

Argentina, Falkland Islands, and Chile - January 2013

After several years of considering a South America cruise around Cape Horn, my wife and I finally put the time and resources in place and booked for January 2013. My wife is not as dedicated a birder as I am, but was still very keen on seeing penguins, wildlife, beautiful scenery, and visiting Buenos Aires. Three of the pre- and post-cruise days were dedicated to birding. However, most of our shore excursions were not dedicated to birding, but allowed for birding opportunities. Nonetheless, I birded every opportunity I could, including some hours on the ship spent looking for seabirds.

We selected the Princess cruise around Cape Horn on the Star Princess. Besides offering a great itinerary for sampling the birds of the “southern cone” of South America in Argentina and Chile, it was one of the few lower-cost itineraries that included the Falkland Islands. Describing it as “lower-cost” is relative, of course; it is lower compared to “expedition” cruises and tours aimed specifically for birders, but not really a budget trip when all is accounted for. As a representative baseline, inside cabins were priced at \$900-1400 pp and balcony cabins at about \$1800-2600 pp; fares varied throughout the year due to occupancy and sale cycles. We booked in October, at which time it appeared that the balcony cabins were about 80% booked. Additional cost considerations are about 12% taxes, fees and surcharges, plus \$11 per person per day added by Princess as a service charge. Of course, you will need a certain amount of resistance to Princess’s persistent (but bearable) up-sell efforts: casino, studio and casual photos, soda and alcoholic beverages, art auctions, spa treatments, and so on. However, all the essentials are included: meals, coffee/tea/lemonade/water to drink, fitness center, swimming pools, shows and entertainment, including the NFL playoffs on stateroom TV and in one of the theater. We ended up purchasing some pricey internet time on board, since there weren’t many opportunities to connect off the ship. We monitored our usage very carefully and made 200 minutes last for two weeks.

We were overall quite pleased with the cruise experience provided by Princess. I won’t go into too much detail about the cruise itself, except where it relates to the birding experience. A lot of valuable information on cruises and specific itineraries is available at www.cruisecritic.com. This is a terrific resource which we used: to read cabin and ship reviews before making our booking; to connect with a few other people on the ship ahead of time; to find out how previous runs of this ship/itinerary fared; and to learn about shore excursions. That said, we did not book any of our shore excursions through the ship.

Embarking in Buenos Aires was actually somewhat of an ordeal, but really Princess should not bear much blame for that. There were four large ships disembarking/embarking on January 4, meaning 8-10,000 passengers were moving both on and off ships through immigration and baggage. It appeared that the immigration agents on hand were just not adequate for the number of passengers. Princess slowed up their registration lines purposefully to avoid crowding the agents with too many passengers at once. The cruise terminal was organized somewhat on the inside; it was a bit chaotic outside getting from taxi to baggage handler, since there was inadequate signage and hundreds of people and bags crowding the front of the building. It took 75 minutes to drop off our bags, and a total of three hours from taxi to ship. With patience and a positive attitude from fellow passengers, it was bearable, but far from ideal. In contrast, the disembarkation at Valparaiso was fast and efficient. We went to our meeting area on the ship at the appointed time, almost immediately boarded buses (from ship to passenger terminal is 1km), waited 20 minutes for immigration processing, found our bags within a couple of minutes, and were on our way.

Guided birding: After some initial investigation, it was clear that guided birding in Argentina and Chile is offered only at premium prices, higher even than in many other developed countries. I do not know the reason, but it is what it is. It became clear early on that in order to keep a reasonable trip budget, I would have to limit my guided birding to just a few days, and go it alone for the rest of the stops. Keep in mind also, that my wife made it clear that we would not do a dedicated birding excursion in every port. Ultimately I decided to hire a guide for one day outside Buenos Aires, and two days in central Chile after disembarkation at Valparaiso. In addition, we hired a birding guide for Puerto Madryn, but it was a compromise of competing goals: we would make our destination the extensive Magellanic Penguin colony at Punta Tombo with some birding stops along the way. With the drive to Puerto Madryn being 2.5 hours each way and the stop at the colony itself requiring time, that left only a couple hours for birding stops. I would have also hired a guide in Ushuaia, had I been able; but I only made a decision to do so in December and was unable to secure a guide at that point. In other ports we arranged our own excursions to various highlights, some of which afforded birding opportunities, and some which did not. Not having guides at every stop saved some money, but also caused me to miss some target birds; that was disappointing, of course, but expected.

January 2, 2013 – We arrived mid-morning after an overnight flight to Buenos Aires in very nice weather. We shared transport with some other people on our flight who were also on our cruise and staying at the Marriott. I used points to stay without cost at the Marriott. In the afternoon we went for a walk and lunch on our own. In the early evening we joined an excellent free walking tour which started right near the hotel. There was no birding, other than casual birding in the Plaza San Martin, as we had a scheduled guided birding trip very early the next day. The park in front of the Marriott had large trees, and so we saw Rock Pigeons, Rufous Hornero, Picazuro Pigeon, Eared Dove, and Monk Parakeets, with Turkey Vultures overhead. We enjoyed a delicious steak dinner at Parrilla Pena. We walked the 3km back to the hotel at 9pm, which maybe wasn't the safest thing to do, but had no incidents along the way.

