Argentina

Northern Patagonia & Pampas



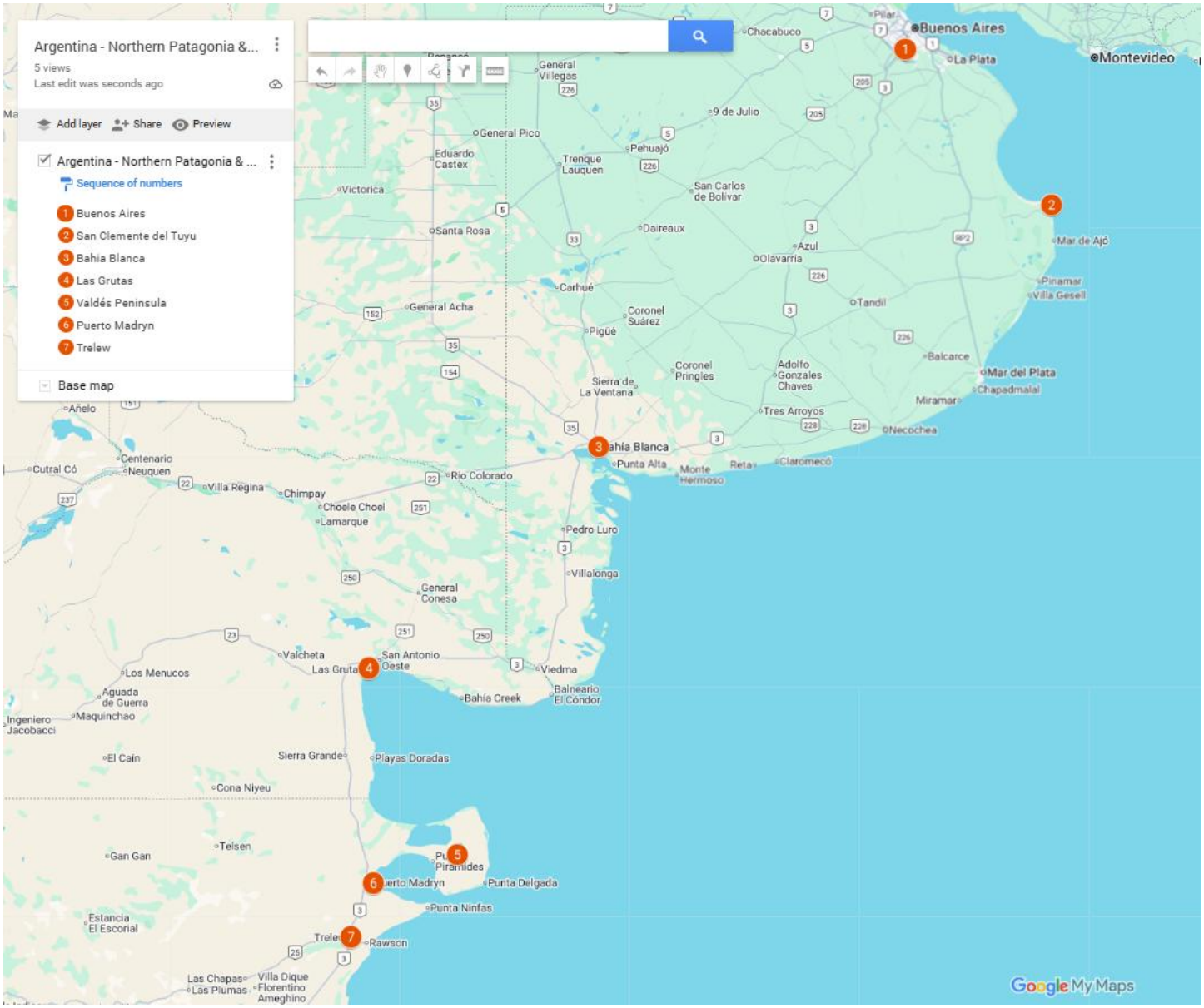
Chubut Steamer Ducks by Dušan Brinkhuizen.

