



SOUTHERN SOUTH AMERICA

3rd to 24th January 2017

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The Objective

To see and photograph several species of Albatross and Penguins of the South Atlantic as well as a variety of other birds and land mammals without paying the premium rates offered by specialised wildlife tour companies.

Result

214 species of bird were seen including 4 species of penguin and 7 species of albatross. 21 species of mammal including 10 species of cetacean. Along with a handful of dragonflies, butterflies and other insects. I took over 15,000 photographs (over 30,000 files) requiring 488GB of storage for both RAW and JPEG files.

The Booking

Arrangements were made with Infinity Cruises for the period 3rd January to 24th January 2017. Although they were a little inefficient they were offering a cruise using Norwegian Cruise Line (NCL) for £1799

This included:

Flight from Heathrow to Buenos Aires

Bed and breakfast in Hotel in Buenos Aires for two nights.

A sailing on the Norwegian Sun from Buenos Aires to Montevideo in Uruguay, Punta del Este in Uruguay, Puerto Madryn in Argentina, Port Stanley on the Falklands, Cape Horn, Ushuaia in Argentina, Punta Arenas in Chile, Chilean Fjords, Puerto Chacabuco in Chile, Puerto Montt in Chile, finishing in Valparaiso Chile.

Bed and Breakfast in a Hotel in Santiago for two nights

Flight back to Heathrow

All meals on board ship

All drinks on board ship for two of us in the cabin

Three of us were in one cabin and one in another although our cabin could have slept four.

Additional payments were needed for a taxi to and from Heathrow/Norfolk, evening meals in Buenos Aires and Santiago. Taxi from the airport to hotel in Buenos Aires (easily booked on arrival in BA) and from the hotel to the ship dock prior to sailing. On arrival at Valparaiso a taxi was pre-booked for transport to Santiago which is about a two hour journey. We did this by use of Albatross Birding that gave us a days birding as well as transport for the four of us with luggage to the hotel for \$200 US each. We had a guide and a driver in a small minibus. The following day three of us also did a trip to the Yeso Valley in the Andes again for \$200 US each with the same company with a guide who was also our driver in a 4 wheel drive vehicle. These were quite expensive but it is what it is.

Any transportation to other sites on shore via taxi unless booked via NCL.

Prices for taxis were equivalent to what they would be in the UK for similar distances. Prices for meals ashore were also equivalent as to what they would be in the UK.

The flight was upgraded for £300 to make it direct rather than via Madrid. We also bought a preference lounge at Heathrow for £30 each as our taxi arrival time was some six hours in advance of the outward flight.

Shore Trips using NCL

These were substantially over priced and with one exception not worthwhile for birding. However they do guarantee if there is a delay the ship will wait for you. If you make your own journey ashore the last return time is made clear to you but the ship will not wait if you are late. The trip we took at Stanley was booked as an NCL trip as it was difficult to arrange independently. We went to Lagoon Bluff which was the nearest site to the port that has King Penguin present. Other trips ashore were also arranged via NCL but could have been made by taxi for substantially less cost without any undue risk and been much better for birding.

The Ship

The cabin had adequate space. Was immaculately clean and well serviced by our cabin steward throughout our sailing. The integral bathroom was spacious enough even for a big guy like me. Each day the steward left a news sheet containing information for the following day as well as a towel sculpture! It was an inside cabin with no natural light. This did not bother me as I only used it to sleep. Despite being told prior to travel by NCL the power points in the cabin were British 3 pin they were South American two flat pin offset and two round pin North American. There was also a minibar fridge which we used to chill our water bottles.

The Restaurants, food and drink were all dealt with in a very hygienic way. We tended to use the Garden buffet for all of our meals. Food was available 24/7 as were drinks. Theoretically I had to pay for my drinks because I wasn't on the inclusive drinks package but these were obtained for me by the other two in the room and Chris in the single room that did have the drinks package without too much difficulty. Tea, Coffee and water from a dispenser were available to all free of charge. We ate at a steak restaurant one evening on deck 12. Additional cost was about \$30US. Laundry on board was expensive. I had two bags done for a total of circa US\$80

WiFi on board was very expensive. I pre-purchased 100 minutes (US\$80) simply to keep in contact with home once per day by email but it was only just enough for the voyage and was extremely clunky. Several areas ashore in bars and shops offered free WiFi but that restricted movements when we needed to be mobile.

Birding from the ship was a concern until I saw the deck layout. Many ships have wind protective plastic screens on decks that preclude a clear vision. Deck 6, the promenade deck, has open views around the ship with adequate shelter from wind. Deck 11 aft had an open eating area that was ideal for looking both sideways and backwards as well as limited forward views. Deck 12 had views forward but was always extremely windy and had few places to take shelter. I spent most of my time on Deck 6 and 11. If the decks were shut as they were on a couple of occasions due to high winds, window seats in the sports bar on deck 11 were a secondary option. Deck 6 was better for photography of small sea birds as it is closer to the surface of the sea. The ship was stable enough to use a scope on a tripod with a wide magnification at 25x. I found it essential for identification of some shearwaters, prions and other distant birds.

The Weather was for the most part good. Several days had rain and there was always a constant breeze which escalated to very strong winds on a couple of occasions. Daylight hours increased as we

moved south but the temperature dropped. On a couple of occasions I needed full waterproofing gloves and woolly hat.

Tips and service charges are payable each day and added to your bill unless you state otherwise at reception prior to the last day of your cruise. We preferred to tip individuals ourselves. No money changes hand on board for purchases. Purchases are made by showing your key card issued to you at the beginning of the voyage. This card must be carried with you everywhere and is used for your door key, drinks purchase and any other purchases made on-board. Total charges are debited to your nominated credit card at the end of the voyage. The card is also used as ID to get on and off the ship; your passport is taken from you on boarding for which a receipt is given.

Travel ashore was either by gangplank if docked or tender if offshore. When tenders were being used NCL tour bookings were given preference otherwise it was done on a ticket basis collected from deck five or six early in the morning. Turns for going ashore were announced over the ships tannoy system.

Currency

We took mainly US\$'s with a small supply of Chilean and Uruguay pesos obtained from the post office. Argentinian pesos could only be obtained in Argentina at the airport by way of an expensive method via ATM. There was a substantial queue to use the single working machine. £ Sterling can be used on The Falklands. US\$ were available via an ATM on the ship. Confusingly the \$ symbol is also used for pesos in Argentina, Uruguay and Chile. On return home spare note currency can be sold back to the post office – even Argentinian pesos but only between 10 and 100 peso bills.

Inoculations

Instructions were obtained from our doctors to top up necessary inoculations prior to travel.

Guide Books and Equipment

Two bird guides were used

'Birds of Southern South America and Antarctica' De La Pena and Rumboll which was useful but limited in detail and difficult to use.

'Birds of Chile including the Antarctic Peninsula the Falkland Islands and South Georgia' Jaramillo. A much better guide but limited in relevance to the latter part of our journey.

An e-book version of Marine Mammals of the World by Jefferson et al was used for cetaceans and seals

Bird calls of Patagonia and the South Atlantic – loaded onto an iPhone 5s had limited value

Binoculars: Zeiss Victory SF 10x42 Black

Telescope: Swarovski ATS 80 with a 25 -50x Wide angle zoom on a Manfroto tripod

Flight and Time Zones

Flights were with British Airways and took 12 hours outward and 13 hours homeward both through the night. Time difference between the whole of the southern part of South America we visited and UK winter time is only 3 hours so jet lag was not an issue.

