



Rockjumper Birding Tours

Worldwide Birding Adventures

Antarctica, Falklands & South Georgia

1st – 20th December 2008



Tour Leaders: Troels Jacobsen (Expedition Leader), Adam Riley, David Hoddinott, Richard White, David Shackelford, Simon Bellingham, Steve Bailey

Tour Summary

Yes! Our adventure had commenced with the signal horn from the Captain! The *MV Aleksey Maryshev* was crowded with excited Rockjumper bird and nature enthusiasts about to fulfill their lifetime dream of visiting the most remote and wild place on Earth – Antarctica and its Subantarctic Isles!

Departing from the scenic harbor of Ushuaia, the southernmost city in the world at the far tip of South America, we were all in high spirits as we began our journey aboard our Russian ice-strengthened vessel. A Black-chested Buzzard-Eagle and several Flightless Steamer-Ducks saw us off as we moved into the Beagle Channel, saddled between the rugged borders of Argentina and Chile.

Already our first Black-browed Albatross glided past us and Magellanic Diving-Petrels fluttered up from the bow before we had to pull ourselves away to complete the necessary safety drills. After a hearty welcome dinner and champagne toast to commemorate the initiation of our adventure, we enjoyed a spectacular sunset and retired to our comfortable cabins for our first night aboard ship.

We awoke early on our debut full day at sea to find swarms of Sooty Shearwater and Cape Petrel circling our ship. Soon someone shouted ‘whale!’ and we were shortly watching a fine Dwarf Minke Whale surfacing about the ocean swells. After sifting through literally thousands upon thousands of Wilson’s Storm-Petrels fluttering over the water surface we started observing our first Grey-backed and Black-bellied Storm-Petrels mixed in with the throngs. The excitement continued into the afternoon with a pod of stunning Long-finned Pilot-Whales that actively maneuvered towards our ship. Slender-billed Prions became increasingly common and our first of the great albatross, both Southern Royal and the phenomenal Wandering Albatross glided effortlessly above the ocean swells. As if this wasn’t already enough we



enjoyed groups of both the attractive Dusky and localized Peale’s Dolphins jubilantly leaping into the air at high speeds off the bow and comically playing in the white surf kicked up by our ship. This day was an exceptional introduction to the phenomenal marine life that thrives in these rich, southern oceans.

Clear blue skies and calm seas greeted us the following morning as Common Diving-Petrels steered away from the ship and we prepared for our first landing of the cruise on Carcass Island in the Falklands. No sooner had our zodiacs been berthed on the rocky beach, did we find the near-endemic Blackish Cinclodes and attractive White-bridled Finch, nearly at our feet! Further explorations revealed spicy looks at the lovely Rufous-chested Dotterel, South American Snipe, the endemic Falkland Steamer Duck and Upland and Ruddy-headed Goose. The near-endemic Striated Caracara (locally known as Johnny-Rook) was unafraid and approachable and a group of them was tearing apart an Upland Goose. The dense tussock grass produced the endemic Cobb’s Wren that is now restricted to only a few of the outer islands because of



predation from introduced rats and cats. Sedge Wren also sang from the tussocks and it was a joy to see other species of colorful passerines.

A large pod of fat Commerson's Dolphins, locally known as "puffing-pigs", surveyed our ship with playful antics for nearly an hour before we set off for the second landing of the day at Saunder's Island. Thousands upon thousands of nesting Gentoo Penguins called from noisy rookeries scattered over the white sand beach. Many birds were crouching over eggs or small chicks. Numerous Magellanic Penguins and our first sighting of the simply gorgeous King Penguin were all very memorable, especially in this beautiful, clear sunlight. It



was however another bird that stole the show that afternoon, the tiny Rockhopper Penguin sporting a bright red bill and yellow plumes of feathers from the side of their faces. Sitting at the edge of this colony of Rockhopper Penguins many thousand strong and witnessing them laughably hopping up the rocky slopes to feed their young fluffy gray chicks was amazing. At this same site we watched hundreds of nesting Black-browed Albatross performing dazzling aerobatics while below on the rocks were our first Snowy Sheathbills representing a special bird family restricted to the Antarctic. Beautiful King Shags were dotted around the mixed colonies and their brilliant blue eyes and orange caruncles were offset by the brilliant blue-black plumage. The whole afternoon on the island was gorgeous and we had plenty of time on our own to find the perfect place to observe this incredible wildlife up close while silently soaking in the spectacle. As we agreed that evening over dinner, it was an unforgettable day that truly overloaded the senses!

Learning how to maneuver ourselves in rougher weather conditions during the following day, we collected a smattering of waterfowl species such as the elegant Black-necked Swan, Speckled Teal, Crested Duck and Flying Steamer-Duck at Pebble Island. Long walks over the grasslands produced several other landbirds including the stunning Two-banded Plover. Thereafter we steamed into harbor at Port Stanley, the capital of the Falklands and one of the major sites of the 1982 Anglo-Argentine war. Setting out from the impressive wreckage of the ship Lady Elizabeth we took time to enjoy the more subtle natural attractions on the Gypsy Cove walk. Highlights included close views of a perched Variable Hawk and the orange Queen of the Falklands Fritillary butterfly that fed on the nectar of native white flowers scattered among the



colorful oceanic heath, including intense red berries of the Diddle Dee and bright green cushions of the Balsam Bog. The quaint village of Stanley itself offered us cultural interests such as the War Museum, the Government House, and picturesque Christ Church Cathedral plus a round of drinks at the local pub.

