

**ANTARCTICA,
SOUTH GEORGIA &
THE FALKLAND
ISLANDS**

ABOARD THE M/V *MINERVA*

JANUARY 2–21, 2010

**LEADERS:
BOB SUNDSTROM**

COMPILED BY BOB SUNDSTROM

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VENT's January 2010 cruise to Antarctica, South Georgia, and the Falkland Islands was one of the most memorable Antarctic cruises we have taken part in. On January 3, the ten tour participants and leader, Bob Sundstrom, met for dinner at the Albatross Hotel in Ushuaia. We shared some good Argentine red wine, went over the details for embarkation the following afternoon, and talked about next morning's visit to Tierra del Fuego National Park.

With half of January 4 to tour Tierra del Fuego National Park, some 10 km. west of Ushuaia proper, we made a series of stops along lakefronts, inlets, and viewpoints, and walked a few forest trails. At our very first stop near a lake, a pair of Andean Condors soared high over a nearby ridge, and along the shoreline we scoped Great Grebes, Chiloe Wigeons, and a beautiful pair of Ashy-headed Geese. Along a forest trail we quickly came upon our first White-throated Treerunners, Thorn-tailed Rayaditos, and Patagonian Sierra-Finches. Along a second forest trail, and with great excitement, we soon found the bird that was on everyone's mind—a Magellanic Woodpecker, one of the world's largest woodpeckers. The huge female, nearly all black with a recurved crest, called and drummed atop a tall snag. Shortly after a nice lunch at a restaurant near the park we boarded the M/V *Minerva*. After orientation and getting underway, we birded from the deck as we traveled east along the Beagle Channel, and anticipated the excitement of the full cruise to come.

By the next morning we had already entered the southern Atlantic Ocean, with a full day of sailing toward the Falklands in store. Both of the "great albatrosses," Wandering and Royal, arced through the wake, as well as numbers of Black-browed Albatrosses. At times there were Slender-billed Prions by the thousands, and Cape Petrels were ever-present. Both Southern and Northern giant-petrels glided around the *Minerva*, and we saw our first White-chinned Petrels and Gray-backed Storm-Petrels of the trip.

Arriving in the Falkland Islands early the morning of January 6, we had a full day to explore out of Stanley. A small bus picked us up at the ship and drove us to the edge of Gypsy Bay, where we walked for several hours. Our local guide pointed out the local flora, and birds were ever-present too, from Correndera Pipits to Magellanic Oystercatchers to our first penguins of the tour. The hike took us close to the burrows of Magellanic Penguins, which watched us shyly from a short distance. Along an inlet and beach overlook, Imperial Cormorants sat atop nests and Double-banded Plovers trotted across the beach. Part of the group hiked into the tundra countryside, finding handsome Rufous-chested Dotterels.

Back aboard ship, it would require two days of sailing to make the crossing from the Falklands to South Georgia, giving ample opportunity to bird on deck, take in lectures or films on the ship, and simply enjoy the Southern Ocean. A variety of albatrosses crossed our wake, as did boldly patterned Cape Petrels. Like most days of the trip, each mile of ocean held out the possibility of new seabirds. This day's new birds included lovely Gray-headed Albatrosses and Black-bellied Storm-Petrels. On the morning of the second day of the crossing to South Georgia at 8 a.m., we crossed the Antarctic Convergence, the circumpolar movement of water that is a primary driver of the Southern Ocean's oceanic ecosystem. The day was unseasonably warm, mid-40s and sunny. Antarctic Prions flew by the thousands, and up to six Wandering Albatrosses converged—a sign that we were approaching their nesting grounds in the South Georgia archipelago.

Arriving at South Georgia on January 9, we got in our first Zodiac ride—a cruise along the shoreline of Elsehul Bay—and a very exciting ride it was. Large colonies of Macaroni Penguins, with golden yellow crests, packed sections of very steep hillsides. More Macaronis stood along the shoreline or porpoised through the wave tops. Hundreds of Gray-headed and Black-browed albatrosses sat atop nests on the steep slopes, others flew overhead. Two lovely Light-mantled Albatrosses flew close by

the ship. By late afternoon the ship had anchored off Fortuna Bay, where we enjoyed epic scenery: steep mountains, rising up from the shoreline beyond a plain perhaps a half-mile deep. Zodiacs took us ashore for a walk among a huge King Penguin colony—thousands of birds in all stages, from adults to chicks, to nearly year-old “oakum boys” in fuzzy brown feathers. Brown Skuas patrolled ceaselessly. Adult pairs of King Penguins performed paired trumpeting, heads pointed to the sky; Antarctic fur seals snuffled and roared; and immense southern elephant seals lazed, doing as little as possible while molting.

The following day we made Zodiac landings near two whaling stations of past years, Stromness and Grytviken, with optional longer hikes at each. One highlight of the Grytviken landing was a visit to Sir Ernest Shackleton’s gravesite, to offer a toast to “The Boss.” We toured the remains of the whaling station and the adjacent whaler’s museum. The next day, January 11, brought high winds, too much weather for Zodiac landings. The *Minerva* entered Drygalski Fjord, protected from the easterly winds, where a Zodiac cruise gave us good views of endemic South Georgia Pipits flitting among seaweed-covered boulders. By mid-afternoon, as we now cruised for the Antarctic itself, we began to see diminutive Blue Petrels flying among the prions. As the group assembled to get a good view of Blue Petrels, a Snow Petrel appeared, flying close over the stern, again and again—a sight truly emblematic of the Antarctic.

