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Worldwide Birding Adventures

Classic Antarctica Trip Report: The Falkland Islands, South Georgia, South Orkneys & Antarctic Peninsula Voyage aboard the Akademik Ioffe *28th December 2011 to 15th January 2012 (19 days)*



Black-browed Albatrosses at West Point Island by John Graham

Trip Report compiled by Tour Leader John Graham

Trip Summary

An excited group of 110 eager travellers gathered at Ushuaia's aptly named Hotel Albatross on the afternoon of 28 December 2011, impatient to board the MS Akademik Ioffe, their home for the next 19 days; and, for many, their platform for the realisation of a lifelong dream to visit the world's only truly unspoilt wilderness – Antarctica! After minimal customs and immigration formalities, we all found ourselves on board, learning the lay of the ship and meeting fellow passengers and Rockjumper Birding Tours' guests.

Departure was somewhat delayed due to the not unexpected high winds of Tierra del Fuego, but this conveniently allowed us to finish dinner and then be on deck in time for casting off on a breathtakingly scenic evening cruise westwards along the Beagle Channel. Trip birding commenced with the exquisite Dolphin Gull and a supporting cast of Chilean Skua, Kelp Gull, South American Tern and flocks of Imperial Shag, with the tubenose account being opened with small numbers of Southern Giant Petrel while still at berth in the harbour. A few South American Sea lions were also noted.

The unfortunate consequence of the late departure was that we only steamed through the narrows of Puerto Williams after 23h00, with the failing light preventing any of the hoped-for sightings of Magellanic Diving Petrel and Magellanic Penguin.



Slender-billed Prion by John Graham

Early morning on 29 December found us in open ocean, steaming north-westwards for the Falkland Islands. Although the sky was overcast, the sea was calm and the wind unobtrusive. Seabirding was brilliant, with good numbers of Black-browed Albatross joined by a few Wandering and Southern Royal Albatross and a single Northern Royal Albatross. Cape, Southern Giant and White-chinned Petrels, and Sooty Shearwaters were plentiful, and numbers of Slender-billed Prions picked up during the day. The disappointments of the previous evening were quickly forgotten as both Magellanic Penguins and Magellanic Diving Petrels were seen, with Common Diving Petrels being added to the tally later in the day. Wilson's Storm Petrels were common and were joined by lesser numbers of the cryptically coloured Grey-backed Storm Petrel. A sprinkling of Great Shearwaters, which breed in the Falkland Islands in addition to the better known colonies of the central South Atlantic, were seen throughout the day, and the cast was rounded off by Northern Giant Petrel, Southern Fulmar and both Chilean and Brown (Falkland) Skuas. The mammal list was restricted to a couple of South American Fur Seals, looking with interest at the ship as we steamed past more than 100 miles (160 km) from the



nearest land.

We were making good time due to the calm conditions, and by the following morning we were in sight of our first landing at West Point Island on the far west of the Falkland Islands. Peale's Dolphin played energetically under the bow as we approached the anchorage, and while the skipper conducted some intricate manoeuvring through narrow channels we were entertained by porpoising Magellanic, Gentoo & Southern Rockhopper Penguins. Rock Shag and the *albiventer* race of Imperial Shag flew close to the ship, and Turkey Vulture, Dolphin Gull and Kelp Gull were seen along the shoreline. Here we had the easiest zodiac landing we were to experience on the trip, onto a sloping wooden pier, watched by loitering Kelp and Upland Geese and the flightless (and endemic) Falklands Steamer Duck. Dark faced Ground Tyrant and Blackish Cinclodes foraged on the sea shore and Austral Thrush, Long-tailed Meadowlark and Black-chinned Siskin studiously ignored our progress up the slope and across the meadows en route to the colony on the far side of the island. A lucky few saw Magellan (South American) Snipe, Correndera Pipit and Sedge Wren on the walk. The colony was an awe-inspiring spectacle, with thousands of Black-browed Albatross and Southern Rockhopper Penguins nesting within a flipper span of each other amongst the tussac grass and rocky screes, serenely ignoring the red, wetskin-clad mob of camera wielding passengers who were within touching distance. A few near-endemic Striated Caracaras patrolled the colony and were seen to plummet onto one luckless chick that was left unattended for mere moments. Our return to the pier after a delicious tea and warm hospitality from the farmer netted a small group of Ruddy-headed Geese, another near-endemic to the Falkland Islands.

The ship relocated to Carcass Island while we ate a somewhat superfluous lunch, and we landed near the farmhouse for a further dose of great birding and friendly hospitality. Here we added the endemic Cobb's Wren, foraging along the rocky seashore, the quite stunning Black-throated (White-bridled) Finch, and both Magellanic and Blackish Oystercatchers. Many Striated Caracaras were feeding on carcasses left out by the farmer, and Upland Geese stood in large flocks in the meadows. A single Variable Hawk was noted ridge soaring along a distant hill. Kelp and Upland Goose, Crested Duck and Falklands Steamer Ducks on the beach were so confiding that one had to deviate to walk around them. A Black crowned Night Heron of the rather surprising slaty breasted *falklandicus* race then emerged to feed in the rock pools as we headed back to the zodiacs. After dinner we relaxed on deck with a spectacularly fiery sunset lighting the island silhouettes to our east.



