

# The Falkland Islands

## Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

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### Outline itinerary

<b>Day 1</b>	Fly from Brize Norton
<b>Day 2</b>	Mount Pleasant, transfer to Darwin
<b>Day 3/5</b>	Carcass Island
<b>Day 6/7</b>	Port Howard
<b>Day 8/10</b>	Sealion Island
<b>Day 11/14</b>	Pebble Island
<b>Day 15</b>	Port Stanley
<b>Day 16</b>	Volunteer Point
<b>Day 17</b>	Depart Mount Pleasant
<b>Day 18</b>	Arrive Brize Norton

**Departs**  
November

**Dates and Prices**  
See website (tour code FLK01) or brochure

**Grading**  
A. Mainly gentle birdwatching walks

**Focus**  
Birds and marine mammals

- Highlights**
- Elephant Seals & Sea Lions loiter on magnificent sandy beaches
  - Excursions to smaller islands including Pebble, Carcass & Sea Lion Islands
  - Flocks of Upland Geese, Steamer Duck, Dolphin Gull & Black-browed Albatross
  - See adults & chicks in a King Penguin colony, Volunteer Point
  - 5 species of penguin on Sea Lion Island, including Gentoo & Rockhopper
  - Explore the capital, Stanley – the size of an English village
  - View Black-browed Albatross colony on West Point
  - King Cormorant, Ruddy-headed & Kelp Geese, Falkland Skua & Tussock Bird
  - Blackish Oystercatcher, Two-banded Plover & Striated Caracara



King Penguins (Alan Henry)



Striated Caracara



Southern Elephant Seal Pup (Alan Henry)





**NB. Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.**

**N.B. Dates are based on anticipated RAF schedules. These will not be published until much nearer the date so there remains a possibility that the dates of this tour may be changed by one day at either end**

## Introduction

Lying just 480 kilometres from the coast of Argentina amid some of the richest fishing grounds of the South Atlantic, the Falkland Islands are inhabited by huge numbers of seabirds during the breeding season which extends from October to March. Arriving from Britain the visitor finds a landscape which brings to mind the northern isles of Scotland and there is an essentially British feel to life in the settlements but the wildlife is excitingly different. It is this constant blend of the familiar and unfamiliar that makes the Falklands such an interesting place to visit. Walking along the seafront at Stanley one might almost imagine being in a small North Sea resort until a Giant Petrel sails past on stiff wings and reminds you that these waters are only some 1,000 kilometres from the edge of the Southern Ocean surrounding Antarctica! Prior to the 1982 conflict the Falklands enjoyed a quiet anonymity helped by the lack of direct air services from Europe and shortage of accommodation away from the capital Port Stanley. A population of about 2,000 was distributed around a land mass roughly the size of Wales with isolated settlements relying on sheep farming as the principal source of income. The post-war construction of a military airfield at Mount Pleasant facilitated a regular direct air link with the UK and realising the potential for bringing interested civilian visitors to the islands a tourist plan was initiated by the newly formed Government Tourist Organisation. To provide suitable facilities a custom-made lodge was built on Sealion Island, one of the most interesting islands for wildlife in the south of the archipelago, and existing buildings at other locations were upgraded to receive parties of tourists. The infrastructure has been in place for over two decades now and whilst mass tourism was never contemplated, a steady stream of visitors have been able to enjoy this unique holiday destination. The Falklands archipelago comprises the two main islands, East and West Falkland, plus some 778 other islands of varying sizes, many of which remain uninhabited. Travel between the far-flung settlements is accomplished by a fleet of light aircraft operated by the Falklands Island Government Air Service (FIGAS) which utilize grass strips and even beaches to maintain a daily link between the islands. We will be using FIGAS flights to reach the three centres which form the principal components of this exciting Naturetrek tour, and will enjoy a birds-eye view of the islands en route between settlements.

This will certainly be a wildlife holiday with a difference combining southern ocean seabirds, neotropical land birds and marine mammals with an intimate view of a very individual style of island life which has managed to endure despite the dramatic events of recent history.