The next day we cruised the Scotia Sea, southwest toward the South Shetlands and the Antarctic Peninsula. The new bird that marked the day was Kerguelen Petrel, which we began seeing mid-morning. Today was a banner day for marine mammal sightings too, with fin whales and humpback whales and, the most intriguing of all, a group of at least three southern bottlenose whales, which surfaced right in front of the ship—close enough to see the whales’ bulbous heads and tan bodies.

By January 13, the second day of sailing south, icebergs became a regular sight—from small bits to large bergs to immense monoliths. The fauna were clearly Antarctic now too, such as Southern Fulmars, silvery-gray petrels of the ice. Mid-afternoon took us by Elephant Island, where Shackleton’s crew spent many long months. The morning of January 14 included a landing on Devil Island, and close encounters with some of its thousands of nesting Adelie Penguins—our first close views of them other than as passengers on passing ice floes. That afternoon the first Antarctic Petrels of the voyage turned up, as two of these much anticipated birds made several long circuits around the ship. This species is known to stray into the west edge of the Weddell Sea, but is not predictable this far from its main nesting colonies on the Antarctic continent.

On January 15, we walked onto Half Moon Island near nesting colonies of Chinstrap Penguins, occupying rocky sites upslope from the beach. Noisy and very busy, the penguins walked up and down snowy slopes between the beach and the colonies, often walking right by a huge Weddell seal that lay snoozing on a snowfield well above the tideline. And on January 16, we stepped onto the Antarctic continent proper, at Paradise Bay. Here were groups of Gentoo Penguins. Later that day, we passed through some of the most stunning fields of icebergs yet: tall, oddly shaped bergs, many with strips of blue or a blue glow, as well as huge tabular icebergs, with sheer sides and flat tops, veritable islands of ice that had broken off the edge of the continent to wander with the currents and winds. We stopped to admire groups of humpback whales bubble-feeding, sometimes right next to the ship, and passed by a half-dozen predatory leopard seals riding ice floes.

After January 17’s stunning navigation of narrow, scenic Lemaire Channel, the weather forecast helped the captain decide at this point to begin the return trip north, to make our crossing of the Drake Passage before a potential storm made the sailing more difficult. As it turned out, the crossing was a

mild one. By the second day heading north we reached Cape Horn on a tame ocean and with the sun shining. As the ship approached the Cape and its rugged landforms came clearly into view, we found ourselves amid thousands of Sooty Shearwaters, and hundreds of Black-browed Albatrosses and South American Terns. By early afternoon we had entered the Beagle Channel, back among Chilean Skuas and Magellanic Penguins, and docked early enough to take an early evening stroll along the Ushuaia waterfront.

The VENT group disembarked the *Minerva* for good the morning of January 20, and spent the morning touring a variety of birding spots near Ushuaia. We saw our first White-throated Caracaras—among three caracara species—and enjoyed scope views of Flying Steamerducks and Red Shovelers. After a relaxed lunch in downtown Ushuaia, we left for the airport and, by mid-afternoon, were flying toward Buenos Aires and homeward, with many wonderful memories of the southern latitudes.

BIRDS

Note: The checklist order, and common and scientific names used in this birdlist are those of James F. Clements' *The Clements Checklist of Birds of the World*, 6th edition, Cornell University Press, with all current updates.

PENGUINS (*Spheniscidae*)

King Penguin (*Aptenodytes patagonicus*) – The group's first close encounter with a King Penguin occurred at an unlikely spot: along the trail at Gypsy Bay near Stanley, where a single sub-adult King Penguin had stopped literally on the trail. As the ship approached South Georgia, we began to see King Penguins in the ocean, and at many places along the shoreline. The zodiac landing at Fortuna Bay put us on shore near thousands of Kings, birds in all stages of development including the downy brown "oakum boys." The spectacle of these large and colorful penguins ranked together by the thousands – and the uncanny sound of their trumpeting calls, with heads pointed skyward – was among the most memorable sights of the entire cruise. The subspecies here was *A.p. patagonicus*.

Emperor Penguin (*Aptenodytes forsteri*) – At least one of these very large penguins was seen early the morning of Jan. 14, near Antarctic Sound, on a bergy bit. Its size relative to nearby Adelies was a good indicator of its identity. A lucky find, as Emperors are scarce this distance from their breeding sites.

Gentoo Penguin (*Pygoscelis papua*) – Although Gentoo Penguins had been seen in small numbers earlier in the cruise, we finally went ashore at Gentoo colonies on Jan. 16 at Paradise Bay and Cuverville Island. The Gentoos proved just as confiding as King Penguins, walking the same pathways as the humans as they made their way to and from the shoreline. Unlike the Adelie colony we visited, Gentoos appeared to having good nesting success.

Adelie Penguin (*Pygoscelis adeliae*) – The penguin Peter Mathiessen refers to as the classic headwaiter penguin, we visited a colony of 10,000 or more at Devil Island on Jan. 14. The petite Adelies at this site were packed into nest sites, sitting atop nests built of pebbles. Nearly all of this nesting colony had lost this season's chicks due to stormy weather that washed out eggs and nestlings. Adelies are highly adapted to the Antarctic ice, as are Emperor Penguins, and have experienced

considerable problems due to changes in the seasonal ice schedule and increased snowfall – both tied to global climate change.

