

Falkland Islands

Wednesday 7 – Wednesday 21 January 2009

Principal leader: Tim Earl
Local support: Tour: Arlette Bloomefield
Darwin: Ken Greenland
Pebble Island: Allan White
Carcass Island: Rob McGill
Sea Lion Island: Jenny Luxton.

Highlights

- 1 The King Penguin colony at Volunteer Point. We saw birds incubating eggs, feeding small and larger chicks, youngsters in 'buzby' plumage, moulting adults and 'sky-pointing' songsters.
- 2 Peale's Dolphins leaping around the boat when we did the Kidney Island trip.
- 3 Rockhopper ledge on Sea Lion Island where the birds came ashore in ferocious waves, once with a Sea Lion in the water chasing them.
- 4 Vast numbers of Sooty Shearwaters in rafts waiting for nightfall when they would return to nests in Kidney Islands's tussock.
- 5 The albatross and penguin colony on West Point: we saw the birds in brilliant conditions as they flew or hopped to their nests.
- 6 The trust shown to those sitting close to the 'penguin parade' on Sea Lion as Gentoos trooped past in a great line stretching from the sea to their colonies.
- 7 My reaction when a Wandering Albatross appeared among the scores of Black-browed attracted to our 'chum' slick.
- 8 Close proximity to all species of penguin which produced some brilliant pictures, film and images.
- 9 Visiting the war memorials and sites from the 1982 Occupation especially the account given by Alan White of how HMS Coventry came to be sunk.

Bird of the trip was King Penguin closely followed by Black-browed Albatross. Wandering Albatross and Rockhopper Penguin came third, equally, with Black-crowned Night Heron, Sedge Wren, South American Snipe, Blackish Cinclodes (Tussockbird), Snowy Sheathbill and Long-tailed Meadowlark as close contenders.

Mammal of the trip was Southern Sea Lion followed by Peale's Dolphin and Commerson's Dolphin.

Daily Diary

Wednesday 7 January

Brize Norton to Ascension Island

Cold, sleet, raw 0°C.

We met at Brize Norton for the rather novel experience of starting a holiday from an RAF base. Take off was slightly delayed but otherwise the flight was uneventful. We arrived at Ascension at 8am.

Thursday 8 January

Ascension Island to Mount Pleasant Airport and Darwin settlement, Falkland Islands

Ascension: warm, sunny, a few clouds 22°C; Falklands: showers, light wind, 10°C.

Our 90 minutes on Ascension Island was well spent with souvenirs, refreshments, ablutions and a bit of bird-watching to entertain us. This produced distant views of many Sooty Terns and quite a few Ascension Frigatebirds, three of which made closer passes. Common Myna was also seen by most.

We boarded the aircraft at 9.30am after getting Ascension arrival stamps in our passports. Procedures seemed protracted but we finally took off at 10.05am.

We arrived at Mount Pleasant Airport on time at 3pm after enjoying a Tornado escort for 20 minutes as we started to descend – a real treat, Boys Own stuff one might say.

Ken and Bonnie Greenland met us at the airport along with Caroline... who drove the luggage vehicle and Arlette Bloomfield from Stanley Services. Our drive to Darwin Lodge was punctuated by birds: Upland Geese, Falklands Pipits, Long-tailed Meadowlarks among them.

We set off for a much-needed walk at 6pm recording many species of birds and a few plants, European Hares and stunning views in the pristine-clear air. (I will not mention the species here in fear of spoiling the surprise for those who read and follow. Enough to say that most of us were excited and somewhat 'punch drunk' by the variety and excellent views.) A delicious supper was followed by call-over and an early night.

Friday 9 January

San Carlos and the Battle for Goose Green

Sunny, light cloud, wind rising to 25kn, 15°C.

We awoke to a brilliant morning with the mountain chain of East Falkland standing purple under a white cloud. Our day was spent increasing knowledge of Falklands' wildlife, getting to know the stunning scenery and retracing the Battle of Goose Green.

We drove in two vehicles to San Carlos after breakfast making frequent stops to study birds such as Falklands Pipit, Variable Red-backed Hawk and various species of ducks. We watched Two-banded Plovers, Turkey Vultures and had glimpses of Dark-faced Ground Tyrant and White-bridles (Black-throated) Finch.

Stops were also made at the official Argentinean War Cemetery, where two Tornado jets did a low-level fly-past, and on top of the ridge overlooking San Carlos where a Hercules aircraft circled below us before flying up a long valley completely out of sight. We visited the British War Cemetery at San Carlos, a quiet and moving moment in an otherwise exciting morning.

Ken Greenland took us over the ground of the Battle for Goose Green in a fascinating tour after lunch at the lodge. We relived the major components of the battle on the ground, ending at the spot where Colonel H. Jones VC, OBE, fell mortally wounded.