Itinerary

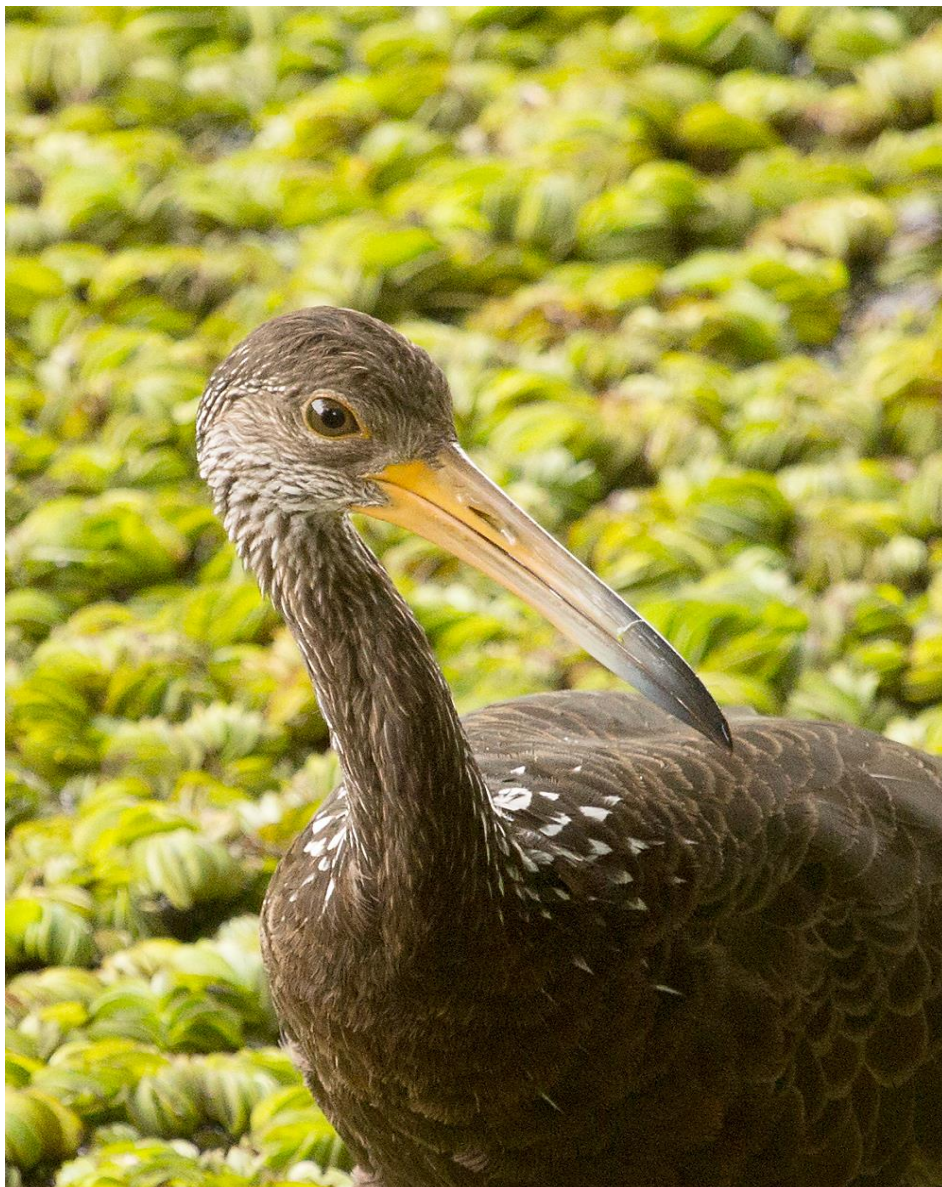
3rd January 2017 – Flight from Heathrow to Buenos Aires

Flight was through the night and uneventful.

4th January 2017 - Buenos Aires Misty which cleared later to get hot at 28°C

We arrived at our hotel around midday (Taxi USA\$160) and some of us has a bite to eat and a drink. We caught a taxi to the south entrance of the Reserva Ecologica Costanera Sur just south of the docks and walked the western most path of the reserve and part of the causeway that affronted the reserve, leaving by the north entrance. Scrub, reeds and open areas of water contained our first real birds of the trip.

We returned to the hotel via a taxi which wasn't too difficult to find at a nearby hotel. We ate in the hotel for our main meal in the evening.



Limpkin



Brazilian Cavy



Argentinian Black & White Tegu



Black Hooded Parakeet



Creamy Bellied Thrush



Rufous Hornero



White Tufted Grebes



Gulf Fritillary



Guira Cuckoo



Reserva Ecológica Costanera Sur looking North



5th January 2017 – Buenos Aires Sunny and hot with a light breeze

After breakfast we again took a taxi to the Reserva Ecologica Costanera Sur north entrance. The reserve is open 8am to 7pm and is free to access. This time we walked an additional path during the morning that took us to the seaward side of the reserve returning to the northern entrance for lunch from one of the street café/vendors. Toilets are on the reserve nearby. In the afternoon we walked the full length of the concrete causeway affronting the reserve before catching a taxi back to the hotel for dinner. It is worth pointing out that the standard of vehicle used by taxi drivers in Buenos Aires is not what one would expect in the UK. Many have their boots tied down with rope; some not securely.



The Reserve in Buenos Aires – the main surface covering plant is Water fern
Salvinia biloba