Chinstrap Penguin (*Pygoscellis antarcticus*) – Another petite penguin with nifty plumage patterning, including a narrow black chinstrap that seems to hold on the black helmet of its crown feathers. Zodiacs took us ashore at Half Moon Island to visit Chinstrap Penguin colonies, where the penguins built their pebble nests well upslope. We watched them trudge up and down snowy slopes between the ocean and their compact nesting colonies. Chinstrap Penguins were also the predominant penguin at Pendulum Cove, where zodiacs took passengers ashore to bathe in the geothermally warmed water near the shoreline.

Macaroni Penguin (*Eudyptes chrysolophus*) – Elsehul Bay on South Georgia Island gave us our best views of Macaroni Penguins. A zodiac cruise worked close along the rocky shoreline where the golden crested Macaroni Penguins were assembled in small groups. Others were visible porpoising along the surface of the bay. The penguins nesting colonies here were located on very steep slopes, often several hundred feet above the water's edge.

Magellanic Penguin (*Spheniscus magellanicus*) – A burrowing penguin and one of the so-called “jackass” penguin group, so named for their braying calls. In the Falklands, we hiked along Gypsy Bay to an area where a number of Magellanic Penguins were nesting, and walked quite close by their burrows to take photos. Magellanics were also seen from the ship along the Beagle Channel, both on the shorelines of small islands and swimming in the Channel.

GREBES (*Podicepsidae*)

Great Grebe (*Podiceps major*) – Seen at two lakes in Tierra del Fuego National Park, decent scope views showed the large grebes' rufous necks and dark bodies.

ALBATROSSES (*Diomedeidae*)

Wandering Albatross (*Diomedea exulans*) – Wandering Albatrosses followed the ship on the majority of the days of the cruise. We left them behind only when reaching the icy waters of the Antarctic Peninsula, and after the northbound crossing of the Drake Passage. With the largest wingspan of any bird – along with Royal Albatross – these immense gale birds arced back and forth across the wake, often circling around the ship, yet never flapping. Careful study of dorsal plumage patterns, the color of tail feathers, presence or absence of a black mark at the wrist, and bill coloration were all good clues in sorting out Wandering from Royal albatrosses. The *exulans* race, or “Snowy” Albatross, breeds on South Georgia Island.

Royal Albatross (*Diomedea epomophora*) – The other “great albatross,” sightings of Royals were limited to areas of the cruise west of the Falklands and the first day of sailing between the Falklands and South Georgia. With lots of time on deck and good viewing conditions, we were able to sort out Royals from Wanderings in most cases, and saw birds of a wide range of ages from near-juveniles to adults.

Gray-headed Albatross (*Thalassarche chrysostoma*) – Small numbers of these striking birds were seen on 8 different days at sea, most between the Falklands and South Georgia, and as we crossed the

Drake Passage. Hundreds were nesting on steep slopes at Elsehul Bay, where a zodiac cruise took us along the shoreline below the dense nesting colonies.

Black-browed Albatross (*Thalassarche melanophris*) – The most numerous by far of the albatrosses seen on the cruise, we began seeing them well up the Beagle Channel and saw them all but two days of the cruise. The greatest concentrations by far were in the Drake Passage, as the ship approached Cape Horn. While seemingly very numerous, Black-browed Albatrosses have been profoundly affected by industrial fisheries in the Southern Ocean.

Light-mantled Albatross (*Phoebastria palpebrata*) – In some respects the Light-mantled was the most striking of all the albatrosses seen, with deeply arched wings and a long, rather pointed tail. Our first sightings were as the ship approached South Georgia, and prepared to anchor off Elsehul Bay. The Light-mantled breeds only at South Georgia in this part of the Southern Ocean. A few were seen daily from here on out until we reached the vicinity of Elephant Island.

SHEARWATERS & PETRELS (*Procellariidae*)

Southern Giant Petrel (*Macronectes giganteus*) – The most reliable of ship followers, Southern Giant Petrels were seen most of the days of the cruise. They ranged in color from all dark immatures to grayish adults with whiter heads to a few striking all white birds, known to sailors as “White Nellies.” With their habit of soaring right up over the stern and then alongside the ship, there were many opportunities to compare them closely with Northern Giant Petrels, which were seen on almost as many days as Southern.

Northern Giant Petrel (*Macronectes halli*) – The other Giant Petrel, the one with the pale iris and darker, reddish bill tip, we saw Northern almost as frequently as Southern. Sailors referred to both giant petrels as “Stinkers,” for their nasty habit of regurgitating at an intruder that came too close to a nest.

Southern Fulmar (*Fulmarus glacialisoides*) – A striking and elegant seabird, silvery gray and white, its appearance fit nicely with the icy realms where we saw them. The first were seen well south of South Georgia, in the vicinity of the South Orkneys, and it was never a common bird at any point in the Antarctic waters we passed through.

Antarctic Petrel (*Thalassoica Antarctica*) – A bit of good luck combined with persistence helped turn up a few Antarctic Petrels, which showed up as the ship entered Antarctic Sound. We had been on the lookout for this species, which is known to stray into the west edge of the Weddell Sea, but is not predictable this far from its main nesting colonies on the Antarctic continent. An exciting find!

