



## Patagonia Birds and Wildlife with Canadian Geographic Trip Report (2024)

[Link: Patagonia Birds and Wildlife with Canadian Geographic Trip Report \(2024\)](#)

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We had a successful trip to Patagonia with 4 participants and 1 Canadian Geographic ambassador. Weather was mostly cooperative other than the high winds this region is famous for. We saw/heard 3 species of Penguins, 4 Puma, and 106 species of birds (Including the penguins). **Day 1:** Our trip started in Ushuaia, Argentina located on Tierra del Fuego and the southernmost city in the world. After a splendid dinner at Casa Garibaldi we hit the hay in preparation for the following day of birding. **Day 2:** We awoke to high winds which meant our boat ride out to the penguin colony at Isla Martello was canceled for the morning. The wind looked to be improving in the afternoon and so we made plans to change our boat ride to after lunch. With a few hours to spare we headed to the local lagoon and spent a few hours photographing Dolphin Gulls, Flightless Steamer Ducks, and Blackish Oystercatcher's. We were lucky to have two White-throated Caracara fly overhead, a relatively cryptic denizen of the mountains.



*Blackish Oystercatcher © Kaiden Bosch*

After lunch the boat ride was a breeze and we piled on to a large catamaran to head west down the Beagle Canal. At our first stop, Faro Les Éclaireurs (a lighthouse), we had great views of South American Sea Lions and a host of Snowy Sheathbills picking through the excrement of the haul-out. Thousands of Imperial Cormorants nest here as well as a few pairs of Kelp Goose. A pair of Blackish Cinclodes made a guest appearance and landed on the vessel itself to pick dead bugs from the windows in front of the bridge. Heading back into the channel we had an assortment of Black-browed Albatross, Southern Giant Petrel, Southern Fulmar and surprisingly even a lonely Blue Petrel!. Once at the Penguin colony we had great looks at both Magellanic and the northern subspecies of Gentoo penguins, the latter being quite active in procuring materials for their nests. This is one of the few places in the world where you can see Gentoo Penguins without travelling by ship to one of their many colonies in the remote southern ocean. Fittingly after a day on the sea we enjoyed a dinner at a local seafood restaurant.



*Blackish Cinclodes* © Kaiden Bosch



*Gentoo Penguin* © Jenny Wong

**Day 3:** The next day we set out to cross the border into Chile, along the way we stopped at the high mountain pass, Paso Garibaldi where we had our first Andean Condors of the trip as well as a Patagonian Sierra Finch. After loading up on Empanadas we visited the Rio Grande interpretive centre for a short lunch and managed to see many Boreal Migrants out on the beach including hundreds of Hudsonian Godwits, White-rumped Sandpipers and a few Red Knots. All on their winter

vacation, recently returned from a summer of breeding in the high arctic. Another unexpected yet welcome boreal migrant we saw was a lone Franklins Gull mixed in with Brown-hooded and Kelp Gulls. After lunch we took off for the border and unfortunately ran into a slight hiccup which meant it took a few extra hours to cross into Chile. Eventually we got there though not with enough time to make it to the local King Penguin colony before it closed. We did however manage to see the King Penguins from the road through the scope. Back on the road we headed to El Sombrero for the night stopping to scan a few ponds where we acquired the first Bairds Sandpiper of the trip.



*Aplomado Falcon © Kaiden Bosch*

**Day 4:** The following morning we headed to the ferry across the straight of Magellan. With only a 30 minute crossing we spent the time looking for birds of course and managed to see a Magellanic Diving Petrel as well as a few Commerson's Dolphins whose attire makes them look like a miniature Orca. After the ferry we made many stops in the Patagonian Steppe utilizing the low wind conditions of the morning. Scale Throated Earthcreeper, Gray-hooded Sierra Finch, and Buff-winged Cinclodes were some of the new birds for the trip we saw at our first stop. By some stroke of luck a Big Hairy Armadillo Crossed the road while we were looking at birds and we managed to view it amidst a dense Calafate bush. Afterwards we carried on, getting looks at Lesser Rhea, White-bridled Finch, Chocolate-vented Ground Tyrant, and plenty of Gaunacos. At one point a family of Elegant-crested Tinamous crossed the road in front of us and we got out for a closer look. The Tinamous were gone by the time we got out of the vehicle but a pair of Aplomado Falcons put on a good show overhead. A quick lunch break in the fierce winds that had developed through the morning allowed for some good looks at Common Miner and South American Grey Fox. The rest of the day was mostly spent driving though we did stop at one point to view some Tawny-throated Dotterel running around in the steppe. Once we arrived in Puerto Natales we walked along the seashore before dinner and got our first Dark-bellied Cinclodes.



