

Ultimate Patagonia: Pumas, Glaciers, Birds & More | Trip Report | Nov. 5 – 19, 2024

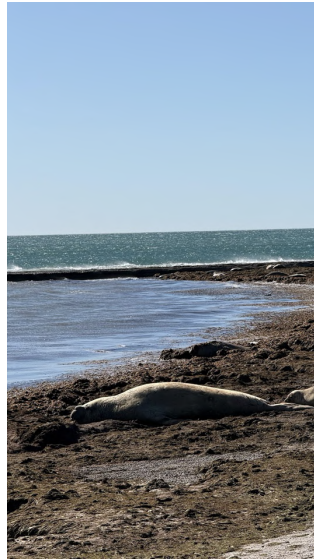


With Guide Xavier Munoz, NJ Host Julie Fannon and clients Peggy, Kathy, Rebecca, Barb, Meg, Ron, and John



Tues., Nov. 5 Arrivals | Costanera Sur

Julie, John, Rebecca, and Barb all arrived a day early. The full group arrived today in time for a hearty lunch of plentiful meats and salads; 2-inch-thick steaks, multiple filets of beef, breads, chimichurri, eggplant, and more. Then, we were off to bird Costanera Sur. The boardwalk was closed today but the malecon was bustling as we slowly birded, quickly picking up species. Hits were the very tiny baby Pied-billed Grebe (still downy and yellow),



a Wattled Jacana, Common Gallinules, and a Rufescent Tiger Heron that stole the show right from the start. Xavier called in a Thin-billed Woodcreeper across the road, and we saw the bird of the Argentina, the Rufous Hornero, which builds nests that look like a pizza oven! Chimango Caracaras circled all afternoon - a few Crested Caracaras too - and a fly-by Harris's Hawk were our raptors for the afternoon. Ducks included Cinnamon Teal, White-headed Whistling Ducks, the ever-present Rosy-billed Pochard, and even a Red Shoveler.

We were all ready for a quick and light dinner at the same lovely restaurant where we had our lunch. Checklist, wine, ensalada, and empanadas were on the menu and then it was off to bed early in preparation for our witching hour wakeup call tomorrow morning.

Wed., Nov. 6 Flight to Trelew | Isla Escondida | Punta Tombo | Puerto Pirámides

We were up early, early for a pre-dawn flight to Trelew; direct flights can be few and far between and we were glad to spend our time in the air as a quick flight and not an all-dayer. We landed and by 6:00 AM were on the road to a very "happening" gas station/café for breakfast. A highlight was Peggy's accidental breakfast lasagna! Afterwards, we were on the road to Isla Escondida for the king of the beaches here - the Southern Elephant Seal. We turned quickly off the paved road in Trelew onto a gravel road that worked its way up and over the steppes; each one we thought, surely, we'll see the ocean once we top this one. But the drive in was eventful, first being caught off guard by a massive European Hare, quickly followed by a Molina's Hog-nosed Skunk. A Lesser Rhea squiggled across our path, and the first of many, many guanacos were spotted by John.

We crested our final steppe and the Atlantic appeared; before we knew it, we were standing on the beach behind some wildly impressive Southern Elephant Seals. Many babies and immatures were enjoying the sunshine and making some impressive noises and the males ... wow. Wow! They were simply massive. Ron was taking a picture of one male and realized the boulder he thought was next to it was actually another male! We saw some very cooperative pairs of White-headed Steamer Ducks and pretty Two-banded Plovers, Chilean Swifts, and others right along the beach. A highlight was the lone Austral Negroito.

Then, it was off to the famous Punta Tombo Magellanic penguin colony, and it did not disappoint. The penguins could be seen right from the start standing next to or lying in the sun next to their burrows. There was quite a long walk through the colony on a well-maintained boardwalk that offered great views of not only the penguins, but also some very close guanacos, some large European Hares running through the brush, and a Chimango



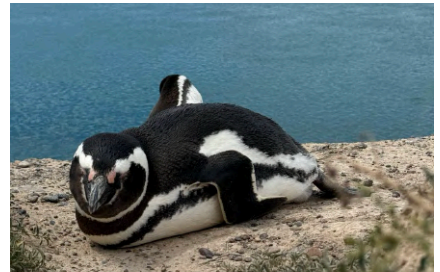
Caracara that was defending her nest right along the boardwalk (this was at waist height and you could see all three of the eggs). The boardwalk led to a lovely overlook on the ocean, where penguins and Kelp Gulls held the shoreline, Great Grebes were on the water, and a fly-by of American Oystercatchers rounded out the sightings. We enjoyed a quick lunch and a visit to the well-done visitor's center before heading back to Trelew and beyond to Puerto Pirámides.

