



*Field Guides Tour Report*

**Antarctica, the Falkland Islands & South Georgia Cruise 2019**

Feb 14, 2019 to Mar 8, 2019

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*For our tour description, itinerary, past triplists, dates, fees, and more, [please VISIT OUR TOUR PAGE.](#)*



*Perhaps nothing more exemplifies Antarctica than penguins on ice. While we saw a higher number of King Penguins, Gentoo Penguins were our most widely encountered species, breeding from the sandy beaches and rocky shores of the Falklands, all the way down to the ice covered Antarctic continent. Photo by guide Doug Gochfeld.*

Antarctica. The word evokes different images and emotions for everyone. Whatever those images are, they are but a shadow of what it is like to be physically present in Earth's icy, vibrant, deep south. From sun-drenched colonies of hundreds of thousands of King Penguins, to seas whipped into a frenzy by southern storms, and channels choked closed with pack ice, we had a range of experiences that could be provided only by the extreme latitudes of our planet.

We started out in Ushuaia, an extreme place in its own right, in Tierra del Fuego at the very southern tip of South America. Tierra del Fuego provided a starkly beautiful mountainous backdrop for a day and a half of exciting pre-maritime birding. Our trip to Tierra del Fuego National Park (TdF NP) started off with a bang when we found a family group of charismatic Magellanic Woodpeckers shortly after we entered the park! After watching and listening to these for a while, we availed ourselves of the rest of the copious birdlife the park had to offer, from flocks of Austral Parakeets and Patagonian Sierra-Finches, to Ashy-headed Goose and Austral Pygmy-Owl. The aptly named Thorn-tailed Rayadito was a group favorite, and other great pickups were Tufted Tit-Tyrant, Austral Blackbird, and a clean sweep on the three species of Cinclodes in the area. The next day was embarkation day, but not before we squeezed a bunch more birds out of Ushuaia. A trip to the dump gave us the range-restricted White-throated Caracara among many of its Southern and Chimango relatives, and the lagoons in town provided us with Austral Negrito, a waterfowl-palooza, and walk-away looks at Magellanic Snipe. After boarding the M/V Ortelius, our home for the next two and a half weeks, and being shown to our rooms, we went through various orientation and safety briefings, and ship fire drills, and then it was off into the Beagle Channel as dusk set in.

Our first full day aboard the ship was also our first fully at-sea day as we steamed towards the Falkland Islands. Though we didn't set foot on land, we still had plenty of birds to divert us. Black-browed Albatrosses and Southern Giant-Petrels were our constant companions, and amidst these graceful giants we picked out a single Southern Royal Albatross. White-chinned Petrels abounded as well, and we were fortunate to get close views of its very close relative, the regionally scarce Westland Petrel, flying around the boat and landing on the water. Our first prions of the voyage came into view as we got farther east, a Manx Shearwater put in a lightning quick appearance amongst the more numerous Great and Sooty shearwaters, and we had our first encounter with the dynamic and gorgeous Hourglass Dolphins in the afternoon.

Our couple of days in the Falkland Islands (Las Islas Malvinas) was jam-packed with excellent natural history experiences. Carcass Island gave us all the regional scarcities we were hoping for: Obscenely close views of dozens of fearless Striated Caracaras, Blackish Cinclodes clambering over our feet and between our legs as they foraged seemingly heedless of the giants that were invading their territory, and the endemic Cobb's Wren (it seems almost laughable that this was considered a subspecies of House Wren at some point!). Saunders Island presented our first big penguin spectacle, with Gentoo, Magellanic, and a couple of dozen King Penguins on the beach. The nearby cliffs held Black-browed Albatrosses (from plump downy youngsters to still courting adults!), Imperial Cormorants, and around twenty young Southern Rockhopper Penguins molting their way through adolescence. The commanding view of the penguins from the bluff overlooking the beach with courting albatrosses in the side-view mirror was something right out of

National Geographic, and the rolling seas during the beach extraction were a proper introduction to the world of zodiac landings (and these would fortuitously be our roughest landing conditions of the entire tour).

While the landscape of the Falklands was beautiful, it was but a wafer thin appetizer of the scenery to come. We awoke on the 22nd adjacent to South Georgia Island, one of the most remote islands of its size on the planet. The rugged mountains coming right out of the sea with the lush valleys sheltered in between presented a starkly beautiful landscape as the backdrop for our next three days of adventure.

We started out by landing in Grytviken, the first and most famous whaling station on the island. There were a couple of tours of the grounds on offer, as well as a post office from which to send postcards abroad (with some very fashionable albatross stamps). The must-do here, of course, is paying respects to “The Boss” himself, with a toast over Sir Ernest Shackleton’s (and Frank Wild’s) grave. There were indeed some birds around as well, highlighted by our first South Georgia Pipit for some of the group. An evening cruise down West Cumberland Bay to Neumayer Glacier under a kaleidoscopic sunset was a perfect way to end our first day here.

Day two saw us exploring the Bay of Isles, the area where Robert Cushman Murphy did much of his pioneering seabird research in the early part of the last century. Our first landing here was Salisbury Plain, where we had our first exposure to a massive King Penguin rookery, and what an experience it was! The din of King Penguin generated noise was a constant, and when we were up close and personal with the penguins it was impossible to ignore or block out. It was breezy, and several snow squalls blew through, alternating with a golden morning sunlight every fifteen to twenty minutes. This gave us insight into the contrast in conditions these remarkable birds face throughout their lives. As we ate lunch, the boat re-positioned towards nearby Prion Island, where another special treat awaited us. First up for us was a zodiac cruise around the island, where we got to study several South Georgia Pipits feeding in the rocks and kelp, a South Georgia Pintail, and an unforgettable surprise encounter with a Leopard Seal tenderizing a young fur seal which it had caught. After this excitement, we landed on Prion Island, and climbed a short distance to an overlook that gave us stunningly good views of several Wandering Albatrosses on nests. There were also several of these longest-winged of all extant creatures gliding around and over the colony. We even got to see them switching nesting duties and vocalizing to each other and to the skuas lurking nearby. It was a truly magical afternoon.

