

THE ATLANTIC ODYSSEY

16 MARCH – 26 APRIL 2009

TOUR REPORT

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From Adelie Penguins in the Antarctic Peninsula to Bar-tailed Desert Larks in the Cape Verde Islands, from Lesser Snow Petrels around icebergs to White Terns around palm trees, and from Leopard Seals and Killer Whales in the Antarctic Sound to Spinner Dolphins and flying fishes on the equator, our Atlantic Odyssey was truly a voyage of extremes. Our journey of 7,070 nautical miles from Ushuaia in Tierra del Fuego to Santiago in the Cape Verde Islands, via the Antarctic Peninsula, South Georgia, Gough Island, Tristan da Cunha, St Helena and Ascension, gave us an unparalleled opportunity to observe the multitude of sea-birds and cetaceans in the Southern Ocean and Atlantic, and took us to some of the remotest islands on the planet. The *Professor Molchanov*, with her sturdy build and superb Russian crew, was the ideal ship for our journey, and the competent Oceanwide Expeditions team made every effort to ensure that we saw as many of the splendours and as much of the wildlife as possible in our 36 days on board. A deep depression in the Scotia Sea caused us to abandon our plans to visit the South Orkneys, and we did not get the calm conditions required for landings on Inaccessible and Nightingale in the Tristan group, but on the whole the weather was kind to us and there were seldom more than a couple of empty seats at mealtimes. For the birders and cetacean enthusiasts, 'sea-watching' from the deck of the *Professor Molchanov* provided endless enjoyment as we passed through an ever-changing panoply of sea-birds and encountered an amazing diversity of whales and dolphins. The long hours spent on the upper deck and bridge were rewarded with sightings of over 65 species of sea-birds, including several that were unexpected, and no less than 24 species of cetaceans, not to mention countless flying fishes, flying squids and other marine creatures. For many of us, however, it was the excursions ashore that provided the highlights of the trip. These included landings on the tip of the Antarctic Peninsula at Brown Bluff and on nearby Paulet Island, six great landings in South Georgia, a wonderful day on Tristan da Cunha, three full days in St Helena, a morning on Ascension, and a day on Fogo in the Cape Verdes. Our total bird list of 171 species was surprisingly high, given that we spent most of our time at sea, and included such cracking birds as Andean Condor and Magellanic Woodpecker in Tierra del Fuego, White-headed Petrel, Mottled Petrel and Westland Petrel in the Drake Passage, Adelie Penguin, Chinstrap Penguin and Lesser Snow Petrel in the Antarctic Peninsula, King Penguin, Macaroni Penguin, Wandering Albatross (at the nest) and South Georgia Pipit in South Georgia, Northern Rockhopper Penguin,

Gough Moorhen and Gough Bunting on Gough Island, Tristan Thrush and Tristan Bunting in the Tristan group, St Helena Plover on St Helena, Ascension Frigatebird on Ascension, and Cape Verde Swift, Cape Verde Cane Warbler and Iago Sparrow in the Cape Verdes. Cetacean highlights included a school of playful Hourglass Dolphins in the Drake Passage, lots of Humpback Whales, about 20 Killer Whales and two Southern Right Whales in the Antarctic Sound, two Blue Whales, a school of Southern Right Whale Dolphins and a pod of Long-finned Pilot Whales in the Scotia Sea, a group of seven Sperm Whales en route to St Helena, a huge school of Pantropical Spotted Dolphins during our 'dolphin cruise' off St Helena, and several schools of acrobatic Spinner Dolphins and a pod of very obliging Short-finned Pilot Whales between Ascension and the Cape Verdes.

Our great adventure began very tamely with a gentle stroll around the wetland reserve of Costanera Sur in Buenos Aires to help while away some of the nine hours between our flight from London and the onward flight to Ushuaia on the shores of the Beagle Channel in Tierra del Fuego. Sadly, the reserve had been dry for some time and the lagoons were completely overgrown with rank vegetation. The only waterbirds that we saw were a couple of Great Egrets and a flock of White-faced Ibises flying over, but there were plenty of other birds about including a family of Harris's Hawks, a pair of Golden-breasted Woodpeckers, a Narrow-billed Woodcreeper, several Black-and Rufous Warbling Finches and a surprise Golden-billed Saltator. A mysterious mammal that ran across the track was confidently identified as a 'Comadreja colorada' from a nearby visitor information board, but as no-one had a mammal guide with them, we could not put an English or scientific name to it. (We later discovered that it was a Lutrine Opossum). We finally arrived in Ushuaia in the late evening, tired and weary after almost 36 hours on the road, but not too tired for some of us to join in the St Patrick's Day celebrations at the Dublin Pub, only a few blocks away from our hotel.

Next morning, the birding began in earnest with a visit to Tierra del Fuego National Park, only a few kilometres west of town. Our local guide Esteban was a keen and knowledgeable birder, and we had a great morning in the park, finding almost everything we could have expected including no less than eight Andean Condors, two Chilean Hawks, four Black-chested Buzzard-Eagles, six Magellanic Woodpeckers, eight Green-backed Firecrowns, three White-throated Treerunners and about 10 Patagonian Tyrants. Several very tame Argentine Red Foxes and an American Beaver working on its dam added mammalian interest. After an excellent picnic lunch in the park, we visited the shore near the Tolkeyen Hotel and here, amongst the many waterbirds, saw a pair of Ashy-headed Geese, several Black Oystercatchers and Magellanic Oystercatchers, a little flock of attractive Rufous-chested Dotterels and our first Dolphin Gulls. Back in Ushuaia, we found a large concentration of ducks including 150 Red Shovelers along with a flock of 50 Brown-hooded Gulls at a small pond near the harbour. We ended the day with a visit to the municipal rubbish tip where the star birds were the White-throated Caracaras – about 25 of them squabbling amongst the rubbish.

We began the next day with a 'sea-watch' from the coast road a few kilometres east of town in the hopes of finding a Magellanic Penguin or Magellanic Diving-Petrel. Both species eluded us, but we saw our first Black-browed Albatrosses and Southern Fulmars, along with large numbers of Imperial Shags and a late Chilean Swallow. Later, the more energetic amongst us took the ski lift up behind town to the base of the Martial Glacier to search for the near-mythical White-bellied Seedsnipe. As usual, there were no seedsnipe to be seen (we did not even find any droppings), but we did find a nice little party of Yellow-bridled Finches. We returned to Ushuaia for a pleasant lunch at a small restaurant and after a last-minute shop in town, we finally boarded the *Professor Molchanov* at 16:10 and settled into the cabins that were to be our home for the next five weeks. The ship was scheduled to sail at 18:00, but there was some minor problem with the engines and we did not get away until 20:20, by which time it was already dark.

By the time we awoke the next morning, we were heading south across the Drake Passage with a strong following wind and big swell from the northwest. There were lots of sea-birds about, and for

those of us who had already found our sea-legs the sea-watching was excellent. In this, our first full day at sea, we recorded an excellent total of 21 species of sea-birds, including four Southern Rockhopper Penguins, 20 Southern Royal Albatrosses, two Northern Royal Albatrosses, 15 Wandering Albatrosses, 30 Soft-plumaged Petrels, a Mottled Petrel, three White-headed Petrels, 20 Slender-billed Prions, at least two Westland Petrels, and our first of many Grey-headed Albatrosses, Northern and Southern Giant-Petrels, Cape Petrels, Antarctic Prions, White-chinned Petrels, Black-bellied Storm-Petrels, Wilson's Storm-Petrels and Common Diving-Petrels. We crossed the Antarctic Convergence during the night, and next morning it was distinctly colder. The wind had eased slightly but there was still a big swell. The diversity of sea-birds was still very high, but the composition had changed; we had left the Southern Royal Albatrosses behind and there were now very few Soft-plumaged Petrels and Slender-billed Prions, but we were finding many more Grey-headed Albatrosses, Southern Fulmars, Cape Petrels, Antarctic Prions and Black-bellied Storm-Petrels, and saw our first Chinstrap Penguins, Light-mantled Albatrosses, Kerguelen Petrels, Blue Petrels and Subantarctic Skuas. We also saw our first Antarctic Fur Seals and our first cetaceans: two Antarctic Minke Whales, about 20 huge Fin Whales and a school of 13 attractive Hourglass Dolphins which rode in our bow wave for a while. By dusk, we were approaching the channel between Nelson and Robert in the South Shetland Islands at the edge of the Antarctic continent.

When we emerged on deck the next morning, we found ourselves approaching Brown Bluff at the tip of the Antarctic Peninsula. It was very cold (-3°C), gloomy and snowing quite heavily, but fortunately there was very little wind. Almost immediately we spotted our first Lesser Snow Petrels gleaming white against the icebergs, and also our first Antarctic Terns. After a quick breakfast, we were soon booted and spurred and ready to jump into the zodiacs for our first landing – a landing on the continent. Everything went very smoothly, and we had a great two hours on shore, although it was a very bleak and forbidding place in the snow. There were lots of Gentoo Penguins on the beach, and we soon discovered three moulting Adelie Penguins amongst them. Several Pale-faced Sheathbills appeared on the rocks, and there were a few Southern Giant-Petrels, Subantarctic Skuas and Kelp Gulls loafing about amongst the numerous Antarctic Fur Seals. We also found our first of several Weddell Seals here. Well pleased with our first excursion ashore, we left in the late morning and cruised east round the south side of Dundee Island to Paulet Island at the northern end of Erebus and Terror Gulf. Three Antarctic Minke Whales gave excellent views as they surfaced close by the ship, a small group of Humpback Whales appeared briefly, and we spotted our first of several Leopard Seals. We made our second landing at Paulet that afternoon, and had a pleasant walk out to the end of a low peninsula in fresh snow. There were only a few Gentoo Penguins and a couple of Adelie Penguins on the beach, but lots of Southern Giant-Petrels and Subantarctic Skuas squabbling over a Leopard Seal carcass, several hundred Antarctic Shags at their colony on a steep hillside, and about 30 Pale-faced Sheathbills, as well as another Weddell Seal amongst the hundreds of Antarctic Fur Seals. We left Paulet in the late afternoon and cruised slowly out into Erebus and Terror Gulf where, on one of the many beautiful icebergs, we found a lone Chinstrap Penguin.

It snowed heavily in the night, and next morning we found the ship covered in ice and snow. It was now almost dead calm and the sea was like a mill pond as we cruised slowly WSW across Erebus and Terror Gulf towards Vega Island. Our main hope today was to find Emperor Penguins, which occasionally occur in this area at this time of year. Viewing conditions were ideal, but there was a lot of ice about and the Captain was reluctant to go any faster than about three knots so we made little progress. The Emperors eluded us, but there was plenty of wildlife about to keep us occupied, including more Adelie Penguins, hundreds of Lesser Snow Petrels, at least three South Polar Skuas amongst the many Subantarctic Skuas, small groups of both Dwarf and Antarctic Minke Whales, and a few Leopard, Weddell and Crabeater Seals on the ice floes. As we were cruising back towards the Antarctic Sound in the afternoon, two Southern Right Whales passed close by in front of the ship, and then, as we entered the Sound, we came across a large group of Humpback Whales and a pod of about 20 Killer Whales. The Killer Whales came over to inspect us and then moved off, but the

Humpbacks put on an excellent show for over an hour, apparently not at all disturbed by our presence. Indeed, two of them followed us when we finally headed off north through the Sound towards the Bransfield Strait. The weather forecast was now speaking of a very deep depression (940 mb) over the Drake Passage and 50 knot winds, so instead of setting sail immediately for the South Orkneys, the Captain decided to take shelter in the Bransfield Strait and wait for the storm to abate.

By sunrise the next morning, we were still cruising about in the Bransfield Strait. However, the weather forecast had improved considerably, and at 07:45 we set off on the three-day journey to South Georgia. By now we were running over 12 hours late, so plans to visit the South Orkneys had to be abandoned. As we headed out into the Scotia Sea, we felt the full force of the 35 knot wind from the northwest and encountered rough seas, but the wind and the swell gradually abated over the next two days, and by the evening of our third day at sea we were within 100 nautical miles of South Georgia. For those of us who could withstand the cold, the sea-watching from the decks was excellent, with good numbers of albatrosses of five species, lots of Southern Giant-Petrels, Southern Fulmars, Cape Petrels, Blue Petrels, Antarctic Prions, White-chinned Petrels, and Black-bellied and Wilson's Storm Petrels, and another dozen Kerguelen Petrels. Highlights included our first Light-mantled Albatrosses and eight Fin Whales on the first day, a Southern Royal Albatross and two Hourglass Dolphins on the second day, and our first King Penguins, 30 Fairy Prions, at least six South Georgia Diving-Petrels, another seven Fin Whales and two superb Blue Whales on our third day. The biggest surprise, however, was a Rufous-collared Sparrow which appeared briefly around the ship on the third day, when we were still 140 nautical miles from South Georgia.

Our first sight of South Georgia came as we rounded Cape Disappointment at the southeast corner of the island in the early morning and headed in past Cooper Island to Cooper Bay. Even before we had dropped anchor, nine South Georgia Pipits appeared around the ship, much to our surprise and delight. After breakfast, we made our first landing in Cooper Bay on a small shingle beach near a large Macaroni Penguin colony. It was a bit of a scramble up through the tussock grass and Antarctic Fur Seals to the penguin colony, but we were well rewarded with close encounters with these colourful penguins and superb views out over the bay. Other birds here included our first South Georgia Pintails and South Georgia Shags, some extremely tame Subantarctic Skuas and several more pipits, while on the beach we came across a huge Leopard Seal taking a rest. Returning to the zodiacs, we moved round to the head of the bay and landed on another beach where there were lots of King Penguins, Gentoo Penguins, Southern and Northern Giant-Petrels and Pale-faced Sheathbills, as well as about 100 huge Southern Elephant Seals. Up on the hillside behind the beach, a Light-mantled Albatross was tending to its large chick at the nest. We left Cooper Bay shortly after mid-day, and as we cruised back round Cooper Island towards Drygalski Fjord, we had some wonderful views of dozens of diving-petrels jumping up off the water just in front of the boat, and had little difficulty in separating the South Georgians from the Common. Here also we encountered several groups of Chinstrap Penguins porpoising through the water. We then spent much of the afternoon cruising up and down the spectacular Drygalski Fjord, reaching the face of the Risting Glacier at the head of the fjord and taking a zodiac cruise in Larsen Harbour. In this very sheltered sub-fjord, we came across a Weddell Seal loafing in the kelp, and had great views of a little group of South Georgia Pintails. That evening, we left the fjord and, after rounding Cooper Island once again, set off along the north coast of South Georgia for the Bay of Isles near the other end of the island.