We were dropped at Goose Green and took almost two hours to walk back to the lodge adding Black-crowned Night Heron and South American Tern to our list. Falklands Flightless Steamer Ducks were close enough for us to see the stubby vestigial wings and both species of oystercatcher were also seen.

A young Variable Hawk was found on a low cliff-top we walked along and as we watched it, the bird's mother flew past us and perched close by to protect her offspring. After taking a few pictures we left her in peace only to be followed by her as she made sure we left the area. There was time for a shower, cup of tea and rest before the call-over and another wonderful dinner.

Saturday 10 January

To Carcass Island and tussock grass

Darwin: rain clearing 25k wind; Carcass: overcast, wind 30kn, 13°C

The day dawned wet after a windy night but it looked clear for our 11am flights to Carcass Island. Fog in Carcass delayed us until 12.45pm cutting our planned luncheon in the tussock stands. However, we eventually arrived, met Rob McGill who had pre-ordered sandwiches ready for us and set off for the sheltered northwest point.

We had seen many Elephant Seals on the beaches as we flew in so finding some was easy and no surprise. Tame Tussockbirds (Blackish Cinclodes) were a surprise, however, and also the South American Snipe which refused to fly away when we disturbed it. Striated Caracaras were present and tame, although not as inquisitive as on the other visits, leaving us to eat our late lunches in peace.

Magellanic Penguins were plentiful, many with well-grown chicks peering at us from their burrows. We walked along the beach after lunch spotting timid White-rumped sandpipers and a Cobb's Wren which was unbothered by us.

Several Elephant Seals lifted their heads as we passed but most continued sleeping, never noticing us. White-bridled Finches were in the tussock at the point while Magellanic Penguins were hiking too and from the distant sea – the very low tide was right out.

Sitting on rocks, we could see Black-browed Albatrosses beyond the kelp beds and a huge flock of King Cormorants (Blue-eyed Shags) which were hunting communally in the kelp. Many albatrosses were passing with a few Sooty Shearwaters and a Common Diving Petrel for company.

The three hours which passed flew by and we seemed to return to our Land Rover in no time. I drove us all back to the airstrip, over the island's high neck and down to the lodge where tea and cakes were waiting for us in the warm dining room. Dinner was followed by a walk to the jetty and back on which we saw South American Snipe, Black-crowned Night Herons, Giant Petrels and a flock of Kelp Geese while being surrounded by Magellanic 'Jackass' Penguins.

Venus was extremely bright before it set and Orion was seen faintly as we retired for the night.

Sunday 11 January

West Point Island, albatrosses and Rockies

Sunny all day, NW wind 15-20k, 13°C.

We awoke to a brilliantly sunny day – the Falklands at their best. Michael Clark had slept on Condor overnight and we were away by 9.45am complete with packed lunches. Three Commerson's Dolphins joined us as we passed Carcass Reef and stayed with the boat for about 40 minutes. A few black-browed Albatrosses were seen close to the boat as we approached West Point but otherwise the crossing was uneventful.

Jenette Clark had a 'smoko' waiting for us – tea and cakes – after which I drove us the 1.5 miles to the albatross colony. It was an instant hit with enough wind for the birds to be steaming in to join their mates. There was much tail-spreading and bill-clapping in greeting.

Rockhopper Penguins were coming ashore way below us where waves were pounding. We were amazed that they could emerge without getting smashed up. After a bathe the birds hopped up the cliff, disappearing in tall tussock to emerge on a path near our position. They looked so smart as they hopped and waddled towards us.

There were many young Rockies forming crèches among the albatrosses' cup-shaped mud nests, a few of which held grey albatross chicks. We watched the activity for two hours and then had to rush for the boat which was in danger of grounding on the falling spring tide.

Heading north we slipped past West Point and Gibraltar Rock to watch Slender-billed and Dove Prions whizzing past us in the tide-race. It was exciting but a little uncomfortable so we headed back to Carcass Island seeing a couple of Common Diving Petrels on the way.

The tide was so low that Condor had to be beached and we were then taken ashore by dinghy for a wet landing. Several Speckled Teal and a Yellow-billed Pintail were seen feeding at the water's edge. There were many huge mussels on the beach – they looked great ingredients for a feed. Our call-over was followed by a delicious dinner of Carcass Island lamb.

Monday 12 January

Northwest end of Carcass, Dirty Ditch Bay

Sunny, very little cloud, cool NW breeze, 15°C in tussock.

The day dawned beautiful – apart from a nip in the breeze and a little mist later, we enjoyed a fine Falklands day.

Some people had a walk before breakfast enjoying watching birds with which we were now familiar.

I drove us all out to the north west side of the island where we parked the Land Rover at Dirty Ditch Bay and set off to follow the coast in a search for Peale's Dolphins and White-rumped Sandpipers. The tide was high and so were our hopes.

