

Northwest Argentina | Trip Report

October 8 – 20, 2017 | Written by Peg Abbott



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With Guide Ricardo Clark, tour host Peg Abbott, and 7 participants John, Mary, Jonathan, Andrea, Alexandra, Don & Jan

Mon., Oct. 9 Arrivals at Buenos Aires | Local Wetland Reserves

Our group came in on several flights, and a few arrived the day before, but congenial Annie (Amelia) was there to greet us. We waited for all flights to come in as it was a half hour or more into the city and our nice hotel. We got acquainted over coffee, changed money, and longed for a rest. The hotel was pretty efficient to get us in close to noon, so we got some hours to regroup ahead of a 4:00 PM meet up for our first birding outing.

Carol Passera was there to welcome us from her company, Causana Viajes. She explained we would need to bird Costanera Sur from the edge as it was closed on Mondays, suggesting we start instead at Reserva Vicente López, located in a nice residential area, on the Rio de la Plata. We had over thirty species here in an hour, a good start! Checkered Woodpecker, Campo Flicker, Nandy (Black-hooded) Parakeet, Masked Gnatcatcher, Solitary Black Cacique, and Red-crested Cardinal were some of the species noted. We also had a Long-necked Turtle in the pond, as well as Striated and Cocoi Herons.



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We then drove to a public walkway across from Costanera Sur, and had great looks at Wattled Jacana, Limpkin, Southern Screamer, Harris's Hawk, both caracaras, and several Rosy-billed Pochard, a species we'd hoped to find here. Local color and music was plentiful!

Carol arranged dinner for us at a lovely spot named Parolaccia in the city, with a view of large buildings lit-up behind. We tried pumpkin soup, several starters, and choices of pasta or meat dishes. Time to go rest up for our flight the next day and the journey ahead!

Tues., Oct. 10 Flight to Salta | Birding Dry Forests of the Monte

All went smoothly checking into our flights; Amelia shepherded us all through the task. The flight was a little over two hours, and smiling Ricardo Clark, an expert birder and head of the birding company for the area met us. Just out of the airport two fancy Fork-tailed Flycatchers posed for us, nice!

We drove south from the city of Salta, and by noon were exploring dry forests of the Monte. Despite it being mid-day it was quite active. We saw our first Golden-billed Saltator, a pair of Narrow-billed Woodcreeper, Variable Antshrike, Stripe-crowned Spinetail, and one we loved hearing the very long, drawn-out call of: Greater Wagtail-Tyrant. Burrowing Owls were perched up on the fence lines.

Wed., Oct. 11 Cafayate Wine Country | Ruinas

On the grounds of the hotel, we enjoyed views of Ultramarine Grosbeak, Mountain Parakeet, Grayish Baywing, Saffron Finch, and others. John was always out early, finding us some good things! What a lovely spot, with distant views out to an extensive red-rock valley through neat lines of vineyards, and tall rugged mountains close by. A flowering bougainvillea splashed color about and a blooming bottlebrush helped us get great views of Sayaca Tanagers.



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We were to see a waterfall, but with dry conditions it had little water, and Ricardo suggested instead that we bird to the east and go out to the impressive Ruinas de Quilmes. First we made a stop in some arid habitat, and were thrilled to find clouds of Burrowing Parakeets, hundreds of them were huddled on the ground feeding. Something set them off and they swirled, dazzling us with the jade color of their wings. Wow!



Ricardo was on track to find us some of the most elusive species. We spent time watching Chaco Earthcreeper skulking along a sandy berm, and a few caught a look at White-throated Cacholote. A favorite for many was the scope view of a handsome bird, the Many-colored Chaco Finch.



At a small farm area with a gate on either side, we wandered up a road, leaving a few under a lovely big shade tree. We found Green-barred Woodpeckers, Ringed Warbling-Finch, Rufous-sided Warbling-Finch, and a big flock of Gray-hooded Sierra Finch. Across the road we heard a Spot-backed Puffbird and chased it for a bit, a few of the group got pretty good looks as it perched atop the scattered trees.



We then stopped in an open, high grass area with beautiful vistas of the mountains. Here we found a singing Great Pampa-Finch, a Spectacled Tyrant (Jonathan's favorite), a White Monjita, and Peg spied a Long-tailed Meadowlark that Ricardo was able to get in the scope.

