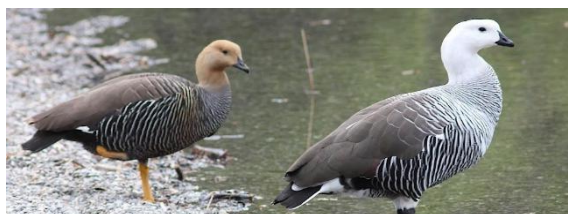


Ultimate Patagonia | November 5-19, 2025

Trip Report by Laura Koehne



With host Laura Koehne, guide Luciano Mathieu, and participants Lloyd, Wendy, Susan, Lucie, Patsy, Tom, Terry, and Fred



Tues., Nov. 4

Early Arrivals

Welcome to Buenos Aires! All of our group arrived the day before the start of the tour, and our guide, Luciano, was able to meet most of us at the airport. We checked into our hotel and spent a laidback afternoon exploring Buenos Aires at our own pace.

Wed., Nov. 5

Buenos Aires | Costanera Sur

The first official day of our tour! After meeting up with Luciano at the hotel for introductions and a review of our upcoming itinerary, we walked to a nearby Italian restaurant for a hearty lunch. Then it was time for our first birding adventure. We drove out to Costanera Sur, an ecological preserve right in the city that features a variety of habitats including ponds, marsh, and scrubby forest. This gave us the opportunity to see many tropical and subtropical species that we likely would not see during the remainder of the tour as we headed south into

Patagonia. Almost immediately upon entering, we spotted a Green Kingfisher, and the excitement continued from there as we meandered through the park's many boardwalks and trails. We observed over 60 species, including Coscoroba Swan, Fork-tailed Flycatcher, Checkered Woodpecker, Rufous-sided Crake, and Rufescent Tiger-Heron. We even got to watch as Argentina's national bird, the Rufous Hornero, constructed its mud nest.

We decided to pick up some empanadas to enjoy back at the hotel while going through our bird checklist, and then called it an early night. Tomorrow the real adventure began!



Thurs., Nov. 6 Flight to Trelew | Puerto Piramides

After a few hours of sleep, our group assembled in the hotel lobby at 2am to head to the airport for a four o'clock flight. Despite the early start, our group was buzzing with anticipation, as in just a few short hours, we would finally be in Patagonia.

We landed in Trelew around 6:30 and met our local guide and our driver for our time in Chubut province - both named Ruben! We stopped at what we deemed a rather posh gas station for breakfast before heading out in search of birds. We took a moment at some roadside ponds where most of our group had a fleeting glimpse at the stunning Many-colored Rush Tyrant as it flitted among the reeds. We also spotted several Wren-like Rushbird, charismatic Spectacled Tyrant with their striking eye ring, and our first Patagonia Mockingbird, which would become a familiar friend throughout the rest of the tour.

We continued down the dirt road towards the large lagoons. We pulled over and started our walk to get a closer look at the strips of pink that were starting to come into view: flamingos! As we walked, we watched as a couple of Burrowing Owl perched on fence posts, occasionally flying off only to return to the same spot. As we made our way down towards the lagoon, we were joined by some very curious horses and dogs who walked right up

to our group and enjoyed some pets as we set up our scopes and looked through binoculars. We took our time watching the scene as shockingly pink flocks of Chilean Flamingos would fly in to join the group in the lagoon.

After a stop to see a life size replica of the Patagotitan mayorum, the largest known dinosaur which was discovered in the area, we continued to make our way north towards the Valdes Peninsula. We took another break in Puerto Madryn to stretch our legs, and caught our first glimpses of Southern Right Whale. Not long after returning to the road, Luciano and Ruben spotted a small flock of Burrowing Parakeet perched on the telephone wires. Very exciting!

We finally made it to the peninsula, seeing our first Guanaco as we drove, and settled into our cozy accommodations at the Del Nomade Eco Hotel, where we enjoyed a light dinner right from their kitchen.



Fri., Nov. 7 Full Day on the Valdes Peninsula

After enjoyed a relaxed breakfast at the hotel, we set out just before nine and headed down to the waterfront. We all donned our life jackets before boarding a boat for an exciting morning of whale watching. After a cloudy morning and predicted rain, it all cleared just as we got out on the water, and we enjoyed gloriously blue skies the rest of the day. It wasn't long before we saw our first Southern Right Whale, and from then on, it was hard to keep up with all of the sightings being called out. The whales were mostly females with their calves, who would surface next to each other. We enjoyed watching as they would dive deeper, exposing their flukes. We had great looks as they'd come to the surface and spout, sometimes with gulls timing a dive just right to take a quick peck at the whale's blubber. This is a relatively new behavior that seems to be unique to the area, having first been observed in the 1970's. We then returned to shore and spent the rest of our day making our way around the peninsula.

