



# Rockjumper Birding Tours

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Worldwide Birding Adventures

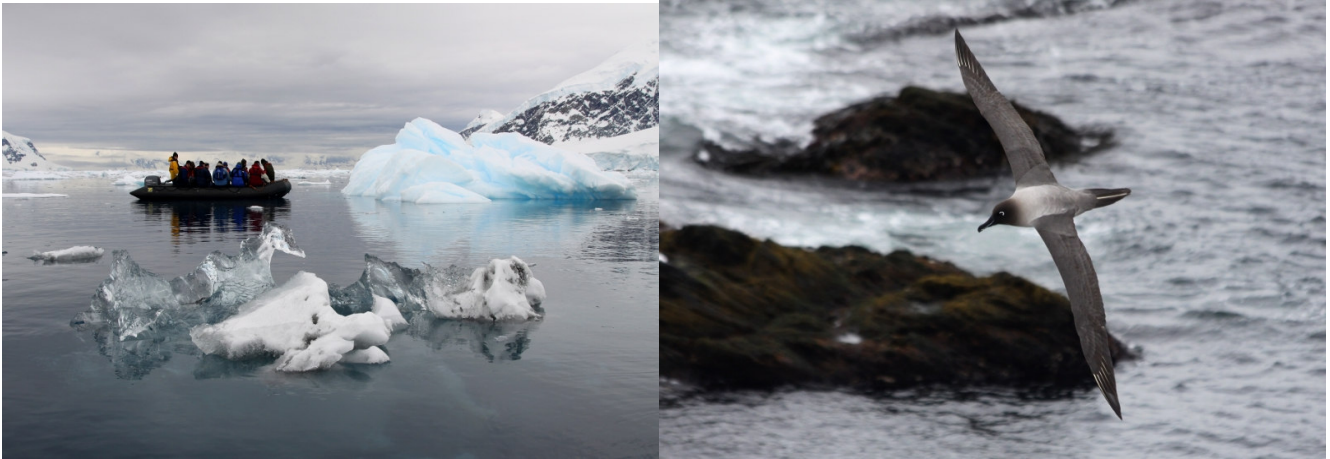
## Antarctica

*Wild frontiers at the end of the Earth!*

**3<sup>rd</sup> to 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2009**



**Trip report compiled by tour leader: David Shackelford**



## **Tour Summary**

‘There’s a peculiar fascination about going – I don’t think I can quite explain it in words, but there’s an excitement, a thrill, a sort of magnetic attraction about polar exploration.’ ~Sir Ernest Shackleton

It was an amazing voyage through the Antarctica this year, with an outstanding group of enthusiastic participants and some of the most incredible wildlife encounters on earth. We boarded our ship from the shores of Puerto Madryn nestled on the central coastline of Argentina, where even from the dock we began our great list of Patagonian wildlife with species such as Southern Martin, White-winged Coot, Chimango Caracara, and a flock of bright pink Chilean Flamingos feeding along the beachfront. While still in port we were already seeing some spectacular Southern Right Whale behavior from the top viewing deck, as well as a distant Sperm Whale spouting. Here we observed nearby rafts of Great Grebe, Red Shoveler and our first sightings of inquisitive Magellanic Penguin inspecting the side of our ship. Aboard the Professor Multanovskiy, our small ice-strengthened exploration vessel, we toasted with Champaign to our adventures to come, and then excitedly set out to sea!

The next two days, while crossing the open waters between the Falkland Islands, were truly memorable, and a great introduction to the pelagic birds of the southern seas. Black-browed and Royal Albatross were in almost constant attendance, as well as the cute Cape Petrel, Slender-billed Prion and the tiny Common Diving-Petrel. A couple of bizarre sightings included an Eared Dove detrimentally flying out to sea and a very lost Many-colored Rush-Tyrant, normally a wetland skulker from mainland South America, that we found hiding from the wind in a zodiac. With hours of persistent scanning we also found several scarce birds for our route, including Greater and Little Shearwaters, Great-winged Petrel and Peduinker – also known as Grey Petrel. These initial days were also a chance to familiarize ourselves with the ship layout, get to know our fellow passengers, and meet our skilled Russian crew. There were also a number of interesting lectures on board that kept us entertained while not sea-watching or marveling at Dusky Dolphins riding in the breakwaters of the bow.

