



## ***FALKLAND ISLANDS***

**Birding with a Camera tour**

**3<sup>rd</sup> - 17<sup>th</sup> December 2022**

***Tour leader & Report - Charley Hesse***



The Falkland Islands were sold as the easiest wildlife photography in the world and it certainly lived up to this. I haven't been anywhere where there is so much wildlife, everywhere, ALL the time. And SO close! It is absolutely astounding. About the only problem is whether or not you brought enough memory cards. The star attraction was of course the PENGUINS! We saw 5 species, and they were everything we dreamed they would be: Beautiful, adorable, comical, ungainly, graceful. On this tour we visited 4 islands: East Island, Saunders Island, Pebble Island and Sea Lion. Each island held different things, and spending time on all these meant that we saw almost everything. On the East Island we visited the largest colony of King Penguins in the Falklands, Pebble we had our first views of all the others, including the rare Macaroni Penguin, plus amazing waterfowl like Silvery Grebe. Saunders was fantastic with the Penguin shower at The Rookery and amazing Black-browed Albatrosses at The Neck. The Grand Finale was Sea Lion Island which in addition to all the penguins had beaches full of Southern Elephant Seal and Orcas. Cruise ships also briefly visit the islands, but to really experience it you need to stay here. And for someone that gets sea sick, there are no boats! By the end of 2 weeks we felt like locals, and you would see people you know everywhere you went. The Falkland's did not disappoint and some of our group are already planning their next trip back.

3<sup>rd</sup> December – Santiago to Stanley



Arriving in Stanley is like going back in time.

With nervous trepidation, we gathered at the international airport at 4:30am in Santiago for our flights to the Falklands. Even though not indicated on the ticket, the flight made a stop in Punta Arenas in the South of Chile, and so left from the domestic terminal. This was made even more confusing by the fact that nobody seemed to have ever heard of Mount Pleasant airport, or Stanley or the Malvinas, as the Falklands are known in Spanish. We finally got checked in and watched our bags disappearing down the conveyor belt hopefully to be seen again on the other side. After a spot of breakfast and an uneventful flight, we arrived in the windswept town of Punta Arenas in southern Chile and made our international connection in a rather crowded departure lounge full of people in puffer jackets talking mainly about penguins. The room was brimming with excitement. Another short hop and we were coming into land at Mount Pleasant airport which doubles as a military base. We had a good view of the islands coming in, and to be honest it looked a bit of a desolate place covered with brown grassy hills and rocky coastlines.



**Falkland Steamer Duck is one of only 2 endemic bird species.**

The small airport on arrival was a bit chaotic and we felt like penguins shuffling our way through a cramped arrivals hall. The Penguin travel coach driver had our names on his list, and we were soon gazing out the window on the way to Stanley. Again, very stark countryside with grassy hills and long 'stone runs', strips of rock beds in long lines. Rock fragments pushed down by glaciers during the last ice age. We were dropped at the Malvinas House Hotel where they were expecting us and after checking in and dropping our bags, we went out for a walk to the local store to grab a late lunch snack. Some of us took a walk along the waterfront where we started picking up some of our first wildlife, which included the endemic **Falkland Steamer-Duck, Imperial & Magellanic Cormorants**, and the snazzy **Dolphin Gull**. There were also some flabby **South American Sealions** lazing about on the dock and a couple of people found **Commerson's Dolphins** close in on the waterfront. A delicious dinner finished off the day as we went through the travel plans for tomorrow.

4<sup>th</sup> December – Volunteer Point penguin colony



**One of the Falkland Islands distinctive Stone Runs.**

Today was our trip to Volunteer Point penguin colony. The largest colony of **King Penguins** on the Falkland Islands. The driver that had been organized for the group could only fit in the 4 clients, but luckily I had been able to secure a place with a separate group. The driver, Nobby, picked up the clients at 8:30am and set off with the group for the 2-hour drive to Volunteer Point. I set off later with another driver and met up with the group when I got there. One of the nice things about the local drivers, was not just their excellent off-road driving skills and intimate knowledge of the terrain, but they were islanders born and bred, and their local knowledge and stories were amazing. My driver was 8<sup>th</sup> generation on the islands and her ancestors were among the first British settlers. We heard about the habitats, plant names, geology including about the 'Stone Runs' which are a distinctive feature of the landscape of the East Falklands, and of course the history, including detailed accounts of the goings on during the conflict. It was fascinating for me, and the clients informed me that Nobby had made sure they were equally well-informed. Volunteer Point was magnificent and was everything we hoped it would be.



**King Penguin has many colors and textures.**

The **King Penguins** were like no other birds I have ever seen. Their posture so human-like, their walk so awkward and comical, and their different behaviors so fascinating that you never got bored watching them. They were completely unafraid of people and you could plonk yourself down in the middle of them and you felt as if you were just another penguin. The adults would occasionally vocalize with the weirdest wheezing call while pointing their bills to the sky. The fat, fully-grown chicks waddled around and begged from the parents in comical displays. I dragged myself away from the main concentration of **King Penguins** and walked over to the **Gentoos** which were equally entertaining. Occasionally, a **Kelp Gull**, **Brown Skua** or **Southern Giant Petrel** would fly over low down looking for unattended chick and all the adults would all open their bills and hiss at the intruders, while their ugly chicks squirmed about below them. We walked over to the small ridge that bordered the fine white sand beach, and out of the holes stuck the heads of **Magellanic Penguins**, guarding their underground nests. It was an amazing day and was over all too soon, although the long drive back did drag on. I got back early enough to go and buy supplies for one of the other islands that we would be visiting. At dinner we all met up and shared highlights from an amazing day.