Cape Petrel (*Daption capense*) – A trip favorite, for its bold black and white patterning and very loyal ship-following, these handsome and sometimes common seabirds were with us most days of the trip, except in or near the Beagle Channel. When a flock of eight or ten would soar together behind the ship, they created an elegant geometry of movement and patterning.

Snow Petrel (*Pagodroma nivea*) – One of the most memorable of all the Antarctic seabirds, we had some excellent views of these all white petrels – including one that showed up at the same time as the first Blue Petrels, and soared repeatedly at the stern. The first sightings were in Drygalski Fjord, in the thick of the bergy water.

Soft-plumaged Petrel (*Pterodroma mollis*) – Very scarce this cruise, we saw but one late in the day we crossed the Falkland Trough, enroute to South Georgia.

Blue Petrel (*Halobaena caerulea*) – A dainty petrel, not much different in size from the prions, but with a notably less flapping manner of flight, darker head patterning, and a surprising distinctive white tail tip. Most of our Blue Petrel sightings were in the Scotia Sea, where they were very regular for about a day and a half.

Antarctic Prion (*Pachyptila belcheri*) – The common, default prion of waters south of South Georgia and south, sometimes there were hundreds in view at a time, fluttering and arcing over the ocean as far as one could see. Their silvery gray forms and flight jizz became a constant over much of the Southern Ocean.

Slender-billed Prion (*Pachyptila belcheri*) – The abundant prion of the waters between the South American Continent and the Falklands. Our best views of this tiny petrel were from the ship's bow area, where prions flew almost directly below and could be viewed in detail.

Fairy Prion (*Pachyptila turtur*) – Paler faced prions in the same geographic range as Slender-billed, with a bit more black at the tail tip. Telling prion species apart as they fly over the ocean is an identification challenge of a high order.

Broad-billed Prion (*Pachyptila vittata*) – Johnny photographed a prion that appeared to fit the bill shape and markings of this species extremely well. Given the degree of distinguishing prion species on the wing, photos may be the best way to reach an absolute identification.

White-chinned Petrel (*Procellaria aequinoctialis*) – The petrel species that followed the ship most reliably, with never more than half a dozen at any one time, but present in all areas except near the Antarctic Peninsula and in the Beagle Channel. A large, dark petrel with deeply bowed wings and a pale bill, the white feathers on the chin were simply not discernible under the conditions of viewing from the ship, despite the bird's name.

Kerguelen Petrel (*Aphrodroma brevirostris*) – Another species we were very lucky to see, possibly due to very strong winds from the east. We began to encounter a small but steady stream of Kerguelen Petrels on the first morning of crossing the Scotia Sea, south of South Georgia. In light winds, they flew in a manner unusual for a petrel – high above the water and with flaps and glides. In stronger winds their flight was one of high, bounding arcs. At least a few dozen flew by in the course of several hours. One was seen earlier in the cruise as well, but far back in the ship's wake.

[**Greater Shearwater (*Puffinus gravis*)** – Bob saw several late in the day of Jan. 5, as the ship was making its crossing east to the Falklands to arrive the morning of Jan. 6.]

Sooty Shearwater (*Puffinus griseus*) – Small numbers both before and after the stop in the Falklands, and then thousands in the latter part of crossing the Drake. Since this species breeds near New Zealand and winters in the North Pacific, these were presumably birds in transit.

STORM-PETRELS (*Hydrobatidae*)

Gray-backed Storm-Petrel (*Garrodia nereis*) – We had some very good views of small numbers of this species, both from the bow and stern, in the days approaching and leaving the Falklands. Its gray back and all white underparts were readily seen. Gray-backed Storm Petrels are somewhat scarce in this area, so we were fortunate to see a good sample of them.

Wilson's Storm-Petrel (*Oceanites oceanicus*) – Except for a couple days west of the Falklands, Wilson's Storm-Petrels were seen every day of the cruise, including good numbers close to Antarctica where there was a great deal of ice on the water. With dark underparts, they were readily told from the somewhat less common Black-bellied Storm-Petrels. This tiny seabird has a remarkable large geographic range, and is thought to be among the world's most numerous birds.

Black-bellied Storm-Petrel (*Fregetta tropica*) – Seen on about half the days of the cruise, notably missing around South Georgia and the Scotia Sea. We had lots of practice picking out their white bellies with black line down the center, sometimes in close comparison with Wilson's. This species regularly dragged its feet in the water while flying, compared to Wilson's habit of pattering in place.

DIVING-PETRELS (*Pelecanoididae*)

South Georgia Diving-Petrel (*Pelecanoides georgicus*) – The diving-petrels are difficult to tell apart at sea, although perhaps not as mysterious as the prions. We saw lots of this species in the waters near South Georgia, including several live birds in the hand that had landed on the pool deck. With birds in the hand, the diagnostic dark line on the rear edge of the tarsus was easy to observe.

Common Diving-Petrel (*Pelecanoides urinatrix*) – The duskier faced diving-petrel, with a broad range overlapping that of the previous species. Seen primarily north of the Antarctic Convergence.

CORMORANTS (*Phalacrocoracidae*)

Rock Shag (*Phalacrocorax magellanicus*) – The dark faced cormorant seen regularly along the Ushuaia waterfront, along the Beagle Channel, and near Cape Horn.