Picazuro Pigeon



Streaked Flycatcher



Narrow billed Woodcreeper



Painted Turtle



Glittering Bellied Hummingbird



Monk Parakeet



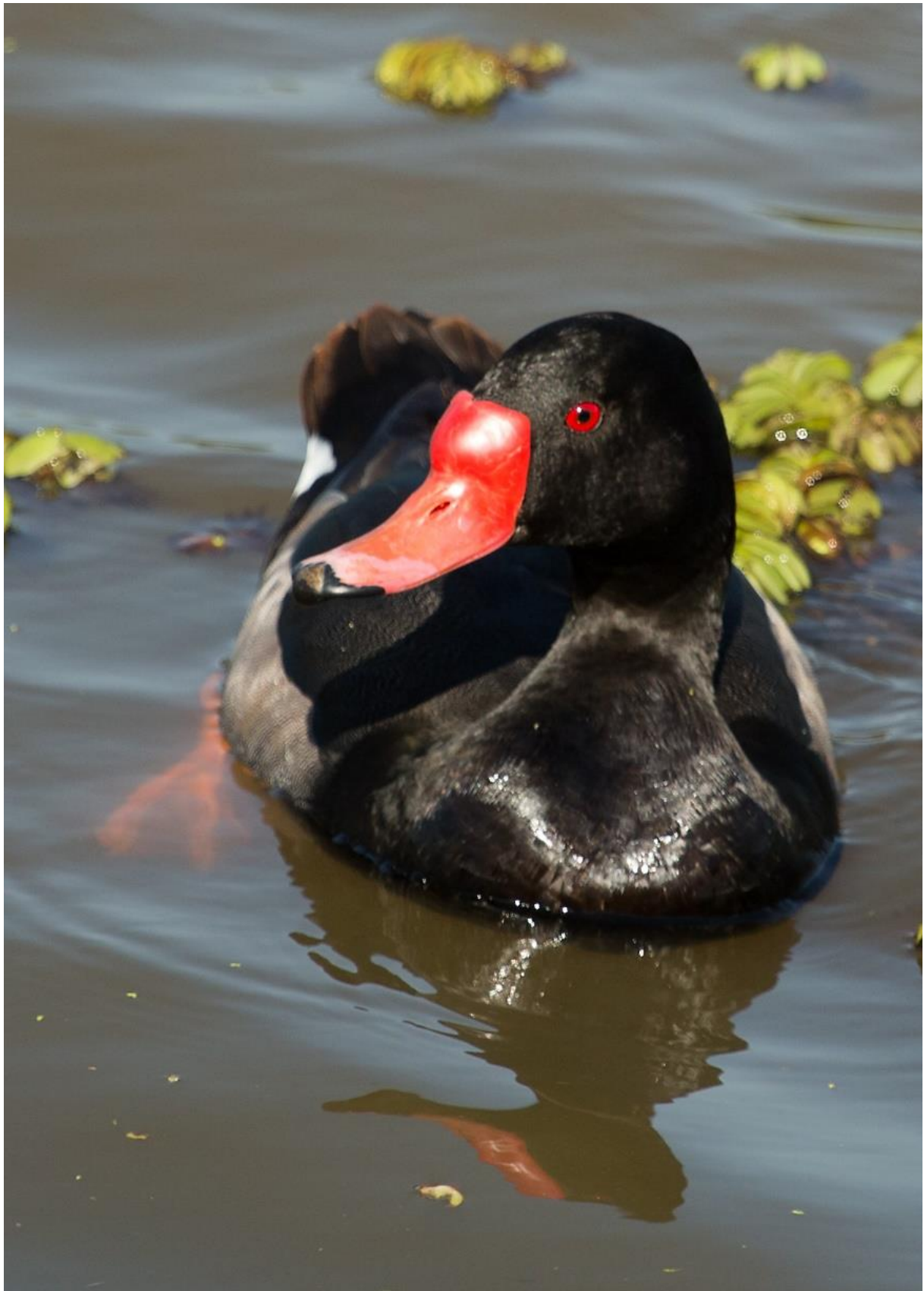
Green backed Woodpecker



Southern Screamer



Rufescent Tiger Heron



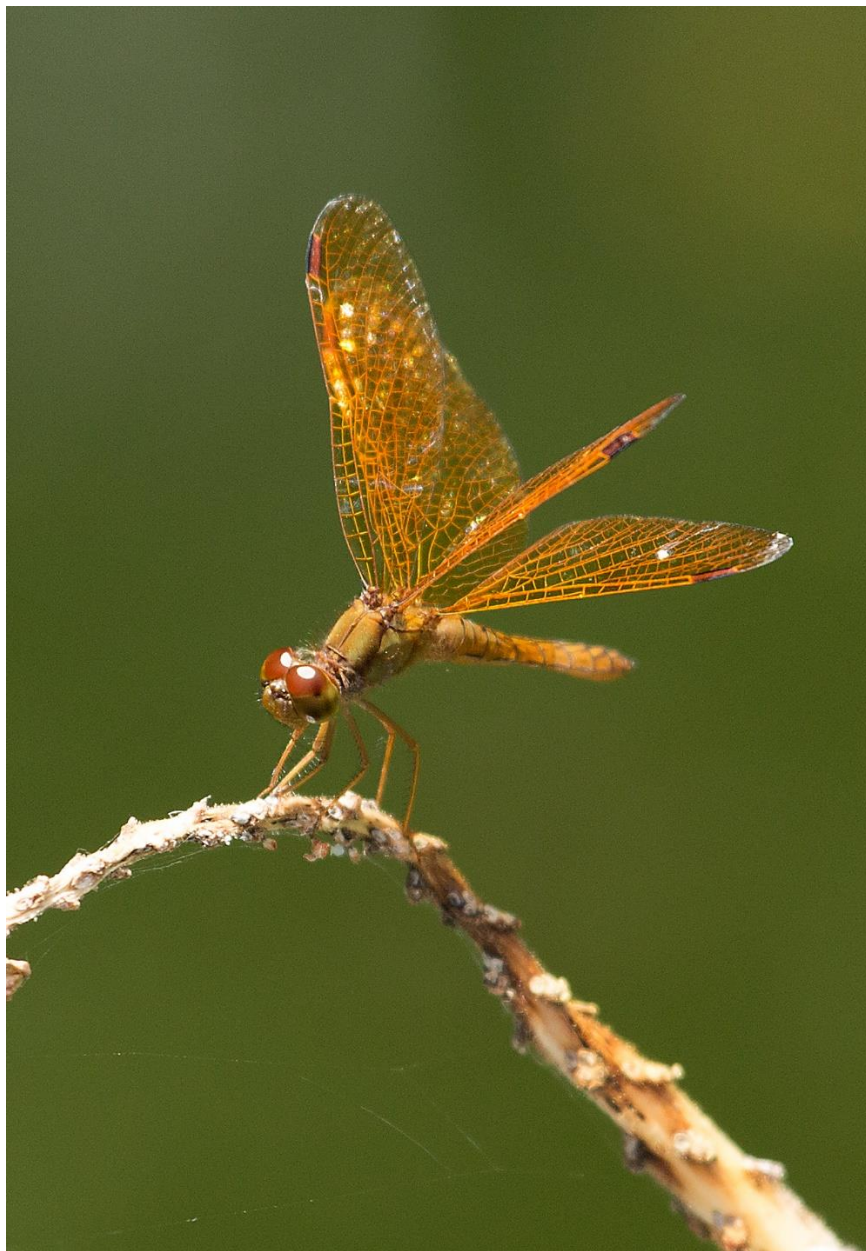
Rosy billed Pochard

6th January 2017 – Buenos Aires/At Sea Warm with a light breeze

A late morning was welcome. We caught a taxi to the ship and checked in which took forever. Our luggage was quickly delivered to our room and we unpacked before having a buffet meal and exploring the ship. Our course was east across the Rio de la Plata river towards Montevideo in Uruguay. After an obligatory muster check at 17:30 we set sail at 19:45

7th January 2017 – At Sea/Montevideo, Uruguay/At Sea Hot with a slight breeze

Docking at 8am we left the ship after breakfast and caught a taxi to the Botanical Gardens arranging with the driver to pick us up at 3pm. (USA\$20 each way) The park was a worthwhile visit, free to enter and had a number of friendly security guards. The driver returned ahead of time and we returned into the town centre to find a pharmacist and do a little shopping and have a drink at a bar to quench our thirst and get WiFi. This was the first and only time we encountered any security issues as we were so obviously being watched within the very busy town by youths.



Amberwing sp of Dragonfly



Picui Ground Dove



Crested Caracara



Grey-necked Woodrail

8th January 2017 – Punta del Este in Uruguay/At Sea Sunny with cloud leading to thunderstorm later

Docking before dawn we took an early tender and walked along the shore front of the peninsula. A small bar opened for us which had nearby WiFi access. Searching the beach and the gardens of the streets was rewarding for birds. A very nice well-kept area.



Southern Lapwing



Lesser Yellowlegs



Cayenne Tern



Great Grebe



American Oystercatcher



Great Kiskadee



Brown chested Martin

9th January 2017 – At Sea Rain and mist clearing later. Moderate wind

Heading south towards the coast of Argentina we started to experience open water.

First Albatross (Yellow nosed) seen at 38° 59.4419'S 58° 15.6366'W

Manx and Great Shearwater seen at 40° 6.9507'S 59° 45.5361'W

First Common Diving Petrel 41° 20.7017'S 61° 25.7952'W



Yellow nosed Albatross juvenile above adult below





Giant Petrel



Great Shearwater

10th January 2017 – Puerto Madryn Argentina Bright sun with wind

Leaving the docked ship first thing we caught the pre-arranged coach to the Valdes Peninsula stopping at various sites including a visitor's centre. There was a substantial charge for park entrance included in the coach trip. The bus broke down a couple of times. It would have been better and cheaper to organise a small taxi. Still, there was lots to see.