5<sup>th</sup> December – Stanley to Pebble Island

**Falkland Island Government Air Service (FIGAS) uses the 10-seater Islander.**

Today we were supposed to be flying to Pebble Island, but the flight was TBC, 'to be confirmed'. Which basically meant that they had to check the conditions. We had a leisurely breakfast and then I confirmed logistics with reception about what time the updated check-in was, what time our transfer would come and pick us up, and so on. Our lodge on Pebble Island was fully catered but after that we were going to Saunders Island which was self-catering, and we needed to have all our supplies sent out. On my shopping run yesterday, I hadn't picked up the most important thing, alcohol, so the clients went down to the West Store on an emergency 'Gin and Tonic' run, while I supplemented yesterday's shopping with a few more delicacies like Branston Pickle for our cheese sandwiches. Our transfer came at 9:30am and was the wife of a Zimbabwean bomb-disposal expert that had stayed behind after clearing mine fields. There really are all sorts on the Falklands. After weighing ourselves, our bags and paying for excess baggage, our young French pilot took us to our 10-seater Islander plane and gave us a safety briefing.



**Silvery Grebe showed particularly well on Pebble Island.**

She took off and flew us the 45 minutes to Pebble Island with a lovely soft landing on the grass runway. Our host Ricky picked us up and informed me I would be driving one of the vehicles the short distance to the lodge. Pebble Island has a population of 6, but with seasonal workers, this swelled to 10. Our group of 5 increased the population on the island by a further 50%. After a brief briefing, we were shown to our comfortable rooms, then had a nice cup of tea in the cozy living room while we waited for lunch. In the afternoon, Rick took us out to some lakes with a good selection of waterbirds. We had a wonderful photo shoot with **Silvery** and **White-tufted Grebes**, and a variety of ducks, including **Yellow-billed Pintail** and **Teal**, **Crested Duck**, **Silver Teal**, **Chiloe Wigeon** and the uncommon **Flying Steamer-Duck**. It was a lovely outing, and it was actually fairly warm. On the way back we stopped at the pebble beach in the settlement where we spent some time photographing **Snowy Sheathbills**, **Magellanic Oystercatcher** and **Southern Giant-Petrels** that looked like they were doing bombing runs along the beach. It was a great afternoon, and when the temperature started to drop and wind picked up, we retreated to the lodge for some downtime before dinner.

6<sup>th</sup> December –Pebble Island



**White-bridled Finch is known by the locals as Black-throated Finch.**

We had 2 full days to explore Pebble Island. Today we would visit penguin colonies on the east of the island. The driver called Luis would take one car and I would follow in the other. There were no roads to speak of on the island, just rough tracks and I must say it was a lot of fun driving. I got a little bit stuck on a dune at one point, but I reversed back down and tried again with a bit more speed. We had a few nice sightings along the way starting with our first **Striated Caracara**, or 'Jonny Rook' as people call it here. There was a long beach which we sped along, stopping to look at numerous **Magellanic** and our first **Blackish Oystercatchers**, along with **Falkland Steamer-Duck** and plenty of **White-rumped Sandpipers**. We climbed up over another dune and crossed a large area of Diddle Dee, the dominant small bush. Along here we had **Two-banded Plover**, plus our first **Rufous-chested Dotterels**, **Magellanic Snipe** with a chick, the bright red **Long-tailed Meadowlark**, the endemic race of **Correndera Pipit** and **White-bridled Finch**, which everybody calls **Black-throated Finch**. We reached the first hilltop nesting colony which was a mixture of **Imperial Cormorants** and **Southern Rockhopper Penguins**. The penguins were absolutely delightful and they kept us very entertained with their comical antics. They did a sort of waddle on the flat bits, but on any step they did their characteristic and surprisingly athletic hop.



Magellanic & Imperial Cormorants



**Macaroni Penguin are larger and more rotund than the rockhoppers.**

While the majority of them busied themselves tending their nests in the colony, a few were coming and going up and down a path which led to the coast below. Some of us followed the path down and spent some time photographing them jumping in and out of the water, and bathing in the rock pools. They were absolutely charming and it was only with regret that we managed to drag ourselves away. The other species in the mixed colony was the **Imperial Cormorant** who were rather magnificent, one might even say 'regal', in their own right. Their very smart black and white plumage was finished off with some orange wattles behind the bill and piercing blue eyes. They were busy adding to their nests and one member of the pair, we assumed the male, waddled or flew off to raid the diddle dee bushes and brought back various branches to add to the nest. Getting it back to the nest without having it stolen by another pair was a real feat and was like running the gauntlet. We drove on to another colony which held a pair of the rare **Macaroni Penguin**. These penguins were having a bad hair day and looked like they could lose a few ounces but were charming in their own way. Around the colony patrolled a Brown Skua and a Striated Caracara looking for unattended chicks to snatch. Nearby there were some **Turkey Vultures** sheltering on a big clump of Tussock Grass as was a splendid male **Kelp Goose**. Also looking out to sea there were dozens of **Black-browed Albatrosses** zipping to and fro. Our time was almost up and a quick shower of hail brought an end to our time here and we set off on the long drive back to the settlement.