Striated Caracara by John Graham

After a leisurely overnight cruise we moored in the inner harbour of Port Stanley, having enjoyed Southern Giant and White-chinned Petrels, Sooty and Great Shearwaters, Black-browed and a single Northern Royal Albatross, and Brown (Falklands) Skua in the approaches. We were to share the town with more than two thousand tourists from the 290m, 109 000 tonne *Star Princess*, which at almost 20x the gross tonnage absolutely dwarfed the *MS Akademik Ioffe*, and so we lost no time zodiacing to the shore. A walk up the centrally placed Philomel Street to the hilly fields south of the town netted us the remaining most sought-



after species, Rufous-chested Dotterel, and very fine views of the endemic Falklands race of *Correndera Pipit*. House Sparrows, Long-tailed Meadowlarks and Austral Thrushes abounded, and further White-bellied Finches, Blackish Cinclodes and Dark-faced Ground Tyrants, South American Terns and Dolphin and Kelp Gulls were noted. An afternoon visit to Gypsy Cove provided great views of Magellanic Penguin and breeding Rock Shag and Black-crowned Night Heron, and the lucky few added Commerson's Dolphin and South American Fur Seal to their lists on the zodiac ride back to the ship. A few Flying Steamer Ducks took to the air ahead of the ship as we steamed out of the inner harbour, solving the debate that had ensued over their head and bill proportions, and a Peregrine was noted perched on the rocky promontory at the entrance.

Over the next two days (1 & 2 Jan) we cruised eastwards across the Falklands Trough and then along the North Scotia Ridge, crossing the Antarctic Convergence en route. Wandering and Southern Royal Albatross were seen in good numbers, and were joined by smaller numbers of Black-browed and Grey-headed Albatross and a single Northern Royal. We saw our last Grey-backed Storm Petrels and Great Shearwaters and our first Black-bellied Storm Petrels on 1 Jan, and Soft-plumaged Petrels were added to the list that day but not seen again other than a singleton east of South Georgia. The Slender-billed Prions that were common west of the Convergence were replaced by Antarctic Prions as we approached and crossed the Convergence. An astounding gathering of many tens of thousands of densely packed Antarctic Prions were seen feeding in the lee of Shag Rocks, some 140 nautical miles west of South Georgia, and alongside this spectacle the few thousand South Georgia Shags on the rocks seemed somewhat less impressive. Mammal highlights were a pair of Southern Bottlenose Whales, 4 Fin Whales and no fewer than 7 Humpbacked Whales!



King Penguin by John Graham

We awoke on 3 January to our first sight of South Georgia Island and an unforgettable early morning zodiac cruise along the shores of the majestic Elsehul Bay under overcast skies, with an icy wind ensuring parkas stayed well fastened. Antarctic Fur Seal pups lined the available beaches and their eerie and resonant wailing cries echoing off the high cliffs provided an acoustic backdrop to an extraordinary wildlife experience. Northern Giant Petrels sat calmly alongside the zodiacs, and small flotillas of Macaroni Penguins slid past the boats before making their landings on kelp-skirted rock outcrops and scrambling up scree slopes to their rocky colonies. Breeding accumulations of Black-browed Albatross also occupied the steep rocky slopes in areas bared of tussock grass, while smaller colonies of Grey-headed Albatross were noted high on more grassy buttresses. Sleek and elegant Light-mantled Albatross glided along the ridges, and Antarctic Terns patrolled and plunged in the inshore waters. A few groups of the exquisitely marked King Penguins occupied stony beaches, with the odd Gentoo Penguin noted amongst them. The wider beaches had ponderous Southern Elephant Seals laid out like gargantuan slugs, and Snowy Sheathbills and additional Giant Petrels foraged opportunistically on the fringes of



the Fur Seal gatherings.

The balance of the day and the following two days found us steaming southwards along the eastern coast of South Georgia, exploring bays, landing at some extreme wildlife sites, and visiting memorable historical sites. Landings on the Salisbury Plains and at Gold Harbour gave us the opportunity to experience the tranquil equanimity of King Penguins at arm's reach with stunning glacial backdrops, as we walked slowly through many thousands on the fringes of colonies of many hundreds of thousands. Brown and downy "Oakum Boy" chicks watched us with inquisitiveness while sleek plumaged adults simply ignored our red garbed presence. Not so the Antarctic Fur Seals, and many of the passengers had heart stopping moments as they followed instructions by standing their ground in the face of feisty charging young male seals. Brown Skuas and Southern Giant Petrels fed on deceased fur seal pups, and further Gentoos and a single Chinstrap Penguin were seen on the fringes of the colonies. Large mounds of lazing Elephant Seals at Gold Harbour were periodically disrupted by bellowing activity as pairs of young males sparred in a manner guaranteed to make a Sumo Wrestler blanch.

We landed on Stromness Beach, sailing past the old whaling town of Leith Harbour on our approach, and again walked the gauntlet of lounging Antarctic Fur and Elephant Seals. We were unable to enter Stromness due to residual asbestos and dangerously weathered buildings, but were able to view (and walk) the last stretches of the epic hike of Sir Ernest Shackleton to the safety of Stromness after his dingy was wrecked far on the western side of the island. We added the reputedly carnivorous South Georgia race of Yellow-billed Pintail to the trip list, and enjoyed watching Antarctic Terns with tiny chicks in the stony river bed near the town. We continued the historical theme later that day with a fascinating visit to the abandoned whaling town of Grytviken, where we gained insights at the Museum into the history of whaling and sealing in South Georgia, marvelled at a replica of Shackleton's tiny 22 foot (7m) dingy, the *James Caird*, stood alongside amazingly preserved 1930's steam powered whaling ships, and in sombre and reflective mood drank a toast in lightly falling snow to Sir Ernest Shackleton and his right-hand man, Frank Wild, at their gravesides.