Our first stop was the Lobería Pirámides, where we had our first real experience of that infamous Patagonia wind. We secured our hats and walked out to the viewpoint where we had sweeping views of the seaside cliffs, and could look down on a colony of South American Sea Lion. Here we also saw Dolphin Gull, Kelp Gull, both Northern and Southern Giant Petrels, and Blackish Oystercatcher. We returned to the van to warm up and opted to eat our lunch on the go. Ruben had secured a real feast for us, having picked up various options from several restaurants in town to fit all of our group's dietary needs.

Our next stop was an exciting one- our first looks at Magellanic Penguin! They were nesting along the cliffs, and some stood right next to the wooden boardwalk, just inches away from us. Further stops featured Lesser Rhea and lots of Elegant Crested-Tinamou, some of which had chicks! Some exciting mammal sightings included a Big

Hairy Armadillo, and the bizarre Mara, which almost looks to be a cross between a rabbit and a small deer. That evening we walked into town for dinner at a cozy local restaurant.

Wed., Nov. 8 Puerto Piramides | Punta Tombo | Trelew

We started our day with another wonderful breakfast at our hotel featuring yogurt, homemade breads, eggs, fruit, and more. We said our goodbyes to Puerto Piramides and started to make our way south to Punta Tombo. We birded along the way, with one highlight being the Carbonated Sierra Finch, Ruben's favorite! We watched as a male performed their signature flight display, flying several meters straight up in the air before gliding back down, as if wearing a parachute. We decided to make a detour down a dirt road to a beautiful beach where we were greeted by humongous Elephant Seal sunning themselves. We also had White-headed Steamer Duck, Two-banded Plover, and Neotropic and Magellanic Cormorants.

Then it was on to the day's main event: Punta Tombo, the largest Magellanic Penguin colony in the world. We had a quick lunch at their restaurant, before beginning our walk down the wooden boardwalk. Coincidentally, Laura's seatmate on the flight down to Buenos Aires had been a biologist on her way to complete a season of field work at Punta Tombo, so she met our group and talked us through some of the research being done on this penguin population. We walked out to the point, all the while surrounded by hundreds of penguins. It was a warm, sunny day, so many of them stood with their mouths open, panting to help them cool down, while others sought shelter in the shade. It was nesting season, with chicks due in the coming weeks, so many of the birds were down in their burrows, incubating their eggs. The end of the boardwalk overlooked a beach, where we watched as penguins swam through the water and then popped out on shore. The contrast between their incredible speed and grace in the water and their bumbling waddling on land was both fascinating and comical. Throughout our walk, we also spotted gulls, petrels, and a Gray-Hooded Sierra Finch.

We then made our way to the city of Trelew, just for the night, before tomorrow's travel day.





Thurs., Nov. 9 Trelew | Travel to Ushuaia

Today was a big travel day. We started with an early flight to Calafate, where we had a layover. Most of our group took the opportunity to do a bit of birding right outside the airport, spotting a few species such as Patagonian Yellow-finch, Diuca Finch, and Austral Negrito. Eventually, it was time for our second flight, this time to Ushuaia, the southernmost city in the world and home to our guide, Luciano. We were leaving behind the flat arid landscape of the Valdes Peninsula and entering a land of snowcapped mountains and ancient forests at “el fin del mundo” or “the end of the world”. As we flew low over the channel, we could see how strong the wind was across the water, and when we stepped out of the airport, we felt its power firsthand.

We checked into the lovely waterfront Tolkeyen Hotel, and then the group headed outside for a bit of pre-dinner birding. The wind nearly blew them away, but they quickly racked up a number of species including Upland, Kelp, and Ashy-headed Goose, Flightless Steamer-Duck, Baird’s Sandpiper, Black-chinned Siskin, and more. Then it was back inside to warm up and enjoy dinner in the hotel’s beautiful dining room with views of the Beagle Channel and the mountains beyond.