The first bay we watched drew a blank but we were fascinated by two young Elephant Seals which were fighting in the waves. They smashed into each other repeatedly in preparation for the time they will be beachmasters controlling a harem. A Sea Lion came into the bay hunting penguins but was seen off by the Elephant Seals.

We continued slowly over the headland which was home to a colony of Kelp Gulls and watched helplessly as it was raided by a Striated Caracara which took a chick away to feed its own youngsters.

Dolphin Gulls had joined several Kelp Gulls feeding on insects and grubs washed out of piles of kelp on the high-tide line. The moon was full and big spring tides were swamping the Elephant Seals' daytime slumber pads. Many were in the water and the beach had something of the atmosphere of an English seaside resort in summer. We half expected a bull Elephant Seal to pop up with a kiss-me-quick hat on.

Approaching Large Pond we disturbed the first of several pairs of nesting Brown Skuas encountered during the day. Those with eggs dive-bombed us but strangely once they hatched the parents stayed close to their young. Pat declared that there was a wader on the edge of Big Pond at our feet. Expecting White-rumped Sandpiper I jumped out of my skin to see a Lesser Yellowlegs – a rare bird in these parts.

As we reached the beach I spotted a pod of Peale's Dolphins close inshore. We estimated between eight and 10 in the group. White-rumped Sandpipers were also found busily feeding on the beach as the tide dropped.

Leaving the group in a tussock stand I returned to get the 'Rover' which had our lunches on board. In my absence the group watched several Black-crowned Night Herons which came onto the beach as the tide dropped. A pair of Striated Caracaras turned up as we ate our sandwiches and played tug-of-war as they attempted to steal my scarf.

A commotion was caused by two Brown Skuas hard on the tail of a male Peregrine which they saw off with great vigour. The Lesser Yellowlegs was seen briefly also. A couple of hours were enjoyed after lunch as we continued around the coast. Chiloe Wigeon and five ducklings were found on a small pond and the appearance of several Turkey Vultures was intriguing. We found a dead Magellanic Penguin which had attracted the birds.

The group split with five walking back to the settlement while I drove the others back. We all met at about 5pm for afternoon tea and cakes, happy with the day's activities and flight schedules for the morning which should get us to Pebble Island in time for a trip to Tamar Point.

Tuesday 13 February

Stuck on Carcass Island; Leopard Beach

Fog all day, northerly breeze 10kn 11°C.

A rather futile morning was enlivened by the arrival of 179 people off a visiting cruise ship. As we sat waiting for news of our flights to Pebble Island they filed past, many believing we were ‘family’ living on the island. I even had a conversation about sheep cysts (about which I know nothing) with a shepherd from the Hebrides!

The news was not good and at noon the flights were cancelled. We made the most of our opportunity and hiked the 2.6 miles to Leopard Beach after lunch. Sadly, one of the best aspects of this walk was denied us – we could not enjoy the normally wonderful views. Gentoo Penguins were marching up a well trodden track to their (invisible) colony high up the hillside, giving us a great opportunity for pictures.

We continued around to Leopard Beach watching many by now familiar birds including Sedge Wrens and a few brilliantly marked Long-tailed Meadowlarks. Throughout the walk we played ‘Name that Tune’ with the songs and calls of various birds including South American Snipe, Upland Goose, Blackish Cinclodes, Steamerducks and both species of oystercatcher.

Leopard Beach was beautiful, even in the fog, and we spent some time watching Magellanic and Gentoo Penguins come ashore and examined the various shells lying around.

The mist cleared sufficiently for us to spot a small new Gentoo colony which contained about 75 adults and at least five well-grown chicks. It was surrounded by about 10 Brown Skuas sitting waiting for adult penguins to return at which time food for the young might be spilled. The walk was longer than expected and there were several tired pairs of legs.

Some of us took a short cut along the beach where a small Sea Lion was sleeping on the upper tide line. Sadly it was badly oiled and, I suspect, moribund.

A few glasses of wine were enjoyed with our meal and we retired hoping for two holes in the fog tomorrow – one to get us out of Carcass Island, the other to let us in to Pebble.

Wednesday 14 January

Pebble at last: Bett’s Pond and Tamar Point

Thick, wet fog clearing to sunny spells. N wind 25-30kn 14°C.

A wonderful afternoon was spent exploring the eastern end of Pebble Island – wildfowl and penguins were seen in numbers.

Each of us had put on a brave face when we saw the thick wet fog in early morning. But it cleared and by midday we had been picked up, arriving at Pebble by 12.30pm. A quick sort out was followed by the afternoon’s activity starting with a drive along a seemingly deserted Elephant (four-mile) Beach.

There at the western end were five King Penguins, admittedly looking a bit glum as they were in the process of moulting some 20,000 feathers each – a rather itchy process. A small flock of waders at the other end of the beach had juvenile Two-banded Plovers and about five White-rumped Sandpipers.