January 3, 2013 – We had arranged a full day with a local guide, Alec Earnshaw. He works full-time work as an engineer, but is available for private tours with advance notice to fit it into his work schedule. See his website at http://www.fotosaves.com.ar/index_english.html. He arrived on time at the Marriott at 4am and drove us to Ceibas, a small village surrounded by wetlands, grazing lands, and sparse woodland, about a two hour drive from Buenos Aires. We birded from the unpaved roads in this area the entire day. The weather was sunny and seemed hot to us, but was actually a bit cooler than normal for the season. Alec proved to be a pleasant companion and competent guide, and has our highest recommendation. He had several birds staked out, and had birded the area just the week before; he knew that some areas were flooded, but also knew which sites could be accessed and be productive for us. He was well-prepared for us with a full gas tank, picnic lunch (including folding chairs), bird list, playback capability (used sparingly), and excellent knowledge of the local birds and their voices. We saw/heard 126 species by about 4pm, and were returned to the hotel around 6pm. There were too many highlights to list separately, but it was a wonderful day seeing a spectacular variety of birds. A separate list of the birds from Ceibas is provided at the end of this report.

Although pretty tired due to the overnight flights the night before and the early morning wake up, we attended a tango show that evening at El Viejo Almacén. It was a unique Argentina experience that we found fascinating. We enjoyed the evening, but in my opinion it is not something you have to do twice in a week unless you are a huge tango enthusiast.

January 4, 2013 – In the morning we did a city bus tour arranged through the hotel, which was a quick

way to see the city highlights. After lunch, we took a taxi to the cruise ship passenger terminal, where we encountered the embarkation mess mentioned above. However, we were on the ship by 6pm. A massive thunderstorm struck just after dark as the ship left port for Montevideo; it was a magical experience watching the lightning and clouds. Kelp Gulls were the only birds seen from the ship.

January 5, 2013 – We arrived a couple of hours late to Montevideo, in spite of the short distance from Buenos Aires. Apparently the mouth of the Rio Plata is quite shallow; consequently there are only a few channels in which large ships can navigate and there are limited places to pass other ships traveling either direction.

We had no excursion planned in Uruguay, for birding or otherwise. That was a good thing, since our late arrival would have killed any early morning birding regardless. It was quite hot when we went ashore. We walked the pedestrian areas of Montevideo, took a taxi to the closed congress building (not exceptional), had a pleasant outdoor lunch, and spent some time in an internet cafe. We also walked over to the immigration office to obtain a “souvenir” entry stamp from Uruguay from an amused Uruguayan official, since our passports would not otherwise have been stamped for entry. Not much to be seen birdwise from the town or the ship on this day. Kelp Gull, Neotropic Cormorant.

January 6, 2013 – I did not really put any effort into seabirding on this day en route to Puerto Madryn, as we tried to find our way around the ship and recover from four days of incessant activity.

January 7, 2013 – We arrived to a brilliant, sunny day in Puerto Madryn; unfortunately, the wind was blowing at 40-50mph. It's maybe not that unusual for Patagonia, but was a disaster for birding. We were met at the end of the pier (using the free bus shuttle) by Ruben Manriquez, a local schoolteacher with whom I had arranged a day of guided birding by email in the weeks prior. As stated before, our plan was to visit Punta Tombo for the penguin colony, with birding stops along the way. Our first stop was to look for Burrowing Parakeet on the edge of town. Burrows? Yes. Parakeets? Not in this wind. However, a White-winged Black-tyrant served as a consolation prize and we moved on. The next stop was at some lagoons on the outskirts of Trelew, which had a nice selection of waterbirds. Surely it was an easy way for Ruben to pad the bird list, but since many of these birds were still new to me and the wind was still blowing strong, it was probably a good strategy on this day. Highlights here: Chilean Flamingo, Red Shoveler, Lake Duck, Yellow-billed Pintail, Black-faced Ibis, White-winged Coot, and Silvery Grebe. Our next stop was a dry lake bed which contained a few interesting species: Rusty-backed Monjita, Austral Negrito, and Chocolate-vented Tyrant. A few additional species were ticked as roadside birds: Elegant Crested Tinamou, Long-tailed Meadowlark, Common Diuca-finch, and Unicolored Blackbird.

Ultimately though, the drive to Punta Tombo and visit to the penguins took the remainder of the day. Seeing our first penguins was a wonderful experience, however. One inquisitive young penguin approached my wife and softly pecked at her knee—the interaction almost caused her to tear up. While a busy tourist destination, Punta Tombo is an interesting site and worth visiting unless you've already seen a lot of Magellanic Penguins at other sites. I would have liked to have spent my day finding other Patagonian specialty birds, but the wind did not relent until we were on the return drive back to the ship. We declined a second visit to the parakeet site because we were in danger of being late. The irony of our conscientiousness was made clear later, when we experienced a two hour delay in departing port due to other late passengers!