We had a stop at Puerto Madryn where we were all very lucky to see a flock of Burrowing Parakeets that put on quite a show, perching quickly, then flying over the highway and landing on some shrubs where everyone hopped out of the van to get a good look. We continued on to Puerto Pirámides, our home for the next three nights. It was fascinating to drive along the narrow isthmus and see the two bays before coming out onto the main part of the Valdes Peninsula. A quick Gray Fox ran in front of the van, and everyone got good views of that wonderful bushy tail, while a Variable Hawk put on a lovely show on top of a power pole. Its feathers looked quite fluffy and lush, and we all had a nice long look. We rolled into the quaint beachy-like town of Puerto Pirámides and settled into our comfortable hotel, Hotel Del Nómade. We enjoyed homemade pizza and flan, a quick checklist, then off we went to bed. It was a long but rewarding first full day.

Thurs., Nov. 7 Whale Watching | Sea Lions | Punta Norte

We were up and ready to go this morning, just popping around the corner and down to the beach where we explored along the coastline while the tide was out as we waited for our whale watching trip to commence. We watched as Southern Giant Petrels soared and Kelp Gulls too. The petrels were attracted to a large whale carcass further down the shore.

The water is shallow enough in the bay that the boats are docked on trailers and then pushed into the water with a large tractor. So off we went, quickly edging along a nice Sea Lion colony, where we had good views of both American and Blackish Oystercatchers, our first gorgeous Snowy Sheathbills, and plenty of cormorants. Then, it was further out into the bay to spot our first whales. This was the end of the season, so it wasn't quite whale soup, but an increased boat speed indicated they heard on the radio that there was a sighting, and we quickly got looks at our first Southern Right Whale and her calf. They spouted and surfaced for a time, then we saw flukes up and that was that. The wind was high, and the water was choppy, but that didn't stop us from finding the next pair, which blew and surfaced quite a bit and put on a good show. The winds were high enough



that at the end of the trip, the captain got word that it was time to come in, so off we sped into port (there was plenty of spray, so we were glad for those thick jackets and rain pants).

After lunch and finally (finally) catching Kathy up to the group (hooray!), we were off to Punta Norte to look for more Elephant Seals, and surprise! We saw a small group of Orcas off in the distance putting on a show. Wow! Full body jumping and white bellies were on display. They were far out, but it was a real treat to see them. We saw our first gorgeous male Mourning Sierra Finch with his deep brownish black chest, and Kathy got her Diuca Finch, though we dipped on the Tufted Tit-Tyrant. A wildly far south Great Egret flew overhead just as we were about to load up in the van.

Dinner was in the most popular spot in town, and we were all ready for bed anticipating an early start in the morning.

Fri., Nov. 8 Full Day on Peninsula Valdez

Off we went after a lovely breakfast at our hotel for a full day out on the southeastern side of the peninsula. We enjoyed multiple stops and walks on the nearly empty road, where Xavier and our local guide Ruben have had good success. And bingo, right off the bat, we saw a stunning Long-tailed Meadowlark perched up on a “tree” singing his heart out. Then, way up on a pole, a fat little Burrowing Owl, who didn’t want to come in second, promptly flew to the ground right across the road from us and then up onto a fence post. What a fun look! We got the Tufted Tit-tyrant here at this stop, and even a brand-new baby guanaco tagging along with its mother. A Gray Fox darted across the road when we first came to a stop.

We made another stop at a sheep field that had the wide white stretch of the salt flat behind it, making for lovely views. The Tawny-throated Dotterel was there again, along with several lapwings and far off, a Lesser Rhea. Raptors were in the air and put on a nice show here too! Next, off we went to a lovely ocean overlook where we had the chance to see Southern Elephant Seals once again, as well as American Oystercatchers, Kelp Gull, and Southern Giant Skua. A neon green Rawson Lizard did pushups right below us. Then, lunch was interrupted by our first Big Hairy Armadillo of the trip, followed quickly by a second who was scooting around the parking lot.



We went to another stunning overlook for Kathy to get her Magellanic Penguins, and they were right there, just happy to be enjoying the sun.