Cutting across the island we discovered seven Black-necked Swans (one pair had four cygnets), lots of Silver Teals, Yellow-billed Pintails and Silvery Grebes on Bett’s Pond. A White-tufted Grebe had been spotted nearby.

A late lunch at the end of Ship Harbour Inlet was followed by a long stop at Tamar Point where a huge mixed colony of Rockhopper Penguins and Imperial Cormorants (Blue-eyed Shags) was studied closely.

All was highly organised with small crèches of penguin chicks among the mud egg-cup shaped nests of cormorants. Organised that is until a fleece-blind (someone had pulled the wool over its eyes) sheep panicked and ran amuck through the colony.

Peace was restored and we were able to look down from the colony's cliff-top position onto rocks washed by great rollers. Through this boiling maelstrom Rockhopper Penguins emerged, scrambling through kelp and crashing waves to then climb the cliff hopping from rock to boulder.

Some came along a path leading to the colony and we were able to sit a few feet away and watch them pass. The colony was like a mini-city, full of noise, excitement and activity. There was a squadron of birds overhead – Kelp and Dolphin Gulls looking for dropped food, sinister Brown Skuas hanging on the wind waiting for an opportunity to snatch a penguin or cormorant chick, Giant Petrels hoping for a carcass to plunder and a pair of Red-backed Hawks also with an eye on the main chance.

We moved on to a nearby Gento colony where we enjoyed the luxury of a close encounter with wildlife and a cuppa. Gentoos are brilliant birds – comical when they return from the sea and are chased at speed around the colony by hungry chicks; endearing as the males 'sky-point' and bellow their love-songs; confiding when they quietly and slowly make their way towards observers sitting patiently in the diddle-dee.

Our delayed visit ended at Cape Tamar where a lone Sea Lion was hauled out on a rock way below us. Allan had heard a Crested Caracara and between us we soon had reasonable views of this elusive bird throwing its head back between its shoulder-blades as it call from a cliff-top rock.

Jacque delayed dinner for us but it was still a shock to realise that we had been out for six hours.... and were late.

Later still after enjoying the Falkland's sport of 'bogging' on the way back. The northerly winds had piled sand on the track and one of the vehicles became bogged. The sport comes when the driver has to leap on the bonnet for a commemorative photo... Oh! the shame of it! (Note to participants: a careless mention of the event by Allan to Jacque on the radio meant that the whole of the Falklands knew and was talking about it the following week.) Successfully pulled out, we returned for a delicious meal and an early night.

Thursday 15 January

HMS Coventry, Sea Lion Island and another five in a day

Sunny becoming overcast with rain by nightfall. 25k 13°C.

Seeing five species of penguin in a day was the last thing I expected on Sea Lion Island where Macaroni Penguin has not been recorded since the 1980's. But we did!

The day started on Pebble with an early breakfast and a trip to the HMS Coventry memorial. There Allan told us about the dreadful events which led to the sinking of HMS Coventry and the Atlantic Conveyor on 25 May, 1982 – Argentina's national day.

We flew to Sea Lion Island in two aircraft – the group was reunited at 3pm. By then the first arrivals had been out to Cow Point seeing three Queen of the Falklands Fritillaries – a rare butterfly.

Our five penguin species got off to an easy start – there were thousands of Gentoos visible from the lodge sitting room. Magellanic Penguins could also be seen standing outside their burrows.

Our hostess Jenny Luxton drove us around the island stopping firstly at the Sea Lion colony at East Loafers. Here at least 10 huge bull Sea Lions were herding their harems of females with a few black pups visible too.

We drove on to the Rockhopper Penguin colony at the HMS Sheffield memorial (a steel cross). Here we saw large numbers of penguins attempting to come ashore up a steep rock ramp washed by great waves. They approached like schools of black fish only to be thrown around and washed out to sea again by the swells.

Some did make it, however, only to face a 100ft climb to their nesting colonies. It was while watching the birds come up towards us that I noticed a bigger penguin with strange yellow 'ears' rather than eye-stripes. It was an immature Magellanic Penguin and I made haste to ensure that we all had a good look at it (including Jenny who had never seen one on Sea Lion Island).

Not realising that we were tantalisingly close to the magic ‘five in a day’ we returned to the lodge via Long Pond where we saw a Silvery Grebe chick sitting on one parent’s back while being fed by the other. Silver Teal and Chiloe Wigeon were seen on the pond too while several South American Snipe were flushed from the bank-side grass.

Arriving at the lodge I remembered that Jenny had said that a King Penguin had been seen east of Cow Point. It was still there and we immediately celebrated achieving a new record for a Travelling Naturalist / Limosa visit to Sea Lion Island.

Some of us popped across to Elephant Corner where, in addition to 30 Elephant Seals a big bull Sea Lion was mating a female, the first time I had seen lions on this beach.