Snow Petrel by John Graham

Our last excursion at South Georgia was a zodiac cruise in Cooper Bay in ever worsening weather, where we managed to get acceptable looks at small numbers of the endemic South Georgia Pipit foraging on the kelp-fringed shoreline, spent some time viewing a mixed colony of Chinstrap and Macaroni Penguins, and excitedly viewed our first dainty Snow Petrels, skimming past within spitting distance of the zodiacs. Our late afternoon voyage up Drygalski Fjord was called off before we reached the glacier due to the mounting storm and bad visibility, but not before we had added Blue Petrels, a single Kerguelen Petrel and numbers of South Georgia Diving Petrels to the list.



Over the next two days we cruised south-westwards in strong winds and fairly bumpy seas towards the South Orkney Islands, hoping that the weather would let up sufficiently to permit landing at the windswept Argentinean base of Orcadas. Antarctic Prions and Cape Petrels were the most numerous birds and were joined by increasing numbers of Southern Fulmars. Blue and Snow Petrels continued to be seen, but the strangest bird sighting was of a group of 8 Snowy Sheathbills which visited the ship briefly some 200nM SW of South Georgia before heading on in a south-westerly direction. Cetacean sightings were picking up, with 2 Sei Whales, a Sperm Whale and no fewer than 15 Fin Whales being seen on 6 January. The weather gods favoured us with flat calm conditions in the bay for the duration of our landing on 7 January at Orcadas Base, on Laurie Island, and we were given a very interesting base tour by the hospitable Argentinean researchers and meteorologists. Our sense of proximity to Antarctica proper, already well established due to the cold weather, ongoing light snow and frequent and spectacular tabular and other icebergs, was further reinforced by the sight of numbers of Cape Petrels patrolling the cliffs adjacent to the base and settling in rows on the nesting ridges and potholes, and also of our first Adelle Penguins lounging amongst Chinstraps on the pebble beach in front of the base.

Following this brief visit we embarked on the final step in our voyage to the Antarctic Continent, the crossing of the mouth of the Weddell Sea. This frozen sea is the “tabular iceberg factory” responsible for the spectacular bergs of up to 160 feet (50 metres) or more in height that punctuated our horizon with Morse-like dashes and dots. Close approach to a few of these bergs allowed us to marvel at their gargantuan size and subtle layering of white and blue tones, and one particular giant block of petrified ice had us gasping as it calved an enormous chunk while we idled past no more than 50 m away. These waters



Antarctic Petrel by John Graham

represented our last realistic chance of the remaining “tubenose” target on the trip, Antarctic Petrel, and it was with great relief that we noted a singleton of this antarctic endemic petrel joining the birds in the wake and spending some time with the boat on 8 January.

The following morning found us in gloriously calm and clear conditions, picking a course through a dense accumulation of small icebergs in our final approach to Paulet Island at the northern tip of the Antarctic Peninsula. The small and often flat chunks of ice formed ideal platforms for wildlife to haul out from the sea, and we saw many small groups of relaxing Adelle Penguins and our first Weddell, Crabeater and Leopard Seals. One of the passengers was lucky enough to have seen a pod of Orcas ahead of the ship in the small hours of the morning, but unfortunately this was to be the only encounter of the trip with this iconic predator. The completely snow covered Dundee and D’Urville Islands close on our starboard side were in odd contrast to the smaller, bare Paulet Island, almost clear of snow as a result, we surmised, of geothermal heat emanating from its central volcanic cone. We landed on Paulet Island for a close look at the large Adelle Penguin colony and sat

enraptured by these comical archetypical penguins as they stumbled in little parties up and down the stone covered slopes to their nests or to crèches of large downy grey chicks. We did a memorable zodiac cruise



through the spectacular ice sculptures of small bergs washed up against the shore, riding with numerous schools of porpoising Adelie's through the clearer waters. We also added Antarctic Shag to the trip list, our final representative for the trip of the Blue-eyed Shag superspecies.

After a spectacular morning we then set off across the Antarctic Sound to Brown Bluff for our first landing on the Antarctic continent. Many thousands of Adelie Penguins amassed ahead of the ship, and the clear waters allowed us to see them spiralling down to great depths after a period gathering air at the surface. The cetacean watching remained good, with Humpback Whale and our first Antarctic Minke Whales of the trip. The landing at Brown Bluff was in stark contrast to our morning Paulet Island excursion as the weather had turned and welcomed our landing with snow and bitter cold. The intrepid few who climbed Brown Bluff were rewarded with close looks at a nesting Snow Petrel, and an abiding memory of the landing was a snow encrusted Gentoo Penguin with two tiny chicks tightly curled in her lee. The arriving Gentoo and Adelie Penguins sped through the shallows before catapulting onto the shore, and while pondering this odd behaviour we noted an ominous undulation in the surface of the water beyond the slight ripple of the shore break and watched as the huge reptilian head of a patrolling Leopard Seal broke the surface momentarily. We had our answer!

