

A [Tropical Birding Tours](#) custom **Birding with a Camera®** Tour



Photo SUMMARY and LIST: SOUTHERN CHILE BwC Custom Tour

November 27th to December 2nd, 2023

Text and photos by ANDRES VASQUEZ N., the guide for this tour



For most participants, the BIRD OF THE TRIP was the precious *Magellanic Woodpecker* (photo above)

OVERVIEW: The following is a short summary of this custom Birding with a Camera® tour that was designed around a couple of target species located in far southern of Chile. This was very convenient for the participants of our Falkland Islands BwC tour given that the few commercial flights into this archipelago depart from Punta Arenas in Chile. The planning started off with a request from one of the participants, who is a bird family chaser, to try to find the localized Magellanic Plover since this bird is in its own family. Since he was willing to open the trip up to other participants of the Falklands tour, we decided to add some time to look for some of the Patagonian specialties like Magellanic Woodpecker and the fierce Pumas of Torres del Paine. This ended up being a very nice itinerary that we may add as a set departure extension to our Falklands tour given the great success that we had, getting not only all the main targets but also enjoying other memorable experiences with the wildlife and the dramatic landscapes.



We ended up finding 3 different Pumas (photo above), but this second one was more than just a simple encounter. This individual gave us a show of a lifetime. We spent over an hour with this “kitty” for a great reason. Details in the report!

We spent some time on the island of Tierra del Fuego which is the best place to find the target Magellanic Plover, and then we headed to the famous Torres del Paine NP for the Puma and the woodpecker. Apart from that, we had some great birding and photographing in other locations along the way. We had a “birdy” ferry crossing from Punta Arenas to Tierra del Fuego, some quality time close to Pali Aike NP, and some extra birding near Punta Arenas both at the beginning of the tour and at the end. This is the itinerary we finally had for this tour:

November 27, 2023	Arrive to Punta Arenas, afternoon birding
November 28, 2023	Morning ferry to Tierra del Fuego
November 29, 2023	Tierra de Fuego to Torres del Paine
November 30, 2023	Puma search and drive to Puerto Natales
December 1, 2023	Puerto Natales to Punta Arenas
December 2, 2023	Punta Arenas to Falklands



One of the secondary targets of our tour was this **Austral Parakeet** (*photo above*) in Torres del Paine NP

BIRDS and WILDLIFE: This summary will not follow a day by day narrative but instead give the general areas where we spent the most time birding, since this was mainly quite a target-focused trip.

We started off with a fun crossing on the ferry from Punta Arenas during which we got plenty of **Black-browed Albatrosses, Imperial Cormorants, South American Terns, Magellanic Diving-Petrels, Wilson's Storm-Petrels** and **Chilean Skuas**. We landed in Porvenir (on Tierra del Fuego) and immediately headed north to the Laguna de los Cisnes. The terrain in Tierra del Fuego is mainly vast open grasslands dotted with lakes and swept by constant strong winds at this time of the year; they that can look quite lifeless at first glance. We had to devote some serious time to scanning to find our targets, enduring the strong winds when we stepped out of the van. It was still very cold for late November but we managed with suitable clothing. Hidden in between dozens of **Baird's** and **White-rumped Sandpipers** we managed to pick up the main target of the trip, two **Magellanic Plovers** that kept feeding in the muddy areas on the border of the lake.



Alone in its own family, **Magellanic Plover** (photo above) is a big target for family listers.

After a tasty lunch back in Porvenir we headed to Cerro Sombrero, one of the only places to stay on this barren island. We picked up along the way a handful of species, but all those were nice to see like **Chocolate-vented Tyrant, Long-tailed Meadowlark, Patagonian Yellow-Finch, Austral Negrito, Correndera Pipit, Black-faced Ibis**, and a few more.