There was no sign of Orcas and we returned for dinner, popping out again after dinner to see the ‘penguin parade’. Hundreds if not thousands of birds were coming out of the sea for the night and marching in a column to their various colonies. It was an amazing sight and we watched in awe as they filed past.

An unsuccessful search for Short-eared Owl ended the day’s activities and we retired to bed resolving to rise at 6am for an Orca vigil at Elephant Corner.

Friday 16 January

Sea Lion Island explored

Sunny with heavy showers, increasing gale in the afternoon – 50k westerly 30°C.

We were already watching birds – thousands of Gentoo Penguins – over an early-morning cuppa. Overnight rain clouds cleared, although the wind was strong and we settled down at Elephant Corner to look for Orcas, without luck.

There was plenty to see, however, as large Elephant Seals slugged out their trials of strength, Magellanic Penguins sang loudly (out of tune) and scores of Black-browed Albatrosses performed their aerial ballets out at sea. A few Sooty Shearwaters were seen way out with South American Terns over the kelp.

Last evening’s Sea Lions were still on the beach but snoozing and there was great rivalry between the Steamerducks. A pair of Striated Caracaras took it in turns to visit their nest and feed two well-grown chicks.

We returned for breakfast at 7.45am. People wanting to walk for the day plus those who wanted the ride were driven out to the Rockhopper Penguin and King Cormorant colonies.

At the latter we found a group of more than 60 Snowy Sheathbills – Antarctica’s only nesting land-bird. The whole population migrate to the Falklands and other islands for the Austral winter but the adults return the following summer. They leave their offspring behind and it was these non-breeding birds we saw.

They were confiding and inquisitive coming up to inspect us (maybe they thought we were a meal...). This gave an opportunity to examine their waxy bill-coverings which protect the birds from the filth they feed among.

At this point we split up for the day, meeting again at 5.30pm to drive down to the penguin parade. This was necessary as the wind was so strong and sand and grit was blowing all over the place. Viewing from a Land Rover was our only option.

Once again we marvelled at the scene and the enormous efforts the Gentoos had to put into coming ashore and marching to their colonies.

The evening call-over gave an opportunity for stories about the day’s adventures – Silver Grebes and ducks on Long Pond; a female Peregrine which swooped around in the wind but did not fly off; loads of South American Snipe which ‘had to be stepped over’; drumming Snipe as we left Elephant Corner before breakfast; White-rumped Sandpipers on Long Pond...and the failure to find a roosting Short-

eared Owl.

Plans were made for the morning for which the weather forecast remained windy with showers.

Saturday 17 January

Island tour, North East Point

Strong SW wind, sunny 5/10 cloud, 35kn, 12°C.

We started the day as yesterday's finished – in a Land Rover. Our pre-breakfast session was an island tour. The plan to spend an hour watching Sea Lions was amended as the wind was so cold. Little was happening among the lions: two big bulls had left and the tiny black cubs were snuggled up with their mothers, a sensible precaution given the rising tide and huge waves.

We waved goodbye and drove up to Long Pond to investigate White-rumped Sandpipers which had been there yesterday. We eventually found them a mile away, close to the Rockhopper Penguins.

A small offshoot of the Rockhopper colony had been swamped by about 1,000 King Cormorants which were roosting on their former nest-sites. All had moved in since yesterday and it was quite a shock to find them there. A tradition of holding up stones for a Blackish Cinclodes to feed under was maintained. In exchange the Tussockbird showed us its nest.

We looked for yesterday's Peregrine without success but a few obliging Rufous-chested Dotterels were compensation. Karen was the most sharp-eyed among us finding a smart King Penguin in a small Gentoo colony after breakfast. We were heading to the North East Point and the bird was one of many distractions along the way.

Elephant Seals were at the far end of Elephant Beach and we were able to see several white Giant Petrel chicks by looking down into the colony from a nearby sand-dune. The recently refurbished hide was closer but gave no views as sand had drifted in front of it. Continuing to the sheltered north beach we found two Snowy Sheathbills and a tiny 'weaner' Elephant Seal.

Some of the group had taken picnic lunches and they went on with the walk while I returned to the lodge with those who had opted for a cooked lunch.. We all met at the lodge and I drove us to The Landing where the island's stores and fuel are brought ashore. About 15 Elephant Seals were sleeping high above the beach.

Beaver Pond, named after the flying boats which once landed there, was deserted of predicted wildlife and so we returned for a last farewell to the Rockhoppers and King Cormorants. Some of us went looking for Orcas (unsuccessfully) while others returned to the penguin parade after a tea-stop at the lodge.

Six of us went out at 11pm (a little too early as the sky was still bright in the west) to look at stars with good results. Orion, with the Orion Nebula, Rigel and Betelguse, was our first object followed by the Pointers which led our gaze to the Southern Cross, the Jewel Box and Coal Sack next to it. We finished by finding the Large and Small Magellanic Clouds plus the rising orange Moon for good measure. Two satellites were seen during the session.

