

Trip Report — Antarctica, the Falkland Islands & South Georgia Cruise 2025

October 20-November 12, 2025 with Doug Gochfeld



Snow Petrel is one of THE iconic birds of Antarctica, and we had a phenomenal trip for them, including lots great close flight views as they practiced their aerial Antarctic acrobatics. Photo by guide Doug Gochfeld.

I've written this before, but it remains as true now as it was then: "For those who have been, no explanation is necessary. For those who have not, no explanation will suffice." This is how I see both Antarctica and South Georgia Island. Their breathtaking environments contain infinite things worth sharing, but when we're tasked with describing these remarkable experiences upon return, words seem an insufficient conduit. It's true that the landscapes take one's breath away, that the scale inspires awe, the biomass can bring a person to tears, and the overall experience can make one reflect on any number of things. Antarctica and South Georgia are two places where these

seemingly cliché, and perhaps overused, phrases pull every bit of their weight.



Landing at St. Andrew's beach at daybreak was a rare opportunity, and this largest of South Georgia's King Penguin colonies fully lived up to expectations. Photo by guide Doug Gochfeld.

This year's charmed tour started along the east coast of Argentina, in Puerto Madryn. This meant that in addition to a pre-tour day trip that involved flamingos, penguin burrows, and Guanacos, we also would be covering a new-for-me stretch of ocean: the northern approach to the Falklands Islands. We embarked on our adventure in the afternoon, and as we steamed southeast out of Golfo Nuevo that evening, we were treated to a phenomenal spectacle of Southern Right Whales. This bay is a globally important body of water for the species, and we got to see adults and calves breaching and frolicking throughout our transit – a truly magical spectacle to start this trip off with a real bang. Our passage over the Atlantic shelf waters of southern Argentina was a great way to familiarize ourselves with some of the families and genera of the pelagic seabirds that would be our companions for the better part of three weeks. The cetacean theme of this northern leg kept delivering the most memorable goods, however, with many sightings covering several species over the next day and a half, including Humpback and Fin whales, Dusky and Peale's dolphins, and the major highlight: Southern Blue Whale!! Another super interesting feature of this

section of the trip was the tremendous number of moths that found their way aboard the ship, seemingly migrants pushed off shore by the northwest winds during the night, with some even landing on members of our group as we scanned the ocean from the outer decks.



It can seem like a rough life down there, but Adélie Penguins are built for it, and that's all they know. This one seemed right at home as it sat on its nest, mostly buried in the snow from a mid-morning snow squall. Photo by guide Doug Gochfeld.

Fortune followed our cruise from start to finish, and the aforementioned northwest winds did more than bring us a windfall of migrant moths. The following sea meant that we made excellent time on this first crossing, and made it to the Falklands in time to make an unscheduled afternoon/evening landing. Not only did we get an extra landing in, but that landing turned out to be at the spectacular Steeple Jason Island, home to the largest single-species albatross colony in the world. The Falklands knocked our socks off with a first landing full of awe, and then the next day it came back for more with the classic one-two punch of Carcass Island (which netted us most of the specialty birds there are to see in the Falklands, including stellar views of

Cobb's Wren and at-our-feet Magellanic Snipe) and picturesque and overwhelming Saunders Island, with its four species of nesting penguins, and another scenic Black-browed Albatross, all around a white sand beach and turquoise waters. As if to prove that it isn't actually a tame place, the next day saw winds gusting to 35 MPH, though we were still able to carry out a landing at the capital of Stanley, allowing people to visit various places in the town, from museums and the post office to the pub and distillery. Most folks even got to see the real snappily-dressed Commerson's Dolphins playing around close to shore in the harbor.

We then set a course to the ESE, and as we reveled in the afterglow of our victorious Falklands appetizer course, we began to pick up some fun seabirds. Before the afternoon was out, we had picked up multiples of several of our target species for this exciting stretch of the trip: Atlantic Petrel, Kerguelen Petrel, and Gray-backed Storm-Petrel.



Just another day on South Georgia, with a Southern Elephant Seals border dispute overseen by some of the neighborhood King Penguins. Photo by guide Doug Gochfeld.