Next morning, we awoke to find ourselves turning in to the Bay of Isles. It was a beautiful day, with clear blue skies, almost no wind and a calm sea – ideal conditions for a landing at Salisbury Plain, the site of one of the largest breeding colonies of King Penguins in South Georgia. All went well, and we had a wonderful four hours on shore, with plenty of time to enjoy the penguins and go for long walks along the beach or across the plain. The penguins were definitely the star attraction, but we also found a few Gentoo Penguins on the beach, about 40 South Georgia Pintails on a small pool in the

tussock grass, 60 Pale-faced Sheathbills, now gathering in flocks at the end of the breeding season, and a few Southern Elephant Seals amongst the hundreds of Antarctic Fur Seals. During lunch back on board, we moved the short distance to Prion Island, and here we spent the afternoon watching Wandering Albatrosses and South Georgia Pipits at extremely close range from the boardwalk. The albatrosses, about 40 in all, were very obliging, circling low over our heads, walking up to us through the tussock grass and even, on one occasion, stepping up onto the boardwalk. We ended a cracking day with a bit of sea-watching from the ship as we headed back east towards Fortuna Bay. As our Expedition Leader Rinie observed, it does not get much better than this in South Georgia.

We had hoped to make a landing in Fortuna Bay the next morning, but there was a strong catabatic wind blowing off the mountains and a big swell on the exposed beach. Plan B was quickly put into action, and we left immediately for Stromness Bay, where conditions were much calmer. We arrived off Stromness in mid-morning and had no difficulty in getting ashore near the old whaling station. Here we had a couple of hours in bright sunshine to wander about amongst the Reindeer and Antarctic Fur Seals, photograph the Gentoo Penguins and Antarctic Terns, and ponder over the ruins of the whaling station from a safe distance. It was only two hours from Stromness round to Grytviken in Cumberland East Bay, and we arrived in mid-afternoon. The zodiacs took us straight to Ernest Shackleton's grave, and here we gathered to drink a toast to his memory, douse his remains in whisky and reflect on his epic achievements. We then had time to explore the remains of the old whaling station and visit the museum and post office before heading out to sea at the start of our long journey north through the Atlantic.

It was 1,350 nautical miles from South Georgia to Gough Island in the South Atlantic, and five full days at sea. There was a strong north-westerly wind and a big swell as we sailed away from South Georgia, but the winds had eased considerably by the second day out, when we crossed the Antarctic Convergence at about 49°20'S, and on the third and fourth days, the sea was relatively calm. The wind picked up again on the fifth day, but by now it was feeling pleasantly mild (with temperatures up to 15°C), and by dusk that evening, we were only 19 nautical miles from Gough. The sea-watching on this leg of the journey was exceptional. We recorded a total of 35 species of birds including many for the first time and several for the last, as we moved from the cold Antarctic waters south of the Convergence into the warmer subantarctic waters of the South Atlantic. Our first full day out from South Georgia produced our first Sooty Albatrosses, Atlantic Petrels, Grey Petrels and Great Shearwaters, and our last King Penguins, Light-mantled Albatrosses and Grey-headed Albatross. The second day produced our first Great-winged Petrels, Spectacled Petrel, Subantarctic Shearwater and White-bellied Storm-Petrels; the third day, our first Northern Rockhopper Penguin and Broad-billed Prions, and last definite Wandering Albatross, Slender-billed Prion and Black-bellied Storm-Petrels; the fourth, our first definite Tristan Albatrosses and last Northern Giant-Petrels and Antarctic Prions; and our fifth, the first Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatrosses. Soft-plumaged Petrels were common throughout the voyage, with counts of 100 or more every day, and we also recorded good numbers of Black-browed Albatrosses, Kerguelen Petrels, Sooty Shearwaters, Wilson's Storm-Petrels and Common Diving-Petrels. A large albatross of the Shy *Thalassarche [cauta]* superspecies was seen in the distance on our second day at sea, and then we had great views of a single Shy or White-capped Albatross on the fourth day and no less than four of these on the fifth day. Our only Grey-backed Storm-Petrel appeared briefly on the fourth day, and we saw single Long-tailed Skuas on the third and fourth days. Big brown skuas were recorded in small numbers every day, but it was not until our fifth day, as we were approaching Gough, that we could assign them to Tristan Skua with any degree of confidence. Much the biggest surprise, however, came from the Cattle Egrets. Two appeared around the ship on our first morning after leaving South Georgia and were last seen heading off southeast into oblivion. Another appeared a couple of hours later and eventually crash-landed on the deck and was taken into care, and yet another appeared in the early morning of our third day at sea, when we were

mid-way between South Georgia and Gough. This bird followed us for about 15 minutes but then appears to have been taken by a skua. This leg of the journey also produced a good number of sightings of fur seals and cetaceans. Antarctic Fur Seals were last recorded in the morning of our second day out from South Georgia, and we saw our first Subantarctic Fur Seal later the same day. Cetaceans included two large male Killer Whales and an Hourglass Dolphin on the first day, four Hourglass Dolphins the next day, and three Sei Whales, a Fin Whale, six Southern Bottlenose Whales, 15 Long-finned Pilot Whales and at least 50 Southern Right Whale Dolphins on the third day.

On the morning of 4 April, we awoke to find ourselves anchored in the lee of Gough Island, which towered above us. It was a fine morning, and after a quick cup of coffee, we were off in the zodiacs for a pre-breakfast cruise along the sheltered east coast of the island. Hundreds of Subantarctic Fur Seals dotted the shoreline and large colonies of Northern Rockhopper Penguins extended up through the tussock grass on the steep slopes. As we approached close to the shore, we soon spotted our first Gough Moorhen walking about at the edge of a penguin colony and our first Gough Buntings flying about. The views were not great and some people had missed them, so we moved into a quiet cove at the base of The Glen where viewing conditions were better. Here we had great views of a bunting foraging on the beach near a large Southern Elephant Seal. Sooty Albatrosses, Broad-billed Prions and Tristan Skuas were flying about the cliffs above us; a little troop of Northern Rockhopper Penguins trundled down to the beach and into the sea only yards away, and Antarctic Terns foraged over the kelp. This was great stuff, but some of us had still not seen the moorhen, so we worked back and forth along the shore for some time until a single bird and then a pair with a full-grown juvenile appeared in the open and gave prolonged views. Well pleased, we returned to the ship and then set off immediately for Tristan da Cunha, some 220 nautical miles to the northwest. By now there was a gale-force wind blowing from the northwest, the sea was very rough and progress was slow. Despite the difficult viewing conditions, the sea-watching was excellent with large numbers of Sooty Albatrosses, Soft-plumaged and Atlantic Petrels, Broad-billed Prions, and Great and Subantarctic Shearwaters, and smaller numbers of Tristan, Atlantic Yellow-nosed and Black-browed Albatrosses, Kerguelen, Great-winged, Grey and Spectacled Petrels, and White-bellied Storm Petrels. A pod of about 20 Long-finned Pilot Whales added cetacean interest as we were leaving Gough behind. By nightfall, we were still 147 nautical miles from Tristan and it began to seem as though we would not be arriving in Tristan until late the next morning.

Fortunately, the wind backed to the southwest and decreased during the night and we made excellent progress. By sunrise we were approaching the southeast corner of Tristan da Cunha, and at 08:00 we dropped anchor off the settlement, grandly named Edinburgh, at the northwest corner. Yesterday's storm had moved off quickly, and it was a bright sunny day with only a very light south-westerly breeze. Breakfast, briefing and customs clearance were all rushed through, and by 09:45, the first of us were stepping ashore on Tristan – a remarkable achievement given the awful weather conditions the night before and pessimistic weather forecast. We had a full day on Tristan and several options were open to us, including a guided tour of the settlement, a round of golf at the remotest golf course in the world, and a walk out to the famous potato patches. Some of the keener birders headed straight off to a small pond where there was reported to be a mysterious egret, while many others walked up to the post office and small gift shops to buy stamps and souvenirs. The egret was quickly found, but its identity was not fully resolved: it appeared to be an immature Little Egret, but Snowy Egret (far more likely in Tristan) could not be completely ruled out. Nearby we found a Cattle Egret that had apparently arrived at the same time. However, there were very few other birds about, and it was strange to walk about in the gardens and fields around the settlement and not see a single small bird. Even the 3km walk out to the potato patches through rolling grassland produced nothing other than a few Sooty and Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatrosses patrolling the hillsides, the odd passing Tristan

Skua, and a few Antarctic Terns feeding on the ground like waders or pipits. The potato patches themselves were completely birdless, although there were lots of Southern Painted Ladies *Vanessa brasiliensis* about. The endemic Tristan Thrush still occurs in the woodland on the slopes of the volcano, but we had been told that none had been seen in the lowlands for at least 10 years, so it came as a considerable surprise when news broke in mid-afternoon that two of our fellow passengers had discovered two Tristan Thrushes in a gully above the potato patches. A lucky few who were on their way out to the potato patches at the time managed to get up to see them, but for the rest of us who were already making our way back to the ship it was too late. Back on the *Professor Molchanov* that evening, we had close views of Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatrosses and Antarctic Terns coming in to feed on fish scraps thrown off the stern, and celebrated our great day on Tristan da Cunha with a barbecue on deck.

The weather was still reasonably fine the next morning, so as soon as we had taken our local guides on board, we headed straight for Inaccessible Island, where we were hoping to find the tiny flightless rail of the same name. There was quite a breeze blowing, but the situation did not seem too bad in the lee of the island, and a zodiac was sent out to check the landing site. Sadly, however, it soon became apparent that there was much too big a swell to risk a landing. As we waited for the zodiac to return, we pulled out the telescopes and scoured the shoreline and tussock grass at the base of the cliffs. No rails were foolish enough to run out into the open, but we did see a couple of Tristan Buntings flying down from the cliffs to forage on the shoreline, although admittedly they were little more than tiny specks in the scopes. Reluctantly we turned away from Inaccessible and headed off to Nightingale Island, only about 20 nautical miles away. Unfortunately, by now the wind was picking up again and when we anchored off the landing site near a cluster of small huts, it became obvious that even getting off the ship into the zodiacs would be difficult, let alone landing on an exposed rocky shore. As we waited for a decision to be made, we again scoured the shoreline with our scopes. Someone called Tristan Thrush, but none of us got onto it, and all we could make out were a few Subantarctic Fur Seals, two Northern Rockhopper Penguins and yet another Cattle Egret. Finally the Captain said no, and with great reluctance we weighed anchor and set off back to Tristan da Cunha. Sea-watching from the ship was very good, as it had been all day, with large numbers of Sooty and Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatrosses, Soft-plumaged and Spectacled Petrels, Great Shearwaters and White-bellied Storm-Petrels, and smaller numbers of Tristan Albatrosses, Great-winged and Atlantic Petrels, Broad-billed Prions and Tristan Skuas. We arrived back at Tristan in the late afternoon and took on a new set of guides so that we could get away early the next morning for another attempt at Nightingale.

At 03:30 that night, we awoke to an unusual bumping noise. Gale-force winds had suddenly sprung up from the northwest and we were dragging anchor. The Captain quickly weighed anchor and we hurried round to the lee of the island to escape the worst of the storm. When we emerged from our cabins the next morning, we found ourselves cruising up and down off the southeast coast of Tristan in a howling gale and very rough seas. Another attempt at Nightingale was out of the question, and the problem now was how to get the local guides ashore. The wind eased a bit during the morning, and at mid-day the harbour master decided to send out the island's lifeboat to take the men off the *Professor Molchanov*. This was pretty hairy stuff, but all went well, and as soon as we had heard from the harbour master that the men were safely on shore, we turned north-northeast and set off on the long voyage to St Helena. As we ploughed our way through the big swells, we watched the magical island of Tristan da Cunha gradually disappear into the haze along with our last Sooty and Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatrosses, South Giant-Petrels, Atlantic Petrels, Broad-billed Prions and Tristan Skuas.