Antarctic Shag (*Phalacrocorax bransfieldensis*) – The only cormorant of the Scotia Sea and south, we had good views of them on cliff nests along Paradise Bay. The “Blue-eyed” cormorant group, which includes the following two species, is divided differently by different taxonomists.

South Georgia Shag (*Phalacrocorax georgianus*) – The “Blue-eyed” Shag or cormorant of the South Georgia archipelago. First encountered at Shag Rocks, west of South Georgia Island, commonly around South Georgia, and all the way south to the South Orkney Islands.

Imperial Shag (*Phalacrocorax atriceps*) – The westernmost of the “Blue-eyed” Shag group, found in southernmost South America and in the Falkland Islands. The South American form *atriceps* varies in the amount of black and white on the face, and may represent more than one form. The dark-cheeked birds seen in the Falklands were subspecies *albiventer*.

HERONS, EGRETS & BITTERNES (*Ardeidae*)

Black-crowned Night-Heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) – Although the same species as found in North America, we saw two subspecies: the very dark *obscurus* along the Ushuaia waterfront, and an endemic form in the Falkland Islands (*falklandicus*).

IBISES & SPOONBILLS (*Threskiornithidae*)

Black-faced Ibis (*Theristicus melanopis*) – Seen in flight, close overhead, and heard making its distinctive bugling, on both outings around Ushuaia. A few were seen foraging in the grass along the road west of Ushuaia, unfortunately at a place that didn't offer room to pull off the road. This species visits southern South America during the austral summer.

DUCKS, GEESE & SWANS (*Anatidae*) – All of the geese species seen on the trip were sheldgeese (of the *Chloephaga* genus), close relatives of the Old World shelducks and not true geese like the North American species.

Upland Goose (*Chloephaga picta*) – The most prevalent of the geese near Ushuaia and on the Falklands, the notably dimorphic males and females were often seen with large goslings. We saw them primarily in upland habitats – lawns and meadows – but a few also in the water at Tierra del Fuego National Park.

Kelp Goose (*Chloephaga hybrida*) – Very striking, stocky geese. Males all white with bright yellow feet, females purplish brown with the same bright feet. Some of the group watched a pair at close range along the Ushuaia waterfront, as they jumped from rock to rock, springing and landing with both feet.

Ashy-headed Goose (*Chloephaga poliocephala*) – Beautiful geese, both sexes with rufous breasts and gray heads. Superb scope views of a pair at Tierra del Fuego National Park. Although seen early in the tour, the view of these boldly colored geese remains one of the trip highlights.

Flightless Steamerduck (*Tachyeres pteneres*) – Several dozen pairs were seen along the Ushuaia waterfront, resting on shore along the water's edge or swimming and diving. The yellow-orange bills of both sexes and very short folded primaries helped distinguish them from Flying Steamerduck.

Falkland Steamerduck (*Tachyeres brachypterus*) – The only steamerduck in the Falklands, where we saw a number right along the main harbor in Stanley. Also flightless, like *T. pteneres*.

Flying Steamerduck (*Tachyeres patachonicus*) – Can be hard to find, so we were fortunate on our post-cruise morning tour around Ushuaia to find a pair on the lake-like impoundment. With different bill color by gender and curly tail feathers, this species is readily distinguished from *T. pteneres*.

Chiloe Wigeon (*Anas sibilatrix*) – Scoped in Tierra del Fuego National Park, along the same lake edge as the pair of Ashy-headed Geese, where they shared the shoreline with Yellow-billed Pintails.

Crested Duck (*Speculanus specularioides*) – The most prevalent duck around the Ushuaia waterfront. A large and singular species, with a long pointed tail like a Wood Duck. We saw subspecies *specularioides*, which has a more prominent tuft on the nape than the more northern subspecies

Yellow-billed Pintail (*Anas georgica*) – Looking much like a female Northern Pintail with a yellow bill, subspecies *spinicauda* was seen around Ushuaia, and *georgica* was noted at Stromness and Grytviken landings South Georgia. Some authorities split the endemic South Georgia form as “Brown Pintail.”

Red Shoveler (*Anas platalea*) – Truly a handsome and distinctive species, especially the rosy brown males. A flock was regular along the west side of the lake-like impoundment at Ushuaia, where we stopped to scope them carefully on Jan. 20.

NEW WORLD VULTURES (*Cathartidae*)

Turkey Vulture (*Cathartes aura*) – Small numbers around Ushuaia.

Andean Condor (*Vultur gryphus*) – A much anticipated sighting as one of the world’s largest soaring birds. At our very first stop in Tierra del Fuego park, alongside a lake, a pair of Andean Condors soared high over an adjacent ridge, much to the delight of the group.

HAWKS, EAGLES & KITES (*Accipitridae*)

Variable Hawk (*Buteo polysoma*) – An all gray-backed adult, therefore likely a male, was scoped as it perched on a post at the Ushuaia basural. This was the lone *Buteo* seen on the trip.

FALCONS & CARACARAS (*Falconidae*)

Striated Caracara (*Phalco boenus australis*) – A species of the Falklands and islands in the Cape Horn archipelago, we watched one fly across the harbor at Stanley with a pair of oystercatchers in pursuit.

White-throated Caracara (*Phalco boenus albogularis*) – It took a trip to the Ushuaia basural (dump) to find this more scarce caracara. Several were seen perched or standing on the ground, in the same area as Southern Caracaras and Chimango Caracaras.