Odd presumed Yellow nosed Albatross seen	40° 43.2666'S	60° 34.8026'W
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Common Diving Petrel seen	41° 20.7017'S	61° 25.7952'W
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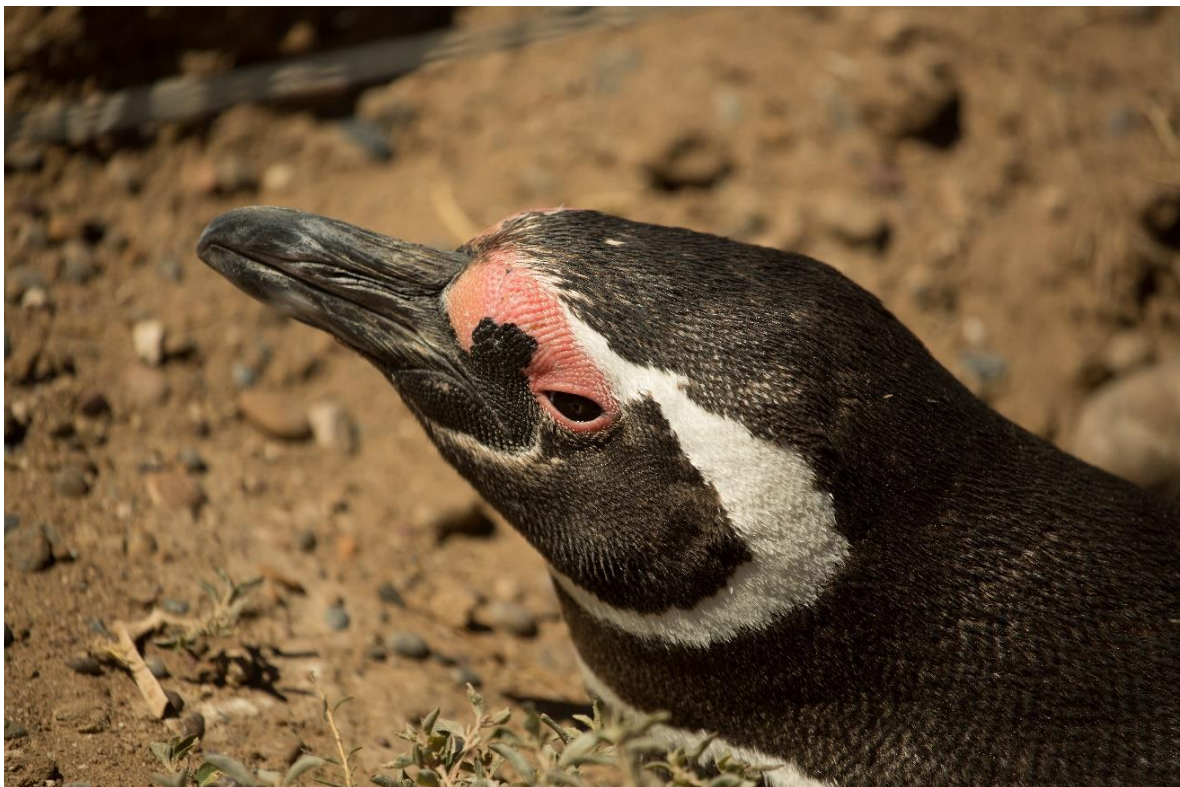
Long beaked Common Dolphins in distant pod viewable from the moored ship



Long beaked Common Dolphins



Mourning Sierra Finch



Magellanic Penguin



Guanaco



Lesser Rhea



Hairy Armadillo



Southern Elephant Seal



Southern Martin



Mara

11th January 2017 – At Sea Calm and bright at first very lumpy sea later

As we ventured out towards the Falklands the seas became a little rougher.

First Wandering Albatross	45° 52.2748'S	62° 1.3303'W
Area where Southern Right Whales first seen	46° 17.6963'S	61° 42.4896'W
Very close Southern Right Whale passed by ship	46° 26.9133'S	61° 35.4025'W
First Soft Plumaged Petrel seen	47° 46.3079'S	60° 35.1284'W



Southern Right Whale. An unprecedented sighting of a pod moving south



Southern Right Whale: classic V shaped blows caused by the two distinct and widely separated blow holes.



Southern Right Whale showing the callosities on the head.



Cape Petrel the only one I saw. The team saw only a handful



Peale's Dolphin



Wilson's Petrel

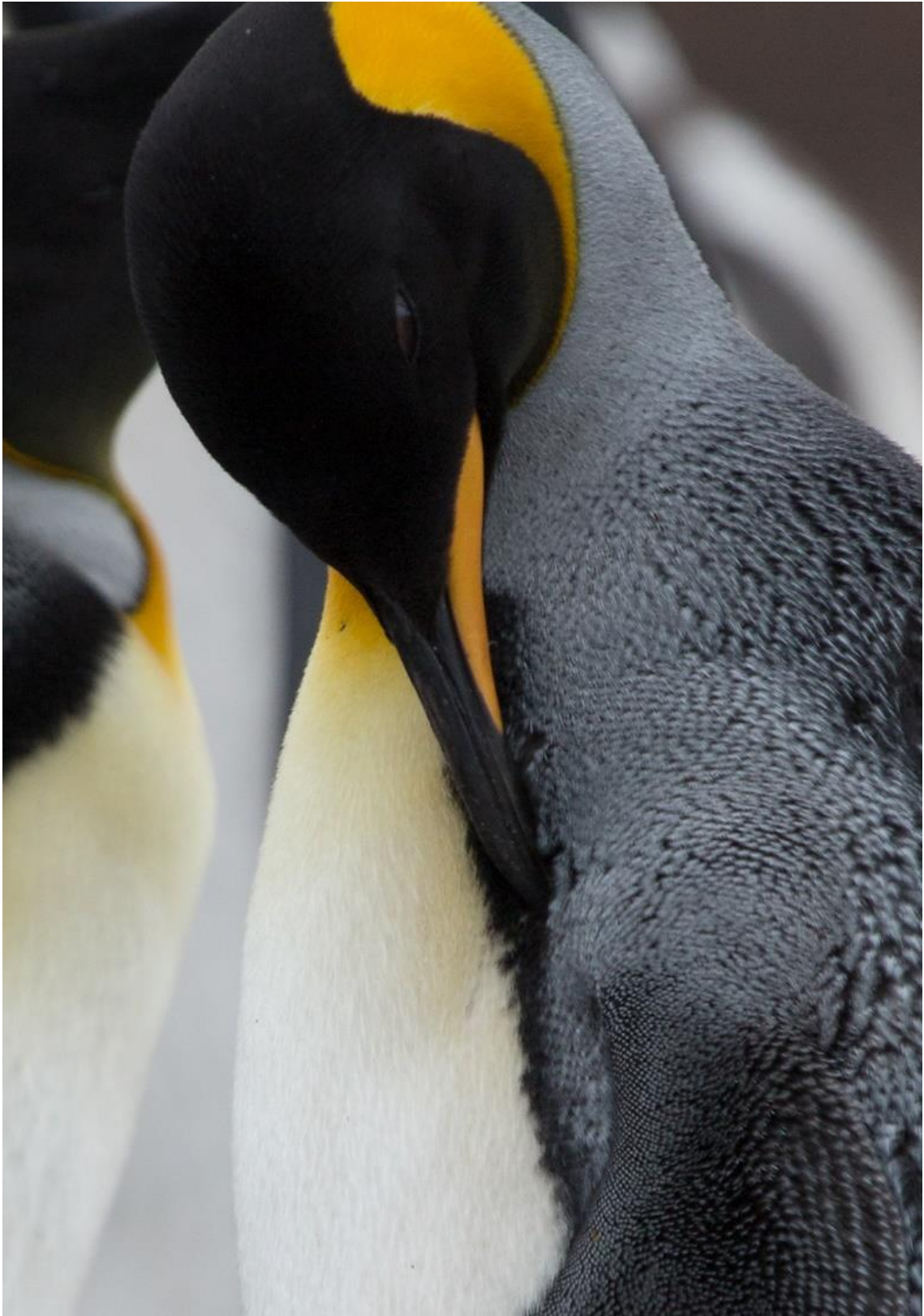
12th January 2017 – Falkland Islands and at Sea Cloudy with some light showers. Quite cool.