Day two alone would’ve been worth the price of admission, but our ultimate day on South Georgia went above and beyond, featuring not two, but three different once-in-a-lifetime excursions. We stepped outside as the first tendrils of dawn illuminated the landscape around Cooper Bay, and felt not a breath of wind, a great augury for what was to come. We embarked on a zodiac cruise around the bay, wending our way from the Chinstrap Penguin colony (our first) through the rocky shorelines with their attendant beds of kelp moving hypnotically to and fro, South Georgia Pipits in seemingly every cove, and ultimately to the base of a Macaroni Penguin colony. Both species of Giant-Petrels (including a couple of “White Nellys”) and a few Cape Petrels foraged on the water’s surface, heedless of our presence. We were at the base of the colony as the daily single-file procession of Macaroni Penguins shuffled its way downslope as if it were a never-ending conveyor belt, and they queued up and then dove into the water mere meters from where we were watching. We returned from this idyllic outing to have breakfast aboard as the ship re-positioned to our next destination: Gold Harbor. Gold is many people’s favorite place on South Georgia, and between the backdrop and the fauna, it’s hard to argue against that position! The main event here is ostensibly being immersed in the large colony of King Penguins and the larger than life Southern Elephant Seals, but the landscape wasn’t overshadowed by much. We enjoyed blue skies and sunshine beating down on us as we enjoyed it all, and even saw some Light-mantled Albatrosses patrolling over the nearby ridges. During lunch, we again repositioned, this time to St. Andrew’s Bay. The wind was picking up and the skies were clouding over, but we were able to have a successful landing before things started taking a turn for the rough. St. Andrew’s is host to the largest colony of King Penguins on South Georgia, and one of the largest in the world, numbering over a quarter of a million birds. Once we landed, those who chose to ford the penguin-lined, knee-deep, river were rewarded with a mind-boggling view overlooking the core of the astoundingly large colony, and the spectacle of penguins along the river and around the beaches were highlights for everyone. Some even got into zodiacs and cruised around just offshore of the colony, giving themselves a unique perspective on this unique spectacle. We could not have expected a better culmination to our South Georgia experience than we were treated to.

The ambitious plan by the expedition staff of three separate expeditions in a single day was brought on (in part) by weather. The weather that we started to see at the end of our St. Andrew’s landing was just the leading edge of a massive storm system that was to loom over the island for the next four days. Given its approach, the (correct) decision was made to forego our final day around South Georgia, and so we turned our gaze at last to the chilly south. It took us almost two whole days to get to the South Orkney Islands, but we were in the good and faithful company of seabirds for most of that time. Kerguelen Petrel was a gem that we encountered briefly twice, and we started seeing more cooperative Light-mantled Albatrosses, including some cruising back and forth around the ship. Upon our arrival in the South Orkneys we cruised over choppy seas between Powell and Laurie Islands, seeing the lights of Orcadas Station twinkling in the distance. We then made a hard right and steamed. Two mornings later we found ourselves just off Elephant Island’s Point Wild, where Shackleton’s crew spent months marooned and waiting to be rescued. We had arrived at Elephant Island in a big time storm, but it was supposed to abate within a couple of hours of sunrise. It initially seemed indeed to be letting up, but then the wind speeds suddenly skyrocketed, and we got to see the southern ocean in full fury for a couple of hours, though the ship stayed relatively stable, as we were sheltered from the largest swells by the windbreak of the island. As the storm passed, we started making our way down through the Bransfield Strait towards the Antarctic continent itself.

As March dawned, we found ourselves amidst pack ice at the northern mouth of the Antarctic Sound, with a red sunrise bathing the sparkling white icebergs all around us. We navigated our way through the ice to Brown Bluff, at the very northern tip of the Antarctic Peninsula, on the southern side of the Antarctic Sound. It was here that we made our first “continental” landing on Antarctica. We also found our first Adelie Penguins here (amidst the more numerous Gentoos), and had the opportunity to climb to a high vantage point to overlook the nearby glacier and the rest of the area. We then went out on a zodiac cruise around the bay, having up close encounters with Antarctic Shag foraging at the base of the glacier, Adelie Penguins playing around and tobogganing on icebergs, and the icebergs themselves, as they towered over our small boat. The afternoon saw us cruising around the ice-packed northern side of the sound, where we saw more Adelies and Gentoos, and got to see Wilson’s Storm-Petrels pattering around as they fed in the meltwater at the foot of icebergs. It was then time for the South Shetland Islands, and the next morning saw us stationed off Half Moon Island, where we experienced our figurative immersion in a Chinstrap Penguin colony before some folks experienced a literal immersion in the frigid -1 degree C waters during the optional Polar Plunge for those who wanted to get an impression of what the seals and penguins are experiencing for much of their lives. The boat once again repositioned during lunch, this time to the caldera of Deception Island. In addition to the striking geological features here (including Neptune’s Bellows at the mouth of the entrance), we got a great study of skuas, being able to pick out a couple of South Polars from their larger, bulkier cousins, and some individuals that defied identification.

Our final two days around the Peninsula were spent even farther south. We explored the Errera Channel, visiting Cuverville Island one morning and Danco Island the next. In addition to the amusing antics of the Gentoo Penguins in both places, and the Leopard Seals, the most memorable highlight was the show put on by Humpback Whales. We had numerous up close and personal meetings with Humpbacks, complete with surround sound audio as

they breathed out upon surfacing. Sandwiched between these two magical mornings were was a southward trek to visit the “Penguin Post Office”, officially known as Port Lockroy, an old outpost maintained by the British Antarctic Heritage Trust. In addition to the museum and shop, we had to be careful not to tread on the numerous Snowy Sheathbills and Gentoo Penguins.

We then turned our attention north once more, and ventured out into the open water of the legendary Drake Passage. We had a blessedly smooth crossing, though it was almost as uneventful for birds as it was smooth. A Cuvier’s Beaked Whale was a highlight, and we started picking up our old friends Great and Sooty Shearwaters as we approached Cape Horn, which Captain Mika gave us a nice drive-by of before continuing north to the Beagle Channel and ultimately the dock at Ushuaia.

From idyllic days with placid seas and landscapes saturated with late summer sunlight, to simultaneously snow and sun-dappled cacophonous penguin colonies, and to ship-heaving gales giving us a mere sliver of insight into what some of the first Antarctic explorers faced, we experienced a full spectrum of the Southern Ocean. It was a true pleasure to make this journey with such an interesting (and interested) group, and I hope to see each and every one of you again somewhere on this birdy planet of ours. Hasta luego!

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#### KEYS FOR THIS LIST

One of the following keys may be shown in brackets for individual species as appropriate: \* = heard only, I = introduced, E = endemic, N = nesting, a = austral migrant, b = boreal migrant

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## BIRDS

### Anatidae (Ducks, Geese, and Waterfowl)

**BLACK-NECKED SWAN** (*Cygnus melancoryphus*) – This striking swan gave great views at Tierra del Fuego NP, and we even got to view it from the comfort of the inside of our lunch restaurant!

**COSCOROBA SWAN** (*Coscoroba coscoroba*) – We had excellent views of what was apparently a long staying individual of this locally rare species at Tierra del Fuego NP.

**UPLAND GOOSE** (*Chloephaga picta*) – The most common goose in our forays around TdF and the Falklands.

**KELP GOOSE** (*Chloephaga hybrida*) – Lots of these around the shorelines of TdF and the Falklands, including many on Carcass Island.

