

Antarctica | Oct. 31 – Nov. 26, 2022 | Trip Report | by John Carlson



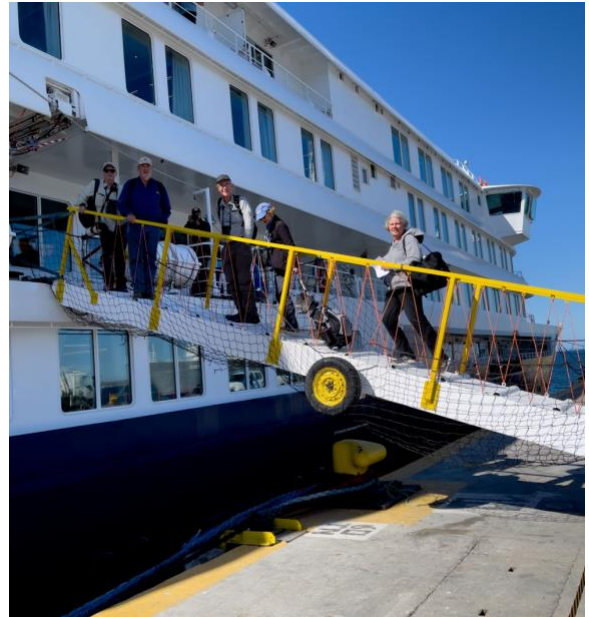
With Naturalist Journeys Guide John Carlson and participants Becky, Carl, Fred, Frederica, Linda, Lon, Martin, Mary Jane, Steve, Sue, and Vicky



Mon. Oct. 31

Buenos Aires

We all gathered outside the domestic terminal at Azeiza Airport in Buenos Aires, Argentina prior to boarding our flight to Puerto Madryn. The temperature in Buenos Aires was rather cool and pleasant. In between our visits and getting acquainted, a few of us wandered around the airport and found a few birds including breeding Monk Parakeets, Cattle Tyrants, Saffron Finches, Fork-tailed Flycatchers and a few rather striking golden-breasted subspecies of Green-barred Woodpecker that were feeding on ants in a wooded field at the edge of the airport. We boarded our flight later in the afternoon and arrived in Puerto Madryn just as the sun set. We



met our local guide and after a short drive, settled into our hotel and prepared for the next day exploring our way to Punto Tombo.

Tues., Nov. 1 Puerto Madryn

We boarded our bus early in the morning and headed out to explore our way to Punto Tombo. Our first stop was at Laguna del Ornitólogo, near the town of Trelew. Here we were able to see a wide variety of Argentine waterbirds including large flocks of Chilean Flamingos, three species of coots and large numbers of waterfowl including Black-headed Duck, Rosy-billed Pochard and Lake Duck in addition to a few shorebird species including some Hudsonian Godwits. Continuing south toward Punto Tombo, we found a few good species including Rusty-backed Monjita, Lesser Horned Owls, Elegant-crested Tinamous and a Patagonian fox. A short detour off the main road brought us to the beach at Playa Isla Escondido where we found our first steamer-ducks, the White-headed or “Chubut” Steamer-Duck, as they foraged just offshore. We also had our first experience with southern elephant seals at the beach while we ate lunch. Arriving at Punto Tombo early in the afternoon, we were greeted by quite a few guanacos, the elk-sized South American humpless camel. We enjoyed exploring the trails of the Punto Tombo Provincial Reserve, home of the largest breeding colony of Magellanic Penguins in the world. In addition to seeing many of these striking penguins, we observed a pair of Plain-mantled Tit-Spinetails nesting in an open metal pipe used to mark the trail edges, and had side-by-side views of Patagonian and Chalk-browed Mockingbirds. After returning to our hotel, we gathered at a waterfront restaurant for our first of many group meals.

Wed., Nov. 2 Puerto Madryn and onboard the *Hondius*

We had a relaxed morning with a nice breakfast. Burrowing Parakeets made another appearance for a few of us, and there were also a few American Oystercatchers at the Punta Cueva near our hotel in addition to the birds we had observed the morning before. After leaving our hotel, a few of us spent the better part of the day birding at Reserva Natural Laguna, a small wetland park in the middle of town. We enjoyed good views of a wide variety of birds including the South American version of the Black-necked Stilt and White-faced Ibis. We also watched the diminutive Picui Ground-Dove gathering nesting materials. Then the group made its way to the pier in the