7<sup>th</sup> December –Pebble Island



**Brown Skua with a penguin chick.**

On our second full day of exploration on Pebble Island, we were heading to penguin colonies in the west. After a nice breakfast at a rather civilized hour, we set off with our host Ricky, him in the lead car and me following in another 4x4. It was a longer drive to get out there and off-roading across the wild interior of Diddle Dee, ferns and peat bogs. We made a few stops, getting photos of things like **White-bridled Finch**, **Dark-faced Ground Tyrant**, **Rufous-chested Dotterel** and **Two-banded Plover** with chicks. After a couple of hours, we arrived at a large **Southern Rockhopper** Colony. This one was just rockhoppers, no cormorants mixed in like yesterday. It was on a windswept clifftop, and after getting plenty of photos of nesting birds (including watching a **Brown Skua** grabbing a young chick), some of us made our way carefully down to some pools at the base of the cliff. There were all sorts of things going on here, with birds, hopping in and out of the ocean, bathing in the pools and passing up and down to the colony. I found a comfortable spot to watch and take photos. Some birds even just waddle up to look at us, sometimes just a couple of feet away. It was just magical.



**Southern Rockhopper Penguins walking back to their colony.**

We finally dragged ourselves away and back up to the top. There was sort of a penguin highway that led from the colony to where they started to go down and it was almost like a racetrack where they ran and hopped along. This too was a lot of fun to watch. After 2-3 hours here we set off back along the coast and stopped at a couple of spectacular white sand beaches. On the way down was a freshwater pond where a group of **Magellanic Penguins** were hanging out. On the beaches, we watched **Magellanic Oystercatchers** catching crabs on the beach, plus **Magellanic Penguins**, and lots of **Gentoo Penguins** coming in and out of the water. They seem to be surfing and times and we would occasionally see the **Gentoo**s swimming along inside the waves and jumping out. The breaking waves, the surf, the turquoise waters, the swirls of fine white sand blowing along the beach. The whole thing was a photographers paradise. Again, we had to drag ourselves away, first to look at a small colony of **Southern Giant Petrels** and then the large colony of **Gentoo**s. The day was getting on, and finally it was time to start heading back, with a quick stop on another cliff top that had a constant stream of **Black-browed Albatrosses** coming by at eye level. It had been another incredible day.

8<sup>th</sup> December – The Rookery, Saunders Islands



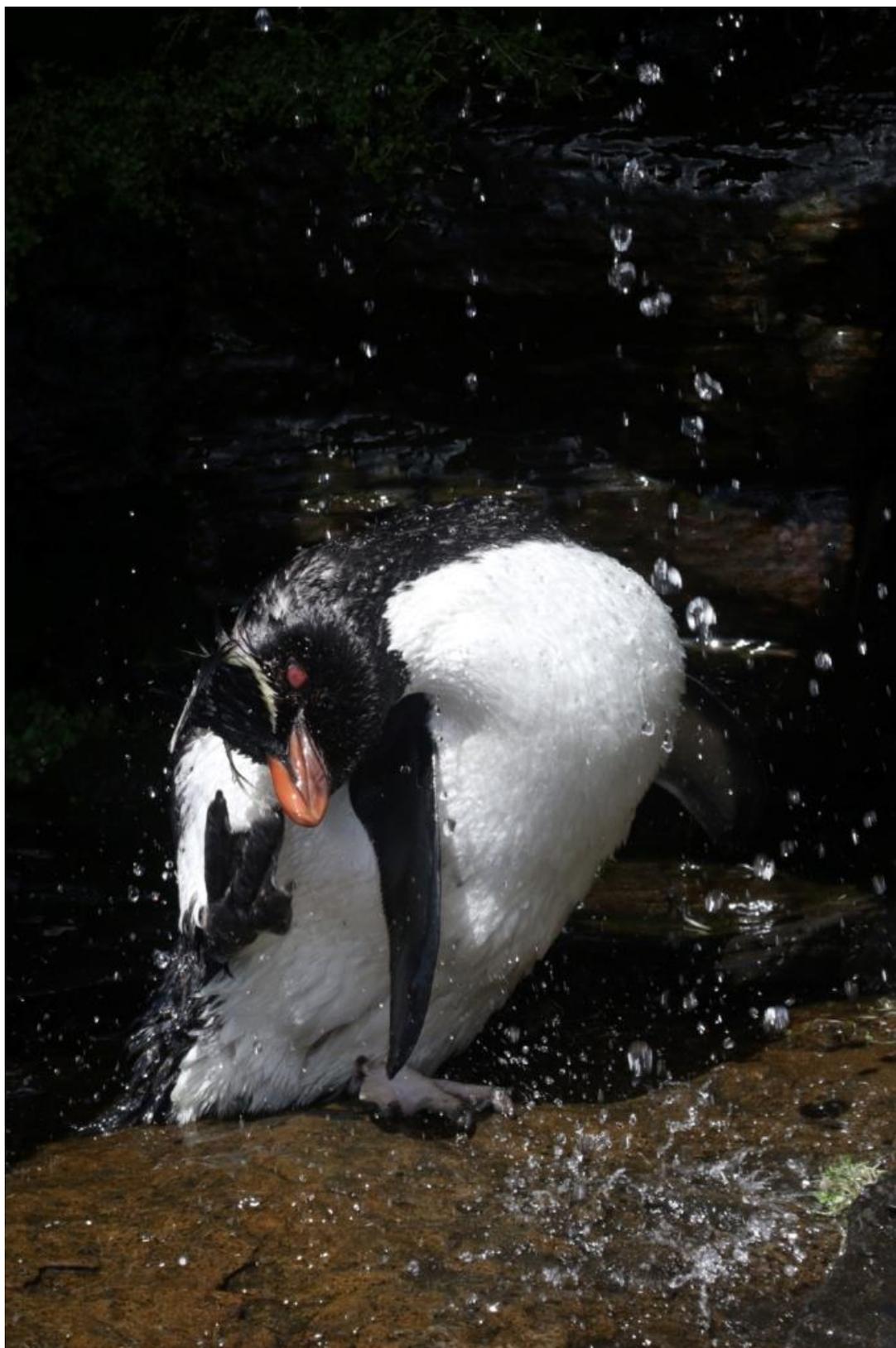
**Long-tailed Meadowlark poses for us on a fence post.**