Ruinas de Quilmes was a park run by the local people and their flag marked the entry. The site was built into the side of a mountain, with steep trails reaching up to lookout points. We saw numerous rock structures and many palms. A pair of Chimango Caracaras did aerial acrobatics for us as we got off the bus, and a pair of American Kestrel were amorous atop a large Cardon cactus. We got very good looks at the "Cactus" (White-fronted) Woodpecker, and Chaco Earthcreeper. We enjoyed

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the musical call once again of Greater Wagtail-Tyrants. We stopped at a water crossing and climbed over a large berm to walk a quiet road for a few minutes. Ricardo found us a Straneck's Tyrannulet, luckily calling to help with the ID, and told us that Dr. Straneck had been his professor at the University. He



proposed this species as a split and it was rejected. Ten years later another of his students continued the work, and when it was definitive, named it after the professor for all his efforts. Back to our lovely winery hotel. This region is known for its Torrentes grapes that make a rich, fruity, pretty sweet white wine. After a long day, it was luscious! The dining room was very cozy, felt historic, and the food was carefully prepared and delicious.



Thurs., Oct. 12

Highway 40 Geology, Landscape & Birding the Monte Habitat

We enjoyed another morning at our most comfortable digs at the wine resort. Several got out early ahead of breakfast. Some bottlebrush trees in the garden were alive with birds, both Gilded Sapphire and Glittering-bellied Emerald, and a real treat, male and female Blue-and-yellow Tanagers, beautiful views.

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John had been out early both days and wanted to show us some of his finds, including a pair of White-tipped Plantcutters. The male carries the colors of British Chaffinch, the female striped with a very red eye. Time passed quickly. Breakfast featured nice fresh fruit, including strawberries and mangoes, scrambled eggs, and lots of tempting breads and pastries.

We were happy to see Jonathan on the mend, and ready to explore Highway 40, Argentina's Route 66, with incredible geology, picturesque small towns, and wild stretches. This section of the highway is all dirt, and sometimes when wet it's not passable. We had the green light of bluebird skies as we started.

Our first stop was the local bakery where we got fresh bread for our picnic lunch, but alas, they were out of Alfajores, the special cookies of the region. We walked into the town square as our driver shopped, finding Saffron Finch and atop the church steeple, an adult and an immature Harris's Hawk. Off to a good start!

But, we could barely make it out of town, as we kept finding birds! We had another good morning show of Burrowing Parakeets and Ricardo heard White-throated Cacholote out the van window. We got out to find them and got distracted, a calling Sandy Gallito, an endemic species of the region. Off we went with the scope, passing an agitated pair of Burrowing Owls that were likely nesting. We saw Common Diuca Finch, both caracaras, and still the call eluded us. Most of us were searching the ground watching for its signature run, but Ricardo found it atop a prominent dead snag. Voila!

We crossed back through the sandy soils, finding seriema tracks, ant lions, and American Kestrel. We got back in the van and went only a short way until Guira Cuckoos crossed the road, calling and perching up for our view. They tolerated us getting out and we enjoyed them, more Burrowing Parakeets (at some point we'd get used to parrots on phone wires) and a stunning very white adult Variable Hawk.



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We spotted birds on the road, White-banded Mockingbird, lots of doves, and both Patagonian and Chalk-browed Mockingbirds. We took photos of the lovely contrast of wild and tame. Neat rows of vineyards backed by tall rugged mountains. Soon the scenery took over and geology became the most awesome part of the day, changing at every turn. The arid landscape was reminiscent of New Mexico, Utah, Arizona — familiar, yet strange and most impressive.

Mid-morning we passed through San Carlos, the oldest town in the region, dating from 1551. The Jesuits established a permanent mission here in 1641. We admired the church and a flashy Cliff Flycatcher that made repeated sallies from the same perch near it. We took a coffee break and pit stop, then continued north. The area got increasingly drier, with fewer farms and vineyards in the sandy soils and badlands terrain. A Fork-tailed Flycatcher flew alongside the van.

The rock layers were laid out dramatically. Peg and John did their best to interpret, but it would take repeated visits and a book or two to let this amazing rock story unfold. We kept getting out for photos, also picking up a bird species or two, only to have an even better view show up around the corner and we'd stop again. The van was overall pretty comfortable with a nice high ceiling, but this dirt road tested us with some lively bumps and an ongoing massage.

