



ANTARCTICA & TIERRA del FUEGO (Argentina)

From the End of the World to the Ice Continent

6 - 18 March 2011



Playful **Gentoo Penguins** were a regular feature



Huge Icebergs littered the channels of the Antarctic Peninsula

Report by Sam Woods (Photos by Pablo Cervantes & Sam Woods/Tropical Birding)

This was to be my first time in Antarctica and I could barely wait. Much hype has been written about Antarctica and all of it is true: amazingly approachable wildlife, jaw dropping scenery like nowhere else on Earth, in one of the last true great wildernesses on the Planet. We experienced all of this firsthand (time and again), from penguins at our feet, Antarctic Minke Whale passing right underneath our small Zodiac, icy channels littered with huge blue-toned icebergs, and clean white snowy mountains with penguins peppered around the bases of them. Time and again we were greeted by spectacular scenes and exciting experiences that can only be offered by the “White Continent” that truly is like nowhere else.



The wildlife is but one of the many spectacular experiences in Antarctica

This was a scouting trip to the continent, and differed markedly from our longer, more comprehensive set-departure tour which also covers the subantarctic islands of the Falklands and South Georgia (and visits earlier in the season when greater variety and numbers of birds would be nesting) that only serve to enhance further the wildlife experiences described here...

March 6 (Day 1) TIERRA del FUEGO NATIONAL PARK

We arrived at the self-proclaimed “End of the World”, Ushuaia, in the morning tired but eager to get in the field and sample the birds on offer on Tierra del Fuego, the “Land of Fire”. Before we had even left this small airport we were noting birds such as snow white male **Kelp Geese** littering the shorelines that were shared at times with **Southern Lapwings** and **Blackish Oystercatchers** too.

After a quick check in and a hearty meal in one of the many fine restaurants that line the main street in Ushuaia we drove the short distance out of town to **Tierra del Fuego National Park** with a few special Patagonian targets in mind. As we drove in to the park we stopped to admire some graceful **Black-necked Swans** gently drifting around one of the many scenic lakes that litter this park right at the southern end of South America. Indeed waterfowl were a

big feature of our afternoon in and around the park, with **Red Shovelers** noted on the edge of Ushuaia town, **Yellow-billed Pintail** shared the same lakes with the swans, the remarkably dimorphic **Upland Goose** decorated some of the roadsides within the park, and a small raft of **Flightless Steamer-ducks** (*below*) rode the surf in a large bay within the national park that also hosted a pair of immaculate **Great Grebes**. One of the most common raptor species around Ushuaia is the oddly-named **Chimango Caracara** that we encountered regularly through the afternoon, although just the one **Black-chested Buzzard-Eagle** was found in the afternoon.



Once into the heart of the park we walked a quiet trail that wound its way through a mixed forest of Antarctic Beech and pine. In this far southern part of the World there are few birds, but the ones there are however quite special indeed. Some excited twittering led us to a small bird party roaming the beech that

held the strangely named **Thorn-tailed Rayadito** (which seems to dominate bird parties in this part of the world), and further along another party of Rayaditos shared the trees with a pair of **White-throated Treerunners** running up their limbs. However, a loud wrap stopped us in our tracks and focused our attentions rapidly for this was the true king of these woods, and the real target on our “shopping list” for the afternoon. A quick burst of playback brought South America’s largest woodpecker, the mighty **Magellanic Woodpecker** steaming agitatedly into the trees alongside us, offering us long, long looks in the process of both the red-headed male and black-crested female (*below*). On our way out of the park we also picked up a flock of smart **Patagonian Sierra-Finches**.



March 7 (Day 2)

TIERRA del FUEGO

For our next “filler day” before our Antarctic cruise we headed north out of Ushuaia and investigated the northern end of Tierra del Fuego. En route the roadside wildlife changed, as the Patagonian grassland hosted **Guanacos** (*next page*) that we had not seen during our afternoon in the south. Similarly, an extravagantly named flycatcher, the **Fire-eyed Diucon** also appeared by the roadsides with regularity. Some roadside trees also hosted our first **Black-chinned Siskins**, a few **Austral Thrushes**, and another party of **White-throated Treerunners**. The

open grasslands and fields at the north end of the island also yielded several striking **Long-**

tailed Meadowlarks, a small number of **Austral Negritos**, the odd **Correndera Pipit**, and a flock or two of **Grassland Yellow-Finches**. Several large lagoons played host to **Chilean Flamingos**, **Chiloe Wigeons**, lingering wintering hordes of **White-rumped Sandpipers**. Around the edges of these large saline lakes both **Common and Short-billed Miners** were found probing in the dirt, and a small group of **Least Seednipes** hid well in the dry earth, while **Chilean Swallows** hawked insects overhead. Geese were everywhere, dominated by flocks of thousands of **Upland Geese** that held a fair number of **Ashy-headed Geese** within them.