It took us another four full days to cover the 1,330 nautical miles to St Helena. For much of the time we were heading into a stiff north-easterly breeze and there were quite a few showers about, but the temperature was now in the twenties and increasing by the day, and shorts were beginning to appear on deck. In the afternoon of the third day, we crossed the Tropic of Capricorn (23°27'S), and by

sunset on the fourth, we were only 140 nautical miles from St Helena. The sea-watching during these four days reached an all-time low and came as something of a shock to us after the wonderful numbers and diversity of sea-birds in the Tristan group and farther south. In four days of almost continuous sea-watching from dawn to dusk, we recorded only 13 species of birds. There were surprisingly few birds about on our first day out from Tristan, when we were still only 200-340 nautical miles from the islands: just 20 or so Soft-plumaged and Spectacled Petrels, a couple of Great-winged Petrels, a few Sooty and Great Shearwaters, six White-bellied Storm-Petrels and a single White-faced Storm-Petrel (the first of only two that we were to see all trip). The next day produced only about 20 birds, but these included a surprise Shy or White-capped Albatross, our first two Bulwer's Petrels and our first Red-billed Tropicbird. There were still a few Spectacled Petrels about, but the three White-bellied Storm-Petrels that we saw were our last. On the following day, the third full day out from Tristan da Cunha, the thirty or so birders on board managed to record only ten birds of four species in 12 hours of sea-watching: our last Spectacled Petrel (which parted company with us at the Tropic of Capricorn), three Sooty Shearwaters, two Bulwer's Petrels, our first three Madeiran Storm-Petrels and an unidentified storm-petrel. There was only a slight improvement on the final day, when we recorded our last Great Shearwater, two Long-tailed Skuas and our first dozen Arctic Terns, along with a Sooty Shearwater, four Bulwer's Petrels, a Madeiran Storm-Petrel and various unidentified specks in the distance. There were also very few cetaceans on this leg of the journey. We had a close encounter with a group of seven Sperm Whales on our first day out from Tristan, but thereafter all we saw were a few unidentified beaked whales on the first two days and two or three unidentified pilot whales on the third day. Instead, the flying fishes (Exocoetidae) and flying squid (Onychoteuthidae) stole the show, appearing in large numbers on our first day out from Tristan and giving excellent views as they hurled themselves up from under the bow and soared away to port and starboard.

On 12 April, we awoke to find ourselves cruising up the west side of St Helena towards the main harbour at Jamestown, where we dropped anchor at 06:45. As we waited to go ashore, we saw our first Masked Boobies, Brown Boobies, White Terns, Brown Noddies and Black Noddies flying by, and had great views of about 20 Madeiran Storm-Petrels feeding over the slick behind the RMS St Helena which lay at anchor nearby. We had three full days in St Helena, and as in Tristan, we were offered a variety of things to do. These included a trip to Deadwood Plain to see the endemic St Helena Plover (or Wirebird), a cruise in the 'Gannet' to see dolphins and breeding sea-birds, a historical tour of Jamestown, and a botanical trip to see some of the last remnants of the island's native vegetation. Several of us decided to go on the dolphin cruise that was leaving that morning as soon as the ship had been cleared. The rest of us spent a leisurely morning wandering about Jamestown, but it was Easter Sunday and very quiet. There were a few Red-billed Tropicbirds flying about the cliffs above the harbour and White Terns in the gardens in town, but the only other birds were introduced species – Rock Dove, Zebra Dove, Common Myna, Madagascar Fody, Common Waxbill and Java Sparrow – and it was not long before many of us had gravitated to the nice little coffee shop by the harbour. All the keen birders reconvened near the pier in the early afternoon for the 'mandatory' trip to Deadwood Plain. The St Helena Plovers were easily found, and we enjoyed great views of about eight of these critically endangered birds, but the only other birds about were a few introduced Yellow Canaries. That evening, we dined at one of the cafés or bars in town to give our two hard-working chefs their only night off in five weeks.

On our second day in St Helena, Oceanwide Expeditions had laid on an island tour for us, and straight after breakfast we went ashore to board our minibuses for the trip into the interior. A great time was had by all, as we trundled round the island from scenic lookout to scenic lookout, calling in at Napoleon's Tomb, Longwood House, Plantation House (with its ancient tortoises on the lawn) and Ladder Hill. The Cattle Egret that had been with us since before South Georgia was finally released, and we saw a few Common Pheasants from the buses, but the only other land-birds that we saw were the seven common introduced species. The butterflies were far more interesting, and we found all four species that occur on the island: African Monarch *Danaus chrysippus*, Painted Lady *Vanessa*

cardui, Diadem Butterfly *Hypolimnas misippus* and Long-tailed Blue *Lampides boeticus*. The more energetic amongst us left the buses at Ladder Hill, and took the 699 steps down Jacob's Ladder into town, while the rest of us retired to the Consulate Hotel for a cool drink or two. Back on the ship that evening, we were treated to another barbecue on deck.

Next morning, those of us who had not already been on the dolphin cruise boarded the 'Gannet', and headed out to sea. We had not gone far before we found a school of at least 200 Pantropical Spotted Dolphins. We stayed with these for about an hour and had wonderful views. We then cruised southwest to the western tip of the island, where we had extraordinarily good views of Madeiran Storm-Petrels and Brown Noddies feeding around two little fishing boats. Continuing on, we finally reached Speery Island, a tall stack off the southern tip of St Helena where the breeding sea-birds including lots of Masked Boobies, White Terns, Brown Noddies and Black Noddies, and a few Sooty Terns. There was a lone Cattle Egret looking very out of place on a cliff ledge, and a Bottlenose Dolphin cruised alongside us for a while. We were back in Jamestown by lunchtime, and had plenty of time for another stroll around town and a couple of beers at the Consulate. We finally weighed anchor at 17:30 and set off on the relatively short leg to Ascension Island just south of the equator. As we headed northwest out to sea, we came across our first two Pomarine Skuas, but there was little else about, and we settled down to another two full days at sea.

We were now under the influence of the Southeast Trades, and for the next 700 nautical miles to Ascension there was a fresh breeze and a fair swell. Our first full day was very quiet, with only a single Sooty Shearwater, four Bulwer's Petrels, 11 Madeiran Storm-Petrels, our first definite Leach's Storm-Petrel and a dozen Arctic Terns. Flying-fishes were present in their thousands, but we failed to see a single cetacean. There was some improvement the next day, with a couple of Cory's Shearwaters, 13 Bulwer's Petrel, 25 Madeiran Storm-Petrels, 25 Leach's Storm-Petrels, a Red-billed Tropicbird, six frigatebirds (presumably Ascension), three Long-tailed Skuas, and several large feeding flocks of terns – mostly Sooty but with a few Arctic Terns, White Terns, Brown Noddies and Black Noddies mixed in. Flying fishes remained abundant, but the only cetaceans were a few unidentified dolphins.

We arrived off Ascension Island long before dawn the next morning, and were up and ready at first light for a cruise in the zodiacs around Boatswain Bird Island, a small islet surrounded by steep cliffs near the eastern tip of Ascension. The entire population of Ascension Frigatebirds nests on this one small island, and we were soon enjoying close-up views of at least a thousand of these great birds, at rest on the cliffs or cruising about overhead. The relatively flat summit of the island was covered in nesting Masked Boobies and frigatebirds, while the cliff ledges supported thousands of nesting Black Noddies, hundreds of White Terns, 150 or so Brown Boobies and about 30 Red-footed Boobies. Nearby, a group of eight Bottlenose Dolphins passed by and showed well to a couple of the zodiacs. Well pleased with this pre-breakfast excursion, we cruised round to Georgetown on the western side of the island and prepared to go ashore. Oceanwide Expeditions had arranged for us to do an island tour by bus in the morning, have lunch at a restaurant in town, visit the Sooty Tern colony at Wideawake Fairs in the afternoon, and visit the Atlantic Green Sea Turtle nesting beaches in the evening. It was a fine sunny morning with little breeze, and all seemed well until we arrived at the very primitive steps at the pier and discovered that there was a big swell. A landing was attempted and four people actually got ashore, but one had a nasty fall and another got very wet. Fearing a disaster, our expedition leader decided to get the four back into the zodiacs and abandon the landing. We then spent the rest of the morning trying to persuade the harbour master to allow us to land at Comfortless Cove – a very sheltered sandy beach only a kilometre away – and arrange a shuttle bus to take us into Georgetown. But the harbour master was an obstinate fellow, and although he would allow us to go to the cove for a swim, he would not allow us to make a 'formal' landing there. By now we were beginning to worry about the 21 passengers on the *Professor Molchanov* who were disembarking at Ascension and flying back to England that night. In mid-afternoon, the harbour master decided to send out one of the island's launches to take them off the *Molchanov*, but this was

still a dangerous procedure – especially jumping from the launch onto the slippery steps at the pier. Meanwhile, we who remained on the ship twiddled our thumbs and cursed the harbour master for his intransigence. There was little else to do other than watch a few Atlantic Green Sea Turtles that kept surfacing near the ship, and count Common Mynas on the beach through our telescopes.

Our second day at Ascension could also have been a disaster as the RMS St Helena arrived at 08:00 and anchored off the harbour. We had already been told that we would not be able to use the harbour facilities this day and that all the buses and taxis would be engaged. However, the harbour master must have softened a little during the night, as he gave us permission to land at the harbour providing we liaised with the RMS St Helena. The swell had gone down a lot, and finally, at 09:45, we were able to set foot on Ascension. The keener birders amongst us immediately set about trying to find transport to take us to the Sooty Tern colony. We soon discovered that the only possibility would be to hire self-drive rental vehicles from the Obsidian Hotel. This turned out to be very quick and easy, and we were soon bowling along in two 4x4 pick-ups across the airport and through the US Naval Base to Wideawake Fairs. The track ended only a couple of hundred metres from the Sooty Tern colony, and we then had the best part of an hour to enjoy thousands of these elegant terns at close range, as well as a few Ascension Frigatebirds that were drifting back and forth over the colony. The only other birds about were introduced Common Mynas, Common Waxbills, Yellow Canaries and House Sparrows, and we were back in Georgetown in time to have a quick look at the town and a couple of beers at the local pub. Most of us who had not gone to see the Sooty Terns had a walk about town and then went for a swim at Comfortless Cove. We were all back on the *Professor Molchanov* by lunchtime; the Captain weighed anchor at 13:30, and we set off on the last leg of our journey to the Cape Verde Islands about five hours ahead of schedule. A pleasant afternoon and evening's sea-watching produced two Cory's Shearwaters, over a dozen Madeiran and Leach's Storm-Petrels, a Pomarine and three Long-tailed Skuas, hundreds of Sooty Terns, and our last Masked Boobies, White Terns and Black Noddies. The highlight, however, was a school of 12 Clymene (Short-snouted Spinner) Dolphins that came over to join the ship and rode the bow wave for a while just after sunset.

It was over 1,400 nautical miles from Ascension to the Cape Verdes and this took us another five full days at sea. It was now getting quite hot, and as we passed through the doldrums on the equator, the temperature rose to over 30°C. However, we soon came under the influence of the Northeast Trades and from then on there was a stiff breeze to cool us down. The sea-watching on this leg of the journey proved to be more interesting than we had expected. Five species of birds were recorded every day: Cory's Shearwater (up to 15 in a day), Bulwer's Petrel (up to 50), Leach's Storm-Petrel (up to 100), Long-tailed Skua (up to 15) and Arctic Tern (up to 80). We recorded our last few Madeiran Storm-Petrels, our last frigatebird and two Pomarine Skuas on the first day out from Ascension; a White-tailed Tropicbird, our only Sabine's Gull and our last Brown Noddy on the second day; our last Sooty Tern (an immature) on the third, and a Pomarine Skua on the fourth. By mid-day on the fifth day, we were less than 150 nautical miles from the nearest of the Cape Verde Islands, and that afternoon we encountered our first few Cape Verde Shearwaters and at least 35 Boyd's Shearwaters, as well as an immature Red-billed Tropicbird. The only other birds recorded on this leg were half a dozen Sooty Shearwaters – in our experience the most ubiquitous of ocean wanderers – and yet another lost Cattle Egret that circled the ship for a while in the evening of the fourth day and then headed off west into the setting sun. With only light winds and relatively calm seas, conditions for spotting cetaceans were excellent, and we did very well, especially on the first day out from Ascension, when we saw a school of about 50 Clymene Dolphins, a huge mixed school of (Long-snouted) Spinner and Pantropical Spotted Dolphins, a school of 25 Rough-toothed Dolphins, and two smaller schools of Risso's Dolphins. As we had some time to spare, we spent six hours in the morning of the second day cruising west along the Romanche Fracture Zone just south of the equator. Here, where the ocean bed extends down to 7,728m, we were hoping to see some of the rarer cetaceans, but all we could find was a single Cuvier's Beaked Whale and three unidentified beaked whales that were probably this species. Two more schools of Spinner Dolphins appeared on the third day, along

with a lone Killer Whale. The fourth day produced one of the cetacean highlights of the trip – close encounters with a pod of 20-30 Short-finned Pilot Whales loafing at the surface for almost an hour – as well as three more Cuvier's Beaked Whales, while on the fifth day, a pod of three Sowerby's Beaked Whales and a False Killer Whale put in brief appearances. This leg of the journey also produced an interesting crop of other marine creatures including a Leatherback Turtle, several big sharks, a large Manta Ray, three or four billfishes (probably Atlantic Blue Marlins), thousands of flying fishes and hundreds of Portuguese Men-o-War.

On the morning of the 35th day since leaving Ushuaia, we found ourselves approaching the spectacular volcanic island of Fogo in the southern group of the Cape Verde islands. The Captain had agreed to hold off the island until well after dawn so that we could do some sea-watching as we slowly approached from a few miles out. This was very rewarding, and we had great views of several hundred Cape Verde Shearwaters as well as a pod of six Blainville's Beaked Whales that surfaced in front of the ship. We weighed anchor off the small harbour of Porto de Vale de Cavaleiros at 07:15, and quickly prepared to go ashore for an excursion up into the interior of the island. As we were waiting on deck for the zodiacs to arrive, we spotted five Humpback Whales blowing in the distance and saw three Fea's Petrels, although they were some way off. The landing in the busy little harbour went smoothly, and we had soon boarded our buses and were on our way up through the main town of São Filipe and into the interior. We had barely gone a few hundred metres before we encountered our first of many colourful Grey-headed Kingfishers (our day's tally was 40). Spanish Sparrows were common in the town, and at our first stop near a small patch of cultivation, we quickly found most of the island's other land-birds: a pair of Alexander's Kestrels circling low overhead, a Common Quail running about in the open, a very obliging Cape Verde Swift that seemed to be responding to 'pishing', at least 20 Black-crowned Sparrow-Larks foraging in a ploughed field, and several Spectacled Warblers and Blackcaps flitting about in the acacias. We could now relax and enjoy the scenery, as we drove high up into the caldera in the centre of the island. After a couple of stops to inspect the recent lava flows, we eventually came to the little village of Portela, where a pleasant buffet lunch awaited us at a small guest house. The only birds about were a few Cape Verde Swifts and Spanish Sparrows, but on the drive back down to São Filipe, two Helmeted Guineafowl obliging flew across the road in front of us. After a quick look around town, we returned to the harbour and found a lone Ruddy Turnstone and three Sanderlings as we were waiting for the zodiacs. We were back on the *Professor Molchanov* by mid-afternoon, and weighed anchor at 16:15 for a cruise round the Ilheus Secos de Rombo – a group of small islands off the north-east side of Brava with large breeding colonies of sea-birds. It was very windy and the sea was quite rough, but the sea-watching was excellent and we saw about ten Fea's Petrels, lots more Cape Verde Shearwaters, over 40 Boyd's Shearwaters, a White-faced Storm-Petrel and a few Red-billed Tropicbirds. As we settled down to our last night aboard the *Molchanov*, we cruised slowly northeast to our final destination, the island of Santiago.