The rest of the two-plus day crossing to South Georgia continued to be filled with interesting seabirding, with a couple of particularly memorable bird events. The most striking was during a section with strong winds hitting the starboard side of the boat, creating an updraft that allowed a dozen (!!) Light-mantled Albatross to stay with the ship and practice dual flight displays over and over again, seemingly mimicking what they would be doing around their steep breeding cliffs. Later on, we had at least 30 Atlantic Petrels in a single hour. We then took a detour to the very remote Shag Rocks, where Captain Per was able to bring us to within near spitting distance of these rocks, by far the closest I have ever been to them, in my four trips to South Georgia. Each time we thought we were as close as we would get, he was able to inch us a bit closer, and the prions and shags were foraging all around the ship as we contemplated these remote pieces of rock. We also encountered our first proper icebergs, including one tabular berg that was a mile long.

We arrived at the stupendous island of South Georgia on the morning of October 29th, and we spent our days here deftly dancing around a broadly windy landscape, hopscotching ourselves from windless bubble to windless bubble, made possible due to the varied and intricate topography of this spectacular island. Our first day of operations were at the northern end of the more forgiving (but still impressive) east coast, visiting Fortuna Bay (King Penguins!), and then Stromness Whaling Station (Elephant Seals!). Both of these locations figure prominently in the legendary story of Ernest Shackleton's post-Endurance journey, as the final section of his crossing of South Georgia was the tricky route from Fortuna Bay to Stromness whaling station, and we got to hike out to the waterfall where they made the last descent of their journey. Day two kicked off with a truly magical morning, where we had an early wakeup call, and then a pre-breakfast sunrise visit to the largest King Penguin colony on South Georgia at St. Andrew's Bay. We had the rare privilege of being able to go ashore here first thing in the morning, while the gorgeous morning sun bathed the landscape orange. After a late morning zodiac cruise along the beachfront here, we relocated to Godthul, where most of us hiked up the tricky slope to get views of the endemic South Georgia Pipit. It wasn't until Friday morning, our third day on

South Georgia, where we finally made it to the only inhabited (by very few people) section of the island at Grytviken. Here, we visited Shackleton's grave, then took tours of the restored storehouse, old church and library, museum, post office, and gift shop (benefiting the South Georgia Heritage Trust). The afternoon brought us to Jason Harbour, a first for much of the expedition staff, and to an astounding beach chock full of Southern Elephant Seals. Some even witnessed an elephant seal actually being born, which caused a ruckus of skuas, gulls, and giant-petrels spectating the event and playing a game of capture-the-placenta. Our final day was yet another super special one, with another pre-breakfast sunrise landing, this time at Gold Harbour, one of the best landing sites on South Georgia thanks to the density of wildlife and the incredible hanging glacier backdrop. In addition to the biomass highlight here (and a skua running around pecking at people's boots and pulling at their pantlegs), some who hadn't yet seen South Georgia Pipit were able to see a couple of birds flying around and displaying over the tussocky hills. Our final zodiac operation here was a nice calm seas exploration of Cooper Bay, seeing five species of penguins, including our first Chinstraps, our only Macaronis, and even a surprise vagrant Adelie Penguin (rare on South Georgia). Then we wended our way through the big tabular iceberg graveyard at the mouth of Drygalski Fjord, rounded Cape Disappointment set sail into the cold south.



You can normally tell the difference between the two giant-petrels by seeing if the bill tip is red or green. That didn't really apply to this ravenous Northern Giant Petrel though! Photo by guide Doug Gochfeld.

The crossing towards the South Orkney Islands had us picking up more cold water birds, and were highlighted by a brief flyby of a couple of Arctic Terns on one of the mornings. Thanks to a couple of days of favorable currents and winds, we were able to sneak through the sea ice and sail through the Washington Strait and land in Shingle Cove, becoming the first ship of the season to be able to visit the South Orkneys. The weather here was befitting of the stark landscape, and during our landing at this Adelie Penguin colony, we experienced temporary whiteout conditions, which just added to the ambiance of the place. It also gave us access to a cliff where Snow Petrels were nesting, getting to watch them swirl around the cliffs, and even get audio recordings of their vocalizations, meanwhile some of the Adelies on their nests were mostly buried in snow, with just their heads peeping out of the snow. On the way out of the South Orkneys, we swung by Signy Island, and viewed at distance the remote Signy base (where one passenger on the ship had once been stationed to do some science). We then set course