**ASHY-HEADED GOOSE** (*Chloephaga poliocephala*) – We found a family of four of these in a riverine meadow at Tierra del Fuego NP, and were able to scope these handsome fowl from the shoulder of the dirt road.

**RUDDY-HEADED GOOSE** (*Chloephaga rubidiceps*) – These are quite similar in appearance to the more common and widespread Upland Goose, but are significantly harder to find. Because of habitat loss on the mainland, the Falkland Islands are now the best location to see this species. We connected with the species twice here, finding small family groups on both Carcass Island and then just outside Stanley. The differences in underparts barring, vent and belly color, head and bill morphology, and head coloring were all quite noticeable once we got a chance to really study them at close range, especially alongside their Upland cousins.

**FLYING STEAMER-DUCK** (*Tachyeres patagonicus*) – We had a nice group of these, including some young birds (probably a family group) on the lake at TdF NP.

**FLIGHTLESS STEAMER-DUCK** (*Tachyeres pterocercus*) – Several of these around the coast off of TdF NP, and we were able to see their disproportionately short wings as they floated around just off shore.

**FALKLAND STEAMER-DUCK** (*Tachyeres brachypterus*) – The flightless Steamer-Duck around the Falklands is a different species than the one on the mainland, and we saw dozens of them, especially at the narrows around West Point Island, and at Carcass Island.

**CRESTED DUCK** (*Lophonetta specularioides*) – Abundant around Ushuaia and adjacent Tierra del Fuego, and also quite a few around the Falklands.

**SILVER TEAL** (*Spatula versicolor*) – A nice surprise was a group of five of these dapper looking ducks on a small freshwater pond near the Stanley Airport in the Falklands.

**RED SHOVELER** (*Spatula platalea*) – Lots in the lagoons around Ushuaia. While the males look quite different from our male Northern Shovelers, the feeding calls we heard them give did closely resemble those of their more familiar (to us) northern congeners.

**CHILOE WIGEON** (*Mareca sibilatrix*) – A few around town in Ushuaia, and then a pair on the small pond near the Stanley Airport on the Falklands.

**YELLOW-BILLED PINTAIL (SOUTH GEORGIA)** (*Anas georgica georgica*) – This taxon of Yellow-billed Pintail is endemic to South Georgia, and we saw it well on several occasions- at various landing sights as well as winging their way over the ship as we navigated our way around the scenic coast.

**YELLOW-BILLED PINTAIL (SOUTH AMERICAN)** (*Anas georgica spinicauda*) – We saw these in various places around Ushuaia, with the highest numbers being in the lagoons we visited during embarkation day.

**YELLOW-BILLED TEAL** (*Anas flavirostris*) – These smaller similar-looking cousins of the Yellow-billed Pintails were quite numerous in the lagoons around Ushuaia.

### Podicipedidae (Grebes)

**WHITE-TUFTED GREBE** (*Rollandia rolland chilensis*) – This dapper looking grebe was a pleasant surprise in one of the marine coves at TdF.

**GREAT GREBE** (*Podiceps major*) – These distinctively shaped plus-sized grebes were on good display at TdF.

### Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)

**ROCK PIGEON** (*Columba livia*) – Present in Ushuaia. [I]

### Chionidae (Sheathbills)

**SNOWY SHEATHBILL** (*Chionis albus*) – These iconic scavengers of the southern oceans were present at just about all of our landing sites, seemingly becoming bolder and bolder as we got farther south. The ones at Port Lockroy with the frumpy looking youngsters were especially heedless of our presence. These are the only landbirds breeding in the Antarctic, and they vacate the continent in the austral winter- in fact, we even had one winging its way north as we transited between South Georgia and the South Orkney Islands while in the open ocean early one morning.

### Haematopodidae (Oystercatchers)

**BLACKISH OYSTERCATCHER** (*Haematopus ater*) – We had distant views of these at TdF NP, but got much better views of this Black Oystercatcher analog at Carcass Island in the Falklands.

**MAGELLANIC OYSTERCATCHER** (*Haematopus leucopodus*) – We saw them in the distance at the harbor in Ushuaia, but luckily they were much more readily available and visible on Carcass Island and around Stanley.

*Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)*

**SOUTHERN LAPWING** (*Vanellus chilensis*) – At a couple of locations on our two days around Ushuaia.

**TWO-BANDED PLOVER** (*Charadrius falklandicus*) – We found a bevy of these on the beach near Stanley, including fresh juveniles, females, and boldly-plumaged adult males.

**RUFIOUS-CHESTED DOTTEREL** (*Charadrius modestus*) – These are often difficult to track down, but because of the timing of our visit, they were done in the hummocky upland breeding habitat, and were down on the coastal mudflats near Stanley, where we saw a couple of dozen of them, including scaly-plumaged juveniles!

*Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)*

**WHITE-RUMPED SANDPIPER** (*Calidris fuscicollis*) – A nice group of 70+ of these super long-distance migrants were around the tidal lagoon near Stanley. A few months after our sightings of them here, they will be provisioning nests in the northern reaches of the arctic.

**SOUTH AMERICAN SNIPE (MAGELLANIC)** (*Gallinago paraguaiiae magellanica*) – Good views at TdF NP, which we somehow improved upon at the drainage canal near the Bahía Encerrado in Ushuaia.

*Stercorariidae (Skuas and Jaegers)*

**CHILEAN SKUA** (*Stercorarius chilensis*) – These rusty-toned skuas were the go-to skua around mainland South America and the Falklands. Of our skuas, these were a welcome reprieve from identification uncertainty, as their orange tones on the back and in the underwings provide an easy way to pick them out most of the time.

**SOUTH POLAR SKUA** (*Stercorarius maccormicki*) – Once in the Antarctic, we were able to identify a few of these with confidence by virtue of a suite of characteristics including size, bill morphology, and head plumage. That said, many skuas we encountered in the deep south had to go by without a secure identification because of their similarity and the specter of hybridization.

**BROWN SKUA (SUBANTARCTIC)** (*Stercorarius antarcticus lonnbergi*) – These bulky bruisers were a common feature of the portion of the tour between South Georgia and the Antarctic. The largest of the southern skuas, they have big, thick bills, and seem fiercer on the whole than their plenty fierce close congeners.

**BROWN SKUA (FALKLAND)** (*Stercorarius antarcticus antarcticus*) – This was the taxon of Brown Skua which we found on the Falklands. Separated from Chilean Skuas by plumage characteristics and from the Subantarctic Brown Skuas largely by range, they are, needless to say, very similar to the preceding species.

*Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)*

**BROWN-HOODED GULL** (*Chroicocephalus maculipennis*) – These were the only small dark-headed gulls we saw. They are closely related to Bonaparte's Gull and Black-headed Gull, but they have a different wing pattern. They were numerous along the Ushuaia waterfront. Most of the Ushuaia birds were in basic plumage, so we counted ourselves lucky to see some that were still in dark-headed full breeding regalia near Stanley.