We spent the following three days on the western side of the Antarctic Peninsula, visiting Half Moon Island and Deception Island in the South Shetlands, a tiny unnamed island in the glacial bay of Mikkelsen Harbour on Trinity Island, and Cuverville Island in the Errera Channel of the Antarctic Peninsula. We also had spectacular Antarctic Peninsula zodiac cruises in Curtis Bay and Neko Harbour, at 64° 50" the most southerly extreme of our voyage. Birding, although low in diversity, was of high quality and we viewed large numbers of Gentoo and



Curtis Bay during Antarctica zodiac cruise by John Graham

Chinstrap Penguins at their colonies, watched Gentoo Penguin chicks in the moment of hatching, pondered the subtle differences between Brown Skua and dark morph South Polar Skuas, watched South Polar Skuas raiding and gorging on carrion in the penguin colonies, ducked diving Antarctic Terns when we inadvertently approached their nest a little too closely, and enjoyed the privilege of Wilson's Storm Petrels swooping past us at arm's reach as they circled low over their breeding islands. Black-browed Albatrosses were noted in small numbers as far south as the Gerlache Straits, and we saw Southern Giant and Cape Petrels each day. Antarctic Shags and Snowy Sheathbills were seen at each of the landings where rocky shore persisted in the primarily glacial surroundings.

The two zodiac cruises were extraordinary and remain amongst the most spectacular memories of the trip. We cruised slowly through magnificent glacial bays with towering snow-clad mountains on all sides and



the fractured teeth of monumental glaciers leaning outwards from each valley. The bays were filled with icebergs that had calved from the glacial landscape and the zodiacs had to break their way through dense mats of jagged brash ice, which seemed as though it must rupture the zodiac hulls. We were able to approach close to Leopard, Weddell and Crabeater Seals lazing on small floes and watched with awe, and no small amount of trepidation, as a huge menacing looking Leopard Seal swam back and forth through the glassy water no more than a metre below our thin rubber hull.

Our final landing of the trip was at a Gentoo Penguin colony on a bare rocky shoreline on Cuverville Island, and we sat quietly amongst the penguins, shags and patrolling South Polar Skuas, staring sightlessly into the heavily dark clouded western skies and reflecting on the magnificent experiences of the past fortnight. Due to the approaching storm the skipper was keen to commence the Drake Passage crossing without delay, and so we set off on our cruise northwards and back to our civilisation.

Although bumpy, the much anticipated (and feared by some) Drake Passage crossing was not extreme, with winds not much beyond 30 knots and worst seas of 5 to 6 metres. Seabirding was much as we had experienced earlier in the trip, with Wandering, Northern Royal, Light-mantled and Grey-headed Albatrosses, Blue Petrels, Sooty Shearwaters, Northern Giant Petrels, White-chinned Petrels and other familiar tubenoses renewing their acquaintance as we steamed northwards. We sighted land, the infamous Cape Horn, at midday on 14 January, the second day of the crossing, and approached to within 3 nautical miles before turning east on our final leg prior to entering the Beagle Channel. The conditions were calm at this stage, with a few Macaroni Penguins being seen and large mixed rafts of Sooty Shearwater and White-chinned Petrels flying up as the ship approached. Amazingly, later examination of photo's taken of one of these flocks by Dr Michael Newlon revealed two Short-tailed Shearwaters in a single photograph. Short-tailed Shearwater has rarely been recorded in the Atlantic although may well be overlooked due to its close similarity to Sooty Shearwater.

After a slow cruise to the Beagle Channel and an overnight transit of the channel, we docked in Ushuaia early on 15 January and said our fond farewells after an exceptional tour and many memorable experiences in the iconic Antarctic.

Birds encountered: 76 species

Nomenclature and taxonomy follows the IOC (International Ornithological Committee).

Key to abbreviations:

ENDEMISM: (E): endemic; (NE): near-endemic; (BE): breeding-endemic; (I): introduced

STATUS: (En): Endangered; (NT): near-threatened; (Vu): vulnerable

Ducks, Geese & Swans Anatidae

Flying Steamer Duck

Tachyeres patachonicus

A total of 5 were seen as we sailed out of Stanley Bay, Falklands, conveniently flying to simplify the identification.

Falkland Steamer Duck (E)

Tachyeres brachypterus

This Falklands endemic was commonly seen in the Falklands on 30 and 31 Dec, and allowed close approach.

Upland Goose

Chloephaga picta

Numerous on West Point and Carcuss Islands on 30 Dec, and also present at Stanley the following day. These birds were of the unbarred (male) *C. p. leucoptera* race.



Kelp Goose*Chloephaga hybrida*

Common along the shore at West Point Island on 30 Dec and also seen well at Carcuss Island, and at Gypsy Cove, east of Stanley the following day.

Ruddy-headed Goose (NE)*Chloephaga rubidiceps*

A group of 4 on the beach near the landing at West Point Island on 30 Dec were our only encounter with this Falklands near-endemic.

Crested Duck*Lophonetta specularioides*

Excellent looks at adults with chicks on the beach at Carcuss Island on 30 Dec.

Yellow-billed Pintail*Anas georgica*

The South Georgia endemic race of this species (*A georgica georgica*) was seen in small numbers on all three days at South Georgia (3 to 5 Jan), with particularly good looks in the King Penguin colony at Gold Harbour and during our landing at Stromness.

Penguins Spheniscidae**King Penguin***Aptenodytes patagonicus*

This magnificent penguin was seen on all three days at South Georgia, initially in small groups at Elsehul Bay and on small beaches on the NE coast, but also spectacularly at arm's reach in huge colonies on the Salisbury Plains and at Gold Harbour on 3 and 5 Jan respectively. Foraging birds were present in inshore waters during each of our transits between sites at South Georgia.