The time of the flights is only confirmed the day of departure, and today at breakfast, we were told our plane would be coming at 10:30. Some of our group went for a walk down to the beach after breakfast, while others tried to shoot a few birds around the garden. **Austral Thrushes** were numerous and tame, but the **Black-chinned Siskins** were a little more cautious, but we managed photographs of these plus some **Long-tailed Meadowlarks** and even a **Dark-faced Ground Tyrant**. We said our goodbyes to the staff at Pebble Lodge and we drove the few minutes up to the airstrip. Ricky, as well as managing the lodge acted as check in, baggage handler and air traffic control for the flight. The flight arrived and a few photographers got off, before we boarded for our short hop over to Saunders Island where we were greeted by our new host Susan. Our food boxes were coming on a later flight which I went back to meet with Susan and bring them back to the self-catering accommodation before we could make a spot of lunch.



**Snowy Sheathbill has a face that only a mother could love.**

She came back in the afternoon to take us on our afternoon trip to the Rookery which was about a 40-minute drive. To get there we drove over a big hill with spectacular panoramic views which we got out to take pictures of. One of the attractions of the rookery was a tiny waterfall where **Southern Rockhopper Penguins** took showers. It was a bit of walk down some big steps, but we made it without too much difficulty and shot the penguins for a good while. This was the first place we had been so far with nesting **Black-browed Albatrosses**. They seemed to live life at a much slower pace but watching them for a while, we managed to observe some different postures. There was the usual coming and going of **Southern Rockhopper Penguins** up and down the slope and I enjoyed watching them getting washed ashore on the rocks below. We had **Snowy Sheathbills** below too, plus plenty of nesting **Imperial Cormorants**, **Striated Caracara** (or Jonny Rook) and **Brown Skuas** patrolling the colony looking for unattended chicks. It was another splendid afternoon of amazing wildlife photography.



Southern Rockhopper Penguin taking a shower.

9<sup>th</sup> December – The Neck, Saunders Islands



**Gentoo Penguins porpoising out of the water.**

The resident family had a busy morning, shuttling people around the island and meeting flights, but they had time to take us to our site for the day at 9am. There was a narrowing on the NW of the island, an Isthmus, called The Neck which was a famous place for wildlife viewing and photography. They had colonies of **King**, **Gentoo**, **Magellanic** and **Southern Rockhopper Penguins** as well as **Black-browed Albatross**. On the way, we had a brief stop to photograph a close family of **Falkland Steamer-Ducks** and also saw our first **Variable Hawks**. When we arrived at The Neck, Carol & Suzan gave us the lay of the land and recommended the best time to hit various spots. The **Southern Rockhopper Penguins** for example played in the rock pools at low tide which was going to be after 2pm. We all had our own ideas and scattered to various spots. There was so much to see, it was hard to know what to do with oneself. Some went first to the **King Penguins** which we as stately as ever. Next to the South beach where we heard was our best chance of seeing **Gentoo Penguins** jumping out of the water. We had a group that was swimming up and down just offshore and were porpoising, but to actually photograph them out of the water was easier said than done. We finally got some shots of them jumping and also coming out of the water before moving on.



**Striated Caracara is one of the main predators of penguin chicks.**

Between spots, there was always something to photograph. Like nesting **Magellanic Oystercatchers** and the ever-present **Brown Skuas**, always on the look out for a baby penguin to snatch. **Straited Caracaras** were also ever vigilant and seemed very curious about us. I started a walk up the hill towards the **Southern Rockhopper Penguin** and **Imperial Cormorant** colonies and **Black-browed Albatrosses** beyond. The advice had been to leave the first albatrosses as they were on a very steep and precarious hill, and head to the second colony. We spent quite a bit of time here and had great views of nest-building, squabbling and allopreening amongst other behaviors. We had to start thinking about our return times. There was a group coming in to stay at the bunk house arriving at 2pm and after that it would be much later. We went back to meet them there, but there seemed to be a delay and they didn't show up. The tide was becoming perfect for the rockhopper pools, so a few of us started walking over. It didn't disappoint, and we spent an amazing time photographing the amazingly cute little **Southern Rockhopper Penguins** bathing, hopping in and out of the sea and just being absolutely adorable in general. The group finally showed up and they were driven around to show them the lay of the land. We were very happy to have been given this extra time here before being picked up and taken back to The Settlement.

