



ROCKJUMPER

Worldwide Birding Adventures

Argentina - Northwest: Endemics I 2023

January 16th - 29th, 2023 (14 days)



Red-faced Guan by Stephan Lorenz

Trip report compiled by Tour Leader: Stephan Lorenz

Tour Summary

Our birding adventure covered the best sites and most stunning landscapes northwest Argentina has to offer. We traveled from Tucuman west across the Andes to the wine-growing regions of Cafayate, continuing northeast through the dramatic Quebrada de las Conchas. Swinging further east, we visited the lowlands around Joaquin V. Gonzalez and then set our sights northward to Yavi and Abra Lizoite on the Bolivian border. In between, we birded Yungas cloud forest, Monte desert scrub, high Andean grasslands and shrubland, arid Chaco forests, lakes and canyons, and all the way to Puna grasslands and lagoons, recording a respectable 339 species along the way. The top birds of the tour as voted by participants included the wonderful and unique Diademed Sandpiper-Plover seen at length in the scope at around 15,000 feet east of La Quiaca. Second place went to the range-restricted Dot-fronted Woodpecker that after some searching offered amazing views in the remnant Yungas forest around the Yala Lagoon. The third place was a tie between Cream-backed Woodpecker, which we saw on several occasions and Gray-breasted Seedsnipe that showed well on the way to Abra Lizoite. The tour offered many other memorable moments and sightings, including all three flamingo species seen close near Abra Pampa, 20 species of waterfowl, including a surprise Masked Duck, the scarce Red-faced Guan, Rufous-throated Dipper, Lesser Horned Owl during the day, and good views of both seriemas. An afternoon in the Chaco offered us both Stripe-backed Antbird and Olive-crowned Crescentchest plus Spot-backed Puffbirds. We also found 4 species of tapaculos and an incredible 33 Furnariids (let's not forget 52 species of flycatchers!). Overall, we also had excellent weather with only brief periods of rain and often fresher days in the usually hot and dry Chaco.



Yellow-striped Brushfinch by Stephan Lorenz

Tour in Detail

The group from the Cordoba extension had an early morning flight to Tucuman, which was right on time and we collected the remaining members of the group in the city. We traveled southwest into the mountains towards Tafi del Valle and made some initial stops in the Yungas forest as we climbed through the Quebrada de Rio Sosa. The birding was fun and rewarding and we added several specialties to the list. We arrived in the beautiful town of Tafi del Valle set amidst a spectacular Andean valley and enjoyed lunch and a break before setting out to a nearby reservoir. The birdlife at the lake and the surrounding grasslands and marshes kept us busy for the rest of the day. One highlight was a Lesser Horned Owl, which after much searching and effort was eventually spotted on its day roost in the early evening. We then enjoyed a welcome dinner and made plans for the following day.



Rufous-throated Dipper by Stephan Lorenz

We returned early in the morning to the Quebrada Los Sosa and scoured the river for the scarce Rufous-throated Dipper. After some serious searching, we eventually found one, then a pair, and then another pair for fantastic views of this special bird. We also added several other species in the surrounding Yungas forest before driving to higher elevations for another stop at the reservoir. After lunch and a short break, we traveled along the road towards El Infiernillo and our time here offered a

great introduction to some of the Andean species, including good views of the sought-after Tucuman Mountain Finch.



Tucuman Mountain Finch by Stephan Lorenz

Today, we enjoyed a long, but spectacular day as we crossed from Tafi del Valla to Amaiche del Valle and then continued north to Cafayate. We birded a large variety of habitats, ranging from scrubby gullies, high-elevation grasslands, and ponds, all the way to the Monte Desert on the western side of the mountains. Our efforts were rewarded with a large number of specialty species including the endemic Bare-eyed Ground Dove, endemic White-browed Tapaculo, many ovenbird species, and various sierra-finches, some of us also reached the site for the scarce Scribble-tailed Canastero. We enjoyed lunch in the field near a small canyon that was full of birds and then continued west into the Monte Desert. A heavy storm was brewing in the distant mountains but held off long enough for us to locate the endemic Sandy Gallito and White-throated Cachalote, while an Elegant Crested Tinamou seen briefly by the guide unfortunately slipped away. Upon reaching Cafayate, we settled into our comfortable rooms at a winery and were able to celebrate another successful day with local libations.

