- Chimney Swift
- Long-billed Hermit
- Stripe-throated Hermit
- Violet Sabrewing
- Rufous-tailed Hummingbird
- Steely-vented Hummingbird
- Purple-crowned Fairy
- Volcano Hummingbird
- Gartered (Violaceous) Trogon
- Black-throated Trogon
- Slaty-tailed Trogon
- Belted Kingfisher
- Ringed Kingfisher
- Amazon Kingfisher
- Green Kingfisher
- Blue-crowned Motmot
- Rufous Motmot
- Turquoise-browed Motmot
- Rufous-tailed Jacamar
- Collared Aracari
- Fiery-billed Aracari
- Keel-billed Toucan
- Chestnut-mandibled Toucan
- Golden-naped Woodpecker
Stripe-headed Sparrow  Common House Gecko
Rufous-collared Sparrow  Black-spinytail Iguana
Volcano Junco  Green Iguana
Streaked Saltator  Helmet-headed Iguana
Grayish Saltator  Tropical Night Lizard
Buff-throated Saltator  Reticulated Night Lizard
Black-faced Grosbeak  Salmon-bellied Racer
Blue-black Grosbeak  Central American Ameiva
Painted Bunting  Yellow-spotted Night Lizard
Red-winged Blackbird  Brown Blunt-headed Vine
Red-breasted Blackbird  Black River Turtle
Eastern Meadowlark  Cat-eyed Snake
Melodious Blackbird  Ebony Keelback
Great-tailed Grackle  Fer-de-lance
Bronzed Cowbird  Black River Turtle
Baltimore Oriole  Black River Turtle
Montezuma Oropendola  Spectacled Caiman
House Sparrow  American Crocodile

Reptiles and Amphibians
(38 species)

Marine (Cane) Toad
Green Climbing Toad
Central American Bullfrog
Strawberry Poison-dart Frog
Black-and-green Poison Dart Frog
Dink Frog
Litter Frog
Nobles Rain Frog
Common Rain Frog
Red-eyed Leaf Frog
Red-eyed Tree Frog
Scarlet-webbed Tree Frog
Hourglass Tree Frog
Masked Tree Frog
Olive Tree Frog
Yellow Treefrog
Drab Treefrog
Common Basilisk
Emerald Basilisk
Striped Basilisk
Dry forest Anole
Yellow-headed Gecko