Northwest Argentina Birding & Nature
With Naturalist Journeys & Caligo Ventures

November 2 – 14, 2019
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Famous for its varied and dramatic landscapes, northwestern Argentina spans across an ever-changing scenery: snow-capped Andean peaks towering over golden puna grasslands and saline lakes, Monte desert clad in columnar cacti, luxuriant Yungas cloud forests cloaked in mosses and bromeliads, and thorny semi-arid Chaco filled with wildlife.

Due to this variety of habitats, Argentina hosts an extraordinarily rich and diverse avifauna — many of which are some of the least known species in South America. It is in this region where you may see Black-legged Seriema running through thorny thickets, Rufous-throated Dipper bobbing about on rushing mountain rivers, James’s and Andean Flamingos dancing on high altiplano lakes, Red-tailed Comet glimmering as they feed on flowers, and Burrowing Parakeet chattering as they visit their cliff nest sites. Vicuña and Guanaco still roam wilder areas.

In addition to our exploration of the wildlife and natural history of the region, we also have opportunities to sample its many wines, as well as learn about its Incan and Spanish colonial past. Join us on this tour to northwestern Argentina and enjoy a splendid palette of birds set among landscapes that grip the imagination with an awesome sense of geologic time and place, many of which are World Heritage Sites.

**Tour Highlights**

- Search for unusual and spectacular hummingbirds like Giant Hummingbird, Slender-tailed Woodstar, Andean Hillstar, and the exquisite Red-tailed Comet among high Andean flowers
- Explore the poorly known dry Chaco for lanky Black-legged Seriema, stoic Spot-backed Puffbird, melodic Many-colored Chaco Finch, and more — a habitat well known for its rich and diverse dawn chorus
- Marvel at the fiery sandstone cliffs of Humahuaca Canyon, naturally painted in various shades of orange and red
- Enjoy and learn about the rich wine making tradition of the area, particularly Malbecs and Torrontes
- Watch for three species of flamingo in the high altiplano, among a special variety of waterfowl and shorebirds such as Andean Goose, Silvery Grebe, Andean Avocet, Giant Coot, and Puna Plover ... perhaps even spot a small heard of Vicuña!

**Tour Summary**

13-Day / 12-Night Argentinian Nature Tour w/Carlos Sanchez
$4990, from Buenos Aires
Airport is Ministro Pistarini International Airport (EZE)
Itinerary

Fri., Nov. 1 Arrivals
Flights to Argentina are typically overnight; we list this day so you are sure to book in time to reach Buenos Aires by Saturday, November 2. You may want to come in early to explore this fascinating city; we are happy to make some recommendations!

Sat., Nov. 2 Tour Begins | Costanera Sur Nature Reserve
This afternoon, we explore Costanera Sur Nature Reserve where we find many species of the Rio de la Plata estuary of Argentina, a region not visited on other parts of our tour. Over 300 species have been recorded at this reserve near the heart of bustling Buenos Aires! Although we do not hope to see anywhere near that many on a brief visit, we do hope to see some of the following iconic species: Black-necked Swan, Coscoroba Swan, Southern Screamer, Great Grebe, Giant Wood-Rail, Many-colored Rush-Tyrant, Spectacled Tyrant, Scarlet-headed Blackbird, and Red-crested Cardinal, just to name a few.

We enjoy dinner at a local restaurant tonight where we have the chance to get to know each other.

Accommodations in Buenos Aires at a well located 4-Star Hotel (D)

Sun., Nov. 3 Salta to Selva Montana Lodge
We have an early breakfast before transferring to the local airport for our flight to Salta. After arriving in Salta, we drive to Selva Montana Lodge near San Lorenzo in the Andes Mountains.

Selva Montana, our lodge for the next two nights, averages 50 inches of rain per year (locally, up to 118 inches!). Mist swathes the forests and wreathes the cliffs most of the day during the summer wet season. Evergreen trees such as orco molle are prevalent. This local giant can reach 130 feet in height! We should find a native walnut and a colossal species of laurel with trunks over six feet in diameter. The trees in this forest are festooned with epiphytes, including mosses, ferns, bromeliads, orchids and begonias. Under the tall trees there is a stratum of low trees, 15 to 30 feet high, and a dense understory of shrubs and grasses. Welcome to the Yungas Cloud Forest ecoregion, the southernmost tract of Andean Cloud Forest! The cast of characters in these forests include the endearing Brown-capped Redstart, clownish Plush-crested Jay, impressive Cream-backed Woodpecker and iridescent Slender-tailed Woodstar.

