



Magellanic Woodpecker – © Alec Earnshaw

Full North Patagonia Birding Tour

From the Atlantic to the Pacific

(Argentina & Chile)

15 days/14 nights tour
October 26 to November 9, 2023
Leaders Marcelo Gavensky, Oscar Rodrigues, John Sterling



INTRODUCTION

Patagonia is one of the most iconic and famous regions of South America. Known for its wilderness, it is a very large region which comprises a wide arrange of habitats, landscapes and species. In terms of biodiversity, it can not be compared with the one of the tropics, but most of the species found here are not found anywhere else.

This is a comprehensive tour to the most diverse part of Patagonia, covering an extensive territory along a transect from the Atlantic coast in the east, to the Pacific coast in the west, across scrublands, deserts, steppes, transitional forests and temperate rainforest, visiting impressive breeding colonies, looking for endemic, range-restricted and endangered birds, and sightseeing breathtaking landscapes, as well as experiencing the exquisite local cuisine.

This tour offers good chances of seeing many of the most attractive Patagonian birds, including a particularly high diversity of Rhinocryptids (tapaculos, gallitos and huet-huets), a big part of the Argentine endemic birds, endangered species such as Yellow Cardinal and Humboldt Penguin, two species of Rheas, marine birds in both oceans, the world's largest breeding colonies of Magellanic Penguin and Burrowing Parakeet, and a good number of marine and land mammals, such as Southern Right Whale, Southern Elephant Seal, Dusky Dolphin, Guanaco, Patagonian Cavy (Mara), armadillos and more.

Join us in the most complete tour to one of the top destinations in South America.



TOUR DESCRIPTION

Arriving in Trelew airport, we will travel to our first birding destination at Punta Tombo natural reserve. This reserve protects one of the world's largest breeding colony of **Magellanic Penguin**, with over one million penguins before the end of the season (when visited at the beginning of breeding season, the number is lower and most penguins are taking care of their eggs and young chicks, hiding in their burrows, but still lots of them are visible). Walking along the trails we will have the chance of seeing species such as **Elegant Crested Tinamou**, **Lesser Rhea**, **Sharp-billed Canastero**, **Patagonian Mockingbird**, **Scale-throated Earthcreeper**, **Mourning Sierra-Finch**, **Gray-hooded Sierra-Finch**, **Common Diuca-Finch**, **Long-tailed Meadowlark** and non-birds such as **Guanaco** and **Greater Hairy Armadillo**. Along the coast, we will be specially looking for **Chubut (White-headed) Steamer-Duck**, our first Argentine endemic target. Other coastal species include **Great Grebe**, **Chilean Skua** and **Southern Giant Petrel**.

After Punta Tombo we will start our way to Puerto Madryn, with a birding stop in the area of Isla Escondida. This place is already in Monte desert habitat so we will have our first chances for **Carbonated Sierra-Finch** (Argentine endemic) and **Hudson's Black-Tyrant**, among others. On the coast there is a small colony of **Southern Elephant Seal** that really worth a visit.

In Puerto Madryn we will spend our first night, and around the hotel we can have our first sights of **Austral Thrush**, **Chiguanco Thrush** and **Black-chinned Siskin**.



From Puerto Madryn we will travel to Valdes Peninsula making birding stops on the way and hoping to get our first views of **Southern Right Whales** from the coast. Targets this day would include **Lake Duck, Black-headed Duck, Red Shoveler, (Southern) Silvery Grebe, Cinereous Harrier, Variable Hawk, Rusty-backed Monjita** (Argentine endemic), **Gray-bellied Shrike-Tyrant, Patagonian Yellow-Finch** and more. Spending one night in Valdes Peninsula (in the town of Puerto Piramides) we will take advantage of the following morning for birding in the surroundings, visiting a **South American Sea Lion** colony to look for **Snowy Sheathbill, Rock Cormorant** and **Dolphin Gull**, and also bird in the steppe and scrubland, looking for **Band-tailed Earthcreeper (Eremobius), Patagonian Canastero** (Argentine endemic), **Tufted Tit-Tyrant, Pallid Tit-Spinetail** and **Darwin's Nothura** among others.