Our main stop included a short steep trail up to a rather remarkable viewpoint. We marveled at Don and Jan, our octogenarians, navigating it so well, with Don climbing up to the very top with our guide and Jonathan ... boys will be boys! The maze of color and form we witnessed from the top was quite extraordinary. Margaret commented that it could rival the Grand Canyon and kept saying, "This can't be real!"

While we had a lot of driving, this scenic route was spectacular enough to make it worthwhile. Ricardo told us about the region's geology, history and landscape, bringing it to life.



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We stopped at a shaded pullout across from a local bar, that while not open provided ambiance with its antique carts, tractors, and buildings. The shade was ample, including two large fig trees, and water ran in the ditch. Ricardo commented that some of these fields have been irrigated for 400 years. Hay crops and a variety of onions provided verdant greenery in an otherwise arid landscape. The place was birdy, with White-tipped Plantcutter, White-crested Tyrannulet, a Tufted Tit-Tyrant, a Rufous Hornero pair working on their nest, Glittering-bellied Emeralds visiting a flowering Pomegranate and always, a noisy Chimango Caracara.

After lunch we made just a few birding stops before Molinas, putting some kilometers away to ease our dawdling. At Molinas we stopped at an interpretive center with a lovely craft store, and further up the road, the Vicuña Rescue Foundation. Though a number of the Vicuña were away at lush pastures, we got to visit with a half dozen, totally too-cute individuals. We got to see their wool, including the finest fiber that comes from the frontal



section, and weavings incorporating this luscious fiber. We also saw a true Salta poncho made of very high-quality weaving. Between the two spots several woven good items made their way into our van, wonderful reminders of this stunning valley where communities are dedicated to their rural way of life and its preservation.

The last stretch was a bit faster, a better road, we saw some fine horses, stretches of river lined by Giant Cane, and we were fortunate to find a Giant Hummingbird. After piling out to see it well, Peg spied a

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patch of Tree Tobacco it was likely feeding in. On cue, it returned, chirped loudly, and struck on a photogenic perch for us to grab some images.

It was a day of scenery more so than birds, with bajadas, fluted walls, arches, anticlines, and a true mélange of features. We arrived at our lovely Inn at La Paya road weary, but happy. Poor Margaret happened to be in the shower when the power went out. We could not unpack well, by flashlight, but with luck it was short lived, causing only a half hour dinner delay.

Dinner was served in the 100+ year old dining room, all presented well, a delicious roasted chicken, rice and local grains, salad, and a local delicacy for desert, Cayote jam.

Fri., Oct. 13

La Paya | Los Cordones National Park

We walked at first light, wanting to sort out the dawn chorus. An added bonus was spectacular light on the rugged cliffs surrounding the Inn. We walked up a road behind the inn into dry upper Monte habitat, picking up really good views of Creamy-breasted Canastero, listening to it serenade. A Peregrine flew over, causing commotion in the Hooded Siskin flock we were viewing. We walked through a gate into vineyards and river frontage areas of the farm, finding White-crested Tyrannulet and White-winged Black-Tyrant with ease. Gaudy Golden-billed Saltator were common and calling. Greater Wagtail-Tyrants performed their endless trills.



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After a nice breakfast, we set off for Los Cordones National Park, 36,000 ha in size, and established for only the last ten years, one of the newer parks of the system. We stopped at a lovely inn at Payogastilla to tell them we'd be coming back for lunch, and from two different vantage points added some great birds. The first was quite out of range, a Gray Monjita, normally a bird of the lower Chaco regions. We saw it perch repeatedly then fly, showing its markings well, until an American Kestrel chased it away. This vantage point from the road down to

the valley gave us a view of fluted hills and snow-capped peaks. We spied Southern Lapwing, Andean Swift, and Andean Swallow, Yellow-winged Blackbird, and a favorite for many, Spectacled Tyrant.

Near the park keen-eyed Ricardo spotted a Gray-bellied Shrike-Tyrant, near the other mirador (lookout) stop that offered splendid views. In one direction were snow-capped peaks of Cachi Mountain, in the other chevrons of colors pressed into the hills, a feature very much like the dramatic Waterpocket Fold of Capitol Reef National Park. With 300 – 400-year-old giant Cordons in front of each view, our cameras were constantly clicking.

Continuing on up the road, Andrea spotted wild Guanacos, our first for the trip, an iconic mammal for the Andes. We got great looks and photos before moving on. Next were Spot-billed Ground-Tyrants, found only because of their general busy feeding behavior, we could pick up the movement amid all the small shrubs. We also found Common Diuca-Finch and Gray-hooded Sierra-Finch. En route to check out the Mesquite forest habitat, Fabio, our driver, spotted a running Sandy Gallito! Peg was fast enough to get off one shot and got a photo. After all our work to see this endemic over the last few days we were happy to see it and glad to see its chipmunk-like, tail-up running behavior.

