

# Birding Costa Rica's Osa Peninsula

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Costa Rica offers so much to birders, whether first-time visitors or repeat customers. One thrilling area is the Osa Peninsula, to which three ornithologists and conservationists working locally serve as our guides.



All photographs were taken by Henry Sandi (@ sandi.\_henry) at locations on the Osa Peninsula, Puntarenas, Costa Rica.

**1** Turquoise Cotinga *Cotinga ridgwayi* (September 2020; Vulnerable) is a regional speciality. It can be seen at several sites on the Osa Peninsula.

>> BIRDING SITES OSA PENINSULA, COSTA RICA



Although a familiar species that is widespread in the Neotropics, it is hard not to enjoy watching 2 Roseate Spoonbill *Platalea ajaja* (October 2019; look for it at Puente Rincón).

**D**espite being a small country (51,000 km<sup>2</sup> terrestrially, plus about ten times that in marine terms), Costa Rica boasts incredible biological diversity due to its geological history, geography and conservation efforts (Sánchez *et al.* 2009). It is a small land ‘bridge’ that helps join the giant continental masses of North and South America. It is bathed by the warm waters of the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. It is crossed from north to south by three mountain ranges: the Talamanca, the Central Volcanic and the Tilaran Volcanic. And it has 12 clearly identified and differentiated life zones where more than 6% of global biodiversity lives or grows (Janzen 1983, SINAC 2014).

Thanks to these characteristics Costa Rica has an enviable list of birds, with 900-plus species recorded (Garrigues & Dean 2014, Dyer & Howell 2023) – a remarkably high number for a country roughly the size of the US state of Virginia or barely one-fifth the size of the UK. The number of endemics varies with taxonomy and perspectives on extinction, with – for example – BirdLife International (2023) listing nine species breeding in no other country (although this includes the Critically Endangered Guanacaste Hummingbird, known only from the 1895 holotype; see *Neotropical Birding* 32: 5). Around 90 additional species are shared only with neighbouring

countries (Sánchez *et al.* 2009). In terms of conservation status, BirdLife International (2023) lists 25 species as globally threatened and 34 Near Threatened. Perhaps 220 species on the Costa Rican list are migrants. These include raptors (such as Broad-winged Hawk *Buteo platypterus*, Swainson’s Hawk *B. swainsoni*, Mississippi Kite *Ictinia mississippiensis* and Turkey Vulture *Cathartes aura*), of which 3 million individuals are thought to migrate south along Costa Rica’s Caribbean coast, ranking the region second globally in terms of migratory-raptor abundance (Porrás *et al.* 2004, Sánchez *et al.* 2009).

## The Osa Peninsula

On the southern stretch of Costa Rica’s Pacific coast, in Puntarenas province, lies one of the country’s three most biodiverse areas. In just 1,741.5 km<sup>2</sup> (an area smaller than South Yorkshire, UK), the world-renowned Osa Peninsula houses 2.5% of the planet’s biodiversity (*vide* Toft & Larsen 2009). The Osa also includes the largest area of continuous tropical forest on the Pacific coast of Central America, and one long recognized as a conservation priority (Cornejo *et al.* 2012). Our NGO, Osa Birds (🌐 [osabirds.org](http://osabirds.org)), is active here.

The Osa Peninsula ranges from sea level to 745 m altitude. Its physiography is marked by a