We crossed back over toward the isthmus a bit for a stop at another shortly grazed sheep area where we had great looks at Maras and found some very tricky earthcreepers. Then, back on the road for the short trip back to Puerto Pirámides where we all enjoyed some free time to walk around town, buy some trinkets, and a few of us went to see the dead Southern Right Whale that was on the beach about a half mile away. Checklist with snacks (tonight, grilled cheese), was quickly followed by dinner on our last night in this fun little whale town. Tomorrow we would head south.

Sat., Nov. 9 Bird Island | Trelew for Flamingos | Flight to the Bottom of the World!

We said goodbye to Puerto Pirámides this morning and headed toward the isthmus and mainland. Our first stop was Bird Island where we had good looks at Kelp Gulls, an American and Blackish Oystercatcher, and a fantastic island with a huge rookery of nesting Imperial Cormorants. While we were on the platform scanning, Xavier perked up, listening, and quickly started scanning for a bird he'd never seen here before: a Guira Cuckoo! It flew over us more than once and landed nicely on a treetop nearby where we were quick to get a scope on it. What a fun bird!

Then, off we went, picking up Fork-tailed Flycatcher, then a little further along the way Rebecca shouted that she'd seen the Carbonated Sierra Finch. Driver Ruben hit the brakes, and we all went scrambling out, and that sweet little finch perched RIGHT in front of us; putting on a show, posing for pictures and occasionally flying up just to flutter down with song. What a treat! As we left, a guanaco ran next to the van and Ruben said it was going 50km per hour.

A quick stop at a wetland got us on the very special Wren-like Rushbird, a pretty White-tufted Grebe, and wow, a Spot-flanked Gallinule - very rare for the area. Then, "vámonos a los flamincos!"; we found an incredible number of gorgeous Chilean Flamingos on an impressive salt lake where we were lucky enough to be able to walk out into the dry lake bed for closer looks. Black-necked Stilts were in the dozens. A Burrowing Owl flew from fence post to fence post, calling out at us to get off his patch. Then, another quick stop yielded probably a hundred more flamingos, and the small lake was thick with waders including more stilts, cute little Wilson's Phalaropes, Lesser Yellowlegs, and Yellow-billed Teals.



We enjoyed a quick lunch at a fun little place in Trelew, where they brought us all a delicious salad and steak before we headed off to the airport and said goodbye to Ruben and Ruben. They were great, and we were lucky to have them on our Valdes Peninsula portion of the trip.

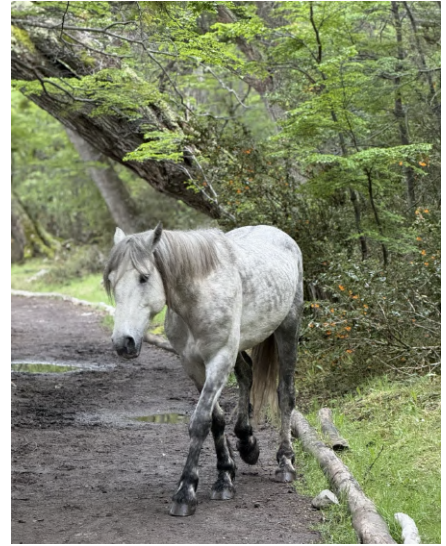
A very full flight to Ushuaia got us there in time to see sunset, and it was stunning. Our hotel was cozy and overlooked the bay, and we enjoyed dinner and the checklist watching the dusk fade. A few of us at the end of a very late dinner snuck outside to find the Southern Cross — success! But it was COLD! So, we counted it seen and went back inside to our cozy beds.

Sun., Nov. 10 Boat Trip on the Beagle Channel | Owl Prowl

After breakfast at our hotel that overlooked the Beagle Channel, we set off for our five-hour catamaran cruise through the Beagle Channel. We boarded easily and settled in at our group table inside the pretty catamaran. The boat was nice and even had a little place where you could buy snacks and freshly made coffees, a treat. As we waited to set sail, an obliging Imperial Cormorant put on a diving show right next to the boat and it was fun to watch as it dove and resurfaced again and again. Then, off we went, and we were immediately met by beautiful, grey Southern Fulmars coasting next to and behind the boat, as well as extra-large Northern Giant Petrels. First stop was a seabird nesting island that was covered in Imperial Cormorants, Sea Lions, and the occasional Snowy Sheathbill.

