

ANTARCTICA, SOUTH GEORGIA AND THE FALKLAND ISLANDS

DECEMBER 27 2011-JANUARY 15 2012



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TOUR REPORT
ANTARCTICA, SOUTH GEORGIA & THE FALKLAND ISLANDS CRUISE
December 26, 2011–January 16, 2012

By Dion Hobcroft

We convened in Buenos Aires on the evening of December 27 with several early arriving participants making an afternoon excursion to Costanera Sur. Here, on a warm summer afternoon, they observed some 40 plus species including such lovely birds as Green-barred Woodpecker, Blue-and-yellow Tanager, Masked Yellowthroat, and White-eyed Parakeet.

A very early start saw us onto our direct flight to Ushuaia and by 10:30 AM we were in a birding bus and off to Tierra del Fuego National Park. It was a great morning in the park with pride of place going to an incredible trio of Magellanic Woodpeckers that fed unconcernedly on the ground within a few meters of us; an absolute knockout.

Other great sightings came quickly as we clocked up Black-necked Swan, Upland Goose, Flightless and Flying steamer-ducks, Crested Duck, Chiloe Wigeon, Great Grebe, Black-chested Buzzard-Eagle, Magellanic and Blackish oystercatchers, Thorn-tailed Rayadito, White-throated Treerunner, Tufted Tit-Tyrant, White-crested Elaenia, Austral Negrito, Fire-eyed Diucon, Patagonian Sierra-Finch, the ubiquitous Rufous-collared Sparrow, Austral Blackbird, and Austral Parakeet.

After lunch at a delicious Argentine parilla, our explorations continued behind the restaurant where we saw a large flock of Black-faced Ibis, a quartet of beautiful Ashy-headed Geese, and a feral North American beaver! We explored the coast and a small freshwater marsh in Ushuaia with more new birds coming in a steady progression including Chilean Skua, American Kestrel, Rock and Imperial shags, Kelp Goose, South American Snipe, Red Shoveler, Speckled Teal, Yellow-billed Pintail, a fledgling Correndera Pipit crouched in the grass at one meter, beautiful South American Terns, and Dolphin Gulls. A pilgrimage to the tip for the White-throated Caracara was blown out by hurricane strength winds blowing up the Beagle Channel!

After boarding the *Clipper Adventurer* we were into our cabins, dinner, then bed. At midnight we left the dock, cleared the Beagle Channel, and set course for Staten Island and the Falklands.

On our first full day at sea we observed more than 80 Magellanic Penguins, rafts of more than 300 Rockhopper Penguins, 300 Black-browed Albatross, 2 Wandering Albatross, and at least 10 Southern Royal Albatross.

Northern and Southern giant-petrels, Southern Fulmar, Cape Petrel, Slender-billed Prion, White-chinned Petrel, Great and Sooty shearwaters, large flocks of the recently split Fuegian and a handful of Gray-backed Storm-Petrel and Common Diving-Petrel kept us on our toes. We also had our only sightings for the voyage of both Manx Shearwater and Magellanic Diving-Petrel—the latter confirmed by photographs of the white arc extending boldly up behind the ear coverts. Marine mammals made an appearance with two killer whales—one a large bull—and fast-paced dusky dolphins getting us off to a fine start.

With good seas the next morning, December 30, we arrived at Carcass Island in the Falklands. A rat-free island, this special place harbors all of the extant small passerines of the Falklands. We all opted

for the long hike of some five miles that wended along the coast and pastures with large areas of well-protected “tussac” grass, culminating at the local landholder’s house with a spectacular tea and cake ceremony.

The birding was special—a solitary King Penguin, nesting colonies of “Subantarctic” Gentoo Penguins and burrows full of Magellanic Penguins, nesting Striated Caracara, Blackish Cinclodes feeding at our feet, Dark-faced Ground-Tyrant, Cobb’s Wren, Austral Thrush, beautiful Black-throated Finch, showy Long-tailed Meadowlarks, and dapper Black-throated Siskins.



Falkland Flightless Steamer-Duck ©Dion Hobcroft

Our next stop was Saunder’s Island where we weathered a sand storm as we made it up the slopes to a breeding colony of both Rockhopper Penguin and Black-browed Albatross. What an amazing treat to be up alongside these most exceptional seabirds. Gentoo, Magellanic, and a small number of King penguins also nested here, while Turkey Vultures, Falkland Brown Skuas, and a lone Snowy Sheathbill patrolled the colonies for opportunities. South American sea lion was also observed working the coastline for feeding chances.

We heaved anchor and were at sea en route to incredible South Georgia. With favorable seas we made the crossing in two-and-a-half-days. Sea watching was again productive. We made our first sightings of the Gray-headed Albatross, the stealth bomber Light-mantled Sooty Albatross, the scarce Atlantic Petrel, Soft-plumaged Petrel performing some incredible display flights like pronking gazelles, a beautiful view of Gray Petrel, the delightful Blue Petrel, a couple of Subantarctic Fairy Prions amongst clouds of Antarctic Prions, Black-bellied Storm-Petrel, and South Georgian Diving-Petrel.