NB The very limited accommodation at the lodges and demand for space may necessitate changes in the sequence of the following itinerary

## Day 1

**Wednesday**

### In Flight

We depart from RAF Brize Norton in Oxfordshire aboard a scheduled RAF flight to the Falkland Islands. (This service has been contracted to civilian carriers since 2005 and will probably be operated on a similar basis in 2016 subject to operational exigencies of RAF transport)) There will be a re-fuelling stop at Ascension Island but unfortunately passengers are confined to the terminal building so we are unlikely to find many birds to watch, even though this interesting tropical island boasts several large seabird colonies. If we are fortunate we may glimpse the Ascension Island Frigatebird gliding over the airfield whilst introduced Indian Mynas are the most likely landbirds to appear.

## Day 2

**Thursday**

### Mount Pleasant and Darwin

Approximately eight hours after leaving Ascension Island we touch down at Mount Pleasant Airport on East Falkland, a large military complex constructed after the Falkland conflict which has revolutionised island life by facilitating regular air links with the UK.

Once at Mount Pleasant Airport, we will make our way over to Darwin, which is approximately a 40 minute drive away. The area now known as Darwin was originally called Rincon del Toros by Gauchos who were most likely stationed in the Port Louis area. The name would have signified the herds of wild cattle grazing there. In 1833 and 1834 HMS Beagle made voyages in and around the Falklands with the naturalist Charles Darwin on board. He made several forays in Camp and was reputed to have stayed the night in the vicinity of what is now Darwin settlement hence the site received its name. The settlement was initially a centre for cattle ranching and later more specifically for sheep farming. At the height of development, it was the largest centre of population outside Stanley with over 200 workers. The community included shepherds and farm hands, as well as a master craftsman, a doctor, school master and a parson. Today the estate is not a farm but remnants of these times can still be seen with the original gaucho stone corral built in 1874 and the Galpon, a stone shed built in 1894, beside it. The idyllic surroundings are a haven for flora and fauna. By 1920 the site became too small for the thriving settlement and over the next 2 years all the farm buildings, church and most of the houses were transferred by sled to Goose Green, 2 km away. Today Goose Green is the largest sheep farm on East Falkland with over 100,000 hectares of grazing land providing pasture for approximately 80,000 sheep. It is possible to see the farm in action between the months of November and February when the sheep are gathered and then sheared. In 1982 Goose Green became a household name after the first and longest battle in the conflict between Britain and Argentina.

We will arrive in Darwin at approximately 16:30, where we will have time to get settled in our rooms, have tea and dinner, and explore some of the wildlife that is on offer. Peale's and Commerson's Dolphins may be spotted off shore, and Magellanic Penguins can be seen in the harbour. Barn Owls and Turkey Vultures are also possible.

The following day we will make our way over to Carcass Island, with the time of the flight being confirmed whilst in Darwin.

## Day 3/5

Friday - Sunday

### Carcass Island

Depending on FIGAS schedules, we catch a morning flight to Carcass Island for a three night stay. This delightful island in the north west of the archipelago takes its name from HMS Carcass, which visited in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. For over a hundred years the island has supported a thriving sheep farm and is particularly noted for having a large, and tame, population of landbirds thanks to an absence of cats and rodents. It also boasts extensive areas of tussac providing cover for such species as Cobb's Wren and Tussacbird which are very vulnerable to predators where these occur. Over a dozen pairs of Striated Caracaras breed here and there are also colonies of both Gentoo and Magellanic Penguins. Accommodation on Carcass Island is a little simpler than some of the other lodges but this is a favourite island among many visitors to the Falklands and regarded as one of the most pristine and picturesque of all the many wonderful locations in West Falkland.

If conditions are suitable we hope to take a boat ride to West Point Island which lies to the south across an expanse of clear water where both Peale's and Commerson's Dolphins may be seen. West Point is particularly important for an accessible colony of Black-browed Albatrosses but it also supports a typical selection of Falkland seabirds including Rockhopper and Magellanic penguins. The albatrosses are remarkably tame as they sit on their mud nests and will allow approach to within a metre or less. Staring into the dark eyes of a sitting bird, it is difficult to imagine the years of ocean wandering that constitute the life of these magnificent birds, an existence that is spent in the harshest of environments amid conditions that we can barely contemplate. The recent decline in albatross populations has demonstrated how vulnerable these magnificent birds are to modern fishing practices and it is to be hoped that colonies such as West Point will continue to flourish for future generations to enjoy. The Falklands boast a sizeable share of the world population of Black-browed Albatross, and it is estimated that over 14,000 pairs breed on West Point alone.