Tenders to the shore. We had booked an NCL Tour to Lagoon Bluff for King and Gentoo Penguins. The journey was a 30 minute bus ride and then a 30 minute 4 wheel drive over rough moor. We had a little over an hour at the colony. Access was restricted to the nesting birds by a ring of markers. There were toilets there within a small reserve centre. The beaches nearby could be explored. I felt rushed here and could have easily have spent several hours at the site. The return was in reverse but we asked to be dropped off outside Stanley to walk back. After walking the front shoreline I then went for a walk through Stanley's back streets before catching the tender back. What were probably Peale's Dolphins were following the tender but there is a policy of remaining seated while it is in transit and given there was restricted external views I only got a quick glance of a disappearing dolphin. I watched all the other returning tenders from the ship and saw no other dolphins bow riding the tenders!

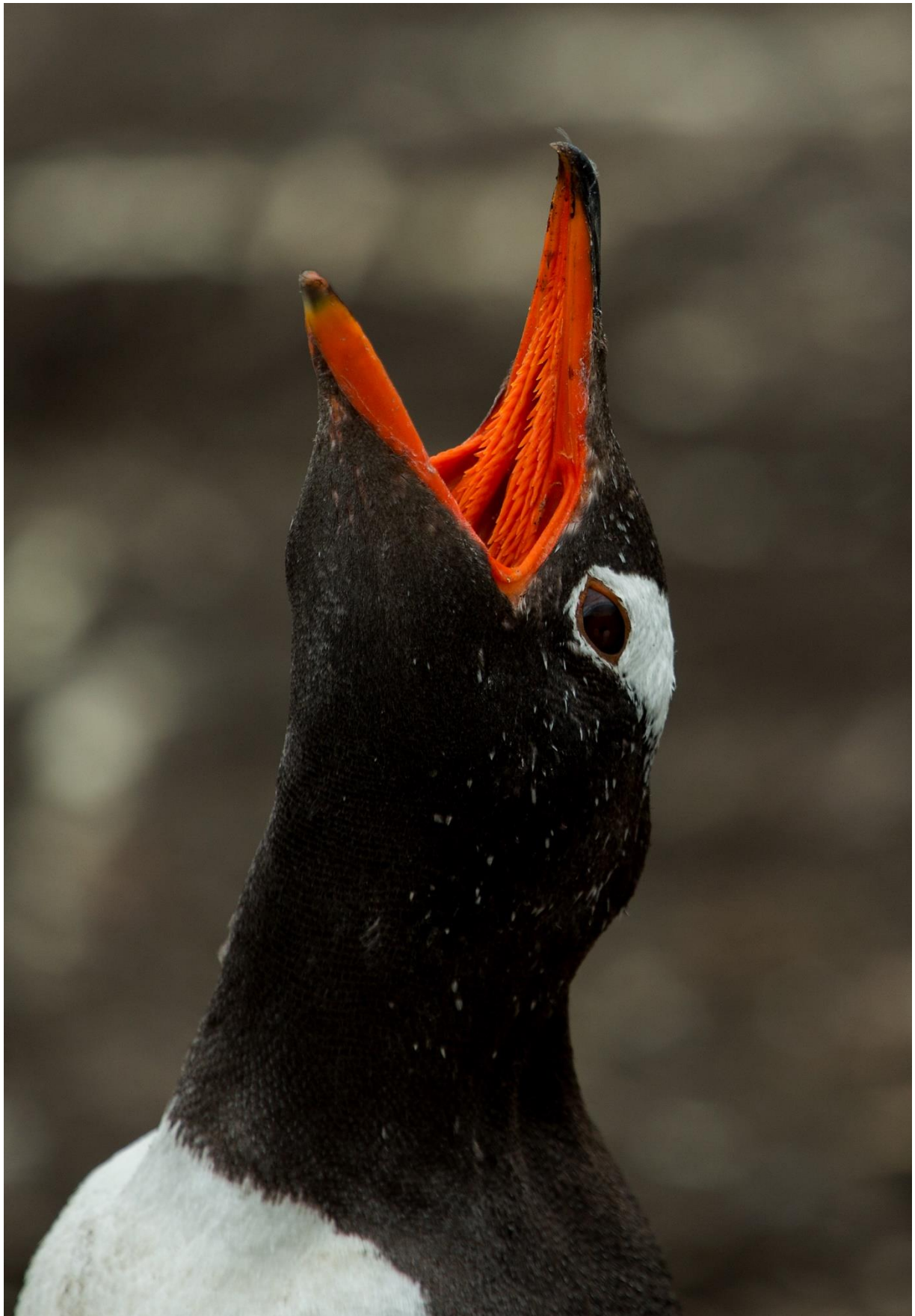
As we sailed there were some large distant Penguin Colonies on view as well as some big rafts of Sooty Shearwaters.