Southern Caracara (*Caracara plancus*) – On the Jan. 20 morning drive along the shore west of Ushuaia, we saw several of these caracaras, including one walking on the beach not far from a roost of gulls. Others were busily engaged at the basural, where they were a common sight.

Chimango Caracara (*Milvago chimango*) – A small caracara with crow-like tendencies, this was a relatively common bird in the outskirts of Ushuaia. One or more of them seemed to follow the group during a walk in Tierra del Fuego park, landing in the trees just above us.

OYSTERCATCHERS (*Haematopodidae*)

Magellanic Oystercatcher (*Haematopus leucopodus*) – A black and white oystercatcher, seen well near Stanley where a pair appeared to be on a nest territory not far from where we exited the bus. Seen chasing a Striated Caracara in the same area. Some in the group also saw this species along the Ushuaia waterfront.

Blackish Oystercatcher (*Haematopus ater*) – An all dark oystercatcher with pale pinkish legs, much like the Black Oystercatcher of the Pacific. Blackish Oystercatchers turned up along the Ushuaia waterfront, on rocky outcrops at Tierra del Fuego, and around Stanley harbor.

PLOVERS & LAPWINGS (*Charadriidae*)

Southern Lapwing (*Vanellus chilensis*) – A tall and boldly patterned lapwing with large red eyes, fairly regular around the Ushuaia waterfront on grassy edges. A pair on nest territory called loudly and flew around the group at the impoundment. Widespread in South America, we saw subspecies *fretensis*.

Two-banded Plover (*Charadrius falklandicus*) – Seen on the beach at the end of the Gypsy Bay hike outside Stanley. A number of this species, mixed with a few White-rumped Sandpipers, were scoped at the last minute as our tour guide attempted to hurry us back onto the bus.

Rufous-chested Dotterel (*Charadrius modestus*) – A few of the group, on the shuttle bus driver's advice, got out of the bus outside of town and began walking toward a large expanse of upland that was part of the town commons. After debating which way to walk, we walked through a gate into the commons and, within a minute or two, were looking at a pair of dotterels with at least one large juvenile. It was an exciting and creative episode of birding, rewarded with a beautiful plover.

SANDPIPERS & Allies (*Scolopacidae*)

South American Snipe (*Gallinago paraguayae*) – Johnny saw one or two as they flushed at the end of the hike near Stanley. The only likely snipe here.

White-rumped Sandpiper (*Calidris fuscicollis*) – A few among Two-banded Plovers on the beach at Gypsy Bay. Truly far south winterers, which nest in the high arctic.

SHEATHBILLS (*Chionidae*)

Snowy Sheathbill (*Chionis albus*) – Bizarre is an accurate description of this oddball species, which looks a lot like a plump white pigeon with an oversized bill. A scavenger, we saw them primarily around penguin colonies at South Georgia and farther south. By far the best views were of small group that landed aboard ship on Jan. 15 and proceeded to carefully inspect every square inch of the pool deck, scavenging for a snack. At this point, one could photograph them from a few feet away.

GULLS (*Laridae*)

Dolphin Gull (*Larus scoresbii*) – Medium sized, dark backed gulls with hefty red bills. We saw numbers of them on the Ushuaia waterfront, and well along the Beagle Channel. Reminiscent of Heermann's Gulls of the Pacific coast.

Kelp Gull (*Larus dominicanus*) – Seen all days of the tour except on ocean crossings between islands and the continent. A large, very dark backed gull, we encountered two subspecies: *dominicanus* near Ushuaia, the Beagle Channel, the Falklands and South Georgia; *austrinus* on Antarctica and nearby islands.

Brown-hooded Gull (*Larus maculipennis*) – Seen on the walk Bob led along the Ushuaia waterfront after dinner on Jan. 19, just after the Minerva had docked in Ushuaia. We scoped a flock of a dozen or so on the back side of the impoundment.

TERNs (*Sternidae*)

South American Tern (*Sterna hirundinacea*) – The pale, finely built terns seen from Ushuaia to the Drake Passage. One or more pairs appeared to be nesting on an old hulk not far from the harbor's edge in Ushuaia. The only tern likely in this area at this season.

Antarctic Tern (*Sterna paradisaea*) – Seen from South Georgia south, Antarctic Terns appeared to be nesting on every island we approached. Nesting pairs were particularly evident along the old Grytviken whaling harbor. Much grayer below than South American Tern, and with a shorter tail. Subspecies *georgiae* at South Georgia and *gaini* in the South Shetland Islands and Antarctica.

SKUAS & JAEGERS (*Stercoraridae*)

Chilean Skua (*Stercorarius chilensis*) – The prevalent skua seen from Ushuaia through the Beagle Channel to the Drake. Different in appearance than the following two species, with a more rufous body and contrasting dark cap. There were Chilean Skuas roosting with gulls east from Ushuaia along the shore, and mixed among the scavenging gulls and caracaras at the basural.

South Polar Skua (*Stercorarius maccormicki*) – The last species of skua we encountered on the trip, only after leaving South Georgia for the South Orkneys and the Peninsula. Smaller and duller backed than Brown Skuas, with which they often overlapped, and seen in several color morphs. Great side-by-side comparisons were possible along the shore at Pendulum Cove, where both species were feasting on krill cooked by the geothermal outlets near shore.