**DOLPHIN GULL** (*Leucophaeus scoresbii*) – A charismatic (and bold) species which we saw all over Ushuaia and adjacent TdF.

**KELP GULL** (*Larus dominicanus*) – Widespread, from Ushuaia to the Antarctic Peninsula near Port Lockroy. We saw them foraging at the sewer outflow at the Ushuaia harbor, and sitting regally on pristine icebergs in the southern pack-ice. If that's not true versatility, I don't know what is.

**ARCTIC TERN** (*Sterna paradisaea*) – A couple of at-sea encounters were the only times we experienced this visitor from the far north. They can look quite like Antarctic Tern, but fortunately, it is this species' winter, so we were cued in to look carefully at any terns in basic plumage. Our most satisfying observation of the species came as we transited towards the South Orkney Islands from South Georgia, when one flew slowly across the bow as we gawked at it from inside the navigational bridge.

**SOUTH AMERICAN TERN** (*Sterna hirundinacea*) – This was the sterna tern which we saw in numbers around Ushuaia and Falklands.

**ANTARCTIC TERN** (*Sterna vittata*) – Common around South Georgia and Antarctica, where we saw them foraging over kelp (South Georgia) or ice (farther south), banding together to defend their colonies against the roving bands of skuas.

*Spheniscidae (Penguins)*

**KING PENGUIN** (*Aptenodytes patagonicus*) – The King Penguin spectacles of South Georgia are perhaps one of the greatest collective wildlife spectacles this amazing planet of ours has to offer. We were overly fortunate to experience the three most impressive of these. We started out at the legendary Salisbury Plain, on a day where snow squalls would trade with full sunshine every ten minutes, creating an unforgettable ambiance. Then we enjoyed Gold Harbor (arguably the most scenic of the normal landing beaches on South Georgia) in full on sunshine, immediately followed up by St. Andrews Bay, perhaps the largest single King Penguin colony in the world. We saw easily over half a million King Penguins at these sites. Not only was watching these inquisitive and bold penguins up close a pleasure, but the soundscape in these colonies was indescribable. Unsurprisingly, it edged out several other worthy competitors for bird of the tour!

**ADELIE PENGUIN** (*Pygoscelis adeliae*) – Our best encounters with these were on icebergs at various points around the tip of the Antarctic Peninsula, though our welcome party of one on the submerged rock as we arrived at Brown Bluff was pretty great too! Watching their antics on the bergs as they bathed in the snow and tobogganed down the slopes on their bellies was a riot.

**GENTOO PENGUIN** (*Pygoscelis papua*) – Falklands, South Georgia, Antarctic Peninsula, South Shetland Islands. One of the unifying figures of all of these locales were the friendly Gentoo Penguins. These penguins ingratiated themselves with us with their boldness and goofiness, and we could rely on their comic relief in just about all of our landing sites.

**CHINSTRAP PENGUIN** (*Pygoscelis antarcticus*) – Our magical morning at Cooper Bay was our first experience with these charming penguins, and then we immersed ourselves in their lives at the colony at Half Moon Island a week later.

**MAGELLANIC PENGUIN** (*Spheniscus magellanicus*) – Quite a few of these were around Saunders Island in the Falklands, amidst the more common Gentoos and more fawned over Kings.

**MACARONI PENGUIN** (*Eudyptes chrysolophus*) – We had a lot of fun with these ornate penguins as they porpoised in flocks alongside the ship transiting between colonies and feeding sprees at various points around South Georgia. However, the best experience by far was our magical morning at Cooper Bay where we were able to wait in the zodiac at the base of their colony, and witness their single-file procession from the cliff top down to the water.



**SOUTHERN ROCKHOPPER PENGUIN** (*Eudyptes chrysocome*) – These were mostly out to sea by the time of our visit to Las Malvinas, though on Carcass Island we got to see around twenty youngsters molting their way through adolescence towards adulthood, just beginning to show the yellow racing stripes on their heads.

*Diomedidae (Albatrosses).*

**GRAY-HEADED ALBATROSS** (*Thalassarche chrysostoma*) – We encountered the highest density of these in the waters around South Georgia Island. Most of the birds we saw were adults with their subtle gray hoods and strikingly bicolored bill, but we also got to see a couple of dirty-headed youngsters.

**BLACK-BROWED ALBATROSS (BLACK-BROWED)** (*Thalassarche melanophris melanophris*) – These were another one of our constant companions from start to finish. On Saunders Island we were privileged to see large chicks on nests along with adults courting. The rest of our observations were at sea, in rain, shine, snow, sideways sleet, and any other weather, gorgeous or inclement. This reliability was one of the attributes that brought Terry to place them on his top 3.

**LIGHT-MANTLED ALBATROSS** (*Phoebastria palpebrata*) – A strong contender for most beautiful animal of the trip. We saw these in the distance cruising over the nesting cliffs at Gold Harbor, but these elegant albatrosses really gave us an eye-full on several occasions as they coasted around the ship over the colder, more southerly seas. The first few encounters with them were fleeting, but as we neared the Antarctic, they seemed to become bolder and more curious about the ship, hanging in the wind above the upper deck on multiple occasions, and making close passes across the bow quite a few times. The silvery back, dark head, bold white eye crescents, and turquoise green cutting edge of the bill give it an appearance not approached anywhere else in nature. They made enough of an impact that they were on the top 3 lists of Barb, Dan, and Jennifer.

**ROYAL ALBATROSS (SOUTHERN)** (*Diomedea epomophora epomophora*) – Though we had a couple of tantalizing birds in the distance, we only got a real good look at one of these massive albatrosses. These are one of the "great albatrosses", a group made up by the two Royal Albatrosses and the various taxa of Wandering Albatross.

**WANDERING ALBATROSS (SNOWY)** (*Diomedea exulans exulans*) – The biggest of the biggest. Superlatives don't do justice to these massive yet graceful beasts. Their slow flaps and long glides were visible from a mile away as we were on the high seas, but we also got up close and personal to their nesting colony on Prion Island, where we got to see and hear them on nests (even when they were being threatened by skuas lurking in the nearby tussocks), and watch them gliding in from the sea to switch off the nest duty (both parents incubate in shifts). The age diversity that we experienced was also excellent, seeing brown bodied, white-faced youngsters, almost completely snowy white adults (who were decades upon decades old), and every plumage in between.

*Oceanitidae (Southern Storm-Petrels).*

**WILSON'S STORM-PETREL** (*Oceanites oceanicus*) – It was incredible to see birds which inhabit the roasty toasty Gulf Stream during our summer flying over pack ice and weaving their way between icebergs as they happily fed in melt water. These tiny critters are perhaps the most abundant seabird in the world, and it was a pleasure to watch them at the other end of their life cycle. We even got to see a few land on boulders and scamper down into their burrows on Half Moon Island.