The next day we started heading north towards the buffer zone of Torres del Paine, but we had some very productive birding on the way, especially at Bahia Direccion which is south of the famous Pale Aike NP. Here the star was the desired **Elegant Crested-Tinamou** and second best was the gorgeous **Tawny-chested Dotterel**. We also picked up **Lesser (Darwin's) Rhea**, **Chiloe Wigeon**, **Magellanic Snipe**, **White-winged** and **Red-gartered Coots**, and **Coscoroba Swan**, among others. We spent most of the morning in this area.



*Cryptic and shy, this **Elegant Crested Tinamou** (photo above) was a great prize*

We birded in a different location in the early afternoon still close to Pale Aike. There we got two key birds, **Short-billed Miner** and **White-bridled Finch**. Then we devoted some hours to driving past the eccentric town of Puerto Natales. Close to the end of the day we managed another small but key species, the loud **Austral Canastero**, and the first of a few **Black-necked Swans** before proceeding to our final location of the day, the Ovejero Patagonico Hotel, which is located in a very convenient spot in the outskirts of Torres del Paine NP; this location allowed us to quickly reach the north entrance of the park to start our Puma search first thing next morning.



Maybe deserving a split, **Lesser (Darwin's) Rhea** (above) and the bright **White-bridled Finch** (below)





Some wetlands produced great waterfowl sightings, *Chiloe Wigeon* (above) and *Black-necked Swan* (below)



We had some big targets inside the amazing Torres del Paine National Park. Number one was getting views, photos, and footage of the “king of the Patagonia”, the mighty Puma. Second, we really wanted the biggest of all the extant new world woodpeckers, the impressive Magellanic Woodpecker. Third, we wanted to absorb the incredible landscapes this park is so famous for. We achieved all three in an outstanding way.



This is the first of three Pumas (above) we managed to find in one morning

For this day we hired the services of a wonderful Puma tracker and guide, Miguel, who has extensive experience in finding this amazing animal in the area. He and one of his friends came to pick us up from the hotel and we rode together towards the park, but we did not even need to enter the perimeter of the park yet (it was just reaching dawn) when Miguel spotted the first cat, a magnificent female that was wandering around near the entrance road. We followed it for close to half an hour until the cat finally went over a hill and disappeared.

Despite being a superb sighting already (it was not even 6am), we wanted more. With the pressure off however, we could do some birding while our trackers would still be focused on the Pumas. This turned out just perfect as we managed to find things like **Cinereous Harrier**, **Great, Silvery**, and **White-tufted Grebes**, **Rufous-tailed Plantcutter**, **Fire-eyed Diucon**, **Spectacled Tyrant**, **Cinnamon-bellied Ground-Tyrant**, and **Andean Duck**.



Rufous-tailed Plantcutter (above) and Fire-eyed Diucon (below) gave us great photos.



Suddenly we got a call from Miguel who had found another Puma quite close to the road a few hundred meters from where we were birding. We jumped in the van and headed towards him. We soon saw the beautiful felid walking parallel to the road next to our van. We stopped a few meters ahead and stepped out and saw this powerful animal walk towards us super calmly. It stopped, drank some water from a small pool and stared at us looking completely uninterested in human meat. It continued walking west and our guide was very quick to realize that it was homing in on a Guanaco with a youngster. He positioned us in the best possible angle and then we basically had an unbelievable “NatGeo” live show. We spent close to an hour watching the whole spectacle from its genesis to the inevitable grand finale.



*This is just seconds before the **Puma** (above) would smell the scent of the **Guanacos** from the distance*

First the Puma caught the scent of Guanaco in the wind that was blowing in the perfect direction for the puma. Then the cat started moving towards the smell trying to find the camelids in the distance. It finally found the mother with its young foraging on a grassy slope at about 400 yards from the puma, totally unaware. The cat locked eyes on the prey and started stalking them, moving at times centimeter by centimeter and at times, when the guanacos were looking away, it moved quickly several feet. It was a very experienced predator and it did not take any risky step that would jeopardize the hunt. It read the topography masterfully and used a hill to keep hidden from the guanaco in order to move towards its prey quickly and efficiently.