We collected more of the same cruising birds to our next stop, another nesting island for the cormorants, but this time, we were looking for the Blackish Cinclodes, and right off the bat, we found one ... which landed right on the boat deck and stayed with the boat for the duration of the time we were in this area. We all got good looks. Then, it was off toward the penguin island, and yes, we picked up our first of many Black-browed Albatrosses. The first two were on the water, but the third picked up the air currents from our wake and cruised along behind us for a nice long time. It was fun to watch it surf the very top of the water.

We made it to penguin island and were greeted by a threesome of Gentoo Penguins standing guard on the pebble beach. They were impossibly cute, and it was very cool to see about 60 more of them the further up on the island laying on their carefully piled pebble nests. There were Magellanic Penguins here too, as well as two more new birds for the trip; Upland Goose and Magellanic Cormorant. A three-new-bird island!



Back on the boat, home we sped, and while we did spend some time in the nice, heated seating area, it was fun to head back out on deck to see what we could see. We all got Chile stamps on our passports, because we did cross into Chile while we were on the channel.

After lunch, we stopped at a local park to see some very cool waterfowl, specifically Crested Duck, which looks a bit underwhelming until we realized how it earned its name—we watched as a number of males squabbled, lifting their necks up and puffing out the crest behind their head. Then, we went on a true snipe hunt, and success! We found a very nearby Magellanic Snipe.

After dinner, a few of us went on a quick evening owl prowl. It was a muddy hike, but we all made it, and when we got to the owl area, like magic, there it was. As our guide Luciano prepared to call it in, it flew over us on the path and perched right up for incredible view. We were very lucky to see this Rufous-legged Owl; it's rare! And it was a life bird for all of us, including Xavier!

Mon., Nov. 11 Tierra del Fuego National Park

We spent the day in Tierra del Fuego National Park, and it was stunning. Breakfast was our standard 7:30, and then we loaded up into the van and made our way up through town, up the mountain, and into the park. The mountain vistas into the park were stunning, with ice cold mountain streams rushing past. For our first stop, we had a long walk, which started in a thicket of taller trees that had a barer understory and right away, we had our first good looks at Thorn-tailed Rayadito. They were feisty and hopped around and above us for good views. We also had a great view of a Patagonian Sierra Finch on the ground right in front of us, so pretty with its grey head and rusty yellow body. We walked along the river and to a lake; it was cold, with the wind whipping off the icy water. But as we tucked into the forest that was simply dripping with mosses and lichens, the wind was dampened, and it was quite pleasant (we were bundled well). We spent quite a bit of time trying to find our goal for this stop, the Magellanic Woodpecker, and while it didn't come to see us, we certainly saw an interesting array of birds including more Sierra finches, White-crested Elaenia and Black-chinned Siskin. Walking in beech forest felt very much like the rainforests of the Pacific Northwest, but much of the plant life was dwarfed because of the cold temperatures year-round. Wild/feral horses passed us occasionally on the trail, and our guide, Luciano, told us that often, horses are dumped in the park, and they breed, and the population is now nearly all wild. We had fun looks at White-throated Treerunner and watched as it worked its way up and down a tree, chucking bits of wood and lichen as it went. Barb called it a demolition crew.



We hiked back to the van and made a stop at the main park building that had a nice café and gift shop. Everyone enjoyed a little after-hike coffee or empanada and then we were off again, this time to another section of the park, where we were immediately greeted by Austral Parakeets. They were perched up on a dead tree (a product of the introduced population of beavers). The parakeets were noisy and easy to find, and we were all pleased! Then, just up the trail, we found it! A stunning female Magellanic Woodpecker, who flew between trees right near us a few times, then settled on another dead tree and gave us all really good, long looks. Through the scope, everyone got to see her little “top knot,” as John called it. Her plumage was beautiful, and we were all so happy. What a stop!