Guanacos were prominent just north of Ushuaia

March 8 (Day 3) GARIBALDI PASS

With our cruise set to depart in the afternoon we opted to try for one of Tierra del Fuego's toughest birds in the morning at a mountain pass just outside Ushuaia. The lower flanks of Garibaldi Pass are cloaked in gnarly trees (which hosted regular flocks of **Black-chinned Siskins** and further **Thorn-tailed Rayaditos**) shrubs, providing quite a barrier to the upper slopes that we were really interested in. The top of the hills there are covered in damp bright green cushion moss and are home to the rarest of the World's seedsnipes, the White-bellied Seedsnipe, which is often looked for but often missed. Weather is always a threat to efforts to see this bird, and it was initially tough to tell whether we were to be clouded out or not. Bouts of clear skies quickly turned to low cloud, causing minimal visibility within minutes. However, we persisted and despite having to endure marked periods of reduced visibility there were

enough clear spells to make it worth persisting. A Peregrine Falcon darted through the air above the pass and scared up the odd **Buff-winged Cinclodes** or **Rufous-collared Sparrow**. We continued our search for the seedsnipe and rounded a corner which led us up a wet gully covered with thick moss on its side. It appeared perfect for **White-bellied Seedsnipe** (*below*), which was confirmed moments later when four of these strange shorebirds were found shuffling their way across the moss. After such a great sighting we returned to Ushuaia, where we stopped off along the shoreline finding a **Chilean Skua** resting on the edge of an estuary along with several parties of ducks foraging along the shoreline that included **Crested Ducks**, **Chiloe Wigeons**, and **Red Shovelers**. A brief check of the town dump produced very close looks at a scavenging **Dolphin Gull**, several expected **Chimango Caracaras**, and three of the hoped-for **White-throated Caracara**.



We were fortunate to get incredible looks at the rare **White-bellied Seedsnipe** shortly before joining our Antarctic cruise (*Pablo Cervantes*)

In the afternoon we boarded our Antarctic-bound vessel, loaded our bags into our cabins, and were soon on our way through the Beagle Channel which would lead us into the infamous Drake Passage. Standing on deck we picked up some new birds on deck around Ushuaia Harbor and along the entrance to Beagle Channel before a dramatic sunset descended on us and brought a close to our days birding. These included dozens of **South American Terns**, **Magellan Cormorants**, along with more **Chilean Skuas**, **Kelp and Brown-hooded Gulls**, and even our first penguin with several parties of **Magellanic Penguins** porpoising through the water.

By the end of the day we met with our Russian crew, familiarized ourselves with our sturdy Polish vessel and met with our expedition staff that seemed to come from all corners of the globe from Canada to the US, South Africa to Germany, and Australia. We also fell to sleep with our heads full of anticipation as to what the next few days cruising the rich southern Oceans would bring us in terms of pelagic birds and ocean-faring animals...

March 9 – 10 DRAKE PASSAGE

Two days sounds like a long time at sea, although with the promise of some very cool pelagic birds it did not feel this way at all. There was rarely a moment when birds were not “attending” the wake or cruising past the hull. This was all interspersed with informative, and excellent expert presentations by our expedition staff to break up our time surveying the seas, which covered everything from Scott and Shackleton’s famous Antarctic expeditions, to a summary of the birds on offer during the voyage, to the intricate ecology of Antarctica’s famous penguins. Furthermore, the seabird mix changes from one day to the next. Our first day was spent in the warmer waters well north of Antarctic Convergence (a changeable, invisible barrier between warmer northern waters and cold southern waters), where the seabird community differed significantly from that found around and south of the convergence.

We were awoken by a timely announcement from the ship’s loud speaker that softly informed us that albatrosses were gliding around our vessel. A quick look out of the port hole brought confirmation that we were surrounded by **Black-browed Albatrosses** that stayed with almost continually through the day. Not long later though the true “Ocean Giants” entered the fray with a **Wandering Albatross** giving us a short but much appreciated flyby of the starboard side. Then shortly after our first Royal



Albatross majestically glided into view for a great comparison with the Wandering that had appeared just moments before. As expected this proved to be the more abundant **Southern Royal Albatross**, although before the day was out we also added the less expected and considerably less numerous **Northern Royal Albatross** too to our list of cool seabirds. We also picked up our first **Northern Giant-Petrels**, several **Sooty Shearwaters**, and got fleeting looks and unidentifiable **diving-petrel species** that darted past the boat. One of the stranger things that happened on this day was finding first a **Sooty Shearwater** resting on the boat,

and then a **Chilean Swallow** resting on the ship's railings (while we noticed we were a good 120km+ from land!).