Our time on the island depends on factors such as tide and weather but after visiting the albatrosses we hope to have time for at least a cursory look at this attractive and wildlife rich island before returning to Carcass. Only two people live on West Point and we will probably enjoy afternoon 'smoko' in their cottage before catching the return boat to Carcass.

Carcass has penguin colonies at the southern end of the island but the north is of particular interest for naturalists, as there are scores of Elephant Seals among the inhabitants of the shoreline. The overwhelming impression here is the sheer abundance of birds and in November many of the residents will be either sitting on eggs or protecting young. Hundreds of goslings are tended by anxious parents, Magellanic Oystercatchers pipe nervously at intruders and Magellanic Snipe fill the air with the ethereal sound of their drumming display flights. In the short turf near the coast we may find clusters of elegant Lady's Slippers adding their delicate beauty to the landscape.

Back at the comfortable lodge there is also plenty of birdlife to keep visitors entertained in the surrounding garden and shore. Dozens of Striated Caracaras, one of the world's rarest raptors, congregate around the buildings on the lookout for any scraps on offer, Black-chinned Siskins sing from the belt of conifers surrounding the settlement and pairs of attractive Kelp Geese sort out their territorial quarrels on the nearby beach.

## Days 6/7

## Monday - Tuesday

### Port Howard

Each days' FIGAS rota is determined the preceding evening in accordance with passenger requirements, thus it is not possible to know too far in advance what time a particular flight departs from Stanley. Our next destination for a two-night stay will be Port Howard on the east coast of West Falkland but the precise departure time will not be advised until Friday evening.

Port Howard is a major sheep farming settlement from which the 200,000 acre Port Howard farm is operated. The forty or so inhabitants look after approximately 42,000 sheep and 800 cattle! Set in a scenically attractive coastal location in the shadow of the Hornby Mountains, the settlement is a perfect place to see at first hand the workings of a typical Falklands farm and a gentle exploration of the surrounding countryside should also be ornithologically rewarding. The tourist lodge constructed here as part of the Falklands tourism initiative provides a comfortable base for visitors which include many fishermen attracted by reports of plentiful Brown Trout in nearby streams. During our stay we will travel into the hills, walk across stretches of Diddle-Dee moorland and birdwatch along the rivers where Speckled Teal shepherd their tiny ducklings and White-tufted Grebes can be observed nesting. Evidence of the southern spring will be all around as Upland and Ruddy-headed Geese nervously fuss around broods of plump yellow goslings, Long-tailed Meadowlarks sing from fence posts and Falkland Pipits try to lure us away from their moorland nests by fluttering through the Diddle-Dee as if injured. The Rufous-chested Dotterel is another handsome resident of the moors whilst a walk around the shoreline will reveal Falkland Skuas, Kelp and Dolphin Gulls, South American Terns, Flightless Steamer Ducks and the inevitable Giant Petrels. With spring turning to early summer, wild flowers are much in evidence and one of the prettiest species is the delightful Lady's Slipper which adorns sunny banks not far from the settlement. Other spring blooms include the delicate Pale Maiden, a characteristic flower of Diddle-Dee moorland, and the pink or white petals of Scurvy-Grass.

An excursion south to Fox Bay will give a wider impression of the size of the Port Howard farm and should produce plenty of bird sightings including Red-backed Hawks, Crested Caracaras, White-tufted Grebe and many Rufous-chested Dotterel. A small Gentoo Penguin colony near Fox Bay is another attraction and our 2001 group found a lone Chinstrap Penguin at this site. Near this headland a small inlet is often favoured by several Peale's Dolphins which delight in foraging through the thick carpets of kelp in search of prey. A secluded lake en route to the settlement is favoured by a good assortment of waterbirds, including Black-necked Swans, Flying Steamer Ducks Silver Teal and Yellow-billed Pintail. The lakeside is an ideal place to eat a picnic lunch with Grass Wrens singing from the sedges and Falkland Pipits song-flighting over the moorland.