Our group and some other tourists that shared the experience with us did not produce a single sound, which could have spoiled this cruel but beautiful nature experience. After close to an hour the puma, still unnoticed, was very close to the target, probably 25 yards away. The tense wait started, and it felt like forever until the mother guanaco started walking cluelessly towards the hidden puma, and the cat finally exploded out of the bushes, chasing down the young guanaco. It was an easy catch for such an experienced hunter.



The cat ran quickly and reached the naive youngster without any problems, but in a dramatic twist, the guanaco managed to escape – but only briefly since the puma caught up in a flash, finally getting its fangs around the guanaco’s throat and taking it down. The mother had escaped, and started running in long loops around the kill area calling desperately for its baby but it soon gave up in desolation.

It was an unbelievable experience, difficult to describe, and words really don’t do it justice. We felt touched by divine hands, chosen as the lucky few witnesses of such a dramatic scene. Days after digesting this moment, I named our small group of birders “The fellowship of the Puma”. All this scene was masterfully recorded on video by Alex, one of the participants of this tour, and he put together an amazing movie summary of this whole experience. If you want to see it (truly recommended) please follow this link to his movie: <https://alex-grim.smugmug.com/Patagonia-The-Falkland-Islands/Movies/i-MFjX3t9/A> and skip ahead to 9m07s for the start of the Puma hunt.



A Puma with its prize (above) and the desperate and helpless mother Guanaco after losing her offspring (below)



As you can see in the previous photo, the backdrop of this scene was also absolutely spectacular which helped making this whole experience an unforgettable moment for all of us. And this leads in to the next target of our tour. We were ecstatic after this and as if that was not enough we soon after started driving past beautiful and imposing snowcapped mountains and crystal blue lakes, towards our lunch spot in a restaurant located in an idyllic site.



The gorgeous spot of our restaurant in Pehoe Lake (above)

Just after lunch our guides spotted the third puma of tour but it was distant this time and shortly after, a South Andean Deer or Huemul (the National Animal of Chile). We had a very nice leisurely meal and afterwards we went to another corner of the park where taller trees form patches of forest. We headed towards Grey Lake where we birded for a while, once a short rain shower stopped. Here we saw **Austral Parakeet** and **Thorn-tailed Rayadito**, but our main goal remained elusive. The scenery again was incredible with a glacier showing on the far side of Grey Lake and an iceberg that had floated down to a few hundred meters from the shore. We then moved on to another site further south, outside the national park, and tried again for **Magellanic Woodpecker** and this time an immaculate female responded very well. It gave us several photo opps but it never really came into a perfect spot. I was still happy with the photos and all participants were satisfied too. We also found here the small but colorful **Patagonian Sierra Finch**.



Magellanic Woodpecker (one of South America's "must see" birds, **above**) and *Patagonian Sierra Finch* (**below**)



After an overnight in Puerto Natales, we did some more birding, trying to fill in some gaps since this day had been planned as a wildcard day in case we had missed either of our primary targets in the park. Therefore, I decided to bird just north of the city where we found various (by now) “usual suspects” but also added **Austral Blackbird**, the small **Striped Woodpecker** and the beautiful **Spectacled Duck**. We decided to start heading towards Punta Arenas and bird near there in the afternoon. This was a great decision since our afternoon birding and photography sites were very enjoyable with gorgeous warm afternoon light. We only picked up a couple new birds, the scarce **Ashy-headed Goose** and the hulking **Flightless Steamer-Duck**, but we had a great time photographing some fine-looking subjects we all had seen before like the cute **Austral Negrito**, **Black-faced Ibis**, **South American Tern**, and two long-distance migrant shorebirds, **Baird’s** and **White-rumped Sandpipers**.