Gentoo Penguin (NT)*Pygoscelis papua*

Both subspecies were seen very well in good quantities, both on shore and foraging at sea, the northern *P. p. papua* at the Falklands on 30 & 31 Dec and at South Georgia on 3 to 5 Jan, and the smaller, slighter billed *P. p. ellsworthii* at Laurie Island (singleton) on 7 Jan and in the South Shetlands and the Antarctic Peninsula daily from 9 to 12 Jan. Birds of the southerly subspecies were seen on eggs and newly hatched chicks at both Mikkelsen Harbour and Cuverville Island.

Adelie Penguin (E)*Pygoscelis adeliae*

Our first examples of this delightful Antarctic endemic were seen on Laurie Island on 7 Jan, and we had stunning interactions with many thousands at the colony on Paulet Island and at Brown Bluff on 9 Jan, both on shore and in tight, porpoising schools amongst the icebergs offshore.

Chinstrap Penguin (E)*Pygoscelis antarcticus*

Our first two Chinstraps were seen at Elsehul Bay on 3 Jan by a few passengers, and these were followed by a singleton at Gold Harbour on 5 Jan and then many hundreds at Cooper Bay later that day. 500 or more were seen along the beach at Laurie Island, South Orkneys, on 7 Jan, and a few thousand two days later at Half Moon Island. 12 birds were seen at Mikkelsen Harbour and our final Chinstrap a singleton amongst the Gentoo's at Cuverville Island on 12 Jan.

Southern Rockhopper Penguin (Vu)*Eudyptes chrysocome*

The species, previously known as Western Rockhopper Penguin, has recently been lumped with Eastern Rockhopper as Southern Rockhopper Penguin. This endearing and colourful penguin was seen fantastically well at the mixed Rockhopper and Black browed Albatross colony at West Point Island on 30 Dec, and in the surrounding coastal waters.

Macaroni Penguin (Vu)*Eudyptes chrysolophus*

Another spectacular crested penguin, this species was first seen at large colonies at Elsehul Bay, South Georgia, on 3 Jan, and again at Cooper Bay on 5 Jan. Numerous birds were seen at sea off South Georgia on 3 to 5 Jan, and 2 a few mile south east of Cape Horn on 14 Jan.

Magellanic Penguin (NT)*Spheniscus magellanicus*

Although we missed this penguin in the Beagle Channel, we saw good numbers at sea on 29 Dec and found them easily in inshore waters and on shore in the Falklands on 30 and 31 Dec.



Albatrosses Diomedidae

Southern Royal Albatross (Vu) *Diomedea epomophora*

3 of these majestic ocean wanderers were seen at sea SW of the Falklands on 29 Dec, another 9 east of the Falklands on 1 & 2 Jan, and then not seen again other than a single bird south of Cape Horn on 14 Jan.

Northern Royal Albatross (En) *Diomedea sanfordi*

A slightly smaller cousin of the above species, we saw only singletons near the Falklands on 29 and 31 Dec and again on 1 Jan.

Wandering Albatross (Vu) *Diomedea exulans*

This ultimate and iconic albatross was seen twice on our first sea day, 29 Dec, and then again daily in small numbers between the Falklands and South Georgia on 1 to 4 Jan. After that we did not see Wanderers again until our crossing of the Drake Passage on 13 & 14 Jan, when we had them both days in small numbers.

Light-mantled Albatross (NT) *Phoebastria palpebrata*

The sleek and elegant albatross was seen daily in small numbers from 2 to 8 Jan, with best numbers being 20 off South Georgia on 5 Jan and 10 during our first day at South Georgia two days prior to that. A single bird was noted in the Drake Passage on 14 Jan.

Grey-headed Albatross (Vu) *Thalassarche chrysostoma*

Seen individually at sea on 29 Dec, 2, 5, 13 & 14 Jan, and good numbers seen at a colony on a tussac strewn butress at Elsehul Bay, South Georgia on 3 Jan.

Black-browed Albatross (En) *Thalassarche melanophrys*

Seen daily from the ship except north of the Weddell Sea on 8 & 9 Jan. A trip highlight was the visit to the colony on West Point Island where we watched many thousands on their nests and effortlessly ridge-soaring along the nearby cliffs.

Petrels & Shearwaters Procellariidae

Southern Giant Petrel (Vu) *Macronectes giganteus*

We saw this huge petrel each day of the trip other than the first day east of the Falklands (1 Jan), with the best day being 100 on the leg north of the Beagle Channel on 29 Dec. Commonly seen scavenging on fur seal pups on South Georgia.

Northern Giant Petrel (NT) *Macronectes halli*

Seen daily between the Falklands and our last day on South Georgia (31 Dec to 5 Jan), and then not again until the vicinity of Cape Horn, on 14 Jan. Best count was an estimated 300 on our first South Georgia day.

Southern Fulmar *Fulmarus glacialisoides*

Good numbers of this attractive dove grey petrel accompanied the ship for hours with Cape Petrels over the 3 days steaming SW from South Georgia (6 to 8 Jan). Other than those, 2 on 29 Dec, 1 in the Gerlache Straits on 11 Jan and 3 on the first day of the Drake Passage crossing (13 Jan).

Antarctic Petrel (BE) *Thalassoica antarctica*

A major target bird, only 1 was seen, but this individual spent an hour or more accompanying the ship on 8 Jan, as we crossed north of the Weddell Sea en route to Paulet Island.