In the otherwise treeless environment, many of the settlements in the Falklands use banks of gorse to provide shelter around the buildings and the vivid yellow flowers on these bushes add a welcome splash of spring colour to the countryside. Small allotments at the farm are likely to be frequented by the hardy Falklands Thrush and may also attract a pair of Black-throated Finches, one of the most handsome of the island passerines. With such numbers of livestock roaming the hills, scavengers can never be far away and at Port Howard these take the form of Turkey Vultures and Crested Caracaras, constantly patrolling the moors in search of any unfortunate casualty. The broad channel which leads from the settlement to the sea is often frequented by pods of Commerson's Dolphins which sometimes swim in the crystal clear waters beneath the wooden jetty.

Port Howard is a remarkably enjoyable place to visit and our stay will be all the more memorable for the excellent food and convivial atmosphere at the Lodge.

Depending upon available time and ground conditions it may be possible to fit in another excursion, or indeed this might be substituted for Fox Bay. This outing takes us to White Rocks, a remote stretch of coast almost opposite Pebble Island. Getting there entails over two hours driving across country, hence the caution about ground conditions! The seemingly endless expanse of white grass and Diddle-Dee moorland is amazingly still part of the Port Howard farm but there are no human inhabitants although two extremely isolated houses bear evidence of occasional use by shepherds rounding up the hundreds of sheep which roam the area. One of the cottages is often frequented by a pair of Barn Owls which somehow find enough food to rear chicks despite the seeming lack of small mammals. The long drive to White Rock is well worth the effort as the headland is the site of two large Rockhopper Penguin rookeries, both augmented by equally large numbers of Imperial Shags. At least one pair of Macaroni Penguins also regularly join the Rockhoppers and as at all penguin colonies, the attendant scavengers include Snowy Sheathbills, Antarctic Skuas, Turkey Vultures and Dolphin Gulls. The noise and odours of the colony added to the visual spectacle make this an unforgettable experience, the first of many on this tour. Apart from the seabirds, another attraction at White Rock is the presence of Southern Sealions on the rocks below the cliffs, the dominant male keeping careful guard over his harem.

## Days 8/10

## Wednesday-Friday

### Sealion Island

After visiting some of the largest islands we move next to a very different environment on Sealion Island, the most southerly inhabited island in the archipelago. The time of our departure from Carcass will depend on the FIGAS schedules but once airborne the flight takes about 35 minutes crossing the flat lowlands of Lafonia before heading out to sea to this remote destination.

Anyone with a fondness for islands will love Sealion Island. A slab of rock eight kilometres long by two kilometres wide it embodies all the attributes a travelling naturalist could wish for, not least being a warm and comfortable lodge! Undeterred by a lack of accommodation on the island, the Falkland Islands Government arranged for a pre-fabricated tourist lodge to be shipped to the island in 1986 and in a tricky exercise involving boats and helicopters it was lifted into place. Visitors can now enjoy the benefits of this very special hotel which occasionally has Elephant Seal pups in the garden and frequently Striated Caracaras perched on the roof! The latter is one of the Falkland specialities, a very attractive bird which also happens to be a global rarity with most of the world population occurring on the islands. It is also one of the tamest of all raptors with a fearless curiosity which can almost seem intimidating as a flock of these buzzard-sized birds attempts to discover the contents of your pockets! Sealion Island contains a good population of 'Johnny Rooks' as the islanders call these birds, and we will see them daily. With three days on the island we have plenty of time for a thorough exploration on foot and by land rover to reach the further extremities. Three species of penguin breed regularly, each preferring a different type of habitat. Magellanics honeycomb the short turf near the shores, Gentoo form dense crowds around bulky mud nests on flat ground and Rockhoppers favour sloping cliffs which they access by suicidal-looking landings through thundering breakers at the foot of the cliffs. Rockhoppers coming ashore have been featured on many natural history films and we will certainly spend some time watching their determined efforts to reach the rocks. Other Antarctic penguins are occasionally drawn in by the nesting colonies; King Penguins are not unusual among the Gentoos and Macaroni

Penguins regularly turn up amid the similar-looking Rockhoppers. Rarer vagrants are also seen from time to time, in fact ten species of penguin appear on the Falklands bird list!