This afternoon, we visit a small lagoon in a nearby private ranch for a good introduction to the local waterbirds including White-faced Whistling-Duck, Coscoroba Swan, Rosy-billed Pochard, Whistling Heron, and Andean Gull. We might spot a Red-legged Seriema or two patrolling the surrounding grasslands, while songbirds might include White Monjita, Golden-billed Saltator, Ultramarine Grosbeak, and several species of warbling-finch. In
the evening, we plan to visit the Huaico Reserve in the backyard of our hotel to look for the localized Montane Forest Screech-Owl and cryptic Scissor-tailed Nightjar.

Enjoy cozy surroundings and dinner tonight at our lodging.

*Accommodations at Hostal Selva Montana (B,L,D)*

**Mon., Nov. 4  Huaico Reserve & Mojotoro (Chaco)**

In the early morning, we explore the forest of the Huaico Reserve, which protects part of the Yungas forest that carpets the San Lorenzo Mountain Ridge. The plant life here is something to behold! Here, we quietly explore the trails in search of an extensive variety of birds, including Large-tailed Dove, White-barred Piculet, Rusty-browed Warbling-Finch, Fulvous-headed Brushfinch, Two-banded Warbler, Mottle-cheeked Tyrannulet, and the incomparably beautiful Red-tailed Comet (arguably, one of the most beautiful of the world’s hummingbirds). The humid forests of this part of Argentina share an important connection with the Atlantic Rainforest of Southeast Brazil, and we should see several species that both ecoregions share, such as Scaly-headed Parrot, Dusky-legged Guan, and Golden-winged Cacique.

In the afternoon, we drive eastward into the valley of Mojotoro to explore a quebrada (the local Spanish term for a dry ravine). Here, we have an initial introduction to the dry Chaco in search of several specialties such as Huayco Tinamou, Olive-crowned Crescentchest, Great Rufous Woodcreeper, and Spot-backed Puffbird.

We end the day visiting the MAAM (Museo de Arqueología de Alta Montaña) Archaeological Museum of Salta, where three perfectly preserved mummies of Inca children, found on a high volcano near Salina Grande, are alternatively on display. Many fine textiles found as funerary attire, dolls, and other belongings are also on display.

*Accommodations at Hostal Selva Montana (B,L,D)*

**Tues., Nov. 5  Santa Laura & Yala River**

This morning, we drive northward along the ancient road crossing the Santa Laura Mountains, where we have further chances for the always unpredictable Red-legged Seriema. We also have further chances to find the very local Huaico Tinamou. Finally, we reach the Yala River where we hope to find Rufous-throated Dipper bobbing on rocks amid the fast flowing water, as well as Torrent Duck swimming deftly through the rapids. Our main focus here is to find these two charismatic and very special birds. However, this protected site is home to many other interesting species that can only be seen in northwest Argentina or southern Bolivia, including Red-faced
Guan, Fulvous-headed Brushfinch, and Rusty-browed Warbling-Finch. After dinner, we might visit a nearby site where Tropical Screech-Owl and Lyre-tailed Nightjar occur.

*Accommodations at Yala (B,L,D)*

**Wed., Nov. 6  Yala to Humahuaca Canyon**

In the early morning, we spend some time birding the surrounding forest in another section of the Yala River, offering more chances for both Torrent Duck and Rufous-throated Dipper. Huge mountain ridges create deep valleys in this area, a favored habitat for large raptors that may include Andean Condor and Black-chested Buzzard-Eagle. We may also see Rothschild’s Swift, Brown-capped Tit-Spinetail, Plumbeous Black-Tyrant, and others unique to this part of the world.

Afterwards, we continue north to enter the Quebrada de Humahuaca, which follows the line of a major cultural route, the Camino Inca, along the spectacular valley of the Rio Grande. The valley shows substantial evidence of its use as a major trade route over the past 10,000 years. It features visible traces of prehistoric hunter-gatherer communities of the Inca Empire (15th to 16th Centuries). This colorful ravine was recently declared a World Heritage Site due to the brilliant red and orange tones of the rocks. The birds here are quite special, too! Here, we search for the endemic Bare-eyed Ground-Dove, huge Giant Hummingbird, shy Ornate Tinamou, lovely Andean Hillstar, striking Andean Negrito, bizarre White-tipped Plantcutter, and more.

Later, we keep on traveling northward along Highway 9, gradually gaining in elevation where expected species include Andean Swift, Creamy-breasted Canastero, Yellow-billed Tit-Tyrant, Black-hooded Sierra-Finch, and Brown-backed Mockingbird. Late in the afternoon, we arrive at the village of Humahuaca, where we stay for two nights at a comfortable hotel within walking distance to good restaurants offering homemade Andean cuisine.