For the better part of three days while traversing the Antarctic Convergence into the Southern Ocean we endured a change in pressure zone causing lofty swells up to forty feet. It was amazing yet humbling to watch the abundance of albatross and other seabirds effortlessly sailing

past our ship at incredible speeds often rocketing by only inches from the wave's surface. A poignant reminder that we as humans are so poorly suited for journeying through these vast open oceans. The antics of several active pods of Hourglass Dolphins as well as a mighty Sei Whale that surfaced right beside the bow entertained us as we were able to see the composition of bird life changing as we continued southeastward. The once abundant Slender-billed Prion and Black-browed Albatross numbering in the thousands began to diminish and instead were replaced by swift flying Antarctic Prion and Grey-headed Albatross, sporting a colorful yellow upper and lower mandible. We all cheered when our first Light-mantled Sooty Albatross appeared, one of the specialties of the western Antarctic and certainly one of the smartest-looking of an incredible complex. For those who put in the long hours scanning over the ocean we were rewarded with some remarkable sightings such as three species of fast-flying pterodroma including numerous Soft-plumaged, two sightings of the scarce Atlantic, and an attractive White-headed Petrel that banked over the horizon flashing its white hood and tail. One of our greatest highlights however was late one afternoon when those extensive hours on the bridge paid off in dividends when a gorgeous Dark-mantled Sooty Albatross glided into view and proceeded to circle the boat long enough for many to race up and admire this sleek species, rarely encountered this far from its regular breeding sites deep along a lengthy trans-south Atlantic passage to the remote Gough or Tristan da Cunha Islands.

We began approaching the archipelago of South Georgia, a series of mountainous islands that were once the site of a major whaling station but are now mostly uninhabited other than by millions of nesting seabirds and pinnipeds. Here we began seeing our first Blue Petrels whizzing about over the water showing the diagnostic white tip of the tail. Whilst enjoying the novelty of being caught in a snowy blizzard on the open ocean, we marveled at our first pristine Snow Petrel, one of the highlights of any Antarctic expedition and a fitting setting for this charismatic species. Soon our first icebergs began appearing, massive monoliths looming in the distance almost like a mirage followed by the precipitous snow covered peaks and glaciers of South Georgia itself.

The seas finally began to calm and were pleased to return to the zodiacs for a landing in the sheltered Fortuna Bay surrounded by rugged ice-covered mountains. The beaches were packed with the most incredible collection of Antarctic Fur Seals from massive proud bulls to tiny newborn pups still attached to umbilical cords. We learned a new respect for these protective animals as we warded off attacks from aggressive males eager to defend their territory. Nesting Antarctic Terns in full breeding plumage and the bizarre meat-eating subspecies of Yellow-billed Pintail were enjoyed as well as



herds of feral Reindeer. We trekked over the frozen streams through the snow to behold thousands upon thousands of glorious King Penguins gathered together in a spectacle unlike any other in the natural world!

Hundreds of fluffy brown chicks (called Oakum Boys) called excitedly to locate their parents as lustrous adults returning from the ocean tobogganed across the ice and snow on their bellies, regurgitating mouthfuls of food and huddling close together for warmth, to combat the freezing temperatures and chilling gusts of wind. The opportunity to observe these marvelous creatures at such close range and truly absorb the endearing behaviors of individuals in this untamed habitat surely must be one of the finest wildlife experiences on Earth!

At "the Boss's" grave, we raised our glasses to toast the heroic efforts and memory of the polar

explorer Ernest Shackleton, and others who have given their lives to the seas. During our days at sea, we had been learning of the incredible history of Antarctic expeditions of the past. Here at Grytviken, we also surveyed one of the abandoned whaling stations that once pillaged the seas during the 19th century, slaughtering an incalculable percentage of the southern ocean whale populations that despite desperate modern conservation efforts will likely never completely recover to their previous levels. That evening, even though we were anchored in a calm harbor with smooth waters, we kept the ship rocking with an outdoor barbeque and dancing along with our enthusiastic Russian crew.



We welcomed the blue patches of sky and tranquil seas that greeted us the next morning as we anchored off St. Andrew's Bay, to experience the largest colony of King Penguins on South Georgia and possibly even the world! Gigantic Southern Elephant Seals lined the beach including several imposing males. Hundreds of baby elephant seals, with huge inky eyes, were incredibly cute and some inquisitive enough to climb into people's laps! Dozens of confiding Snowy Sheathbills scurried eagerly at our feet and both species of Giant Petrel roosted on the beach. The next several hours were

lost somewhere between exhilaration and disbelief as we marveled our way among an estimated 300,000 King Penguins of all ages and stages that covered every surface until the terrain finally met the icy glaciers at the base of the mountains far in the distance. There is no way to accurately portray such overwhelming sensations in words but we all knew that we were very fortunate to be absorbing this scene. Even the most hardened travelers amongst us agreed that this had to be the greatest wildlife experience of their lives.