Another couple of birders we met on the ship hired a separate guide and headed north for a full day of birding on the Valdes Peninsula. They reported these additional birds seen (and may have failed to mention others): Darwin's Nothura, Mourning and Carbonated Sierra-finches, plus the parakeets which they successfully saw late in the afternoon.

January 8, 2013 – As we departed Puerto Madryn with a lovely sunset, the captain informed us that we would have some rough winds and seas for the next 24 hours or so. It was indeed a very rough night on the ship with a lot of motion and crashing noises (maybe the hanging lifeboats banging?). At one point before going to bed, I opened the door to the cabin and took a peek at the waves and wind. I was surprised to see, by the lights of the ship, a very small squat bird pop up in the wake alongside the ship. It could only have been a Diving-petrel by its size; my book reported that Common Diving-petrel is the most common to be found at sea. In the morning, the waves and motion were still apparent, but had calmed somewhat from the midnight turmoil. I spent the late morning through lunch at the full-length windows in the Horizon Buffet. What a way to enjoy seabirding! A comfortable chair out of the weather, eighty feet above the water, enjoying a steady supply of fresh coffee. Perfect! There were many Black-browed Albatrosses, Northern Giant Petrels, Great Shearwaters, Sooty Shearwaters, White-chinned Petrels, plus 1 Manx Shearwater, 1 Wandering Albatross, 2 Royal Albatrosses, Wilson's Storm-petrels, a Fairy Prion seen well just below the window, with several other Prions seen from distance, and a likely Soft-plumaged Petrel. A lot of curious passengers stopped by to share my table during lunch (prime window seat), and asked all kinds of questions about the birds. The ship might benefit from a staff naturalist. Due to the rough weather, apparently a good number of passengers were not feeling well on this day at sea. There were a lot of people carrying food to their rooms to help their family members through a rough day. I felt pretty tired all day, maybe because of the Dramamine, but thankfully was not nauseous at all.

January 9, 2013 – We arrived to the Falklands at daybreak. As we moved slowing into the bay, we were surrounded by rocky peninsulas vegetated with grasses and small shrubs. There were Sooty Shearwaters and Imperial and Rock Cormorants flying around, but also penguins (Magellanic I guessed) swimming in the bays as we slowly made our way toward Stanley. With binoculars we could make out many Magellanic Penguins on shore by their burrows or waddling down to the water.

From the beginning of our planning, we expected the visit to the Falklands and its King Penguin colony at Volunteer Point to be the highlight of the trip. Our hopes were weighed down with some concerns on three accounts: our landing chances, our tour arrangements to Volunteer Point, and potential political interruption. From what we could gather from trip reports of previous cruises, there was about a 50% chance of the weather preventing tenders from delivering passengers ashore; strong winds are common here, and tenders will not go ashore if there are any safety concerns. Added to that was the ongoing political strife between Argentina and the UK which might create a scenario to keep us on board. A Princess ship one or two years prior had held passengers on board because there was concern about protests/disruptions from Argentine passengers. Also, the final Princess itinerary of the previous season was blocked from discharging passengers at Ushuaia because the ship had come directly from a visit to the Falklands. However, from conversations with a couple of Argentine passengers, it seemed that they were just as eager to go ashore to see the war memorials and to visit the islands they consider theirs. Apparently, a cruise is one of the least problematic ways for an Argentine citizen to visit the Falklands. It was clear that the weather was going to cooperate; we had clouds and sun at sunrise with a steady breeze, but very promising. The captain announced that tendering would begin, so it appeared that we only had to worry about the tour arrangements. Finally, regarding our tour arrangements: our tour to Volunteer Point had been cancelled by the operator the day before departure to Argentina. Apparently

the visit of the Star Princess on the previous cruise a week prior had encountered a very rainy spell; all-terrain vehicles heading to Volunteer Point got bogged frequently and were late returning to the ship. Apparently the operator could not assemble enough willing drivers and vehicles for all the booked tours, and cancelled some of them. We scrambled to find an alternative, and fortunately landed with Estancia Tours, a family operation; cost was \$180pp, cash on arrival, box lunch included. We were still unsure if all the arrangements would work out as we boarded the tenders. However, Nyree from Estancia was waiting at the pier, and we were on our way with our driver Tamara in minutes! As we started our journey to Volunteer Point, we learned from Tamara that it had been a relatively dry period for several days. As it turned out we had an easy and enjoyable time on the jouncy trip to Volunteer Point—ninety minutes of gravel road and ninety minutes of off-road, and we were there. We arrived earlier than other groups, so enjoyed about an hour with only a handful of visitors at the site.