*Accommodations at Humahuaca (B,L,D)*

**Thurs., Nov. 7  Abra Pampa**

We rise very early today on an unforgettable and exciting journey into the Puna, a semi-arid grassland and shrubland ecosystem in the Argentine altiplano. High altitude lakes dot this region, each with varying levels of salinity and aquatic vegetation, which determine the abundance of waterfowl, waders, and flamingos. Many of these high elevation species are highly charismatic, beautiful, and evocative, including the stocky Andean Goose, enormous Giant Coot, and elegant Andean Avocet. Most marvelous of all are the three species of flamingo that are found here — Chilean, Andean, and James’s — immortalized in documentary films by their synchronized,
communal trots across these lakes as part of their courtship ritual. On land, dry ravines host some highly specialized furnariids such as Puna and Rufous-banded Miners, Rock and Straight-billed Earthcreepers, and Cream-winged and White-winged Cinclodes. Attractive songsters include Bright-rumped Yellow-Finch, Puna Yellow-Finch, and Black Siskin.

Mammals are also a feature here. Vicuña, the most elegant of the four South American camelids, can sometimes be seen running in small herds across the plains. We plan to spend the whole day exploring this area. At some point in the afternoon, we reluctantly leave the Puna and drive back to our hotel in Humahuaca.

**Accommodations at Humahuaca (B,L,D)**

**Fri., Nov. 8 Humahuaca to San Lorenzo**

Today, we retrace our stops from Humahuaca Canyon to San Lorenzo, making several birding stops at different altitudes along the way. We plan to spend most of this birding time looking for those species we might still be missing or wanting to get better views. These may include Gray-breasted Seedsnipe, Aplomado Falcon, Andean Flicker, Andean Hillstar, Variable Hawk, and many others. Dry ravines provide our best chances for Plain-breasted Earth creeper and White-winged Cinclodes, while shrubby slopes and gullies may yield sightings of Black-hooded Sierra-Finch. Everywhere we turn today, the fantastic landscape of Humahuaca Canyon keeps us busy taking photographs and enjoying the grandeur of this land. We arrive back to our lodge at Selva Montana in San Lorenzo for the night.

**Accommodations at Hostal Selva Montana (B,L,D)**

**Sat., Nov. 9 Los Cardones National Park**

After an early breakfast, we depart for a full-day excursion into Los Cardones National Park. As we reach the vicinity of the park, we drive along parts of an ancient Incan road with views of spectacular cardon grande cactus-clad slopes and towering peaks of the sub-Andean ranges southwest of Salta. The park itself preserves an area of the Argentine Monte ecoregion, an area dominated by thorn scrub and desert dotted by oases. Andean Condors of ten soar over the ridges or just below us along deep valleys, while herds of Guanacos, a South American camelid, wander across the landscape. The winding road eventually crosses a river and climbs up the Escoipe Canyon to about 10,000 feet, where Elegant Crested-Tinamou and Tawny-throated Dotterel occur. Short walks along vegetated gullies allow us to observe many of the smaller avian inhabitants, such as Gray-hooded
Parakeet, Rock Earthcreeper, Zimmer’s Tapaculo, Maquis Canastero, Brown-capped Tit-Spinetail, and Rufous-bellied Mountain-Tanager. Flowering tobacco bushes attract the amazing Red-tailed Comet. Later, we search for the scarce endemic Tucuman Mountain-Finch in the Enchanted Valley.

We arrive at Hosteria Payogasta on the border of the Calchaqui River for the night, at the edge of Los Cardones National Park. This family run lodge is a working farm and includes a small winery.

**Accommodations at Sala de Payogasta (B,L,D)**

### Sun., Nov. 10   Calchaqui Valley & Los Cardones National Park

We devote the morning to birding the Monte scrub and agricultural areas surrounding the oasis of Payogasta, in the shadow of the imposing snow-capped Mount Cachi. Large flocks of noisy Burrowing Parrot raid the crop fields, while pairs of White-fronted Woodpecker stand guard at the tops of cardon grande cactus. The long list of possibilities to add to our trip list today include Cliff Flycatcher, Long-tailed Meadowlark, White-tipped Plantcutter, White-banded Mockingbird, and many more. We aim to make a couple good stops where we may see the endemic White-throated Cacholote, Sandy Gallito, and Steinbach’s Canastero.