Motoring alongside one of the intense blue icebergs that had grounded in Royal Bay, we found our first Chinstrap Penguins, mixed among the more numerous Gentoo. Continuing our excursion flanking the jagged cliffs of South Georgia we attempted to land on a short stretch of rocky shoreline but after two zodiacs were beaten by icy waves, we were forced to abort our efforts. Those of us who were temporarily stranded on the shore found ourselves surrounded by congregations of adorable Macaroni Penguins jumping from the jagged rocks. Despite the harsh weather and roaring waves we clamored aboard two rescue zodiacs that held against the rocks and we all made it safely back to our ship a little wet for the wear but with a great adventure story to tell.

We awoke to windless conditions anchored off Cooper's Bay at the far eastern edge of South Georgia in slick turquoise waters encircled by immense icebergs. Cruising by zodiac and much to the relief for those who hadn't caught up with them the day before, we enjoyed amazing views of hundreds Macaroni Penguins at a rookery, jumping from rock to rock and diving fearlessly into the ocean surges to feed. The tussock-covered mountain slopes yielded nesting Light-mantled Sooty Albatross and a single Weddell Seal as well as our first Chinstrap Penguin colony; in fact at one point we were able to see four species of penguins in one binocular view! South Georgia has unfortunately been plagued with the highly destructive Brown Rat that has wreaked havoc upon the native bird populations since their introduction more than a century ago, however this was one of the few rat-free areas and consequently within short time we had obtained excellent views of the endemic South Georgia Pipit, the planet's most southernmost passerine and highly threatened due to the infestation of these foreign pests.

Setting our sights for the South Orkney Islands, we continued our journey bound towards the

Antarctic Peninsula. We were all taken aback by the sheer number and magnitude of icebergs. Each monolith seemed to be painstakingly chiseled away with fine precision creating an icy wonderland of fantastic shapes and intense color. Seabird activity picked up and we sifted through literally thousands of diving-petrels to carefully separate the endemic South Georgia Diving-Petrel. The ocean swells also enlarged sometimes compounded by gales of hurricane force winds and for several days at sea we scanned over the rough open ocean wracking up an impressive list of petrels, shearwaters, and albatross as well as some splendid cetacean sightings. Flights of Cape Petrel, Southern Fulmar, and Antarctic Prion amused us in acrobatic action as constant companions while we were pleased to have our first encounters with the smart black and white Antarctic Petrel plus several sightings of Fin Whale breaking the surface and a showy pod of five Killer Whales including two impressive males. However, these high winds and massive swells impeded our progress and we had to swing away from the South Orkneys and aim for the Antarctic Peninsula itself.

Given recent reports of unobstructed seas, the last thing we expected to encounter during the final approach of our journey to the Antarctic Peninsula was heavy pack ice covering the ocean as far as we could see. Carefully navigating our way between colossal icebergs and endless miles of extraordinary ice formations, we were thrilled to have numerous encounters with the adorable Adelie Penguins on the ice flows. They amused us with their ungainly antics of shuffling and sliding along the ice before leaping over the edge and plummeting into the frigid waters. We soaked in as much of the simply phenomenal scenery as possible enhanced by our first sightings of Crabeater Seal as well as the reptile-like Leopard Seal, one of the southern ocean's most ferocious predators.



Having reinforced along our journey from onboard lectures the tremendous hardships endured by some of the great Antarctic explorers of the past, we all felt a bit euphoric when land was finally sighted again. However a landing was not to be for some time as the pack ice refused to let us through and we had to circle around the peninsula and approach from the western side. At long last, the mountainous continent of Antarctica stretched out before us as we made our way through the scenic Errera Channel, where several Humpback Whales and Antarctic Minke Whale blew plumes into the air, before we turned towards the aptly named Paradise Bay. Even here, a significant amount of drift ice had recently filled the bay so the captain had to carefully cut through huge chunks with the bow until at last we had anchored off securely near our landing site. We all excitedly loaded into the zodiacs and within short time we were celebrating our first steps on the Antarctic continent – for many of us, our seventh and final continent! South Polar Skuas and Antarctic Shags flew over our heads as we climbed to the top of the snow covered hill above the Argentinean research station and proceeded to celebrated with a royal snowball fight followed by exuberant sledding down the steep ice slope on our backs! We enjoyed it further as we continued with a zodiac cruise during a snowflake flurry along a colossal ice shelf through some of the most awe inspiring ice sculptures imaginable, many glowing intensely blue, shaped with incredible contours and displaying long spiraled icicles. We concluded this amazing day with a landing at Port Lockroy, where the small British Antarctic research station doubled as a post office. Here we had our passports stamped and we sent greetings to our loved ones, although the biggest challenge of the day came actually trying to get into the station without

inconveniencing the nesting Gentoo Penguins or inquisitive Snowy Sheathbills that literally were all around us, sometimes walking between our legs!

Our last morning in Antarctica was almost surreal as we landed with the zodiacs in Neko Harbor where our final Gentoo Penguin colony of the tour stretched up the mountain slope covered by freshly fallen snow. Completely windless and serene with sunshine occasionally percolating through the clouds, we watched these incredible creatures nesting habits one last time, trying to absorbing every detail of this incredible wilderness. A few very courageous souls also plunged fearlessly into the frigid Antarctic waters while Gentoo Penguins swam around them, although the majority of us contentedly watched from the rocky shore sympathetically listening to their cries of anguish. Before setting out into the vast ocean swells of the Drake Passage, we concluded with one final landing soaking in the sunshine watching a rookery of endearing Chinstrap Penguins nesting, breeding, and displaying. Not wanting our adventure to end, we played in the thick powdery snow almost up to our waists enticing us to engage in another intense snow



fight followed by a group photo overlooking some of the most amazing scenery of our voyage, with huge icebergs and abrupt mountains spiraling skyward in all directions.