Fri., Nov. 10 Beagle Channel | Ushuaia Birding

After a full day of travel, we were all excited to spend today exploring this new region of Patagonia. First on the agenda was a cruise of the Beagle Channel, named for the famous HMS Beagle which surveyed the area in the 1820’s. We circled a small rocky island that was covered in wildlife- Imperial Cormorant, Dolphin Gull, Snowy Sheathbill, Southern Seas Lion, and one rogue Fur Seal. We also had a few Blackish Cinclodes land on our boat, as they like to drink the water that pools on the top. As we continued, Black-browed Albatross soared in front of us, slowly swooping up and down, back and forth, just riding the wind and rarely flapping their wings. While the wind had certainly subsided a good bit since yesterday, with the temperature sitting at about 50 degrees, it was quite chilly standing out on the deck, but the views were worth it!

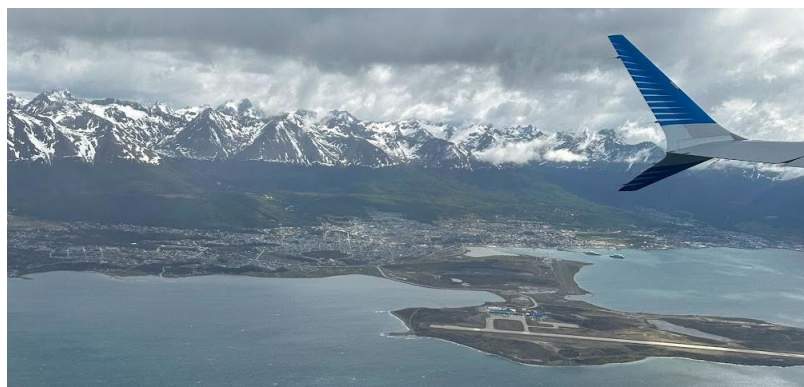
We eventually pulled up to Isla Martillo. Everyone excitedly moved towards the front of the boat to catch a glimpse of the penguins that nest here. We could see playful Magellanic zipping through the water near the shore, and a bit further inland was a new species for our group: Gentoo Penguin! Unlike the burrow-nesting Magellanic Penguin, the Gentoo create circular rock piles to lay their eggs in. They are very particular about the stones they choose, and we watched as they made some home improvements. We spent about thirty minutes here which gave us plenty of time for everyone to get a good view and enjoy observing the penguins’ behavior.

As we cruised back west towards town, we enjoyed the scenery, particularly the beautiful flashes of red along the mountainsides. Luciano informed us this was the firebush, which we would have lots of up-close looks of

tomorrow. Many of our group spent the long return journey enjoying the warmth of the interior, sipping hot drinks and catching a few z's.

We returned to town for a seafood lunch, where our group enjoyed local specialties such as king crab and sea bass. We then visited a local park to look for waterfowl. There was a large group of ducks right as we started walking, including Crested Duck and the striking Chiloe Wigeon. Then a bird took off from near the shore and we heard Luciano call out "Snipe!". We continued our walk and before long, there it was, just a few feet away. We watched as the charismatic Magellanic Snipe buried its long bill into the mud, occasionally coming up with a tasty worm.

We returned to our hotel for a short rest before dinner. While we ate, some of us decided that after dinner we would go to a spot Luciano knew to be good for seeing the rare Rufous-legged Owl. While the owl did not make an appearance, we enjoyed our first foray into the beech forests of Tierra Del Fuego.



Sat., Nov. 11

Tierra Del Fuego National Park | Ushuaia Birding

We enjoyed our hotel's buffet breakfast, and then hopped in the van with our new driver, Dylan. We headed straight to Torres Del Paine National Park, in hopes of being among the first tourists to arrive. The island of Tierra del Fuego has just six native

species of trees, and the forests here are dominated by the three species of Nothofagus, or beech, trees. Dylan dropped us at a forest trail that followed along a lake. Along the way, we spotted a pair of nesting Great Grebe, Flying Steamer Duck, Spectacled Duck, and more. As the trail wound into the forest, we saw Austral Thrush, Thorn-tailed Rayadito (a favorite of our group), White-throated Treerunner (Luciano's favorite), and the Tufted Tit-Tyrant with its memorable "devil horn" crest.

It was a chilly, rainy day, but after a break for some mate (the traditional, caffeine-rich beverage of choice among Argentinians) and alfajores (a traditional South American confection of dulce de leche sandwiched between two shortbread cookies), we continued driving to another trail. One of our main targets of the day was the iconic Magellanic Woodpecker, which so far had eluded us. We started down another trail, and before long, we spotted him! Just a glimpse, at first, but we took up the chase, and soon found the tree he was in. We got nice close looks at this giant of a woodpecker as he flew between trees and pecked at their branches. Continuing our walk, we arrived at the end point of the Pan-American Highway which starts 19,000 miles north in Prudhoe Bay, Alaska.