The skies cleared as we prepared for our first landing of the tour on West Point Island in the Falklands, a hilly archipelago that supports a rich avifauna. Our landing site was surrounded by dozens of attractive Kelp and Upland Geese that corralled their tiny chicks, sometimes only a few feet away. An inquisitive Blackish Cinclodes landed nearby to inspect us, and a short walk soon produced Long-tailed Meadowlark, Dark-faced Ground-Tyrant, Correndera Pipit and the scarce Ruddy-headed Goose. It was, however,

another bird that stole the show this morning – the tiny Rockhopper Penguins with their bright red bills and yellow plumes that extended from the side of their faces. Combined with thousands of nesting Black-browed Albatross, observing the interactions of these two species from the edge of this colony was simply amazing; from the amusing penguins comically hopping up the rocky slopes, to the dazzling aerobatics of the albatrosses careening effortlessly into the wind. In the afternoon we continued onwards to Carcass Island, where no sooner had our zodiacs been berthed on the rocky beach that we found the endemic Cobb's Wren, (now restricted to only a few of the outer islands because of predation from introduced rats and cats), and Magellanic Oystercatcher almost at our feet! Further explorations revealed a noisy rookery of Gentoo Penguin protecting their eggs at the nest, as well as spicy looks at the attractive White-bridled Finch, Rufous-chested Dotterel and a lovely encounter with a confiding South American Snipe. The whole afternoon on the island was gorgeous, and we had plenty of time on our own to find the perfect place for observing 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!

Settling into harbor at Port Stanley, one of the major sites of the 1982 Anglo-Argentine war for control of the Falkland Islands, we made our way past the impressive wreckage of the Lady Elizabeth before exploring Gypsy Cove. Here we took time to enjoy the more subtle natural attractions, including the orange Queen of the Falklands Fritillary that fed on the nectar of native white flowers scattered among the colorful oceanic heath. The quaint village of Stanley offered us cultural interests such as the War Museum, the Government House and the picturesque Christ Church Cathedral, not to mention a round of drinks at the local pub!

We were sent off by a delightful pod of Commerson's Dolphins as we set off to traverse the Antarctic Convergence into the Southern Ocean. It was amazing yet humbling to watch the abundance of albatross and other seabird species effortlessly sailing past our ship at incredible speeds, often only inches from the wave's surface, reminding us how poorly equipped we are for journeying through these vast open oceans. We began scanning over an increasing number of Grey-backed and sleek Black-bellied Storm-Petrels, while the antics of a leaping pod of Hourglass Dolphins kept us suitably entertained.



We were also able to observe the composition of birdlife slowly changing as we continued southeastward, with the once abundant Slender-billed Prion and Black-browed Albatross beginning to diminish, and replaced instead by the swift-flying Antarctic Prion and Grey-headed Albatross. We were delighted when our first Light-mantled Sooty Albatross appeared, one of the specialties of the western Antarctic and certainly one of the smartest-looking of this incredible complex. Our smooth crossing allowed us to arrive ahead of schedule, and in return we were able to cruise around the swarm of wildlife surrounding the Shag Rocks, which included the endemic South Georgia Shag. We were also rewarded for our long hours of scanning with remarkable sightings of three fast-flying Pterodroma species: namely a dozen Soft-plumaged, at least forty of the scarce Kerguelen, and more than one hundred sightings of the smart Atlantic Petrel, banking gracefully over the horizon throughout our journey.

Approaching the archipelago of South Georgia – a series of mountainous islands that once harbored a major whaling station, but are now mostly uninhabited other than the hundreds of thousands of nesting seabirds and pinnipeds – we began seeing our first Blue Petrels whizzing about over the water, showing their diagnostic white tip of the tail. We also marveled at our first Snow Petrel; one of the highlights of any Antarctic expedition. Upon arrival we loaded into the zodiacs for a landing on the Salisbury Plains, an incredibly scenic site with green flats and a massive glacier in the background. Here we trekked over the frozen streams through the snow in order to behold thousands upon thousands of glorious King Penguins gathered together in a spectacle unlike any other in the natural world! Here hundreds of fluffy brown chicks called excitedly to their parents as lustrous adults returning from the ocean tobogganed across the ice and snow on their bellies. All would then huddle close together in their attempt to combat the freezing temperatures and chilling gusts of wind. The opportunity to observe these marvelous creatures at such close range in this untamed habitat must surely be one of the finest wildlife experiences on earth!