With heavy hearts we began the return journey across the formidable Drake Passage, a two-day stretch of open seas with an intimidating reputation for pummeling ships with forceful waves and unrelenting winds. Some of the familiar seabirds from earlier in our tour returned and on several occasions we witnessed miraculous sightings of breaching Humpback Whales rocketing skyward as well as one brief Southern Bottlenose Whale and further sightings of Long-fined Pilot-Whale. The Drake Passage certainly lived up to its reputation tossing us around at first, but as we crossed back over the Antarctic convergence, the rough waters subsided as we cruising peacefully through the scenic Beagle Channel. Throughout our voyage we marveled at some of the most remote yet breathtaking places in the world both in regards to outstanding scenery, enormous glaciers and icebergs, and prolific wildlife observed by land and sea. This was the essence of Antarctica, a truly wild frontier at the end of the Earth!



A DVD of images from the cruise will be sent around to all participants once it has been collated. In the meantime galleries from participants can be found on the following links:

Dave Kutilek <http://www.birdingpix.com/home.html>

Beatrice Henricot <http://www.flickr.com/photos/beatricehenricot/>

Annotated List of Birds Recorded:

Nomenclature and taxonomy follows the IOC (International Ornithological Committee) including all recent updates.

Key to abbreviations:

ENDEMISM

(E): endemic (NE): near-endemic (NE): breeding-endemic (I): introduced

STATUS

(T): threatened (Nt): near-threatened (Vu): vulnerable

Ducks, Geese & Swans *Anatidae*

Black-necked Swan

Cygnus melanocoryphus

We found four of this attractive South American swans in a small freshwater lake on Pebble Island in the Falklands.

Flying Steamer Duck

Tachyeres patachonicus

Up to ten birds were seen on the Falkland Islands.

Flightless Steamer Duck

Tachyeres patachonicus

We enjoyed scope views of five birds from the deck of the ship while still in harbor in Ushuaia upon our departure.

Falkland Steamer Duck (E) *Tachyeres brachypterus*

Simply amazing views on two consecutive days on the Falklands, of this localized flightless species with more than twenty birds on each occasion including point-blank experiences with couples attending young chicks.

Upland Goose *Chloephaga picta*

Numerous birds during our time visiting the Falklands Islands with up to one hundred daily. We needed to take special care to distinguish the female of this species from the similar Ruddy-headed Goose.

Kelp Goose *Chloephaga hybrida*

Another very attractive waterfowl species that we found in Ushuaia as well as numerous memorable views of parents attending their chicks along the coastal areas of the Falkland Islands.

Ashy-headed Goose *Chloephaga poliocephala*

One representative of these sleek South American species was observed on our first day on the Falkland Islands.

Ruddy-headed Goose *Chloephaga rubidiceps*

Much easier to see on the Falkland Islands than the mainland South American subspecies (which is suffering a major population decline), we enjoyed views on two consecutive days including up to thirty birds on Carcass Island.

Crested Duck *Lophonetta specularioides*

This species was regularly encountered, especially along the rocky coast on a daily basis while exploring the Falkland Islands.

Chiloe (Southern) Wigeon *Anas sibilatrix*

Two birds were seen as we began our departure from Ushuaia through the Beagle Channel.

Speckled Teal *Anas flavirostris*

We first found six birds near from the harbor in Ushuaia and later another eight birds were seen on the Falklands at Pebble Island.

Yellow-billed Pintail *Anas georgica*

We found several birds daily at landing sites across South Georgia of the unique carnivorous nominate subspecies *georgica*, often called South Georgia Pintail

Penguins *Spheniscidae*

King Penguin *Aptenodytes patagonicus*

Certainly one of the greatest wildlife spectacles on Earth, we enjoyed up to three-hundred thousand birds at their rookery in St Andrew's Bay, South Georgia. We also observed from a distance, hundreds of thousands on the Salisbury Plains. Other encounters included spending quality time at a smaller colony at Fortuna Bay although our first experiences were with several breeding individuals including molting birds on Saunder's Island in the Falklands.

Gentoo Penguin (Nt) *Pygoscelis papua*

Several hundred of these comical penguins were first encountered nesting at Saunder's Island in the Falklands with numerous sightings thereafter including another very memorable colony nesting all around the post office at Port Lockroy off the Antarctic Peninsula.

Adelie Penguin *Pygoscelis adeliae*

We enjoyed an amazing experience with this charismatic species as we passed hundreds of birds porpoising through the water and standing atop massive icebergs as we sailed through the pack ice near the Antarctic Peninsula.

Chinstrap Penguin*Pygoscelis antarcticus*

First a few birds were encountered at the southern edge of South Georgia followed by a fantastic colony on Orne Island that we enjoyed during our final landing site of the trip. Another single bird was well photographed at Port Lockroy.

Western Rockhopper Penguin*Eudyptes chrysocome*

One of the favorites of the trip, we enjoyed the antics of several thousand delightful birds as they clamored over rocks to their noisy nesting colony on Sander's Island in the Falklands. Stunning weather and profusion of wildlife combined to make this into one of the most memorable days of the voyage!