As we slipped quietly into Praia harbour the next morning, we spotted a group of seven Grey Herons on a small island at the entrance to the harbour, and then, at 07:45 we pulled up alongside the dock. It was now time to say our final farewells to the *Professor Molchanov* and our fellow passengers and crew, and prepare to go ashore for the last time. But there was drama yet to come. The Customs and Immigration officials had arrived to clear the ship, but seemed to have no idea what to do about our passports and entry stamps. After a considerable amount of dithering about, it was finally decided that the passports should be taken into town and stamped there. It was two hours before things were sorted out and we were finally allowed to leave the ship. A few of us had chosen to go on the cultural and historical tour of Praia and Cidade Velhas (the old city) organised by the Oceanwide Expeditions team, but the rest of us boarded our bus for an excursion into the interior of the island. At our very first stop in a valley near São Lourenço dos Orgãos, we found our two main targets, the endemic Cape Verde Cane Warbler and endemic Iago Sparrow. At a small reservoir in the hills, we found an assortment of waterbirds including two Squacco Herons, a Great Egret, 11 Little Egrets, two

Eurasian Spoonbills, a pair of Common Moorhens with their chick, a Black-winged Stilt and a few Common Sandpipers and Common Greenshanks. There were lots of birds about, but species diversity was very limited: Alexander's Kestrel, Cape Verde Swift, Grey-headed Kingfisher and Spectacled Warbler were all quite common, and there were lots of Rock Doves, Blackcaps, Spanish Sparrows and introduced Common Waxbills. We stopped for a picnic lunch near the botanical garden at São Jorge dos Orgãos, and here we had fine views of a Cape Verde Buzzard over the hillside, distant views of a group of Brown-necked Ravens over the crags, and close views of more Cape Verde Cane Warblers and Iago Sparrows in the lush valley. Later, we visited the trees where a few pairs of the critically endangered Bourne's Heron nest, but the breeding season had ended and the herons were nowhere to be seen. The only birds we could find here were a few Helmeted Guineafowl. After another quick look at the reservoir, we returned to Praia for a welcome coffee stop, and then visited an area of semi-desert near the airport, where we found half a dozen very confiding Bar-tailed (Desert) Larks, several Common Quail and, somewhat surprisingly, a Eurasian Whimbrel. We ended the day at our pleasant hotel overlooking the sea on the outskirts of town, and enjoyed our first night on terra firma for over five weeks.

Next morning, as we drove out to the airport for our flight home, we could see that the *Professor Molchanov* had already left for the Canary Islands, where she was to be refitted for her summer season in the Arctic. She had been a great ship, carrying us safely for over 7,000 nautical miles through some of the world's roughest seas and to some of its remotest islands. The flight back to the UK was far shorter and simpler than the outbound journey had been, and as we headed our separate ways from Heathrow, we could part cheerfully in the knowledge that this had surely been one of the greatest adventures of our lives.

SYSTEMATIC LIST

Species which were not personally recorded by the leader are indicated by the symbol (NL).

NUMIDIDAE

Helmeted Guineafowl (Introduced) *Numida meleagris*: Brief views of a couple in flight on Fogo, excellent views of a group of six near the heron trees on Santiago, and 12 seen by John near the airport as we were leaving the Cape Verdes. An introduced species, remarkable only for being the first species on our checklist!

PHASIANIDAE

Common Quail *Coturnix coturnix*: Good scope views of one in a small ploughed field on Fogo, and a total of five flushed as we were walking about in the desert near the airport on Santiago.

Common Pheasant (Introduced) *Phasianus colchicus*: A total of four seen from the buses during our island tour on St Helena.

ANATIDAE

Upland Goose *Chloephaga picta*: Common in Tierra del Fuego National Park and the Ushuaia area.

Kelp Goose *Chloephaga hybrida*: Common along the shore in Tierra del Fuego National Park and in the Ushuaia area. The pure white male is striking, but the female is surely the most attractive goose in this genus.

Ashy-headed Goose *Chloephaga poliocephala*: A pair flew along the shore at the Tolkeyen Hotel near Ushuaia.

Crested Duck *Anas specularioides*: Very common around Ushuaia.

Flying Steamer-Duck *Tachyeres patachonicus*: Good views of a pair in Tierra del Fuego National Park and six near Ushuaia.

Fuegian Steamer-Duck (Flightless Steamer-Duck) *Tachyeres pteneres*: Good views of about 100 in Tierra del Fuego National Park and the Ushuaia area.

Red Shoveler *Anas platalea*: Good scope views of about 150 on the lake in Ushuaia.

Chiloe Wigeon (Southern Wigeon) *Anas sibilatrix*: A male on the shore at the Tolkeyen Hotel, and at least 25 on the shore east of Ushuaia the next morning.

Speckled Teal *Anas flavirostris*: Only one in Tierra del Fuego National Park, but about 30 on the lake in Ushuaia.

South Georgia Pintail *Anas georgica*: Fairly common and remarkably tame in South Georgia, where we saw about 70. The largest concentration was a flock of 40 on a pond at Salisbury Plain in the Bay of Isles.

Yellow-billed Pintail (Brown Pintail) *Anas spinicauda*: One in Tierra del Fuego National Park and about 20 in the Ushuaia area.

PODICIPEDIDAE

Great Grebe *Podilymbus major*: Great views of about 10 in Tierra del Fuego National Park, and also a couple in Ushuaia harbour.

SPHENISCIDAE

King Penguin *Aptenodytes patagonicus*: Visiting the spectacular breeding colony of this impressive penguin at Salisbury Plain in South Georgia was undoubtedly one of the highlights of the trip. Many of the birds were on eggs, but there were also some large chocolate-coloured chicks almost ready to go to sea. We encountered our first few birds at sea over 100 nautical miles from South Georgia, and then had our first close encounters on the beach at Cooper Bay. Our last were a few at sea south of the Antarctic Convergence on the day after leaving South Georgia.

- Adelie Penguin *Pygoscelis adeliae*: The breeding season had ended and the colony at Paulet Island was deserted. However, we had close views of three individuals on the shore at Brown Bluff and a couple on the shore at Paulet, and found at least six on icebergs in Erebus and Terror Gulf. Many little black specks in the distance were probably also this species. The number of Adelie Penguins breeding in this area is decreasing as the species retreats southwards in the face of global warming.
- Gentoo Penguin *Pygoscelis papua*: A common and widespread penguin, first encountered at Brown Bluff (where there were about 200) and Paulet, and then seen in good numbers at most of our landings in South Georgia. With the recent warming in climate, this species has been extending its range southwards in the Antarctic Peninsula.
- Chinstrap Penguin *Pygoscelis antarctica*: First encountered at sea in the Drake Passage south of the Convergence, and then seen in small numbers on icebergs near Paulet and in the Scotia Sea. Our best views were at Cooper Bay in South Georgia, where there is a small breeding colony.
- Macaroni Penguin *Eudyptes chrysolophus*: Superb views of at least 1,000 of these very fancy penguins at their breeding colony at Cooper Bay, and also seen at sea as we were approaching Cumberland Bay.
- Southern Rockhopper Penguin *Eudyptes [chrysocome] chrysocome*: Close but brief views of four at sea in the northern Drake Passage. This is still a common breeding bird in the Cape Horn archipelago and Falkland Islands, but numbers at the colonies in the Falklands have suffered a sharp decrease in recent years.
- Northern Rockhopper Penguin *Eudyptes [chrysocome] moseleyi*: Great views, from the zodiacs, of some thousands at their breeding colonies on the steep slopes of Gough Island, where there are reckoned to be some 144,000 pairs. Our best views were of a group waddling down to the sea at the 'valley'. We also had distant views of a couple on the rocks at Nightingale.

DIOMEDEIDAE

- Southern Royal Albatross *Diomedea [epomophora] epomophora*: At least 20, many of which came close to the ship, in the Drake Passage north of the Convergence, and a single bird in the Scotia Sea as we were heading towards South Georgia. This form, with extensive white on the upper wing, breeds on Auckland and Campbell Islands, New Zealand.
- Northern Royal Albatross *Diomedea [epomophora] sanfordi*: Good views of two birds showing completely black upper-wings in the northern Drake Passage. This form breeds in the Chatham Islands and on the mainland of South Island, New Zealand.
- Wandering Albatross (Snowy Albatross) *Diomedea [exulans] exulans*: Undoubtedly the special bird of the Southern Ocean. We encountered at least 18 individuals in the Drake Passage, several of which followed the ship for some time, and then saw another nine in the Scotia Sea as we were heading towards South Georgia. Our best encounters, however, were at the small breeding colony on Prion Island in the Bay of Isles, where we enjoyed spectacular views of about 40 adults at the nest, fighting their way through the tussock grass, or circling low overhead. Once we had left South Georgia, numbers dwindled rapidly and our last definite 'Wanderer' was north of the Convergence on our third day at sea. (Confusion with the very similar Tristan Albatross then became a problem). Long-lining has certainly taken a horrendous toll of these magnificent birds. Numbers at the breeding colonies in South Georgia are decreasing at over 4% per annum, while the numbers encountered at sea appear to have decreased by over 50% since the mid-1990s.
- Tristan Albatross *Diomedea [exulans] dabbenena*: Many excellent views of these great albatrosses which closely resemble immature stages of the Wandering Albatross and are doubtfully distinguishable at sea. We reckoned we saw our first on our third day at sea after leaving South Georgia (well north of the Convergence) and then recorded 22 the next day, and at least 30 the day before we arrived at Gough. The great bulk of the population of about 1,500 pairs breeds on Gough, and here at last we could be really convinced that we were

seeing *dabbenena*, although we only saw about 20 individuals around the island. Thereafter, we saw only four as we cruised between Tristan, Inaccessible and Nightingale, and two as we were sailing away from Tristan.

- Sooty Albatross *Phoebetria fusca*: The first came early – three during our first day at sea after leaving South Georgia and still well south of the Convergence. Numbers then increased steadily as we approached Gough where there is a large breeding colony, and here we recorded at least 100. The species was common in the Tristan group and there were still a few as we were sailing away from Tristan on our final day there, but these were our last.
- Light-mantled Albatross (Light-mantled Sooty Albatross) *Phoebetria palpebrata*: In some ways the most elegant of the albatrosses, especially when flying in formation around their breeding sites on steep, tussocky hillsides. We saw our first (seven) in the southern Drake Passage and then small numbers in the Scotia Sea en route to South Georgia. Our best views were at Cooper Bay, where we found an adult and large chick at the nest, and at Grytviken, where a couple of pairs were circling over the hillside and whaling station, but numbers dwindled rapidly after we left South Georgia and we recorded none north of the Convergence.
- Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatross *Thalassarche [chlororhynchos] chlororhynchos*: We saw our first north of the Convergence en route to Gough but numbers remained small until we reached Tristan da Cunha, when suddenly there were hundreds about. Our best views were of birds coming to feed on fish scraps at the stern of the ship as we lay at anchor. This was much the commonest albatross as we cruised between Tristan, Inaccessible and Nightingale, and we recorded about 50 as we sailed away from Tristan on our last evening, but none was recorded thereafter.
- Black-browed Albatross *Thalassarche [melanophris] melanophris*: Much the most widespread of the albatrosses, first seen in the Beagle Channel at Ushuaia and then on most days at sea, except in the far south, until we left Tristan da Cunha. Our biggest daily counts were about 40 in the northern Drake Passage and some hundreds around the large breeding colony on Cooper Island in South Georgia. The last individuals were three during our day at sea in the Tristan group and one as we were leaving Tristan the next day.
- Grey-headed Albatross *Thalassarche chrysostoma*: A very smart albatross, first encountered in the Drake Passage, where we logged 32, and then seen in small numbers in the Scotia Sea (up to 15 in a day) and around South Georgia. Our last was a single bird south of the Convergence on the day after leaving South Georgia.
- Shy/White-capped Albatross *Thalassarche [cauta] cauta/steady*: Close views of one cruising by the ship on our fourth day at sea after leaving South Georgia, and then no fewer than four the next day, between 140 and 30 nautical miles southwest of Gough. Two of these birds (an immature and a near-adult) stayed with the ship for several hours. Even more interesting was a single bird which passed close by the ship in the early afternoon of our second full day at sea after leaving Tristan da Cunha. This bird, at approximately 28°00'S, 09°30', was well outside the known distribution of either *cauta* or *steady*, and was the last albatross that we encountered during the cruise. The Shy Albatross *T. [cauta] cauta* and the virtually identical White-capped Albatross *T. [cauta] steady* breed on islands off Tasmania and New Zealand respectively, and are indistinguishable in the field. Indeed, until recently the validity of *steady* as a subspecies was open to doubt. The White-capped Albatross is much the commoner of the two forms and is known to occur in small numbers in the South Atlantic, but the possibility of the birds that we saw being Shy Albatrosses cannot be ruled out, as the non-breeding range of this form is poorly known. We also saw a very distant albatross during our second day out from South Georgia which could have been one of these two forms or *salvini* (Salvin's Albatross).