As we explore Sealion Island we will encounter extensive stretches of Tussac Grass (*Poa flabellata*), a characteristic maritime grass of sub-Antarctic islands which is very vulnerable to grazing and as a consequence is becoming increasingly rare on the Falklands. Clumps can grow up to 4 metres high and the dense cover it provides is an efficient wind break for small birds such as Cobb's (House) Wrens and the entertaining Tussacbird. This dumpy, all dark member of the cinclodes tribe has a very restricted world range and is just as inquisitive as the caracara, the arrival of a human visitor triggering off a frenzy of twittering calls as the birds stream out of the tussac to view the newcomer! Black-crowned Night-Herons also like to pass the daylight hours roosting in the tussac and Short-eared Owls can sometimes be watched hunting along the dunes.

Some of the other residents on this magical island include Silvery Grebe, Giant Petrel, Rock and Imperial Shags, Ruddy-headed, Upland and Kelp Geese, Crested Duck, Chiloe Wigeon, Flightless Steamer Duck, Peregrine, Turkey Vulture, Crested Caracara, Magellanic and Blackish Oystercatchers, Two-banded Plover, Rufous-chested Dotterel, Magellanic Snipe, Brown-hooded, Kelp and Dolphin Gulls, Dark-faced Ground-Tyrant, Black-chinned Siskin and Black-throated Finch. Passage flocks of White-rumped Sandpipers pause to feed along the seashore and offshore rarer seabirds can occur among thousands of Black-browed Albatrosses gliding over the ocean. There is a very big colony of Black-broweds on Beauchene Island to the south of Sealion, and it is one of the commonest birds in the waters around the islands.

Although the birds will be our main priority, Sealion Island is also noted for its marine mammals. Strangely enough only a few Southern Sealions are likely to be seen during our visit but we will witness scores of snorting, groaning Elephant Seals on some of the beaches and youngsters often travel some distance from the shore, appearing in most unexpected places in the interior of the island. The animals on the beach will be a mixture of cows with newly born pups and immature males but most of the really big adult males will be out to sea although a few could still be present asserting their dominance over the young pretenders. The sight of these enormous beasts confronting each other with all the bluster and bravado of a playground fight is a memorable experience, but one best viewed from a discreet distance as the bulls can move a lot quicker than their bulk suggests! Always in attendance around the seals are pigeon-like Snowy Sheathbills, a tough southern ocean scavenger which finds rich pickings around penguin and seal colonies. The activity on the beaches also attracts Killer Whales and for prolonged periods they are a regular sight off Sealion Island, even coming close enough at one place for people to touch their backs! November is a good month for sightings and whilst nothing can be guaranteed, we have enjoyed a performance by these magnificent creatures on each of the last five tours.

## Day 11/14

## Saturday-Tuesday

### Pebble Island

We continue our exploration of West Falkland by embarking on a short domestic flight to Pebble Island. One of the largest northern islands, it is over 38 kilometres long and comprises areas of grassland and a distinctive trio of conical mountains along the western side. There are many freshwater pools and marshes of varying sizes making this an attractive breeding area for wildfowl. In shape it is essentially two large islands joined together by a neck of land and the settlement is situated on this isthmus. A magnificent sandy beach adjacent to the buildings is sometimes used by the FIGAS aircraft as a landing strip but before each landing someone from the settlement has to ensure

that no Elephant Seals or Sealions have gone to sleep on the runway! Like Port Howard, Pebble operates as a working sheep farm but the former manager's house has been converted into comfortable visitor accommodation forming an ideal base to explore this interesting island. Because of the distances involved, most of our excursions here will be by land rover but there are plenty of walking opportunities.