As morning turns to afternoon, we revisit the high puna steppe of Los Cardones National Park where there is always a good chance of seeing the scarce Tawny-throated Dotterel running along in the short grass or the cryptic Gray-breasted Seedsnipe crouching quietly on patches of bare earth. Beyond the park, we descend the Escoipe Canyon while enjoying great views of sheer cliffs painted in burnt hues by the setting sun. We keep a watchful eye for Andean Condor, Aplomado Falcon, Burrowing Owl, Andean Tinamou, and others. Once in the lowlands, we head south for a short drive to the town of Moldes where we stay for two nights at the Hosteria Cabra Corral.

**Accommodations at Hosteria Cabra Corral (B,L,D)**

### Mon., Nov. 11   Dry Chaco of Moldes

Today after an early morning departure, we explore the dry Chaco ecoregion of northwestern Argentina, a hot and semi-arid area known for its rich variety and abundance of wildlife. The dawn chorus of this habitat should
be memorable! The raucous calls of Chaco Chachalaca should resonate through the early morning, while songsters such as Black-crested Finch and Many-colored Chaco Finch join the jumbled cacophony of bird song. We start birding right outside the town of Moldes, checking several sites for the elusive and lanky Black-legged Seriema. The Cabra Corral Reservoir should have various waterfowl familiar to us from Costanera Sur in Buenos Aires, such as Great Grebe and Rosy-billed Pochard. We soon reach the entrance of Juramento Canyon, where spectacular geological formations support seasonally wet transitional forests. These quickly transition to drier brushland, where we hope to see Brushland Tinamou, Crested Gallito, Ringed Warbling-Finch, Stripe-backed Antbird, Greater Wagtail-Tyrant, Checkered Woodpecker, Ultramarine Grosbeak, and many more. We drive slowly along the road, making several stops for short, exploratory walks into the habitat. In the afternoon, we retrace our steps back to the town of Moldes for a sumptuous dinner and a good rest.

Accommodations at Hosteria Cabra Corral (B,L,D)

Tues., Nov. 12 Cafayate

Today, we drive southward along the spectacular Las Conchas Canyon. We stop at several different rock formations, with names like the Devil’s Throat, the Amphitheater, the Frog, and the Three Monks. We explore both dry Chaco and Monte semi-desert within the Calchaqui Valley — and this gives us a second chance at the hard-to-spot Black-legged Seriema.

In the afternoon, we reach the beautiful and peaceful town of Cafayate, the capital of the wine region. It is here that some of Argentina’s finest wines are produced. The history of wine in the province of Salta in Argentina goes back to early colonial times when the first vines were brought by the Jesuits from the Canary Islands in the mid-seventeenth century. Today, the vineyards stretch along the provinces of Salta and Tucuman for over 3,500 hectares. In Cafayate, the “Torrentes” variety of grapes produces a white wine with an intense aroma and fruity flavor. This variety, brought from Spain, has achieved a unique expression in Salta’s soil, becoming the flagship white grape of Argentina. We have fun and sample local foods and wines after our day afield.

In the evening, there is an optional night outing in search of the enigmatic Chaco Owl.

Accommodations at an Estancia (B,L,D)

Wed., Nov. 13 Cafayate

We explore the environs of Cafayate today, perhaps heading south along the Calchaqui Valley in search of Sandy Gallito, Steinbach’s Canastero, and White-throated Cacholote if views were not satisfying elsewhere. Other species we may see for the first time (or see again for better views or photos!) include Burrowing Parrot, White-banded Mockingbird, Elegant Crested-Tinamou, White-tipped Plantcutter, and Monte Yellow-Finch. Much of this area lies in a rain shadow, leading to a semi-desert Monte habitat much like the area around Los Cardones National Park.
Our hotel maintains an organic garden to supply the kitchen with fresh vegetables, as well as several false tobacco trees, which attract Glittering-bellied Emerald. The cuisine at our lodging is regional, ranging from famous Salta empanadas to Argentine steaks grilled to perfection. We enjoy a lovely farewell tonight.

*Accommodations at an Estancia (B,L,D)*

**Thurs., Nov. 14  Departures or Iguazu Falls Extension**

We depart early from Cafayate, driving northward along the ancient Camino Real Road. As we make our way along this scenic drive, we may make opportunistic stops for birds such as tinamous, earthcreepers, or seriemas. We arrive at Salta in time to catch mid-afternoon flights home. While some must return to the USA, those opting for the extension travel on to one of the most beautiful places in the world, Iguazu Falls, fly directly from Salta. We highly recommend this three-night extension to Iguazu Falls.

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**Iguazu Falls Extension**
Thurs., Nov. 14  Salta | Flight to Iguazu Falls | Hummingbirds
Depending on our flight time, we enjoy some time to explore the city or just relax in Salta before flying to Iguazu. We may even get our first glimpse of the falls from the plane! We also see extensive forests that beckon us to explore.