By the afternoon of January 2 we were ready for our first Zodiac cruise in Elsehul Bay in spectacular South Georgia. Hordes of Antarctic fur seals and a few loafing moulting southern elephant seals thronged the bay while King Penguins, Gentoo Penguins, a solitary Chinstrap Penguin, good numbers of three species of nesting albatross, giant-petrels, Cape Petrels, our first sightings of both South Georgian Shag and Antarctic Terns, and good numbers of Snowy Sheathbills made for a lively afternoon. Pride of place went to the Macaroni Penguins—our only chance to see a nesting colony of this species that favors steep, rocky coastal cliffs to breed. With their luxuriant crests and puffin-like bills they are quite the penguin. As Peter Harrison professed, “If you don’t like penguins, you should seek medical advice!”



Black-browed Albatross ©Dion Hobcroft

Overnight we moved to the Salisbury Plain in the Bay of Isles. Gray skies and rain greeted us as we made landing at an enormous colony of King Penguins estimated at more than 100,000 pairs! With King Penguins in all plumages and at all stages of reproduction, it was an insight into the lives and struggles of this most splendid penguin as they trumpeted around us: br...br...br...brrrrrrr. The birders convened for a Zodiac cruise to nearby Tern Islet. We found a pair of South Georgia Pipits that gave a bunch of quite good to very good views as they flitted amidst the boulders and sea caves. These delicate passerines eking out a tough existence in this harsh environment are the only perching birds in the Antarctic.

From Salisbury Plain we repositioned to Fortuna Bay. Forty passengers and staff commenced the Shackleton Walk, hiking overland to the Stromness Whaling Station where Sir Ernest was able to raise the alarm and rescue his stranded expeditioners on Elephant Island—a tale of epic drama in the heroic era of Antarctic exploration.

The next morning dawned clear and sunny, and we had a magical morning at Gold Harbour—truly the Serengeti of the Far South. The southern elephant seals led the charge, indulging in combat and mating

rituals as a throng of King Penguins scampered to keep out of the way of these voluminous jousting behemoths. Words cannot describe.

As we rounded the southeast of South Georgia, we were joined briefly by small numbers of ethereal Snow Petrels—what special birds they are. A massive tabular iceberg attracted thousands of prions to the upwelling of life it brought to the surface.

Two days at sea en route to the Antarctic Peninsula included excellent sightings of giant fin whales, and both Peale's and dashing hourglass dolphins amidst a rich diversity of seabirds, with giant Wandering Albatross in view much of the time in a variety of plumages.

When we reached the Antarctic Sound, giant tabular berg after giant tabular berg announced our arrival at the southernmost continent. An Antarctic Petrel gave a great view—a lucky break—while an Antarctic Minke whale surged, half breaching parallel with the ship. We had truly arrived.

We were straight into the action making a first continental landing at Brown Bluff. Here we strolled past colonies of “Antarctic” Gentoo Penguins and Adelie Penguins as rock pilfering, regurgitation, and star patterns kept the digital cards being filled like penguin chicks. A special encounter with nesting Snow Petrels under a boulder bank was something else.

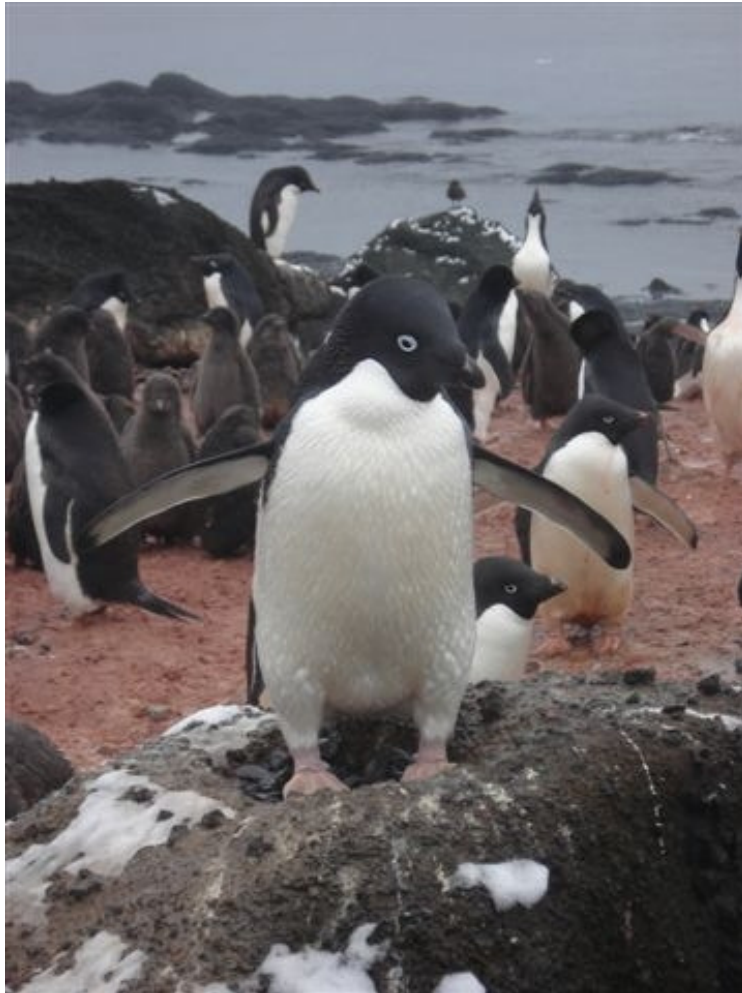


Snow Petrels ©Dion Hobcroft

Trying to maximize our time, we went straight to Gourdin Island which literally heaved with nesting Adelie, Gentoo, and Chinstrap penguins—a biomass and olfactory spectacular! Our next stop was Neko Harbour, set amongst Andean mountains and enormous tongue glaciers. An uphill hike gave us a “buena vista” shared with nesting South Polar Skuas.