10<sup>th</sup> December – The Neck, Saunders Islands



**Black-browed Albatross pairs are very affectionate.**

Today was our second full day at the neck. Susan and David had a busy morning of meeting flights and boats and we were at their mercy as to what time they could take us. We wanted to be there at low tide again for the rock pools which today was around 3pm, so we didn't mind going a bit later and staying later. We took along a professional photographer too who had been sent out here by the tourist board. They were supposed to have a gap to take us at 10am, but the flight was late, so they agreed to let us take the car. This was perfectly OK with us as it would mean we had a vehicle to shelter in if the weather turned, and also we could come back whatever time we wanted. Land Rovers are great fun to drive, especially on the rough roads for which they were designed. I tried to keep it as smooth as possible although it wasn't always easy. We had a couple of stops on the way for birds including to get our first pictures of **Variable Hawk**, although it was still a little far away. When we reached the neck, I parked into the wind, so the doors didn't blow off. There were so many options here of what to shoot. Some hadn't seen the **Black-browed Albatross** colony yet, so they followed the pink flags up the hill, while the rest of us walked to South Beach to try and shoot **Gentoo Penguins** jumping out of the water.



**Southern Giant-Petrel is the hyaena of the bird world.**

There was good activity today and groups swam up and down, presumably catching fish. There was a bit of a trick to telling when they would jump. Sometimes you could see the shadows under the waves which you could trace until they broke the surface, then shoot and hope for the best. I certainly managed more shots than yesterday. I saw a different shape break the waves and this turned out to be **Commerson's Dolphin** which unfortunately didn't hang around and I was the only one to see. As well as jumping shots, the **Gentoo Penguins** were also fun to shoot coming out of the water. Next, I walked up to the **Black-browed Albatrosses** and had a nice time trying to get shots of different positions. There seemed to be a carcass up there too which both **Striated Caracaras** and **Southern Giant-Petrels** were pecking at. Many were single birds sat on their nests, but there were a few pairs that were preening each other which made a nice picture. The tide was now going out and it was down to the rock pools which were just as good if not better than yesterday. I hadn't noticed the crevasse yesterday, a gap between 2 rocks that the **Southern Rockhoppers** often hopped across, but some didn't make it and tumbled a few feet into the pool below. Needless to say, it was very entertaining. Most of us had shot our fill and walked back to the car, shooting a few King Penguins on the beach. We started the drive back but left a couple of people who wanted to shoot for longer and would be picked up later. Another great day.

11<sup>th</sup> & 12<sup>th</sup> December – Saunders Islands – Cape Pembroke – Sea Lion Island



Grass Wren treated us with great views.

The 11<sup>th</sup> was simply taken up with getting back to Stanley. In the Falklands you are at the mercy of the FIGAS schedules, and it was delayed until early afternoon. We didn't venture out in the morning as it was windy and rainy, but instead finished off our store of food for breakfast and lunch. We finally said goodbye to our hosts, David and Susan before boarding the plane back to Stanley. It was a bit of shock to the system seeing more than half a dozen people, and the small town seemed to us like New York City. The next day too our flight to Sea Lion was early afternoon, so we had the morning to go and do something. We checked various options and settled on visiting Cape Pembroke, an old lighthouse on a peninsular jutting out in the sea, just beyond Stanley Airport. Our friendly Zimbabwean driver, Lettie, took us there and said she would come back at an agreed time. It was a wild place with jagged rocks and endless bunches of Tussock Grass. We first checked out the lighthouse which was no longer functioning but instead had been replaced by a rather modern LED hooked up to solar panels. After that, we walked out to the point. In the long grass here we found the endemic race of **Grass Wren** that had eluded us up until now. The peninsular was supposed to be good for sea lions and dolphins.



**Blackish Cinclodes** was omnipresent on Sea Lion Island.

The sea lions were on the south shore and dolphins on the north. We tried the south first, and saw our first **Northern Giant Petrel**, along with plenty of **Kelp Geese** and **Brown Skuas**. We finally found a single **South American Sea Lion**, which looked like a young male that had been ostracized. We had just enough time to cross the peninsular to the north shore. We found a nice sandy beach and scanning the water we saw the unmistakable shape of dolphins. The larger of the regularly occurring species here on the islands which was the **Peale's Dolphin**. Lettie came to pick us up and got us back to the hotel in time for check out. Again, our flight had been put back, so we had a leisurely lunch before heading out to the Stanley airport for our flight to Sea Lion Island. This was the smallest island we were visiting and most remote. Much of the flight was over water. We were met by our friendly hosts and even friendlier **Blackish Cinclodes** which hopped around our feet as we walked to our very comfortable lodge. We had a nice cup of tea, cookie and orientation before we were shown to our rooms. We were keen to head out soon after and went to the South Beach which was full of **Southern Elephant Seals**. The famous animal that everyone wants to see on the island though is the **Orca**. These had been seen today for the first time in 5 days, so we kept our fingers crossed. **Blackish Cinclodes** hopped around the huge, hulking elephant seals pecking at them which seemed to put them in a bad mood. **Striated Caracaras** were also around the island and took a real interest in us, walking up just about 2 feet away. One of them even tried to make off with Alan's iPhone. It had been a nice walk, but we were happy to get back to the lodge for dinner.