One of the classic birdwatching destinations, Argentina's Northern Patagonia and Pampas areas not only offers superb birding, but also excellent cuisine, accommodation, and transport. A vast country that possesses a large variety of habitats and climates, our tour introduces one to the famous Gaucho ridden Pampas, windswept steppes, and endless barren Atlantic shores. Bird diversity thrives here, with almost half of Argentina's endemics available. The southern Atlantic coasts will provide for some of the most spectacular scenery in the country.

We start off with some relaxed city birding around Buenos Aires before heading south, birding the wetlands and tidal mudflats to Punta Rasa. We search for the rare and endangered Yellow Cardinal and range restricted Pampas Meadowlark around Bahía Blanca, while targeting two endemics - White-throated Cacholote and Sandy Gallito around Las Grutas. With a burgeoning list of impressive species including Hudson's Canastero, Hudson's Black Tyrant, Crested Gallito, Olrog's Gull, Carbonated Sierra Finch, Cinnamon Warbling Finch and Black-crowned Monjita, we head to what will surely be one of the tour highlights, the magnificent Valdés Peninsula, home of Sea Lion hunting Killer Whales, Chubut Steamer Ducks as well as several immense bird and marine mammal breeding grounds.

Itinerary & Map

Day 1	**Arrival in Buenos Aires, birding Costanera Sur**
Day 2	**Buenos Aires to San Clemente del Tuyú**
Day 3	**Punta Rasa**
Day 4	**San Clemente del Tuyú to Bahía Blanca**
Day 5	**Bahía Blanca**
Day 6	**Bahía Blanca to Las Grutas**
Day 7	**San Antonio Oeste to Valdés Peninsula**
Days 8 & 9	**Valdés Peninsula**
Day 10	**Valdés to Trelew via Playa Isla Escondida; flight to Buenos Aires & final departure**



Birding sites in detail



Coscoroba Swans by Glen Valentine

Costanera Sur. Located within the boundaries of Argentina's capital city, this 350-hectare reserve is an excellent introduction to Argentina's Pampas birding and wildlife. We will walk along some of the numerous trails to explore different Pampas and riverine habitats such as grasslands, lagoons, marshes, and forest. Some of the commoner local species seen here are Coscoroba and Black-necked Swans, White-winged, Red-fronted and Red-gartered Coots, Monk Parakeet, Picazuro Pigeon, Grey-necked Wood Rail, Green-barred and Checkered Woodpeckers, and many passerines, including Masked Gnatcatcher, Yellow-billed Cardinal, Black-and-rufous Warbling Finch, Spectacled Tyrant, Golden-billed Saltator and Pampa Finch. This can also be an excellent location for several difficult or shy species including Spot-flanked Gallinule, Masked Duck and Plumbeous Rail.

Several species of mammals live here as well, and it is not unusual to find Coypu (Nutria), two species of opossum and Brazilian Guinea Pig on an afternoon walk.

Buenos Aires to San Clemente del Tuyú. Our drive from Buenos Aires to San Clemente del Tuyú is not particularly far, and we shall spend most of the day birding the roadside verges en route. The habitat is predominantly flat grasslands interspersed with lagoons, marshes and mud flats making for easy and rewarding birding. We can look forward to seeing a high number of species today with highlights likely to include Spotted Nothura, Chiloe Wigeon, Cinnamon Teal, Red Shoveler, Long-winged Harrier, Campo Flicker, Sulphur-bearded Spinetail, Curve-billed Reedhaunter, Greyish Bay-wing and Scarlet-headed Blackbird. A combination of effort and luck might elicit some of the trickier species such as Dot-winged Crake or South American Painted-snipe.