The following morning we continued our explorations of South Georgia in the sheltered Fortuna Bay, surrounded by rugged ice-covered mountains and beaches lined with bull Antarctic Fur Seals. We enjoyed nesting Antarctic Terns in full breeding plumage, confiding Snowy Sheathbills scurrying eagerly at our feet, and the bizarre meat-eating subspecies of Yellow-billed Pintail, as well as herds of feral Reindeer. We also enjoyed the antics of thousands more King Penguins, nesting Light-mantled Sooty Albatrosses, and a phenomenal wildlife experience with a massive bull Southern Elephant Seal guarding over a dead female being butchered by Brown Skuas and both species of Giant Petrel in a frenzied bloodbath!

With the ocean swells increasing we decided to take shelter in Hercules Bay. Here the weather was brilliant against a backdrop of jagged snow-covered mountains and waterfalls. We then zodiac-cruised around the perimeter to marvel at the hundreds of Macaroni Penguins jumping precariously from rock to rock to access their nests in the tussock grass. That evening, even though we were anchored in a calm harbor with smooth waters, we kept the ship rocking with an outdoor barbeque while dancing along with our enthusiastic crew.

After retracing part of the overland journey of famed polar explorer Ernest Shackleton to the inlet of Stromness Bay, we next ventured to Grytviken where we stood beside his very gravestone and reflected on the lost lives of previous polar expeditions. Here at King Edward Point we surveyed one of the abandoned 19<sup>th</sup> century whaling stations that once pillaged the surrounding seas, slaughtering an incalculable



percentage of the southern ocean whale populations. Sadly, despite desperate modern conservation efforts, these will probably never completely recover to their previous levels.

On our final day exploring South Georgia we set out into Cooper's Bay at the far eastern edge of the archipelago. Here we found hundreds of nesting Macaroni Penguins at the rookery jumping from rock to rock and diving fearlessly into the ocean surges to feed. The tussock-covered mountain slopes also yielded a gorgeous pair of Light-mantled Albatross in

synchronized courtship flight, as well as an abundance of Snowy Sheathbills often feeding right at our feet! On the down side, South Georgia has unfortunately been plagued with the highly destructive Brown Rat which has wreaked havoc upon the native bird populations since their introduction more than a century ago.

However, this is one of the relatively few rat-free areas, allowing us to obtain excellent views of the endemic South Georgia Pipit in full song – the southernmost passerine of the world, and one that is highly threatened due to the infestation of these foreign pests.

Our vessel was then steered into the scenic Drygalski Fjord where numerous glaciers flow to the water's edge before cracking off in huge pieces. Here Snow Petrels whirled around the ship and we watched several pods of attractive Orcas surfacing around us before setting out towards the South Orkney Islands. Seabird activity soon picked up and we carefully sifted through hundreds of diving-petrels in our quest to separate the endemic South Georgia variety. Even though the ocean swells enlarged overnight we still managed good time, and by morning the South Orkney Islands were within sight. As we approached land we were surrounded by enormous icebergs of inconceivable shapes and intense shades of cerulean blue. Adorable Adelie Penguins huddled on the ice flows, and we were soon soaking in our first views of Weddell, Crabeater and the reptile-like Leopard Seal; the latter one of the southern ocean's most ferocious predators. We were especially fortunate to make a landing at the Argentinean research station of Orcada where we toured the unique wintering quarters of fifteen hardy souls – they were actually surprised and ecstatic to see us as we were the first outsider faces they had seen in eight months!

Continuing our voyage, we awoke to a winter wonderland of icebergs as far as the eye could see. Although a beautiful sight, this also meant rerouting ourselves northwest to avoid the risk of blockage in the Weddell Sea. The next two days we awed at an amazing variety of colorful ice, including pack ice, drift ice, black ice and, of course, some monolith tabular icebergs, some stretching nearly four kilometers! An abundance of Fin Whales were most evident, and we also were able to spot Sei Whale, a lovely pod of Type B Orcas (restricted to the Antarctic Peninsula region) that approached the ship to within a few meters, and even the scarce Cuvier's Beaked Whale during our journey.



At long last, the mountainous continent of Antarctica stretched out before us as we made our way through the scenic Errera Channel. Here Antarctic Minke and Southern Bottlenose Whales blew plumes into the air before we turned towards Neko Harbor. This is where we made our landing onto the continent itself, with our final Gentoo Penguin colony stretching up the adjacent mountain slope. Perhaps most impressive were several thunderous calvings from the flanking glacier. South Polar Skuas and Antarctic Shags complemented a subsequent zodiac cruise through windless and serene conditions, with sunshine occasionally illuminating the fantastic diversity of the area's icebergs.