There are colonies of Gentoo and King Penguins situated a couple hundred meters apart at Volunteer Point. In addition, there are dozens (hundreds?) of Magellanic Penguin burrows scattered around as well. Each of the colonies has a couple of thousand pairs of penguins; when we arrived there were young hatchling Gentoos, and a handful of yearling King Penguins along with the adults of both species. I assume the King Penguins were on eggs, since we didn't see any very young hatched birds. The King Penguins are especially beautiful and photogenic. It was an unreal and thrilling experience to be able to experience such beautiful and interesting creatures as such close distance. There were wardens at the site controlling access to the colonies, whose responsibilities were to provide basic naturalist information and to keep a watch out for obtrusive behavior by visitors. Penguins were in constant flux of arrival and departure to the beach and ocean, about 200 meters away. After a while at the colonies we walked to the beach (following a small group of King penguins) to watch them nervously enter the water in small groups. The weather was a mix of sun and clouds with a strong wind—a pretty nice day in the Falklands. It was impossible to use binoculars from the Land Rover, but a few birds were seen well enough to identify from the vehicle. Here were the day highlights, besides the King and Gentoo Penguins: Austral Thrush, Correndera Pipit, Dark-faced Ground-Tyrant, White-bridled Finch, Kelp Goose, Upland Goose, Brown Skua, Variable (Red-backed) Hawk, Falkland Steamer-ducks in the harbor. A Cape Petrel was reported by other birders at the Volunteer Point Beach.

January 10, 2013 – Unfortunately we passed through the south Atlantic Ocean between the Falklands and the continent during the night and missed a lot of potentially great seabirding in the darkness. When the sun came up this brilliant clear morning, we saw Isla de los Estados ahead of us, a breeding site for colonies of Rockhopper, Magellanic, and Macaroni Penguins. As we passed offshore by five or ten miles, penguins could be seen swimming near the ship on occasion. Unfortunately, my inexperience with penguins at sea did not allow identification in the brief moments they surfaced. We did the cruisers' loop around Cape Horn itself in the afternoon; by the time we arrived there we were in low cloud and drizzle, cutting visibility substantially. Besides the ever-present Black-browed Albatrosses and Giant Petrels, the only birds seen were distant terns and cormorants.

January 11, 2013 – We arrived in the early morning to Ushuaia, and disembarked shortly after 8am. We planned to visit Tierra del Fuego NP, and Lago Escondido. We also thought about visiting the ski area, which would have higher elevation species, but would have required a hike. We didn't know if there would have been enough time for hiking there and also at the national park. We had reserved a rental car a month prior, figuring we would be able to find our way around and enjoy a flexible schedule. However at the last minute, we decided to inquire about a taxi for the day, partly out of curiosity, but also because we knew wouldn't have to ask for directions to every destination. The first taxi asked for \$40 per hour, which over six hours was just too much. He didn't seem eager to negotiate. Further down

the street we were offered \$32 per hour, and then settled with the driver for a flat \$150 for the day—anywhere we wanted to go until we had to return to the ship. We stopped by Alamo to cancel the rental car, but found out the office was closed until 10am! Since we hadn't prepaid, off we went in the taxi.

Our first stop was Bahia Escondida, which we had to ourselves for about 20 minutes before the buses arrived. Here we found Dark-bellied Cinclodes on the rocky beach, and Patagonian Sierra-finch in the parking lot. A short hike on the nearby forest trail produced nothing. We next drove to Lago Roja and hiked about a mile along the lakeside trail. It was fairly windy, but still nice weather. We met a fox that had clearly been accustomed to feedings by park visitors; he did everything but a song and dance to get us to toss out some food. (We didn't comply.) Austral Parakeets zoomed overhead and Thorn-tailed Rayaditos appeared at a few places, but our most sought-after bird, the Magellanic Woodpecker, could not be found. [We missed this bird, although we heard later that evening that some people from our cruise saw one during their (non-birding) van tour!] Our next stop was at the obligatory tourist signs at Bahia Lapataia; a walk on the trail to the lagoon produced Flightless Steamer-duck and Magellanic Oystercatcher. Our taxi driver then drove us back through town and up over a couple of passes to a view of Lago Escondido. This is a very scenic drive, but not knowing the area, we had no idea where to stop for birding; we did see three Andean Condors in flight while stopped for photos at the Garabaldi Pass. Upon returning to the ship I located a Snowy Sheathbill along the distant shoreline.

After leaving Ushuaia, we passed through "Glacier Alley" in the late evening. Even though it was not dark yet, it was overcast and drizzly at times, cutting visibility drastically, so the photographic results were so-so at best.

January 12, 2013 –We disembarked in the morning to a very cool and windy Punta Arenas; on the other hand it was sunny and bright. The plan was to go hiking at the Magellanic Forest Reserve above town, which was accessible by taxi. We stopped by a tourist agency with our friend, who negotiated transportation for the three of us for about \$10 per person round trip. They informed me (truthfully or not?) that the road to the Laguna Parrillar Forest Reserve had been closed due to flooding was only accessible by several miles walk. The Magellanic Forest Reserve had nicely maintained trails, but was obviously secondary forest with only a couple of very small patches of older trees. Birds were few in number and few in species, and nothing new was found all morning long. My wife and our friend had signed up for an additional tour to the Otway Sound penguin colony in the afternoon (\$35pp), and departed at midday. I opted to stay in the forest reserve for a couple hours longer; I finally found the Treerunner just after noon while exploring more of the trails. The few other highlights at the forest reserve were: Thorn-tailed Rayadito, Patagonian Sierra-finch, and Black-chinned Siskin. To my chagrin, my wife saw Austral Negrito, Long-tailed Meadowlark, Lesser Rhea, and Flamingos on the ride over to Otway Sound, without dedicating any special effort to birding.