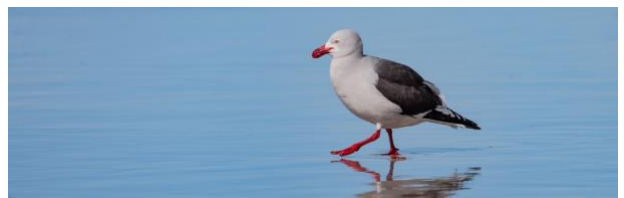
afternoon and boarded the *Hondius*. We located our rooms and found our way around the ship just as it pulled away from the pier. After our mandatory safety briefings, welcome toast, orientation and a nice dinner, we were able to watch many southern right whales, including a few breaching, and our first of many Southern Giant Petrels and Black-browed Albatrosses as the sun set.

Thurs., Nov. 3 At Sea

We awoke on our first morning onboard the *Hondius* and got accustomed to our new home for the next few weeks. A Fork-tailed Flycatcher was an early morning hitchhiker onboard the ship, and a White-banded Mockingbird was found a short while later. The flycatcher left rather quickly, but the mockingbird stuck around the entire day, mostly foraging on an abundance of moths that were flying around the ship. We began our seabird observations with a few species we would encounter for the bulk of the trip including Cape Petrels, or Pintados, Wilson's Storm Petrels and White-chinned Petrels along with Black-browed Albatrosses and Southern Giant Petrels. We also observed Sooty and Greater Shearwaters and began our trip-long challenge of prion identification. These very similar, relatively small, and fast-flying seabirds are notoriously hard to ID. Steve dove into this ID challenge, and our field observations and photos helped us ID our first Slender-billed Prions of the trip. We saw a couple of Orcas during the day, and also attracted a few Peale's Dolphins who rode the bow for a bit.

Fri., Nov. 4 At Sea and Falklands | Steeple Jason Island

Our morning observations were mostly species we had already encountered as well as Common Diving-Petrels and Slender-billed Prions. A highlight was watching a pod of Orcas cross the front of the ship. The fair winds and following seas allowed us to make an unexpected afternoon landing at Steeple Jason Island on the far west part of the Falkland Island group. As we prepared for our landing, the local "Johnny Rooks," a.k.a. Striated Caracaras, flew out from the islands to check out the ship. Preparing for our first landing, we marveled at the expansive colony of breeding Black-browed Albatross and tussock-covered slopes from our offshore perspective. We found



our first Blackish Cincloides or “Tussock Birds” immediately upon landing amidst the throng of Gentoo Penguins along with a few South American sea lions and two Black-crowned Night-Herons. As we made our way to view the breeding albatross from land, we encountered more curious Striated Caracaras, a few White-bridled Finches, Black-chinned Siskins, Dark-faced Ground-Tyrants, Austral Thrushes and some Grass Wrens in the tussock grass. The highlight was sitting at the edge of the huge Black-browed Albatross colony, watching them perch on their pedestal mud nests. Mixed in the colony were a few Southern Rockhopper Penguins, also on nests. The day was capped off with close-up views of an orca next to the ship and a marvelous sunset during dinner.

Sat., Nov. 5 **Falklands | Carcass and Saunders Islands**

Morning found us just off Carcass Island. Our first landing was at Dyke Bay where we immediately encountered the endemic, mouse-like, Cobb’s Wren foraging in the wrack and tussock grass along the shoreline. We made a short hike to Leopard Beach, and on the way encountered Gentoo and Magellanic Penguins, a furtive Magellanic Snipe, hordes of Upland Geese, with a few Ruddy-headed Geese hiding in their midst, Magellanic and Blackish Oystercatchers, White-bridled Finches, Dark-faced Ground-Tyrants, Blackish Cincloides, flocks of South American Terns foraging at offshore kelp beds, and our second steamer-duck species: the Falklands Steamer-Duck. After we were finished at Leopard Beach, we all jumped into a Zodiac and enjoyed a leisurely shore cruise. A Falklands Steamer-Duck performed its namesake wing-paddle across the surface of the water, and we saw Magellanic Cormorants diving in and around the kelp beds. We arrived at the settlement and headed toward one of the buildings where the island’s owners, the McGills, had laid out an impressive spread of cakes, cookies and assorted desserts to accompany our tea. Then it was back to the zodiacs to return to the ship. On the way we observed many Kelp Geese, pure white males and brown-and-black-patterned females, feeding on the exposed rocks along with Magellanic Oystercatchers.