Our second day traversing the famed Drake Passage was also characterized by calm seas, barely a breath of wind and a very comfortable crossing indeed. Rumors of our first Antarctic ice to be seen by the days end proved to be unfounded, but we experienced a very interesting day at sea besides. Entering cooler waters the mix of birds around the boat changed markedly: glancing out of ship's portholes brought us our first addition before breakfast; several **Gray-headed Albatrosses** (*below*) cruising close past the portside. **Southern Fulmars** now also started to appear and bumped into double figures by the days end. **Southern Giant-Petrels** also joined the list and all thus far proved to be dark phase birds. Not

seen at all seen the day before **Cape Petrels** were now almost constant companions around the ship, gliding past close or resting just off the bow. Storm-petrels were also constantly present with both **Wilson's and Black-bellied Storm-Petrels** both numerous in this part of the Drake Passage. The highlight of the day though was when a scheduled safety presentation had to be rapidly re-scheduled as a pod



of **Orcas** were spotted surfacing just off the bow. We rushed to the scene to find them still present and lingering for some time. As we watched one of Antarctica's most feared predators cutting through the surface of the ocean by the boat a **Wandering Albatross** very nearly stole the show by gliding with a few meters of our faces at the same time, while a small party of **White-chinned Petrels** also cruised low over the prominent fin of one of the "Killer Whale". As if that was not enough a **Light-mantled Albatross** did a bad job of trying to sneak past in the background. This turned out to be one of the standout moments of the whole tour, let alone the crossing. After two days at sea, and the cool wind of the Antarctic being felt on our faces we were ready to experience the great white continent itself, and we retired with thoughts of finally stepping on to the ice itself the next day...



One of the impressive pod of **Orcas** that hung around the bow of our ship for some time in the Drake Passage



A **White-chinned Petrel** fails to distract us from the **Orca** behind

Other highlights from the Drake Passage...



...Cape Petrel



...& the World's largest albatross, the immense **Wandering Albatross**

March 11 **ANTARCTIC PENINSULA: LEMAIRE CHANNEL & PETERMANN ISLAND**

This morning I awoke to one of the greatest mornings I have experienced anywhere: the dramatic setting of the Lemaire Channel, our very first glimpse of Antarctica. This narrow channel is some 11km long but just 1600 meters wide. The still waters of this icy channel were littered with large icebergs and is flanked by spectacular jagged peaks and cliffs of the mountain ranges on the west Kiev Peninsula that flanks its eastern edge. The many floating ice platforms played host to many seals loafing on them, while the waters surface was broken regularly by passing pods of **Antarctic Minke Whales**. And this was all before breakfast! The bow of the ship was lined with cruise participants desperate for their first "snap" of Antarctica. Unsurprisingly this famed location has been dubbed Kodak Gap by virtue of the many thousands of photos that are taken there each year. With such a scene on offer this is more than justified.



Adelie Penguin rests on Petermann Island as snow falls gently around it (*Pablo Cervantes*)

A lot of willpower and berating from the ship's staff was necessary for us to take a break from this awe-inspiring scene and finally have a belated breakfast. We then prepared ourselves for our first Zodiac venture onto Antarctica. Our first destination was **Petermann Island** on the west side of the Antarctic Peninsula and home to the southernmost

Gentoo Penguin colony in the world. Even before we reached the shores of this 2km-long island we could see that penguins were the dominant form of life there with thousands of birds crowding our landing site. A short calm ride in a Zodiac saw us setting foot



on Antarctica for the very first time, a thrilling and unforgettable experience. Well prepared in our provided Antarctic clothing the cold was kept out and never troubled us, even when light snow began to fall which merely added to the experience. As snow gently drifted down around us we walked among Gentoo Penguins, which were always under the watchful eye of the attendant **South Polar Skuas**, (*below*) always looking for a meal to scavenge or a hapless penguin to prey on. Our main reason for visiting was the Gentoos which were well-dressed as ever, and well-behaved inadvertently allowing us well within the "legal" barriers for approach as they waddled up to us on many occasions leaving us no other option but to soak up the photo opps and admire these immaculate birds at very close quarters. Petermann also plays host to a large Adelie Penguin colony that at this late stage of the season may have already gone to sea. However, soon after arrival the radio crackled to life and soon enough our expedition staff revealed their "penguin expert" had found a few "rogue" or "relict" **Adelie Penguins** (*page 10*) still persisted on Petermann. We made our way across the rocks and ice, weaving our way through skuas and penguins to a small group of handsome Adelines looking a little out of place among the mass of Gentoos surrounding them.

After an enjoyable morning among penguins and predatory skuas we returned to the ship for another fine spread provided by our friendly and attentive Russian crew, before we returned to the Zodiacs in the afternoon to survey the shores and channels surrounding Petermann Island. Our plan had been to cruise among the bergs littering the channels around Petermann and take advantage of the wonderful landscape photos on offer, but this quickly turned into a seal tour by virtue of the great "sealing" opportunities on offer. Antarctica is a rich continent for *pinipeds* (or seals), and we saw this first hand from our Zodiacs which weaved between the prominent bergs and gently ambled within just a few meters of 4 different seal species during

the afternoon. First up was a pair of young **Southern Elephant Seals** (*next page*) practicing their “beachmaster” skills, which will come in handy when they are mature in order to fight on the beaches and protect their harems of females.