South American Sea Lion & Southern Elephant Seals

13<sup>th</sup> December – Sea Lion Island



**Magellanic Oystercatcher doing their breeding display.**

On all the islands that we had visited the tour so far, we had been driven to the sites which usually meant that we weren't there too early in the morning (with the nice morning light). The beauty of Sea Lion island was that it was small and there was plenty to see in walking distance. So, some of us set off at 6am to start the day. First off, we checked the Orca Pools, but there were no Orcas. We watched the **Southern Elephant Seals** for a while, with **Blackish Cinclodes** hopping around them, and took some photos before walking up the South Beach. There were **Magellanic Penguins** coming ashore with their comical walks and **Gentoo Penguins** porpoising just offshore. On the beach were **White-rumped Sandpipers** and **Two-banded Plovers**, and set a bit further back, **South American Terns** dropping in and out. There were many **Falkland Steamer Ducks** around and **Magellanic Oystercatchers**, some of them doing their alarm behavior of sticking their tail up in the air. We started to walk across to the North Beach around a muddy lagoon with a few young **Southern Elephant Seals** wallowing in it. In the tussock grass around the edge, we found and had good views of **Grass Wren**, **White-bridled Finch** and the endemic **Cobb's Wren**, all of which posed beautifully for photos. We continued on, trying to make it back in time for breakfast at 8 O'clock, but we got waylaid by very close **Magellanic Snipe**, and finally a pair of **Brown Skuas** mating. We certainly didn't want to rush that. After a delicious breakfast, we decided to relax a bit, having taken quite a long walk first thing. I thought I would take the opportunity to scope a few locations on the island, so I went to check out the Long Pond.



Magellanic Snipe was right by our feet.



**Cobb's Wren is the other endemic species on the Falklands.**

This had dried out recently, and although it now had water in again, it was a shadow of its former glory and just had a few common water birds like **Upland Goose**, **Yellow-billed Teal** and **Black-crowned Night Heron**. On the way back, I checked out the **South American Sea Lion** colony below a low cliff on the coast. There were several huge males battling it out and looking very ferocious. We ate our packed lunches in the dining room at midday and then went out for a walk above the Orca Pools. There had been some confusion about tide times, and rather than high tide, it was falling, so not suitable for Orcas to visit the pools where they hunt for the young elephant seals. The trail through the tussock grass was a bit tense as it was also shared by elephant seals, but we got there and back without incident. We enjoyed a few of the common birds around, like **Blackish Cinclodes** and **Striated Caracaras** before heading back to rest up for the afternoon, ahead of our owling trip out tonight. Micky was kind enough to take us out to look for Short-eared Owl at 9pm. He took us to its regular haunt and we waited inside the car as it was pretty cold and windy outside. We waited for quite a while, but it was a no show. At least we knew the spot, and we could try again another night. He also kindly offered to take me out to look for **Gray-backed Storm Petrels**. This was at 11pm when it was completely dark. Apparently they are sometime preyed upon by the owls. It was still really windy and the first couple of birds coming in looked like a locusts in the spotlight. As more came though, we got closer and better looks. Certainly not a photographic opportunity but interesting nevertheless.

14<sup>th</sup> December – Sea Lion Island



**Black-chinned Siskin taking a bath.**

After last night's late finish, we caught up on sleep and didn't venture out before breakfast. Luckily, it was getting towards high tide after breakfast so most of us wandered down to South Beach afterwards, and watched the Orca Pools, hoping for some action. While we waited I scanned way out to sea and saw many **Black-browed Albatrosses** flying around. It was a beautiful day and warm and I found myself taking off layers while we waited. Again, a no show for the orcas, but we checked out the bird shower, which was a fresh water drip under the low cliff that had a steady stream of birds coming to bathe and drink. We got some nice pics of **Black-chinned Siskin**, **Blackish Cinclodes** and **White-bridled Finch**. The light was a little bit harsh by this point so we hoped to make it back here again when it wasn't so contrasting. The lunch packs had been put out by the time we got back to the lodge and Micky had kindly lent us a Land Rover to take a drive to the rockhopper colony at the other end of the island. We trundled along the bumpy, peat roads, first stopping to see the **South American Sea Lions** at the base of some other low cliffs. There were several males spread out, obviously setting up territories. They were all taking a rest but from the open wounds on their necks, they must have been fighting. We continued on to the **Southern Rockhopper Penguin** colonies which were on the top of some much higher cliffs on a rocky hill hop. They weren't as big as some of the other colonies we had seen previously but the setting was spectacular.



**Southern Rockhopper Penguins coming in for a hair-raising landing.**

We checked out the 2 nearby groups and tried to find where they got up and down to the sea. We found a very steep set of steps with huge waves breaking against them. Surely not. We looked again and saw that was the only access. Sure enough we saw a few penguins out at sea trying to make a landing. We watched them for quite a while as more and more came in. It was incredibly dramatic, right out of a wildlife documentary. We positioned ourselves at a safe distance and got some great images of them being thrown around in the swell. It turned out to be one of the highlights of the trip. Before leaving we had a quick look at a **Macaroni Penguin** mixed in with the **Southern Rockhoppers**. When we got back to the lodge, one member of the group who hadn't come with us was heading out to North Beach to shoot **Gentoo Penguins**. We were all pretty tired and wanted to take a short break before going out. Big mistake. By the time we got down there an hour later, he showed us his pics of the pod of **Orcas** that had since departed. I asked which way they had gone, and based on this I thought that they may have swum around to South Beach. I left the clients and power-hiked over there to check. After winding my way through the dunes, doing my best to avoid the resting **Southern Elephant Seals**, I got there and scanned but couldn't see anything obvious. Another couple who had just arrived with their baby in a carrier were cutting back across to the North Beach. I didn't speak to them then, but I caught up with them later on to find out they had just been looking at the Orcas too. I had missed them twice. Better luck tomorrow. I gave the clients the news and we walked back to the lodge spotting a delightful **Silver Teal** in the muddy pond on the way.