Brown Skua (*Stercorarius antarcticus*) – The largest, most hulking of the three skua species seen, and with the heaviest bill. Even where size was hard to judge, the pale spangled back was a good way to identify this skua. Seen from the Falkland Islands (subspecies *antarctica*) south through South Georgia to the Antarctic Peninsula (subspecies *lonnbergi*).

PIGEONS & DOVES (*Columbidae*)

Rock Pigeon (*Columba livia*) – small flocks around Ushuaia

PARROTS (*Psittacidae*)

Austral Parakeet (*Enicognathus ferrugineus*) – Just a single bird was seen at Tierra del Fuego park, but we had good views of it perched fairly low in a tree. The southernmost parrot in the New World, Austral Parakeets eat the buds of *Nothofagus antarctica*.

WOODPECKERS & Allies (*Picidae*)

Magellanic Woodpecker (*Campephilus magellanicus*) – One of the most anticipated birds of the trip to Tierra del Fuego, we were fortunate to get good views of a huge female, nearly all black with a recurved crest, as it called and drummed atop a tall snag. We had been looking for more than an hour,

hiking in the forest where there were older trees and snags, before the woodpecker was at last sighted. A very exciting moment!

OVENBIRDS & WOODCREEPERS (*Furnariidae*)

Bar-winged Cinclodes (*Cinclodes fuscus*) – The last morning of the trip, as we bused around Ushuaia to bird at the basural and other spots, we saw this species several times. A medium brown bird shaped like a blackbird, we saw Bar-winged Cinclodes on the ground and along a stream, and flashing a pale wing-stripe in flight.

Blackish Cinclodes (*Cinclodes antarcticus*) – Our best view of this very terrestrial furnariid was at the basural (the dump), where one stood atop a pile of rubbish just a few meters from the group. The birds on the Chilean mainland are subspecies *maculirostris*. An uncommon species restricted to outer Tierra del Fuego and the Cape Horn archipelago, it occurs more commonly on some of the Falkland Islands, where it goes by the name tussock-bird.

Thorn-tailed Rayadito (*Aphrastura spinicauda*) – Small flocks of Rayaditos, chattering and gleaning through foliage like kinglets, were seen early in the tour in Tierra del Fuego National Park and at the top of the road to Martial Glacier at the end of the tour. We saw subspecies *spinicauda*.

White-throated Treerunner (*Pygarrhichas albogularis*) – These nuthatch-like birds offered terrific views in the *Nothofagus* forest of Tierra del Fuego National Park, foraging low to the ground on trunks and fallen trees. Despite their apparent similarity to nuthatches, they are unrelated, and part of the immensely diversified furnariid family of birds.

TYRANT FLYCATCHERS (*Tyrannidae*)

White-crested Elaenia (*Elaenia albiceps*) – The common forest flycatcher around Ushuaia, we saw this bird both in Tierra del Fuego National Park and along the road to Martial Glacier. At the latter spot, at least three birds flew in close and repeatedly flared the white crests that are often hidden in the crown feathers. Subspecies *chilensis* that winters north to Brazil.

Austral Negrito (*Lessonia rufa*) – As we drove slowly through Tierra del Fuego National Park, we stopped to watch a pair of negritos right next the road. The male, black with a rufous back, and the paler female, perched on a fence line and then flitted to the ground in search of prey, in the style of bluebirds. An eye-catching little flycatcher.

Dark-faced Ground-Tyrant (*Muscisaxicola maclovianus*) – Denizens of the rocky outcrops and boulder fields in the Falkland Islands, we watched a number of them foraging as we hiked along Gypsy Bay outside of Stanley. A member of the huge flycatcher family, this species is highly adapted to terrestrial habitats.

SWALLOWS (*Hirundinidae*)

Chilean Swallow (*Tachycineta meyeni*) – The only swallow encountered in the vicinity of Ushuaia, we saw scattered pairs both along the waterfront and in our tour travels outside the city. Its plumage is very reminiscent of a Tree Swallow, but with a prominent white rump.

WAGTAILS & PIPITS (*Motacillidae*)

Correndera Pipit (*Anthus correndera*) – Just as the group stepped down from the bus outside Stanley, we had close views of the only pipit species found in the Falklands. Others were seen more distantly, flying and singing over the tundra-like expanses of the island. Subspecies *grayi* in the Falklands. Some of the group had brief views of this species near Ushuaia (subspecies *chilensis*).

South Georgia Pipit (*Anthus antarcticus*) – We had thought our chances of seeing this pipit were minimal, since it is missing from most of the main island due to nest predation by introduced rats. But during a zodiac cruise of Larsen Bay (Jan. 11, off of Drygalski Fjord), our boatman Chris got us close to a rocky shoreline where we had good views of this endemic as it walked on and flitted among seaweed covered boulders.

WRENS (*Troglodytidae*)

House Wren (*Troglodytes aedon*) – It is a bit mind-boggling to travel to the distal end of the South American continent and encounter the same species of wren that is a common Neotropical migrant in North America. This far-ranging species has been divided by some authorities into 32 subspecies. We saw several of the *chilensis* form – and heard numerous others – in the denser understory of Tierra del Fuego National Park.

Sedge Wren (*Cistothorus platensis*) – Another wren that ranges from the Falklands as far north as Canada. Some in the group saw a Sedge Wren in the tall grassy habitat near the trail along Gypsy Bay near Stanley. This *falklandicus* endemic island race is split by some as a distinct species (Grass Wren).