January 13, 2013 – The next day broke brilliantly clear as we sailed through the Chilean fiords region. We were blessed with a spectacular, cloudless, calm day and unbelievable visibility. The snowcapped mountain peaks seemed within reach, and the colors and relief of the bays and valleys were a photographer's dream. The captain piloted the ship up to the Skua Glacier; he said that in the six years (30+ visits) he had seen such perfect weather conditions at the glacier only once before. This day was the undisputed high point of the trip for scenic photography. There were not too many birds to be seen as we travelled through the fiords: some Chilean Skuas, Flightless Steamer-ducks, (distant) cormorants, and Magellanic Diving-petrels.

January 14, 2013 – This day we were at sea again, the only time we were two days in a row without a port stop. We followed the coast north along the coast of Chile. I dedicated a couple of morning hours to pelagic birding from the comfort of the Horizon buffet dining area. (“Another coffee, sir?”) Black-browed Albatrosses, Sooty Shearwaters, and Giant Petrels dominated birds at sea; hardly any time passed that one of these species is not visible. However, I also found a few Wandering Albatrosses, and one Royal Albatross. Bird size was very difficult to estimate, particularly from my perch on an enormous vessel, eighty feet above the sea. Usually I was able to use Black-browed Albatrosses and Shearwaters as size reference. Every once in a while I picked up one or a couple Wilson’s Storm-petrels, which seemed impossibly small and very easy to miss completely. How many hundreds passed without me noticing? On a couple of occasions I detected birds that must be prions, but they were never close enough to identify. Finally one passed directly below me (yes, below—I was looking down at the bird) and I enjoyed a good look—Slender-billed Prion! Later I saw a Blue Petrel, the only petrel I saw all morning. At one point, I saw an Albatross that was different from all the others—it had to be a Gray-headed Albatross. The rest of the day was spent in the room reading and keeping my wife company, since she was sick with the flu and had been confined to our room.

January 15, 2013 – We arrived to clear weather at Puerto Montt, with several volcanoes visible in the near and far distances. We had booked a rental car with Europcar (prepaid US\$67), so as soon as we disembarked we took a taxi over to the rental agency. It took over 45 minutes to get the car, even though we were the only patrons in the rental agency. The car was in good condition and gave us no problems. Gas cost us about \$25 for our short day trip. We had planned this day to be a sightseeing and photography day, with only incidental birding along the way to Petrohue Falls and the Osorno volcano. We had hoped to visit Frutillar for lunch; my wife is German and we had read about this town being particularly German in character. However, it took much longer to drive to the falls, since we got a little bit off track near Puerto Varas, and made many stops for photos along the way. We realized we would never make it to Frutillar, so we instead stopped for some shopping and lunch in Puerto Varas. Fortunately the German character of this region is well-represented in Puerto Varas and many of the smaller towns, farms, restaurants, and hotels along the way to Osorno. It really does seem like a European alpine landscape, with a lot of verdant dairy farmland, forestland, and mountains. This was a stark contrast to the regions of Patagonia and the Chilean fiords, where there is very little land capable of productive agriculture. The volcano was in full view all day, lending a spectacular backdrop to every photo.

I have no birding highlights for this day at all; we passed through no forests capable of holding the woodpecker and although there were many blooming flowers, no hummingbirds were seen. The other birders on the ship went on a guided tour to the Alerce Andino National Park, but were not able to hike to the alerce trees in the time they had available. They also were disappointed in the few birds they saw, although they did hear the Huet-huet.

January 16, 2013 – This was our last day at sea; I only dedicated about an hour to birding on this day. As before Black-browed Albatrosses, Wilson’s Storm Petrels, and Giant Petrels were the most common birds seen. But on this day the flocks of Sooty Shearwaters were much less common and Pink-footed Shearwaters were far more common.

January 17, 2013 – We opted to be in the first group to disembark to make the most of the morning hours for birding. Disembarkation was prompt and well-organized: at 7am we boarded a bus for the mile drive over to the passenger hall, picked up our luggage, and met our guide for the day, Carolina Yáñez. I had made arrangements for two days of guided birding with Rodrigo Reyes of Aconcagua