After lunch we once again left the ship, venturing onto Saunders Island at “The Neck.” We arrived on the beach and beelined to the opposite shore, hoping to witness the spectacle of Southern Rockhopper Penguins emerging from the sea to climb to their colony, but alas, the incoming tide cut us short. Still, we enjoyed seeing the Snowy Sheathbills and Dolphin Gulls along the shoreline, and the nesting Gentoo Penguins along with our first King



Penguins (including a few “oakum boys” – last year’s chicks covered in brown down). The chicks were gathered near the water’s edge trying to keep cool on a rather warm day. We also climbed the hillside above the rocky surf to visit another Black-browed Albatross colony and get much closer looks at Southern Rockhopper Penguins at their colony on the island. Before returning to the ship, we visited the local gift shop – a collection of souvenirs displayed in the back of a land rover on the beach.

Sun., Nov. 6 Falklands and At Sea

Passed through The Narrows, we entered Stanley Harbor to visit the capitol of the Falkland Islands for our first and only landing of the day. We snagged a ride to town in our zodiac shuttle, and each of us made the best of our last connection with civilization, doing some shopping, sight-seeing, internet connecting and birding on a breezy Sunday morning. Lunch was back aboard the *Hondius* as we slowly backtracked through The Narrows just as another ship made its’ way into the harbor. The winds were gaining strength as we headed out to sea towards the island of South Georgia, generating a bit more motion on the *Hondius* than we thus far had been accustomed to. The usual accompaniment of seabirds included Royal Albatrosses, Southern Fulmars and a mix of Antarctic and Slender-billed Prions joined us for the afternoon.

Mon., Nov. 7 At Sea

Our first full day at sea was mostly foggy, making observations difficult. On the bright side, what birds we did see were quite close! Our transit took us over an undersea canyon, and we encountered a few species associated with deeper waters including quite a few Atlantic Petrels. One White-headed Petrel was observed on the water too. We also had a rather large gathering of at least 13 Light-mantled Albatross, weaving their way around the ship in the fog along with our more usual compliment of petrels and prions. Numerous lectures throughout the day by the ship’s staff kept us entertained and informed.

Tues., Nov. 8. At Sea

Overnight we crossed the Antarctic Convergence, meaning the waters around the ship were now colder than when we went to bed, and the abundance and variety of bird life reflected that change. We awoke to sunny



skies and light winds and were soon treated to new birds like the Snow Petrel, Blue Petrel and the South Georgia Diving-Petrel, the southern hemisphere's version of an auklet. Antarctic Prions and Royal and Wandering Albatrosses were also observed. The highlight of the day was passing by Shag Rocks, a small assemblage of rocky islands that jut from the ocean and are covered in nesting South Georgia Shags (hence the name). It was indeed a rare sunny observation of this landmark, and soon after we passed the rocks, the fog settled in again. We spent part of the day conducting biosecurity efforts to ensure that we hadn't inadvertently brought errant seeds or other contaminants to the island of South Georgia. The ship staff conducted more lectures, and we prepared for our first full day in South Georgia.

Wed., Nov. 9 South Georgia

Our first landing on South Georgia Island was at Grytviken, the old whaling base where the government offices are located. We made land at the site of a graveyard where Ernest Shackleton is buried. We paid our respects, offering a toast to "The Boss" as our first South Georgia Pipits foraged in the grass at our feet. This former industrial whaling base, the site of so much death during its days of operation, is now home to a wide variety of iconic wildlife of South Georgia. King Penguins and Antarctic fur seals now litter the beach, and southern elephant seals loll along the shoreline. South Georgia Pintails were foraging in the shallow wetlands, and Antarctic Terns were nesting amidst the now ancient and rusting machinery. Our initial impression of South Georgia was only a primer for what we would experience later in the week. For now, we made our way through the remnants of the machinery toward the restored buildings, now home to an impressive museum that highlights both the human and natural history of the island. The restored Lutheran Church at the base of the cliffs was a popular spot to visit, and we also stopped by the post office and gift shop to mail post cards and purchase souvenirs.

Our afternoon landing was just down the coast at Fortuna Bay, and although not the first King Penguins we had observed, this was our first King Penguin colony. We hiked a short distance inland to a relatively small King Penguin colony just as the sun disappeared behind the steep rocky walls to the west. It felt nice to stretch our



legs, climbing to the top of a rocky bluff that overlooked the colony. We shared the path with small groups of penguins making their own way to and from the colony. Small meltwater ponds along the trail were filled with South Georgia Pintails and a few South Georgia Pipits were observed in the tussock grass along the edge of the bay as Light-mantled Albatross soared effortlessly overhead. We came across a large reindeer antler, a remnant of the animals brought from Norway by the early whalers as a source of meat that have since been removed in an effort to rid the island of exotic animals and restore its delicate ecology. It was a sensory overload day, and yet the island was just getting started with us.