Pebble Island at this time of year is teeming with young birds. Upland Geese are abundant and will be starting to congregate into huge flocks in preparation for their summer moult. Ruddy-headed Geese are only slightly less numerous and every headland seems to have a pair of Kelp Geese standing on the rocks. Flightless Steamer Ducks occur in rafts around the coastline but it is worth paying particular attention to any birds seen on the freshwater lakes as these could be the confusing Flying Steamer Duck which is easy to overlook. If a steamer duck sustains flight for more than ten seconds it is probably the latter! Most of the pools support breeding populations of wildfowl with Speckled and Yellow-billed Teals the most frequently encountered ducks along with smaller numbers of Chiloe Wigeon. With a little luck it may also be possible to find a few Silver Teals with perhaps one or two rarer vagrants. The most striking residents are the stately Black-necked Swans which nest on one particular pond and can be watched sailing around on the open water with tiny cygnets hitching a lift on their parents back.

The nesting frenzy is not confined to wildfowl and everywhere we go on Pebble there will be evidence of the season with some birds still sitting on eggs, others looking after chicks. Both Silvery and White-tufted Grebes inhabit the pools, Magellanic and Blackish Oystercatchers create a typical fuss at any intrusion, Snipe 'drum' over the marshes and Two-banded Plovers escort chicks through the vegetation. The long and varied coastline offers many other attractions for us and during our stay we will visit a number of sites where the inhabitants of the cliffs include; Rock and Imperial Shags, Rockhopper Penguins, Black-crowned Night Herons, Turkey Vultures, Peregrine Falcon, and Dark-faced Ground-Tyrant. Magellanic Penguins burrow into the turf wherever they can and create an underground network of warrens which gives the ground a distinctly unsteady feel as you cross the colony! Although only Magellanic and Rockhopper can be regarded as guaranteed residents, most seasons one or two Macaroni Penguins can be located amid the Rockhoppers, single King Penguins come ashore to commence their protracted moult and until 2009 a lone Erect-crested Penguin from the New Zealand Antarctic was another regular visitor to Pebble making this one of the best penguin islands. Pebble is also a particularly good location to view Southern Sea-Lions, the massive bulls with their leonine features and fearsome yellow teeth looking much more menacing creatures than the Californian Sealions of circus fame! Scanning out to sea we will once again witness large numbers of Black-browed Albatrosses cruising over the waves, sometimes joined by Sooty Shearwaters, White-chinned Petrels and other seabirds from Steeple Jason to the west which is an important island for seabirds.

Other breeding birds include Falkland Skua, Red-backed Hawk, Rufous-breasted Dotterel, Long-tailed Meadowlark, Falkland Pipit, Black-chinned Siskin and Black-throated Finch making the Pebble bird list one of the most varied of any island in West Falkland and it is also favoured by passage waders such as White-rumped Sandpipers giving potential for a few unexpected additions.

Mention should also be made of the Pebble Island flora which includes delicate Dog Orchids, Vanilla Daisies, Pale Maidens and many other attractive species which will be in flower at this season. The only resident butterfly on the Falkland Islands, the Queen of Falkland Fritillary, may be seen on sunny days sipping nectar from these moorland flowers.

## Day 15

## Wednesday

### Port Stanley

Once again we will be at the mercy of FIGAS schedules but, today we will make our way over to Port Stanley. If the timing results in an earlier journey to the capital we can utilise the time to visit interesting sites in the town and the surrounding country. Stanley is a small colourful capital, with no shortage of places to visit.

If weather conditions allow us to take to the water we will sail north from Stanley in the afternoon to circle around Kidney Island, an uninhabited mound of Tussac grass and sand which is the nesting grounds for large numbers of White-chinned Petrels and Sooty Shearwaters. The adult birds do not return to the island until after dark but we may be lucky enough to see a few feeding offshore along with a Southern Fulmars and possibly some deep ocean seabirds such as Pintado Petrel and Wilson's Storm Petrel. The pristine Tussac clumps are full of twittering Tussacbirds which greet arrivals in characteristic manner. Sealions also make use of the island adding a degree of excitement to any walks through the Tussac as startled animals suddenly crash through the grasses in a desperate rush for the beach. Because of the extreme difficulty in walking on the island, and the risk of disturbing the nesting seabirds, we will not land on Kidney but the value of a visit is in the surrounding waters rather than the island itself. As evening approaches many of the seabirds will be congregating offshore and it is this gathering that we hope to witness.