Sunday 18 January

Sea Lion Island farewells and Stanley boat trip

Overcast with a few bright spots, strong W wind 25kn, 14°C.

With midday flight we spent the morning saying farewell to favourites: Gentoo and King Penguins, Elephant Seals and albatrosses. Butterflies hoped for failed to show in the rather sunless conditions. We

were once again split for lunch. Two people remained on the island for a 1.15pm flight while the rest of us left at 12.15pm.

We went our separate ways once in Stanley – some to the museum, others for shopping – meeting at the boat jetty for our 4pm trip to Kidney Island. It nearly did not happen – I was worried about the wind strength but no rebate would be given for a cancellation so we went. Thank goodness.

The sea was rough but the birds were brilliant. Conditions on the launch John Byron were a little uncomfortable but Skipper Mike Rosser and Stewie, his crewman, did their best to make things comfortable. We went about three miles out and started ‘chumming’ – throwing a mixture of rotten Corn Flakes and cooking oil over the side.

Nothing happened at first but then Black-browed Albatrosses started appearing in droves with lots of Southern Giant Petrels and a few White-chinned Petrels coming in to investigate. It was thrilling but got even better when a Wandering Albatross joined the throng. Wow! The world’s greatest wingspan was cruising around among the (much) smaller Mollymanks.

It was a wonderful session but increasing discomfort made me call it off and we headed for Kidney Island. There we found great rafts of Sooty Shearwaters gathering before using darkness to hide their homecomings in holes deep in the island’s tussock stands. We searched through maybe 15,000 birds but could not find a Great Shearwater.

No matter. Mike took us close to the island’s cliffs where we watched Rockhopper Penguins ascending to a colony on the top...which held a Macaroni Penguin, its golden plumes shining in the early evening sunlight.

With that success we headed around to the (thankfully) sheltered side where South American Terns were feeding and resting... with a Brown-hooded Gull. It flew off as soon as I had spotted it but happily another appeared giving good views of its pink body plumage which gives rise to the Falkland’s name of Pink Gull.

The trip was not without mammals, however. A pod of at least four Peale’s Dolphins entertained us as we were waiting for the chum to work – breaching and turning barrel-rolls into belly-flops, splashing us and generally having a great time. And as we entered Stanley Sound a pod of Commerson’s Dolphins put in a late appearance to our combined delights.

It was one of the best pelagic trips I have done in the Falklands, a wonderful experience.

Monday 19 January

Volunteer Point and the Kings

Overcast and drizzle clearing by 11am to a perfect day, 16°C.

The 700 pairs of King Penguins at Volunteer Point are a true trip highlight – providing everything is perfect... and today it was, sunny with light wind by the time we arrived. The colony was super with at least two chicks in their brown ‘buzby’ coats, birds incubating eggs held between their feet, and tiny heads poking out to be fed. Others were braying the nicest of all the islands’ penguin songs) while more sat moulting forlornly.

The beach was pristine – blue waves turning into white-topped rollers, bright white sand with black dots all over. Those were the Magellanic, Gentoo and King Penguins coming ashore. They were joined by a large raft of Flightless Steamerducks, Oystercatchers and even a Brown-hooded Gull.

At the top of the beach scores of White-rumped Sandpipers were chasing and catching sand-flies. We spent two hours at the point watching the various penguin colonies before setting off back to Stanley.

One stop was made to watch 200 or more gulls and terns which had bathed and were preening on the road. The majority were Kelp Gulls and South American Terns but about five Brown-hooded Gulls were among them.

This report has to end with penguins, however. We have enjoyed seeing one species or another every

day of the tour with five species recorded on two days – a surprise and Travelling Naturalist record for this holiday.

Each species – Rockhopper, Magellanic, Macaroni, Gentoo and King – had its characteristics and fans among group participants.

I enjoyed leading this tour and showing everyone the species they hoped to see. I hope it will not be your last encounter with penguins, surely one of the most charismatic bird species.

ANNOTATED LIST OF SPECIES

ASCENSION ISLAND - BIRDS

FRIGATEBIRDS

- 1 Ascension Island Frigatebird *Fregata aquila*

Fregatidae

Distant views of about 10 from the cage.

GULLS, TERNS, SKIMMERS Laridae

- 2 Sooty Tern *Sterna fuscata*

About 50 on their way to the Ascension Island colony.

STARLINGS

- 3 Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis*

Sternidae

About six in total.