After visiting Valdes Peninsula we will continue our way northwards to reach the town of Las Grutas, which we will use as our base for a couple of nights. The following day we will spend the morning birding in the surroundings of Las Grutas, where we will be looking for more Argentine endemic birds from the Monte desert habitat such as **Sandy Gallito, White-throated Cacholote** and **Cinammon Warbling-Finch**, the breeding endemic **Black-crowned Monjita, Yellow-billed Tit-Tyrant** and many of the other species mentioned before. After having a typical Patagonian lunch we will look for waders and coastal species in the San Antonio bay, where both boreal and austral migrants (as well as resident species) can be found. Possibilities include **Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, White-rumped Sandpiper, Sanderling, Two-banded Plover, Crested Duck** and more.

The following morning we will take a boat for a short (half-day) pelagic trip in the San Matias gulf, where we will be looking for birds such as **Black-browed Albatross, (Atlantic) Yellow-nosed Albatross, White-chinned Petrel, Southern Giant Petrel, Great**



Shearwater, Manx Shearwater, South American Tern and also marine mammals such as **South American Fur Seal, Short-beak Common Dolphin, Dusky Dolphin** and more. Closer to the shore we will also look for **Chilean Flamingos, Royal Terns** and **Snowy-crowned Terns** among others.

In the afternoon we will move towards General Conesa, our next destination, where we will spend the night and get ready for the following day, when we will be birding in a transitional area between Monte desert and Espinal forest, where our targets will include the endangered **Yellow Cardinal** and many other specialties such as **Crested Gallito, Spot-winged Falconet, Greater Rhea, Brushland Tinamou, Brown Cacholote, Tufted Tit-Spintail, Lesser Shrike-Tyrant, Ringed Warbling-Finch, Chaco Earthcreeper, White-tipped Plantcutter, White Monjita** and many more.

From General Conesa we will travel to El Condor, a small town located near the mouth of the Rio Negro (largest river in Patagonia) and home to the world's largest breeding colony of Psitacids (parrots and parakeets) of any kind, purely formed by **Burrowing Parakeets**, a large and colorful species. Their burrows are dug along a very tall cliff that faces the ocean, and the total number of birds can exceed 500,000 by the end of the breeding season (fewer birds are found at the beginning of the season, but still in great and impressive numbers). We will visit this place in the afternoon and following morning before continuing our trip. On the way to El Condor we might get some more new birds such as **Long-winged Harrier** and **Firewood Gatherer**.



Burrowing Parakeet – © Jorge La Grotteria

After that we will take a flight connection to the city of Bariloche, where we will begin our NW Patagonia tour leg. From Bariloche we will travel to San Martin de los Andes (a town that we will use as our base for the following couple of days) on a full day transfer with birding stops across the Patagonian steppe and along a river valley, where we hope to get our first sights of the magnificent **Andean Condor** and **Black-chested Buzzard-Eagle**. In the river valley and surroundings we will focus in finding the beautiful **Many-colored Rush-Tyrant** and other reed bed specialties such as **Ticking Doradito**, **Wren-like Rushbird** and the grassland dwelling **Grass Wren**. The adjacent Patagonian steppe could give us **Austral Canastero**.

From San Martin de los Andes we will visit Lanin National Park, where we will have our first experience birding in the Patagonian forest and its transitional area with the Patagonian steppe. Here we will be looking for **Austral Parakeet**, the great **Magellanic Woodpecker**, **Striped Woodpecker**, **Chilean Flicker**, **Patagonian Forest Earthcreeper**, **Des Mur's Wiretail**, **Thorn-tailed Rayadito**, **Chucao Tapaculo**, **White-crested (Chilean) Elaenia**, **Patagonian Tyrant**, **Great Shrike-Tyrant**, **Fire-eyed Diucon**, **Rufous-tailed Plantcutter**, **Patagonian Sierra-Finch**, **Austral Blackbird** and more. In the marshy areas we will start seeing locally very common **Upland Goose**, **Ashy-headed Goose** and **Black-faced Ibis**.