THRUSHES & Allies (*Turdidae*)

Austral Thrush (*Turdus falcklandii*) – Very robin-like in shape and habits, we first encountered Austral Thrushes right in Ushuaia, then in Tierra del Fuego park, and later found them quite common on the rough terrain outside Stanley. The subspecies we encountered were *magellanicus* around Ushuaia and *falcklandii* in the Falkland Islands.

OLD WORLD SPARROWS (*Passeridae*)

House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) – Common around the city of Ushuaia, this species was intentionally introduced into Argentina in the 1870s and into Chile in the early 20th Century. Remarkably cosmopolitan and adaptable species.

SISKINS, CROSSBILLS & Allies (*Fringillidae*)

Black-chinned Siskin (*Carduelis barbata*) – Although mostly seen briefly in one tree top or another, these siskins were prevalent enough that we eventually had good views of them in our two half-days of touring near Ushuaia.

BUNTINGS, SPARROWS & Allies (*Emberizidae*)

Patagonian Sierra-Finch (*Phrygilus patagonicus*) – An attractive emberizid in golden orange and gray hues, this species was seen on both the half-day tours near Ushuaia, and often foraged junco-like on the ground.

Yellow-bridled Finch (*Melanodera xanthogramma*) – Wonderful views of this finch were had outside Stanley, where we saw pairs and young birds foraging over the rocky landscape near Gypsy Bay. It's habits are reminiscent of other finches of alpine zones, like the North American rosy-finches.

TROUPIALS & ALLIES (*Icteridae*)

Long-tailed Meadowlark (*Sturnella loyca*) – A large and flashy meadowlark, we saw a pair just uphill from Gypsy Bay outside Stanley. The male's crimson breast was very flashy, in vivid contrast to its dark upperparts.

MAMMALS

HARES & RABBITS (*Leporidae*)

European Rabbit (I) (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*) – an introduced lagomorph, seen in and near Tierra del Fuego park

RORQUAL WHALES (*Balaenopteridae*)

Fin Whale (*Balaenoptera physalus*) – This baleen or rorqual whale was among the most frequently seen whale of the trip, along with Humpbacks. Its distinctive curved dorsal fin and tall blow helped identify it. In one area south of South Georgia we encountered a group of at least five Fin Whales.

Antarctic Minke Whale (*Balaenoptera bonaerensis*) – Seen on at least one occasion, as we were navigating through the ice of Lemaire Channel.

Humpback Whale (*Megaptera novae-angliae*) – This species afforded the best and most repeated views as we traveled through Antarctic waters proper. We watched groups of two or three whales working together in shallow bubble-feeding, likely taking krill not far under the surface.

BEAKED WHALES (*Ziphiidae*)

Southern Bottlenose Whale (*Hyperodon planifrons*) – A very exciting find was a group of at least three Southern Bottlenose Whales, which surfaced right in front of the ship – close enough to see the bulbous head shape and tan body color. This was during the day after the ship left South Georgia, heading south.

DOLPHINS (*Delphinidae*)

Hourglass Dolphin (*Lagenorhynchus cruciger*) – A group of three or more were seen between the Falklands and South Georgia. In leaping partly clear of the water, the vivid black and white patterning on their sides was very striking.

Peale's Dolphin (*Lagenorhynchus australis*) – A few came alongside the ship in the morning as we approached Cape Horn and the Beagle Channel. Another dolphin with distinctive black and white patterning, including a dark snout.

Commerson's Dolphin (*Cephalorhynchus commersonii*) – A few were seen in Gypsy Bay, from the trail during the walk along the bay.

SEA LIONS & FUR SEALS (*Otaridae*)

Southern Sea Lion (*Otaria byronia*) – Seen in the water and on small islands in the Beagle Channel as we departed Ushuaia for the Falklands.

Antarctic Fur Seal (*Arctocephalus gazella*) – Emphatically present along the shorelines of our stops on South Georgia Island, where 95% of the world population comes to breed. Their numbers are apparently growing rapidly and beyond historic levels, possibly because of less competition for krill from the now vanquished whale populations of the South Georgia region.

TRUE SEALS (*Phocidae*)

Southern Elephant Seal (*Mirounga leonine*) – We had superb views of molting individuals and small groups of these immense seals at each of our stops on South Georgia. Their immense dark eyes and “smiling” faces were oddly captivating, as they produced a variety of startling grunts and gasps.

Crabeater Seal (*Lobodon carcinophagus*) – Best views were of several hauled out on a bergy bit near Pleneau Island, near our furthest south point of the cruise. The massive brown seals got a close going over by a series of groups making zodiac cruises among the icebergs.

Leopard Seal (*Hydrurga leptonyx*) – Hauled out on bergy bits, we cruised by at least a dozen of these legendary predators over the course of our several days near the Antarctic Peninsula. The first sightings were in Drygalski Fjord, as the ship entered ice-strewn water near the face of the glacier.

Weddell Seal (*Leptonychotes weddelli*) – Another large seal, we saw them hauled out on shore in Larsen Bay and Half Moon Island, as well as on a number of bergy bits.

DEER (*Cervidae*)

Reindeer (*Rangifer tarandus*) – Introduced to South Georgia, there were small groups visible at the landing at Stromness.