**GRAY-BACKED STORM-PETREL** (*Garrodia nereis*) – A handful of these smoothly patterned storm-petrels were seen during our days around the Falklands and then en route to South Georgia.

**BLACK-BELLIED STORM-PETREL** (*Fregetta tropica*) – These were more widespread than Gray-backed Storm-Petrels, stretching farther into the cold waters around and south and west of South Georgia, and was also encountered once we were back in the Drake Passage on the way home.

**BLACK-BELLIED STORM-PETREL (GOUGH STORM-PETREL)** (*Fregetta tropica melanoleuca*) – A couple of us were on deck when this interesting storm-petrel came in towards the stern to check the boat out for a minute or so. It was a small storm-petrel reminiscent of Black-bellied Storm-Petrel, but with a clean demarcation between the black chest and white underbody, extensively white underwing coverts, and no toe projection. This makes it look quite similar to what is currently considered White-bellied Storm-Petrel, but the traits above, in addition to the dark vent, match this taxon, which breeds on Gough Island.

*Procellariidae (Shearwaters and Petrels).*

**SOUTHERN GIANT-PETREL** (*Macronectes giganteus*) – The more common of the Giant-Petrels, we started seeing these in Ushuaia, and saw them every day of the trip (there were two days when conditions didn't allow for specific identifications of our Giant-Petrels, but Giant-Petrels were encountered on every day). Their light green bill tips blend into the rest of the bill fairly well, but are still discernible at close range. We even saw a couple of the "White Nelly's", the mostly white morphs, which only occur in this taxon, and not M.halli.

**NORTHERN GIANT-PETREL** (*Macronectes halli*) – We started seeing ones or two of these on the way to the Falklands, and their occurrence peaked in the vicinity of South Georgia. Subtle plumage characters aside, the most fail-safe way of differentiating them from the former taxon is via the reddish color of the bill tip.

**SOUTHERN FULMAR** (*Fulmarus glacialis*) – Once we got to true Antarctic waters we ran into these cold water lovers. We saw quite a few of them between the South Orkneys, Elephant Island, and the tip of the Antarctic Peninsula. Their shape and flight style is much different, and more petrel-like, than that of their more bulky cousins, the Northern Fulmar, and their bills and heads are noticeably more delicate as well.

**CAPE PETREL (ANTARCTIC)** (*Daption capense capense*) – Cape Pigeons, Pintado Petrels, Cape Petrels. Whatever moniker you use for them, they're great (so great that Kathy, Pat, and Jennifer put them on their top 3 lists). They were just about the only bird active in the gale we experienced off Elephant Island, and they were negotiating the 70 knot wind as if the air was still. They are truly built for the windiest regions of the planet, and the small flocks of them we had following the ship from time to time were a delight to watch.

**SNOW PETREL** (*Pagodroma nivea*) – Most of our encounters with these "Angels of the Antarctic" came once we got to the most southerly latitudes. We most frequently saw them either flying around the boat at sea or navigating their way over ice fields as we were zodiac cruising down south.

**KERGUELEN PETREL** (*Aphrodroma brevirostris*) – We encountered this small gadfly petrel on two consecutive days on our southbound transect from South Georgia to the South Orkney Islands. These dynamic oceangoers don't tend to stick around ships for long periods of time, and both instances were "you had to be there" moments, as they continued on their travels after close fly-bys.

**SOFT-PLUMAGED PETREL** (*Pterodroma mollis*) – One of the most fun species to watch, we saw a very good number of Soft-plumaged Petrels this trip, including around 400 on the afternoon of our first day between the Falklands and South Georgia. Their aerial acrobatics and mastery of the wind was a sight to behold, and then behold some more. They spent a lot of their time ripping through the gale force winds with agility that had to be seen to be believed, and would just as easily coast up hundreds of feet into the air and glide around effortlessly as if there wasn't a breath of wind. Truly remarkable creatures.

**BLUE PETREL** (*Halobaena caerulea*) – We didn't come into contact with these cold-water denizens of the deep south until we were heading to Elephant Island from the South Orkneys. They stood out from the prions by virtue of their dark hoods and obvious white terminal tail bands, as well as in their slightly different flight style.

**FAIRY PRION** (*Pachyptila turtur*) – One of these came into the starboard stern on our second day traveling between the Falklands and South Georgia. The thick black tail tip was the trait that alerted us to it being different than the surrounding Antarctic Prions, and the muted face pattern and pale gray collar helped clinch the identification. These breed in small numbers on South Georgia, but are outnumbered by Antarctic Prion there by multiple orders of magnitude.

**ANTARCTIC PRION** (*Pachyptila desolata*) – The most numerous species of prion we encountered during the tour. We had them as we approached South Georgia, and didn't stop seeing them until we were halfway across the Drake Passage from Antarctica to Argentina. Their thick bills, flared superciliums, and contrasty plumage were the keys to their identity, and they are the only expected prion in very cold Antarctic waters in this region.

**SLENDER-BILLED PRION** (*Pachyptila belcheri*) – Quite a few of these on the way to and around the Falklands. They are a fairly average looking prion, with an intermediate supercilium thickness, variable collar color tending towards paler than Antarctic, a more muted upperwing pattern than Antarctic, and most importantly, a thinner based bill.

**GRAY PETREL** (*Procellaria cinerea*) – Wow! This is a species that is often encountered in just ones or twos during this cruise, but we ended up with dozens of them on our stormy, and appropriately gray, first day on the open ocean between the Falklands and South Georgia. We tallied over 80 individuals this day, and then a couple of leftovers the next day to boot. While the sheer numbers came as some surprise, this late summer season seems to be a good time window for encountering numbers of them in this stretch of ocean.

**WHITE-CHINNED PETREL** (*Procellaria aequinoctialis*) – The most abundant *Procellaria* petrel, and the only one of this genus that is a given on these trips. There are large colonies on South Georgia, of which we got only a hint of during our evening cruise to Neumayer Glacier, where they were winging overhead towards various breeding cliffs. Most of our time spent with this species, however, were during our traverse of the large expanses of open ocean, where they were often our only avian companions.

**WESTLAND PETREL** (*Procellaria westlandica*) – One of these White-chinned lookalikes made several passes around the boat, and even alighted on the water twice, as we made our way from Ushuaia to the Falklands. We could see the dark bill tip as clear as day for the entire time that it was close to the boat. This species' breeding range is centered around New Zealand, but it has become known, over the past couple of decades, that they regularly disperse east to the western coast of South America, and are intermittently seen around Cape Horn. Their similarity to White-chinned Petrel may cloud their true frequency in these waters, but they certainly aren't common.

**GREAT SHEARWATER** (*Ardenna gravis*) – One of the few familiar species to many of us from the north, we had these on every day between Ushuaia and South Georgia, and then picked them up again on our final passage day in the northern Drake, as we approached Cape Horn.