After walking a few more short trails, we left the park and made a stop in a local neighborhood that Luciano knew to be a good place for finding Austral Parakeet. We enjoyed a short walk, admiring the blooming firebush along the way, and were very excited to spot some flocks of parakeets moving between the trees. We had a bit

of time this afternoon for those of us who wished to spend some time in town, visiting the museum and shopping for souvenirs. We finished up the day with another fabulous dinner at our hotel, complete with tiramisu for dessert.



Sun., Nov. 12

Travel Day to Chile

After a final breakfast at Tolkeyen and bidding farewell to the family of Southern Lapwings that lived on the premises, it was off to the airport. We flew north to Calafate, admiring the glacial blue of Lago Argentina, the largest freshwater lake in the country, as we landed. We met our new local guide, Ricardo, and then it was time to start our journey by land into Chile. It wasn't long before we started spotting birds, including our first Andean Condor soaring high above, and Lesser Rhea running along the roadside. We were back on the

steppe, with a landscape more similar to what we had experienced on the Valdes Peninsula. With that open landscape came strong winds. We turned off onto a dirt road to make a birding stop, spotting Least Seedsnipe along the way. The road came to a series of small lagoons. We exited the van and were immediately hit by the full force of the wind we had seen whipping across the steppe. Bracing ourselves against it, we walked out to the lagoons, spotting a few exciting species including Chocolate-vented Tyrant and Tawny-throated Dotterel.

We continued our drive, and a few hours later we arrived at the border crossing. Passports were stamped, and after playing fetch with their "working" labrador retriever, we drove into Chile. Our hotel was just a couple of miles from the border, and we quickly settled in. The Hotel Estancia El Ovejero Patagónico had cozy, ranch-inspired decor, and plenty of big dogs napping around the lobby, always ready for a belly rub. After enjoying a buffet dinner in the dining room, we all retired to our rooms, feeling very snug in our beds as the wind howled outside.

Mon., Nov. 13

Torres del Paine National Park

After breakfast at the hotel, we headed out around 7:30 for our first day at Torres del Paine National Park. We were finally approaching those jagged mountains we had been seeing from a distance. From the van, we spotted two male guanacos in a territorial dispute. As they one chased after the other while they tried to bite at each other, and spitting all the while. We continued to wind our way through the park, and as the clouds began to clear, Ricardo guided us to a waterfall, and just beyond it, a perfect view of the three famous Torres del Paine towers for which the park is named, which were just emerging from the mist. It felt as if we had just stepped into the postcard. While there, we spotted Yellow-billed Pintail, Chilean Swallow, and what was becoming a favorite, the Austral Negrito. We continued our drive, seeing more birds along the way, including Scale-throated Earthcreeper, Silvery Grebe, Red-gartered and White-winged Coots, and plenty of Black-faced Ibis. At another lakeside stop, we spotted one of our targets for the day, the Rufous-billed Plantcutter, which perched out in the open with the sun hitting it, giving us a wonderful view of its bold coloration.

After returning to our hotel for lunch, some of us opted for a late afternoon drive to fit in a bit more birding. We observed fifteen species, including Brown-hooded Gull, White-throated Caracara, Long-tailed Meadowlark, and our first sightings of Black-necked Swan. As we headed back, we also spotted a Chilla, or South American Gray Fox. We returned for another buffet dinner in our cozy hotel before heading off to bed, as we had an early start the next day.



Tues., Nov. 14 Puma Tracking | Torres del Paine National Park

Today was one of our most anticipated days of the tour: puma tracking. We met in the lobby at 4:45 am with our bags packed, and then had about an hour drive to our meetup point at Laguna Amarga. We split into smaller groups and headed out in 4x4 vehicles. We drove off in different directions into Laguna Amarga Estancia, which is directly adjacent to the national park. The search was on!