Back into the Zodiacs, we were joined by a trio of surface lunging humpback whales. It was my first time to literally see the tonsils of these baleen giants as they fed (and we could see the krill) right next to us. This was perhaps the overall voyage highlight for many. We made further landings at Almirante Brown before taking the ship, skillfully guided by the captain, through an ice-filled Lemaire Channel. Back in the Zodiacs we encountered Weddell seals, leopard seals, crabeater seals, and hot chocolate tipped with Bailey's Irish Cream.

Our final day in the peninsula saw us landing on Wienke Island at Dorian Bay, inspecting a well-preserved British Antarctic Survey hut. A highlight was seeing a photograph of geologist Geoff Renner celebrating Christmas 1978. Geoff was amongst our amazing lecture staff on board the *Clipper Adventurer*.



Adelie Penguins ©Dion Hobcroft

Our final landings at Port Lockroy and Jougla Point provided a unique chance to send mail and pick up some souvenirs. Antarctic Shags had well-developed chicks, with Gentoo Penguins in different stages of breeding success and attentive South Polar Skuas acting as health inspectors.

We cruised the amazing Neumayer Channel as the sun broke through past Brabant Island, and into a Drake Passage that massaged us with roiling five meter plus swells—a Drake experience that satisfied most!

I would particularly like to thank all of the participants on this voyage and the amazing Zegrahm staff, ship's crew, and Quark liaison staff who kept us as well as an expedition team possibly could.

Dion Hobcroft

January 19, 2012

ITINERARY

- 28 Dec 11:** Fly Buenos Aires to Ushuaia. Full day exploring Tierra del Fuego National Park (TDFNP) and Ushuaia.
- 29 Dec 11:** At sea via Beagle Channel and Staten Island to the Falkland Islands.
- 30 Dec 11:** AM: Carcass Island PM: Saunder's Island.
- 31 Dec 11-1 Jan 12:** At sea to South Georgia
- 2 Jan 12:** Arrive South Georgia with afternoon zodiac cruise Elsehul.
- 3 Jan 12:** AM: Salisbury Plain-Shackleton Walk (Fortuna to Stromness) PM: Grytviken
- 4 Jan 12:** AM: Gold Harbour then at sea to Falklands.
- 5-6 Jan 12:** At sea to Stanley, Falklands.
- 7 Jan 12:** Arrive Stanley 1400-2400
- 8-9 Jan 12:** At sea to Antarctic Peninsula
- 10 Jan 12:** Antarctic Sound-Brown Bluff-Gourdin Island.
- 11 Jan 12:** Neko Harbour-Almirante Brown-Paradise Harbour-Lemaire Channel
- 12 Jan 12:** Dorian Bay-Port Lockroy-Jougla Point (Wienke Island) then cruise Neumayer Channel.
- 13-14 Jan 12:** At sea across Drake Passage to Ushuaia
- 15 Jan 12:** Arrive Ushuaia flights home via BA

BIRD LIST

- Black-necked Swan *Cygnus melanocoryphus*:** (10) TDFNP on 28 Dec.
- Upland Goose *Chloephaga picta*:** (20) TDFNP on 28 Dec, (100) on Carcass Island on 30 Dec and many at Stanley on 7 Dec.
- Kelp Goose *Chloephaga hybrida*:** (3) Ushuaia on 28 Dec with (10) on both Carcass and Saunders Island and more seen at Gypsy Point near Stanley on 7 Dec.
- Ashy-headed Goose *Chloephaga poliocephala*:** Great views of (4) in marsh grassland behind our lunch restaurant on TDF on 28 Dec was a lucky break.
- Ruddy-headed Goose *Chloephaga rubidiceps*:** (4) on Carcass Island on 28 Dec and a small number near Stanley on 7 Jan was a good result for this Falklands specialty.
- Flightless Steamer Duck *Tachyeres pteneres*:** (10) in TDFNP and Ushuaia Harbour on 28 Dec.
- Falkland Steamer Duck *Tachyeres brachypterus*:** (20) on Carcass Island and (2) on Saunders Island on 30 Dec with numerous in Stanley area on 7 Jan.
- Flying Steamer Duck *Tachyeres patachonicus*:** (6) TDFNP and Ushuaia Harbour on 28 Dec and (6) at Carcass Island on 30 Dec.
- Crested Duck *Lophonetta speculariodes*:** (20) at TDFNP and Ushuaia on 28 Dec, (6) at Carcass Island and seen on 7 Dec near Stanley.
- Chiloe Wigeon *Anas sibilatrix*:** (10) at TDFNP and Ushuaia on 28 Dec included several handsome drakes.
- Yellow-billed (Speckled) Teal *Anas flavirostris*:** (6) on a small freshwater wetland in Ushuaia gave great scope views.
- Yellow-billed Pintail *Anas georgica*:** We encountered two subspecies of this duck. (10) on 28 Dec at a freshwater wetland in Ushuaia belonged to the subspecies *spinicauda*. (1-4) birds seen on three dates Elsehul, Grytviken and Gold Harbour on South Georgia were of the nominate subspecies.
- Red Shoveler *Anas platalea*:** (6) at a small freshwater wetland in Ushuaia on 28 Dec.