With another engaging pod of Orcas and sighting of the rare Arnoux's Beaked Whale to entertain us, we carefully navigated through huge chunks of ice to access the impressive Lemaire Channel. Here the sheer mountains rose like giants in a narrow but spectacularly scenic passageway, replete with innumerable colorful ice fields and exquisite glaciers. An evening landing on Petermann Island at 65.1 degrees latitude

marked the southern-most point of our voyage, and we celebrated with a visit to an Adelie colony, perhaps the most personable-looking and comical of all the world's penguins. The sunset late that evening cast luminous hues over the snow-covered Antarctica mountains, mirroring a glassy reflection in the still waters surrounding our ship; a fitting ending to perhaps the most beautiful and memorable day of our voyage!

The following morning we were greeted by the sight of several confiding Weddell and Crabeater Seals on the volcanic shores of Deception Island, while nesting Antarctic Terns and Cape Petrels lithely wheeled around the neighboring cliffs. Sulfuric steam rose from the beach of our landing site, and a few of us stripped down to our bathing suits to courageously plunge into the frigid Antarctic waters. The majority, however, sympathetically watched from the shore and amused themselves with our anguished wailing.

Before setting out into the vast ocean swells of the Drake Passage, we concluded with one final landing on the South Shetland's Half Moon Island where we watched a rookery of endearing Chinstrap Penguins nesting, breeding and displaying.

With heavy hearts we began the return journey across the formidable Drake Passage, a two-day stretch of open seas with an intimidating reputation of forceful waves and unrelenting winds. Some of the familiar earlier seabirds soon returned, and on several occasions we witnessed miraculous sightings of Orcas and Fin Whales. Luckily the seas were kind to us during this final leg of our journey, and we crossed the Antarctic convergence and Cape Horn before finally cruising through the scenic Beagle Channel. Throughout our remarkable voyage we marveled at some of the most remote and breathtaking places in the world, both in terms of outstanding scenery and prolific wildlife, accounting for a truly memorable and once-in-a-lifetime experience!

## Birds encountered:

*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

**Falkland Steamer Duck (E)** *Tachyeres brachypterus*

We enjoyed great views of this localized flightless species on two consecutive days surrounding the Falkland Islands.

**Upland Goose** *Chloephaga picta*

Numerous birds were seen during our time visiting the Falklands Islands with up to one hundred daily where 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 abundance along the coastal areas of the Falkland Islands and again in Ushuaia.

**Ruddy-headed Goose** *Chloephaga rubidiceps*

Much easier to see on the Falkland Islands than the mainland South American subspecies that's population continues to decline, we enjoyed views on two consecutive days in the Falkland Islands.

**Crested Duck** *Lophonetta specularioides*

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

**Chiloe Wigeon***Anas sibilatrix*

Several pairs were seen while walking along the few small freshwater ponds on Carcass Island.

**Red Shoveler***Anas platalea*

A few birds were observed from the dock at Puerto Madryn.

**Speckled Teal***Anas flavirostris*

We first found six birds on the Falklands.

**Yellow-billed Pintail***Anas georgica*

We found several birds daily at landing sites across South Georgia of the unique carnivorous nominate subspecies *georgica*.

**Penguins Spheniscidae****King Penguin***Aptenodytes patagonicus*

Certainly one of the greatest wildlife spectacles on earth, we enjoyed many thousands of birds at the landing site of Salisbury Plains, South Georgia as well as another large colony at Fortuna Bay as well as scattered sightings at sea.

**Gentoo Penguin (Nt)***Pygoscelis papua*

Several hundred of these comical penguins first encountered nesting at Carcass Island in the Falklands with numerous sightings thereafter including another very memorable encounter at Deception Island in the rising steam along the beach.

**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 followed by as colony we visited south of the Lemaire Channel.

**Chinstrap Penguin***Pygoscelis antarcticus*

First a few birds were encountered at the southern edge of South Georgia followed by a fantastic colony after we left Deception Island that we enjoyed during our final landing site of the trip.

**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 the noisy nesting colony in the Falklands with Black-browed Albatross.

**Macaroni Penguin (Vu)***Eudyptes chrysolophus*

Several hundred birds were seen on two days at sites on South Georgia including a magnificent zodiac cruise that allowed us to observe a fantastic breeding colony and feeding behavior through the frigid Antarctic waters and again at Cooper Bay.