We walked the short interpretive trail near the park entry, then returned for lunch. And it was a most delightful lunch, good choices for all on the menu, homemade bread and salsas, good company, weather and views, a visiting Chimango Caracara and a few more Burrowing Owls. We finished about 2:30 PM and all agreed a good afternoon rest was in order.

Passing back through historic Cachi, we admired the buildings, refreshed our cash supplies at an ATM, and headed back to the inn for dinner and the evening.

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Sat., Oct. 14 Los Cardones NP | Enchanted Valley | Mountain Crossing | Yungas Forest

Our particular group liked the birding and nature over some cultural choices, and Ricardo wisely took us on a precursor visit to Los Cardones NP yesterday rather than time in town and at a local museum. So we had the full day to pass through what we'd traveled, but this time earlier in the day; we were able to find Sandy Gallito again and Elegant Crested-Tinamou, score!



First, we stopped at the restaurant at Payogastillo to pick up our lunchtime empanadas. At the adjacent glorious overlook of agricultural lands layered to badland hills to snow-capped peaks, we saw twenty species right off the bat — some repeats, and others just a treat — such as two Long-tailed Meadowlarks posing for us, brilliant red breasts in view.



On to the park, we were so happy that a tinamou crossed the road and then lingered for viewing from the bus. At the viewpoint stop, we also had cracking views of an endemic, the Monte Yellow-Finch, which several had missed a few days back, always nice to catch everyone up like that.

We traveled within the high Puna habitat, Cachipampa Pass, finding some 30 Tawny-throated Dotterel, and with some searching, Gray-breasted Seedsnipe, which Ricardo explained were just returning (hard to remember spring migration was going on now as we explored, mid-October).



We dropped down in elevation, more artful driving by Fabio. We stopped at a spot en route, and watched a totally unattended sheep dog move and keep track of his flock of sheep. It was just amazing to see his drive and skill, all canid-focus on the task at hand. We had great views of Streak-fronted Thornbird and Black-billed Shrike-Tyrant, also found some delightful wildflowers in bloom on the tundra-like landscape.



Into Enchanted Valley, among the trip highlights for scenic beauty, and for finding mammals, both Andean Red Fox and Mountain Viscacha. We first spotted a distant Viscacha, sunning itself high on rocks against the skyline. We had so

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many distractions, Aplomado Falcon, Mountain Caracara, Cinereous Ground-Tyrant. But with the scope we honed in on this odd rabbit-like rodent. Then walking on farther, we found another much closer, enough that Peg even got video of it. Jonathon just had to see it jump, approaching it, it did! Okay, we agreed to the fun, and egged him on, but just before the leap we discovered a real find, Magellanic Horned Owl (similar to Great-Horned Owl) watching all the fun!



We continued to find wonderful birds, and lingered as long as we could. Then we ascended to the pass again, continuing on and over extreme terrain. An Andean Lapwing and several Andean Flickers were encountered on our passage. We hit a small pocket of brush en route down, one held a real beauty not easy to find, Rufous-bellied Mountain-Tanager (Saltator), and we found them with ease. We also had fun watching a Slaty Flowerpiercer steal nectar from a flowering shrub, doing just what his name implies.

We dropped quickly into trees, the first forest for several days, and we enjoyed the elevation's effect on vegetation. Late afternoon we arrived at Ricardo's lodge, Selva Montana outside of Salta, and we immediately loved it! A small porch held signs of birds we might spot from there, our first Toco Toucans, Plush-crested Jays, and pretty little Saffron-billed Sparrow.

Lovely wine, nice rooms, and a nice dinner ... what more could we ask for after a very special day!

Sun., Oct. 15

Huaico Reserve, San Lorenzo | Vincentanario Lagoon, Salta

We had an early breakfast today so we could be at the Huaico Reserve for a full morning of walking. We found the forest to be teeming with birds, many of them furtive or flighty, but with work we noted four

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species of tyrannulets, and the Stripe-headed (White-browed) Brushfinch and the Buff-browed Foliage-gleaner were amid several flocks. We made a steady climb, with treats like the Red-tailed Comet, a stunning hummingbird with a long tail and brilliant colors. We reached Mirador with hopes for finding raptors, enjoying a chance to sit down and survey. Few were flying, so we continued on, finding Highland Elaenia and Euler's Flycatcher, Cinnamon Flycatcher, and more. Pale-legged Warblers sang loudly and we found several Tropical Parula, and finally the regional endemic Brown-capped Redstart. Plush-crested Jays made several passes through.