White-tufted Grebe *Rollandia rolland*: (3) birds of the distinctive nominate subspecies seen on a small freshwater wetland near Stanley Airport on 7 Jan.

Great Grebe *Podiceps major*: (2) scoped in TDFNP on 28 Dec.

King Penguin *Aptenodytes patagonicus*: (1) on Carcass Island, (20) on Saunders Island and (1) near Stanley were our Falkland sightings. The main events were in South Georgia where we visited enormous breeding colonies at Salisbury Plain and Gold Harbour with smaller numbers at Elsehul.

Gentoo Penguin *Pygoscelis papua*: (100) on Carcass Island, (500) on Saunders Island with (20-30) on three days at South Georgia. All of these birds belonged to the larger nominate Subantarctic subspecies. (100-400) seen on three days in the Antarctic Peninsula belonged to the smaller subspecies *ellsworthi*.

Chinstrap Penguin *Pygoscelis antarcticus*: Singles seen on 2 and 4 Jan at South Georgia at Elsehul and Gold Harbour. The main event was at Gourdin Island on 10 Jan where nesting colonies of a few hundred were seen. (10) birds seen on both 11 and 12 Jan mostly at sea or resting on the ice in the Antarctic Peninsula.

Adelie Penguin *Pygoscelis adeliae*: (1000) at nesting colonies at Brown Bluff and Gourdin Island on 10 Jan was the main event. (10) birds seen the following day at Almirante Brown and Lemaire Channel.

Magellanic Penguin *Spheniscus magellanicus*: (80) seen at sea in the Beagle Channel and off Staten Island on 29 Dec, (100) at both Carcass and Saunders Islands in the Falklands on 30 Dec with many seen near Stanley on our visit here on 7 Jan. (20) or so seen again as we re-entered the Beagle Channel on 14 Jan.

Rockhopper Penguin *Eudyptes chrysocome*: (300) seen in rafts as we cruised past Staten Island on 29 Dec; (500) plus at a nesting colony we visited on Saunders Island on 30 Dec; (2-4) seen at sea 7-8 Jan between the Falklands and Antarctic Peninsula centred on the Burdwood Bank. All the birds we observed were of the nominate subspecies.

Macaroni Penguin *Eudyptes chrysolophus*: (1) was well spotted in the Rockhopper colony on Saunders Island in the Falklands on 30 Dec. Recorded on four days in South Georgia with the main event at Elsehul on 2 Jan with (500) plus seen. Another singleton was seen on the beach at Gold Harbour mixed in with the King Penguins.

Grey-headed Albatross *Thalassarche chrysostoma*: This most beautiful albatross was recorded on ten days with the high count at Elsehul on 2 Jan where (30) or more were seen. This species is a cold water specialist with its distribution centred on the Antarctic convergence.

Black-browed Albatross *Thalassarche melanophris*: Another beautiful if more abundant albatross, this species was recorded on thirteen days with the major event visiting the nesting colony at Saunders Island on 30 Dec. Here we could watch those feeding chicks and flying so close to us they would almost part our hair in the middle!

Light-mantled Albatross *Phoebastria palpebrata*: This stealth bomber of the albatross world with its startled white eye crescent and smiley sulcus is a firm favourite of any pelagic enthusiast. We recorded (1-10) birds on seven days including three singletons over three days in the Antarctic Peninsula the most southerly at 63 degrees S. The highest count was in South Georgia on 2 Jan.

Wandering Albatross *Diomedea exulans*: (2-20) birds recorded on ten days of this voyage all birds possible identified as Snowy Albatross subspecies *chionoptera*, the largest in terms of body measurements of the populations. This subspecies breeds at South Georgia. We also saw several birds in different age categories that resembled the subspecies *dabbenena* that breeds on Tristan da Cunha but they lacked the greenish nail (mandibular unguis) that is sometimes seen in this population so the ID can only be considered tentative. The highest day count was of (20) on 2 Jan as we approached South Georgia.

Southern Royal Albatross *Diomedea epomophora*: (1-30) birds recorded on eight days with the high count on 14 Jan as we approached the Beagle Channel of a large gathering of birds attracted to a fishing trawler. We observed a high proportion of juvenile and subadult birds.

Northern Royal Albatross *Diomedea sanfordi*: Although not recognised formally by Clements this distinct subspecies is elevated to full species status by the New Zealand checklist committee. Markedly scarcer than the Southern Royal on this voyage we observed (2) on 7 Jan and (1) on 14 Jan. This bird can be recognised by the uniform jet black upper wings, greatly reduced white leading edge to the forewings and solid black carpal blaze on the underwing.

Southern Giant-Petrel *Macronectes giganteus*: (1-100) recorded on fourteen days we had a lot of fun identifying giant-petrels on this voyage. This species was absent only in the Falkland Islands on this voyage being present all the way through the Antarctic Peninsula. We observed several of the spectacular white morph birds.