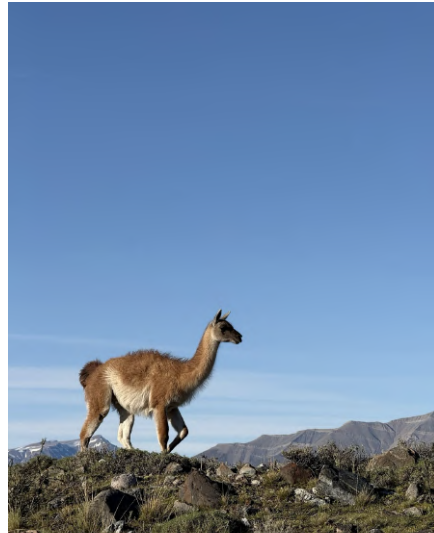
We hiked out to the road and then got into the van for a short ride to a lovely spot by the river right under the mountain for a picnic lunch. Yerba Mate was shared with Rebecca, and everyone else enjoyed a hot cup of coffee or tea with their sandwich. During lunch, two Black-faced Ibis landed and were so stunning through the scope. What a treat to see their golden necks shimmering in the sun. Then, we walked a bit from our lunch stumps and saw more Upland Geese, this time intermingled with Ashy-headed Geese, and they were both so beautiful together.

En route to the dump, Barb spotted our first White-throated Caracara right outside of the park, perched nicely on a fence post. We all got great looks. And then it was through to “the prettiest dump in the world” (it did have great mountain views and a view over the Beagle) where we instantly saw an immature Black-chested Buzzard-Eagle perch high on a pole, as well as all three caracaras, and hundreds of Kelp Gulls.

Our final stop on a very full day was at the old airport. Dark-bellied Cinclodes were our key bird here and a few very feisty ones were found pretty quickly and put on a show. We also saw Black-crowned Night-Herons and a Blackish Oystercatcher as we watched the cinclodes. We had a delicious dinner and a fun checklist, then it was off to bed.

Tues., Nov. 12 Travel Day to Chile

Today was a full travel day, leaving Ushuaia, Argentina, and taking a smooth, quick flight north to El Calafate, Argentina. It was interesting to leave such a lush region of the country and head back to a more “campo”-like ecosystem, though this section of Argentina clearly got more rain than Peninsula Valdes. We had a long drive



from the airport to the Argentinian/Chilean border, but the road was smooth and straight. Our driver, Pocho, was a good spotter too, and would often begin to slow for a good bird or mammal before any of us could even call it out. Right from the airport we saw our first condors that were sailing beautifully over a ridge. Then, off we went and plenty of guanaco were seen, and we had a good pull over stop for six Lesser Rheas, which were less shy than the ones we saw on the peninsula. Further on we saw a stunning Red Fox, its tail was so full and bushy, and it gave us good looks before slipping off over a hill. We had a nice birding stop at the top of a ridge that looked over a stream and wet area, where we got (hooray!) our first Magellanic Oystercatchers, and these were with chicks! We added a Red-gartered Coot, and saw plenty of beautiful Upland Geese.

We continued on to the border, where we did our paperwork to leave Argentina. At that point, in no-mans-land between the two borders, we had incredible views of condors almost at eye level. There were probably close to eight, and it was a treat to watch them ride the thermals. Chilean Immigration was quick, and from there it was just five minutes to our lovely hotel. Dinner was a buffet, and we ate and checklisted at the same time, and then it was off to bed in preparation for an early rise for Puma tracking the next day.

Wed., Nov 13 Puma Tracking at Estancia Leona Amarga

We were up very early this morning to get to the Puma estancia just after sunrise. We swapped our van for three four-wheel-drive vehicles and off we bounced, combing the ranch's vast landscapes for signs of Puma. Right before breakfast, we got a call on the radio that a Puma had been seen and all three vehicles (and a few more) rendezvoused below her and we all got to see her in the scope. She was quietly lying down, but watchful, and we thought she might be looking at us, as well as a lone guanaco several hundred meters below her. She did get up and move between the bushes, so we got to see her full, impressive size, but she quickly settled back down on her belly, lounging a bit. We had a lovely breakfast in the field before loading up, reconnecting with the van and heading back to our hotel for a siesta.

Afterwards, it was off again for a late afternoon and evening of looking for Pumas. We worked the hills and valleys without much luck, and just as we were calling it a night, the call came in that one of the spotters had found pumas again, and this time, four! One female with two cubs, and another female, a distance apart, but they were clearly watching each other. They were far off, but we were able to see them with scopes. It was a success! The day was long, and dinner was late, but it was amazing to be out in such an amazing place under the



shadow of Torres del Paine's famous peaks. Our drivers, Angelo, Chris, and Junior, took good care of us and knew the ranch well.