Fabio had gone into Salta to get us his favorite empanadas, cheese and beef, with delicious salsa. With fruit, it made for an easy lunch. Jonathan had his appetite back and with a big smile announced he had had four! The walk was about 2.5 miles, and up 1000 feet in elevation, and though taken at a birder's pace, all agreed a nap was calling! We elected for a break and easy birding in the afternoon.

For that we drove into Salta from San Lorenzo, going to the Vincentanario Lagoon. We made our observations with two scopes from a vantage point and recorded about 35 species, several new for the trip. New were several ducks, Tawny-headed Swallow, Greater Yellowlegs, Solitary Sandpiper, Unicolored Blackbird, and Coscoroba Swan. It was fun to discover a Southern Screamer on its nest with two plump growing chicks.

Our hearty ones went back out at night, a short way to the reserve, to look for Scissor-tailed Nightjar, and possibly owls and potoo. They had success finding Tropical Screech-Owl and quick views of the marvelous tails of the nightjar as it came up off the road.



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Mon., Oct. 16

Huaico Reserve | North to Purmamarca & The Seven-Colored Hills

We started the day in search of Blond-crested Woodpecker, at Ricardo's lovely home at the base of the reserve. We were not successful in that endeavor, but had great looks at Streaked Flycatcher and Scaly-headed Parrot, the race here having a bold eye ring. Dusky-legged Guans were aggressively chasing each other around, racing about the rim of the dry lagoon. We sort of hated to tear ourselves away but adventures were calling.

Not far out of town, still in the lush Yungas forest on the highway as it climbed up a pass, we stopped for a forest flock, and pulled out views of Rufous-capped Antshrike, Azara's Spinetail, Rust-and-yellow and Fawn-breasted Tanagers, and quite a few Common Chlorospingus.

Then it was north along the Camino Real towards Jujuy, following the ancient route of trade between the Lerma Valley near Salta all the way to the border with Bolivia; cattle from the valley were driven along it to workers at the mines at Potosi. We passed through some lovely tree-lined streets, noticing more political signs now, with elections next week for the nation.

The rural areas had a cadence of charm, small villages each with a church and between the towns little farms with adobe buildings, gardens, makeshift livestock corrals, irrigation ditches, and views of stunning and colorful rock landscapes.

We drove for a while and then had a stop at a large reservoir, Digue Campo Alegre, where open fields went down to an extensive shoreline. As we drove in we found a nest of Savannah Hawk and got good looks at the pair. Horses, sheep, goats, and cattle were spread out, some lovely horses enjoying their freedom and frolicking in the water at times. Right away we found a Wood Stork and a Roseate Spoonbill, then over the course of a half hour or so there we found almost 40 species. Most numerous were the almost 400 Fulvous Whistling-Ducks, a few White-faced Whistling-Ducks mixed in with them. There was a Coscoroba Swan, three pair of Great



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Grebe, over 100 White-faced Ibis, noisy Southern Lapwing and Wattled Jacana, Tawny-headed Swallows, and Ricardo spied a Yellowish Pipit.



It was quite overcast today, with a wind, so the Seven-colored Hills were somber rather than bright. We arrived in time to walk among them if we wished, but we decided instead to walk through the large central market, and on through town to some tree-lined streets. The market was large, with all kinds of textiles as this was the weaving center of this part of the country.

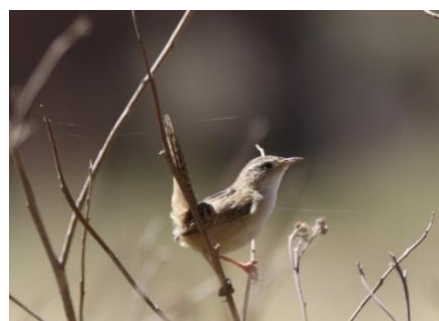
Our hotel had a lot of charm, especially in the restaurant next door where the proprietor was very gracious. He had real flair, and this night was wearing a pair of deep orange pants that matched the terra-cotta interior. The staff was friendly, and as we ate early compared to the locals, we had it mostly to ourselves. All of our food was good but my, oh my, the pear with wine and ice-cream dessert took the prize.