After incredible luck with the weather throughout the tour, we finally had a gray, rainy day. The guides also told us about how recently, the tracking has been more difficult, with fewer sightings. We braced ourselves for the possibility that we may not end up with any sightings, and tried to just enjoy the beauty of this wilderness we had found ourselves in. However, our luck returned and we ended up seeing three of these majestic cats! One of our groups tracked a puma as it moved through the hills and then down to the road where it crossed right in front of one of our other groups. Our best sighting came after another local tracker had found a puma on a guanaco kill. Our groups took turns approaching to watch as the powerful cat fed, close enough to hear the cracking of bones. Not just a trip highlight, but a life highlight! As we drove back up to the rest of the group, one guide, Christian, spotted another puma with its eyes locked on a guanaco that was downhill from where the cat stood. While the guanaco's attention was focused on the feeding puma we had just seen, this other cat slowly stalked towards it. We snapped a few photos before moving on so as not to disrupt the hunt. What a morning! High fives all around.

We spent the rest of the afternoon making our way across the park to our next hotel, admiring the jaw-dropping landscapes along the way. Ricardo knows this region like the back of his hand, and had several memorable stops up his sleeve. One such stop features a pair of Black-necked swan in a small lake with jagged mountain peaks on the other side. Another postcard moment.

Our last stop for the day was at the stunning Salto Grande waterfall. We enjoyed a short hike and watched as the icy blue water cascaded over the rocks and into the lake below. Finally, we checked into Kau Rio Serrano, our hotel for the next couple of nights where we each enjoyed our own little modern cabin with stunning views. We met in the dining room for a pre-dinner bird list and local cocktail, the Calafate sour, made from the berries of the yellow-flowered Calafate shrub seen throughout the region. Then came a delicious dinner that was a perfect end to an unforgettable day.



Wed., Nov. 15 Full Day in Torres del Paine

After breakfast at the hotel, we set out on a walk to explore the forest riverside habitat nearby, joined by some local dogs who did a pretty good job of keeping pace with us and stopping when we did to observe the birds. We spotted a number of species including Chilean Flicker, Thorn-tailed Rayadito, Correndera Pipit, and Magellanic Tapaculo. Then we set off for another day of exploring the national park. As we were driving, Lloyd called out an exciting spot: another Magellanic Woodpecker! Ricardo pulled over and we saw both the red-headed male and the mostly black female. An unexpected surprise!

We then enjoyed a short hike down to Lago Gray. It wasn't long before we spotted two Austral Parakeet working on widening a tree hollow for a cavity nest. It was a damp, chilly day with temperatures in the forties, so it felt surreal to be seeing parrots in this environment. The lake is fed by a glacier that sits at its northern end, and we could see vibrant blue icebergs floating by. That infamous Patagonian wind started whipping up again, so we made our way back to the van and over to one of the park's fabulous restaurants for lunch. The wind and rain beat against the large picture windows overlooking the lake, while we warmed up with a hot lunch as the skies slowly cleared. By the end of our meal, we could finally see the blue glacier at the far end of the lake.

This afternoon, we took a short but steep hike up to a point with panoramic views. We then returned to our hotel for some relaxation time before another evening bird checklist and a delicious dinner in the hotel's beautiful dining room.

Thurs., Nov. 16 Torres del Paine | Puerto Natales

This was our last morning in Torres del Paine National Park. We were sad to leave this fantastical landscape behind, but more adventures lay ahead. We made a few birding stops along the way, with excellent sightings of

Plumbeous Rail, Striped Woodpecker, Lake Duck, Yellow-winged Blackbird, and a displaying Grass Wren. We made a quick stop at a museum detailing the extinct megafauna that roamed this area during the Pleistocene, including the Mylodon which has become an icon of the region. In the parking lot, we were greeted by a very friendly Chimango Caracara, clearly habituated to human presence, and probably used to picking up scraps from the parking lot. We drove another thirty minutes and reached the town of Puerto Natales. This is Ricardo's hometown, and he drove us along the waterfront where we saw hundreds of Black-necked Swan, including lots of cygnets, some of which were riding along on a parent's back. Very cute!

We then checked into our hotel and had dinner at El Brisket, a local barbecue restaurant that also featured a variety of pizzas and salads.



Fri., Nov. 17
Puerto Natales |
Estancia Olga Teresa |
Punta Arenas

Today was our grand finale of Patagonia, and Mother Nature decided to show off with the full range of Patagonian weather. We had a few hours' drive south

towards Punta Arenas, and along the way, we experienced wind, rain, fog, and even snow! Birding along the way, we had great looks at Austral Canastero, Black-chested Buzzard-Eagle, the incredibly vibrant Long-tailed Meadowlark, Lesser Rhea with large broods of chicks, and Chilean Flamingo, including a couple of still grey juveniles. We also spotted a Culpeo, a species of fox.