Young **Southern Elephant Seals** practicing their jousting skills

The radio then crackled to life to inform us a predatory **Leopard Seal** (*next page*) had just caught a hapless Gentoo Penguin and was “playing” with it in the water. What more could we do but tace over there and watch the show. Nature’s brutality was there for all to see as this large dappled seal tossed what was left of the penguin this way and that just a few feet from our boat, while several **Wilson’s Storm-Petrels** (*below*) picked pieces of the meal off the surface of the water within just inches of us. Next up on the “seal menu” was a pack ice specialist, a **Weddell Seal** (*next page*), which was loafing rather prominently along the rocky shorelines



(surrounded by Gentoos). We drifted just off the rocks while the seal gave us a calm look, before we went on our originally-planned tour of the local bergs and ice platforms, finding yet another seal species, and another ice zone specialist, the **Crabeater Seal**, resting on a small ice platform that once again showed no signs of fear as we

brushed up against its icy “stage” and shot it from every possible angle. It was a wonderful afternoon, shooting seals from the comfort of the Zodiac which allowed us to get front row seats to all the action. All the while scattered flakes of snow fell around us adding to the atmosphere of this fairytale Antarctic scene. One of the many appeals of visiting the “seventh” continent is the incredible close-ups of wildlife, and it seems often every animal or bird encountered is close enough for everyone to walk away with their own unforgettable shots and memories of the occasion. A dream first day on Antarctica.



Gruesome scenes on the Antarctic Peninsula: A predatory **Leopard Seal** tears apart its latest catch, a hapless Gentoo





A **Weddel Seal** watches us, *watching it*, during a gentle snowfall on our unforgettable first day on the Antarctic Peninsula

March 12 **ANTARCTIC PENINSULA: PORT LOCKROY**

After yesterday's stormy gray skies, and snowfalls we were surprised to awake to a vastly different scene at **Port Lockroy**, where brilliant blue skies, crisp clean snow-covered slopes bordered the harbor, and not a cloud or a snowflake in sight. Antarctica is famed for the extraordinary landscapes on offer and we got to see this first hand, before we had even had breakfast as this peaceful, eerily quiet scene was made for photo albums.

A tiny island was our morning's destination, discovered in 1904 by the French Antarctic Expedition, and named after French politician Edouard Lockroy who supported this expedition of discovery. The islet hosts the most southerly post office in the World (run by the British-based United Kingdom Antarctic Heritage Trust), and is also home to a **Gentoo Penguin** colony that dominates the island. Evidence of whaling activities from the early part of the 20th century were plain to see with several large whale skeletons strewn on the island, which provided unusual perching posts for the penguins on the island.

Evidence of whaling activities from the early part of the 20th century were plain to see with several large whale skeletons strewn on the island, which provided unusual perching posts for the penguins on the island. Skirting the edge of the island we made our way to a colony of **Antarctic Shags**, some of which had rather large juveniles and many of which were calling and displaying to each other making for yet another great "Antarctic photo shoot".



After snow flurries the day before, we awoke to picture postcard scenes at **Port Lockroy**





A colony of **Antarctic Shags** competed for our attentions at Port Lockroy



Gentoo feeding time on Port Lockroy

Afterwards we checked in on one of the more unusual residents of Lockroy, the grotesque **Snowy Sheathbills** (*below*) that lie in readiness for any opportunity to scavenge or prey on any penguins on the island. Most of the time these pigeon like birds loafed around on the post office roof, although dropped to the ground at the first hint of an opportunity to digest penguin faeces, steal regurgitated food from a young penguin while in the process of being regurgitated by the parent, or to kill one of the weaker young penguins in the colony. On this day we were “treated” to the sight of a sheathbill desperately trying to grab a dead Gentoo Penguin that had succumbed to skua predation earlier that day. After rapidly circling the protective adult Gentoos several times, the by-then slightly confused gentoos dropped their guard for a second when the sheathbill darted in and grabbed the already dead penguin chick at the first opportunity. We were also treated to a number of **Brown Skuas** displaying on the island. The afternoon was a relaxed affair, our landing bringing us to a large snowy peak that gave us great views of this scenic bay, and the penguins colonies that dot the area below.