Macaroni Penguin (Vu)*Eudyptes chrysolophus*

Several hundred birds were seen on consecutive days at two sites at the southern tip of South Georgia including a magnificent zodiac cruise that allowed us to observe a fantastic breeding colony and feeding behavior through the frigid Antarctic water.

Magellanic Penguin (Nt)*Spheniscus magellanicus*

We encountered this species first as we departed from the Ushuaia harbor in the Beagle Channel and then daily around the Falkland Islands. Here we found up to four hundred birds each day including numerous nesting birds in their burrows.

Albatrosses Diomedidae**Royal Albatross***Diomedea epomophora*

This species was first sighted cruising past in front of our ship en route to the Falklands followed by daily encounters en route to South Georgia with scattered sightings thereafter. All birds observed were of the nominate southern form, often split as its own species, Southern Royal Albatross.

Wandering Albatross*Diomedea exulans*

Certainly one of the most impressive birds on Earth, we enjoyed sightings in the same areas as the previous species with amazingly close encounters on several occasions including nearly completely white elderly individuals. All birds observed were believed to be of the form known as Snowy Albatross.

(Dark-mantled) Sooty Albatross (En) *Phoebastria fusca*

One of the most unexpected but highly appreciated sightings of the voyage! We were thrilled to find a single bird that flew alongside our ship for several minutes allowing almost everyone to obtain nice views of this species. This albatross is seldom encountered this far from its breeding islands half way to the African continent.

Light-mantled (Sooty) Albatross (Nt) *Phoebastria palpebrata*

Another great bird that was never tiring to observe, we enjoyed daily sightings of several birds in the waters surrounding South Georgia including nesting birds on the main island.

Grey-headed Albatross (Vu)*Thalassarche chrysostoma*

This attractive albatross was never especially common but we found birds of all ages on a daily basis in the waters surrounding South Georgia.

Black-browed Albatross*Thalassarche melanophrys*

By far the most common albatross of our voyage with several hundred recorded on many days of the trip at sea, although undoubtedly our most memorable experience was sitting among hundreds of birds as they nested on Saunter's Island of the Falkland Islands. At times, they cruised only a few feet above our heads – what an experience!

Petrels & Shearwaters Procellariidae

Southern Giant Petrel (Vu)*Macronectes giganteus*

Encountered throughout the trip almost daily with up to a couple hundred birds on some days; especially nice views on South Georgia where we saw individuals stealing Antarctic Fur Seal placentas. The rare pure white form was seen on several occasions, including a few together at Cooper Bay in South Georgia.

Northern Giant Petrel (Nt)*Macronectes halli*

We found this species, distinguishable by the darker red coloration on the bill, in much smaller numbers throughout our voyage with a maximum of thirty birds in one day.

Southern Fulmar*Fulmarus glacialisoides*

This attractive seabird was available to us throughout the tour with up to fifteen birds sighted in a single day gliding over the waves around our ship.

Antarctic Petrel (BE)*Thalassoica antarctica*

A very scarce bird on this route and certainly not guaranteed. We were fortunate to encounter a few birds on two days during the trip while crossing from South Georgia to the Antarctic Peninsula allowing us to study two particular individuals for several hours. What a beauty!

Cape (Pintado) Petrel*Daption capense*

A constant companion throughout the voyage and seen every day at sea with peak numbers of over two hundred representatives of this attractive species encountered one day crossing towards the Antarctic Peninsula.

Snow Petrel*Pagodroma nivea*

One of those amazing pure white birds that really epitomizes Antarctica; we enjoyed good numbers on several days during the tour beginning as we approached South Georgia with peak numbers near the Antarctic Peninsula.

Blue Petrel*Halobaena caerulea*

Easily distinguished from the superficially similar prions by the white tip of the tail and dark half-collar, we enjoyed sighting at sea from South Georgia and throughout our time on the Antarctic Peninsula and well into the Drake Passage, with up to ninety bird estimated in a single day.

Broad-billed Prion*Pachyptila vittata*

Prions are notoriously difficult to identify in the field but we had two sightings of this species, scarce in these waters and the identification confirmed by photographs.

Antarctic Prion*Pachyptila desolata*

The most numerous prion once we crossed over the Antarctic Convergence into the Southern Ocean with peak numbers of up to five hundred birds estimated in a single day.

Slender-billed Prion*Pachyptila belcheri*

Common only at the beginning of our trip whilst in the vicinity of the Falkland Islands where we observed hundreds of birds at sea daily.

Kerguelen Petrel*Aphrodroma brevirostris*

On bird showed as we made our way towards the Falkland Islands flashing the silver outer edges of its underwing as it wheeled in large arcs over the horizon in front of the bow.

White-headed Petrel*Pterodroma lessonii*

One of this distinctive species showed as it rocketed in front of the ship while we began our journey towards South Georgia. Only seen by a few lucky participants.

Atlantic Petrel*Pterodroma incerta*

Two boldly patterned individuals were seen well by those observing from the top deck of the ship as we cruised towards South Georgia.

Soft-plumaged Petrel*Pterodroma mollis*

The most numerous *Pterodroma* with daily sightings as we motored from the Falklands to South Georgia, up to fifteen birds in a single day.

White-chinned Petrel (Vu) *Procellaria aequinoctialis*

This widespread species was fairly common at sea throughout the tour with up to two hundred birds at most seen on any one day throughout the voyage.