westwards for Elephant Island. Usually, this visit involves merely sitting off shore in the ship and pointing out the beach where the men of the Endurance were marooned for months. As we approached the island, there were no indications that this visit would be any different. However, as we settled into dinner, the sea state got suddenly calm, and the staff decided that we would be able to indulge ourselves in the rare opportunity to take a zodiac cruise around Point Wild and the environs, which was a welcome shock to all of us, giving us our second bonus operation of the trip.

Then it was time, finally, for us to head down to Antarctica proper. Ultimately, we would spend one day in the Antarctic Sound, one day in the Weddell Sea, and then one day around the Gerlache Strait, before finishing up with a day in the South Shetland Islands. The Antarctic Sound day featured a zodiac cruise through ice on the north side of the sound, and then a phenomenal post-dinner sunset landing at Brown Bluff, our one “continental” landing. Brown Bluff has some good access to Gentoo Penguin and Adelie Penguin colonies in the shadow of the eponymous cliffs. This time, the fates conspired to do us one better: the late afternoon/early evening time of the landing, the early season date of our trip (and the reasonable weather) set the stage for a truly phenomenal display of Snow Petrel breeding behavior, with pairs doing flight displays and on-the-ground courtship, lots of vocalizing between duos and small groups, and even some copulation. Wilson’s Storm-Petrels were also returning to their burrows, providing another rare experience with seabirds on land. This landing was definitely one of the major highlights of the trip for yours truly!



Southern Right Whale breach. Photo by guide Doug Gochfeld.

Our day in the Weddell Sea started out with us navigating slowly through sea ice, and waking up surrounded by the stuff, and also with a view of a tall lump on the ice 8-9 miles away, which was an Emperor Penguin that we got some less than ideal scope views of (but hey, we saw one, which is pretty great in and of itself!). We then landed at Devil Island, which in addition to a very dense colony of Adelie Penguins, featured a very low tide that made us have to walk quite a ways to pick up the zodiacs back to the ship, where we then had a scenic cruise through the Weddell Sea with hot cocoa (spiked or unspiked). The next day, we were in the scenic Gerlache Strait, though it took us until the afternoon to have a real nice view of it, thanks to the fog. This was also the point in the trip where everyone's life was most in danger, as yours truly took the "steering wheel" of the ship for half an hour (thanks to the South Georgia charity auction), but thankfully, we evaded the ice, didn't spring any leaks, and didn't have to launch any of the lifeboats. We then made our way to the great Chinstrap Penguin colony at Palaver Point, which we fittingly got to don snowshoes for. Our exit from the Gerlache featured a magical sunset, and then a great experience with close Fin Whales, a

cooperative Antarctic Petrel, and then a distant pod of the scarcely seen Arnoux's Beaked Whale, including one that launched itself out of the water several times.



The scene of our most unexpected opportunity of the tour, when we got into zodiacs and explored the waters just off shore of Elephant Island's legendary Point Wild at dusk. Photo by guide Doug Gochfeld.

Though we left the Antarctic Peninsula behind, our northbound journey back towards South America had one more day with an Antarctic flavor, as we made stops in the South Shetland Islands, landing at the striking caldera of Deception Island, and then the excellent Chinstrap Penguin colony at Half Moon Island, before making our crossing of the Drake Passage, viewing Cape Horn, and entering the Beagle Channel for the final chug over to good ol' Ushuaia.