Austral Negrito (above) is a great-looking passerine

We had our final night of the this custom extension in Punta Arenas and got our bags ready for the next day’s flight to the Falkland Islands. This was a great adventure in preparation for what was going to be one of the best tours I have been on to the British Archipelago off of the coast of Argentina.

See the final list of species recorded on this tour at the end of this report.



The gorgeous *Spectacled Duck* (above) and the elegant *Black-faced Ibis* (below)



FINAL CHECKLIST:

A total of **83** species of **BIRDS** were recorded. Out of this total, 1 alone was Heard Only (**H**) and **3** species were seen only by the Tour Leader (**L**). In terms of **MAMMALS**, we recorded **6** species. See the final list below:

Rheas (Rheidae)

Lesser Rhea (Darwin's) *Rhea pennata pennata*

Tinamous (Tinamidae)

Elegant Crested-Tinamou *Eudromia elegans*

Ducks, Geese, and Waterfowl (Anatidae)

Black-necked Swan *Cygnus melancoryphus*

Coscoroba Swan *Coscoroba coscoroba*

Upland Goose *Chloephaga picta*

Ashy-headed Goose *Chloephaga poliocephala*

Ruddy-headed Goose *Chloephaga rubidiceps*

Flying Steamer-Duck *Tachyeres patachonicus*

Flightless Steamer-Duck *Tachyeres pteneres*

Crested Duck *Lophonetta specularioides*

Spectacled Duck *Speculanas specularis*

Red Shoveler *Spatula platalea*

Chiloe Wigeon *Mareca sibilatrix*

Yellow-billed Pintail *Anas georgica*

Yellow-billed Teal *Anas flavirostris*

Andean Duck *Oxyura ferruginea*

Flamingos (Phoenicopteridae)

Chilean Flamingo *Phoenicopterus chilensis*

Grebes (Podicipedidae)

White-tufted Grebe *Rollandia rolland*

Great Grebe *Podiceps major*

Silvery Grebe *Podiceps occipitalis*

Pigeons and Doves (Columbidae)

Eared Dove *Zenaida auriculata*

Rails, Gallinules, and Coots (Rallidae)

Austral Rail *Rallus antarcticus*

Red-gartered Coot *Fulica armillata*

White-winged Coot *Fulica leucoptera*

Magellanic Plover (Pluvianellidae)

Magellanic Plover *Pluvianellus socialis*

Oystercatchers (Haematopodidae)

Magellanic Oystercatcher *Haematopus leucopodus*

Plovers and Lapwings (Charadriidae)

Tawny-throated Dotterel *Oreopholus ruficollis*

Southern Lapwing *Vanellus chilensis*

Two-banded Plover *Charadrius falklandicus*

Sandpipers and Allies (Scolopacidae)