Dolphin Gull



King Penguin



Gentoo Penguin



Upland Goose



Austral Thrush



Brown/Falkland Skua



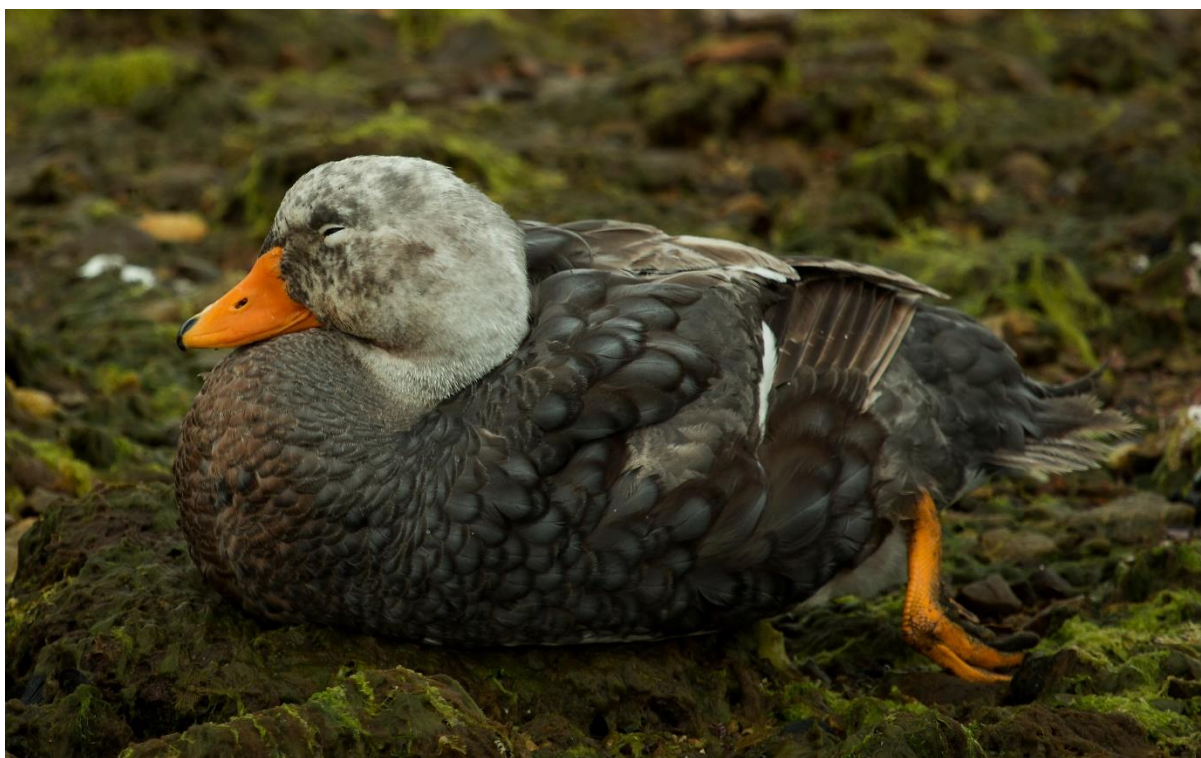
Long tailed Meadowlark



Two Banded Plover



Dark faced Ground Tyrant



Falkland Steamer Duck

13th January 2017 – At Sea heading towards Ushuaia Rough early morning flattened out to a calm evening. Some cloud with mostly sunshine.

Given the conditions were so calm as we passed Cape Horn – we returned east and did it twice.

Fin Whale distantly seen

54° 16.0823'S 62° 11.2200'W



Thin billed Prions



Black browed Albatross



Imperial (Blue eyed) Cormorant



A very distant shot of an Hourglass Dolphin discovered retrospectively within photographs



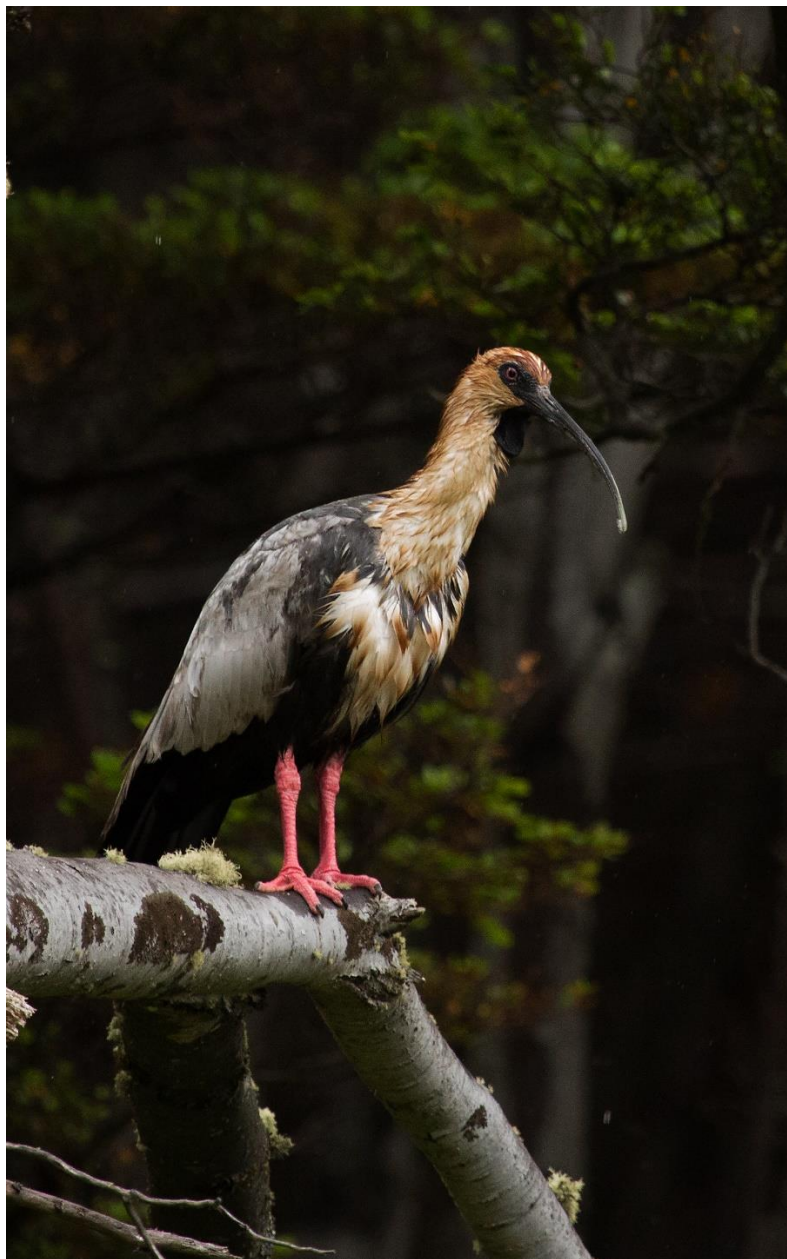
Cape Horn



Royal Albatross

14th January 2017 – At Sea and Ushuaia in Argentina Rain in the morning and evening. Sun occasionally. After docking we went on a coach trip to Tierra del Fuego National Park. Park entrance fee and boxed lunch included. This also included a trip on a boat to Seal Island in the Beagle channel. Evening sailing up the channel on the ship passed a number of glaciers.

Glacier Hollanda	54° 58.7726'S	69° 4.9388'W
Glacier Italia	54° 55.8106'S	69° 15.5162'W
Francia Glacier	54° 55.1996'S	69° 20.2809'W
Alemania Glacier	54° 54.2523'S	69° 26.2072'W
Glacier Romanche	54° 53.9193'S	69° 28.2050'W