Today was a travel day through one of the scenically most spectacular sections of the tour, the red sandstone gorge of the Quebrada de las Conchas. While we made several stops for scenery, we also added some scarce species to the list, foremost the endemic Steinbach's Canastero which showed well, and the unique Burrowing Parakeet. After we had our fill of the beautiful canyon, we continued east

through the mountains to a roadside restaurant. Birdlife around the restaurant was in full swing and we added several species in this new habitat. After we reached the hotel set right on the edge of a large lake, some decided to take a break while others explored the scrubby forest nearby, adding a handful of species.



Streak-fronted Thornbird by Stephan Lorenz

Today we set out before sunrise to reach the Cuesta del Obispo area early. It was a long and fantastic day with many high-altitude specialties. We drove through Yungas forest, adding some birds from the van, and then reached the Andean shrub and grasslands. We started birding along the edge of a productive gully, but our main quarry, the stunning Rufous-bellied Mountain Tanager proved elusive. We finally located a single bird that showed very well only to find four more in a valley higher up. The birding was consistently productive and we ended the day with a long walk in the Valle del Encantado which held many flycatchers, ovenbirds, and sierra-finches. Best of all, we also enjoyed great views of Andean and Ornate Tinamous. We drove back to the hotel late in the day and arrived tired but satisfied.

We traveled east today along the Rio Juramento through a wonderful gorge that contained good stands of Chaco forest. This new habitat offered several new species, including endemics and near-endemics. While the day warmed up quickly we still had good looks at Crested Gallito, Chaco Earthcreeper, Black-crested Finch, and Many-colored Chaco Finch. Small reservoirs and the river along the way added a good selection of water birds. As the afternoon heated up, we found a small oasis with large

shade trees and in this hollow of habitat had close views of Great Rufous Woodcreeper, the stately Cream-backed Woodpecker, and noisy Plush-crested Jays. We then drove the rest of the way to Joaquín V. González where we settled in for the night.



Steinbach's Canastero by Stephan Lorenz

The full day around Joaquín V. González proved to be the highest in terms of species diversity for the entire tour with around 120 species recorded. We started the morning at Dique El Tunal where the lake edge held a variety of waterfowl, shorebirds, waders, and terns. We moved on to bird along the road below the dam and added an excellent variety of Chaco species. We were lucky that it remained cloudy for most of the morning, keeping temperatures mild, and as we checked the final pond we even stumbled upon a male Mased Duck, a widespread Neotropical species that is not often encountered. We returned to town for a sit-down lunch and then drove back west to explore a secondary road winding through some excellent Chaco habitat. Here we finally saw a Stripe-backed Antbird and after much searching had excellent views of an Olive-crowned Crescentchest, two key targets in this area. We also caught up with several other Chaco species, including Spot-backed Puffbirds of the Chaco subspecies. Elated, we returned to town to rest and then had dinner.



Rufous-bellied Mountain Tanager by Stephan Lorenz

Today was mainly a travel day as we made our way north towards the wonderful Yungas forests of Calilegua National Park. Despite some heavy rains and longer distances, we still picked up some excellent birds, most notably Greater Rhea and Black-legged Seriema. The rain forced us to move on eventually, but after checking into our hotel in Libertador General San Martín the weather had improved and we set out towards the lower elevation at the entrance of the national park. Here we added several excellent species in this rather tropical habitat including Ochre-cheeked Spinetail and in the same color theme, Ochre-faced Tody-Flycatcher. We settled back into our accommodations in preparation for an early start the following day.