Tues., Oct. 17

Quebrada de Humahuaca | Local Birding | Salinas Grandes

Our group was not keen on shopping or going into a weaver's home (both opportunities there) so Ricardo was game to do some birding this morning along this ancient travel route of the Rio Grande Valley.

Near Tilcara, we stopped at a roadside wetland, and found over 30 species. Close views of Plumbeous Rails took everyone's fancy, and we were entertained by a singing, posing Sedge Wren. Brown-capped Tit-Spinetail and Creamy-breasted Canastero were present, and walking back to the van, in a little farmyard,



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we got good looks at d'Orbigny's Chat-Tyrant. We also added Brown-backed Mockingbird and Thick-billed Siskin.

We got back to town and found the Seven-colored Hills all aglow. Fabio angled us into a good viewpoint and we all had fun with our artistic moment.

Some then took a nice mid-day rest, and others did a little "retail therapy" feasting their eyes on textiles the colors of this town's lovely backdrop.



One could sense why the weavers felt inspired here. The entire region was arid, highly textured, with a mix of stunning and subdued colors. The river corridors provide green oasis in an otherwise barren realm. We explored by driving, with short stops at multiple locations.

We went back out after lunch, driving a long way (120K!!) to see a vast salt flat area in the Puna, windswept and impressive, but bare. Poor Fabio got the challenge as this wild mountain road with its twists and turns is a major truck route over to Bolivia, and many trucks were loaded with new or used cars. The switchbacks were tight and numerous! Near the top we spied Vicuñas to our delight, and were thrilled to find them in the wild, grazing. We got out at a curve and found Cordilleran Canastero, Andean Hillstar (an impressive hummingbird), and at close range, White-browed Chat-Tyrant. We got up to the flats and found them to be a tourist attraction. Pulling into the parking lot we found vendors selling carvings of salt, and few living creatures to be found. Peg spied a tea shack and suggested we take a break. It turned out to be really fun with a delightful woman and her very young son serving us sweets and tea, all smiles for our business and curious obviously about our binoculars and gear. After tea, it was back down



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the mountain, with a highlight being a close pass by of a Mountain Caracara, just outside the bus!

We loved the restaurant next door and went back again. They had great empanadas, good chicken, some creative dishes, and that sinful wine-ice cream dish for dessert once again, yum!

Wed., Oct. 18 Quebrada de Humahuaca | Abra Pampa | Flamingoes | Huancar Lagoon

After breakfast we packed up to head north, the landscape getting drier and drier, and by day's end much wilder in feel.

At Angosta de Perchel, we found the Bar-eyed Ground-Doves we hoped to see, by being there early in the morning. They posed well for us, and in nearby shrubs we found Yellow-billed Tit-Tyrant, Creamy-breasted Canastero, and nearby, Spot-billed Ground-Tyrant.

We were impressed by the Pucara de Tilcara Fortress but not inspired to do the hike up to it. This ancient fortress sits on a hill midway between the deep canyon walls, allowing native peoples to fend off first each other, and then the Spanish, in this rugged valley.

At Uquía, we stopped at a picturesque church, and while not yet open for us to go in, we enjoyed the colorful little market outside it, with textiles and other crafts, small enough to manage, and fun.

We stopped a couple of times along the river, typically at a bend with a view, and found Crested Duck and Yellow-billed Teal.

We were not prepared however for Abra Pampa; this was the wild west of the late 1800s, adding only a few amenities. We were amazed at the rugged barren setting, the dirt streets, crumbling adobes,



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horses, humans, and activity. Big trucks bound for the border took rest here, and we stayed in the best available spot, which won great points for hospitality but was sporting on the creature comfort ends. We took upstairs rooms as they were more spacious, and still very-strong Don, our octogenarian hauled everyone's suitcase up the stairs. Laundry decorated the interior railings with the rooms in a large rectangle looking down on the tiled floor a story below. We dropped our suitcases and went to lunch — a great chance to watch people and an old western movie, Zorro, that seemed almost surreal given the surroundings. Great soup and off we went to find flamingoes.