March 13 **ANTARCTIC PENINSULA: PARADISE BAY & NEKO HARBOR**

Once again our day started with us docking in a setting that was just breathtaking: bright skies overhead bring the snow-draped mountains to life with the snow crystals glistening in the sun, while the bay we were in (the well-named Paradise Bay) was littered with ice platforms and blue-tinged icebergs, which seals used regularly to rest on between bouts of fishing in the icy waters. The dramatic ice blue glaciers of the area were memorable and later in the morning we took a close-up look at them. However, our first stop was an Argentine Antarctic

base: **Altamira Brown** (*below*). There was no mistaking its nationality with the roof boldly decorated with the colors of the Argentine flag. This tiny base on a remote rocky outcrop was a convenient platform for another **Gentoo Penguin** colony that sat under the watchful eye of the attendant and predatory **Brown Skuas**. While at the back of the colony three **Chinstrap Penguins** looked lost and out of place, and stuck out “like a sore thumb”. The small buildings, many of which seemed in disrepair (the station is only manned for short periods of the Antarctic summer), again played host to half a dozen Snowy Sheathbills always watchful for scavenging possibilities within the colony. After walking among penguins, with sheathbills scurrying around our feet, and skuas cruising regularly overhead we boarded our familiar Zodiacs and took in the remarkable setting of Paradise Bay, a crumbling pale blue glacier being the standout feature, made all the more dramatic by the sounds of icde breaking away from the main wall at regular intervals.



In the afternoon, and after a dramatic barbecue on the deck of the ship (in the shadow of huge icebergs, and with whales for company), we took a short trip to **Neko Harbor**. While some people opted to spend more time with the greeting party of Gentoo Penguins on shore (where some friendly penguins even used our lifejackets to rest on!) the rest of us went on a tour of the berg-strewn harbor to look at the residents that Neko is most famous for: Whales. The inlet of Neko was indeed named after a Norwegian whaling vessel, the Neko, that operated in the area between 1911 and 1924. While the people on the beach were entertained by the loud thundering noises of large chunks of ice breaking off a near glacier we cruised the harbor, working our way around massive icebergs that dwarfed our tiny Zodiac, until we rain into the larger residents in the harbor.



The glacial scenery around the Argentine **Altamira Brown Station** was jaw-dropping



First off we encountered a small group of **Antarctic Minke Whales** which were completely unperturbed by our presence in these calm waters, one individual actually passing under the boat while we watched on! The purity of the waters here and the lack of any current means the still and clear waters gave us a great look at this impressive whale as it passed right underneath us. Not long later we encountered another pod of whales, although this time the larger **Humpback Whales**, (*next page*) which seemed to involve a mother and a calf resting for some time near the water's surface. After these extreme close-ups of whales we returned to our ship and reflected on a great day, packed with awe-inspiring scenes, and incredibly approachable wildlife, the likes of which can only be found here, in one of the World's true great wilderness areas.



This bold **Antarctic Minke Whale** literally passed underneath our small Zodiac while we looked on in utter amazement!



Humpbacks and Minkes completed a good afternoon “whaling” in Neko Harbor

March 14

ANTARCTIC PENINSULA: ORNE HARBOR & CUVERVILLE ISLAND

One of the things that is not always appreciated about the Antarctic is quite how rugged and mountainous the continent is. Some of us got to see this firsthand as we took a walk up to a ridge looking out over the bay and down to our ship looking distinctly smaller, far below. The amazing thing about the hike was we only had penguins for company as we got to the top of a ridge where it was hard to fathom how these awkward and far from agile creatures (on land anyway) could make it up there, and indeed why would they choose to nest way up on a rocky ridge. So we had the distinctly surreal experience of enjoying panoramic views of another jaw-dropping scene while we rubbed shoulders with the gentle **Chinstrap Penguins**, once again, like all Antarctic wildlife completely unperturbed by our presence. As we looked down over Orne Bay we could see one of the other Zodiacs cruising around a pod of **Humpback Whales** that broke the surface regularly. Later in the morning we walked down from the snow-lined ridge and back past the grumpy looking group of **Antarctic Fur Seals** at the base and returned to the ship again for lunch. Our afternoon was spent cruising the waters around the island of Cuverville, home to one of the largest **Gentoo Penguin** rookeries in the region. For this afternoon we chose not to go ashore and walk among the penguins but rather cruise the harbor searching for other wildlife. The penguins were especially active on this afternoon with regular bands of gentoos lining the rocks nervously contemplating dropping into the icy waters below. Their nervousness was well-placed as in one place a Leopard Seal was lurking, with intent, off the edge of the rocks ready to pounce on any careless penguin. As we cruised the icy channel Gentoo Penguins were busy feeding in the late afternoon, and we got to see them at their most graceful: porpoising through the waters at great speed in tight-knit “pods”. We also circled around several staggeringly beautiful icebergs, and maneuvered in close to a resting **Leopard Seal** resting calmly on a small ice platform. We took a long hard look around

us in order to take in our last view of an Antarctic scene, as tomorrow we would be free from the ice and further north on the Subantarctic Islands of the South Shetlands...