*Birding the Pampas © Kaiden Bosch*

**Day 5:** The following morning we set out on another catamaran for a trip up the Chilean Fjords to see the Serrano and Balmaceda Glaciers. It was wet and windy but we did see lots of condors as well as more cormorant colonies, a Black-chested Buzzard Eagle and some Blue and White Swallows. The hike to the glacier Serrano was very wet and windy so birding was difficult but many blooming chilean fire bush's provided colour to the scene. On our way back we stopped at Estancia Perales for lunch where we got our only Ruddy-headed Goose and Ringed Kingfisher of the trip.



*Serrano Glacier © Kaiden Bosch*

**Day 6:** The next day we drove into the world famous Torres Del Paine national park and though it was windy we had lots of sunshine. Laguna Azul hosted a variety of waterbirds such as Silvery Grebe who allowed us great looks. A pair of Rufous-tailed Plant Cutters at the campground were another highlight. After lunch we headed to a known Lesser Horned Owl roost but proved unsuccessful in locating them. As we made our way to the hotel we stopped at a few more sites but the relentless wind made birding difficult. We did manage to see Cinnamon-bellied Ground Tyrant however which was a new addition for the trip. At the famous Laguna Juncillo high winds kept a lot of the birds down but we did get good looks at White-tufted Grebe and an Austral Rail vocalized while remaining hidden in the reeds despite our best efforts to see it. That night we checked into Hosteria Pehoe and got a good nights rest for the following early start of Puma tracking.



*Rufous-tailed Plantcutter © Kaiden Bosch*



*Crested Caracara © Kaiden Bosch*

**Day 7:** We met our Puma Guides at 6am at Laguna Largo and while looking for Pumas we spotted a Short-eared Owl perched atop a Calafate bush. We didn't need to wait long to see a puma! A well known female called Rupestra was sighted by one of our scouts and we got there in time to watch her slink through the grass along a small lake. Things were going well and we headed over to where the guides knew she had her kittens. While watching the edge of a patch of trees for the kittens, Rupestra came over the ridge behind us and nonchalantly strolled in front of the van and through the marsh to her kittens calling all the while. We spent over an hour hoping for another glimpse but did not see her again. At that point we decided to leave the puma guides there and try to squeeze in a quick hike to the nearby cave paintings. Although we were on a time crunch we did see White-throated Caracara, Long-tailed Meadowlark, and Sharp-billed Canastero. The cave paintings were from 6500 years ago and due to the hustle of all participants we managed to make it there and back in time for lunch.



*Cave © Kaiden Bosch*

When we passed the puma guides they showed us photos of the kittens who had come out into the open after we left. WE quickly ate lunch and then headed back to the kittens. After much patience we got excellent views of all 3 kittens playing out in the open and had a lot of laughs at a strange mans tall tales who was also photographing the puma. Satisfied with the day of pumas we headed home for dinner, stopping for Great Grebe and Spectacled Duck along the way.



*Puma © Kaiden Bosch*



*Puma kittens © Kaiden Bosch*



*Our group with Puma guides*

**Day 8:** The following day, our last full day in the park, we hiked and birded around Lago Grey. Our puma guides had told us about an Austral Pygmy Owl nest in the area and after much searching we managed to locate it and view the adults. Many Austral Parakeets were also in the area, entertaining us while we waited for the pygmy owl to visit the nest. We hiked along the lakeshore looking for forest birds but once again highlands provided us with some difficulty, we did see Austral Blackbird,

Thorn-tailed Rayadito, and Patagonian Sierra Finch however. After lunch we birded more but the real highlight was the scenery and exercise.



*Hosteria Pehoe © Kaiden Bosch*

**Day 9:** The next morning we said goodbye to Torres Del Paine and spent another day on the road. Many Rhea, some foxes, and a Variable Hawk provided some action as we crossed the border back into Argentina and drove to El Calafate. **Day 10:** The last full day of the trip had arrived so we got up early to make the most of it and birded Laguna Nimez, an absolute gem of a reserve. Because it didn't open until 9:30am we had to "sneak in" the unlocked gate. Many new birds of the trip materialized for us including Patagonian Mockingbird, Tufted Tit Tyrant, Wren-like Rushbird, and many Spectacled Tyrant. From the viewing platform we managed very distant views of Chilean Flamingos before we had to get back to our for our trip to Perito Moreno Glacier. Arriving at Perito Moreno we had lunch and then headed out to view this particular corner of the Southern Patagonian Ice Field, the third largest reserve of freshwater in the world after Antarctica and Greenland. We saw multiple small calving events amidst the epic backdrop. Birds were few and far between but an enraged Black-chested Buzzard Eagle chasing a Crested Caracara provided entertainment for the group. After Perito Moreno we headed back for our last supper in El Calafate where the trip ended.



*Perito Moreno © Kaiden Bosch*



*Group photo at Perito Moreno © Kaiden Bosch*