Many-colored Rush Tyrant by Rob Williams

Punta Rasa. Our day will be spent birding the tidal mudflats, salt marshes and sand dunes



Pampas Meadowlark by Dušan Brinkhuizen

of Punta Rasa and the Bay of Samborombón. This area, not far south of Buenos Aires, is home to the most spectacular flocks of migrant waders and a wide array of grassland birds. Northern migratory shorebirds are likely to include Hudsonian Godwit, Red Knot, Lesser and Greater Yellowlegs, Wilson's Phalarope, Stilt, White-rumped, Pectoral and Baird's Sandpipers amongst many others that spend the northern winter (Austral summer), on the southernmost tip of our continent.

We will also look for Olrog's Gull, one of the most endangered seabird species that nests in the area.

Punta Rasa is one of the main feeding grounds for these long-range travellers that share the area with some residents, such as the near endemic Hudson's Canastero, Bearded Tachuri, Firewood-gatherer, Bay-capped Wren-Spinetail, Hellmayr's Pipits and Greater Rhea. Other species that we will be on the lookout for during the day include Lake Duck, Great and White-tufted Grebes, Roseate Spoonbill, Whistling Heron, American Oystercatcher, Black Skimmer, Cabot's Tern, Freckle-breasted Thornbird, Wren-like Rushbird, Sooty Tyrannulet, Warbling Doradito, Scarlet Flycatcher, Yellow-winged and White-browed Blackbirds and Brown-and-yellow Marshbird.

San Clemente del Tuyú to Bahía Blanca. A long drive with only some cursory birding stops en route, where we'll keep a sharp lookout for Blue-crowned Parakeet, Bay-capped Wren-Spinetail and Tufted Tit-Spinetail while we would need a healthy dose of luck to find rarities such as Pampas Pipit and Dot-winged Crake.



Burrowing Parrots by Glen Valentine



Carbonated Sierra Finch by Keith Valentine

Bahia Blanca. Bahía Blanca sits in an ecotonal area between the Pampas and Patagonia regions, thus offering a fantastic diversity of species. It is here that we will have the opportunity to see the spectacular and highly restricted Pampas Meadowlark, a near-endemic bird only possible in the southern Pampas and some areas of Uruguay, which is suffering from habitat degradation throughout its range. It is also here where chances are best for another highly restricted passerine: the endangered and declining Yellow Cardinal.

The woodlands in the area are extensive as well and hold some real specials including the striking Crested Gallito, Stripe-crowned Spinetail, near endemic Sharp-billed Canastero, Short-billed Canastero, Firewood-gatherer, Brown Cacholote, Narrow-billed Woodcreeper, White-banded Mockingbird, White-winged Black Tyrant, Ringed Warbling Finch and even Spot-winged Falconet. We will also take time to check a variety of wetlands and adjacent habitat for species such as Hudsonian Godwit, Many-colored Rush Tyrant, Long-tailed Meadowlark, Correndera and Short-billed Pipits, Gull-billed, South American and Snowy-crowned Terns, American Cliff Swallow, Southern Martin, Black-crowned Monjita, and Grassland Yellow Finch.

Bahía Blanca to Las Grutas. We continue to travel south towards Las Grutas. While much of the day will be spent travelling, we can expect to add yet more species to our list. Excluding the above-mentioned birds, we will also be keeping our eyes on the road verges for Darwin's Nothura.

Las Grutas. We will no doubt be greeted by flocks of Burrowing Parrots on arrival, as they are very common here. We will spend time searching for endemic and near-endemic species such as Sandy Gallito and Carbonated Sierra Finch, Hudson's Black Tyrant, Scale-throated Earthcreeper, Tufted Tit-Tyrant, White-throated Cacholote, White-tipped Plantcutter, Austral Thrush, Diuca Finch, Black-chinned and Hooded Siskins, and Greater Wagtail-Tyrant. We spend the following two nights in Las Grutas, a small village turned popular beach resort.



Sandy Gallito by Bobby Wilcox

San Antonio Oeste and Las Grutas. We will start early this morning, birding the surrounding areas of San Antonio Oeste. Our first stop will be just outside the city boundaries where we will search for White-throated Cacholote and Sandy Gallito (if we



Elegant Crested Tinamou by Keith Valentine

missed them previously). Here we also have a good chance for Elegant Crested Tinamou, Black-crowned, Rusty-backed, and White Monjitas, Grey-hooded and Mourning Sierra Finches and Scarlet Flycatcher.