Little Shearwater *Puffinus assimilis*

A single bird was observed by those watching from the top deck while traveling en route to South Georgia.

Sooty Shearwater (Nt) *Puffinus griseus*

Most common near the mainland of South America and in the waters surrounding the Falkland Islands where we watched this species daily with one exceptional sighting of more than two thousand birds streaming by on one particular morning.

Great Shearwater *Puffinus gravis*

Three individuals total were seen flying over the water surface as we entered and exited from Pebble Island in the Falklands.

Storm Petrels *Hydrobatidae*

Wilson's Storm Petrel *Oceanites oceanicus*

We found this widespread species in good numbers almost daily at sea including one particular day en route to the Falklands where we estimated more than four thousand birds.

Grey-backed Storm Petrel *Garrodia nereis*

An attractive but uncommon species that we found in small numbers daily at sea only while in the vicinity of the Falkland Islands and South Georgia.

Black-bellied Storm Petrel *Fregetta tropica*

Scattered numbers of this distinctive storm-petrel were enjoyed on many days at sea throughout the voyage with our highest numbers of up to twenty each day en route to South Georgia from the Falklands.

Diving Petrels *Pelecanoididae*

Magellanic Diving Petrel *Pelecanoides magellani*

Only observed on the first two days of the voyage with six and ten birds seen on respective days en route to the Falkland Islands.

South Georgia Diving Petrel *Pelecanoides georgicus*

This is a tough species to separate from the more abundant Common Diving-Petrel although we first identified three birds at sea near the Salisbury Plains and a further estimated two hundred birds among much more numerous Common Diving-Petrels as we departed South Georgia from the southwest heading towards the Antarctic Peninsula.

Common Diving Petrel *Pelecanoides urinatrix*

We encountered this widespread species almost every day at sea with scattered numbers with several hundred en route to the Falklands, smaller numbers en route to South Georgia, an impressive afternoon with no less than three thousand birds, and scattered sightings again on the Drake Passage.

Grebes *Podicipedidae*

Great Grebe *Podiceps major*

Two birds showed up in the Beagle Channel just before we returned to port in Ushuaia.

Hérons Ardeidae**Black-crowned Night Heron***Nycticorax nycticorax*

We found a few of this cosmopolitan species on the Falkland Islands including several birds near the pier at Stanley.

Cormorants Phalacrocoracidae**Rock Shag***Leucocarbo magellanicus*

We had daily encounters with this attractive cormorant with especially nice views of two adults in breeding plumage along with a juvenile at our first landing on Carcass Island.

Imperial Shag*Leucocarbo atriceps*

A few representatives of this species, sometimes lumped by authorities with the following three species of cormorant listed below, were seen as we approached Ushuaia on our return in the Beagle Channel.

South Georgia Shag (E)*Leucocarbo georgianus*

Up to two hundred birds were seen daily while we were close to the shoreline of South Georgia including especially nice views of many pairs nesting in the tussock grass on the steep cliffs.

King Shag*Leucocarbo albiventer*

Common only from the tip of South America through the Falkland Islands were we found several hundred birds.

Antarctic Shag*Leucocarbo bransfieldensis*

We were pleased to see nearly one hundred birds in the vicinity of Paradise Bay including nesting birds on a nearby cliff.

New World Vultures Cathartidae**Turkey Vulture***Cathartes aura*

We had several very close sightings on the Falkland Islands as well as a few birds flying over the harbor in Ushuaia.

Caracaras & Falcons Falconidae**Striated Caracara (Nt)***Phalacrocorax australis*

This fantastic near endemic to the Falklands was seen in large numbers especially at the Carcass Island landing where we estimated nearly fifty approachable birds.

Southern Crested Caracara*Caracara plancus*

We found a few birds at Carcass Island on the Falkland Islands.

Peregrine Falcon*Falco peregrinus*

We found two of these very widespread falcons on our first day landing on the Falkland Islands.

Kites, Hawks & Eagles Accipitridae**Black-chested Buzzard-Eagle***Geranoaetus melanoleucus*

A single bird flew high over our ship as we were about to leave the harbor in Ushuaia.

Variable Hawk*Buteo polyosoma*

We first found two birds in flight followed by a stunning nesting pair while walking in the vicinity of Stanley in the Falkland Islands.

Sheathbills Chionidae**Snowy Sheathbill***Chionis albus*

A unique family of the Antarctic, we first found a dozen birds near the nesting Black-browed Albatross on the Falkland Islands and were eventually enjoying birds even landing on our ship closer to South Georgia and the Antarctic. Peak numbers were two hundred birds foraging around our feet at St Andrews Bay where we walked among the largest King Penguin colony.

Oystercatchers *Haematopidae*

Magellanic Oystercatcher

Haematopus leucopodus

We enjoyed about a dozen of these striking birds, often very confiding, on two consecutive days landing in the Falkland Islands.

Blackish Oystercatcher

Haematopus ater

Another eye-catching species that we saw only on the Falkland Islands where we had up to sixteen birds in a single day with especially memorable views of a nesting pair on Carcass Island.

Plovers *Charadriidae*

Two-banded Plover

Charadrius falklandicus

This attractive wader was seen only one day during our voyage; however on this day walking Pebble Island in the Falklands we enjoyed great views of no less than thirty individuals including adults attending chicks.