Cape Petrel *Daption capense*

One of the most numerous of the small petrels that we encountered, we saw in excess of a 1000 on day 1, as we steamed north from the Beagle Channel, and then saw them daily after crossing the Antarctic Convergence west of South Georgia for the balance of the trip. A particular highlight was seeing this charismatic Antarctic breeding petrel at nesting cliffs on Laurie Island in the South Orkneys.

Snow Petrel *Pagodroma nivea*

We saw approximately 20 of this dainty, ethereal petrel in Cooper Bay and south of South Georgia, and a similar number in the Antarctic Sound. Other than these, only a singleton SW of South Georgia on 6 Jan.



Blue Petrel*Halobaena caerulea*

Seen in numbers off the southern end of South Georgia (5 Jan) and on the first day of the cruise south westwards from here (6 Jan), and on both days of the Drake Passage crossing. Also a singleton on 2 Jan. Best daily count was 40 on 6 Jan.

Antarctic Prion*Pachyptila desolata*

The most numerous tubenose of the trip, it was seen daily from our crossing of the Antarctic Convergence until the north of the Weddell Sea (2 to 8 Jan), and again in the southern part of the Drake Passage crossing. Enormous gatherings of many tens of thousands were seen at Shag Rocks on 2 Jan and south of Drygalski Fjord on 5 Jan.

Slender-billed Prion*Pachyptila belcheri*

This slighter, thin billed prion was seen commonly between the Beagle Channel and the Falklands and again E of the Falklands until near the Antarctic Convergence. A few possibles after that weren't positively identified.

Fairy Prion*Pachytila turtur*

Two seen by a few passengers on 4 Jan, east of Grytviken.

Kerguelen Petrel*Aphrodroma brevirostris*

A single bird was seen south of Cooper Bay on 5 Jan, flying alongside the ship in the company of Blue Petrels for 30 minutes or so in wild and stormy conditions.

Soft-plumaged Petrel*Pterodroma mollis*

This attractive fast flying pterodroma petrel was seen commonly on 1 Jan between the Falklands and the Antarctic Convergence, and a singleton noted off the coast of South Georgia on 3 Jan.

White-chinned Petrel (Vu)*Procellaria aequinoctialis*

This large procellarid petrel was seen relatively commonly on all sea days with the exception of the vicinity of the South Shetlands and Antarctic Peninsula (9 to 12 Jan), where none were noted. A bird photographed on 14 Jan SE of Cape Horn showed the dark bill tip features of an immature Westland Petrel, but was identified as an aberrant White-chinned due to restricted white feathering on the chin.

Sooty Shearwater (NT)*Puffinus griseus*

Large numbers at sea on three days only, on 29 Dec north of Beagle Channel, on 31 Dec off Stanley and on 14 Jan SE of Cape Horn.

Short-tailed Shearwater*Puffinus tenuirostris*

Two birds were identified from a photograph taken by Dr Mike Newlon of a mixed flock of White-chinned Petrels and Sooty Shearwaters flushing from the surface in front of the ship, a few miles SE of Cape Horn. This species has been very rarely recorded in the Atlantic or SE Pacific.

Great Shearwater*Puffinus gravis*

A mid-Atlantic and Falklands breeder, this shearwater was seen in good numbers on the first four days of the trip, with the last individuals being seen between the Falklands and the Antarctic Convergence.

Storm Petrels Hydrobatidae**Wilson's Storm Petrel***Oceanites oceanicus*

The commonest storm petrel of the trip, seen daily except 31 Dec (Stanley) and 6 Jan (SW of South Georgia). Also seen onshore, circling over breeding penguins at Half Moon Island and Paulet Island.

Grey-backed Storm Petrel*Garrodia nereis*

This tiny and cryptically coloured storm petrel was seen in small numbers on both days between Beagle Channel and the Falklands, and again on the first day east of the Falklands.

Black-bellied Storm Petrel*Fregatta tropica*

This stock *Fregatta* storm petrel was seen daily from the ship between the Falklands and Paulet Island (1 to 8 Jan). The best daily count was 50, while steaming around the south side of South Georgia.



Diving Petrels Pelecanoididae

Magellanic Diving Petrel

Pelecanoides magellani

The easiest of the Diving Petrels to identify, due to its conspicuous white crescent behind the ear coverts. We saw two while steaming northwards from the Beagle Channel on 29 Dec.

South Georgia Diving Petrel

Pelecanoides georgicus

A tough bird to separate from Common Diving Petrel. Two were seen on 4 Jan and four the following day as we steamed between sites on the southern half of South Georgia.

Common Diving Petrel

Pelecanoides urinatrix

The most frequently encountered Diving Petrel, seen on 29 & 30 Dec south of the Falklands, 3 & 5 Jan at South Georgia and 6 Jan south of the island. Best count was 6 birds on 3 Jan.

Hérons Ardeidae

Black-crowned Night Heron

Nycticorax nycticorax

Was seen commonly along the shoreline at Carcuss Island and at a sea-cliff breeding colony at Gypsey Cove. These birds were of the endemic, slaty breasted Falklands race, *N. n. falklandicus*.

Cormorants Phalacrocoracidae

Rock Shag

Leucocarbo magellanicus

This crisp, stunningly plumaged cormorant was seen in good numbers both days at the Falklands, including adults with large chicks on the cliffs at Gypsey Cove.

Imperial Shag

Leucocarbo atriceps

Seen commonly in the Beagle Channel, at the Falklands on 30 & 31 Dec, and close to Cape Horn on 14 Jan. Birds were of the King Shag (*L. a. albiventer*) race, and although possibility of the white cheeked Imperial Shag (*L. a. atriceps*) could not be excluded in the vicinity of Ushuaia no individuals were noted.