Silver Teal in reflection.

15<sup>th</sup> December – Sea Lion Island



**Striated Caracara & Southern Giant Petrel battling it out.**

It was our last day on Sea Lion Island and foremost on our minds was seeing Orcas. I took a pre-breakfast walk along South Beach, cutting across and back along North Beach. Orcas had been seen every day along here for the past 3 days, usually early or late. It was cold and a bit windy but certainly refreshing. There was plenty of activity, with penguins in fine voice. **Falkland Steamer-Ducks** were waddling about awkwardly and adolescent **Southern Elephant Seals** sparring. After breakfast the rest of the group joined me to walk down to the Orca Pool. We climbed the hill through the clumps of tussock grass to the top of the viewpoint over the pool. The pool was only accessible to Orcas at high tide and we were about an hour shy of that now. There was a local lass on holiday here and she gave us some more info on the pools. There was one female in particular who frequented the pool while the rest of the pod waited outside. If she caught an elephant seal pup, she would take it out and they would share it. She had seen them doing this in the past, as well as the female showing its calf how to get in and out. It turned into another warm sunny day, but we waited over 2 hours and again it was a no show. After lunch we took another walk along North and South beaches with all the usual suspects, but Dee also managed to locate our first **Brown-hooded Gull** of the trip. I found a pair of **Striated Caracaras** with a penguin chick they had snagged, and it turned into a Battle Royale between them, a pair of **Brown Skuas** and a **Southern Giant Petrel**. The petrel won out in the end. As if I hadn't walked far enough today, I did a late evening walk around the by now familiar route. Again, no Orcas although I did stumble upon our first **Sanderling**.

16<sup>th</sup> December – Sea Lion Island to Stanley



**Two-banded Plover in breeding plumage.**

It was our final morning on Sea Lion Island before flying back to Stanley. Our flight was supposed to be around midday so we still had a full morning. Sunrise here was at 4:30, and so far I had avoided waking up this early, but with it being the last chance at Orcas, I thought it was worth the extra effort. I walked the same loop I had done several times now, starting at South Beach, cutting over the dunes and back along North Beach. There was plenty of activity and the North Beach was filled with both **Magellanic** and **Gentoo Penguins**, many of which were just starting to make their way to the water. It was so familiar and comfortable now, I felt like I lived here and was out for my daily stroll. That is the beauty of this trip, that there is time to get to know each place intimately, not just the rushed day trips from a cruise ship. The light was soft and cool, and I tried to improve on a few species that I had taken so many times already. The **Falkland Steamer-Ducks** were particularly photogenic, as were the **Magellanic Oystercatchers** and **Two-banded Plovers**. I stopped every minute or 2 to check the sea over my shoulder for Orca dorsal fins sticking out of the water. I went back to bed for an hour or 2 before breakfast and afterwards, the group joined me for one last vigil at the Orca Pools. This time we waited on the rocks by the side of the pool instead of the dune above.



**A female Kelp Goose having a drink with its chicks.**

The view was just as good, but you got a lot more comings and goings. There was a delightful family of **Kelp Geese**. Mom and dad escorted their 3 adorable chicks down to a puddle to drink. The adult female was particularly attractive and gave us a good show of flapping her wings and bathing. There was the usual passage of **Southern Giant Petrels** zooming by like B52 bombers. **Blackish Ciconiids** and **Striated Caracaras** sat around us hoping for a snack. We were able to wait until high tide but we were left empty handed and in the end had to give up and keep something to come back for. We walked past the bird bath which had some **White-bridled Finches** bathing and some adolescent but still huge **Southern Elephant Seals** still battling it out for dominance. Just wait until the really big boys show up! We sat down for our final lunch at the lodge before walking out the door for the final time to meet the plane. We got some great aerial views of the island as we were leaving. Our friendly taxi driver was there to meet us in Stanley and took us back to our hotel and the afternoon was filled with a trip to the museum for some and gift shop for others. Tomorrow was our international flight. It had been an amazing 2 week stay on the islands. We had met so many characters, heard so many stories and seen so many amazing things. All that remained now was to go through the absolutely staggering number of photos that we have taken when we get back and no doubt relive our time in one of the very best places in the world for wildlife photography.