Thurs., Nov. 14 Morning Birding | Torres del Paine National Park

This morning, we were up and out by 8:15, but for just a short jaunt down the road. Our first stop was right when we turned off the main road onto gravel, and we stopped for what we originally thought were just a few Andean Condors soaring above the cliffs. But then, the few turned into about 30, some of which were on the cliff then took off to join the huge flock. It was amazing to see them lumbering around on the ground. We birded the back roads, making good use of the standing water and creeks and ponds we passed. We stopped to see stunning Silver Teal, and flushed a noisy Magellanic Snipe. A beautiful Cinereous Harrier worked its way around us and eventually perched on a fence post. Some of us went to the fence line to pluck a bit of guanaco fur from the barbed wire to examine it. Another stop produced Black-faced Ibis, Coscoroba Swans, and other stops along the way produced a very fluffy Molina's Hog-nosed Skunk. Before we turned around, Xavier tried to call in the Chilean Flicker, but no luck. Then, it was back to the ranch to do some fun shopping at a shop in town, a really good lunch of empanadas and chicken soup, and then we were off to the park.

Torres del Paine is jaw-dropping. We ventured up and into the park and stopped at Laguna Azul where we watched some pretty Crested Ducks in the water, and found a new species for the trip, a stunning Silvery Grebe! Then, we were on the hunt for the Rufous-tailed Plantcutter and just when we thought we were going to dip, there it was! It was bright against the dead trees, sitting right up at the top of a branch and it let all of us have good time with it in the scope. Xavier got a pretty incredible picture. We also went to the Cascada del Rio Paine, where we again had amazing views and saw, from very far away, a female Torrent Duck. While we would have liked to have seen the male, it was still interesting to see a duck thrive in such a different habitat. We proceeded up and over and followed the Paine River and then a set of stunning blue lakes past the so-famous pinnacles of Torres del Paine. One lake had a pair of Great Grebes with a chick, who spent time riding on its parent's back - too cute! Then, we traveled the rest of the scenic route to a little valley full of different lodges. Ours was pretty stunning, with a very bright, open design and fantastic windows to look out over the river. Most of us had salmon for dinner tonight, and it was a delicious way to end the day.

Fri., Nov. 15 Local Birding Around Torres del Paine Village & National Park

Today was laid back, with a nice breakfast before heading out on a bird walk from the grounds of our lodge. We enjoyed good looks at many Upland Geese and got our first Cinnamon-bellied Ground Tyrant. Two different



cinclodes were seen as we walked, both Buff-winged and Gray-flanked and of course, any time Xavier played the Austral Pygmy-Owl's call, a busy mixed flock of Thorn-tailed Rayaditos, Black-chinned Siskins, White-crested Elaenia, and Rufous-collard Sparrow were present. Austral Thrush were ever-present too. As we walked further, we got a really great bird; the Magellanic Tapaculo. We heard it right along a scrubby brush along the water, and Xavier played its call just once and it was literally hopping around and on the speaker. Back and forth it went, and we all got great looks. Once we were done looking at him, we looked up and a Chimango Caracara was perched directly above us, watching the show.

Next, we ventured just a few minutes into the park and stopped at a fun little place right by the river. We walked over a stile to get over the fence, and right away saw a mob of birds and found our goal, the Austral Pygmy-Owl. It was so cute and called and called. We all got good looks in the scope. Then, a bit further we tried for the Chilean Flicker again, and success! A pair flew over, then flew right back and perched directly above us. They stayed in the area for quite some time and let us get really good, close looks.

Then, it was back to the lodge for lunch, and a really nice siesta time, and then a few of us went out again in the rain for a short jaunt back into the park. Xavier really wanted us to see Spectacled Duck, and again, we were successful! We got such good looks at these pretty birds, even seeing the bit of pink on one of their wings.

Dinner was a buffet, and we all tried the smoked guanaco. It was a dark meat and tasted like a tender smoked beef. The dessert buffet was beautiful (and delicious).

Sat., Nov. 16 Birding en route to Puerto Natales

We had a nice breakfast this morning at our hotel, then packed up and headed off in the rain. We went a little way into the park, put on rain gear and headed out to look for the Striped Woodpecker, but we dipped. We all agreed it was raining too hard to keep trying, so we loaded back up into the van and went to our pretty lunch spot a little bit early and had a nice hot coffee while we waited for the lunch buffet to open. They had a nice gift shop, too, and many of us bought souvenirs to take home. When the weather let up, we did take a short walk out to the bridge that went over a gorgeous rushing river to look for Torrent Ducks, but we missed on those too.