**Magellanic Penguin (Nt)***Spheniscus magellanicus*

We encountered this species first in port at Puerto Madryn and then daily around the Falkland Islands where we found hundreds of birds including 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.

**Northern Royal Albatross***Diomedea sanfordi*

Significantly less common in these waters than the preceding species, several birds were enjoyed circling around the ship mostly en route to the Falkland Islands.

**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.

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

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

**Yellow-nosed Albatross (Vu)** *Thalassarche chlororhynchos*

One immature bird made a few circles around our ship in the Drake Passage.

**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 with our highest numbers near an Orca pod sighting.

**Black-browed Albatross** *Thalassarche melanophrys*

By far the most common albatross of our voyage with several hundred to thousands 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 the Falkland Islands sometimes cruising only a few feet above our heads – what a sight!

### Petrels & Shearwaters Procellariidae

**Southern Giant Petrel (Vu)** *Macronectes giganteus*

Encountered throughout the trip almost daily with up a couple hundred birds on some days; especially nice views on South Georgia where we saw individuals feeding on a dead Southern Elephant Seal.

**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 fifty birds sighted in a single day gliding over the waves around our ship.

**Antarctic Petrel (BE)** *Thalassoica antarctica*

A scarce bird on this trip 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.

**Cape Petrel** *Daption capense*

A constant companion throughout the voyage and seen every day at sea sometimes with hundreds of this attractive species encountered in a single day.

**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 throughout our time on the Antarctic Peninsula and well into the Drake Passage.

**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 several thousand birds estimated in a single day.

**Slender-billed Prion** *Pachyptila belcheri*

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

**Fairy Prion***Pachyptila turtur*

Several birds were seen very well this year after we left the Falkland Islands and approached South Georgia.

**Kerguelen Petrel***Aphrodroma brevirostris*

This was an amazing trip for these fast-flying petrels and we were very fortunate to observe nearly two hundred birds throughout our voyage mostly south of the Antarctica Convergence. On several occasions we even had birds passing within fifty meters of our ship flashing the silver outer edges of its underwing as it wheeled in large arcs over the horizon in front of the bow.

**Great-winged Petrel***Pterodroma macroptera*

One individual was seen arching in front of the bow as we traveled towards the Falkland Islands.

**Atlantic Petrel***Pterodroma incerta*

Another species we saw in unusually high numbers this year, more than one hundred boldly patterned individuals were seen very well mostly as we cruised towards South Georgia.

**Soft-plumaged Petrel***Pterodroma mollis*

Normally the most numerous *Pterodroma* in these waters, we found several birds on different days of the tour with peak numbers of up to a dozen as we motored from the Falklands to South Georgia.

**White-chinned Petrel (Vu)***Procellaria aequinoctialis*

This widespread species was fairly common at sea throughout the tour with moderate numbers on most days throughout the voyage.

**Grey Petrel (Peduinker) (Vu)***Procellaria cinerea*

Although this species was not seen by the tour leader, a single bird was seen flying close to the ship near the Falkland Islands by one participant.

**Little Shearwater***Puffinus assimilis*

Three birds were observed flying near the ship en route to the Falkland Islands.

**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 in the Drake Passage.

**Great Shearwater***Puffinus gravis*

Good numbers were seen flying over the water surface en route to the Falklands with up to twenty sighted in a day.

**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 again in the Drake Passage.

**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 en route to South Georgia from the Falklands.

**Diving Petrels Pelecanoididae****Magellanic Diving Petrel***Pelecanoides magellani*

Only observed on the voyage towards the Beagle Channel where a several birds were identified flying across the bow.

**South Georgia Diving Petrel** *Pelecanoides georgicus*

This is a tough species to separate from the more abundant Common Diving-Petrel, although numerous birds showed well as we departed South Georgia from the southwest heading towards the Antarctic Peninsula.

**Common Diving Petrel** *Pelecanoides urinatrix*

We encountered this widespread species most days at sea with scattered numbers including several hundred birds near the Falklands, smaller numbers en route to South Georgia, and scattered sightings again on the Drake Passage.

**Pigeons and Doves Columbidae****Eared Dove** *Zenaida auriculata*

One very off course bird was seen the second day at sea circling around the ship.

**Rails and Coots Rallidae****White-winged Coot** *Fulica leucoptera*

One bird was observed from the dock of Puerto Madryn.