The pleasant three hour cruise to Kidney Island is a fine way to end the day and as we return to Stanley we will hope for the company of a pie-bald Commerson's Dolphin to provide one last memory of the voyage.

The brightly painted roofs of Port Stanley clustered along the shore of a wide inlet look strangely familiar from many hours of news coverage but the capital is much smaller in reality than most visitors expect. The population of around 1800 is barely that of a small English town and even on the busiest of days the sparse motor traffic is a refreshing contrast to the chaos of modern cities. The cathedral is one of the most prominent landmarks in the town and like most of the buildings faces north overlooking the harbour. Stanley was once regularly visited by sailing ships and early steam vessels taking advantage of a final refuge before braving the treacherous waters of Cape Horn and the harbour formed the last resting place for some of these vessels which returned from the experience in such a damaged condition that they were unable to continue their voyage. The hulks of these ships represent a veritable maritime museum and a guide book can be obtained in Stanley detailing the history of the various wrecks. The best preserved of these are popular nesting sites for Rock Shags which delight in building their bulky seaweed nests wherever they can find a large enough platform among the decaying timbers. A stroll along the waterfront after settling in at our hotel should quickly provide further evidence of the southern latitude for in addition to the Rock Shags we are likely to find Kelp and Dolphin Gulls, South American Terns, and perhaps a Flightless Steamer Duck dabbling in the shallows. Giant Petrels will be gliding like albatrosses over the water or quarrelling over some disputed scrap of food. Although magnificent to watch, these huge seabirds are arch scavengers and cruise Stanley inlet looking for anything that is remotely edible in the water. The Dolphin Gull is a particularly attractive member of its family, a neat slate-black and white bird with deep red bill and legs. Nesting activity is just beginning at the time of our visit and males will be energetically courting their mates with elaborate bowing and posturing. Other birds might be discovered in the gardens around Stanley, such as the ubiquitous Falklands Thrush. Should anyone wish a little more exercise we could follow the shoreline west from the town to a muddy bay where Crested Ducks and Speckled Teal may be found and White-rumped Sandpipers feed in the tidal pools.

## Day 16

## Thursday

### Port Stanley/Volunteer Point

King Penguins are everyone's idea of what a penguin should look like, thanks no doubt to their association with the famous biscuit advertisements! Standing some three feet high, it is a very striking bird which lives a very rigorous lifestyle in the southern oceans but it is difficult to resist smiling at these natural comedians as they amble about their nesting grounds like so many bewildered waiters. The main breeding population is on sub-Antarctic islands to the south of the Falklands but small numbers do occur among Gentoo Penguin colonies at various places around the Falklands and an increasing colony of over 500 pairs has been established at a remote headland called Volunteer Point which will be our destination today.

Formerly groups were taken to Volunteer Point by boat but in recent years improvements to the limited network of island roads have made access by motor vehicle a more popular all-weather option. Whichever mode of transport is favoured, it entails a long journey from Port Stanley but any discomfort is quickly forgotten on reaching the flat headland where the King Penguins congregate. Areas of open country away from Port Stanley are known to islanders as the 'camp', and the peat moorland at Volunteer Point is a typical example of the most widespread habitat on the islands, a mix of various grasses and a heather-like shrub called Diddle-Dee (*Empetrum rubrum*). The ground here is honeycombed with the nesting burrows of Magellanic Penguins and as we walk past the entrances many pairs of eyes will follow our progress. The donkey-like braying of the occupants is a familiar sound around the coastline of the islands and has earned the local name of Jackass Penguin, although this is more accurately applied to another species found in South Africa. The King Penguins tend to congregate on an area of flat ground not far from the sea and in this well trampled clearing we may find several hundred adults and young. Because of their protracted breeding season some birds are invariably present at the colony, but November is the peak period for egg laying so we can expect maximum attendance. The young penguins, which are fed for an astonishing 11-12 months are even more comical figures than their parents, the youngest resembling large chocolate brown balls of fur with a long bill poking out of the top and large feet at the bottom. Slightly older birds exhibit all manner of transitional plumage with some individuals almost in adult dress but still retaining random tufts of juvenile 'fur' sprouting from unlikely places. The best strategy is to settle down near the colony and simply watch the entertainment. The adults occasionally throw back their heads in courtship display but it is the youngsters that provide the best show. Overcome with curiosity they gradually shuffle closer, uttering a variety of whistling cries and periodically beating their stumpy little wings as if making a futile attempt at flight. Within minutes the advance guard will form a bemused line just a few metres away then one or two bolder than the rest will advance even closer and start nibbling at our feet and clothing or any interesting items of equipment scattered about on the grass. It is impossible to resist these entrancing creatures and for once it is easy to get frame-filling photographs without recourse to special lenses.