PROCELLARIIDAE

- Southern Giant-Petrel (Common Giant-Petrel) *Macronectes giganteus*: The more numerous of the two giant-petrels, first encountered in the Beagle Channel at Ushuaia and then recorded in good numbers almost daily until we left Tristan da Cunha. Around South Georgia and in the south, we found a number of wholly white adults (the Northern Giant-Petrel does not have a white phase, although some adults become quite pale). Some of our best views were at Paulet Island, where several of these 'Antarctic Vultures' were squabbling over a Leopard Seal carcass, and on Prion Island, where a few pairs were nesting amongst the Wandering Albatrosses. The birds breeding in the Tristan group are somewhat intermediate between *giganteus* and *halli*, having the bill colour of the former but showing some plumage characteristics of the latter.
- Northern Giant-Petrel (Hall's Giant-Petrel) *Macronectes halli*: About 10 in the northern Drake Passage and then common around South Georgia, where there are some large breeding colonies. We saw our last two days after crossing the Convergence en route to Gough.
- Southern Fulmar (Antarctic Fulmar) *Fulmarus glacialisoides*: Our first were five birds resting on the water in the Beagle Channel near Ushuaia. We encountered over 60 in the Drake Passage, mostly south of the Convergence, a few in Erebus and Terror Gulf, and at least 100 during our first day in the Scotia Sea, but ten individuals seen the next day were our last. An attractive bird, but not a patch on the Northern Fulmar.
- Cape Petrel (Pintado Petrel) *Daption capense*: First encountered in the northern Drake Passage and then recorded daily until we were approaching South Georgia, but much less common than it is during the summer months, with the highest daily count being just 60 in the southern Drake Passage.
- Lesser Snow Petrel *Pagodroma [nivea] nivea*: This very pretty little petrel was seen only around the Antarctic Peninsula. We recorded 15 at Brown Bluff, 10 near Paulet and at least 300 amongst the icebergs in Erebus and Terror Gulf. Two birds followed the ship briefly as we were leaving the Bransfield Strait, but these were the last. A few birds in Erebus and Terror Gulf appeared a little larger and chunkier than the others, but we could never quite convince ourselves that we were seeing any pure Greater Snow Petrels *P. [nivea] confusa*.
- Kerguelen Petrel *Lugensa brevirostra*: Many great views of this subtly attractive petrel, mostly cutting across the bow of the ship. Our first were seven in the southern Drake Passage. We saw another dozen in the Scotia Sea, eight south of the Convergence en route to Gough, and about 20 near Gough, where there is a very large breeding colony.
- Great-winged Petrel *Pterodroma macroptera*: First encountered near the Convergence en route to Gough, and then recorded daily in small numbers until we reached the Tristan group. Here amongst the islands we recorded up to 40 in a day and had some great views. Two on the day after leaving Tristan da Cunha were the last.
- Soft-plumaged Petrel *Pterodroma mollis*: This very attractive petrel was pleasingly common in the Southern Ocean from the region of the Convergence north to Tristan. We counted at least 30 in the northern Drake Passage but only four the next day (south of the Convergence). Only one or two were seen in the Scotia Sea and only three near South Georgia, but after leaving South Georgia we recorded at least 100 every day on the way to Gough, and up to 200 in a day in the Tristan group. However, we saw only about 20 on our first day at sea after leaving Tristan, and none thereafter.
- Fea's Petrel (Cape Verde Petrel) *Pterodroma feae*: The last petrel of the trip. We saw our first two or three from the *Professor Molchanov* as we lay at anchor off Fogo, and then saw about ten more as we cruised round the Ilheus Secos do Rombo that evening. Most were rather distant, but at the last moment, just as the light was beginning to go, one passed close by the bow of the ship and gave great views.

- Atlantic Petrel *Pterodroma incerta*: Another attractive petrel, first encountered just south of the Convergence on our first day at sea after leaving South Georgia and then quite common until we reached the Tristan group. Our highest daily tally was 100+ the day before we arrived at Gough, and our last were five as we were leaving Tristan da Cunha in the evening.
- Mottled Petrel *Pterodroma inexpectata*: One that passed by the ship at high speed as we cruised south through the Drake Passage on our first full day at sea came as something of a surprise, as this species, which breeds only in New Zealand, is rare in these waters. The identification was clinched by a photograph taken by one of our fellow passengers.
- White-headed Petrel *Pterodroma lessonii*: Great views of three individuals in the northern Drake Passage – a scarce bird in these waters but not entirely unexpected.
- Blue Petrel *Halobaena caerulea*: Many great sightings of these smart petrels, often cutting in close under the bow of the ship. We recorded about 50 in the southern Drake Passage and up to 100 in a day in the Scotia Sea, but then only one off South Georgia and none farther north.
- Fairy Prion *Pachyptila turtur*: Close views of about 30 of these small, pale-faced prions amongst the much commoner Antarctic Prions during our last day at sea before arriving at South Georgia. Identification of prions at sea is certainly much easier when there are good digital cameras at hand.
- Broad-billed Prion *Pachyptila vittata*: First identified convincingly on our third day out from South Georgia when we were north of the Convergence, and then seen in thousands as we approached Gough. Our best views were around Gough, where there is a huge breeding colony, and here we saw birds flying around the cliffs and over the tussock grass. Numbers were much lower in the Tristan group, and we saw our last few birds as we left Tristan da Cunha in the evening.
- Antarctic Prion (Dove Prion) *Pachyptila desolata*: The common prion of the cold waters south of the Convergence. We saw our first few in the northern Drake Passage, then at least 200 in the southern Drake Passage and up to 500 in a day in the Scotia Sea and around South Georgia, where there are huge breeding colonies. Numbers dwindled rapidly as we cruised north towards Gough, and we saw our last on the day after crossing the Convergence.
- Slender-billed Prion (Thin-billed Prion) *Pachyptila belcheri*: About 20 in the northern Drake Passage but only a couple the next day, south of the Convergence. Then none until one on our first day out from South Georgia, 30 the next day as we crossed the Convergence, and at least one the following day. This is primarily a bird of subantarctic waters, breeding in large numbers in the Falkland Islands and Tierra del Fuego.
- Grey Petrel *Procellaria cinerea*: A large and very distinctive petrel, but sadly one that seldom showed much interest in the ship. We saw the first eight on our first day out from South Georgia, and then recorded small numbers (maximum 11) every day until we reached Gough. Our last were three individuals as we headed northwest from Gough towards Tristan da Cunha.
- White-chinned Petrel *Procellaria aequinoctialis*: Fairly common in the Drake Passage (up to 30 in a day) and Scotia Sea (up to 40 in a day), and recorded in similar numbers around South Georgia, where there are large breeding colonies. However, we only saw three the day after leaving South Georgia and only two or three individuals thereafter, the last being one as we were sailing away from Tristan da Cunha.
- Spectacled Petrel *Procellaria conspicillata*: Our first was a single bird near the Convergence on our second day out from South Georgia. From then on, we recorded double figures daily until our second day out from Tristan, with the highest count of at least 100 coming during our day cruising between Tristan, Inaccessible and Nightingale. This species was a regular follower in our wake, with some individuals staying with us for an hour or more, and this was the case with our last bird – an individual that followed us to the Tropic of Capricorn (23°27'S) on our third full day at sea en route to St Helena. This strikingly marked petrel is

known to breed only on Inaccessible Island and the total population is thought to number only 2,500-10,000 individuals. It is listed as Critically Endangered by BirdLife International because of its tiny breeding range, small population size and high mortality from long-lining.

Westland Petrel *Procellaria westlandica*: At least two passed close by the ship during our first day at sea in the northern Drake Passage. This species, which breeds only in southern New Zealand, is known to wander occasionally to the waters off South America.

Cory's Shearwater *Calonectris [diomedea] diomedea*: Our first definite Cory's were two individuals on our first day at sea after leaving Ascension. Thereafter we recorded up to 15 in a day until our last day at sea before arriving at the Cape Verde Islands.

Cape Verde Shearwater *Calonectris [diomedea] edwardsii*: At least three on the day before we arrived at the Cape Verde Islands, and then several hundred close inshore off Fogo in the early morning and hundreds more around the Ilheus Secos do Rombo that evening. John also managed to scope five from the hotel at Praia on Santiago. The size difference between this form and Cory's was not as apparent as we had anticipated, but the Cape Verde Shearwaters certainly appeared lighter in build and more attenuated.

Sooty Shearwater *Puffinus griseus*: The only species to be with us, on and off, throughout the cruise, first encountered in the Beagle Channel and last seen as we approached the Cape Verde Islands; the only prolonged absence was in the far south. Large numbers were moving east through the Beagle Channel at Ushuaia and we recorded about 20 in the northern Drake Passage. We next saw a few off South Georgia, and then recorded small numbers on most of our days at sea until we reached Ascension. We saw a couple near the equator and finally four on our last day at sea before arriving in the Cape Verdes.

Great Shearwater *Puffinus gravis*: A very common shearwater in the seas around Gough and Tristan da Cunha, where almost the entire population of about five million pairs breeds. We encountered our first few individuals on our first day at sea after leaving South Georgia, still south of the Convergence. Numbers then increased rapidly to over 100 in a day as we approached Gough. The species was abundant in the main Tristan group, but numbers dwindled surprisingly rapidly as we headed north from Tristan, with only two being seen on our first day out and the last – a single individual – on our fourth day out when we were still over 200 nautical miles from St Helena.

Subantarctic Shearwater *Puffinus elegans*: Our first was a single bird just north of the Convergence on our second day out from South Georgia. Numbers then increased rapidly to about 200 on the day before we arrived at Gough, and we saw about 50 as we were sailing away from Gough towards Tristan, but these were our last. This was a particularly obliging bird, often taking off from the water just in front of the ship and keeping pace with us for some time.

Boyd's Shearwater *Puffinus boydi*: About 35, mostly in the evening, on our last day at sea before arriving in the Cape Verde Islands, and about 45 during our evening cruise around the Ilheus Secos do Rombo the next day. Like the Subantarctic Shearwater, this species also gave some great views just in front of the ship.

Bulwer's Petrel *Bulweria bulwerii*: Obviously a widespread bird of the tropical Atlantic. We encountered our first two on our second day north of Tristan and then saw small numbers on all of our days at sea until we were approaching the Cape Verde Islands, when numbers increased to 50 in a day. Surprisingly, however, we saw none in close proximity to the islands. The birds were often in small groups and gave close views as they came up off the sea in front of the ship.

HYDROBATIDAE

- Black-bellied Storm-Petrel *Fregetta tropica*: First encountered in the northern Drake Passage (10) and then seen commonly in the southern Drake Passage, Scotia Sea and South Georgia. Our highest daily tallies were 70 in the western Scotia Sea and at least 200 on our first day out from South Georgia. Numbers dwindled rapidly as we sailed away from South Georgia, and we saw our last the day after crossing the Convergence en route to Tristan.
- White-bellied Storm-Petrel *Fregetta grallaria*: The common storm-petrel in subantarctic waters north to the Tristan group, where there are large breeding colonies. We saw our first (eight) on the day we crossed the Convergence (when there were still a few Black-bellied Storm-Petrels around for comparison), and numbers then increased rapidly to over 100 in a day off Inaccessible and Nightingale. There were still lots about as we sailed away from Tristan da Cunha in the evening, but we recorded only six the next day and only three – our last – on the following day, when we were about 550 nautical miles north of Tristan.
- Wilson's Storm-Petrel *Oceanites oceanicus*: First encountered in the northern Drake Passage (50) and then seen commonly in the cold waters south of the Convergence, with counts of 100 in Erebus and Terror Gulf, several hundred around Cooper Island, and at least 100 off the north coast of South Georgia near Cumberland Bay. Numbers dwindled slowly as we headed north to Tristan, and we saw our last – a singleton – off Tristan da Cunha. Two birds came aboard one misty night in the far south and were much admired in the hand.
- Grey-backed Storm-Petrel *Garrodia nereis* (NL): Only a single bird seen by Ken about 400 nautical miles south-west of Gough. This is a small and inconspicuous storm-petrel that seems actively to avoid ships. The birds had finished breeding on Gough and disappeared out to sea a couple of weeks before we arrived.
- White-faced Storm-Petrel *Pelagodroma marina*: Only two individuals: a bird seen well from the bow on the day after we left Tristan da Cunha, and another seen briefly from the bridge as we were cruising round the Ilheus Secos do Rombo in the Cape Verdes. Like the Grey-backed Storm-Petrels, the White-faced had finished breeding in the Tristan group and dispersed out to sea.
- Madeiran Storm-Petrel *Oceanodroma castro*: The first to be identified with certainty were three near the Tropic of Capricorn on our third day at sea after leaving Tristan da Cunha. The species was quite common around St Helena, where we recorded up to 40 in a day, and we had some superb views, notably of several birds feeding round a fishing boat during our cruise on the 'Gannet'. Counts were in double figures on both days at sea between St Helena and Ascension, and again as we left Ascension in the afternoon, but 11 the next day were our last.
- Leach's Storm-Petrel *Oceanodroma leucorhoa*: A single bird on the day after we left St Helena was the first to be identified with certainty, but 25 were recorded the next day, and after Ascension, this was much the commonest storm-petrel all the way to the Cape Verde Islands, with counts of up to 100 in a day. The birds were often in small groups sitting on the water, and gave close views as they took off in front of the bow. At least one bird showed a wholly dark rump, and several others had very little white.