Rufous-chested Plover

Charadrius modestus

A strikingly marked species, we found birds on two consecutive days in the Falkland Islands including up to a dozen birds on one morning walking around Pebble Island.

Sandpipers & Snipes *Scolopacidae*

South American (Magellanic) Snipe *Gallinago paraguaiiae*

Surprising numbers of a least six cooperative birds located at scattered sites on Carcass and Pebble Islands in the Falklands.

Sanderling

Calidris alba

Four birds were noted along the shores of Pebble Island in the Falklands.

White-rumped Sandpiper

Calidris fuscicollis

Two wintering flocks of about fifty birds total were observed on Pebble Island in the Falklands.

Gulls & Terns *Laridae*

Dolphin Gull

Leucophaeus scoresbii

We enjoyed large numbers of up to fifty of these colorful gulls daily while departing from the South American mainland and on the Falkland Islands.

Kelp Gull

Larus dominicanus

Up to two thousands birds were observed on one day in the Falkland Islands with scattered sightings throughout the voyage.

Brown-hooded Gull

Larus maculipennis

We had just a few sightings of this South American species while we landed on the Falkland Islands.

South American Tern

Sterna hirundinacea

This sleek tern was only seen near the mainland where we observed up to thirty birds in a single day with especially great views in the Beagle Channel and nesting on the pier at Stanley in the Falklands.

Arctic Tern

Sterna paradisaea

A long distance migrant that we found in scattered small numbers throughout the voyage in non-breeding plumage.

Antarctic Tern *Sterna vittata*

A stunning species of tern that we found to be relatively common in the vicinity of South Georgia and the Antarctic Peninsula with up to thirty birds recorded in a single day including several nesting pairs.

Skuas *Stercorariidae***Chilean Skua** *Stercorarius chilensis*

About ten birds were observed as we departed the harbor from Ushuaia and made our way through the Beagle Channel. Others were seen on the return leg.

South Polar Skua *Stercorarius maccormicki*

The majority of skuas that we saw in the vicinity of the Antarctic Peninsula were this species including several birds seen exceptionally well scavenging around the Gentoo Penguin colonies.

Subantarctic (Brown) Skua *Stercorarius antarcticus*

We observed this species throughout much of our voyage beginning in the Falkland Islands with our highest numbers of up to sixty individuals estimated in a single day at South Georgia including numerous nesting pairs.

Tyrant Flycatchers *Tyrannidae***Dark-faced Ground Tyrant** *Muscisaxicola maclovianus*

About a dozen birds were seen scattered along the verdant hillsides of Carcass Island on the Falklands. A nest with a brooding bird was located during our walk around Gypsy Cove near Stanley.

Fork-tailed Flycatcher *Tyrannus savana*

We were pleased to find a single vagrant adult while birding on Carcass Island in the Falklands.

Ovenbirds *Furnariidae***Blackish Cinclodes** *Cinclodes antarcticus*

Locally abundant on the Falkland Islands were they literally ran around our feet at Carcass Island with about fifty birds estimated in a single day.

Swallows & Martins *Hirundinidae***Chilean Swallow** *Tachycineta meyeni*

A few representatives of this South American species were seen from the deck of the ship as we departed from Ushuaia.

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*

An unexpected individual showed up clinging tightly to one of the lines of our ship as we approached the Falkland Islands. It was gone the following morning.

Wrens *Troglodytidae***Sedge (Grass) Wren** *Cistothorus platensis*

Three birds were seen quite well as they bubbled in song perched on top of the scrubby vegetation on Carcass Island in the Falklands. Others were seen around Gypsy Cove near Stanley.

Cobb's Wren (E) *Troglodytes cobbi*

A lovely endemic that suffers from the infestation of rats and cats throughout much of the Falklands. We found a predatory-free zone at Carcass Island where we encountered no less than ten confiding birds including a pair attending a tiny chick.

Thrushes *Turdidae***Austral Thrush***Turdus falcklandii*

Common and obviously quite successful on the Falkland Islands where we found this species daily including up to fifty birds in one day.

Old World Sparrows *Passeridae***House Sparrow (I)***Passer domesticus*

Large numbers of this introduced species seen at Stanley in the Falklands.

Wagtails & Pipits *Motacillidae***Correndera Pipit***Anthus correndera*

We found up to a dozen birds in the open grass on Carcass and Pebble Islands in the Falklands.

South Georgia Pipit (E)*Anthus antarcticus*

On our final morning in South Georgia we enjoyed a lovely zodiac cruise into the predator-free zone of Cooper Bay where we had lovely views of eight birds, the world's southernmost passerine.

Finches *Fringillidae***Black-chinned Siskin***Carduelis barbata*

Several sizable flocks of this bright and chipper species were noted on consecutive day in the Falklands.

New World Blackbirds *Icteridae***Long-tailed Meadowlark***Sturnella loyca*

This is another colorful species that we observed in good numbers on consecutive days on the Falkland Islands. The Falkland's subspecies is much larger and longer-billed than the South American forms.

Tanagers & Allies *Thraupidae***White-bridled (Canary-winged/Black-throated) Finch *Melanodera melanodera***

This pretty little finch was enjoyed on consecutive days at Carcass and Pebble Islands on the Falklands with up to twelve birds seen each day.