South Georgia Shag (E)

Leucocarbo georgianus

Huge colony at Shag Rocks, west of South Georgia, and seen daily in good numbers on South Georgia and again at Laurie Island, South Orkneys, on 7 Jan. The only shag on these islands, South Georgia Shag is also smaller and shorter billed than Imperial Shag.

Antarctic Shag (E)

Leucocarbo bransfieldensis

Seen well on all days in the vicinity of the Antarctic Peninsula, from 9 to 12 Jan, with best numbers being in excess of 250 at a colony on a rocky buttress on Paulet Island.

New World Vultures Cathartidae

Turkey Vulture

Cathartes aura

Commonly seen quartering the shoreline on both days at the Falklands.

Kites, Hawks and Eagles Accipitridae

Variable Hawk

Buteo polyosoma

A single bird was seen soaring on the hill slopes south of the farm houses at Carcuss Island, on 30 Dec.

Caracaras & Falcons Falconidae

Striated Caracara (NT, NE)

Phalcoboenus australis

Known by the islanders as Johnny Rook, this Falklands near-endemic was particularly well seen on both West Point and Carcuss Islands on 30 Dec. Two individuals foraging in the vicinity of the Black-browed Albatross / Southern Rockhopper Penguin colony on West Point were seen taking a penguin chick that was momentarily left vulnerable.



Southern Crested Caracara*Milvago chimango*

A single immature bird was noted at Stanley by a few passengers on 31 Dec.

Peregrine*Falco peregrinus*

A single adult was seen sat on low cliffs as we departed the inner bay at Stanley on 31 Dec.

Sheathbills Chionidae**Snowy Sheathbill (E)***Chionis albus*

This inquisitive and endearing scavenger was seen in good numbers at each of our landings at South Georgia and the Antarctic Peninsula with the exception of the small island at Mikkelsen Harbour. A flock of 8 joined the ship for half an hour in open sea some 200 miles SW of South Georgia and then flew on over the horizon in a south westerly direction.

Oystercatchers Haematopididae**Magellanic Oystercatcher***Haematopus leucopodus*

This beautiful glossy black and white oystercatcher was seen well on Carcuss Island on 30 Dec.

Blackish Oystercatcher*Haematopus ater*

Small numbers of this sooty black oystercatcher were seen well at Carcuss Island on 30 Dec and at Stanley (Gypsey Cove) on 31 Dec.

Plovers Charadriidae**Rufous-chested Plover***Charadrius modestus*

A tough bird to find, we found 4 rather worn plumaged examples of this sought after shorebird in a large field on the hills above Stanley, on 31 Dec.

Sandpipers & Snipes Scolopacidae**South American Snipe (Magellan)***Gallinago paraguaiiae*

A single very confiding individual of the southern *G. p. magellanica* race was seen by a lucky few in long grass on the walk to the Black-browed Albatross colony on West Point Island, on 31 Dec.

Gulls & Terns Laridae**Dolphin Gull***Leucophaeus scoresbii*

Adults of this gorgeous gull were seen well in the Beagle Channel and again at the Falklands.

Kelp Gull*Larus dominicanus*

Seen commonly at all landing sites on the trip. Birds on the mainland, the Falklands and South Georgia were of the nominate *L. d. dominicanus* race, whereas birds seen on the South Orkneys, South Shetlands and Antarctic Peninsula were of the endemic *L. d. austrinus* race.

South American Tern*Sterna hirundinacea*

Seen in good numbers in the Beagle Channel on 29 Dec and at the Falklands on 30 and 31 Dec.

Antarctic Tern*Sterna vittata*

Seen daily on South Georgia, Laurie Island (South Orkneys) and on the South Shetlands and Antarctic Peninsula. Subspecies seen were *S. v. georgiae* (South Georgia, South Orkneys) and *S. v. gaini* (South Shetlands and Antarctic Peninsula).

Skuas Stercorariidae**Chilean Skua***Stercorarius chilensis*

Only noted in small numbers in the vicinity of the South American mainland, on 28 & 29 Dec and again on 14 Jan.



South Polar Skua *Stercorarius maccormicki*

Seen in good numbers in the vicinity of the Antarctic Peninsula and South Shetlands from 8 to 12 Jan. Most birds were of the intermediate or intermediate/dark morphs, but a few dark morph birds were present and presented challenges in separation from Brown Skua.

Subantarctic (Brown) Skua *Stercorarius antarcticus*

Seen almost daily at sea and on shore. Birds seen on and on the close vicinity of the Falklands were Falklands Skua (*S. a. antarcticus*), whereas the balance seen in the vicinity of South Georgia, South Orkneys, South Shetlands and Antarctic Peninsula were Subantarctic Skua (*S. a. lonnbergi*).

Tyrant Flycatchers Tyrannidae**Dark-faced Ground Tyrant** *Muscisaxicola maclovianus*

The endemic Falklands race (*M. m. macloviana*) was easily seen on both days of our visit to the Falklands.

Ovenbirds Furnariidae**Blackish Cinclodes (NE)** *Cinclodes antarcticus*

This Falklands near endemic was most easily seen on Carcuss Island, where upwards on twenty were noted, but a pair was also seen on the shore at the West Point landing and a single bird at Stanley on 31 Dec.

Swallows & Martins Hirundinidae**Chilean Swallow** *Tachycineta meyeni*

Two birds were seen in the Beagle Channel shortly after our departure from Ushuaia on 28 Dec.