**SOOTY SHEARWATER** (*Ardenna grisea*) – We encountered these in a similar pattern to the previous species, losing it as we neared South Georgia, and then picking them up again for our final two days passing north through the Drake.

**MANX SHEARWATER** (*Puffinus puffinus*) – Another familiar face from the north, we picked up one of these crossing the bow as we steamed from Ushuaia to the Falkland Islands. Unlike the previous two species, which are southern breeders and which we encounter in the north on their wintering travels, Manx Shearwater is a northern breeder, and so this individual, like us, was spending part of its winter in these waters.

**LITTLE SHEARWATER (SUBANTARCTIC)** (*Puffinus assimilis elegans*) – We had several sightings of these shockingly fast-flying small shearwaters on our two days in transit between the Falklands and South Georgia. They are so small and fast they can remind one of alcids or diving-petrels. The extensively white underwings and face, and silvery upperwings with a variable white band across the covert tips helped to separate it from the larger, more gangly Manx.

**COMMON DIVING-PETREL** (*Pelecanoides urinatrix*) – Diving-petrels are unique seabirds, being very reminiscent of small alcids (to which they are not closely related) in both flight style and overall appearance. This species is the most widespread of the diving-petrels, and the one we encountered most frequently. Their duskier (than their congeners) underwings, dirty flanks, and more extensively dark faces and backs differentiated them from the following two species. Luckily, Magellanic and South Georgia, which are similar plumage to one another, typically don't overlap spatially at this time of year.

**SOUTH GEORGIA DIVING-PETREL** (*Pelecanoides georgicus*) – Only a couple of encounters with diving-petrels which we could confidently assign to this species, on our second day approaching South Georgia and our first day after departing the island. The more extensive white in the underwing, cleaner underparts, obvious pale coming up behind and above the cheeks, and bold white braces on the back were the key field marks to separate these from the exceedingly similar (and sometimes indistinguishable) Common Diving-Petrel.

**MAGELLANIC DIVING-PETREL** (*Pelecanoides magellani*) – A brief fly-by seen by some as we exited the Beagle Channel on our first morning on the ship.

#### *Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants and Shags)*

**NEOTROPIC CORMORANT** (*Phalacrocorax brasilianus*) – A few of these were around TdF NP.

**MAGELLANIC CORMORANT** (*Phalacrocorax magellanicus*) – We had scope views of this red-faced cormorant around the harbor in Ushuaia and at TdF NP, but then improved our experience tenfold with point blank views of a couple at the dock on Carcass Island in the Falklands.

**SOUTH GEORGIA SHAG** (*Phalacrocorax georgianus*) – The Blue-eyed Cormorant around South Georgia and Shag Rocks is *P.georgianus*, though it is visually almost indistinguishable from the Imperial Cormorants found in southern South America and on the Falklands (not to mention Antarctic Shag).

**IMPERIAL CORMORANT** (*Phalacrocorax atriceps atriceps*) – This was the taxon of Imperial Cormorant that we saw while we were still in the vicinity of the South American mainland.

**IMPERIAL CORMORANT** (*Phalacrocorax atriceps albiventer*) – This is the form of Imperial Cormorant found in the Falklands. Adults of this taxon have more extensive dark on the face, coming down to the cheeks, than the Imperial Cormorants on the adjacent mainland, but some authorities question whether this subspecies is actually a valid separate taxon, and consider it synonymous with *P.a.atriceps*.

**ANTARCTIC SHAG** (*Phalacrocorax bransfieldensis*) – This was the version of Blue-eyed Shag which we ran into down around the Antarctic Peninsula and the South Shetland Islands. It was pretty cool (pun only somewhat intended) watching some of these perched on the edge of glaciers and atop icebergs, while foraging and diving in the frigid waters around the pack ice.

#### *Ardeidae (Herons, Egrets, and Bitterns)*

**BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON (FALKLANDS)** (*Nycticorax nycticorax falklandicus*) – We saw a few of these around the dock at Carcass Island in the Falklands.

#### *Cathartidae (New World Vultures)*

**ANDEAN CONDOR** (*Vultur gryphus*) – After Barb used her super-human eyes to spot a couple of these over various distant mountaintops (and we were able to enjoy these a bit in the scope), we finally had a closer view of a couple working an adjacent hillside along the coast during our afternoon excursion at TdF NP.

**TURKEY VULTURE (SOUTH TEMPERATE)** (*Cathartes aura jota*) – Quite a few of these around the dump in Ushuaia, and then plenty of the Falklands at various points on the Falklands, especially at Saunders Island.

*Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)*

**BICOLORED HAWK (CHILEAN)** (*Accipiter bicolor chilensis*) – This was an unexpected addition to the trip list, as one of these medium-sized accipiters buzzed through the coastal forest at TdF a couple of times in a fifteen minute span.

**VARIABLE HAWK** (*Geranoaetus polyosoma*) – Barb spotted one of these sitting on a rock way upslope of the path we were birding along at Carcass Island. We all got scope views of it before it lifted off and flew out over the settlement and beyond the ridge. This form was formerly known as Red-backed Hawk, before it got lumped with the closely related Andean birds.

**BLACK-CHESTED BUZZARD-EAGLE** (*Geranoaetus melanoleucus*) – What a stunning bird in every way! It is boldly marked, and has an exceptionally distinctive flight profile. This combination gives it the nice bonus of being very easy to identify in the field. We saw these at a couple of locations around TdF NP, and then got wonderful up-close views at the dump the next day.

*Strigidae (Owls)*

**AUSTRAL PYGMY-OWL** (*Glaucidium nana*) – We eventually tracked down one which was tooting from the top a tree at TdF NP and all got to see this charismatic little murderer in the scope. The experience was so memorable that it made it into Charley's top 3!

*Alcedinidae (Kingfishers)*

**RINGED KINGFISHER** (*Megaceryle torquata*) – We ran into one of these loud, well-built kingfishers on our afternoon along the coast at TdF NP.

*Picidae (Woodpeckers)*

**MAGELLANIC WOODPECKER** (*Campephilus magellanicus*) – Probably the most-wanted species at TdF NP, we were most fortunate to find a family group of these along the road shortly after our morning arrival. We watched (and listened to) the male, female, and their young male offspring for a while before they melted back into the forest. It was a great experience with these largest of the new world woodpeckers!

*Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)*

**WHITE-THROATED CARACARA** (*Phalcoboenus albogularis*) – Closely related to the more widespread Mountain Caracara, this species is uncommon through the southern Andes, and we made a special trip to the municipal landfill to track them down. Despite the gale-force winds, we saw several of these striking scavengers there, in the company of their more numerous cousins (Chimango and Southern caracaras).