Baird's Sandpiper *Calidris bairdii*

White-rumped Sandpiper *Calidris fuscicollis*

Magellanic Snipe	<i>Gallinago magellanica</i>
Wilson's Phalarope	<i>Phalaropus tricolor</i>
Lesser Yellowlegs	<i>Tringa flavipes</i>
Skuas and Jaegers (Stercorariidae)	
Chilean Skua	<i>Stercorarius chilensis</i>
Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers (Laridae)	
Brown-hooded Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus maculipennis</i>
Kelp Gull	<i>Larus dominicanus</i>
Dolphin Gull	<i>Leucophaeus scoresbii</i>
South American Tern	<i>Sterna hirundinacea</i>
Albatrosses (Diomedidae)	
Black-browed Albatross	<i>Thalassarche melanophris</i>
Southern Storm-Petrels (Oceanitidae)	
Wilson's Storm-Petrel	<i>Oceanites oceanicus</i>
Shearwaters and Petrels (Procellariidae)	
Southern Giant-Petrel	<i>Macronectes giganteus</i>
White-chinned Petrel	<i>Procellaria aequinoctialis</i>
Magellanic Diving-Petrel	<i>Pelecanoides magellani</i>
Cormorants and Shags (Phalacrocoracidae)	
Neotropic Cormorant	<i>Nannopterum brasilianum</i>
Imperial Cormorant	<i>Leucocarbo atriceps</i>
Ibises and Spoonbills (Threskiornithidae)	
Black-faced Ibis	<i>Theristicus melanopis</i>
New World Vultures (Cathartidae)	
Andean Condor - VU	<i>Vultur gryphus</i>
Hawks, Eagles, and Kites (Accipitridae)	
Cinereous Harrier	<i>Circus cinereus</i>
Black-chested Buzzard-Eagle	<i>Geranoaetus melanoleucus</i>
Woodpeckers (Picidae)	
Striped Woodpecker	<i>Dryobates lignarius</i>
Magellanic Woodpecker	<i>Campephilus magellanicus</i>
Falcons and Caracaras (Falconidae)	
Crested Caracara	<i>Caracara plancus</i>
Chimango Caracara	<i>Daptrius chimango</i>
Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>
New World and African Parrots (Psittacidae)	
Austral Parakeet	<i>Enicognathus ferrugineus</i>
Ovenbirds and Woodcreepers (Furnariidae)	
Common Miner	<i>Geositta cunicularia</i>
Short-billed Miner	<i>Geositta antarctica</i>
Dark-bellied Cinclodes	<i>Cinclodes patagonicus</i>
Plain-mantled Tit-Spintail	<i>Leptasthenura aegithaloides</i>
Austral Canastero	<i>Asthenes anthoides</i>
Cotingas (Cotingidae)	
Rufous-tailed Plantcutter	<i>Phytotoma rara</i>

Tyrant Flycatchers (Tyrannidae)

White-crested Elaenia	<i>Elaenia albiceps</i>
Austral Negrito	<i>Lessonia rufa</i>
Spectacled Tyrant	<i>Hymenops perspicillatus</i>
Cinnamon-bellied Ground-Tyrant	<i>Muscisaxicola capistratus</i>
Fire-eyed Diucon	<i>Pyrope pyrope</i>
Chocolate-vented Tyrant	<i>Neoxolmis rufiventris</i>
Patagonian Tyrant	<i>Colorhamphus parvirostris</i>
Blue-and-white Swallow	<i>Pygochelidon cyanoleuca</i>
Chilean Swallow	<i>Tachycineta leucopyga</i>
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>
House Wren	<i>Troglodytes aedon</i>

Thrushes and Allies (Turdidae)

Austral Thrush	<i>Turdus falcklandii</i>
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Old World Sparrows (Passeridae)

House Sparrow (Introduced)	<i>Passer domesticus</i>
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Wagtails and Pipits (Motacillidae)

Correndera Pipit	<i>Anthus correndera</i>
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Finches, Euphonias, and Allies (Fringillidae)

Black-chinned Siskin	<i>Spinus barbatus</i>
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New World Sparrows (Passerellidae)

Rufous-collared Sparrow	<i>Zonotrichia capensis</i>
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Troupials and Allies (Icteridae)

Long-tailed Meadowlark	<i>Leistes loyca</i>
Austral Blackbird	<i>Curaeus curaeus</i>
Gray-hooded Sierra Finch	<i>Phrygilus gayi</i>
Patagonian Sierra Finch	<i>Phrygilus patagonicus</i>
White-bridled Finch	<i>Melanodera melanodera</i>
Patagonian Yellow-Finch	<i>Sicalis lebruni</i>

MAMMALS

Puma (Cougar)	<i>Puma concolor</i>
South American gray fox (Chilla)	<i>Lycalopex griseus</i>
Molina's hog-nosed skunk	<i>Conepatus chinga</i>
Guanaco	<i>Lama guanicoe</i>
South Andean Deer (Huemul)	<i>Hippocamelus bisulcus</i>
Peale's dolphin	<i>Lagenorhynchus australis</i>