Thurs., Nov. 10 South Georgia | Gold Harbor

Our South Georgia experience ramped up this morning with a visit to Gold Harbor where we had an early morning landing at an even larger King Penguin colony. The cast of characters was roughly the same as our previous landings, but the numbers and activity were mind-boggling, and the backdrop was stunning. As we departed the zodiacs at the beach, we had to maneuver around several elephant seals in the surf alongside gangs of King Penguins arriving to and leaving the beach. As we made our way alongside a meltwater stream, we were torn where to look. Look down and marvel at the multitude of colorful, loud King Penguins and their fuzzy brown chicks; or gaze up at the awesome glacier, ever so slowly pouring over the bare granite ridge with the towering snow-glazed mountains in the background. On our left, the bull elephant seals were hammering out a disagreement. To our right, the light blue waterfalls cascaded from the tussock-covered cliffs. It was all so overwhelming and wonderful!

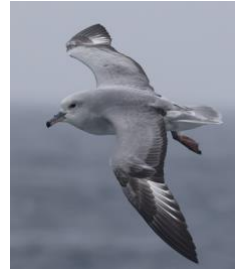
Eventually it was our turn to leave the beach, and we all jumped in a zodiac and made our way north toward the rocky walls of Gold Head. From there, we explored the small channels and kelp beds at the base of the cliffs where we had the opportunity to witness Leopard Seals hunting along the edge of the kelp beds. Northern Giant Petrels squabbled over the remains of a penguin, while a couple of Cape Petrels picked at the smaller bits and pieces floating on the water. As we ducked into a shallow cove between towering cliffs, a few South Georgia



Pipits sang and chased each other, and the rest of the world disappeared from our thoughts. And that was just the morning! We spent the afternoon zodiac-touring in the sheltered confines of the steep-walled harbor known as Godthul where we watched a progression of Giant Petrels, both Northern and Southern, feast on an elephant seal pup that had recently died. Once again, the scenery was impressive with tussock-covered cliffs and waterfalls. Just to the north of the harbor was a Macaroni Penguin colony on the appropriately named Rookery Point. Since this was likely our only chance to see this species, we ventured out beyond the shelter of the harbor, riding the rolling swells in our small group of zodiacs to reach the large slabs of rock on the shoreline where the penguins were landing. We watched a small group of Macs at the shoreline and could see many more at the colony further up the hill. The photographers in our group had to time their shutters to the rhythms of the large swells that caused our boats to rise and fall considerably. Then we retraced our route back to the ship, had dinner, recapped our day and called it a night. What an adventure!

Fri., Nov.11 South Georgia | Salisbury Plain

The winds altered our original plans a bit and we found ourselves anchored in Rosita Bay in the morning. The staff had established a loop train inland from the fur seal-covered beach and into a series of low rocky tussock covered ridges. We were greeted on the beach by a South Georgia Pipit and as we moved off through the tussock grass, we realized there were many more at this spot. A few South Georgia Pintails were also moving along the small stream we followed. Antarctic fur seals were the main attraction here. The beach was littered with them, all males awaiting the arrival of the females and the commencement of the breeding season. Our afternoon stop was another, even larger, King Penguin colony at Salisbury Plain, the second largest on the island with about 250,000 birds. The colony occupies a streambed at the head of a broad outwash plain along the coast. The route from our landing spot looped around a few groups of loitering King Penguins, eventually taking us to the edge of the colony. Seeing that many large birds is impressive, and taking in the sights, sounds and smells certainly impressed us. The clear skies also provided views of the island and the nearby Grace Glacier,



named after the wife of Robert Cushman Murphy, the pioneering ornithologist of South Georgia. We shared the beach with elephant seals as we waited for our zodiac, entertained by the Antarctic Terns foraging in the surf.

