

Central American Birding... with the 80~200/f4 Vario-Elmar-R

Text and photos by David Young.

Recently Rose and I had the opportunity to travel, with friends, in Costa Rica. Because this would be a foursome, there would not be the same time to devote to photography as there would be were we traveling alone. So a small kit, covering a huge range, would be ideal.

I settled on the LeiCanon 20D, with the 80~200 Vario Elmar, my old SL-style 2x converter and Canon's "consumer grade" 17~85mm IS zoom. The Canon's 1.6x crop factor meant continuous coverage from 28mm through 640mm with just 2 lenses and a converter!

To be fair, the little Canon zoom is quite sharp, though it will never rival anything from Leica. Still, it was fine for hundreds of "happy snaps". I sold it shortly after the trip, because it suffers from significant flare and, at the wide end, severe barrel distortion... though that is correctable, to a large degree, with PT-Lens. (*It's free and can be found at <http://epaperpress.com/ptlens/>*)

As you might have guessed, the 80~200/4 Vario was the joy of the trip. This lens is one of the most under-rated lenses in the Leica arsenal. It's compact, beautifully made and second only to the fabled 70~180/2.8 APO Vario Elmarit-R, in both sharpness and freedom from



*Spotted in La Fortuna, CR, I'm still unsure what it says!
Canon 17~85 IS zoom. ~55mm.*



The Costan Rican "Snake Bird" (anhinga anhinga). Hand held from a moving boat on the Sarapiquí River. 80~200/f4 Vario Elmar and 2x converter.

distortion. Certainly, it is noticeably sharper than the 180/4 Elmar it replaced... surprising for any zoom lens!

Designed by Leica, it's built in Japan by Kyocera and its build quality is the equal of anything made by Leica, themselves. I wonder, though, about its future, now that Kyocera have exited the camera and lens making business.

I found the combination of Vario-Elmar and 2x converter with the 20D a bit hard to hand hold... and for space/weight considerations, I'd not taken a monopod. That was a mistake.

The problem was the LeiCanon was too light to properly balance the pair. It's much better on the R8 w/DMR.



As we all know, using a 2x converter increases the effective focal length, yet maintains the minimum focus distance. I don't know why, but, we seldom think of this for close-up work. As you can see, in the cactus flower shot below, it works very well!

Overall, Canon's 20D and Leica's 80~200/f4 Vario-Elmar proved to be superb traveling companions.



Top left: The Violet Sabrewing Humminbrd. **Top right:** The Rufous-tailed Hummingbird. **Below:** Cactus flower with unknown insect.
All shots, except the sign, made with Canon's 20D, the 80~200/f4 Vario Elmar and 2x converter. All are © by David S. Young.



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