Birding, which included guide with a driver and vehicle for our time in the Santiago area. The first day was to be Parque Nacional La Campana, and the second day would be El Yeso Reservoir in the Andes. We first stopped at the rocks behind the marine biology buildings of the Universidad Valparaiso near Concon, where the highlights were Peruvian Booby, Seaside Cinclodes, Inca Tern, Gray Gull, Peruvian Pelican, and our target, Humboldt Penguin. All these were life birds. Our next stop was the Rio Aconcagua estuary near Concon, where we found Black-necked Swan, Yellow-billed Pintail, Yellow-billed Teal, Great Grebe, American Golden Plover, American Oystercatcher, Whimbrel, Black-necked Stilt, Black Skimmer, Chilean Swallow, Long-tailed Meadowlark, and Yellow-winged Blackbird. From there we drove to the Ocoa (northern) entrance to La Campana National Park. The climate of this region is very much like California: hot and dry, but seasonally moderate in temperature, and very productive land for fruits, nuts, and vegetables when irrigated. The park itself is famous for its coastal mountains and dry forests containing the huge Chilean Wine Palms. Since it had been foggy all morning it was not too hot at the park when we arrived. But the fog burned off quickly, and it heated up fast. Fortunately, there are trails with some amount of shade in the valley, and these are generally the most productive for birding. Of the two key target birds, Mustached Turca and White-throated Tapaculo, we saw the former well, but only heard the latter. The Turca was quite elusive for two hours: we heard them frequently and caught only glimpses. Finally while we were resting at a shaded picnic table, a Turca ventured out of the brush and we got to observe foraging behavior for several minutes. Other highlights in the park: California Quail, Picui Ground-dove, Giant Hummingbird, Striped Woodpecker, Chilean Flicker, Dusky-tailed Canastero, Fire-eyed Diucon, Chilean Mockingbird, and Common Diuca Finch. Juan (our driver) and Carolina dropped us off at the Marriott in Santiago, staying free again using points.

January 18, 2013 – Juan and Carolina picked us up on time at 8 am. For birders this is admittedly a bit late, but we wanted to make the last couple of days feel a little like vacation. After free of the city traffic we headed up the Maipo valley above Santiago; it consists of some small towns that are part second homes and part working class. It was again a brilliant clear day, but comfortable temperature in spite of the very bright sunshine. Except for some vegetation along the river and small plantations on the edge of the valley that can be irrigated, the slopes above are a landscape of stark brown, gray, and orange rock. The scenery is beautiful, and there are a few unique bird species to be seen. In the upper valley there are occasional meadows used by for raising horses, cattle, and even goats. I'm not sure how it is determined who has the rights to use each meadow, but there is very limited grazing area, restricted to places where snowmelt streams come down from higher mountains. Otherwise, it is just rock in the lower valleys, but very high up, snow and glaciers. The road is unpaved and dusty, and frequented by many large trucks from the gypsum mine. In some places there is only a single track available along steep cliffs, so vehicles have to wait to pass. The road is passable to two-wheel drive, but it would be best not to attempt it with a low-clearance vehicle, or you may risk damage to the underside. Highlights from the lower valley were Red-backed Hawk, American Kestrel, Chilean Mockingbird, Black-winged Ground-dove, Crag Chilia, Plain-mantled Tit-spinetail, Rufous-banded Miner, Mustached Turca, Cream-winged (Bar-winged) Cinclodes, White-browed Ground-tyrant, and Gray-hooded Sierra-finch. In the middle and upper parts of the valley we added Yellow-billed Teal, Gray-breasted Seedsnipe, White-sided Hillstar, Dusky Tapaculo, Cordierran Canastero, Ochre-naped Ground-tyrant, Greater Yellowfinch, and Plumbeous Sierra-finch. We saw several Andean Condors at various points during the hours we were in the valley of El Yeso, but it was hard to determine when we were seeing the same birds; the most seen at one time was five birds. Finally, at the uppermost meadows, we searched for the signature species of El Yeso, the Diademed Sandpiper-plover, which was found after much scanning. First a juvenile was seen, and then later, at a greater distance across the meadow of stream channels, was the adult. For such flamboyant coloring they blend very well into their surroundings!

Overall, I was very pleased with the arrangements made by Aconcagua Birding. In my research for the trip, I found that all bird guiding companies in Chile seemed to be much higher priced than what I expected budget-wise, even by US or European cost standards. I'm not sure why (insurance, taxes?), but it's the reality. On the positive side, Rodrigo responded to emails quickly and was able to furnish arrangements that met our needs and schedule. Carolina was a joy to be with, and we both loved her enthusiasm and optimism. She has a great future as a naturalist and bird guide. Our driver Juan was on time, polite, and a safe driver. There were a couple of minor negatives about our two days of birding: a) When it appeared to me that we would be heading directly to La Campana from the ship, I asked that we make a couple of stops along the coast. Carolina and Juan (our driver) were flexible and she knew the coast well, so we managed to pick up several species that we would have missed entirely. Of course, on account of these stops, we arrived to La Campana later than planned. b) Carolina knew La Campana quite well, and we did well with the species there. However, I think she may not have been as experienced at El Yeso, since her home is along the coast, and she was substituting for Rodrigo as our guide. Overall, I would recommend Aconcagua Birding and consider them for my next visit to Chile. NOTE: it appears that Rodrigo and Carolina are now operating as Birdwatching Chile, <http://www.birdwatchingchile.com/index.php>.