The Patagonian forest around San Martin de los Andes will give us more chances of finding the species missed in Lanin National Park, and maybe add other ones such as the rare **Ochre-flanked Tapaculo**, **Chilean (Bicolored) Hawk**, **Magellanic Tapaculo**, **Black-throated Huet-huet**, **White-throated Treerunner**, **Dark-bellied Cinclodes** (common in lake and river shores), **Green-backed Firecrown**, **White-throated Hawk** and more. A



Chucao Tapaculo – © Jorge La Grotteria

nocturnal hike could add an encounter with **Austral Pygmy-Owl** and even the scarce **Rufous-legged Owl**, both endemic of the Patagonian forest. Leaving San Martin de los Andes we will head towards Villa la Angostura along the scenic “seven lakes road”, where we will make strategic birding stops to try finding more species such as **Flying Steamer-Duck** and the very scarce **Rufous-tailed Hawk** (one of the rarest Neotropical raptors). Before taking the seven lakes road we will visit Chapelco mount in search of species from the high Andes ecoregion at fairly low elevation, as it occurs in Patagonia. Some of our targets there include **White-throated Caracara**, **White-sided Hiltstar**, **Black-billed Shrike-Tyrant**, **White-browed Ground-Tyrant**, **Cinereous Ground-Tyrant**, **Ochre-naped Ground-Tyrant**, **Plumbeous Sierra-Finch** and the rare **Yellow-bridled Finch**. After this we will continue our way to Villa la Angostura, where we will spend the night.

From Villa la Angostura we will continue our way westwards and enter Chile, where we will travel to Puerto Varas, making birding stops along the way for **Torrent Duck** and **Chilean Mockingbird**, and in Puyehue National Park to try clearing up the list of Patagonian forest birds. After one night in Puerto Varas we will continue traveling to our next destination, in the island of Chiloe. For that we will be crossing a narrow strait on a ferry, from where we will be looking for oceanic birds such as **Pink-footed Shearwater**, **Wilson’s Storm-Petrel** and the scarce and recently described **Pincoya Storm-Petrel** (Chilean endemic), as well as marine mammals such as **Peale’s Dolphin**.



Yellow-bridled Finch – © Andrés Terán

In Chiloe island we will be looking for coastal species along the shore, such as **Peruvian Pelican, Flightless Steamer-Duck, Hudsonian Godwit, Whimbrel, Baird's Sandpiper, Franklin's Gull** and more. Inside the island the farmland is a good area to look for **Slender-billed Parakeet** (Chilean endemic), and the bamboo thickets would give us more chances of finding the rare **Ochre-flanked Tapaculo** and **Des Mur's Wiretail**.

Spending a night in Chiloe island we will have time to look for all of our targets, and the following morning we will take a boat trip to visit the southernmost breeding colony of **Humboldt Penguin** at Puñihuil islands (mixed with **Magellanic Penguins**), where we will also look for other species such as **Kelp Goose** and the beautiful **Red-legged Cormorant**. A great (although not guaranteed) non-bird target in this place would be the rare **Marine Otter**. After this experience we will travel to Puerto Montt airport where our Patagonian odyssey ends.

ITINERARY*

October 26 DAY 1: AM arrival at Trelew airport and transfer to Punta Tombo natural reserve. PM transfer to Puerto Madryn with birding stop at Isla Escondida. Night in Puerto Madryn.

October 27 DAY 2: AM transfer to Puerto Piramides (in Peninsula Valdes natural reserve) with birding stops along the way. PM birding around Puerto Piramides. Night in Puerto Piramides.