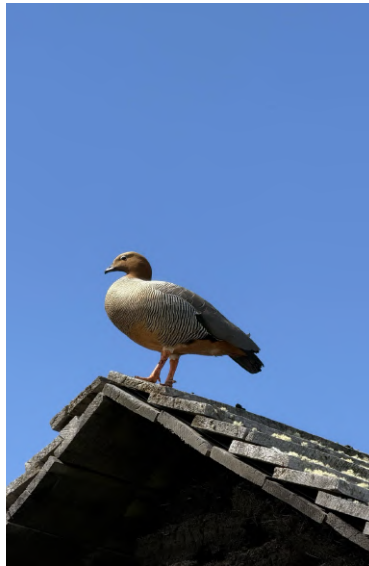
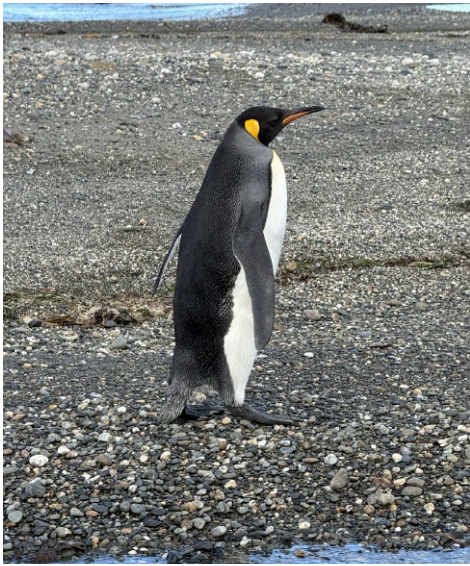
After lunch, we got a very small glimpse at Grey Glacier, then we made a few more stops as the weather tried to clear, and in wet roadside ponds, we saw two Magellanic Snipes right out in the open. What a treat to see these birds so well! Then it was off to Puerto Natales. The scenery as we made our way out of the park was gorgeous and we even got a few looks at the towers. The lakes in the area are just massive and aquamarine blue from the glaciers, and they were a constant presence.

As we rolled into Puerto Natales, we saw our first of what turned out to be many, many Black-necked Swans; this first pair with four chicks. They were very close to the road alongside the ocean, and we had really great looks. We spent some time birding along the shoreline, many of us went down onto the beach to see these gorgeous swans closer and picked up a few Magellanic Oystercatchers. We arrived at our hotel, unloaded our luggage and had a little bit of free time to wander around the cute town. There were lots of shops and restaurants, and you could tell that it was bustling and busy with tourists.

Dinner tonight was impressive at a little restaurant that Xavier knew, and all of us were very impressed with our meals, including a massive king crab that Rebecca and Barbara shared, and guanaco ragu over fettuccine that Julie had enough to share around. Ricky, our driver, joined us for one last meal and we were sad to see him go!

Sun., Nov. 17 Puerto Pratt | Olga Teresa Estancia for Condors

Today we set out at our regular 8:30 time, in the rain, to do some road birding. We drove past the airport and into the sheep fields where we saw probably a dozen Crested Caracaras, a few Chimango Caracaras, and plenty of waterfowl in lakes and deep puddles. As we were birding, a rainbow appeared over the water that was ahead of us that was simply stunning. You could see the entire rainbow end to end, and it looked like it was going into the water. It was quite picturesque, and we all got out to take lots of pictures. The rain continued on and off, but we got some good birding in and even found one of Xavier's key birds for us for the morning - the Plain-mantled Tit-spinetail. Ron got a great picture of the Fire-eyed Diucon. Then, we all saw a little bird on a fence post. We backed up and all agreed that it was quite different than anything we'd seen before. It flew, but Xavier called it back in, and we got incredible views of this little bird, a Correndera Pipit. It was very obliging and came incredibly close to the van and gave all of us really great looks. On the same road a little way up, we spotted a small pond with Chiloe Wigeons, a Red Shoveler, and Yellow-billed Pintails, as well as White-tufted Grebes with chicks! It was a great stop.



We went back to Puerto Natales for lunch at a really good pizza spot, followed by some shopping at a great gift store, and then we were on the road to Olga Teresa Estancia. At the estancia in their outdoor barbecue area, we had coffee and specially made empanadas that were delicious, before we loaded up in the van to cross the road to go to the condor cliff. We parked and walked up to the cliff where there was seating and we had scopes set up, and the condors simply poured into the cliff. For an hour, we watched as they soared in, taking turns roosting in a special crevice or hole or next to their partner. It was fascinating to watch them use the wind currents to angle into the cliff, some of them hovering steadily in places and other swooping around to find the perfect spot. Everyone was in awe. It was neat to compare the condors to the Black-chested Buzzard-Eagle that flew past a few times and see that bird's beautiful underbelly.