Here is a list of the mammals, and a select few other non-birds, that we came across on this tour:

Dusky Dolphin (*Sagmatias obscurus*)
Peale's Dolphin (*Sagmatias australis*)
Hourglass Dolphin (*Sagmatias cruciger*)
Commerson's Dolphin (*Cephalorhynchus commersonii*)
Arnoux's Beaked Whale (*Berardius arnuxii*)
Fin Whale (*Balaenoptera physalus*)
Antarctic Blue Whale (*Balaenoptera musculus intermedia*)
Humpback Whale (*Megaptera novaeangliae*)
Southern Right Whale (*Eubalaena australis*)
South American Sea Lion (*Otaria flavescens*)
Antarctic Fur Seal (*Arctocephalus gazella*)
South American Fur Seal (*Arctocephalus australis*)
Crabeater Seal (*Lobodon carcinophaga*)
Leopard Seal (*Hydrurga leptonyx*)
Weddell Seal (*Leptonychotes weddellii*)
Southern Elephant Seal (*Mirounga leonina*)



Perhaps your guide's favorite part of the infinite wonderful moments we experienced: watching Snow Petrels actively engage in territorial, courtship, and breeding behavior during our sunset landing at Brown Bluff, on the tip of the Antarctic Peninsula. Downright incredible. Photo by guide Doug Gochfeld.

It was my absolute pleasure to guide this trip for you all, to one of my favorite places in the world, and with such a lovely group of humans – you each made it more enjoyable by your presence and enjoyment of all the fantastic things we experienced together, and I look forward to seeing you all on another trip somewhere on this beautiful, bird-filled globe of ours!

You can see my complete trip report on eBird at this link: <https://ebird.org/tripreport/433566>

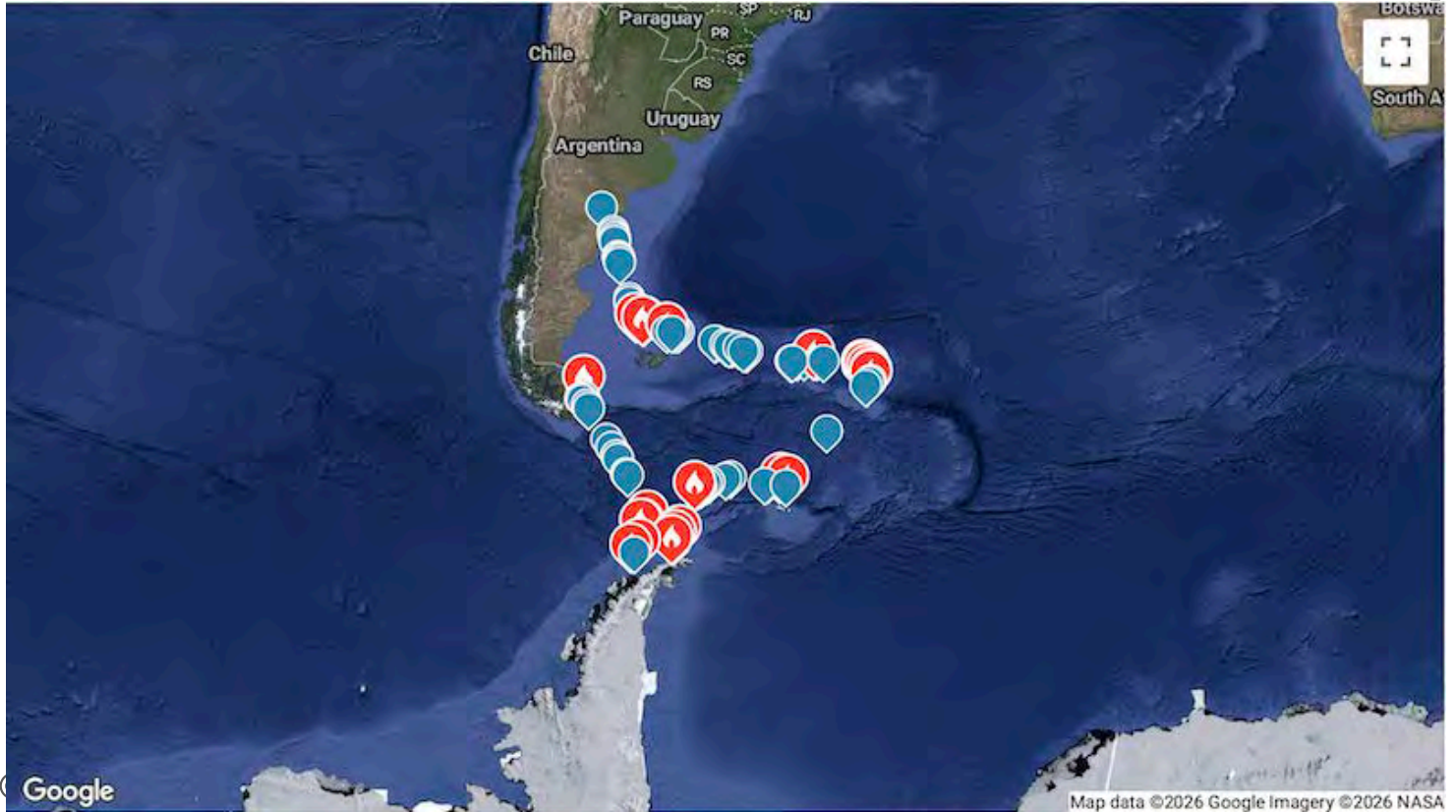
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-- -Doug Gochfeld (Treeswift)