Northern Giant-Petrel *Macronectes halli*: (1-50) recorded on twelve days being absent only around the Antarctic Peninsula. The giant pinkish mandibular unguis (nail on the beak) is the consistent diagnostic feature although adults can be identified by the development and patterning of pale feathering on the head and wings in many cases.

Southern Fulmar *Fulmarus glacialis*: (1-100) recorded on six days the great majority south of the Antarctic Convergence and with a high count on 11 Dec as we approached Neko Harbour in the Antarctic Peninsula. This species is not polymorphic like the Northern Fulmar.

Antarctic Petrel *Thalassoica antarctica*: Arguably bird of the trip we were very fortunate to have a good view of a single bird in the Antarctic Sound on 10 Jan.

Cape Petrel *Daption capense*: This dapper inveterate ship follower was a firm crowd favourite. (1-100) recorded on twelve days and observed nesting on steep cliffs at Brown Bluff and Paradise Bay. All birds of the nominate subspecies.

Snow Petrel *Pagodroma nivea*: (10) birds followed the ship briefly as we rounded the south east tip of South Georgia on 4 Jan. We were delighted to observe (4) birds nesting under a massive boulder at Brown Bluff on 10 Jan with more sightings of (4-9) birds at Lemaire Channel and Dorian Bay.

Atlantic Petrel *Pterodroma incerta*: (1-2) seen on three dates, 31 Dec, 6-7 Jan this elusive bird was only recorded by the most diligent sea watchers as they rarely approached closely. Best view on 31 Dec.

Soft-plumaged Petrel *Pterodroma mollis*: (3-20) recorded on four days giving some superb views and dazzling erratic display flights often in pairs. The main event was on 31 Dec between the Falklands and South Georgia.

Blue Petrel *Halobaena caerulea*: (1-40) recorded on five days with many good views of this delightful petrel. The main event was on 13 Jan as we crossed the Antarctic Convergence between the Peninsula and Tierra del Fuego.

Antarctic Prion *Pachyptila desolata*: (20-1000+) recorded on seven days centred mostly on or south of the Antarctic convergence with huge numbers in the vicinity of South Georgia.

Slender-billed Prion *Pachyptila belcheri*: (1-500) recorded on six days centred north of the Antarctic convergence with highest numbers concentrated on the Falkland Islands.

Fairy Prion *Pachyptila turtur*: (2) seen on 2 Jan as we approached South Georgia took considerable scanning and searching for through the enormous flocks of Antarctic Prions. Apparently the nominate subspecies in South Georgia which is a bit surprising-not the subantarctic subspecies *subantarctica*.

Grey Petrel *Procellaria cinerea*: (1) bird made a close approach right across the bow on 31 Dec fortunately as just about all birders were gathered together. This is an elusive and rarely recorded species on this voyage transect so we were lucky!

White-chinned Petrel *Procellaria aequinoctialis*: (1-100) recorded on thirteen days of the voyage—a ubiquitous species on or north of the convergence. Almost daily good views, often revealing the inconspicuous tiny white chin at the base of the lower mandible in good views.

Great Shearwater *Puffinus gravis*: A highlight of the voyage was seeing the increase in abundance of this species with (1-100) recorded on seven days mostly centred on the Falkland Islands but also recorded off Tierra del Fuego on two dates.

Sooty Shearwater *Puffinus griseus*: (1-300) recorded on seven days with high counts centred on the Beagle Channel, off Tierra del Fuego and the Falkland Islands.

Manx Shearwater *Puffinus puffinus*: (1) seen by Peter Harrison off Staten Island on 30 Dec was the only sighting.

Wilson's Storm-Petrel *Oceanites oceanicus*: (1-50) recorded on fourteen days. One bird observed entering a burrow under a rock on Gourdin Island in the Antarctic Peninsula. Two seen in flight over the cemetery in Grytviken heading to their nests in the scree slopes here.

Fuegian Storm-Petrel *Oceanites chilensis*: This is the population of “Wilson's” that nests on islands off the southernmost tip of South America including Tierra del Fuego. Consistent plumage, biometric and genetic differences will see this population elevated to full species status (P. Harrison pers. comm.) We observed more than (500) at sea of Staten Island on 30 Dec. One noticeable feature was seeing them raft on the ocean surface—behaviour I have never previously seen with Wilson's. About (10) seen as we approached the Beagle Channel on 14 Jan.

Grey-backed Storm-Petrel *Garrodia nereis*: (1-3) recorded on five days at sea off Staten Island, the Falklands and South Georgia. A scarce species on this voyage typically associated with drifting kelp.

Black-bellied Storm-Petrel *Fregetta tropica*: (1-15) recorded on eight days typically associated with convergence waters and further south. Highest numbers off South Georgia and the Scotia Sea towards Elephant Island.

Magellanic Diving-Petrel *Pelecanoides magellanicus*: Single bird seen by many of us on 30 Dec off Staten Island was photographed by Brent Stephenson. His photo pulled up the diagnostic white crescent extending above the eye.

South Georgia Diving-Petrel *Pelecanoides georgicus*: Always difficult to identify we recorded (1-10) individuals on four days with fresh birds showing the paler ear coverts, frosty mantle braces and paler underwing coverts.