After arriving at Iguazu, our local guide meets us at the airport and transfers us to our accommodations at Yvy Hotel, right at the edge of Iguazu National Park. This afternoon we visit a private hummingbird garden, where at feeders we get close-up views of up to seven different species of wild hummingbirds, including Black Jacobin, Planalto Hermit, Violet-capped Woodnymph, and more.

Accommodations for at Yvy Hotel de Selva, Iguazu

Fri., Nov. 15  Birding at Iguazu Falls
We spend the morning birding the famous Macuco Trail of Iguazu National Park, in search of typical Atlantic Forest species, such as Surucua Trogon, Rufous-capped Motmot, Creamy-bellied Gnatcatcher, White-eyed Foliage-gleaner, Robust Woodpecker, and Spot-backed Antshrike, among many others — all among a list that can exceed 50 specialties!

Enjoy a picnic lunch with a view of the falls, then explore in detail the Argentinean side of Iguazu, an international treasure shared with Brazil. We use the park’s train system to get from one section to another, stopping at various viewpoints with the ultimate goal of reaching the most spectacular one: the Devil’s Throat. We reach this area by walking along a footbridge across the delta of the Iguazu River.

During the walk, it is possible to spot White-winged Swallow flying over the river, Yellow-billed Cardinal singing from the reeds, wild Muscovy Duck, Anhinga, kingfishers, herons ... and from the balcony at the Devil’s Throat, you can watch hundreds of Great Dusky Swift doing their acrobatic flight through the curtains of the falls to
roost on the rocks behind the water. We walk both the upper and lower trails to immerse ourselves in this wonder.

Sat., Nov. 16  Birding at Iguazu Falls
This area gives us a chance to experience the forests and birds of the Atlantic region, shared with Brazil and home to many spectacular species such as Magpie Tanager. There are many sites to visit, and we explore more of the national park today, including the 101 Road, in search of many species like Tufted Antshrike, Ochre-collared Piculet, Southern Antpipit, Chestnut-bellied Euphonia, Green-headed Tanager, and others. We return to our hotel for a break and go back as activity increases in the afternoon. Photographers may want more time just to be fascinated by the falls!

Sun., Nov. 17  Departures
There might be time for an early morning walk with some avian surprises right around the hotel grounds. Afterwards, we transfer from our hotel to the local airport in time to fly to Buenos Aires and connect with international flights home.

Cost of the Journey

Plan Ahead!
Protect yourself with Allianz Travel Insurance. Please note, starting in January 2017, Naturalist Journeys pays 100% of your flight carbon offset.

Travel Information
Airport is Ministro Pistarini International (EZE) in Buenos Aires. Arrive at your leisure on Nov. 1. Plan departures after 9:00 PM on Nov. 14. If you opt for the extension, plan your flights out after 9:00 PM on Nov. 17. We recommend booking flights through our travel agent, Pam Davis: pamd@wittravel.com. Naturalist Journeys pays her ticketing fee.

Cost of the Journey
The cost of the 13-day main tour is $4990 DBL / $5450 SGL per person. Tour price includes 12 nights’ accommodations, all meals as noted in the itinerary, airport transfers, transportation during the journey, professional guide services, park and other entrance fees, and miscellaneous program expenses. Tour cost does not include internal flights, personal expenses such as laundry, telephone, drinks from the bar, and gratuities for luggage handling or other services.

Cost of the Iguazu Falls extension is $1895 DBL / $2155 SGL per person. Tour cost does not include flight to Iguazu and back to Buenos Aires.
Photo Credits
Burrowing Owl, Textiles, Flamingoes in Flight, Andean Flicker, Llamas, Savannah Hawk, Los Cardones National Park, Spices at Market, Guanaco, Plush-crested Jay, Rufous-capped Antshrike, Rosy Pochard, Torrent Duck, Whistling Heron, Humahuaca Canyon, Flaminogs, Birding Puna Habitat, Wild Vicuña, Los Cardones National Park, Burrowing Parrot, Chaco Chachalacas, Glittering-bellied Emerald, by Peg Abbott; Iguazu Falls by Bud Ferguson; Naturalist Journeys Group at Iguazu, Green-headed Tanager by Peg Abbott; Guira Cuckoo by Bud Ferguson; Violaceous Euphonia, Toco Toucan, Tegu Lizard, Group at Iguazu on Boardwalk, Great Dusky Swift, Blond-crested Woodpecker, Black-capped Donacobius by Peg Abbott.

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