FALKLAND ISLANDS - BIRDS

WILDFOWL

- 1 Black-necked Swan *Cygnus melanocoryphus*
 2 Falkland Steamer Duck *Tachyeres brachypterus*
 3 Upland Goose *Chloephaga picta*
 4 Kelp Goose *Chloephaga hybrida*
 5 Ruddy-headed Goose *Chloephaga rubidiceps*
 6 Crested Duck *Lophonetta specularioides*
 7 Chiloe Wigeon *Anas sibilatrix*
 8 Speckled Teal *Anas flavirostris*
 9 Yellow-billed Pintail *Anas georgica*

Anatidae

Seven with four cygnets on Bett's Pond, Pebble Island.
 Common on the sea around all the islands.
 Common around the islands.
 Common in coastal areas.
 Seen commonly with Upland Geese.
 Common around the islands.
 Fairly common, a few seen each day.
 Common around the islands.
 About 10 birds with five ducklings on Bett's Pond, Pebble Island.

- 10 Silver Teal *Anas versicolor*

A few pairs with ducklings here and there.

PENGUINS

- 11 King Penguin *Aptenodytes patagonicus*
 12 Gentoo Penguin *Pygoscelis papua*
 13 Rockhopper Penguin *Eudyptes chrysocome*
 14 Macaroni Penguin *Eudyptes chrysolophus*

Spheniscidae

The colony at Volunteer Point, which had two furry brown youngsters, was a highlight of the tour; a few birds seen moulting in Gentoo colonies on Pebble.
 Colonies on Pebble and Sea Lion and at Volunteer Point.
 Colonies on Pebble, Sea Lion and Kidney Islands.
 A pair and two singles on Pebble Island, two on Kidney Island.

- 15 Magellanic Penguin *Spheniscus magellanicus*

Common in suitable habitats on all islands.

ALBATROSSES

- 16 Wandering albatross *Diomedea exulans*
 17 Black-browed Albatross *Thalassarche melanophrys*

Diomedidae

One on the pelagic trip out of Stanley, a highlight of the tour.
 Many birds were seen at sea around the islands but the colony of half a million on Steeple Jason was a highlight of the trip.

PETRELS & SHEARWATERS Family Procellariidae

- 18 Southern Giant Petrel *Macronectes giganteus*
 19 Antarctic (Dove) Prion *Pachyptila desolata*
 20 Slender-billed Prion *Pachyptila belcheri*
 21 White-chinned Petrel *Procellaria aequinoctialis*

Common at sea around the islands, colonies on Pebble and Sea Lion.

These two species were seen in large numbers on our trip to West Point.

Five seen on our pelagic trip.

22 Sooty Shearwater *Puffinus griseus*

Many thousands congregating before entering their nest burrows on Kidney island; a few seen at sea from the northern islands.

DIVING PETRELS

23 Common Diving Petrel *Pelecanoides urinatrix*

Pelecanoididae

About 20 on our way to Steeple Jason.

GREBES

24 White-tufted Grebe *Rollandia rolland*
25 Silvery Grebe *Podiceps occipitalis*

Podicipedidae

Just one on Pebble Island.
A few on Pebble and up to 20 plus chicks on Sea Lion.

HERONS, BITTERNES

26 Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*

Ardeidae

Common at most settlements.

CORMORANTS

27 Rock Shag *Leucocarbo magellanicus*
28 Imperial Shag *Leucocarbo atriceps*

Phalacrocoracidae

Seen daily with a few colonies here and there.
Common out at sea with colonies on Pebble and Sea Lion.

NEW WORLD VULTURES

Cathartidae

29 Turkey Vulture *Cathartes aura*

Common on all the islands.

FALCONS, CARACARAS

30 Striated Caracara *Phalcoboenus australis*
31 Southern Crested Caracara *Caracara plancus*
32 Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*

Falconidae

Common on Carcass, Pebble and Sea Lion.
Singles on Pebble and Sea Lion.
Just two sightings on Carcass and Sea Lion.

KITES, HAWKS, EAGLES

33 Variable Hawk *Buteo polyosoma*

Accipitridae

Several seen on the San Carlos trip, a pair on Pebble and one on the Volunteer Point excursion.

SHEATHBILLS & ALLIES

Chionidae

34 Snowy Sheathbill *Chionis albus*

Amazingly, seen only on Sea Lion – 60 at the King Cormorant colony.

OYSTERCATCHERS

35 Magellanic Oystercatcher *Haematopus leucopodus*
36 Blackish Oystercatcher *Haematopus ater*

Haematopidae

Common throughout.
Common on beaches.

PLOVERS

37 Two-banded Plover *Charadrius falklandicus*
38 Rufous-chested Plover *Charadrius modestus*

Charadriidae

Common throughout.
Common on Pebble and Sea Lion islands; a few at Darwin and Volunteer Point.

SANDPIPERS, SNIPES

39 South American Snipe *Gallinago paraguaiiae*
40 Lesser Yellowlegs *Tringa flavipes*
41 White-rumped Sandpiper *Calidris fuscicollis*

Scolopacidae

Common throughout.
One on Big Pond, Carcass.
Common on beaches, a few inland.