Common Diving-Petrel *Pelecanoides urinatrix*: (1-100) recorded on seven days at sea off Staten Island, Falklands and South Georgia where we had the highest count at sea off the south east corner. Birds seen in the Falklands belong to subspecies *berard* whilst birds off South Georgia belong to subspecies *exsul*. This species is identified by its dingy face and underwing typically unbraced dorsal surface.

Rock Shag *Phalacrocorax magellanicus*: (2-30) of this smart looking red faced shag seen on four dates at Ushuaia, Beagle Channel and the Falkland Islands.

Antarctic Shag *Phalacrocorax bransfieldensis*: (10-30) seen on three days in the Antarctic Peninsula with nesting colonies seen at Almirante Brown and Jougale Point mostly with large well developed chicks.

South Georgia Shag *Phalacrocorax georgianus*: (10) recorded on three days at South Georgia at Elsehul, Salisbury Plain and at sea off the south east tip of the main island.

Imperial Cormorant *Phalacrocorax atriceps*: (20-50) of the nominate subspecies recorded on three days in Ushuaia, the Beagle Channel and at sea off Staten Island. (20-30) recorded on the Falkland Islands on 30 Dec and 7 Jan at Saunders Island and Stanley area of the black-faced subspecies *albiventer*.

Black-crowned Night-Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*: (1) juvenile at Carcass Island, Falklands on 30 Dec and also recorded near Stanley on 7 Jan. Birds of this population assigned to an endemic subspecies *falklandicus*.

Black-faced Ibis *Theristicus melanopis*: (1) seen poorly in TDFNP with great views of (20) on a marshy grassland behind our lunch restaurant on 28 Dec.

Turkey Vulture *Cathartes aura*: (10) on both Carcass and Saunders Islands in the Falklands on 30 Dec and at least (5) near Stanley on 7 Jan.

Black-chested Buzzard-Eagle *Geronoetus melanoleucos*: Some excellent views of (4) birds in TDFNP on 28 Dec.

Variable Hawk *Buteo polysoma*: (2) near Stanley on 7 Jan.

Striated Caracara *Phalcoenus australis*: (10) on both Carcass and Saunders Islands in the Falklands on 30 Dec but not recorded near Stanley. Some excellent views of this charismatic and range restricted raptor.

Southern Caracara *Caracara plancus*: (1-2) near our restaurant near Ushuaia on 28 Dec.

Chimango Caracara *Milvago chimango*: (20) seen on our day in Ushuaia with a large number at the camp ground in TDFNP.

American Kestrel *Falco sparverius*: (1) flying across Ushuaia Harbour was a good sighting.

Snowy Sheathbill *Chionis albus*: (1) seen by some folks at Saunders Island on 30 Dec. (10) at Elsehul and (40) at Gold Harbour in South Georgia. (2-20) recorded on three days in Antarctic Peninsula including a bird incubating on a nest under a rock ledge on Gourdin Island.

Southern Lapwing *Vanellus chilensis*: (4) at Ushuaia gave great views.

Two-banded Plover *Charadrius falklandicus*: (4) seen near Stanley on 7 Jan.

Magellanic Oystercatcher *Haematopus leucopodus*: (2) TDFNP on 28 Dec with (10) at both Carcass and Saunders Islands on 30 Dec.

Blackish Oystercatcher *Haematopus ater*: (1) TDFNP on 28 Dec and (1) Carcass Island on 30 Dec.

South American Snipe *Gallinago paraguayiae*: (1) gave superb scope view at a small freshwater wetland in Ushuaia on 28 Dec. (5) seen by some folks on Carcass Island on 30 Dec and a few seen near Stanley on 7 Jan. All the birds we saw belong to the subspecies *magellanica*.

Brown-hooded Gull *Chroicocephalus maculipennis*: (1) seen by Alan at Saunder's Island on 30 Jan and at least (20) including several birds in rosy pink alternate plumage as we approached Stanley Harbour on 7 Jan.

Dolphin Gull *Leucophaeus scoresbii*: (20) in Ushuaia Harbour on 28 Dec, (20) on Saunder's Island on 30 Dec and at least (10) in Stanley Harbour on 7 Jan.

Kelp Gull *Larus dominicanus*: (1-50) recorded on ten days at all sites visited. Most interesting record was of a juvenile at sea half way between the Falklands and South Georgia on 31 Dec. Several pairs with chicks seen in Antarctic Peninsula.

South American Tern *Sterna hirundinacea*: (6) in Ushuaia Harbour, (100) in the Beagle Channel on 30 Dec and 14 Jan with (10) as we approached Stanley on 7 Jan.

Arctic Tern *Sterna paradisaea*: (2) in the Beagle Channel on 14 Jan. Adults in basic plumage showing translucent primaries, spike-like bill, uniform outer primaries and lighter dipping flight in direct comparison with South American Terns.

Antarctic Tern *Sterna vittata*: (10) seen on three days in South Georgia of the subspecies *georgiae* and (10-20) seen on three days in Antarctic Peninsula of the subspecies *gaini*.

Chilean Skua *Stercorarius chilensis*: (20-50) seen on three days in Ushuaia and Beagle Channel.