October 28 DAY 3: AM birding around Puerto Piramides (optional whale watching boat trip). PM transfer to Las Grutas. Night in Las Grutas.



October 29 DAY 4: Full day birding in Las Grutas surroundings. Night in Las Grutas.

October 30 DAY 5: AM pelagic trip in San Matias gulf. PM transfer to General Conesa. Night in General Conesa.

October 31 DAY 6: Full day birding in General Conesa surroundings. Night in General Conesa.

November 1 DAY 7: AM transfer with birding stops to El Condor. PM birding in El Condor surroundings. Night in El Condor.

November 2 DAY 8: AM birding in El Condor surroundings. PM flight to Bariloche. Night in Bariloche.

November 3 DAY 9: Transfer to San Martin de los Andes birding in the Patagonian steppe and marshes. Night in San Martin de los Andes.

November 4 DAY 10: Full day birding in Lanin National Park. Night in San Martin de los Andes.

November 5 DAY 11: Full day birding in San Martin de los Andes surroundings. Night in San Martin de los Andes.

November 6 DAY 12: AM visit to Chapelco mount. PM transfer with birding stops to Villa la Angostura through seven lakes scenic road. Night in Villa la Angostura.



Ochre-flanked Tapaculo – © Andrés Terán

November 7 DAY 13: AM border crossing to Chile and transfer with birding stops to Puerto Varas. PM and night in Puerto Varas.

November 8 DAY 14: AM transfer and full day birding in Chiloe Island. Night in Chiloe Island.

November 9 DAY 15: AM boat tour to Puñihuil islands. PM transfer to Puerto Montt airport. End of the tour.

** The itinerary may change due to force majeure*

TOUR DETAILS

Price \$8,000 based upon 8 participants/\$9400 based upon 6 participants

Single supplement is \$1,120

Our prices **include** all accommodations, three meals a day (breakfast, lunch and dinner), all land transfers in private vehicle, local guide/driver and tour leader with quality spotting scope, snacks and drinks (bottled water) during the tour. Our prices **do not include** flight tickets (unless asked on request) to and from Trelew nor Puerto Montt airports, personal insurance, alcoholic drinks, tips, nor anything not mentioned on previous sentence.

Whale watching boat tour from Puerto Piramides (2 hours duration) is optional and will be added to the quote on request.



Group size

We run this tour on request for groups with a minimum size of 6 and a maximum of 8 passengers. Please contact us for information about larger groups and options for single travelers.

Physical difficulty

Easy to moderate.

Accommodations

Comfortable 3 stars hotels in most locations, comfortable apart-hotel in El Condor.

Best time of the year

This is a tour that needs to be carried out during southern hemisphere summer time, from mid October to early March. In this period of time, chances of seeing Southern Right Whales are only from mid October to mid November.

Weather in northern Patagonia

In this trip we will be going through many different habitats and landscapes, from the warm north-east Patagonia (where we can have temperatures over 30°C) to the cold and windy



Black-browed Albatross – © Andrés Terán

Patagonian steppe and high Andes (where temperatures could be below 10°C at times in the summer). Rains are not expected but could occur, especially in the west.

Packing for the trip

Bring light clothing (long-sleeves shirts and long pants) with a good polar fleece sweater or jacket and an impermeable windbreaker. It's also important to bring closed shoes (2 pairs if possible), a good hat and sun glasses. Sun screen, insect repellent (which may not be needed) and a flash light (with its batteries or charger) would complete the list.

Best combined with

Central Chile Endemics & Pelagics of the Humboldt Current (4 days/3 nights tour extension)

Important information: our tours are designed for small groups, with low impact, personalized attention and hiring local guides whenever possible, in order to increase their quality. We keep the use of play back down to a minimum possible so to avoid stressing the birds or affecting their natural behavior, thus actively contributing to the conservation of the same and promotion of responsible birding and ecotourism practices.



Lanin volcano and Araucaria trees in NW Patagonia – © Marcelo Gavensky

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