Grumpy Antarctic Fur Seals and Chinstrap Penguins on a ridgeline greeted us at Orne Bay



March 15 **SOUTH SHETLANDS: DECEPTION ISLAND & HANNAH POINT**

This was to be our final finale of the tour, and what a finale it was: for our last day glorious weather allowed us to make three markedly different landings in the South Shetlands. These were the riskiest landings of the tour as the famously changeable weather can often render any landings impossible. However, an early wake up call informed us gently but firmly that Baily Head on Deception Island awaits, under glorious blue skies and barely a swell to be felt. We took full advantage of this and landed on a very different scene from what we had experienced down on the peninsula: dark sands, and high cliffs, washed burnt-orange under the early morning sun, greeted us, as did a mass of **Chinstrap Penguins** and a mob of touchy **Antarctic Fur Seals** fighting on the dark beach. Overhead seabirds cruised close in to the rocky cliffs that included both dark and white morphs of the **Southern Giant Petrel**. Other inhabitants of the beach were the ever-irrepressible **Snowy Sheathbills** always on the look out for something to scavenge.



Baily Head on Deception Island glows orange in the first rays of sunlight, while white morph Southern Giant Petrels circle the towering cliffs

After a wonderful time on the dark sands watching Chinstraps gather on the shoreline and look longingly into the sea, clearly wondering whether it was safe to proceed, we returned to the boat and set sail for our next destination, the haunting Whaler's Bay. This sheltered bay, also on Deception Island, holds the most significant whaling remains in Antarctica dating from the period 1906-1931, when it served as a sheltered anchorage for factory ships that processed whale blubber. Huge tanks that were used to process the blubber still loom large on the dark sandy beaches alongside large flocks of **Brown Skuas** that regularly displayed to each other conspicuously on the beach alongside their smaller cousins the **South Polar Skua**.

The boisterous and bold Brown Skuas of Whaler's Bay, (Deception Island)...





The “whaling remains” at Whaler’s Bay on Deception Island in the South Shetlands

Our final stop in the South Shetlands, and arguably the best of the lot, was Hannah Point on Livingston Island where we hoped we might find one last penguin species for the trip, and a very large animal indeed, the Southern Elephant Seal. Unfortunately, the skies had turned gray since the morning and the swell picked up making this the most precarious landing of the lot. Our expedition leader carefully surveyed the scene and finally gave the go ahead, much to our relief. As it turned out it was a very easy landing and it got off without a hitch. Soon we were within another large penguin rookery, although quite different in nature from the ones we had experienced previously: up until now we had generally encountered just one penguin species per colony but here we were greeted with noisy **Chinstraps**, sitting alongside immaculate **Gentoos**, and also a trio of comical **Macaroni Penguins** (*next page*) looking a little lost and out of place amongst the other more numerous species. For the start at least the Macaronis, with their funky humorous, wig-like hairstyles were the stars of the show as this was our only encounter with them on the cruise. This all changed though once hundreds of photos had been taken and our expedition staff calmly announced that a pile of Southern Elephant Seals was waiting down the beach! We hurried on down to them and then immediately began to wish we hadn't; the smell is quite something! Although, these massive beasts were a sight to behold: massive and ugly in appearance, and seemingly very irritable in nature, as the males regularly stirred from their slumber to vent their anger at being disturbed by a fidgety neighbor. It was an amusing and amazing scene of a truly remarkable creature. This whole memorable final scene on the cruise was topped off with the discovery of nesting Southern Giant Petrels nesting on the cliffs above, that revealed some fluffy chicks among them, while a number of ghostly white morph Southern Giant Petrels constantly circled overhead just

daring us to photograph them. A magical end to a once-in-a-lifetime cruise into the last great wilderness on Earth.



A lost looking group of three wild-haired **Macaroni Penguins** greeted us at Hannah Point



...as did more than a few inquisitive **Chinstrap Penguins**

March 16 - 17 DRAKE PASSAGE

Our final two days on board our comfortable Antarctic vessel saw us retracing our route back to Ushuaia, although this time we found time to cruise close by the southern tip of South America, the famed Cape Horn while

Black-browed Albatrosses glided effortlessly above this most famous landmark. Our ride back saw us run in to “old friends” from our cruise south from Tierra del Fuego such as **Gray-headed Albatrosses, Royal and Wandering Albatrosses, Cape Petrels, Great Shearwaters, Soft-plumaged Petrels,** and **Antarctic Prions,** while as we



got closer to Ushuaia **Imperial Cormorants** became increasingly common along with hundreds of **South American Terns.**

March 18: Martial Glacier (Ushuaia)

We awoke back at the “End of the World” in Ushuaia and, after a final hearty breakfast, bid fond farewells to our expedition staff and Russian boat crew that had given us exemplary service, and I hope to see again real soon. And with that we were back on dry land, and back on another continent, this time South America. With our flights not due out until the next morning we could not resist another birding session on the outskirts of Ushuaia that still held one special bird for us lurking on its rocky slopes. So we traveled up to Martial Glacier, an impressive geological structure that looms on the horizon just behind the city of Ushuaia. We got there by



car, and then taking part of the final journey to the base of the glacier by way of a chair lift. Then it was back on foot and trudging around the rocky slopes in search of our quarry, which we eventually found huddled in a sheltered spot where it was trying to avoid the worst of the wind and rain that had descended upon us. As we all getting these **Yellow-bridled Finches**, (*above*) we also looked back down the way we came and could enjoy wonderful view of the fabled Beagle Channel running away from us far down below, the very channel that we had traveled through as we begun our amazing Antarctic journey the week before. It can be quite a journey, a genuinely remarkable life experience that had brought many close up encounters with the wonderfully approachable wildlife of the Antarctic and brought us unquestionably the most jaw dropping landscapes that any of us had experienced anywhere.