South Polar Skua *Stercorarius maccormicki*: (1-2) seen on three days at sea between South Georgia and Falklands and return on 6-8 Jan included a lovely light morph bird and a slaty juvenile seen by Peter Harrison. This species became the dominant skua on 11-12 Jan on our southernmost days in the Antarctic Peninsula with a high count on 12 Jan of (100) plus.

Brown Skua *Stercorarius antarcticus*: (1-20) recorded on eight days. Birds seen in the Falkland Islands belong to the nominate subspecies typically showing a dark cap. Birds seen in South Georgia and northern Antarctic Peninsula (Brown Bluff-Gourdin Island) belong to subspecies *lonnbergi*. One interesting observation was watching pairs of *lonnbergi* attacking Wandering Albatross and forcing them onto the water attempting to get them to disgorge food. This was seen on 7 Jan about 100 nm E of Port Stanley.

Parasitic Jaeger *Stercorarius parasiticus*: (1) dark morph seen on 31 Dec off the Falklands.

Austral Parakeet *Enicognathus ferrugineus*: (2) seen in flight briefly in TDFNP on 28 Dec.

Magellanic Woodpecker *Campephilus magellanicus*: Amazing views of a family trio feeding unconcernedly on fallen timber and the ground at TDFNP on 28 Dec literally at our feet.

Blackish Cinclodes *Cinclodes antarcticus*: (30) on Carcass Island feed right around and very nearly on our feet.

Thorn-tailed Rayadito *Aphrastura spinicauda*: (3) in TDFNP on 28 Dec gave good views.

White-throated Treerunner *Pygarrhichas albogularis*: (2) in TDFNP on 28 Dec gave good views for some folks.

Tufted Tit-Tyrant *Anairetes parulus*: (1) in a mixed flock at TDFNP on 28 Dec gave sneaky views.

White-crested Elaenia *Elaenia albiceps*: (4) showed well including the white crest in TDFNP on 28 Dec.

Austral Negrito *Lessonia rufa*: (2) male and female gave good views in TDFNP on 28 Dec.

Fire-eyed Diucon *Xolmis pyrope*: (1) seen in TDFNP on 28 Dec did not stay for long.

Dark-faced Ground-Tyrant *Muscisaxicola maclovianus*: (3) on 28 Dec in Ushuaia, (4) showed well on Carcass Island on 30 Dec and several seen near Stanley on 7 Jan.

Chilean Swallow *Tachycineta meyeni*: (20) in TDFNP and Ushuaia on 28 Dec.

House Wren *Troglodytes aedon*: (1) seen briefly in TDFNP on 28 Dec and at least (6) of the distinctive taxon *cobbi* seen on Carcass Island-the latter previously given full species status but currently lumped in Clements.

Sedge Wren *Cistothorus platensis*: (1) seen by Peter Harrison and Pervin on Carcass Island on 30 Dec. This belongs to the endemic subspecies *falklandicus*.

Austral Thrush *Turdus falcklandii*: (6) in TDFNP on 28 Dec with (20) on Carcass Island and (1) on Saunder's Island on 30 Dec; several seen near Stanley on 7 Jan.

Correndera Pipit *Anthus correndera*: (2) including a fledgeling showing traces of down in the crown gave amazing views at Ushuaia on 28 Dec. Several recorded near Stanley on 7 Jan.

South Georgia Pipit *Anthus antarcticus*: We were very fortunate to get from the zodiac good views of (2) on Tern Islet in the Bay of Isles, South Georgia on 3 Jan.

This species is restricted to rat free areas on South Georgia and can be very problematic to see due to the unpredictable weather, toothy Furseals and island closures due to albatross nesting. Hopefully the rat eradication campaign will enable this species to recolonise its former haunts on the main island.

Patagonian Sierra-Finch *Phrygilus patagonicus*: (1) male seen in TDFNP albeit briefly.

White-bridled Finch *Melanodera melanodera*: (10) seen well on Carcass Island on 30 Dec and a similar number seen near Stanley on 7 Jan.

Rufous-collared Sparrow *Zonotrichia capensis*: (10) seen in TDFNP and Ushuaia on 28 Dec.

Long-tailed Meadowlark *Sturnella loyca*: (10) on Carcass Island on 30 Dec included some showy males; a similar number seen near Stanley on 7 Jan.

Austral Blackbird *Curaeus curaeus*: (6) in TDFNP on 28 Dec was a bit of a bonus.

Black-chinned Siskin *Spinus barbatus*: (4) in TDFNP on 28 Dec and at least (10) on Carcass Island on 30 Dec and a few near Stanley on 7 Jan.

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*: (10) in Ushuaia and several in Stanley.



Gentoo Penguin ©Dion Hobcroft



Chinstrap Penguin ©Dion Hobcroft



South Polar Skua ©Dion Hobcroft

MAMMALS

North American Beaver *Castor canadensis*: (1) watched gnawing at a tree and collecting branches in TDF on 28 Dec. Introduced to TDF for fur bearing it has quickly developed into an ecological disaster.

European Rabbit *Oryctolagus cuniculus*: (2) in TDFNP on 28 Dec and (1) near Stanley on 7 Jan.

Sei Whale *Balaenoptera borealis*: (1) on 31 Dec identified by distinctive falcate dorsal fin.