January 19, 2013 – This last day of our trip was reserved for sleeping in and touring the city highlights before our evening flight back home. We spent a lot of time trying to go to Cerro San Cristobal, a popular park on a substantial hill in the center of the city. We do not recommend going up to the top on a Saturday morning by taxi, since you will be driving at slower than a walking pace, due to all the other city residents getting their exercise—better take your mountain bike or plan on hiking up yourself if you have the time and energy. But if want to go for a hike, the Andes are just an hour's ride away! We were privileged to be invited to lunch by Chilean friends we met on our cruise. We enjoyed the shade of their garden for a delicious outdoor dinner. Remarkably, the final life bird of the trip showed up in their garden: Rufous-tailed Plantcutter! After lunch it was back to the hotel to pack followed by a taxi ride to the airport. The LAN flight home was uneventful, except for the scheduled midnight stop in Lima for a change of crew and passengers. It was strange that they cleaned the entire plane with over a hundred drowsy passengers still aboard! Morning arrival at JFK left us with a two hour ride home to Philadelphia; thankfully a friend met us, and spared us the driving after the red-eye flight.

Mike Tanis
Pennsylvania, USA
phdbirderATgmailDOTcom

Ceibas, 03 Jan 2013

Black-necked Swan
Coscoroba Swan
Black-bellied Whistling-Duck
White-faced Whistling-Duck
Ringed Teal
Brazilian Teal
Yellow-billed Pintail
Yellow-billed Teal (split from Speckled Teal)
Rosy-billed Pochard
Pied-billed Grebe
Neotropic Cormorant
Anhinga

Rufescent Tiger-Heron
Whistling Heron
Cocoi Heron
Great Egret
Snowy Egret
Cattle Egret
Striated Heron
Roseate Spoonbill
Black-crowned Night-Heron
White-faced Ibis
Bare-faced Ibis
Wattled Jacana
Wood Stork
Southern Screamer
Maguari Stork
Long-winged Harrier
Southern Caracara (Crested Caracara)
Chimango Caracara
American Kestrel
Snail Kite
Giant Wood-Rail
Purple Gallinule
Plumbeous Rail (h)
Common Gallinule
Spot-flanked Gallinule
Black-necked Stilt (White-backed Stilt)
Solitary Sandpiper
White-rumped Sandpiper
Pectoral Sandpiper
South American Snipe
Kelp Gull
Large-billed Tern
Rock Pigeon
Spot-winged Pigeon
Eared Dove
Picui Ground-Dove
Monk Parakeet
Guira Cuckoo
Nacunda Nighthawk
Scissor-tailed Nightjar
Glittering-bellied Emerald
Checkered Woodpecker
White-fronted Woodpecker
Green-barred Woodpecker
Campo Flicker
Scimitar-billed Woodcreeper
Narrow-billed Woodcreeper
Rufous Hornero

Firewood-gatherer
Brown Cacholote
Lark-like Brushrunner
Curve-billed Reedhaunter
Wren-like Rushbird (h)
Tufted Tit-Spinetail
Chotoy Spinetail
Sooty-fronted Spinetail
Yellow-chinned Spinetail
Stripe-crowned Spinetail
Short-billed Canastero
Little Thornbird
Freckle-breasted Thornbird
Warbling Doradito
Small-billed Elaenia
Sooty Tyrannulet
White-crested Tyrannulet
Southern Scrub-Flycatcher
White Monjita
Streaked Flycatcher
Great Kiskadee
Crowned Slaty Flycatcher
Tropical Kingbird
Fork-tailed Flycatcher
Many-colored Rush Tyrant
Vermilion Flycatcher
Spectacled Tyrant
Suiriri Flycatcher
Yellow-browed Tyrant
Black-backed Water-Tyrant
Cattle Tyrant
White-naped Xenopsaris
White-tipped Plantcutter
Barn Swallow
Gray-breasted Martin
Brown-chested Martin
House Wren
Masked Gnatcatcher
Chalk-browed Mockingbird
Yellowish Pipit (h)
Rufous-browed Peppershrike
Masked Yellowthroat
Golden-billed Saltator
Grayish Saltator
Red-crested Cardinal
Double-collared Seedeater
Saffron Finch
Grassland Yellow-Finch

Rufous-collared Sparrow
 Black-capped Warbling-Finch
 Black-and-rufous Warbling-Finch
 Great Pampa-Finch
 White-browed Blackbird
 Unicolored Blackbird
 Yellow-winged Blackbird
 Chestnut-capped Blackbird
 Brown-and-yellow Marshbird
 Shiny Cowbird
 Screaming Cowbird
 Bay-winged Cowbird
 Hooded Siskin
 House Sparrow

M Puerto Madryn, Argentina
F East Falkland
A Pelagic Atlantic/Cape Horn
P Pelagic Pacific/Chilean Fiords
U Ushuaia area, Argentina
R Punta Arenas, Chile
C La Campana NP & Concon area & Santiago city
Y Embalse El Yeso, Chile