PELECANOIDIDAE

- Common Diving-Petrel (Subantarctic Diving-Petrel) *Pelecanoides urinatrix*: Small numbers of diving-petrels, mostly if not all this species, were encountered in the Drake Passage, and large numbers, mainly of this species, were seen in the Scotia Sea and around South Georgia. Small numbers were recorded every day on the way to Gough, and a single individual came aboard and was seen in the hand as we lay at anchor off Gough, but that was our last. There are large breeding colonies of this species on Gough and in the Tristan group, but it seems that the breeding season had ended and most birds had dispersed out to sea.

South Georgia Diving-Petrel (Georgian Diving-Petrel) *Pelecanoides georgicus*: At least six in the Scotia Sea the day before we arrived at South Georgia, at least 50 off Cape Disappointment and Cooper Island, where there is a large breeding colony, and a couple off the north coast of South Georgia near Cumberland Bay. The identification of this species at sea is always a great challenge and is best achieved from the bow of the ship, as the birds rise up off the water from almost underneath. Good digital photography also helps!

PHAETHONTIDAE

Red-billed Tropicbird *Phaethon aethereus*: Fairly common at St Helena, where we had counts of up to 30 in a day. Several pairs were nesting in cavities in the cliffs at Jamestown. At sea, a single bird joined the ship briefly when we were still over 700 nautical miles from St Helena, another circled the ship several times on our second day out from St Helena, and an immature circled the ship briefly on our last day at sea before reaching the Cape Verdes. We also saw half a dozen during our cruise round the Iheus Secos do Rombo off Brava.

White-tailed Tropicbird *Phaethon lepturus*: Great views of about a dozen around Boatswain Bird Island at Ascension, where there is a large breeding colony, and one circling the ship north of the equator on our third day at sea after leaving Ascension.

FREGATIDAE

Ascension Frigatebird *Fregata aquila*: We encountered our first half dozen frigatebirds, presumably this species, harassing feeding flocks of Sooty Terns far out at sea on the day before we arrived at Ascension, and then had wonderful views of at least 1,000 at the breeding colony on Boatswain Bird Island. There were also a few immature birds drifting lazily back and forth over the Sooty Tern colony on Ascension the next day. A single frigatebird was spotted at sea early the next morning as we were heading north to the Cape Verdes, but that was the last. The world population of this species is thought to number only 10,000-12,000 individuals, and all breed on Boatswain Bird Island.

SULIDAE

Masked Booby *Sula dactylatra*: Fairly common in inshore waters around St Helena and seen well at the colony on Speery Island, where we found about 60 birds. Common around Ascension and nesting in large numbers on the flat top of Boatswain Bird Island. We also saw about 60 as we sailed away from Ascension in the afternoon and evening, but none thereafter.

Red-footed Booby *Sula sula*: Great views of about 30, including a few of the white morph, at the breeding colony on Boatswain Bird Island off Ascension, and one at sea as we were leaving Ascension.

Brown Booby *Sula leucogaster*: Our first were two or three individuals passing by the ship as we lay at anchor off Jamestown, St Helena, and a juvenile at Speery Island during the dolphin cruise. We then had excellent views of about 150 at the breeding colony on Boatswain Bird Island, and saw about 25 at sea as we were leaving Ascension.

PHALACROCORACIDAE

Neotropic Cormorant (Olivaceous Cormorant) *Phalacrocorax brasilianus*: About 10 in Tierra del Fuego National Park and 15 in the Ushuaia area.

Rock Shag (Rock Cormorant) *Phalacrocorax magellanicus*: Good views of three at Lapataia Bay in Tierra del Fuego National Park and half a dozen in the harbour at Ushuaia.

Imperial Shag (Imperial Cormorant) *Phalacrocorax atriceps*: Very common in the Beagle Channel near Ushuaia, where there were large feeding flocks, and also seen at Lapataia Bay in Tierra del Fuego National Park. Most individuals were of the dark-cheeked form 'albiventer' (King Shag), but there were a few of the white-cheeked form 'atriceps' (Blue-eyed Shag) in Ushuaia harbour.

- Antarctic Shag (Antarctic Cormorant) *Phalacrocorax bransfieldensis*: Excellent views of about a thousand at Paulet Island, where there is a large breeding colony, and also seen in small numbers in the Antarctic Sound the next day
- South Georgia Shag (South Georgia Cormorant) *Phalacrocorax georgianus*: Common in inshore waters around South Georgia, and seen well on many occasions. We recorded up to 150 in a day.

ARDEIDAE

- Black-crowned Night-Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*: About 10, mostly immature birds, in the harbour at Ushuaia. These birds belong to the very dark race *obscurus* which is confined to southern South America and the Falklands.
- Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides*: Two at the dam on Santiago in the Cape Verde Islands – a very scarce migrant here and a surprising find.
- Western Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*: It is well known that Cattle Egrets are great wanderers, and our encounters with the species on this cruise certainly demonstrated the fact in dramatic fashion. Much to our amazement, two Cattle Egrets appeared alongside the ship in the early morning of our first day at sea after leaving South Georgia (at about 52°47'S, 33°20'W). These birds followed us for a while and then headed off southeast into oblivion. An hour or so later, another Cattle Egret appeared alongside. This was obviously very tired, and after several failed attempts, finally crash-landed in one of the zodiacs. It was soon captured and taken into care by Simon, who looked after it in his cabin for the next two and a half weeks. The egret, aptly named 'Lucky', made a good recovery and was finally released in fine fettle on St Helena. Only two days after Lucky had come aboard, another Cattle Egret appeared around the ship, at 47°32'S, 22°17'W – some 660 nautical miles northeast of South Georgia and 690 nautical miles southwest of Gough. This bird was not nearly so lucky. It soon attracted the attention of a passing Subantarctic/Tristan Skua and was forced into the water by the skua and presumably devoured. Four days later we arrived in Tristan da Cunha to find that at least one Cattle Egret had recently arrived there, along with a mystery egret. We soon located the Cattle Egret feeding with cattle in a field near the settlement. Next day we found yet another Cattle Egret near the huts on Nightingale Island as we lay at anchor on the *Professor Molchanov* hoping to make a landing. Until now, we had assumed that these Cattle Egrets had originated from South America, as we had been experiencing westerly winds since leaving South Georgia. However, by the time we reached St Helena we were well within the influence of the Southeast Trade Winds. Here we found another Cattle Egret, perched incongruously on the sea-bird cliffs at Speery Island. And this was not the last. In the evening of our fourth day at sea after leaving Ascension, when we were still about 380 nautical miles from the nearest of the Cape Verde Islands, another Cattle Egret appeared around the ship for a few minutes and then headed off strongly towards the setting sun. This and the St Helena bird must surely have originated from West Africa. Why Cattle Egrets from the New World and the Old World should simultaneously be crossing the Atlantic in opposite directions is far from obvious. It came as little surprise to us to find that the species was common in the Cape Verde Islands; we saw at least 50 on Santiago and a single bird on Fogo.
- Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*: A group of seven on a small island at the entrance to the harbour on Santiago, and later in the day, at least six flying in to rest and feed at the dam in the interior of the island – quite possibly the same birds.
- Great Egret (Great White Egret) *Ardea alba*: A single bird at the dam on Santiago – another rare visitor to the Cape Verde Islands.
- Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*: Eleven at the dam on Santiago in the Cape Verde Islands.

[Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*/Snowy Egret *E. thula*: On arriving on Tristan da Cunha, we were informed by a visiting RSPB ornithologist that a small egret had recently arrived with one or two Cattle Egrets. The winds had been from the west, and he had guessed that it was probably a Snowy Egret, a species that had already been recorded as a vagrant in Tristan. However, he was uncertain of the identification. Within minutes of arriving at the pier, the keen birders amongst us set off to see the egret. We soon found it at a small pool behind the beach, but it was quite shy and viewing conditions were far from ideal. The leg colour was unconvincing either way, but there was general agreement that the bare skin at the base of the bill was greyish, suggesting an immature Little Egret. However, as some immature Snowy Egrets can apparently also have greyish lores, and as this would have been the first record of a Little Egret in the Tristan group, we left the identification as tentative.]

THRESKIORNITHIDAE

Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*: Good views of two immature birds that flew in to feed at the dam on Santiago. This species is a regular winter visitor in small numbers to the Cape Verde Islands.

CATHARTIDAE

Turkey Vulture *Cathartes aura*: Three around Ushuaia on our final morning there.

Andean Condor *Vultur gryphus*: Quite good views of eight adults soaring over the peaks during our excursion to Tierra del Fuego National Park.

ACCIPITRIDAE

Chilean Hawk *Accipiter [bicolour] chilensis*: Extraordinary close-up views of a very tame immature bird perched in full view near Lapataia in Tierra del Fuego National Park, with an adult appearing briefly nearby, and then, amazingly, a bird bouncing off the window of the Albatross Hotel in downtown Ushuaia as we were waiting for our bus to take us to the pier.

Black-chested Buzzard-Eagle *Geranoaetus melanoleucus*: Great views of at least four in Tierra del Fuego National Park, including at least one juvenile, and a couple of others near Ushuaia.

Cape Verde Buzzard *Buteo [buteo] bannermani*: Good views of a bird soaring over the wooded hillside at Sao Jorge dos Orgaos on Santiago.

FALCONIDAE

Southern Crested-Caracara *Caracara plancus*: Common in Tierra del Fuego National Park and the Ushuaia area, and much in evidence at the municipal rubbish tip.

White-throated Caracara *Phalcoboenus albogularis*: Close views of about 25 somewhat soiled individuals at the municipal rubbish tip outside Ushuaia.

Chimango Caracara *Milvago chimango*: Very common in the Ushuaia area and Tierra del Fuego National Park.

Alexander's Kestrel *Falco [tinnunculus] alexandri*: Great views of at least nine on Fogo and 12 on Santiago in the Cape Verde Islands. Like the Cape Verde Buzzard, not a very convincing 'split'.

American Kestrel *Falco sparverius*: One in Tierra del Fuego National Park and one in the suburbs of Ushuaia.

RALLIDAE

Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*: A pair with a small chick at the dam on Santiago in the Cape Verde Islands.

Gough Moorhen *Gallinula [nesiotis] comeri*: Great views, from the zodiacs, of six, including a pair with a full-grown juvenile, amongst the tussock grass and in an open grassy area at the base of the cliffs on Gough Island. There were thought to be 4,250 pairs of this species on Gough in 1983 and at least 250 pairs on Tristan da Cunha, where it was introduced in 1956. (The Tristan Moorhen *G. [nesiotis] nesiotis* is generally believed to have become extinct by the end of the 19th Century).

CHARADRIIDAE

Southern Lapwing *Vanellus chilensis*: Common around Ushuaia where we recorded about 100.

St Helena Plover (Wirebird) *Charadrius sanctaehelenae*: Great scope views of at least eight in the grassland on Deadwood Plain in St Helena. This small plover, a close relative of the common and widespread Kittlitz's Plover *C. pecuarius* of Africa, is now critically endangered because of changes to the habitat and predation, especially by cats. The total population was estimated at 450 in 1988-1989, 435 in 2001, 350-370 in 2003 and 208 in 2005, and the decline continues.

Rufous-chested Dotterel *Charadrius modestus*: Great views of a party of 22 on the shore near the Tolkeyen Hotel in Ushuaia.

HAEMATOPODIDAE

Blackish Oystercatcher *Haematopus ater*: Good views of two on the shore near the Tolkeyen Hotel and four around Ushuaia harbour the next day.

Magellanic Oystercatcher *Haematopus leucopus*: Good views of about a dozen on our full day in the Ushuaia area and four around the harbour the next day.

RECURVIROSTRIDAE

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*: A single bird at the dam on Santiago in the Cape Verde Islands.

CHIONIDIDAE

Pale-faced Sheathbill (Snowy Sheathbill) *Chionis alba*: This extraordinary bird was first encountered at Brown Bluff on the Antarctic Peninsula, where there were about half a dozen. There were at least 30 on the beach at Paulet, and we saw another six as we were cruising back and forth through Erebus and Terror Gulf. There were also at least 100 at Cooper Bay, 60 at Salisbury Plain and a couple on Prion Island in South Georgia. Intensely inquisitive birds, they would sometimes fly out to the ship even before we had dropped anchor, and test almost anything to see if it was edible.

SCOLOPACIDAE

Eurasian Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*: One in the desert near the airport on Santiago and another on the shore near the Hotel Praiamar.

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*: Three at the dam on Santiago.

Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*: Six at the dam on Santiago and one on the shore near the Hotel Praiamar.

Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*: One in the harbour on Fogo.

Sanderling *Calidris alba*: Three in the harbour on Fogo.

White-rumped Sandpiper *Calidris fuscicollis*: Two with the Rufous-chested Dotterels on the shore near the Hotel Tolkeyen in Ushuaia.

STERCORARIIDAE

- Chilean Skua *Catharacta chilensis*: A couple at Lapataia in Tierra del Fuego National Park and at least a dozen around the harbour at Ushuaia. The most richly coloured of this group of large skuas and one of the most distinctive.
- South Polar Skua *Catharacta maccormicki*: At least three, including one quite pale individual, and a number of other 'possibles' in Erebus and Terror Gulf, at the southernmost limit of our cruise. This is a slightly smaller, slimmer and more athletic bird than the tank-like Subantarctic Skuas.
- Subantarctic Skua (Brown Skua) *Catharacta [antarctica] lonnbergi*: The common skua south of the Antarctic Convergence, first encountered in the southern Drake Passage and then recorded in good numbers on every day until we left South Georgia. Our highest count was 50 at Cooper Bay and Dryglaski Fjord. Many of the birds in South Georgia were remarkably tame, allowing approach to within a few feet.
- Tristan Skua *Catharacta [antarctica] hamiltoni*: Common around Gough and in the Tristan da Cunha group, with up to 50 recorded in a day. We recorded small numbers of large skuas on all five days of the voyage from South Georgia to Gough, but where the Subantarctic Skuas ended and the Tristan Skuas began was not clear. Our last Tristan Skuas (and *Catharacta* skuas of any kind) were three birds as we sailed away from Tristan da Cunha in the afternoon.
- Pomarine Skua *Stercorarius pomarinus*: Two individuals just as we were leaving St Helena, one as we were leaving Ascension, a couple the next day, and another north of the equator on our fourth day out from Ascension. Most if not all were immature birds.
- Long-tailed Skua *Stercorarius longicaudus*: Many great sightings of this very elegant skua, starting with one midway between South Georgia and Gough and another the following day. We saw two on the day before we arrived in St Helena and three more on the day before we arrived at Ascension. Numbers increased dramatically north of Ascension, with sightings every day until we reached the Cape Verde Islands and counts of up to 15 in a day. On many occasions the skuas were accompanying feeding flocks of Sooty Terns, but we also watched them harassing Leach's Storm-Petrels. Our last was one seen by John from the shore at Praia on Santiago in the Cape Verde Islands, where this species is listed as a vagrant!