**STRIATED CARACARA** (*Phalcoboenus australis*) – The best spot for this Tierra del Fuego specialty is on the Falklands, and our experiences with the bold "Johnny Rook" (as it's colloquially called there) on Carcass Island were exceedingly intimate. We even got to hear them vocalizing to each other frequently as they cavorted around the pier, beach, and settlement without a care for the crowd of people who had just descended upon their home.

**SOUTHERN CARACARA** (*Caracara plancus*) – Fairly common during our first couple of days birding around Ushuaia.

**CHIMANGO CARACARA** (*Milvago chimango*) – This small caracara was numerous in Ushuaia and at TdF NP, and it was downright abundant at the municipal landfill.

**AMERICAN KESTREL (SOUTH AMERICAN)** (*Falco sparverius cinnamominus*) – A few of these were scattered around TdF NP.

**PEREGRINE FALCON** (*Falco peregrinus*) – We had a flyby of one as we approached Carcass Island on day 1 in the Falklands.

*Psittacidae (New World and African Parrots)*

**AUSTRAL PARAKEET** (*Enicognathus ferrugineus*) – Some excellent experiences with vocal, gregarious flocks around TdF NP.

*Furnariidae (Ovenbirds and Woodcreepers)*

**BUFF-WINGED CINCLODES** (*Cinclodes fuscus*) – A brief view at TdF NP was supplanted by a much more prolonged and satisfying experience around the Ushuaia lagoons the next day.

**BLACKISH CINCLODES** (*Cinclodes antarcticus*) – The famous tussock-bird! On Carcass Island, we found these tame ground feeders clambering around our feet, picking insects off of kelp, and from under rocks, and even our boots.

**GRAY-FLANKED CINCLODES** (*Cinclodes oustaleti*) – This is a high elevation nester in the Chilean and Argentinean Andes, but it comes down to the coasts after the breeding season. We were fortunate to find a couple of these which had vacated the nearby hills for the sea coast of TdF NP, and we got excellent scope views of them.

**DARK-BELLIED CINCLODES** (*Cinclodes patagonicus*) – These larger, darker cousins of the prior species were fairly common around the coastline of TdF NP.

**THORN-TAILED RAYADITO** (*Aphrastura spinicauda*) – Pound-for-pound (or should it be gram-for-gram?) one of the most charismatic species we encountered. We ran into several vocal, curious, and showy flocks of these little sprites on our day in TdF NP, and their antics (and name) made them one of Barb's favorite birds of the tour!

*Tyrannidae (Tyrant Flycatchers)*

**TUFTED TIT-TYRANT** (*Anairetes parulus parulus*) – Another most-wanted bird at TdF NP for some, we happened upon a small group of these despite the wind during our afternoon jaunt at the park. Frenetic (and cute) little buggers for sure!

**WHITE-CRESTED ELAENIA (CHILEAN)** (*Elaenia albiceps chilensis*) – Good views of these in several places around TdF NP. We even got to study the distinctive head-on profile of the crown, where the central crown feathers seem to disappear due to their paleness, and it looks almost as if the bird has a window of nothing where the central crown feathers should be.

**AUSTRAL NEGRITO** (*Lessonia rufa*) – A couple of post-breeding individuals hopping around the muddy lagoon in Ushuaia were a nice way to clean up this locally scarce species which had already left the breeding territories.

**DARK-FACED GROUND-TYRANT** (*Muscisaxicola maclovianus*) – A loose group of over twenty at TdF NP was a fun sight, and we followed that up with an in-your face experience with some absurdly cooperative ones on the Falklands (especially at Carcass Island).

**FIRE-EYED DIUCON** (*Xolmis pyrope*) – Good views of the fiery eyes on these unique birds at TdF NP.

*Hirundinidae (Swallows)*

**CHILEAN SWALLOW** (*Tachycineta leucopyga*) – The only species of swallow we spied during the tour, we got good studies of these as they soared around over open country.

*Troglodytidae (Wrens)*

**HOUSE WREN (SOUTHERN)** (*Troglodytes aedon chilensis*) – Quite a few around TdF NP.

**COBB'S WREN** (*Troglodytes cobbi*) – One of our main targets in the Falklands was this tussock-loving endemic wren. Once considered a House Wren, these are clearly quite different, from their appearance, to their habits and even their voice. We were able to find a couple of these during our landing on Carcass Island, and got some really excellent views of one as it foraged on and around tussocks just feet away from us!

**SEDGE WREN (AUSTRAL)** (*Cistothorus platensis falklandicus*) – We ran into this Falkland Island endemic taxon on both Carcass Island and around Stanley. The ones at Surf Bay were even flying around and feeding chicks under our noses, being much more obliging than the species typically is earlier in the season.

*Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)*

**AUSTRAL THRUSH (MAGELLAN)** (*Turdus falcklandii magellanicus*) – Loads of these throughout TdF NP, giving us great views of many birds ranging from spotty juveniles to smooth adults.

**AUSTRAL THRUSH (FALKLAND)** (*Turdus falcklandii falcklandii*) – About as common as the taxon on the mainland, we had some very confiding individuals on Carcass Island.

*Motacillidae (Wagtails and Pipits)*

**CORRENDERA PIPIT (FALKLANDS)** (*Anthus correndera grayi*) – Nice views of a few around the coastline near Stanley.

**SOUTH GEORGIA PIPIT** (*Anthus antarcticus*) – We saw a scattering of them here and there over the first twenty four hours on South Georgia. Then, starting with our Prion Island zodiac cruise, we found them to be abundant in appropriate habitat around the kelp-strewn shorelines and grass-and-tussock-covered slopes above penguin rookeries. These incredible year-round residents are the southernmost breeding songbird on Earth. Just thinking about them spending the Antarctic winter roving around the frigid rocky coasts of South Georgia makes one shiver. Amazing.

*Fringillidae (Finches, Euphonias, and Allies)*

**BLACK-CHINNED SISKIN** (*Spinus barbatus*) – These were fairly abundant at TdF NP, and we also ran across them on our stroll to the settlement on Carcass Island.

*Passerellidae (New World Sparrows)*

**RUFOUS-COLLARED SPARROW (PATAGONIAN)** (*Zonotrichia capensis australis*) – Abundant during our two days in the Ushuaia area. This is the southernmost taxon of this widespread Neotropical species.

*Icteridae (Troupials and Allies)*

**LONG-TAILED MEADOWLARK** (*Leistes loyca falklandicus*) – Excellent views of southern South America's take on the meadowlarks. Their substitution of red for our more familiar yellow lent itself well to the reddening late summer vegetation on Carcass Island. We also had quite a few as we birded around Stanley.

**AUSTRAL BLACKBIRD** (*Curaeus curaeus*) – A nice semi-surprise was finding a feeding flock of these rather strange and often difficult-to-track-down blackbirds in a coastal marsh during the afternoon portion of our TdF NP excursion.