The King Penguins are the star act but other birds inhabit Volunteer Point and we can expect to see plenty of Upland Geese supervising goslings, the attractive little Kelp Goose which favours shorelines, Crested Duck, Turkey Vultures, Crested Caracara, Brown-hooded Gull, Magellanic Oystercatcher, Rufous-breasted Dotterel, and Two-banded Plover. There is also a sizeable colony of Gentoo Penguins here to complete a trio of penguin species for the day. If conditions are at all windy it may be worth looking out to sea from the point as even a short watch can produce a number of seabird species. Black-browed Albatrosses are numerous off this coast but rarer relatives including the huge Royal Albatross are possible and other less predictable birds could occur.

## Day 17

Friday

### In Flight

We leave Port Stanley after an early breakfast and drive to Mount Pleasant where the RAF flight to Brize Norton departs mid-morning. As we pass through the rough terrain en route to the airport we are likely to spot our last Falkland birds from the coach and typically these will include Upland Goose, Turkey Vulture, Rufous-breasted Dotterel and possibly a few waterbirds on roadside pools and creeks. It will probably be dark when we land at Ascension Island so unfortunately there is unlikely to be any birding there during our short stop-over.

## Day 18

Saturday

The flight is scheduled to arrive back at Brize Norton 0730.

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## Tour grading

This is a traditional birdwatching tour with a moderate amount of day walking.

## Weather

Contrary to the popular image it is not always cold and miserable in the Falklands, indeed it can be quite warm and sunny in the spring with a high risk of sunburn in the clear unpolluted atmosphere. Conditions do however change with great rapidity and it is frequently windy adding a wind-chill factor to temperatures. The average wind speed is about 15 knots but stronger gales occur on about four days per month. The average monthly temperature is around 15c with a range of 5-20c. Rain can occur at any time but more usually develop in the afternoon after a sunny morning.

## Food & accommodation included in the price

All meals are included in the tour price. Accommodation will be in a comfortable hotel in Port Stanley and in comfortable tourist lodges at most other locations. Tourist accommodation on the Falkland Islands was either custom built in 1988 or upgraded from existing accommodation to achieve a suitable international standard and all rooms have private facilities. Because of the very limited space in the lodges **SINGLE ROOMS WILL PROBABLY NOT BE AVAILABLE AT ALL LOCATIONS.** The standard of catering is very high, utilising local vegetables and meat.

## Your Safety & Security

Risks to your safety and security are an unavoidable aspect of all travel and the best current advice on such risks is provided for you by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. In order to assess and protect against any risks in your chosen destination, it is essential that you refer to the Foreign Office website – <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/falkland-islands> regularly prior to travel.

Security is rarely a problem on any of our trips; the vast majority of the people we come into contact with are scrupulously honest. However, it is only sensible not to put temptation in the way of the local people. Do not take expensive jewellery or watches with you; do not flash your money around, keep your large notes separate from small ones so that when you make a small purchase you only have to bring out a small amount of money. Do not leave anything of value lying around where it can easily be picked up. In short, look after your belongings!

## How to book your place

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at [www.naturetrek.co.uk](http://www.naturetrek.co.uk), or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website. Please stipulate any special requirements, for example extension requests or connecting/regional flights, at the time of booking.