Sat., Nov.12 South Georgia

We were up early the following morning (yes, 0400!) for to experience South Georgia's largest King Penguin colony at sunrise. Looking out into this overwhelming mass of King Penguins, perhaps 450,000 birds including chicks, was an unforgettable moment. King Penguins have a long breeding cycle, and we were at the colony before last year's chicks had fully developed their adult feathers, so there was a mix of young, rusty-brown penguins, adult penguins starting their breeding efforts and molting sub-adults. We returned to the ship for breakfast and then it was our turn to go ashore. Once again, the staff had established a trail taking us further inland to the colony, and we made our way along a series of rocky lateral moraines where the feathers from molting penguins covered the ground like snow. The clouds had disappeared and although it was quite windy, we enjoyed sunny skies as we hiked towards the colony. We arrived at a high vantage point overlooking the colony that gave us another perspective on the enormity of this gathering of birds. Along the way we also found a few pairs of breeding Brown Skuas and more South Georgia Pipits too. Once back aboard the ship, we made our way south, away from this spectacular place and around the southeastern edge of South Georgia. Then turning the corner, we were on our way to Antarctica!

Sun., Nov.13 At Sea

The increased motion of the ship that we'd experienced the previous day and night mellowed out a bit this day, and the stabilizers on the *Hondius* helped out a lot too. A few whales were spotted as we made our way southwest towards the South Orkney Islands, and the mix of birds had already become familiar with Northern and Southern Giant Petrels, Cape Petrels and Black-browed Albatross the most numerous. However, some new birds filtered in as well: Antarctic Prions and Slender-billed Prions were in the company of Blue Petrels, and a lone Arctic Tern made an appearance. There were plenty of staff lectures to keep us occupied, and with the experiences from our days in South Georgia still fresh in our thoughts, it was also a time to reflect and prepare for our coming experiences on the Antarctic Peninsula.

Mon., Nov. 14 At Sea | South Orkney Islands



In the morning following mandatory briefings and biosecurity cleanings, we embarked on a quick offshore tour of Laurie Island, the largest island in the South Orkney group. On our approach, penguins appeared, porpoising through the water. Some of them were Chinstrap Penguins, new for our trip. Icebergs too were more plentiful, and the ship wove a careful path through the behemoths on its way toward Scotia Bay. Each berg was its own ice-island and many hosted small groups of resting penguins including one with all three species of *pygoscelid* penguins – Adelie (our first observation of this species and the last species of penguin we would find on our trip), Chinstrap, and Gentoo. We made a quick loop through Scotia Bay and waved at the Argentine base, Orcadas. Along the rocky shoreline we could see scattered Chinstrap Penguin colonies with their telltale pinkish guano stains. Exiting the bay, slaloming our way through icebergs, more than 100 Cape Petrels swirled along the ice cliffs of a large iceberg as Snow Petrels cruised the waterline edges. It was certainly another world experience. We eventually rounded the southeast corner of Laurie Island, continuing our way to Antarctica.

Tues. Nov. 15 At Sea | South Shetland Islands

Tuesday was another full day at sea in less-than-ideal conditions. Our course shifted to the north, taking past Elephant Island to Point Wild, the location where Frank Wild and twenty-one of Sir Ernest Shackleton's Endurance crew waited after their ship sank in the Weddell Sea while Shackleton and five members of the expedition including Tom Crean, sought help on King George Island. We had hoped to explore the point in the Zodiacs, but that plan disappeared into the dense fog that surrounded the ship and Point Wild. We had to settle for glimpses of the point from the ship and a round of hot chocolate on the front deck.

Wed. Nov. 16 Antarctica | Penguin Island | South Shetland Islands

The wind that had been dogging us all the way from South Georgia further impacted our original plans today. Arriving to the South Shetland Islands that cap the edge of the Antarctic Peninsula, conditions were judged too extreme to land at Penguin Island, which lies just off the coast of King George Island. Instead, our Expedition Leader, Pippa Lowe, decided to attempt a landing at Half Moon Island, home to a large colony of breeding Chinstrap Penguins. As we made our way past Admiralty Bay on King George Island, we spotted a large number of fin whales. Not much later an even rarer observation occurred: blue whales! Four of these largest creatures on earth were moving through and the captain deftly positioned the ship allowing us to watch them surfacing.

We arrived at Half Moon Island in the afternoon. After the first groups headed out in the zodiacs, conditions worsened considerably, and everyone was pulled off the island ASAP. The wind had won again, and we had to



settle for distant views of the Chinstraps. Even though the wind had trumped our plans to make an Antarctic landing, the Blue Whales were a darn good consolation prize!