March 19: Ushuaia and Departure

With just a few precious hours left at the “End of the World” before we had to depart, what better place to go than the local rubbish dump! We had very little time but it was enough to see some of the raptors loafing around by the “tip” entrance waiting for it to open. This included a handful of the local **White-throated Caracara**, along with the much more numerous Chimango Caracaras, and several hulking **Black-chested Buzzard-Eagles** lurking with intent for the first sign of any trash to scavenge. Not a picturesque end to the trip but with some great birds. As we traveled to airport we admired the shorebirds and geese lining the shoreline, like Magellanic and Sooty Oystercatchers, and strikingly dimorphic Kelp Geese before we finally had to leave this enchanted place behind for good.



A pair of **Kelp Geese** by Ushuaia Airport



The local **White-throated Caracara** is surprisingly easy around Ushuaia dump!

Images from Antarctica...



From beautiful to ugly...



An irritable **Southern Elephant Seal** vents its anger



The ice-specialist: **Crabeater Seal**

The Gentoos of Antarctica...



Seabirds of the subantarctic...



Southern Giant-Petrel



...and the greatest of them all: Wandering Albatross

BIRD LIST

The taxonomy of the list follows: **Clements, James F., White, Anthony W., and Fitzpatrick, John W. *The Clements Checklist of Birds of the World*. Cornell, 2007.**

This list is up to date with the major changes published by Cornell in December 2008 and further updates in December 2009.

DUCKS, GEESE, and WATERFOWL: Anatidae

Black-necked Swan	<i>Cygnus melancoryphus</i>
Coscoroba Swan	<i>Coscoroba coscoroba</i>
Upland Goose	<i>Chloephaga picta</i>
Kelp Goose	<i>Chloephaga hybrida</i>
Ashy-headed Goose	<i>Chloephaga poliocephala</i>
Flightless Steamer-Duck	<i>Tachyeres pteneres</i>
Crested Duck	<i>Lophonetta specularioides</i>
Chiloe Wigeon	<i>Anas sibilatrix</i>
Red Shoveler	<i>Anas platalea</i>
Yellow-billed Pintail	<i>Anas flavirostris flavirostris</i>

GREBES: Podicipedidae

Great Grebe	<i>Podiceps major</i>
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FLAMINGOS: Phoenicopteridae

Chilean Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus chilensis</i>
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PENGUINS: Spheniscidae

Adelie Penguin	<i>Pygoscelis adeliae</i>
Gentoo Penguin	<i>Pygoscelis papua</i>
Chinstrap Penguin	<i>Pygoscelis antarcticus</i>
Magellanic Penguin	<i>Spheniscus magellanicus</i>
Macaroni Penguin	<i>Eudyptes chrysolophus</i>

ALBATROSSSES: Diomedidae

Gray-headed Albatross	<i>Thalassarche chrysostoma</i>
Black-browed Albatross	<i>Thalassarche melanophris melanophris</i>
Light-mantled Albatross	<i>Phoebetria palpebrata</i>
Royal Albatross (Southern)	<i>Diomedea epomophora epomophora</i>
Royal Albatross (Northern)	<i>Diomedea epomophora sanfordi</i>
Wandering Albatross (Snowy)	<i>Diomedea exulans exulans</i>

SHEARWATERS and PETRELS: Procellariidae

Southern Giant-Petrel	<i>Macronectes giganteus</i>
Northern Giant-Petrel	<i>Macronectes halli</i>
Southern Fulmar	<i>Fulmarus glacialisoides</i>
Cape Petrel	<i>Daption capense</i>

Soft-plumaged Petrel	<i>Pterodroma mollis</i>
Antarctic Prion	<i>Pachyptila desolata</i>
White-chinned Petrel	<i>Procellaria aequinoctialis</i>
Sooty Shearwater	<i>Puffinus griseus</i>
Great Shearwater	<i>Puffinus gravis</i>

STORM-PETRELS: Hydrobatidae

Wilson's Storm-Petrel	<i>Oceanites oceanicus</i>
Black-bellied Storm-Petrel	<i>Fregetta tropica</i>

DIVING-PETRELS: Pelecanoididae

Diving-Petrel sp.	<i>Pelecanoides sp.</i>
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CORMORANTS and SHAGS: Phalacrocoracidae

Neotropic Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax brasilianus</i>
Magellan Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax magellanicus</i>
Antarctic Shag	<i>Phalacrocorax bransfieldensis</i>
Imperial Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax atriceps</i>