People come here to bird to see water birds of the Puna lakes, and an assortment of birds well-adapted here, ground hugging Puna Miner, Ash-breasted Sierra-Finch, and Andean Negrito. We were worried hearing that it has been so dry, that we might miss them, but Ricardo knew the terrain well and not that far out of town we found a lake and field near enough we could wander over. Wander was the operative word at this high elevation; we all moved slowly. We had 21 species at this stop, but the show-stopper was seeing three species of flamingoes feeding together, Chilean, Andean, and James. We watched them first through the scope, with Ricardo patiently going over their features, and then got much closer. In with them we found Giant Coot, Puna Ibis, Puna Teal, Andean Avocet, Andean Lapwing, and more.



We left the water area and drove out to a dune area, impressive with scenery and a good place for birds. On the way in we found Ornate Tinamou, score! After the long drive and time at the high elevation, some then needed to relax or



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nap. A few of us, Alex, Margaret, and Peg, went north with Fabio and Ricardo, hoping to find another endemic dove. We got sidetracked at a corral just stuffed with llamas for the evening, one rogue one outside the enclosure not sure how to get in. We got out and found them quite curious, fun! Further up the road we found both Bright-rumped and Greenish Yellow-Finches and then called it a day.

Our hostess put on a nice dinner in the little bar she ran, and thoughtfully put out the closed sign so we'd have it privately and quiet, otherwise it may have been a rowdy crowd and long evening. We had grown fond of Abra Pampa by now, and enjoyed hearing her talk about her son who plays music, and the various industries (mining) and occupations (ranching) that hold the place together.

Thurs., Oct. 19 South to Jujuy | Yala Forest Reserve

Today we had a long drive, retracing our steps down the Humahuaca Canyon, past Purmamarca, and on to Jujuy, back to lush forest again at Yala.

We stopped to bird at a dramatic road cut, with triangular cliffs on both sides and a steep drop off to a river on the other. Margaret spied the prize here, a flock of over 20 Black Siskins. We had very good looks as they perched on shrubbery down below. We had Mountain Parakeet, Plain-mantled Tit-Spintail, and Rufous-banded Miner. Just a little further down the road we stopped at a farmhouse and found the endemic Black-hooded Sierra-Finch, nice views of this species, too.

We made good time after this, ending up at a place with big trees and a green lawn for lunch; it seemed like something out of a dream. A beautiful Whistling Heron was strutting on the lawn, and we had quite a feast. No napping though, this was our precious afternoon at Yala, and a rushing stream waited for us to see some hopeful species.

What luck we had! Almost immediately Ricardo spotted a family of Torrent Ducks, male and female, and two almost grown chicks, just below us. Watching them, Margaret and Jonathan pulled out a pair of Rufous-throated Dipper, wahoo! Finding these so quickly afforded us time for general birding and we



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really enjoyed it. We found Plush-crested Jay, a mixed flock with Buff-browed Foliage-gleaner, Brown-capped Redstart, Rusty-browed Warbling-Finch, and beautiful Fulvous-headed Brushfinch. Ricardo moved us back down to where we had seen Dusky-legged Guan earlier, and sure enough, several Red-faced Guans had joined them going in to roost and we got scope views of this rare species. Though our



night trip back here later was a

bust, we fell in love with this beautiful reserve, more time here the next trip!

Fri., Oct. 20 Morning Birding | Main Tour Ends | On to Iguazu

Our flock would disperse today, with Jonathan leaving, and the rest flying on to Iguazu Falls. But first we had a special species to find, and we did find it with quite a bit of searching: Red-legged Seriema. What

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an incredible bird, strutting through tall grasses into the shrubbery of the forest edge. We also found White-tailed Kite in this habitat, near San Antonio.

At a small residential area pond, we found about 35 species, more ducks and swallows, and we estimated 100 Southern Lapwings. We had our last looks at Guira Cuckoo and Fork-tailed Flycatchers. And oh, the Whistling Heron, what a beauty!

It was time to wrap up the main tour, and over lunch we compared our many highlights.

What fun we had, despite a flu-bug going around the whole group (three survivors, though two of them surrendered to it once home); we enjoyed each other, the dramatic landscapes, the understanding we gained of the Andes and its range of habitats, and all the birds we found. With so many endemic or regionally endemic to this area we all had life-birds, some had many. And we all had stories, shared experiences, and memories for a very long time. Ricardo our guide was the consummate guide and gentleman and Fabio a fabulous, safe driver. great trip, and for most of the group — one more keenly different and stunningly impressive place to explore — Iguazu!