**Annotated List of Mammals Recorded:****Hares & Rabbits *Leporidae*****European Rabbit (I)***Oryctolagus cuniculus*

This introduced species was seen a handful of times on the Falkland Islands.

Rats & Mice *Muridae*

Brown Rat (I)

Rattus norvegicus

We found this destructive introduced predator once on the Falkland Islands as well as on several occasions in South Georgia.

Eared Seals & Sea Lions *Otariidae*

South American Sea Lion

Otaria flavescens

We had just a few sightings of this species as we were leaving the harbor from Ushuaia and heading towards the Falklands. Small numbers were also observed in the Falklands.

South American Fur Seal

Arctocephalus australis

Although common on the South American mainland and in the Beagle Channel, we mostly encountered this species at sea near the Falkland Islands with peak numbers of up to fifty animals on one afternoon as we departed for South Georgia.

Antarctic Fur Seal

Arctocephalus gazella

Thousands encountered throughout our voyage especially in the vicinity of South Georgia and the Antarctic Peninsula where we were often trying to avoid unwanted aggression from territorial bulls while marveling at tiny suckling pups.

Seals *Phocidae*

Southern Elephant Seal

Mirounga leonina

A very impressive beast of which we encountered thousands of animals especially on South Georgia including several views of fighting males but mostly females and young lounging all over the beaches. Some of the youngsters were particularly inquisitive and climbed right onto some of us!

Crabeater Seal

Lobodon carcinophagus

This sleek seal that was observed on several occasions including in the pack ice as we approached the Antarctic Peninsula and especially nice views in Paradise Bay.

Leopard Seal

Hydrurga leptonyx

We found this handsome seal first on the pack ice right beside our ship as we approached the Antarctic Peninsula with a couple more distant views thereafter.

Weddell Seal

Leptonychotes weddellii

One individual was first seen as we zodiac cruised Cooper Bay on South Georgia followed by several sightings thereafter closer to the Antarctic Peninsula.

Ocean Dolphins *Delphinidae*

Orca (Killer Whale)

Orcinus orca

We first had nice views of five individuals including two large males surfacing in the waves for several minutes en route to South Georgia followed by a couple more distant views near the Antarctic Peninsula.

Dusky Dolphin

Lagenorhynchus obscurus

This species was only seen on one occasion as two animals surfaced several times and rode the bow of the ship before disappearing, again en route to the Falkland Islands.

Peale's Dolphin

Lagenorhynchus australis

Although highly range-restricted, we enjoyed numerous views of this playful dolphin species in the vicinity of the Falkland Islands with up to eight total animals on two consecutive days.

Commerson's Dolphin*Cephalorhynchus commersonii*

A very striking species that we found to be fairly common near the Falklands; on one occasion to our delight a pod of at least seven individuals rode the wake of zodiacs and circled the anchored ship for nearly an hour.

Hourglass Dolphin*Lagenorhynchus cruciger*

Another very attractive species that we found in open ocean while crossing towards South Georgia including several playful individuals that rode the bow of the ship.

Long-finned Pilot-Whale*Globicephala melas*

We had two sightings of pods each containing at least seven individuals approaching our ship of this sleek, dark whale once en route to the Falklands and again in the Drake Passage.

Beaked Whales Ziphiidae**Southern Bottlenose Whale***Hyperoodon planifrons*

The beaked whales are notoriously difficult to see, although this is one of the most regularly sighted and we had at least two animals surface in the wake of our ship while crossing the Drake Passage toward the mainland.

Rorquals Balaenopteridae**Dwarf Minke Whale***Balaenoptera acutorostrata*

Minke whales are often tough to separate from each other although we were able to obtain photographs of this species surfacing above the waves while en route towards the Falklands.

Antarctic Minke Whale*Balaenoptera bonaerensis*

It is likely that most of the Minke whales we saw near the Antarctic Peninsula and in the Drake Passage represented this species although at least two sightings in the scenic Errera Channel near Paradise Bay showed the diagnostic features.

Humpback Whale*Megaptera novaeangliae*

The most common whale sighted on the trip including several fantastic breaches in the Drake Passage as we made our way back towards the South American mainland.

Sei Whale*Balaenoptera borealis*

Many of those birding from the top deck and later from the bridge enjoyed especially nice views of this baleen whale surfacing right next to our ship.

Fin Whale*Balaenoptera physalus*

This is the second largest whale in the world after the Blue Whale and we had several sighting of these animals surfacing above the waves both approaching and departing the Antarctic Peninsula.

Deer Cervidae**Reindeer (I)***Rangifer tarandus*

We found several introduced herds of these attractive species native to the Arctic whilst exploring South Georgia including some interesting interactions between deer and penguin!

Photo credits: All photos taken on Rockjumper's Antarctica Dec 2008 Trip: King Penguin; Southern Royal Albatross; Rockhopper Penguin; Black-browed Albatross; Zodiac trip – Paradise Bay; Wedell Ice bergs; Gentoo Penguin; Antarctica scenery; Group photo; Elephant Seal and Orca.

Rockjumper Birding Tours
Worldwide Birding Adventures
PO Box 13972, Cascades, 3202, South Africa
Tel: +27 33 394 0225
Fax: +27 88 033 394 0225
Email: info@rockjumper.co.za
Alternative Email: rockjumperbirding@yahoo.com
Website: www.rockjumper.co.za