Black faced Ibis



Austral Parakeet



Andean Fox



South American Sea Lion



Imperial (Blue eyed) Cormorant



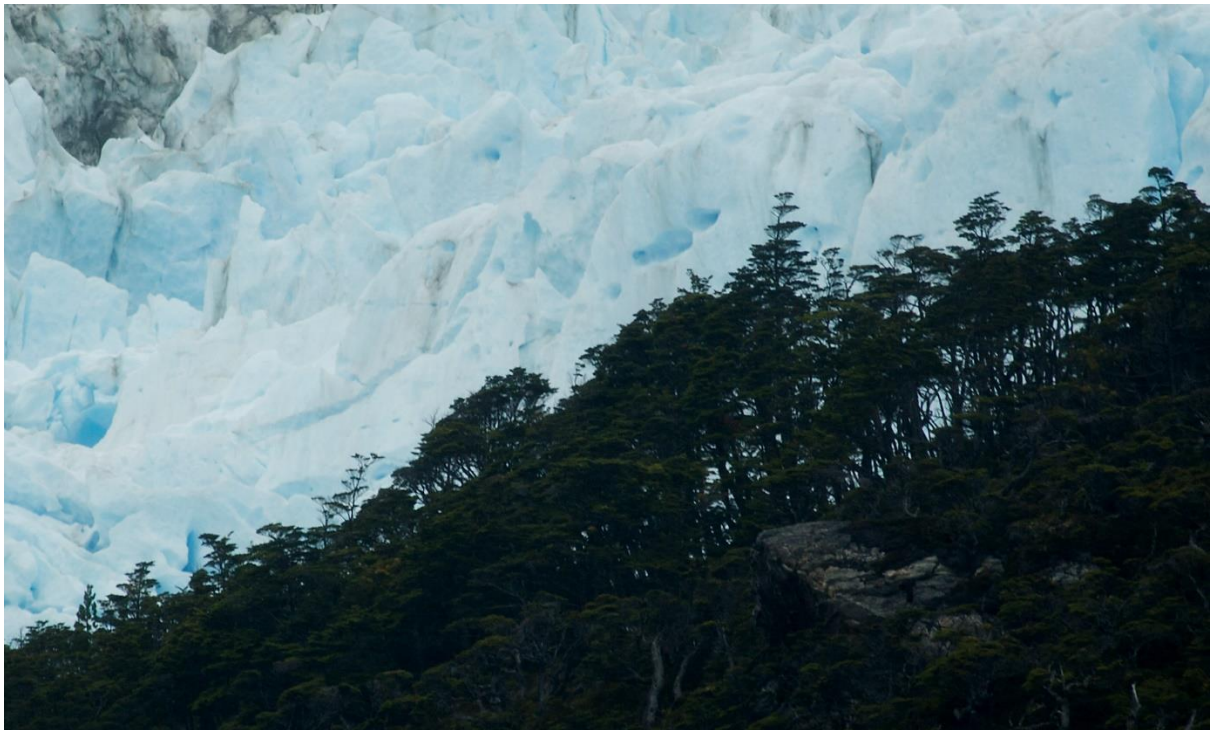
Kelp Goose



Blackish Cinclopes



The Italia Glacier ... with 'iceburglets'



'Glacier Alley' in the Beagle channel

15th January 2017 – Punta Arenas Chile Windy and showers later

Due to high winds the ferry to Magdalena Island was delayed for around 2 hours. The departure point was around the other side of the port on the far side of a military area. This demanded a short bus ride rather than walking! The ferry was a freight transporter adapted for people carrying. The Island had a walkway roped off around a large Magelanic Penguin colony. I decided to only walk the first 500m and return in the hour we had available. Some good gatherings of seabirds and cetaceans within the sea journey which took around 90 minutes each way.

Sei Whales seen

53° 7.7405'S 70° 49.2536'W



Magelanic Penguin chicks



Rufous chested Dotterel



Black bellied Cinclodes



Commerson's Dolphin



Sei Whale – a nice surprise on the return journey to Magdalena Island. The sickle shape dorsal fin, strong blow, latitude of the sighting and the shallow dives with the dorsal fin showing for a long time afterwards gave away the identification.



Chilean Skua



Magdalena Island Ferry

16th January 2017 – At Sea. Very windy

The open decks were closed after 11am due to the high winds in the Pacific and viewing had to be done from indoors - the sports bar on deck 11 had the best seating and cleanest windows.

Whale blow seen

52° 47.2254'S 74° 16.5241'W



Thin billed Prions were around the ship in good numbers



White chinned Petrel

17th January 2017 – At Sea. Very windy and rough seas.

Orcas seen at	48° 18.1428'S	75° 6.5003'W
2 Fin Whales seen	48° 14.7474'S	75° 9.0492'W
First Pink footed Shearwater	47° 51.7261'S	75° 24.4716'W

All upper decks closed. All cetaceans seen before leaving Chilean Fjords for the Pacific.



Pink Footed Shearwater



Salvin's (Shy) Albatross



Wandering Albatross



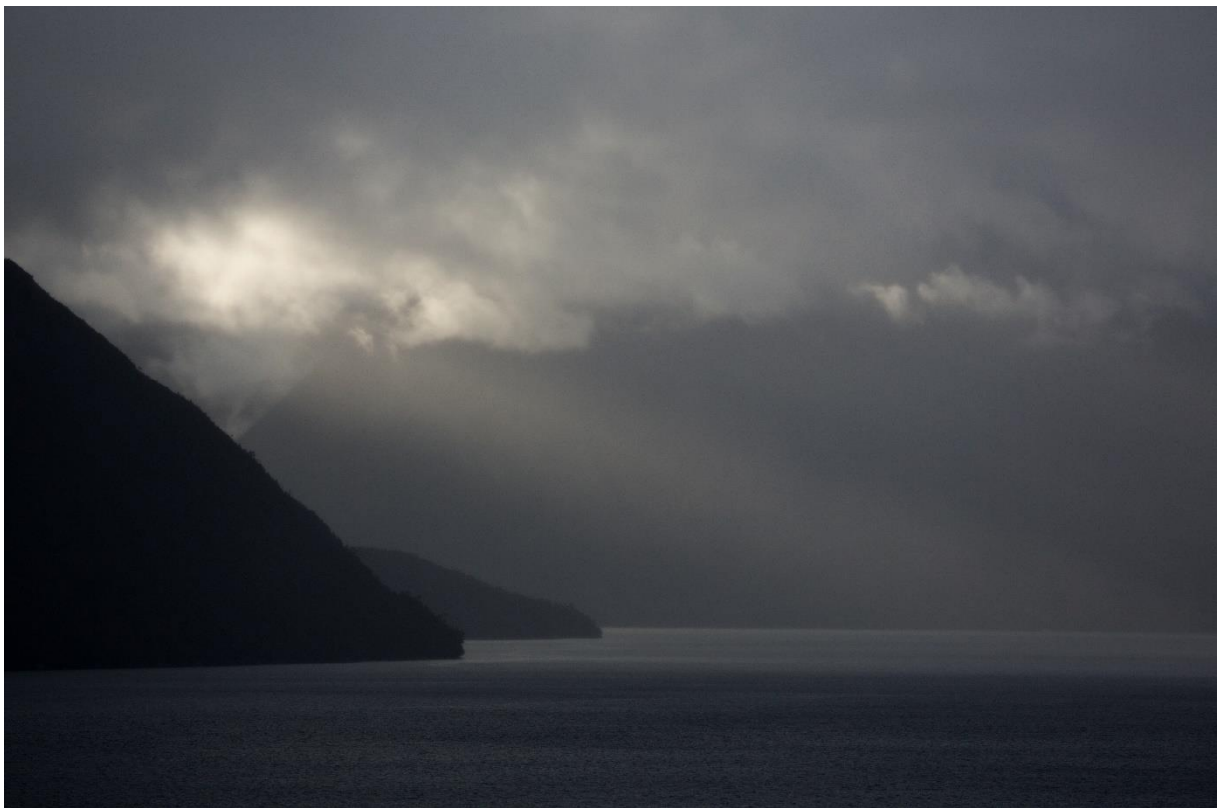
Stejnegers's Petrel



Orcas



Fin Whale – the second largest animal on the planet.



Early morning in the Fjords

18th January 2017 – Puerto Chacabuco and at Sea. Mist and rain most of day despite the pleasant forecast.

Tender early morning; we took a walk around the small community of Puerto Chacabuco and a short track through scrub and fields identified from Google Earth at the back of the only hotel in the settlement.

A group of up to 10 Fin Whales seen at

44° 17.7351'S 73° 26.0139'W



Chilean Swallow



White crested Elaenia

19th January 2017 – Puerto Montt and at Sea Warm to Hot shower later

The ship anchored offshore and we were tendered-in. A taxi tout arranged us a driver and taxi for the day. We wanted to go east to the estuary and valley of the Rio Colhuin Chamiza. Identified from Google Earth the area was rich in shorebirds. The valley birding on the river may have been better earlier in the day but the hotspots were around the isolated settlements. Two dolphins spotted close inshore within the estuary were identified as Chilean Black Dolphins.



Peale's Dolphin seen from the anchored ship



Turkey Vulture



Black crowned Night Heron



Peruvian Pelican



Franklin's Gulls



Hudsonian Whimbrel



Black faced Ibis



Chimango Caracara



Fire eyed Diucon



Spectacled Tyrant

20th January 2017 – At Sea. Foggy am with no wind. Clear and windy later but still mild.

A group of Long finned Pilot Whales passed the ship at high speed but close enough to see in the fog; however they disappeared into the gloom before they could be photographed.