We spent a full day in the Calilegua National Park and despite some slower periods still managed to see several excellent species. We also birded a bit beyond the park higher up where we had a productive stretch of roadside birding. One definite highlight was a Tataupa Tinamou that trundled across the road for all to see. Impressive Toco Toucans were fun, a range-restricted Yungas Manakin was welcome, a responsive Buff-banded Tyrannulet after much searching, and various brushfinches and warblers made it all on the list. We drove back through the park to reach our hotel.

We began the morning a bit later since we had a longer transfer to Yala Lagoon. We reached the Yungas forest at the base of the hill by midmorning and set out immediately to look for some of the targets here. Fortunately, despite the late hour, we located a cooperative Red-faced Guan and then carried on further up the road to find the scarce Dot-fronted Woodpecker. We also saw several Slaty Elaenias and singing Andean Slaty Thrushes. The lagoon itself held a few waterbirds which we studied during our picnic lunch. We then drove north towards Tilcara where we settled in for the night.



Great Rufous Woodcreeper by Stephan Lorenz

We set out after an early breakfast and reached the small village of Abra Pampa a few hours later. Here we explored numerous ponds and small lagoons set amidst the spectacular Andean valley and Puna grasslands. This high-elevation habitat offered plenty of new birds and we studied three species of flamingos that showed closely, many species of waterfowl, grebes, and coots, plus a good variety of shorebirds. The surrounding grasslands held some new species of ovenbirds and pipits. A walk through

the scrub finally produced a vocal Cordilleran Canastero, which strangely had been missing so far. We continued north along Route 9 and eventually reached La Quiaca on the border with Bolivia. We settled in and rested a bit before having dinner at a nearby hotel.



Andean Goose by Stephan Lorenz

Today we would visit the highest elevation during the entire tour and fortunately, we had been slowly acclimatizing over the past two weeks. We first drove east parallel to the Bolivian border to reach the hamlet of Yavi where the birding proved to be quite productive in town. We found the range-restricted Citron-headed Yellow-Finch, had perched views of Wedge-tailed Hillstar, saw plenty of Bare-faced Ground Doves, and a good variety of other species. We took a break in a local hosteria for coffee and tea and then headed further east climbing towards Abra Lizoite, a pass at 15,000 feet! Along the way, we kept an eye out for high-elevation species and added Gray-breasted Seedsnipe, Ornate Tinamou, Mountain Caracara, and lots of sierra-finches. We reached a small valley east of the pass that held a bog favored by the main target of the day, the unique Diademed Sandpiper-Plover. Upon arrival, we bumped into our first Red-backed Sierra-Finches and a beautiful male Andean Hillstar. It took a bit of trekking up the small valley, but we did find a single Diademed Sandpiper-Plover that showed very well in the scope, this proved to be the bird of the trip for the majority of participants.



Giant Coot by Stephan Lorenz

For the final full day, we had a long travel day back towards the Salta area from La Quiaca. We made several stops along the way, especially north of Salta where excellent Yungas forest remains. Some of the birding highlights included Red-legged Seriema and the near-endemic Yungas Sparrow and we saw one or two species we had only heard previously. We arrived at our wonderful hotel set amidst spectacular greenery in the early evening and then enjoyed a celebratory dinner at a nearby restaurant.

We birded around the hotel and neighborhood for the final morning and then transferred to the airport in Salta for our flights home with a bag full of specialty species and lots of memories.

Trip Lists:

Bird List (339 species with 5 heard only):

<https://ebird.org/tripreport/103952>

Mammal Observations:

Vicuna (*Vicugna vicugna*)

Guanaco (*Lama guanicoe*)

Argentine Gray Fox (*Lycalopex griseus*)

Southern Mountain Viscacha (*Lagidium viscacia*)

Montane Guinea Pig (*Cavia tschudii*)



Andean Flamingo by Stephan Lorenz