 M..... Elegant Crested-Tinamou
U.C. Black-necked Swan
 .F..U... Upland Goose
 .F..U... Kelp Goose
 .F..... Falkland Steamer-Duck
 M...U... Flying Steamer-Duck
U... Flightless Steamer-Duck
U... Crested Duck
 M..... Red Shoveler
 M.....C. Yellow-billed Pintail
CY Yellow-billed Teal (split from Speckled Teal)
U... Rosy-billed Pochard
 M..... Lake Duck
C. California Quail
C. Great Grebe
 M..... Silvery Grebe
 M..... Chilean Flamingo
 .F..... King Penguin
 .F..... Gentoo Penguin
C. Humboldt Penguin
 .FAP.... Magellanic Penguin
 ...P.... Gray-headed Albatross
 .FAPU... Black-browed Albatross
 ..AP.... Royal Albatross
 ..AP.... Wandering Albatross

..AP....	Southern Giant-Petrel
..AP....	Northern Giant-Petrel
..A.....	Soft-plumaged Petrel
...P....	Blue Petrel
..A.....	Fairy Prion
...P....	Slender-billed Prion
..A.....	White-chinned Petrel
...P....	Pink-footed Shearwater
..A.....	Great Shearwater
.FAPUR..	Sooty Shearwater
..AP....	Wilson's Storm-Petrel
..A.....	Common Diving-Petrel
...P....	Magellanic Diving-Petrel
.....C.	Peruvian Booby
M.....C.	Neotropic Cormorant
.....R..	Magellan Cormorant
.F..U...	Imperial Cormorant
.....C.	Peruvian Pelican
.....C.	Great Egret
.....C.	Cattle Egret
.F.....	Black-crowned Night-Heron
M.....	White-faced Ibis
M.....	Black-faced Ibis
.....R..	Black Vulture
.F..UR..	Turkey Vulture
....U..Y	Andean Condor
M.....	White-tailed Kite
.....R..	Roadside Hawk
.F....CY	Variable Hawk (Red-backed Hawk)
M...UR..	Southern Caracara (Crested Caracara)
M...URCY	Chimango Caracara
.....CY	American Kestrel
M.....	Common Gallinule
M.....	White-winged Coot
....U...	Snowy Sheathbill
.....C.	American Golden-Plover
.....Y	Diademed Sandpiper-Plover
.....C.	American Oystercatcher
....U...	Magellanic Oystercatcher
M.....C.	Black-necked Stilt (White-backed Stilt)
.....C.	Whimbrel
.F.....	Sanderling
.....Y	Gray-breasted Seedsnipe
M...U...	Brown-hooded Gull
....U...	Dolphin Gull
.....C.	Gray Gull
.....R..	Franklin's Gull
MFAPURC.	Kelp Gull
M.....	Yellow-billed Tern (Cayenne Tern)
.....C.	Inca Tern

M.AP....	South American Tern
.....C.	Black Skimmer
M.AP....	Chilean Skua
..AP....	Brown Skua (Antarctic Skua)
M.....CY	Eared Dove
.....C.	Picui Ground-Dove
.....Y	Black-winged Ground-Dove
....U...	Austral Parakeet
.....C.	Monk Parakeet
.....Y	White-sided Hillstar
.....C.	Giant Hummingbird
.....C.	Striped Woodpecker
.....C.	Chilean Flicker
.....Y	Rufous-banded Miner
.....Y	Crag Chilia
.....Y	Cream-winged Cinclodes (Bar-winged)
....U...	Dark-bellied Cinclodes
.....C.	Seaside Cinclodes
....URC.	Thorn-tailed Rayadito
.....Y	Plain-mantled Tit-Spinetail
.....Y	Cordilleran Canastero
.....C.	Dusky-tailed Canastero
.....R..	White-throated Treerunner
.....C.	Moustached Turca
.....H.	White-throated Tapaculo
.....Y	Dusky Tapaculo
....U.C.	Tufted Tit-Tyrant
....RCY	White-crested Elaenia
M.....	White-winged Black-Tyrant
.....C.	Fire-eyed Diucon
M.....	Rusty-backed Monjita
M.....	Austral Negrito
.....	Cinereous Ground-Tyrant
.....Y	Ochre-naped Ground-Tyrant
.F.....	Dark-faced Ground-Tyrant
.....Y	White-browed Ground-Tyrant
M.....	Chocolate-vented Tyrant
.....C.	Rufous-tailed Plantcutter
.....Y	Blue-and-white Swallow
M...URC.	Chilean Swallow
M.....	Barn Swallow
M.....	Southern Martin
....U.CY	House Wren
.F....CY	Austral Thrush
M.....	Patagonian Mockingbird
.....CY	Chilean Mockingbird
.F.....	Correndera Pipit
.....CY	Gray-hooded Sierra-Finch
....UR..	Patagonian Sierra-Finch
.....Y	Plumbeous Sierra-Finch

M.....C.	Common Diuca-Finch
.F.....	White-bridled Finch
.....Y	Greater Yellow-Finch
MF..URCY	Rufous-collared Sparrow
M.....C.	Long-tailed Meadowlark
.....C.	Austral Blackbird
M.....	Unicolored Blackbird
M.....C.	Yellow-winged Blackbird
.....Y	Yellow-rumped Siskin
.....RC.	Black-chinned Siskin
MF..URCY	House Sparrow