Thurs., Nov. 17 Antarctica | Portal Point and Danco Island

This morning dawned relatively calm and clear with a few clouds lingering over the peaks surrounding Charlotte Bay. We arrived here to make a landing at Portal Point on the continent of Antarctica. The staff located a suitable spot to access the land, and we donned our snowshoes and headed out to explore the point. Not much wildlife here, a few Kelp Gulls, Antarctic Terns and Antarctic Shags, however, the scenery was epic. Huge icebergs (one with a hole through the middle of it) were backed by towering, snow-covered cliffs and high ridges on a beautiful sunny day. Our first landing in Antarctica was spectacular! We toured the area in our zodiac, experiencing the ice up close and cruising by some larger bergs at a respectful distance. We were entertained by a few Chinstrap Penguins foraging in the bay and even lounging around the zodiac for a bit. Returning to the ship, we pushed further south to Danco Point, home to a large Gentoo Penguin colony. We cruised the bay in zodiacs getting good looks at Antarctic Shags and some lounging Weddell seals. When it was our turn onshore, we landed near the colony, making use of steps carved into the snow to reach a comfortable place where we could put our snowshoes on. This year there was so much snow that the penguins were having a hard time finding the pebbles they use to construct their nests, and most of them were standing stoically on the snow, waiting for the melt to arrive.

Some of us ventured to the top of the hill that provided wonderful views of the surrounding landscape. One Adelie Penguin became a bit of a celebrity when he arrived at the shoreline and slowly made his way into the colony. This was the closest look that many of us had of this species for the trip. Danco was also the spot for our Antarctic swim, and Frederica joined about 20 others for a quick dip into the freezing waters before returning to the ship for a nice warm shower!



Fri., Nov. 18 Antarctica | Cuverville Island | Paradise Bay

Our morning at Cuverville Island, home to a large colony of Gentoo Penguins, was impacted by our old friend the wind that was blowing directly into the landing site, making landing too difficult. We settled for a zodiac cruise on the lee side of the island where we enjoyed watching Gentoos cross the snow-covered islands, searching for a way down the steep snow to reach the water as Kelp Gulls and South Polar Skuas hung around the inter-tidal areas. A few Weddell seals loafed on the ice, and many Antarctic Shags populated small icebergs and exposed cliffs near the island. Snow was falling as we returned to the ship, and we spotted a humpback whale just off the island.

We enjoyed lunch as we sailed to Paradise Bay, anchoring at the small Argentine base known as Admirante Brown. Cruising the bay by zodiac, the snow let up and as the skies cleared the awesome extent of the mountains lining the bay was revealed. The interplay of light on the snow and towering rocks provided us a continually changing tapestry to enjoy. Some of the group landed at the base, hiking the steep hill through the Gentoo Penguins to enjoy the views from that vantage point. We also glimpsed a crabeater seal, the only one of this species on our trip.

Sat., Nov. 19 Antarctica | Cierva Cove | Bransfield Straight

Our last day in Antarctica started with a zodiac cruise around Cierva Cove in the fog and snow, which provided to be a dramatic setting for iceberg viewing. We didn't see a lot of wildlife this morning, but once again Antarctica delivered with the scenery. Navigating the swells through the bergs, we watched as the waves washed around and over the twisted ice sculptures. A few Wilson's Storm-Petrels pattered around as our ship turned north across the Bransfield Straight and into the Drake Passage. A few humpback whales were spotted, and one even breached a few times as we slid past. A few Wilson's Storm-Petrels pattered around as our ship turned north across the Bransfield Straight and into the Drake Passage and we watched Antarctica disappear into the fog and snow behind us.



Sun., Nov. 20 Drake Passage

We experienced the moodiness of the Drake Passage today. The wind made its presence known and the waves responded. The *Hondius* once again proved to be a stable ride as we rolled our way north. We were accompanied by Light-mantled, Gray-headed and Black-browed Albatross and an assortment of prions and petrels as we steadily sailed northward throughout the day and into the night.

Mon., Nov. 21 Entrance to the Beagle Channel

Calmer seas were welcomed as we continued our relentless northern journey. The same suite of birds was around the ship for most of the day, and later in the day we could see land in the distance. Arriving at the continental shelf, the bird life changed dramatically with large feeding flocks of Black-browed Albatross, Imperial Cormorants, Sooty Shearwaters, South American Terns and Chilean Skuas as we entered the mouth of the Beagle Channel. The sun peaked through at the end of the day, delivering a delightful sunset for our last evening onboard the *Hondius*.