We will then drive eastwards to search for the elusive Yellow Cardinal (in case we missed it previously), as well as Pale-breasted Spinetail, Straneck's Tyrannulet, Plain-mantled Tit-Spinetail, Chaco Earthcreeper, Short-billed Canastero, Yellow-billed Tit-Tyrant, Fork-tailed Flycatcher, Blue-and-yellow Tanager and Cinnamon Warbling Finch. Time permitting, we will again bird the surroundings of Las Grutas for any birds we might have missed to date.

Puerto Pirámides. This town is situated on the shores of the Nuevo Gulf. Here we'll be in search of species such as Rusty-backed Monjita, near endemic Band-tailed Earthcreeper and endemic Patagonian Canastero. Further interesting steppe dwellers may include Elegant Crested Tinamou, Short-billed Pipit, Least Seedsnipe and Diuca Finch. We should also find several land mammals that include Guanaco, a wild relative of the Llama, Patagonian Cavy (Mara), an overgrown, long-legged version of the Guinea Pig, and if we are lucky, South American Grey Fox, Humboldt's Hog-nosed Skunk and the Large Hairy Armadillo.

Valdés Peninsula. Declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1999, we will spend time exploring the riches of the Valdés Peninsula. A harsh, yet spectacular environment, this remote peninsula is a haven for Patagonian marine and terrestrial wildlife including massive colonies of South American Sea Lion and Southern Elephant Seal. The abundance of afterbirth and young pups here attracts the attention of several scavengers and predators, including the striking Killer Whales that are known to beach themselves along this coastline to capture prey, as well as Southern Giant Petrel and unique Snowy Sheathbill that forage through the remains. The rocky coastline may hold Imperial and Rock Shags alongside the commoner Neotropic Cormorants.



White-throated Cacholote by Clayton Burne

The more barren interior of the Valdés Peninsula offers a chance to find the endemic Patagonian Canastero and Carbonated Sierra Finch, as well as Lesser Shrike-Tyrant and Two-banded Plover. Other birds we will search for include the stately Lesser Rhea, Common Miner, near endemic Patagonian Yellow Finch, near-endemic Austral



Rusty-backed Monjita by Glen Valentine

Negrito, Blue-and-white Swallow, Grey-bellied Shrike-Tyrant and Elegant Crested Tinamou walking through the short-stunted growth.

During the day, we will make a small detour to a huge Magellanic Penguin colony tucked away in a secluded area of Valdes. Aside from the penguins, there are also an array of seabirds and shorebirds that include Blackish Oystercatcher, Chilean Flamingo, near endemic Dolphin Gull and Brown Skua, alongside several passerines such as Cordilleran Canastero, Scale-throated Earthcreeper and the near-endemic Patagonian Mockingbird, to name but a few. This is a good site for rarities, and we could be lucky and find Upland or Ashy-headed Geese, or even Flying Steamer Duck.

**The Valdés Peninsula is a marine mammal's paradise, and we intend to enjoy a short boat tour in the afternoon to search for Southern Right Whales.*

Playa Isla Escondida. We'll make a short stop at the gravel beaches here to find another key target - the endemic Chubut Steamer Duck, also known as White-headed Steamer Duck. Pairs of this localized, flightless endemic may be engaged in their unique steaming behaviour - a truly fantastic sight. Southern Elephant Seals bask on the beach, and Grey-bellied Shrike Tyrants can be found foraging on top of them, picking insect prey from their skin. Other new species we find in the area include Lesser Horned Owl and Black-headed Duck.