GULLS, TERNS, SKIMMERS

Laridae

42 Dolphin Gull *Leucophaeus scoresbii*
43 Kelp Gull *Larus dominicanus*
44 Brown-hooded Gull *Larus maculipennis*
45 South American Tern *Sterna hirundinacea*

A few around seabird colonies.
Common throughout.
Quite common in coastal areas.
Common all around the coasts.

SKUAS

46 Brown (Subantarctic) Skua *Stercorarius antarcticus*

Stercorariidae

Common throughout.

TYRANT FLYCATCHERS

47 Dark-faced Ground Tyrant *Muscisaxicola maclovianus*

Tyrannidae

A few here and there.

OVENBIRDS

48 Blackish Cinclodes *Cinclodes antarcticus*

Furnariidae

Common on rat and cat-free islands: Carcass and Sea Lion.

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WRENS

- 49 Sedge Wren Cistothorus platensis
- 50 Cobb's Wren Troglodytes cobbi

THRUSHES

- 51 Austral Thrush Turdus falcklandii

OLD WORLD SPARROWS Passeridae

- 52 House Sparrow Passer domesticus

WAGTAILS & PIPITS

- 53 Correndera Pipit Anthus correndera

FINCHES

- 54 Black-chinned Siskin Carduelis barbata

NEW WORLD BLACKBIRDS Icteridae

- 55 Long-tailed Meadowlark Sturnella loyca

BUNTINGS & NEW WORLD SPARROWS

- 56 White-bridled Finch Melanodera melanodera

FALKLAND ISLANDS – MAMMALS

RABBITS & HARES

- 1 European Hare Lepus europaeus

CATS

- 2 Wild Cat Felis silvestris

EARED SEALS

- 3 South American Sea-Lion Otaria flavescens

EARLESS SEALS

- 4 Southern Elephant Seal Miroungaleonina

MARINE DOLPHINS

- 5 Peale's Dolphin Lagenorhynchus australis
- 6 Commerson's Dolphin Cephalorhynchus commersonii

FLUTS AND MOTHS

- 1 Queen of the Falklands Yramea cytheris
Fritillary
- 2 Southern Painted Lady Cynthia carye
- 3 Brocade moth Pareuxonia falclandica
- 4 Pug moth Eupithecia anguligera

OTHER TAXA

- 1 Ground beetle Trechisibus antarcticus
- 2 Amphipod sp

Troglodytidae

Common in tussock and marshy areas.
Common on rat and cat-free island beaches: Carcass and Sea Lion.

Turdidae

Common throughout.

A few in Darwin and Port Stanley.

Motacillidae

Common throughout.

Fringillidae

Common throughout.

Common throughout, but absent from Sea Lion Island.

Emberizidae

Common throughout.

Leporidae

A few on East Falkland.

Felidae

Common on Pebble Island.

Otariidae

A few among Elephant Seals here and there. A colony of 10 beachmaster males, several contenders, 20 females and pups on Sea Lion Island.

Phocidae

Many moulting animals on Carcass but fewer than normal on Sea Lion.

Delphinidae

Seen mostly from the boat to West Point but also inshore on Carcass Island.
Seen on the boat trip to West Point and from Sea Lion.

One, possibly two, seen at Cow Point, Sea Lion.

One seen at Cow point, Sea Lion.

Common on heathland throughout the trip.

Common on heathland throughout the trip.

Common in houses and baths.

This common shrimp-like marine crustacean was found on the beaches but also under stones a long way from the sea, for example at the Rockhopper colony on Sea Lion.

HEAVENLY BODIES

- 1 Orion: Rigel, Betelgeuse, the Orion Nebula
- 2 Crux, the Southern Cross
- 3 The Coalsack and Jewelbox, seen close to Crux
- 4 Large and Small Magellenic Clouds
- 5 Mars
- 6 The Milky Way
- 7 Sirius (the brightest star in the sky)
- 8 Pleiades
- 9 Venus
- 10 The Moon rising

All the bodies below were seen from Sea Lion late in the evening.

PLANTS SEEN ON THE FALKLAND ISLANDS

(With thanks to Sheila Stead for compiling this list.)

Astelia (soft camp-bog)
Arrow-leaved Marigold
Balsam Bog
Wild Celery
Diddle-dee
Buttonweed
Christmas Bush
Sea Cabbage
Marsh Daisy
Fachine
Groundsel
Antarctic Hawkweed
Orange Hawkweed
Coastal Nassauvia
Sheep's Sorrel
Boxwood
Pig Vine
Gorse

Almond Flower
Field Mouse-ear
Prickly Burr
Falkland Thrift
Common Violet
Water-milfoil (Pond weed)
Scurvy Grass
Monterey Cypress
Cinnamon Grass
Marram Grass
Tussac Grass
White Grass
Native Woodrush
Short Rush
Tall Rush
Tall Fern
Small Fern

Tim Earl
Principal leader
Guernsey

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