Wrens Troglodytidae**Sedge (Grass) Wren** *Cistothorus platensis*

Only seen on West Point Island, with one seen by a few passengers in the tall grass on the walk to the Black-browed Albatross / Southern Rockhopper Penguin colony and two singing birds were seen in thick shrub vegetation behind the main farm houses. This race, *C. p. falklandicus*, is confined to the Falklands.

Cobb's Wren (E) *Troglodytes cobbi*

Seen very well on Carcuss Island on 30 Dec, where three birds were found quite easily foraging quite confidently on the rocky shoreline close to tussac and shrub vegetation.

Thrushes Turdidae**Austral Thrush** *Turdus falcklandii*

Commonly seen on both days in the Falklands.

Old World Sparrows Passeridae**House Sparrow (I)** *Passer domesticus*

Good numbers noted in the town of Stanley on 31 Dec.

Wagtails & Pipits Motacillidae**Correndera Pipit** *Anthus correndera*

Birds of the endemic Falklands race, *A. c. grayi*, were easily and well seen in the fields south of Stanley on 31 Dec, and two were also seen by some at West Point on 30 Dec.

South Georgia Pipit (E) *Anthus antarcticus*

This, the most southerly breeding passerine on earth, is highly sought after on South Georgia but due to rat infestations on the main island is very difficult to see. We saw 4 birds on 5 January feeding amongst kelp and shoreline vegetation in Cooper Bay.



Finches Fringillidae**Black-chinned Siskin***Carduelis barbata*

Commonly seen in small flocks on West Point and Carcuss Islands on 30 Dec and at Stanley on 31 Dec.

New World Blackbirds Icteridae**Long-tailed Meadowlark***Sturnella loyca*

Common and easily seen at all three landings in the Falklands on 30 & 31 Dec. This race, *S. l. falklandica*, is confined to the Falklands.

Tanagers & Allies Thraupidae**White-bridled (Canary-winged/Black-throated) Finch *Melanodera melanodera***

A quite gorgeous small finch, now taxonomically placed with the tanagers, which was seen very well on Carcuss Island on 30 Dec and a few the following day on the hill above Stanley. This nominate race is confined to the Falklands.

MAMMALS ENCOUNTERED: 17 species**Eared Seals & Sea Lions Otariidae****South American Sea Lion***Otaria flavescens*

A few seen during our transit down the Beagle Channel and on 30 and 31 Dec at the Falklands.

South American Fur Seal*Arctocephalus australis*

Two seen at sea on 29 Dec, and a small group in the harbour at Stanley on 31 Dec.

Antarctic Fur Seal*Arctocephalus gazella*

A few seen at sea on 2 Jan, very common at sea and on shore on South Georgia, and seen in small numbers on 6 & 7 Jan at sea and at Laurie Island.

Seals Phocidae**Southern Elephant Seal***Mirounga leonina*

Commonly seen on the shore on South Georgia at Elsehul Bay, Salisbury Plains and Stromness, and great looks at jousting young males at Gold Harbour.

Crabeater Seal*Lobodon carcinophagus*

First seen on ice floes during our approach to Paulet Island on 9 Jan, but also seen on 10 Jan and at close range during zodiac cruise in Curtis Bay on 11 Jan.

Leopard Seal*Hydrurga leptonyx*

Seen daily from 9 to 12 Jan, on ice flows or swimming menacingly close to shore. One seen at extremely close range swimming under the zodiac in Curtis Bay.

Weddell Seal*Leptonychotes weddellii*

Seen well 9-11 Jan, with best views at Half Moon Island and the small island in Mikkelsen Harbour.

Ocean Dolphins Delphinidae**Orca (Killer Whale)***Orcinus orca*

Only one pod seen, in the early hours of the morning in the approaches to Paulet Island on 9 Jan. Unfortunately missed by most.

Peale's Dolphin*Lagenorhynchus australis*

Small schools seen wonderfully bow-riding ahead on our ship on 30 Dec, and from the shore at Gypsey Cove on 31 Dec. Seen again on 14 Jan SE of Cape Horn



Commerson's Dolphin

Cephalorhynchus commersonii

Two were seen by a lucky few during the transit from the shore to the ship at Stanley on 31 Dec.

Beaked Whales Ziphiidae

Southern Bottlenose Whale

Hyperoodon planifrons

Two were seen quite well swimming away from the bow east of the Falklands on 1 Jan.

Rorquals Balaenopteridae

Antarctic Minke Whale

Balaenoptera bonaerensis

A pod of four showed very well in calm waters between Paulet Island and Brown Bluff on 9 Jan.

Sperm Whale

Berardius arnuxii

A single Sperm Whale was seen at sea on 6 Jan, as we steamed SW from South Georgia.

Humpback Whale

Megaptera novaeangliae

Seven were seen on 2 Jan, some of these breaching repeatedly for 20 minutes or more, and the species was also seen daily in the vicinity of the Antarctic Peninsula from 8 to 12 Jan.

Sei Whale

Balaenoptera borealis

Two were seen close to the ship on 6 Jan.

Fin Whale

Balaenoptera physalus

Seen in good numbers as we steamed SW towards the South Shetlands on 6 Jan. No fewer than 15 individuals noted.

Deer Cervidae

Reindeer

Rangifer tarandus

Seen on the steep mountain slopes and in the glacial plain at Stromness on 4 Jan. Approximately 60 individuals noted.

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