Sea Lion Island from the air, showing North and South Beaches

## BIRD LIST

View the eBird trip report here: [Falklands Birding with a Camera - eBird Trip Report](#)

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

Black-necked Swan	<i>Cygnus melancoryphus</i>		
Upland Goose	<i>Chloephaga picta leucoptera</i>	Endemic ssp	P
Kelp Goose	<i>Chloephaga hybrida malvinarum</i>	Endemic ssp	P
Ruddy-headed Goose	<i>Chloephaga rubidiceps</i>		P
Falkland Steamer-Duck	<i>Tachyeres brachypterus</i>	Endemic	P
Crested Duck	<i>Lophonetta specularioides</i>		P
Silver Teal	<i>Spatula versicolor</i>		P
Chiloe Wigeon	<i>Mareca sibilatrix</i>		P
Yellow-billed Pintail	<i>Anas georgica</i>		P
Yellow-billed Teal	<i>Anas flavirostris</i>		P

**Grebes (Podicipedidae)**

White-tufted Grebe	<i>Rollandia r. rolland</i>	Endemic ssp	P
Silvery Grebe	<i>Podiceps occipitalis</i>		P

**Sheathbills (Chionidae)**

Snowy Sheathbill	<i>Chionis albus</i>		P
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**Oystercatchers (Haematopodidae)**

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

**Plovers and Lapwings (Charadriidae)**

Two-banded Plover	<i>Charadrius falklandicus</i>		P
Rufous-chested Dotterel	<i>Charadrius modestus</i>		P

**Sandpipers and Allies (Scolopacidae)**

Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>		P
White-rumped Sandpiper	<i>Calidris fuscicollis</i>		P
Magellanic Snipe	<i>Gallinago magellanica</i>		P

**Skuas and Jaegers (Stercorariidae)**

Brown Skua	<i>Stercorarius antarcticus</i>		P
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**Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers (Laridae)**

Brown-hooded Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus maculipennis</i>		P
Dolphin Gull	<i>Leucophaeus scoresbii</i>		P
Kelp Gull	<i>Larus dominicanus</i>		P

South American Tern	<i>Sterna hirundinacea</i>		P
<b>Penguins (Spheniscidae)</b>			
King Penguin	<i>Aptenodytes patagonicus</i>		P
Gentoo Penguin	<i>Pygoscelis papua</i>		P
Magellanic Penguin	<i>Spheniscus magellanicus</i>		P
Macaroni Penguin	<i>Eudyptes chrysolophus</i>		P
Southern Rockhopper Penguin	<i>Eudyptes chrysocome</i>		P
<b>Albatrosses (Diomedidae)</b>			
Black-browed Albatross	<i>Thalassarche melanophris</i>		P
<b>Southern Storm-Petrels (Oceanitidae)</b>			
Gray-backed Storm-Petrel	<i>Garrodia nereis</i>		
<b>Shearwaters and Petrels (Procellariidae)</b>			
Southern Giant-Petrel	<i>Macronectes giganteus</i>		P
Northern Giant-Petrel	<i>Macronectes halli</i>		
White-chinned Petrel	<i>Procellaria aequinoctialis</i>		
Sooty Shearwater	<i>Ardenna grisea</i>		
<b>Cormorants and Shags (Phalacrocoracidae)</b>			
Magellanic Cormorant	<i>Leucocarbo magellanicus</i>		P
Imperial Cormorant	<i>Leucocarbo atriceps albiventer</i>	Endemic ssp	P
<b>Hérons, Egrets, and Bitterns (Ardeidae)</b>			
Black-crowned Night-Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax falklandicus</i>	Endemic ssp	P
<b>New World Vultures (Cathartidae)</b>			
Turkey Vulture	<i>Cathartes aura</i>		P
<b>Hawks, Eagles, and Kites (Accipitridae)</b>			
Variable Hawk	<i>Geranoaetus polyosoma</i>		P
<b>Falcons and Caracaras (Falconidae)</b>			
Crested Caracara	<i>Caracara plancus</i>		P
Striated Caracara	<i>Daptrius australis</i>		P
Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>		P
<b>Ovenbirds and Woodcreepers (Furnariidae)</b>			
Blackish Cinclodes	<i>Cinclodes a. antarcticus</i>	Endemic ssp	P

**Tyrant Flycatchers (Tyrannidae)**

Dark-faced Ground-Tyrant	<i>Muscisaxicola m. maclovianus</i>	Endemic ssp	P
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**Wrens (Troglodytidae)**

Cobb's Wren	<i>Troglodytes cobbi</i>	Endemic	P
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Grass Wren	<i>Cistothorus platensis falklandicus</i>	Endemic ssp	P
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**Thrushes and Allies (Turdidae)**

Austral Thrush	<i>Turdus f. falcklandii</i>	Endemic ssp	P
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**Wagtails and Pipits (Motacillidae)**

Correndera Pipit	<i>Anthus correndera grayi</i>	Endemic ssp	P
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**Old World Sparrows (Passeridae)**

House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>		
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**Finches, Euphonias, and Allies (Fringillidae)**

Black-chinned Siskin	<i>Spinus barbatus</i>		P
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**Troupials and Allies (Icteridae)**

Long-tailed Meadowlark	<i>Leistes loyca falklandicus</i>	Endemic ssp	P
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**Tanagers and Allies (Thraupidae)**

White-bridled Finch	<i>Melanodera m. melanodera</i>	Endemic ssp	P
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**MAMMALS****Marine dolphins (Delphinidae)**

Commerson's dolphin	<i>Cephalorhynchus commersonii</i>		P
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Peale's dolphin	<i>Lagenorhynchus australis</i>		P
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Orca	<i>Orcinus orca</i>		
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**Eared seals, sealions (Otariidae)**

South American sea lion	<i>Otaria flavescens</i>		P
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**Earless seals (Phocidae)**

Southern elephant seal	<i>Mirounga leonina</i>		P
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P - Photographed