Pilot whales seen at

38° 22.7525'S 74° 16.2324'W

3-4 Dolphin sp. travelling east

34° 45.5885'S 72° 45.3218'W



White chinned Petrel



Pink footed Shearwater



Westland Petrel



The last bird photographed at sea – Buller's Albatross

21st January 2017 – Valparaiso and coastal area and journey east to Santiago. Warm with cloudy but bright skies

The ship docked at 6am and disembarkation started soon after. Tickets for an orderly departure at allocated times were collected earlier in the week from reception. We were called at 8:15pm and were seen off the ship onto a coach which dropped us off at the terminal to claim our luggage which

was collected from outside our cabin the previous evening. Very streamlined procedure. We were met by Fernando Medrano our ace guide from Albatross Birding who took us to a small minibus to take us birding. Pedro was our driver who we also used to take us to the airport on departure. We had several stops on the coast at Montemer-Renaca, a rocky bay, Desembocadura San Geronimo, a river bridge and small nature reserve, Laguna Cartagena, a dune and reservoir nature reserve, a small quarry area further inland, Quebrada de Corboda Isla Negra where we had lunch and a busy beach with an adjacent estuary of the Rio Maipo desembocadura. After which we made our way to the hotel in Santiago which took around 2 hours. The hotel was very basic and not traditional but it was adequate. We ate in an Italian restaurant that evening.



Inca Terns



Peruvian Booby



Snowy Egret



White backed Stilt



Elegant Terns



Red Shovelers



Coypu



Austral Negrito



Black Skimmer skimming!

22nd January 2017 – Santiago and Yeso Valley. Warm and sunny if a little windy in exposed places

We were picked up by Fernando at 5:30am in a four wheel drive. Making our way up the river Maipo we stopped at Camino bordeano al Toyo, a river canyon and nearby in a smaller canyon with a bridge over the river. We then ascended the Yeso valley stopping at various sites to bird. We finally halted our ascent on a rocky track at around 7500' about 5km from the Argentinian border before returning to the hotel in Santiago. Many restaurants were closed given it was Sunday so we went to the local supermarket and made a makeshift room picnic that evening.



Giant Hummingbird



Rufous Banded Minor



Pepsis (Tarantula Hawk) Wasp



White browed Ground Tyrant



Grey headed Sierra Finch



Crag Chilia



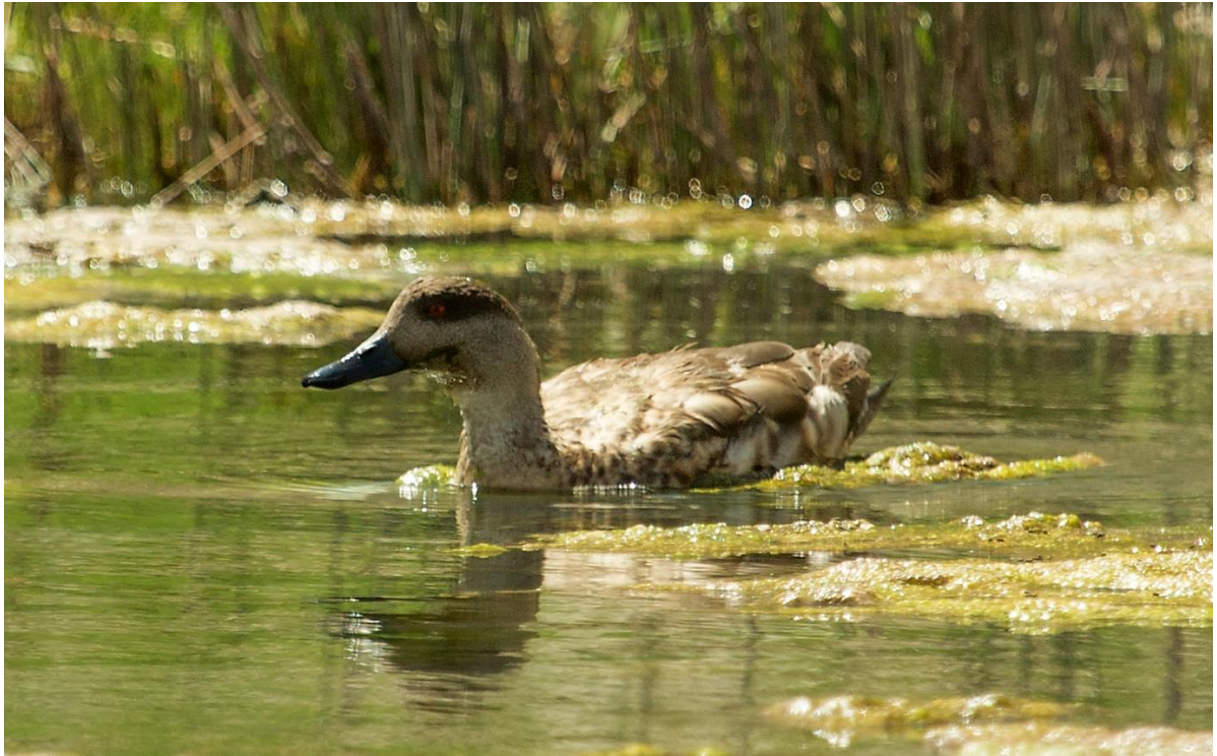
Tufted Tit Tyrant



Black winged Ground Dove



American Kestrel



Crested Duck



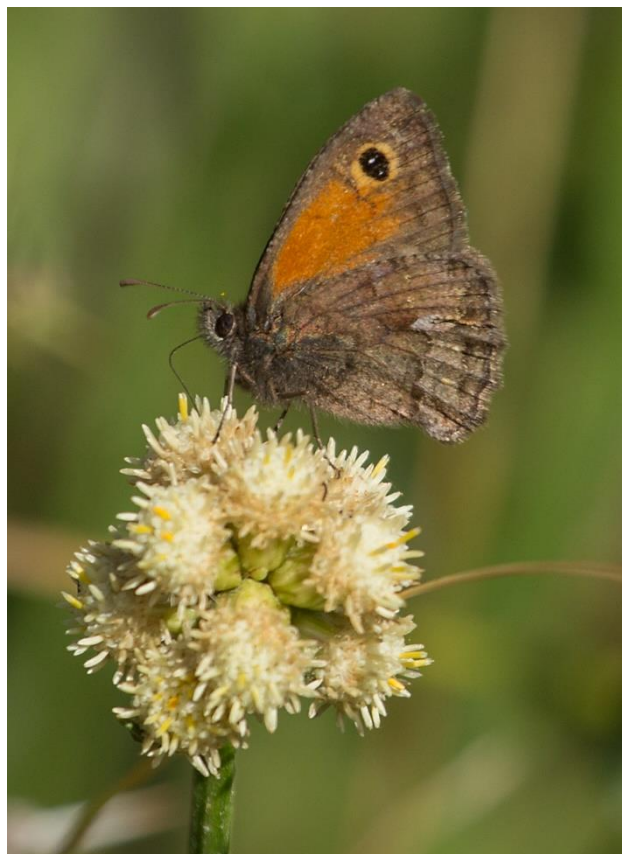
Andean Condor



The El Yeso Valley



Grey breasted Seedsnipe



Common Chilean Satyr



Diademed Sandpiper Plover

23rd January 2017 – Santiago to Airport and Flight back to Heathrow. Warm and Sunny

After a scenic walk around Santiago we made our way back to the airport for our journey back to the UK which was uneventful but comfortable on the newest plane in the BA fleet.



The Team: From left to right Bob, Moi, Chris, Bill and John (our Canadian honorary member)