LARIDAE

- Brown-hooded Gull *Larus maculipennis*: A flock of 50 at the lake in Ushuaia.
- Dolphin Gull *Larus scoresbii*: Good views of at least 50 of these very attractive gulls in the Ushuaia area.
- Kelp Gull *Larus dominicanus*: Abundant in Tierra del Fuego and common on the Antarctic Peninsula and in South Georgia.
- Sabine's Gull *Xema sabini*: Distant views of one heading north near the equator on our second day at sea after leaving Ascension.
- Arctic Tern *Sterna paradisaea*: We saw our first (a dozen) on the day before we arrived in St Helena and then saw small numbers on several occasions between St Helena and Ascension. North of Ascension we logged double figures every day, with a maximum count of 80 on our third day at sea. We also found good numbers in the Cape Verde Islands, especially around the Ilheus Secos do Rombo where we logged 55. Obviously the spring migration was still in full swing.
- South American Tern *Sterna hirundinacea*: Common in Tierra del Fuego National Park and the Ushuaia area, where this is the only breeding tern.
- Antarctic Tern *Sterna vittata*: Common around the Antarctic Peninsula (up to 300 in a day) and South Georgia (up to 100 in a day), and fairly common around Gough (20) and the Tristan da Cunha group (up to 50 in a day). The recently fledged juveniles, with their copious brown barring, were especially nice.

Sooty Tern *Sterna fuscata*: First encountered at St Helena, where we found small numbers at the breeding colony on Speery Island. On our second day out from St Helena, we began to encounter large feeding flocks of Sooty Terns, often accompanied by Long-tailed Skuas, and on Ascension, we had close views of some thousands at the large breeding colony at Wideawake Fairs. The birds showed relatively little interest in us 'intruders', and from their behaviour, it seemed that they were only just preparing to breed.

White Tern (Fairy Tern) *Gygis alba*: Very common on St Helena, even in Jamestown and the interior of the island, and also at Ascension, where we had some close views of birds nesting on the cliffs at Boatswain Bird Island.

Brown Noddy *Anous stolidus*: Two from the zodiacs at Gough, then none until we arrived at St Helena, where we saw about 150 on the dolphin cruise in the 'Gannet'. Thereafter only small numbers at sea and around Ascension. Our last was a single bird near the equator on our second day out from Ascension.

Black Noddy *Anous minutus*: Common around St Helena, where they were nesting on Speery Island and nearby islets, and abundant at Boatswain Bird Island off Ascension, where we had close views of thousands on the cliff ledges.

COLUMBIDAE

Rock Dove *Columba livia*: Feral pigeons were common in the Ushuaia area and on St Helena. In the Cape Verde Islands, the status of the Rock Doves is uncertain. We saw good numbers of Rock Doves that may be the descendents of a dark endemic form, but there were many obvious feral pigeons mixed in with them, and it may be that all the pigeons in the Cape Verdes are descendents of introduced stock.

Zebra Dove (Introduced) *Geopelia striata*: Common and remarkably tame in St Helena.

PSITTACIDAE

Austral Parakeet *Enicognathus ferrugineus*: Only distant flight views of a noisy party of four in the beech forest in Tierra del Fuego National Park.

APODIDAE

Cape Verde Swift *Apus alexandri*: Great views of seven on Fogo and about 20 on Santiago. One bird seemed to be responding to 'pishing'. As its name implies, this species is confined to the Cape Verde Islands.

TROCHILIDAE

Green-backed Firecrown *Sephanoides sephanoides*: Good views of at least eight in Tierra del Fuego National Park. Best were the four or five birds mobbing the immature Chilean Hawk.

ALCEDINIDAE

Grey-headed Kingfisher *Halcyon leucocephala*: Common and conspicuous on Fogo, where we recorded about 40, and only slightly less common on Santiago, where we logged 20. A colourful kingfisher, here occupying a variety of niches.

Ringed Kingfisher *Ceryle torquata*: Good views of one in Tierra del Fuego National Park and one on a couple of occasions in Ushuaia harbour.

PICIDAE

Magellanic Woodpecker *Campephilus magellanicus*: Unbelievable views of a family party of four and two single birds in the *Nothofagus* beech forest in Tierra del Fuego National Park. Why the birds were so tame is a mystery.

FURNARIIDAE

Bar-winged Cinclodes *Cinclodes fuscus*: A single bird on the beach at Lapataia in Tierra del Fuego National Park, and three seen by John near the Martial Glacier above Ushuaia.

Dark-bellied Cinclodes *Cinclodes antarcticus*: Great views of four along the shore in Tierra del Fuego National Park.

Thorn-tailed Rayadito *Aphrastura spinicauda*: This attractive little furnarid was very common in the forest in Tierra del Fuego National Park and responded well to 'pishing'. We also saw about a dozen in the forest below the Martial Glacier.

White-throated Treerunner *Pygarrhichas albogularis*: Brief views of three fast-moving birds in the forest in Tierra del Fuego National Park.

TYRANNIDAE

White-crested Elaenia *Elaenia albiceps*: A couple in Tierra del Fuego National Park. This is a common summer visitor to Tierra del Fuego, but most birds had obviously already left.

Fire-eyed Diucon *Xolmis pyrope*: Great views of about a dozen in Tierra del Fuego National Park.

Tufted Tit-Tyrant *Anairetes parulus*: Good views of a party of four at Lapataia in Tierra del Fuego National Park.

Dark-faced Ground-Tyrant *Muscisaxicola macloviana* (NL): Two seen by John near the Martial Glacier. This is another common summer visitor that had almost disappeared by now.

Patagonian Tyrant *Colorhamphus parvirostris*: Great views of about 10 in Tierra del Fuego National Park, including a loose party of seven or eight. A great find, as this summer visitor can be extremely elusive during the breeding season.

CORVIDAE

Brown-necked Raven *Corvus ruficollis*: Seven over the distant crags at Sao Jorge dos Orgaos on Santiago in the Cape Verde Islands.

HIRUNDINIDAE

Chilean Swallow *Tachycineta leucopyga*: Good views of one over the coast road east of Ushuaia on 19 March – a very late date for this summer visitor which, according to our local guide Esteban, usually leaves the Ushuaia area in February.

ALAUDIDAE

Bar-tailed (Desert) Lark *Ammomanes cinctura*: Excellent views of six in the desert near the airport on Santiago. These belonged to the nominate race which is endemic to the Cape Verde Islands.

Black-crowned Sparrow-Lark (Black-crowned Finch-Lark) *Eremopterix nigriceps*: Great views of about 30 in and around cultivation on the lower slopes of Fogo. As with the Bar-tailed Lark, these birds were of the nominate race which is endemic to the Cape Verde Islands.

SYLVIIDAE

Cape Verde (Cane) Warbler *Acrocephalus brevipennis*: Easily found on Santiago, where we saw our first at our first stop in suitable habitat. We saw about six in all, and had great views in the valley at Sao Jorge dos Orgaos where the birds responded well to 'pishing'. Another Cape Verdes endemic.

Spectacled Warbler *Sylvia cantillans*: Fairly common in the dry woodland and cultivation on Fogo and Santiago in the Cape Verdes.

Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*: Fairly common on Fogo and positively abundant on Santiago.

STURNIDAE

Common Myna (Introduced) *Acridotheres tristis*: Very common on St Helena and also on Ascension, where it was much the most conspicuous land-bird.

TURDIDAE

Austral Thrush *Turdus falcklandii*: At least 50 in Tierra del Fuego National Park, already gathering in flocks and presumably preparing to migrate.

Tristan Thrush *Nesocichla eremita* (NL): One of the great surprises of the trip. Two of our fellow passengers were investigating the native woodland near Edinburgh on Tristan da Cunha when they discovered two Tristan Thrushes. The news broke in mid-afternoon, too late for most of us to get there, and only the lucky few (including Graham and John) who happened to be in the vicinity at the time were able to get up to see them. This was the first time that Tristan Thrushes had been seen in the lowlands near Edinburgh for over 10 years, and even the local islanders were excited. It could be that the current rat eradication programme is beginning to have an effect.

MOTACILLIDAE

South Georgia Pipit *Anthus antarcticus*: Easily found at this time of year. Our first – a loose party of nine – appeared around the ship as we were cruising into Cooper Bay; we found another half dozen on the shore in Cooper Bay, and then went on to see one from the ship in Drygalski Fjord and about 15 in the Bay of Isles. Our best views were from the boardwalk on Prion Island, where the birds were exceedingly tame. This endemic passerine was once widespread in South Georgia, but is now confined to a small number of rat-free islands and rat-free enclaves on the south coast. Contrary to popular belief, it is not the most southerly songbird in the world – even the House Sparrows in Ushuaia are living further south!

EMBERIZIDAE

Patagonian Sierra-Finch *Phrygilus patagonicus*: Good views of about 20 in Tierra del Fuego National Park and three in the forest below the Martial Glacier.

Yellow-bridled Finch *Melanodera xanthogramma*: Close views of about a dozen on the rocky slopes below the Martial Glacier.

Gough Bunting (Gough Island Finch) *Rowettia goughensis*: About a dozen seen and heard from the zodiacs as we were cruising along the shore of Gough Island. One bird, feeding just above the tide-line by a huge Southern Elephant Seal, gave great views to everyone.

Tristan Bunting *Nesospiza acunhae*: Distant scope views of a couple flitting about the cliffs and dropping down to the beach on Inaccessible Island as we waited on the deck of the *Professor Molchanov* hoping to be able to land. All very frustrating! The form concerned is the nominate 'Lowland' form *acunhae* which also formerly occurred on Tristan da Cunha.

Rufous-collared Sparrow *Zonotrichia capensis* (NL): Two seen by John in Tierra del Fuego National Park and, quite amazingly, one seen by many of us as it circled the ship a couple of times in the Scotia Sea about 140 nautical miles southwest of South Georgia. This bird was photographed by several people and there can be no doubt about its identity. The scarcity of Rufous-collared Sparrows in Ushuaia (where this is much the commonest bird in summer) would suggest that the southernmost populations of this species are migratory.

ICTERIDAE

Austral Blackbird *Curaeus curaeus*: Good views of about 25 in Tierra del Fuego National Park and also one near Ushuaia.

PASSERIDAE

House Sparrow (Introduced) *Passer domesticus*: Common in Ushuaia and three in and around Georgetown on Ascension.

Spanish Sparrow *Passer hispaniolensis*: Very common on Fogo and Santiago in the Cape Verdes.

Iago Sparrow (Cape Verde Sparrow) *Passer iagoensis*: About 20 seen well on Santiago, but much less common and conspicuous than the larger Spanish Sparrows. Our best views were in the valley at Sao Jorge dos Orgaos. Another Cape Verdes endemic.

PLOCEIDAE

Madagascar Fody (Introduced) *Foudia madagascariensis*: About a dozen on St Helena, mostly in the uplands.

ESTRILDIDAE

Common Waxbill (Introduced) *Estrilda astrild*: Fairly common on St Helena, especially around Jamestown; about a dozen on Ascension, and abundant on Santiago in the Cape Verdes.

Java Sparrow (Introduced) *Padda oryzivora*: Common on St Helena, even down by the pier.

FRINGILLIDAE

Yellow Canary (Introduced) *Serinus flaviventris*: About 20 on St Helena, mostly in the uplands, and five on Ascension.

Black-chinned Siskin *Carduelis barbata*: A single bird in Tierra del Fuego National Park and a dozen in the forest below the Martial Glacier.

MAMMALS

European Rabbit (Introduced) *Oryctolagus cuniculus*: Common in Tierra del Fuego National Park and also seen at Deadwood Plain on St Helena.

American Beaver (Introduced) *Castor canadensis*: Good views of one working on its dam in Tierra del Fuego National Park.

Western House Mouse (Introduced) *Mus domesticus*: One was seen being caught and eaten by the Little/Snowy Egret on Tristan da Cunha, and another was seen on Deadwood Plain on St Helena.

Argentine Red Fox *Dusicyon culpaeus*: Amazing views of about five very tame and inquisitive individuals in Tierra del Fuego National Park.

Antarctic Fur Seal *Arctocephalus gazella*: Abundant in the Antarctic Peninsula and South Georgia, where the populations have recovered completely from the depredations of sealers in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Fortunately, the mating season was over and the big males had lost all their aggressiveness, but many of the pups could not resist giving us a snarl or two.

Subantarctic Fur Seal *Arctocephalus tropicalis*: A very attractive and distinctive fur seal, present in large numbers on the rocky shores of Gough, Inaccessible and Nightingale. We encountered our first at sea just north of the Convergence, about 850 nautical miles from Gough.

Leopard Seal *Hydrurga leptonyx*: Reasonable views of couple at Paulet and six on ice floes in Erebus and Terror, and then superb views of a very big male on the beach at Cooper Bay in South Georgia.