Iguazu Falls National Park, A Fabulous Tour Extension

Sat., Oct. 21 – Mon., Oct. 23 Iguazu National Park



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Almost our full group headed on today to Iguazu, very excited to spend time at this treasured World Heritage site. Aerolinas Argentina changed us from a mid-day flight to a late-day flight, so all we accomplished day one was to get there. Our operator chose a hotel in town to save us some funds, and it was one with birding on the grounds, including a Plumbeous Kite that stood watch over the pool, and a Common Potoo that called through the night. We settled in and got ready for an early start the following day.



Our local guide, Daniel, organized our time so well. He was obviously used to sharing the bird excitement with the full impact of seeing this amazing arc of waterfalls, vistas of which are simply overpowering. He walked us on all the trails with views our first day, but first in the early hours ahead of when these trails were open, helped us find birds in the productive early hours. Toco Toucans were everywhere, common birds! Their smaller cousins, Chestnut-eared Aracari, were easy to find as well. We found a nesting pair of Yellow-fronted Woodpeckers right away, and got views of Scaly-headed Parrot. There were secretive Slaty-breasted Wood-Rails, and very rare Black-fronted Piping-Guan. Just this day we tallied over 500 Great Dusky Swifts plying the airways of the falls, and ducking in to potential nest sites. Trees arched over the boardwalk trails, perfect spots for Tropical Parula, Magpie Tanager, and Violaceous Euphonia. Time passed quickly! We fended off the way-too-tame Coatimundis over lunch, and appreciated a short break in the afternoon.



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Daniel made such an effort to honor each request, offering to walk with us to spots close to the hotel in search of Rufous-capped Motmot and Surucua Trogon. Bingo, both were found! Only Alex and Peg hung in there due to rain, but we enjoyed the quiet time in the rainforest with the rain, and sharing Daniel's quiet skills.

Dinners at the restaurant brought entertainment, more than we wanted, so we ate early to get a jump on it before the music and dance began. Food was excellent, and over the course of our three nights here we traded favorites and had fun.

Our second morning was just amazing. Somehow, we had special access to drive to the boardwalk and get out to Devil's Throat viewpoint, normally accessed now just by tram. The birding was phenomenal, and being at the viewpoint, just by ourselves was the best part of the whole time there. This is a treasured park worldwide, and that comes with crowds, this morning time alone, magical! We found a rookery of Black-crowned Night-Heron, saw the piping-guans again, watched a Limpkin feed, watched Black-capped Donacobius courting, and found brilliant Yellow-billed Cardinal and Green-headed Tanager.

From here, walking back just as the crowds arrived, we headed on to a trail by the old airport. Here we found some very special species, including Blond-crested Woodpecker, Green-winged Saltator, Tawny-crowned Pygmy-Tyrant, and more. Again, Daniel's quiet persistent manner helped us to find so many species we would have not seen on our own. This day we tallied almost 70 species!

Back for lunch at the park rest areas, then home for a break, and then a grand finale visit to a local hummingbird garden — wow. Here we got amazing close-up views at Black Jacobin, Planalto Hermit, Swallow-tailed Hummingbird, Versicolored Emerald, and more. The Jardin de Picaflors is so well set up with natural perches, our cameras were clicking like wildfire, even iPhones ringing in good shots.

Back to dinner and this night a Tango show. Hard to believe our grand adventure had come to an end. Iguazu is a place of the imagination, a must for birders and anyone wanting inspiration!

Until the next adventure!

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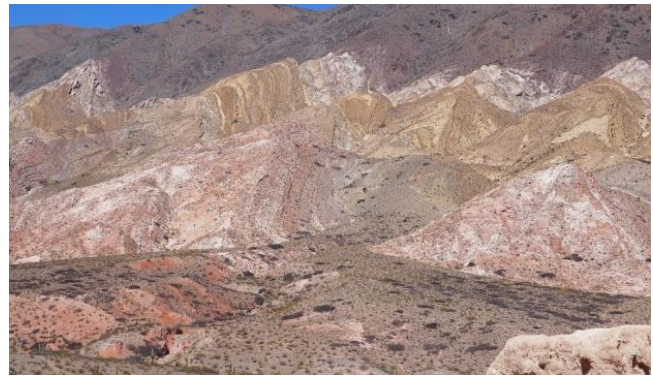


Photo Credits: Thanks to Jonathan Shagrin & Peg Abbott for sharing trip photos. Jonathan's photos are noted **in bold** in the following list. Other photos by Peg Abbott unless otherwise noted.

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