We continued on to Punta Arenas, our home for the next (and last) two nights. We settled into our hotel rooms and had dinner and did the checklist and talked about plans for the next day.

Mon., Nov. 18 Fuerte Bulnes & The Road To and From

We were up for our 7:30 breakfast for our final full day of the trip. We began our drive to a historic fort called Fuerte Bulnes. We birded en route, working our way along the coast line of the Strait of Magellan, making several stops looking for shore and seabirds, and hoping upon hope for the rumored King Penguin that had been sighted. Our stops produced plentiful birds, including one stop where we saw close to 50 South American Terns; so many for having seen so few throughout the trip. On this stop, we were greeted by a big, bully-type dog with a collar that said his name was Lolo and he birded the whole stop with us, showing us his beach and sticking close. As we got nearer to the beach, we had a spectacular view of a Black-crowned Night-Heron with his stunning long-feathered cap. We also saw a massive purple jellyfish washed up along the shore, probably a meter in diameter. Another stop along the road produced a pair of rare Ruddy-headed Geese, as well as a pair of oystercatchers with two tiny fluffball chicks - cute! And another stop produced a very large flock of Austral Parakeets *and* Dusky Dolphins.

We arrived at the fort and stopped for coffee all around at the coffee truck, and as we were ordering, a very habituated Chimango Caracara landed on the coffee truck roof and stayed with us for the duration of our coffee break. It was very close, and it was fun to get a really good look at this bird that we had seen nearly every day of the trip. Heading into the park, Julie spotted something moving along the road in the forest, yelled "stop," and we all had great looks at a juvie Plumbeous Rail. It was curious about us and we enjoyed watching its wedge-



shaped tail work up and down. Then, it was out into the restored fort to look at the buildings and enjoy great views. We had our first Black-chinned Siskins of the day, perching in the trees and along the fence tops, then, at the overlook point, we had our first Black-browed Albatross sighting of the day out over the strait, as well as a Sea Lion patrolling the shore, poking its head up occasionally, and flock after flock of cormorants. We walked further into the woods and the weather was simply incredible. 60 degrees, no wind, and no clouds. It felt good to have the sun on our faces. We walked out to a second overlook and enjoyed more views of Chilean Skuas, Southern Giant-Petrels, more albatrosses, and even a Southern Fulmar, which we recognized from our cruise on the Beagle Channel back in Ushuaia.

After one more overlook point, we loaded back up into the van, using our time back to the hotel for one more chance at the King Penguin. We knew we were in for a treat when Xavier started getting serious, had Luis pull over, told us all to stay in the van as he went out for a second look and then came *running* back to us. Go, go, go! Up to the next pull off point, and there, right on the shore, was a lone, sleeping King Penguin. Success! We had an incredibly long time with this bird, watching it sleep, getting very close scope views for those who wanted to really inspect its feathers, and then, wow, we watched it use its bill to push up off the sand and stand, walk toward us (only about 10 feet away!), and inspect us one by one. This was a silent, precious moment, and we all agreed this was the most amazing way to end the trip.

Tues., Nov. 19 Departures

We all loaded up after an early breakfast and took a flight from Punta Arenas to Santiago, where our flock dispersed and we made our separate ways home. What a fun trip with a really lovely group of people.

Photos: Group (Julie Fannon - JF), Magellanic Penguin (Hugh Simmons - HS), Guanaco (HS), Magellanic Woodpecker (HS), Southern Elephant Seal (JF), Punto Tombo Penguin Colony (JF), Magellanic Penguin (JF), Chimango Caracara (JF), Whale Watch at Puerto Piramides (JF), Whale Watch (JF), Burrowing Owl (JF), Peggy and Penguin (JF), Ushuaia Scenic (HS), Tierra del Fuego (JF), Imperial Cormorant (HS), Torres del Paine Peaks (JF), TDP Julie & Rebecca (JF), Austral Pygmy Owl (HS), Xavier and Gaucho (JF), Andean Condor roost (HS), Chimango Caracara and Rebecca (JF), Ruddy-headed Goose (JF), King Penguin (JF), Chimango Caracara (HS)