Eventually, we started to see our main target of the day: the Andean Condor. We saw some soaring overhead, and one individual that was walking in a field among the sheep gave us some scale for their sheer size as the largest flying bird in the world. As we drove along the water, we stopped to watch a Southern Giant Petrel feeding on a carcass in the water. A graphic scene, but fascinating to see the petrel at work so close up. We arrived at Estancia Olga Teresa, a 103-year-old farm that has turned to eco-tourism in the last couple of decades. Their property is home to a cliffside roost that is home to over 200 condors. After an introduction from the family, we drove out to the site. Just as we exited our van, the rain stopped and slowly but surely, the clouds began to clear. We set up our scopes and took in the incredible scene. With this sudden favorable change in weather, some of the birds took off from their roosts, gliding against the blue skies. There were too many to count, and everywhere you looked was some interesting behavior. There were birds preening each other, hopping along the rocks, soaring overhead, and some just enjoying an afternoon nap.

After spending about 45 minutes with these incredible birds, we returned to our van feeling incredibly lucky. We continued our drive to Punta Arenas, spotting a big rainbow along the way. We checked into our hotel overlooking the Strait of Magellan, and, after such a long day, opted for dinner at the onsite restaurant.



Sat., Nov. 18

Punta Arenas | Punta Arbol

It was our last full day of the tour, and we had a nice relaxed itinerary. After breakfast at the hotel, we started driving south to a few birding spots. One species we were hoping to find was the Ruddy-headed Goose. This species is doing well in the Falklands and other islands, but is very endangered on the mainland. Not only did we find it, but we found a whole family! Luciano spotted a pair of adults with seven little goslings walking along the rocky shore. It was very encouraging to see this next generation in a population where every individual counts!

We continued our drive to the end of the road at Punta Arbol, the southernmost point of mainland South America. We enjoyed a short coastal walk along the *Nothofagus* forest. It was a beautiful sunny day, which made the scenery all the more breathtaking. We watched Black-browed Albatross, Southern Giant Petrel, and Chilean Skua soar above the sea, and spotted Black-chinned Siskin, Dark-bellied Cinclodes, and Patagonian Sierra Finch in the trees. Then it was back to town, where we visited the full-scale replicas of the *Nao Victoria* and *Beagle* ships that had played such important roles in the exploration and mapping of the Strait of Magellan. We were able to walk around the ships, and appreciate that our trip to Patagonia had not been spent in the cramped quarters of a wooden sailing vessel.

Our last birding stop of the day was the Three Bridges Wetland, which proved to be full of waterfowl. We had great looks at Red-gartered Coot, including one with a couple of very little babies, as well as Coscoroba Swan, Yellow-billed Pintail, White-rumped Sandpiper, close up looks at another Magellanic Snipe, and our final new bird of the tour, a Red Shoveler.

We enjoyed our final farewell at a nearby restaurant, La Luna, which offered delicious food and an extensive wine list. We shared a few bottles while reminiscing over the last couple of weeks in this incredible part of the world, and shared our favorite species, although none of us could narrow it down to just one. We took our time with the meal, enjoying the convivial atmosphere, before walking along the waterfront back to our hotel.

Sun., Nov. 19

Punta Arenas

After breakfast at our hotel, we drove to the airport where we said our goodbyes to Luciano. It was hard to express how grateful we were for not only his extensive expertise, but also his warm, upbeat attitude throughout the tour. But we did our best! Then it was time for the rest of us to fly to Santiago, where our flock dispersed. It was hard to believe it was over, but what an incredible couple of weeks it was!

Photo Credits: Group Photo (Wendy Hudson, WH), Upland Geese (WH), Gentoo Penguins (WH), Grass Wren (WH), Fire Eyed Diucon (WH), Puma (WH), Group Birding (Laura Koehne, LK), Plumbeous Rail (WH), Black Faced Ibis (WH), Crested Caracara (WH), Magellanic Snipe (WH), Flying Steamer-Duck (WH), Dark-bellied Cinclodes (WH), Southern Right Whale (WH), Magellanic Penguins (WH), Chimango Caracara (WH), Elegant Crested Tinamou (WH), Juvenile Cuis (WH), Lesser Rhea (WH), Ushuaia From Air (WH), The Cascado Rio Paine (WH), Torres del Paine NP (WH), Guanaco (WH), Magellanic Penguin (LK), Puma (WH), Ruddy-headed Geese (WH), Group Photo (LK)