IBISES and SPOONBILLS: Threskiornithidae

Black-faced Ibis	<i>Theristicus melanopis</i>
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HAWKS, EAGLES, and KITES: Accipitridae

Black-chested Buzzard-Eagle	<i>Geranoaetus melanoleucus</i>
Variable Hawk	<i>Buteo polyosoma polyosoma</i>

FALCONS and CARACARAS: Falconidae

White-throated Caracara	<i>Phalcoboenus albogularis</i>
Southern Caracara	<i>Caracara plancus</i>
Chimango Caracara	<i>Milvago chimango</i>
American Kestrel	<i>Falco sparverius cinnamominus</i>
Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus cassini</i>

SHEATHBILLS: Chionidae

Snowy Sheathbill	<i>Chionis albus</i>
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PLOVERS and LAPWINGS: Charadriidae

Southern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus chilensis fretensis</i>
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OYSTERCATCHERS: Haematopodidae

Blackish Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ater</i>
Magellanic Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus leucopodus</i>

SANDPIPERS and ALLIES: Scolopacidae

White-rumped Sandpiper	<i>Calidris fuscicollis</i>
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SEEDSNIPES: Thinocoridae

White-bellied Seedsnipe	<i>Attagis malouinus</i>
Least Seedsnipe	<i>Thinocorus rumicivorus</i>

GULLS, TERNS, and SKIMMERS: Laridae

Brown-hooded Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus maculipennis</i>
Dolphin Gull	<i>Leucophaeus scoresbii</i>
Kelp Gull	<i>Larus dominicanus</i>
South American Tern	<i>Sterna hirundinacea</i>
Antarctic Tern	<i>Sterna vittata</i>

SKUAS and JAEGARS: Stercorariidae

Chilean Skua	<i>Stercorarius chilensis</i>
South Polar Skua	<i>Stercorarius maccormicki</i>
Brown Skua (Subantarctic)	<i>Stercorarius antarcticus lonnbergi</i>

WOODPECKERS: Picidae

Magellanic Woodpecker	<i>Campephilus magellanicus</i>
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OVENBIRDS and WOODCREEPERS: Furnariidae

Common Miner	<i>Geositta cunicularia</i>
Short-billed Miner	<i>Geositta Antarctica</i>
Buff-winged Cinclodes	<i>Cinclodes fuscus</i>
Dark-bellied Cinclodes	<i>Cinclodes patagonicus</i>
Thorn-tailed Rayadito	<i>Aphrastura spinicauda</i>
White-throated Treerunner	<i>Pygarrhichas albogularis</i>

TYRANT-FLYCATCHERS: Tyrannidae

Austral Negrigo	<i>Lessonia rufa</i>
Dark-faced Ground-Tyrant	<i>Muscisaxicola maclovianus</i>
Fire-eyed Diucon	<i>Xolmis pyrope</i>

SWALLOWS: Hirundinidae

Chilean Swallow	<i>Tachycineta meyeni</i>
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WRENS: Troglodytidae

House Wren	<i>Troglodytes aedon</i>
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THRUSHES: Turdidae

Austral Thrush	<i>Turdus falcklandii</i>
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WAGTAILS and PIPITS: Motacillidae

Correndera Pipit	<i>Anthus correndera</i>
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BUNTINGS, SPARROWS and ALLIES: Emberizidae

Patagonian Sierra-Finch	<i>Phrygilus patagonicus</i>
Yellow-bridled Finch	<i>Melanodera xanthogramma</i>
Grassland Yellow-Finch	<i>Sicalis luteola</i>
Rufous-collared Sparrow	<i>Zonotrichia capensis</i>

TROUPIALS and ALLIES: Icteridae

Long-tailed Meadowlark	<i>Sturnella loyca</i>
Austral Blackbird	<i>Curaeus curaesus</i>

SISKINS, CROSSBILLS, and ALLIES: Fringillidae

Black-chinned Siskin *Spinus barbatus*

OLD WORLD SPARROWS: Passeridae

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*

MAMMAL LIST

HARES and RABBITS: Leporidae

European Rabbit *Oryctolagus cuniculus*

FUR SEALS and SEA LIONS: Otariidae

Antarctic Fur Seal *Arctocephalus gazelle*

TRUE SEALS: Phocidae

Leopard Seal *Hydrurga leptonyx*
Weddell Seal *Leptonychotes weddellii*
Crabeater Seal *Lobodon carcinophaga*
Southern Elephant Seal *Mirounga leonine*

DOLPHINS: Delphinidae

Peale's Dolphin *Lagenorhynchus australis*
Hourglass Dolphin *Lagenorhynchus cruciger*
Killer Whale *Orcinus orca*

RORQUALS: Balaenopteridae

Antarctic Minke Whale *Balaenoptera bonaerensis*
Sei Whale *Balaenoptera borealis*
Humpback Whale *Megaptera novaeangliae*

CAMELS: Camelidae

Guanaco *Lama guanicoe*