Weddell Seal *Leptonychotes weddelli*: One on the shore at Brown Bluff, two at Paulet Island and a few on ice floes in Erebus and Terror Gulf. We also saw one from the zodiacs in Larsen Harbour (Drygalski Fjord) in South Georgia, where there is a small, very isolated population of this species.

Crabeater Seal *Lobodon carcinophagus*: About half a dozen at Paulet and in Erebus and Terror Gulf, mostly resting on ice floes.

Southern Elephant Seal *Mirounga leonina*: First encountered in Erebus and Terror Gulf, where we saw about eight, then seen on several of the beaches in South Georgia, especially at Cooper Bay where there were about 100. We also found about 25 on the shore at Gough Island.

Northern Minke Whale *Balaenoptera acutorostrata*: Six small rorqual whales seen well amongst the ice floes in Erebus and Terror Gulf were identified as Dwarf Minke Whales, an as yet unnamed subspecies of the Northern Minke Whale. This form is confined to the Southern Hemisphere and occurs mainly in subtropical and temperate regions, although some move south into Antarctic waters in the austral summer.

- Antarctic Minke Whale *Balaenoptera bonaerensis*: Recorded in small numbers in the southern Drake Passage, off Brown Bluff and Paulet, and in Erebus and Terror Gulf. Our best views were of a group of three off Paulet.
- Sei Whale *Balaenoptera borealis*: Excellent views of two together and another in the distance on our third day out from South Georgia en route to Tristan.
- Blue Whale *Balaenoptera musculus*: Close encounters with two of these giants surfacing in front of the ship in the Scotia Sea about 200 nautical miles southwest of South Georgia. Definitely one of the mammalian highlights of the trip.
- Fin Whale *Balaenoptera physalis*: Good views of several groups totalling about 20 individuals in the southern Drake Passage, at least 15 in the Scotia Sea en route to South Georgia, and a single individual north of the Convergence en route to Gough. Many of the large blows seen way off in the distance in the Southern Ocean probably belonged to this species.
- Humpback Whale *Megaptera novaengliae*: Brief views of four near Brown Bluff in the Antarctic Peninsula, then wonderful views of about 30 in Erebus and Terror Gulf and Antarctic Sound the next day. One small group of playful individuals allowed exceptionally close views as we circled them for 30 minutes or more, and then gave chase as we headed off north through the Antarctic Sound. A month later, we came across Humpbacks again, in the tropical waters off Santiago in the Cape Verde Islands. Here a group of five put on a splendid show of 'tail-slapping' as we lay at anchor off Praia.
- Southern Right Whale *Eubalaena australis*: Superb views of two individuals passing close by in front of the ship in the southern approaches to the Antarctic Sound. A good find, as this is a scarce whale in these waters.
- Sperm Whale *Physeter macrocephalus*: Great views of a group of three adults and four quite large calves during our first full day at sea after leaving Tristan.
- Sowerby's Beaked Whale *Mesoplodon bidens* (NL): A group of three surfaced close to the ship during our last day at sea before arriving at Fogo in the Cape Verde Islands. As is typical with beaked whales, the sighting lasted only a few seconds, and many of us missed them.
- Blainville's Beaked Whale *Mesoplodon densirostris*: Good views of a pod of six surfacing just ahead of the ship shortly after sunrise as we were approaching Fogo in the Cape Verdes.
- Southern Bottlenose Whale *Hyperoodon planifrons* (NL): A pod of six surfaced close to the ship during our third day at sea after leaving South Georgia. Sadly, only a few of us were at the right place at the right time to catch them.
- Cuvier's Beaked Whale *Ziphius cavirostris*: Another elusive creature that showed only briefly. We saw one definite and three 'probables' as we were cruising along the Romanche Fracture Zone on the equator, and three more individuals two days later as we neared the Cape Verde Islands. (There were quite a few other sightings of beaked whales during our journey north through the Atlantic, but identification of these poorly known species is notoriously difficult at sea, especially as there may still be species out there that have yet to be described).
- Killer Whale *Orcinus orca*: Our first and best sighting was of a loose pod of about 20 individuals initially harassing a group of Humpback Whales in the Antarctic Sound and eventually passing close by the ship. These were presumably 'Type B' Killer Whales – the form that occurs in inshore waters in the Antarctic and is known to prey on Humpback calves. Two large males (probably 'Type A' – the oceanic form) cruised past the ship during our first day at sea after leaving South Georgia and were seen by most of us. A single individual that appeared briefly north of the equator en route to the Cape Verde was missed by most of us.
- False Killer Whale *Pseudorca crassidens* (NL): Good views for a lucky few of a single individual that surfaced briefly close to the ship during our last day at sea en route to the Cape Verde Islands, and three 'probables' later the same day.

- Hourglass Dolphin *Lagenorhynchus cruciger*: Superb views of a school of 13 that came over to ride in the ship's bow wave in the southern Drake Passage, but then only brief sightings of small numbers: a couple of individuals in the Scotia Sea, a single individual on our first day at sea after leaving South Georgia, and four individuals the next day. This is surely one of the more attractive dolphins.
- Pantropical Spotted Dolphin *Stenella attenuata*: Wonderful views of a large school of about 200 of these very acrobatic dolphins during both our trips out in the 'Gannet' at St Helena. We also saw a few with a large school of Spinner Dolphins on our second day out from Ascension, and found another large school close inshore off Santiago in the Cape Verdes.
- Clymene Dolphin (Short-snouted Spinner Dolphin) *Stenella clymene*: Close views of 12 which joined the ship briefly just before sunset as we were sailing away from Ascension, then a school of about 50 passing by quickly the next day, and five 'probables' at dusk the following day.
- Spinner Dolphin (Long-snouted Spinner Dolphin) *Stenella longirostris*: A large school of at least 300 passed quickly by the ship just after lunch on our first day at sea after leaving Ascension, and two schools, each of about 30 individuals, passed by on the third day en route to the Cape Verdes.
- Rough-toothed Dolphin *Steno bredanensis*: Excellent views of a school of about 25, many of which spent some time riding the ship's bow wave, on our first day at sea after leaving Ascension. A very distinctive dolphin with its white lips and Roman nose.
- Southern Right Whale Dolphin *Lissodelphis peronii*: Sadly very brief views of a school of at least 50 that suddenly appeared as we were watching a pod of Long-finned Pilot Whales north of the Convergence on our third day out from South Georgia. This very strange and strikingly marked dolphin frequently associates with pilot whales but shows little interest in ships and often seems to avoid them.
- Bottlenose Dolphin (Common Bottle-nosed Dolphin) *Tursiops truncatus*: Close views of a group of six that came to investigate the ship as we lay at anchor off Jamestown, St Helena; one alongside the 'Gannet' during our dolphin cruise the next day, and about eight from the zodiacs as we were cruising around Boatswain Bird Island at Ascension.
- Short-finned Pilot Whale *Globicephala macrorhynchus*: Extraordinary views of a loose pod of 20-30 individuals north of the equator on our fourth day at sea after leaving Ascension (c.430 nautical miles from the Cape Verdes). The whales seemed little bothered by our presence, although we stayed with them for the best part of an hour, and one individual even obliged us by rolling and showing its short pectoral fins.
- Long-finned Pilot Whale *Globicephala melas*: Good views of a pod of about 15 north of the Convergence en route to Gough and a pod of 20 as we were leaving Gough for Tristan. Three pilot whales seen on our third day out from Tristan were in the zone of overlap between Short-finned and Long-finned, and could have been either.
- Risso's Dolphin *Grampus griseus*: Good views of two schools totalling about 30 individuals during our first day at sea after leaving Ascension. A large and sedate dolphin, with a huge dorsal fin.
- Caribou (Reindeer) (Introduced) *Rangifer tarandus*: Several small herds of these introduced 'exotics' in Stromness Bay on South Georgia. The official count was 84!

BIRDS AND MAMMALS RECORDED IN THE BUENOS AIRES AREA ON 17 MARCH

PHALACROCORACIDAE

Neotropic Cormorant (Olivaceous Cormorant) *Phalacrocorax brasilianus* (NL): Four seen by John from the bus.

ARDEIDAE

Great Egret (Great White Egret) *Ardea alba*: A couple of birds flying over at Costanera Sur.

THRESKIORNITHIDAE

White-faced Ibis *Plegadis chihi*: A flock of 55 flying over at Costanera Sur.

ACCIPITRIDAE

Harris's Hawk (Bay-winged Hawk) *Parabuteo unicinctus*: Excellent views of four – probably a family party – over the marshes at Costanera Sur.

Roadside Hawk *Buteo magnirostris*: Good views of a couple at Costanera Sur.

FALCONIDAE

Southern Crested-Caracara *Caracara plancus*: A couple at Costanera Sur.

Chimango Caracara *Milvago chimango*: A couple on the drive in from the international airport and a couple at Costanera Sur.

CHARADRIIDAE

Southern Lapwing *Vanellus chilensis*: Several pairs on the drive in from the international airport.

COLUMBIDAE

Rock Dove *Columba livia*: Common.

Picazuro Pigeon *Columba picazuro*: Common and remarkably tame.

Eared Dove *Zenaida auriculata*: Very common.

Picui Ground Dove *Columbina picui*: A dozen at Costanera Sur.

PSITTACIDAE

Monk Parakeet *Myiopsitta monachus*: About 30 at Costanera Sur.

CUCULIDAE

Guira Cuckoo *Guira guira*: Three at Costanera Sur.

TROCHILIDAE

Glittering-bellied Emerald *Chlorostilbon aureoventris*: At least six in the shrubbery at Costanera Sur.

Gilded Hummingbird *Hylocharis chrysura*: One gave good views in the shrubbery at Costanera Sur.

PICIDAE

Golden-breasted Woodpecker *Colaptes melanolaimus*: Good views of two near the entrance at Costanera Sur. This is still lumped with Green-barred Woodpecker *C. melanochloros* in Barnett & Pearman's *Annotated checklist of the birds of Argentina*.

DENDROCOLAPTIDAE

Narrow-billed Woodcreeper *Lepidocolaptes angustirostris*: A single bird at Costanera Sur.

FURNARIIDAE

Rufous Hornero *Furnarius rufus*: About 10 in the city and at Costanera Sur. This is the national bird of Argentina.

TYRANNIDAE

- White-crested Tyrannulet *Serpophaga subcristata*: Good views of four in the shrubbery at Costanera Sur.
Bran-coloured Flycatcher *Myiophobus fasciatus* (NL): One seen by Roger at Costanera Sur.
Cattle Tyrant *Machetornis rixosus*: One on the lawn at the bus station in downtown B.A.
Tropical Kingbird *Tyrannus melancholicus*: Four at Costanera Sur.
Great Kiskadee *Pitangus sulphuratus*: Common and conspicuous.

TURDIDAE

- Rufous-bellied Thrush *Turdus rufiventris*: Half a dozen, mostly at Costanera Sur.
Creamy-bellied Thrush *Turdus amaurochalinus*: A single bird near the entrance at Costanera Sur.

MIMIDAE

- Chalk-browed Mockingbird *Mimus saturninus*: Several on the drive in from the airport and several near the entrance at Costanera Sur.

STURNIDAE

- European Starling (Introduced) *Sturnus vulgaris*: At least 30. This introduced species first appeared in the Buenos Aires area as recently as the 1990s.

TROGLODYTIDAE

- House Wren *Troglodytes aedon*: Common and vocal.

POLIOPTILIDAE

- Masked Gnatcatcher *Poliophtila dumicola*: Half a dozen responding well to 'pishing' in the shrubbery at Costanera Sur.

HIRUNDINIDAE

- Brown-chested Martin *Phaeoprogne tapera*: Large flocks totalling about 150 on the wires and over the marshes at Costanera Sur.
Grey-breasted Martin *Phaeoprogne chalybea*: A few hawking high over the marshes at Costanera Sur.

PLOCEIDAE

- House Sparrow (Introduced) *Passer domesticus*: Abundant.

FRINGILLIDAE

- Hooded Siskin *Carduelis magellanica*: Good views of about six birds at Costanera Sur.

PARULIDAE

- Masked Yellowthroat *Geothlypis aequinoctialis*: Good views of a bird responding well to 'pishing' at Costanera Sur.

THRAUPIDAE

- White-lined Tanager *Tachyphonus rufus*: Close views of a male at Costanera Sur, here at the extreme southern edge of its wide range.

EMBERIZIDAE

- Rufous-collared Sparrow *Zonotrichia capensis*: About 10 at Costanera Sur.
Red-crested Cardinal *Paroaria coronata*: Good views of two birds near the entrance at Costanera Sur.
Black-and-rufous Warbling-Finch *Poospiza nigrorufa*: Good views of about half a dozen at Costanera Sur.

Grassland Yellow-Finch *Sicalis luteola*: Four birds in song at Costanera Sur.
Double-collared Seedeater *Sporophila caerulea*: Common at Costanera Sur.
Golden-billed Saltator *Saltator aurantiirostris*: One showing well near the entrance at Costanera Sur.
Another species here at the extreme southern edge of its range.

ICTERIDAE

Epaulet Oriole *Icterus cayanensis*: Good views of about half a dozen at Costanera Sur.
Orange-backed Troupial *Icterus croconotus*: Brief views of one at Costanera Sur. This was probably an escaped cage-bird, as the species does not normally occur south of Formosa in the extreme north of Argentina.
Bay-winged Cowbird *Molothrus badius*: Close views of one near the entrance at Costanera Sur.
Shiny Cowbird *Molothrus bonariensis*: Two in a small park in the city.

MAMMALS

Lutrine Opossum (Thick-tailed Opossum) *Lutreolina crassicaudata*: A single individual ran across the trail by the main lake at Costanera Sur. This was the 'Comadreja colorada' illustrated in the poster by the main trail.