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👤 Doug Gochfeld



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Species Observed

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242	Upland Goose <i>Chloephaga picta</i>	 4
18	Kelp Goose <i>Chloephaga hybrida</i>	 3
20	Ruddy-headed Goose <i>Chloephaga rubidiceps</i>	 1
23	Falkland Steamer-Duck <i>Tachyeres brachypterus</i>	 3
9	Crested Duck <i>Lophonetta specularioides</i>	 3
2	Chiloe Wigeon <i>Mareca sibilatrix</i>	 1
63	Yellow-billed Pintail <i>Anas georgica</i>	 9
12	Yellow-billed Teal <i>Anas flavirostris</i>	 1
295	Snowy Sheathbill <i>Chionis albus</i>	 2  14
1	Blackish Oystercatcher <i>Haematopus ater</i>	 1
24	Magellanic Oystercatcher <i>Haematopus leucopodus</i>	 4
4	Magellanic Snipe <i>Gallinago magellanica</i>	 1
4	Chilean Skua <i>Stercorarius chilensis</i>	 2
170	Brown Skua <i>Stercorarius antarcticus</i>	 19
8	South Polar Skua <i>Stercorarius maccormicki</i>	 5
25	Dolphin Gull <i>Leucophaeus scoresbii</i>	 4
259	Kelp Gull <i>Larus dominicanus</i>	 25
2	Arctic Tern <i>Sterna paradisaea</i>	 1
14	South American Tern <i>Sterna hirundinacea</i>	 3
203	Antarctic Tern <i>Sterna vittata</i>	 23

220,518	King Penguin <i>Aptenodytes patagonicus</i>	▶  14
1	Emperor Penguin <i>Aptenodytes forsteri</i>	▶  1
65,859	Adelie Penguin <i>Pygoscelis adeliae</i>	▶  2  10
14,275	Gentoo Penguin <i>Pygoscelis papua</i>	▶  2  27
13,116	Chinstrap Penguin <i>Pygoscelis antarcticus</i>	▶  10
122	Magellanic Penguin <i>Spheniscus magellanicus</i>	▶  4
12	Macaroni Penguin <i>Eudyptes chrysolophus</i>	▶  1
2000	Western Rockhopper Penguin <i>Eudyptes chrysocome</i>	▶  1
24	Southern Royal Albatross <i>Diomedea epomophora</i>	▶  1  14
11	Snowy Albatross <i>Diomedea exulans</i>	▶  7
52	Light-mantled Albatross <i>Phoebastria palpebrata</i>	▶  14
13	Gray-headed Albatross <i>Thalassarche chrysostoma</i>	▶  8
104,041	Black-browed Albatross <i>Thalassarche melanophris</i>	▶  47
689	Wilson's Storm-Petrel <i>Oceanites oceanicus</i>	▶  3  41
12	Gray-backed Storm-Petrel <i>Garrodia nereis</i>	▶  5
60	Black-bellied Storm-Petrel <i>Fregetta tropica</i>	▶  13
674	Southern Giant-Petrel <i>Macronectes giganteus</i>	▶  48
104	Northern Giant-Petrel <i>Macronectes halli</i>	▶  19
248	Southern Fulmar <i>Fulmarus glacialisoides</i>	▶  15
7	Antarctic Petrel <i>Thalassoica antarctica</i>	▶  7
2153	Pintado Petrel <i>Daption capense</i>	▶  51
1160	Snow Petrel <i>Pagodroma nivea</i> 	▶  11  24
18	Kerguelen Petrel <i>Aphrodroma brevirostris</i>	▶  7