Magellanic Penguin by Keith Valentine

Tour Grading & Key

Overall Ease		Comfortable. Suitable for most birding / wildlife interest levels.
Birding Ease		Mostly easy, with many species provide decent visuals in open conditions. Some low-density targets.
Accommodation		Comfortable.
Walking / Trails		Average walking, mostly on flat ground with variable substrate. Some internal forest trails.
Vehicles / Roads		Several drives, some very long. Mostly sealed roads between towns, changing to dirt in remoter areas.
Photography		Good to good+. Some species distant, and bright light can be challenging. Hummingbird feeders at some sites.
Annoyances		Temperatures vary from hot & humid to cold. Some wind & rain to be expected.

Financial Arrangements and Important Notes

Tour dates, prices, single supplement, approximate flight costs and tour spaces are displayed on our website.

Tour inclusions:

- All meals from dinner on day 1 to lunch on day 10;
- Bottled drinking water;
- All lodgings;
- All ground transportation during the tour;
- All reserve entrance fees;
- All guiding services
- Tips for local guides, drivers and services.

Tour exclusions:

- Visa fees;
- ANY flights;
- Any beverages (including mini-bar charges at hotels);
- Optional excursions;
- Special gratuities;
- Telephone calls, laundry and other items of a personal nature.

Single Supplement: The single supplement cost for this tour will be charged if you wish to have single accommodation. If RBL cannot provide you with a rooming partner for these nights although you choose to share, the single supplement will become applicable. We will make all reasonable efforts to ensure that a rooming partner is found if you do wish to share.

Tipping: As noted above, gratuities (drivers, hotel staff, restaurants etc.) are included on this tour. However, this does NOT include your Rockjumper leader/s. If you feel that they have given you excellent service, it is entirely appropriate to tip them at your discretion.

- **Due to constantly fluctuating exchange rates, we quote our tours in 4 currencies. The tour price is fixed only in the currency printed in bold, and the actual cost in the other currencies listed will be adjusted according to prevailing exchange rates at the time of final invoicing. The same applies to approximate flight and single supplement rates.**
- **Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registrations, a small group supplement will be offered to confirm the tour.**
- **Tour prices are subject to unforeseen increases in tour related costs and may have to be adjusted as a result.**
- **The designated tour leader/s may be changed at short due to unforeseen circumstances.**
- **The itinerary is indicative only. Changes may need to be made to the order in which the tour is conducted, or some of the venues we visit closer to departure. We will attempt to adhere as close to the original program as possible.**

- To ensure your comfort and that of your companions, please limit yourself to one medium-sized suitcase or duffel bag (20 kg / 44 lb) and one carry-on bag, as space in the vehicles is limited.

Arrival and Departure Details

The tour will begin in Buenos Aires in the early afternoon of on day 1. The tour will conclude in Buenos Aires after an internal flight on day 10.

The above information in respect of arrivals and departures is a guide only. Precise arrival and departure information will be sent to you in your Tour Confirmation package once the tour has been officially confirmed. If you wish to arrive early and/or depart late and would like assistance in this regard, kindly contact the Rockjumper office.

Ministro Pistarini International Airport, Buenos Aires (IATA: EZE) is the main port of entry for international flights into Argentina and is well serviced by all of the world's major airlines. Almirante Marcos A. Zar Airport, Trelew (IATA: REL) is well connected via Buenos Aires airport.

It is important to note that there are two major airports in Buenos Aires;

1) Ministro Pistarini International Airport (IATA: EZE) and;
2) Buenos Aires – Aeroparque, also known as Jorge Newberry (IATA: AEP) which handles domestic flights.

Both the international and domestic airports cater for internal flights within Argentina. These airports are separate, and the drive between them usually takes between 1 and 1½ hours. It is, therefore, essential that you confirm the IATA airport codes with your travel agent to be sure which airport your flights arrive at and depart from.

Visa requirements differ by country, nationality of the traveller and duration and purpose of your intended stay. It may be necessary to obtain a visa or an electronic travel authorization in advance of your travel. It is therefore vitally important that you check with your travel agent/consulate/embassy for exact visa requirements.

DO NOT book any flights until the Rockjumper Team have officially confirmed the tour.