Tues. Nov. 22 Ushiaia | Tierra del Fuego National Park

We woke just offshore in Ushuaia and slowly made our way to the pier alongside a number of other tour ships. Petrels and albatross were replaced by gulls and terns. Kelp Gulls, Dolphin Gulls and Chilean Skuas dominated the skies, and as we pulled alongside the pier, we surmised that Argentina was playing in the World Cup since many of the shore hands were huddled around their phones, occasionally cheering.

We disembarked and said our goodbyes to fellow travelers and the wonderful Oceanwide staff that made our journey so memorable. Our local guide, Esteban Daniels, met us at the ship and we were soon off, our white world suddenly turned vivid green! Becky joined us and by 10:00 we were at Tierra del Fuego National Park, strolling along Rio Lapataia where we observed a few Great Grebes. An Austral Parakeet called from a tree across the river, and we found a few Flying Steamer-Ducks. Martin called out "woodpecker!" and we were all able to get good looks at a female Magellanic Woodpecker. Soon a male joined her, and we were treated to a



nice show as they worked up and down nearby trees giving their characteristic double-knock drums. This was followed with a nice walk through the beech forest along Lago Roca where we found White-throated Tree Runners, Thorn-tailed Rayoditos, some obliging Black-faced Ibis and House Wrens along with blooming dog orchids. After a nice lunch, we continued birding and found a few Flightless Steamer-Ducks in the bay, which completed our steamer-duck grand slam! Other nice finds included White-crested Elaenia, Tufted Tit-Tyrant and the highlight for most of us: Austral Pygmy-Owl calling from the top of a beach tree! We made one more stop on our way back to town along the Rio Pipa and found many Ashy-headed Geese mixed in with a large flock of Upland Geese. A Crested Caracara lingered nearby, and Chilean Swallows swooped over us as we hiked. A sudden shower chased us back to the van and we loaded up and returned to town. Martin headed to the airport to catch his flight, and the group settled into the hotel before gathering for our farewell dinner.

Wed., Nov. 23

Tierra del Fuego extension | Giribaldi Pass and drive to Rio Grande

We began the morning by saying goodbye to Steve, Linda, Sue, Frederica and Vicky. The rest of us jumped into the van and headed north, winding our way on Route 3 through the beach forests at the southern extent of the Andes Mountains until we reached the top at Garibaldi Pass. Here we pulled off the highway and strapped on our hiking boots for the hike above treeline in search of White-bellied Seedsnipe. It was a tough slog up the steep slope, and we had to stop a few times to catch our breath. Above the trees it was a bit windy (just kidding, it was very windy!) when we spotted some Ochre-naped Ground-Tyrants in the rocks. We spread out across the slope and found Yellow-bridled Finches, Dark-faced Ground-Tyrants and Buff-winged Cinclodes along the way, but no seedsnipe. Just as it was starting to seem like we weren't going to find seedsnipe that day, Fred heard something. We couldn't figure out what it was until Esteban exclaimed, "seedsnipe!" And there, just a little downslope on a small rocky ridge, were two White-bellied Seedsnipe.

WE found a spot out of the wind for a quick lunch and then made our way down to the van. Just as we got to the tree line, a White-throated Caracara flew along the ridge and a short while later we found an Andean Condor floating above us on the wind. Continuing north to Rio Grande we saw several guanacos in the grasslands along



the highway. When we reached Rio Grande, we stopped at Laguna del los Patos, a small urban nature reserve just across the street from our hotel, and were treated to a good selection of waterfowl and shorebirds including Coscoroba Swans, Chilean Flamingos, Red Shovelers, Chiloe Wigeon and Crested Ducks. We also had a large flock of Hudsonian Godwits and Red Knots fly over. In the uplands near the water, we found a couple of Two-banded Plovers and Rufous-chested Dotterels. We had a quick dinner in downtown Rio Grande and then headed to a local shop where many of us purchased gaucho hats, which are designed to stay on your head in strong winds! I think we all slept well that night!

Thurs., Nov. 24 Grasslands west of Rio Grande

The wind. It continued to blow hard again this morning. However, we made the best of the day and found some great birds. We headed northwest out of Rio Grande into the grasslands of Tierra del Fuego. Our first stop was at a formerly large lake called Laguna de los Cisne (Swan Lake). A persistent drought has dried up most of the shallows, and the remaining patches of water were a result of efforts to pump water into the lake to keep the dust from the dry lakebed from blowing into Rio Grande. Our target here was the Magellanic Plover, an odd shorebird, the only member in its family and likely related to sheathbills. At our first stop at the lake, we were fortunate to find two right away, and then more down the road. We also found a Least Seedsnipe with chicks, on the shoulder of the road. Other new species included the Correndera Pipit, Patagonian Yellow-Finches and Common Miners.