Fin Whale *Balaenoptera physalus*: (1-10) recorded on three days gave some excellent views showing the asymmetrical white right jaw on a few occasions. Typically fast and elusive many times we only saw the distinctive blow of this giant species.

Antarctic Minke Whale *Balaenoptera bonaerensis*: (1) showed very well on 10 Jan as we approached Brown Bluff. At least three other tentative sightings on 1 Jan and 8 Jan but views typically fast and fleeting.

Humpback Whale *Megaptera novaeangliae*: (1-8) seen on four days culminating in some extraordinary zodiac experiences with feeding Humpbacks at Gourdin Island and Neko Harbour on 10-11 Jan.

Killer Whale *Orcinus orca*: (2) off Staten Island on 29 Dec included a large bull.

Dusky Dolphin *Lagenorhynchus obscurus*: (10) in the Beagle Channel and off Staten Island on 29 Dec.

Hourglass Dolphin *Lagenorhynchus cruciger*: (6) on 31 Dec and (4) on 8 Jan gave some quite good views of this striking lightning fast cetacean.

Peale's Dolphin *Lagenorhynchus australis*: (4) on 8 Jan on the Burdwood Bank at 54 44S and 56 48W.

Commerson's Dolphin *Cephalorhynchus commersonii*: (6) gave magic views as we loaded in to the zodiacs at Saunder's Island on 30 Dec.

South American Sealion *Otaria byronia*: (1) in the Beagle Channel on 29 Dec and (2) off Saunder's Island on 30 Dec.

Antarctic Fur Seal *Arctocephalus gazella*: (50-400) over three days at all landing or zodiac sites in South Georgia. All folks developed a healthy respect for these toothy often belligerent pinnipeds.

Southern Elephant Seal *Mirounga leonina*: (50-200) recorded on three days in South Georgia with the main event at Gold Harbour on 4 Jan. Here we enjoyed jousting and carousing males although all of the fully adult beach masters had returned to the ocean. Singles seen at sea near Neko Harbour on both 11-12 Jan-rarely encountered at sea.

Crabeater Seal *Lobodon carcinophagus*: (1-10) seen on 10-11 Jan in southernmost Antarctic Peninsula sites with some excellent views of individuals hauled out on sea ice.

Leopard Seal *Hydrurga leptonyx*: (1-3) seen on 10-11 Jan in southernmost Antarctic Peninsula with some good views of individuals hauled out on the sea ice.

Weddell Seal *Leptonychotes weddelli*: (2-4) seen on 10-12 Jan in Antarctic Peninsula with some great views of loafing animals in Lemaire Channel and Jougla Point.

Reindeer *Rangifer tarandus*: (30) seen on the Shackleton Hike on 3 Jan between Fortuna and Stromness in South Georgia. Introduced by Norwegian whalers to provide some relief in their diet.



Feeding Humpback Whales in Neko Harbour
Photo: Victoria Harris



Feeding Humpback Whales in Neko Harbour
Photo: Victoria Harris

**BIRDS RECORDED COSTANERA SUR
27 DEC 2011**

Great Egret *Ardea alba*

Snowy Egret *Egretta thula*

Harris' Hawk *Parabuteo unicinctus*

Southern Caracara *Caracara plancus*

Southern Lapwing *Vanellus chilensis*

Rock Pigeon *Columba livia*

Picazuro Pigeon *Patagioenas picazuro*

Eared Dove *Zenaida auriculata*

Nanday Parakeet *Nandayus nanday*

Monk Parakeet *Myiopsitta monachus*

White-eyed Parakeet *Aratinga leucophthalmus*

Guira Cuckoo *Guira guira*

Green-barred Woodpecker *Colaptes melanochoros*

Rufous Hornero *Furnarius rufa*

Narrow-billed Woodcreeper *Lepidocolaptes angustirostris*

White-crested Tyrannulet *Serpophaga subcristata*

Cattle Tyrant *Machetornis rixosa*

Streaked Flycatcher *Myiodynastes maculatus*

Great Kiskadee *Pitangus sulphuratus*

Tropical Kingbird *Tyrannus melancholicus*

White-winged Becard *Pachyramphus polychopterus*

White-rumped Swallow *Tachycineta leucorrhoa*

Blue and White Swallow *Pygochelidon cyanoleuca*

Grey-breasted Martin *Progne chalybea*

House Wren *Troglodytes aedon*

Masked Gnatcatcher *Poliophtila dumicola*

Rufous-bellied Thrush *Turdus rufiventris*

Creamy-bellied Thrush *Turdus amaurochalinus*

Chalk-browed Mockingbird *Mimus saturninus*

European Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*

Masked Yellowthroat *Geothlypis aequinoctialis*

Golden-crowned Warbler *Basileuterus culicivorus*

Black and Rufous Warbling Finch *Poospiza nigrorufa*

Double-collared Seedeater *Sporophila caerulea*

Red-crested Cardinal *Paroaria coronata*

Rufous-collared Sparrow *Zonotrichia capensis*

Blue and Yellow Tanager *Thraupis bonariensis*

Bay-winged Cowbird *Molothrus badius*

Shiny Cowbird *Molothrus bonariensis*

Screaming Cowbird *Molothrus rufoaxillaris*

Hooded Siskin *Spinus magellanicus*

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*