**Grebes Podicipedidae****Great Grebe** *Podiceps major*

Several birds showed extremely well in Puerto Madryn from the ship.

**Flamingos Phoenicopteridae****Chilean Flamingo** *Phoenicopterus chilensis*

About thirty of these exquisite birds were seen feeding along the shoreline from the dock of Puerto Madryn.

**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 at Puerto Madryn and again on the Falkland Islands.

**Imperial Shag** *Leucocarbo atriceps*

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

**South Georgia Shag (E)** *Leucocarbo georgianus*

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

**King Shag** *Leucocarbo albiventer*

This species was common along the coast of South America and through the Falkland Islands where we found several hundred birds.

**Antarctic Shag** *Leucocarbo bransfieldensis*

We were pleased to see a good number of birds including breeding birds while exploring various areas of the Antarctic Peninsula.

### 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 Puerto Madryn.

### Caracaras & Falcons Falconidae

#### **Striated Caracara (Nt)**

*Phalacrocorax australis*

This fantastic near endemic to the Falklands was seen in large numbers on one day especially at the Carcass Island landing.

#### **Chimango Caracara**

*Milvago chimango*

One bird was seen flying over the dock at Puerto Madryn.

### Kites, Hawks & Eagles Accipitridae

#### **Variable Hawk**

*Buteo polyosoma*

We found several birds in the vicinity of the Falkland Islands.

### Sheathbills Chionidae

#### **Snowy Sheathbill**

*Chionis albus*

A unique family of the Antarctic, we enjoying birds walking around our feet while landing on South Georgia and the Antarctic; at times we even had individuals landing on the ship itself!

### Oystercatchers Haematopidae

#### **Magellanic Oystercatcher**

*Haematopus leucopus*

We enjoyed several 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 four birds in a single day.

### Plovers Charadriidae

#### **Rufous-chested Plover**

*Charadrius modestus*

A strikingly marked species, we found birds on two consecutive days in the Falkland Islands including nice views for those who walked up the hill at Carcass Island of four stationary birds.

### Sandpipers & Snipes Scolopacidae

#### **Baird's Sandpiper**

*Calidris bairdii*

Good numbers of this migrant were seen feeding along the shore from the dock of Puerto Madryn.

#### **South American Snipe (Magellan)**

*Gallinago paraguaiiae*

We enjoyed these cooperative birds located at scattered sites on Carcass Island in the Falklands.

### Gulls & Terns Laridae

#### **Dolphin Gull**

*Leucophaeus scoresbii*

We enjoyed large numbers of up to one hundred of these colorful gulls on the Falkland Islands.

**Kelp Gull** *Larus dominicanus*

Large numbers of this species were encountered at scattered sightings throughout the voyage.

**Brown-hooded Gull** *Larus maculipennis*

We had large numbers of this South American species in Puerto Madryn and again in small numbers while we landed on the Falkland Islands.

**South American Tern** *Sterna hirundinacea*

This sleek tern was only seen near the mainland and the Falklands Islands with some remarkable viewing opportunities in breeding plumage.

**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 one hundred birds recorded in a single day including several nesting pairs.

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

One bird was seen heading south from Puerto Madryn with another few birds observed as we made our way through the Beagle Channel.

**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 thirty individuals estimated in a single day at South Georgia including numerous nesting pairs.

**Long-tailed Jaeger** *Stercorarius longicaudus*

One bird was seen passing beside the ship on our first day at sea after departing from Puerto Madryn.

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

About a dozen birds were seen scattered along the verdant hillsides of the Falklands.

**Many-colored Rush-Tyrant** *Tachuris rubrigastra*

One ill-fated bird somehow managed to find its way onto our ship from the South American mainland and took shelter in one of the zodiacs. This is a beautiful but often reclusive species of wetland grasses.

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

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

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

Six representatives of this South American species were seen from the deck of the ship as we departed from Puerto Madryn.

**Southern Martin** *Progne elegans yeni*

About five birds were seen flying around the dock of Puerto Madryn as we departed.

### Wrens Troglodytidae

#### **Sedge Wren**

*Cistothorus platensis*

4 birds were seen quite well in song as they perched on top of the scrubby vegetation on the Falklands.

#### **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 five confiding birds.

### Thrushes Turdidae

#### **Austral Thrush**

*Turdus falcklandii*

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

### Old World Sparrows Passeridae

#### **House Sparrow**

*Passer domesticus*

Common in Puerto Madryn and seen again near Stanley in the Falkland Islands.