*Thraupidae (Tanagers and Allies)*

**PATAGONIAN SIERRA-FINCH** (*Phrygilus patagonicus*) – We had small groups of these burly finches in several locations around TdF NP.

**WHITE-BRIDLED FINCH** (*Melanodera melanodera*) – Very good, though brief, views of this Falklands specialty on Carcass Island. The next day, though, we got very excellent and prolonged views of a male that plopped down on the beach right in front of us near Stanley.

*Passeridae (Old World Sparrows)*

**HOUSE SPARROW** (*Passer domesticus*) – Common around the streets of Ushuaia, and then several as we drove around Stanley. [I]

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## MAMMALS

**PEALE'S DOLPHIN** (*Lagenorhynchus australis*) – We bookended the trip with these dolphins, which tend to stick closer to South America than most of the others we encountered, seeing them on our first morning at sea and during our final evening within sight of Cape Horn.

**HOURLASS DOLPHIN** (*Lagenorhynchus cruciger*) – These dynamic, fast dolphins, so named because of the beautiful black-and-white patterning on the sides, paid the ship some visits around the Falkland Islands, and then again as we approached the South Orkney Islands.

**COMMERSON'S DOLPHIN** (*Cephalorhynchus commersonii*) – As we approached the Falklands on the morning of day four, several of these fantastic looking dolphins found us and did some bow riding, much to the delight of all those out on deck.

**SOUTHERN RIGHT WHALE DOLPHIN** (*Lissodelphis peronii*) – YEEAAHH! Normally, Commerson's Dolphin would be the runaway favorite for prettiest dolphin of the trip, but normally these cruises don't run into Southern Right Whale Dolphins. We had a pod of over a hundred of these exceptionally athletic animals on the afternoon of our the first of our two at sea days between the Falklands and South Georgia. These sleek dolphins, named because of the one similarity they have with a right whale: the lack of a dorsal fin, are highly oceanic, and finding them is no small feat. In a tour full of excitement, watching their maritime acrobatics ranked as one of the most exciting.

**LONG-FINNED PILOT WHALE** (*Globicephala melas*) – Almost lost in the ruckus about the awesome Southern Right Whale Dolphins were the Long-finned Pilot Whales which were attracted to the same feeding frenzy. We had several of these around the boat during this half hour, including one which we very nearly ran over!

**ORCA** (*Orcinus orca*) – There were several sightings of these during the cruise, but none were for very long. The best was certainly a lone male that repeatedly surfaced in the vicinity of Shag Rocks before we arrived at South Georgia. This beast showed us its very impressive dorsal fin over and over again, and even poked part of its head out of the water on several of its surfaces.

**CUVIER'S BEAKED WHALE** (*Ziphius cavirostris*) – We had a brief encounter, from the bridge, with this widespread but sparsely distributed species as we motored north through the Drake after leaving the Antarctic behind. It surfaced several times with quite a while between surfacings, and so we only saw it a few times as we cruised by it, but photos seemed diagnostic (within the region) of this species.

**ANTARCTIC MINKE WHALE** (*Balaenoptera bonaerensis*) – These (relatively) diminutive balaenopterans were present in the large aggregation of biomass around West Point Island as we entered the Falklands archipelago, and then some saw one or two animals as we approached Half Moon Island a couple of weeks later.

**SEI WHALE** (*Balaenoptera borealis*) – We had a couple of these as we approached the Falkland Islands on our first morning, and then a couple of at sea sightings after leaving South Georgia. They can be very difficult to separate from Fin Whale, as the dorsal fin shape can be difficult to assess, and can come close to overlapping, so quite a few whales seen during the trip were put down simply as Sei/Fin Whale.



- FIN WHALE** (*Balaenoptera physalus*) – The second largest animal on the planet, and our most numerous whale of the tour, we encountered around 400 of these over the week when we were in the neighborhood of South Georgia and the South Orkneys.
- HUMPBACK WHALE** (*Megaptera novaeangliae*) – Some of the most magical experiences of the tour involved these long-distance migrants in their southern homes around the Antarctic Peninsula. Having (and especially hearing!) them right around the zodiacs with icebergs and glaciers adjacent to us was truly unforgettable, and we got to experience this on multiple excursions!
- SOUTH AMERICAN SEA LION** (*Otaria flavescens*) – At sea sightings of a few as we approached the Falklands, and then a young male was hauled out on the landing dock at Stanley, paying no never-mind to passerbys as it basked in the sun.
- ANTARCTIC FUR SEAL** (*Arctocephalus gazella*) – These penguin wannabe torpedoes were porpoising around the boat as we approached South Georgia, and from then on they were our constant companions until our entry into the Drake Passage two weeks later. Because of their mild disposition and cuddly antics, Terry picked them as his favorite mammal of the trip. Troops of them guarded almost every one of our beach landings, though since it was late in the summer, the particularly surly beachmasters were long gone, and we were given very little trouble by the pups, mothers, and young males that remained. An especially cool feature of the Antarctic Fur Seals this year were the occasional leucistic pups. These "blonde" pups are speculated to make up only about one in ten thousand seals, and we ended up seeing four or five of these beauties. Unfortunately, blonde fur seals older than pups are virtually never seen, as their pale coats might as well be beacons for predators once they get out to sea for the first time.
- SOUTHERN FUR SEAL** (*Arctocephalus australis*) – We had a few of these more temperate breeders than the preceding species in the nearby waters and on shore at the Falklands.
- CRABEATER SEAL** (*Lobodon carcinophagus*) – Truly abundant once we got down to the pack ice, these are often cited as the most common large mammal on the planet after humans. We saw these lounging around on various ice floes on all four of our days in Antarctica, and they were the most numerous marine mammal we encountered at the southern continent (though Humpback Whales gave them a good run for their money!).
- LEOPARD SEAL** (*Hydrurga leptonyx*) – What an amazing beast! At times it seems like a serpent in the guise of a mammal, as it seems to slither around through the water. We had several encounters with these, including a couple of very memorable ones while we were in the zodiacs. Our very first one was near Prion Island at South Georgia, where the species tends to be scarcer than it is down on the peninsula. This one was thrashing a newly killed young Antarctic Fur Seal around the surface, seemingly tenderizing it. Then, when we were at Port Lockroy, we had a wonderful encounter with one as it swam around and under the boat a few times, even nuzzling the zodiac. While it was just being curious and investigative, it was still humbling to realize just how big the head is on these beasts when it was right next to us.
- WEDDELL SEAL** (*Leptonychotes weddelli*) – We ended up with views of one of these from the zodiac around Port Lockroy after having difficulty laying eyes on the species prior.
- SOUTHERN ELEPHANT SEAL** (*Mirounga leonina*) – We saw these big ol' beasts on each of our days around South Georgia, with the best experiences coming during our memorable Gold Harbor landing.
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## ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

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**Totals for the tour: 121 bird taxa and 18 mammal taxa**