77	Atlantic Petrel <i>Pterodroma incerta</i>	▶  1  10
657	Blue Petrel <i>Halobaena caerulea</i>	▶  30
9	Fairy Prion <i>Pachyptila turtur</i>	▶  2
1725	Antarctic Prion <i>Pachyptila desolata</i>	▶  19
831	Slender-billed Prion <i>Pachyptila belcheri</i>	▶  18
721	White-chinned Petrel <i>Procellaria aequinoctialis</i>	▶  40
56	Great Shearwater <i>Ardenna gravis</i>	▶  6
691	Sooty Shearwater <i>Ardenna grisea</i>	▶  11
6	Manx Shearwater <i>Puffinus puffinus</i>	▶  2
10	Common Diving-Petrel <i>Pelecanoides urinatrix</i>	▶  4
23	South Georgia Diving-Petrel <i>Pelecanoides georgicus</i>	▶  2
1	Magellanic Diving-Petrel <i>Pelecanoides magellani</i>	▶  1
20	Magellanic Cormorant <i>Leucocarbo magellanicus</i>	▶  4
5909	Imperial Cormorant <i>Leucocarbo atriceps</i>	▶  27
4	Black-crowned Night Heron <i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>	▶  3
32	Turkey Vulture <i>Cathartes aura</i>	▶  5
1	Variable Hawk <i>Geranoaetus polyosoma</i>	▶  1
60	Striated Caracara <i>Daptrius australis</i>	▶  3
50	Blackish Cinclodes <i>Cinclodes antarcticus</i>	▶  2
10	Dark-faced Ground-Tyrant <i>Muscisaxicola maclovianus</i>	▶  4
1	Barn Swallow <i>Hirundo rustica</i>	▶  1
2	Cobb's Wren <i>Troglodytes cobbi</i>	▶  1
6	Grass Wren <i>Cistothorus platensis</i>	▶  2

21	Austral Thrush <i>Turdus falcklandii</i>	▶ 3
20	House Sparrow <i>Passer domesticus</i> *	▶ 1
1	Correndera Pipit <i>Anthus correndera</i>	▶ 1
6	South Georgia Pipit <i>Anthus antarcticus</i>	▶ 3
12	Black-chinned Siskin <i>Spinus barbatus</i>	▶ 2
8	Long-tailed Meadowlark <i>Leistes loyca</i>	▶ 3
17	White-bridled Finch <i>Melanodera melanodera</i>	▶ 4
ADDITIONAL TAXA		
2	Long-tailed/Parasitic Jaeger <i>Stercorarius longicaudus/parasiticus</i>	▶ 1
29	skua sp. <i>Stercorarius sp. (skua sp.)</i>	▶ 10
64	Sterna sp. <i>Sterna sp.</i>	▶ 5
2	tern sp. <i>Sterninae sp.</i>	▶ 1
10,025	penguin sp. <i>Spheniscidae sp.</i>	▶ 4
2	Northern/Southern Royal Albatross <i>Diomedea sanfordi/epomophora</i>	▶ 2
2	Snowy/Tristan/Antipodean Albatross <i>Diomedea exulans/dabbenena/antipodensis</i>	▶ 2
8	large albatross sp. <i>Diomedea sp.</i>	▶ 5
2	albatross sp. <i>Diomedidae sp.</i>	▶ 1
8	storm-petrel sp. <i>Oceanitidae/Hydrobatidae sp.</i>	▶ 1
790	Southern/Northern Giant-Petrel <i>Macronectes giganteus/halli</i>	▶ 42
4320	prion sp. <i>Pachyptila sp.</i>	▶ 1 23
4	Blue Petrel/prion sp. <i>Halobaena caerulea/Pachyptila sp.</i>	▶ 2
137	diving-petrel sp. <i>Pelecanoides sp.</i>	▶ 12