We arrived at an estancia where Esteban received permission to enter. Baird's Sandpipers popped out from along the road, and we found several Tawny-throated Dotterels. We continued exploring the backroads of Tierra del Fuego and were rewarded with an observation of more Patagonia foxes and guanacos. Headed north along the coast from Rio Grande, we stopped at a small pond and discovered a flock of Wilson's Phalaropes. Our final bird for the day was a majestic Peregrine Falcon. We enjoyed our dinner at the hotel restaurant and recapped our day before heading off to bed.



Fri., Nov. 25 Drive to Ushuaia

Another windy day, our last in Rio Grande. We found a few Long-tailed Meadowlarks and a small flock of Whimbrels in the grass as well as a couple of patches of small yellow orchids known as Zapatilla de la Virgen, or Sand Lady Slipper. Along the shoreline we found large flocks of Crested Ducks and Hudsonian Godwits hunkered down against the wind, and Baird's and White-rumped Sandpipers foraged at our feet. Southern Giant-Petrels, our old friends from our time on the ship, cruised the breakers just offshore. We headed back to the van and made our way toward Ushuaia, stopping in the small town of Tolhuin to purchase lunch, then continued exploring the backroads. We ducked into the beech trees along the south shore of the lake at Laguna del Indio and found a nice little spot to eat our lunch but had to cut it short when a rare thunder shower moved through. We made a short detour to visit one of the least aesthetically pleasing locations of the trip, but a great place to see birds – the Ushuaia dump. As we drove up the narrow road along the Olivia River, we found Black-crowned Night-Herons hanging out along the river and a Turkey Vulture joined the throngs of Kelp Gulls and Chilean Skuas flying overhead. Once we got to the edge of the dump, we watched both immature and adult Black-chested Buzzard-Eagles swirling around with the gulls and skuas along with many White-throated Caracaras. On the way back through Ushuaia, we stopped by a small urban park along the coast where some of us were able to see a Magellanic Snipe along with Crested Ducks, Red Shovelers, Dolphin Gulls and Baird's and White-rumped Sandpipers. We returned to our hotel to wash up before venturing downtown for our last dinner.

Sat., Nov. 26 Departure from Ushuaia

We gathered for one last group photo in front of the hotel with all of us wearing our gaucho hats and Esteban in his full gaucho garb. A quick round of goodbyes and we parted ways, heading back home. After nearly a month of traveling we were grateful for our adventures and the diversity of life and places we were privileged to see.

Photo Credits: Group on Skiff (John Carlson - JC), Black-browed Albatross (Steve Parrish - SP), Gentoo Penguins (SP), Southern Fulmar (JC), King Penguins in St. Andrew's Bay (JC), Elephant Seals (SP), Chilean Flamingos (SP), Give Way To The Penguins Sign (JC), Magellanic Penguin (SP), Boarding! (JC), View from the Ship (JC), White-banded Mockingbird (JC), Gentoo Egg (SP), Falklands (SP), Striated Caracara (JC), Imperial Shag (SP), Rockhopper (JC), Black-browed Albatross (JC), Falkland Steamer (SP), Dolphin Gull (JC), Identifying Birds (JC), Birding on deck (JC), Shag Rocks (SP), Grytv (SP), Antarctic Tern (JC), Lenticular (SP), Feeding (SP), Group On Skiff (JC), King Penguin (JC), Good Harbor (JC), Leopard Seal (SP), Giant Petrel (SP), Fur Seals (SP), Feast (SP), South Georgia Pintail (SP), King Penguins Swimming (SP), Iceberg at South Orkneys (SP), Blue Petrel (JC), Southern Fulmar (SP), Antarctic Shag (SP), Weddel Seal (JC), Blue Whale (JC), Scenic (SP), Smiles on Ice (JC), Weddell Seal (SP), Chinstrap Penguin (SP), Penguins (SP), Antarctic Shag (SP), Light-mantled Albatross (SP), Sunset at sea (JC), Light-mantled Albatross (JC), Magellanic Woodpecker (JC), Royal Albatross (SP), Taking a break (JC), Scenic (JC), White-crested Elaenia (SP), Scenic from the road (JC), Shearing station (JC), Group (JC), Black-chested Buzzard Eagles (JC)