### Wagtails & Pipits Motacillidae

#### **Correndera Pipit**

*Anthus correndera*

We found up to a seven birds in the open grass in the Falklands seen very well.

#### **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 amazing views of a vocal bird singing on top of a grass tussock, the world's southernmost passerine.

### Finches Fringillidae

#### **Black-chinned Siskin**

*Carduelis barbata*

A flock of this bright and chipper species was noted on the Falklands near our tea stop.

### 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.

### Tanagers & Allies Thraupidae

#### **White-bridled (Canary-winged/Black-throated) Finch** *Melanodera melanodera*

This pretty little finch was enjoyed on the Falklands with three birds seen very well.

## **Mammals encountered:**

### Hares & Rabbits Leporidae

#### **European Rabbit**

*Oryctolagus cuniculus*

This introduced species was seen once on the Falkland Islands.

### 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 Puerto Madryn and heading towards the Falklands.

**South American Fur Seal** *Arctocephalus australis*

Although common on the South American mainland, we encountered just a few animals at sea near the Falkland Islands.

**Antarctic Fur Seal** *Arctocephalus gazella*

Thousands encountered throughout our voyage especially in the vicinity of South Georgia and the Antarctic Peninsula where we were sometimes trying to avoid unwanted aggression from territorial bulls.

**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 large males and females lounging on the beaches.

**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 at Deception Island.

**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 views thereafter.

**Weddell Seal** *Leptonychotes weddellii*

We enjoyed some great views first at sea close to the Antarctic Peninsula and later had an approachable individual on the shore at Deception Island.

**Ocean Dolphins Delphinidae****Orca (Killer Whale)** *Orcinus orca*

Certainly one of the highlights of the trip, we encountered at least five pods of these beautiful creatures during our tour with some outstanding behavioral observations.

**Common Dolphin** *Delphinus delphis*

A single pod of these widespread species were seen well swimming alongside the ship as we departed from Puerto Madryn.

**Dusky Dolphin** *Lagenorhynchus obscurus*

This species was only seen on two occasions as about twenty-five animals surfaced several times and rode the bow of the ship before disappearing again en route to the Falkland Islands and once more in the Drake Passage.

**Peale's Dolphin** *Lagenorhynchus australis*

Although highly range-restricted, we enjoyed views of 7 of these playful dolphins in the Drake Passage.

**Commerson's Dolphin** *Cephalorhynchus commersonii*

A very striking species that we found near the Falklands; six individuals total.

**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 one sighting of pods five animals strong approaching our ship as we left the Falkland Islands.

**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 en route to South Georgia and again a pod of at least nine animals surfacing when we reached the Antarctic Peninsula.

**Cuvier's Beaked Whale**

*Ziphius cavirostris*

Several sightings were enjoyed on one afternoon with at least four animals along the drifting pack ice as we approached the Antarctic Peninsula.

**Arnoux's Beaked Whale**

*Berardius arnuxii*

We were extremely fortunate to observe no less than 3 of these rare animals surfacing en route to the Lemaire Channel.

**Rorquals Balaenopteridae**

**Antarctic Minke Whale**

*Balaenoptera bonaerensis*

It is likely that most of the minke whales we saw near the Antarctic Peninsula represented species although at least two sightings were confirmed.

**Sperm Whale**

*Berardius arnuxii*

Two individuals were scoped spouting in the distance near Puerto Madryn.

**Southern Right Whale**

*Eubalaena australis*

We had amazing views of at least fifteen individuals around the harbor of Puerto Madryn including one animal that approached directly beside our ship.

**Humpback Whale**

*Megaptera novaeangliae*

Surprisingly few sightings this year with just two animals being seen in deeper water.

**Sei Whale**

*Balaenoptera borealis*

Many of those birding from the captain's bridge enjoyed especially nice views of this baleen whale surfacing next to the pack ice with a calf.

**Fin Whale**

*Balaenoptera physalus*

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

**Deer Cervidae**

**Reindeer**

*Rangifer tarandus*

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

**Photo credits (in order of appearance):** Professor Multanovskiy with wildlife scene at South Georgia, Zodiac Cruising past Iceberg in Antarctica, Light-mantled Albatross, Hourglass Dolphin, King Penguin youngsters and Antarctic scenery. All photos by David Shackelford.

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