

The Falkland Islands

Naturetrek Tour Report

6 - 23 November 2007



King Penguin chicks at Volunteer Point



Green Rincon beach Pebble Island



Black-browed Albatross colony at West Point



Rockhopper Penguin at West Point

Report and photos compiled by Will Wagstaff



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Days 1/2

Tuesday 6th – Wednesday 7th November

Brize Norton to Stanley

We assembled at RAF Brize Norton during the late afternoon and evening, taking advantage of the free dinner at Gateway House before being bussed back to the terminal ready for departure. The formalities did not take long so it was then on another bus and out to the DC10 that was to take us on our South Atlantic adventure.

We took off just after 11pm and soon settled down, having been fed again! Some watched the films whilst other slept before being roused ready to land on Ascension Island just after 7am. Our luck was in as some of the group spotted an Ascension Island Frigatebird from the plane before we came to a halt. All saw this endemic species when we were in the compound where we spent our time whilst the plane was being readied for our onward flight. The only other wildlife seen was a few of the introduced Common Myna birds. It was here that we had chance to talk to Robin Woods, the author of the Falklands wildlife books that some of us were carrying before being called to board for the slightly shorter leg of the trip which meant we landed on time at Mount Pleasant Airport on East Falkland. As we made our final approaches we were joined by one of the Tornado fighter planes that seemed to be flying only feet from our wingtips as the co pilot took photos of us taking photos of them! Once the military 'high ups' had left the aircraft we did the same and eventually collected our bags before exiting immigration and were met by Jo, our ground agent, in somewhat less than clement weather. Still, it was calm - just wet.

Upland Geese were present on the airfield and were visible every now and then as we made our way out of the airbase and on the road north towards Stanley. We had our first chance to look at the lay of the land, from the bands of whitegrass to the stoneruns that are found on the edge of the Wickham Heights. It had cleared a bit as we approached Stanley but was wet again as we reached the Malvina House Hotel which was our base for the next two nights. As it was rather heavy rain we did not do a group walk in the late afternoon, although some brave souls ventured out and found Flightless Steamerducks, Giant Petrels, Rock Shags and some of the other species that were to become familiar over the next few days. We were glad to hit our beds following dinner after a long day but were eager to get out on our adventure in the morning.

Day 3

Thursday 8th November

Volunteer Point

It was a much brighter day to start with little wind but some very slow moving heavy showers as we had breakfast. Our drivers arrived shortly after and were rather concerned as to whether we would make it to Volunteer Pt, our destination today due to the amount of surface water. However we need not have worried as they got us there in good time.

The route initially took us back along the road we had come in on before turning north up through some of the more impressive Stoneruns including the one called 'Princes Street' by Darwin in the 1830s. We passed the remains of two Argentine helicopters that were shot up by the British forces in the 1982 war. Between the showers we could see out over the many inlets that typify this section of the route before we turned towards Johnson's Harbour and the end of the route and the start of our introduction to camp driving. I think by the end of the day we all agreed that it was amazing where one could take a 4 x 4 vehicle if you had the skill as shown by our three drivers.

A few Rufous Chested Dotterels, Black-throated Finches plus a scattering of waterfowl were seen on the route before we stopped for a comfort break at the Volunteer Shanty. A Falklands Thrush showed very well, which was not surprising as it was nesting in the shed we were using to hide from another shower. Then it was time to find some penguins, which took no time at all as this area has the largest concentration of King Penguins on the Falkland Islands as well as a Gentoo Penguin colony and many Magellanic Penguin burrows. Once we had reached portacabin, which we used as our base, it was hard to know where to look next but the Kings won so we wandered over and spent quite a while watching and photographing these magnificent birds. Good numbers of 'woolly bears' were present indicating that last year had been a good breeding season, in fact there were over 430 young making it the best ever year for this increasing species. Although one heavy shower did cause us to pop back to the shelter for lunch we were able to spend the rest of our time exploring this wildlife rich area.

It was difficult to know where to go next. Whether to watch the displaying adult Kings or to watch the charismatic 'woolly bears; with their plaintive whistling or to visit the Gentoo colony, the occasional Magellanic Penguin popping its head out of the burrow or to see the wide variety of waterfowl on the small ponds that were on the top of the bank, and then there was the scenery from the distant hills, occasionally sunlit, or the long white sand beach with its green sea and white curling breakers behind which a pod of Peale's Dolphins were seen.

All too soon it was time to drag ourselves away from this wonderful sight and to start making tracks back to Stanley. The weather was much better until we hit showers at the head of Berkeley Sound but it did not seem to bother the lone King we saw sat on the heath near Johnson's Harbour. The rain had stopped by the time we reached the best of the Stoneruns which enabled us to have a photo stop to look at this strange geographical feature that is so typical of this area of the archipelago. It was just before 5.30 when we reached the hotel and said thank you to our drivers after an excellent start to the tour and our first penguins!

Day 4

Friday 9th November

Stanley to Port Howard

As we were not due to be flying until mid morning we had time for a short visit to town or to look at the varied wildlife along the seafront before being collected just after 10am. We were on two flights, one direct and the other via Sea Lion Island that were supposed to reach Port Howard in late morning. Sadly time slipped a bit on the way so it was not until after 1pm that we assembled at the very comfortable Porth Howard Lodge where we soon got stuck into the 'smoko' provided by our hosts Wayne and Sue.

First stop this afternoon was at the shearing shed a few minutes from the lodge. It was a hive of activity inside with six shearers hard at work and the rest of the gang sorting the shorn fleeces ready for packing. We soon got used to the distinctive smell of these sheds and spent some time here watching what was going on. However we had other sites to visit so headed north along some rather wet tracks until we reached Many Branch House where a gang of Crested Caracara posed for us on the fence posts near the house.

A little further on the track had dried so Wayne said that it was fit to head for the Gentoo colony at Gladstone Bay overlooking Port Purvis. This involved a drive up the slopes of Mt Henry, which I enjoyed once the four-wheel drive decided to get going! The views as we came up over the ridge were superb as we could see out to Pebble, Keppel and Saunders Island in the distance. After a few more gates we started down to the Gentoo Penguin colony and a spot of rather late lunch. We had to wait for one shower to pass but it was dry for the rest of the time at this pretty site. The Gentoo colonies were split over three sites with a steady trickle of birds coming and going from the shore. We also had good views of some more Rufous-chested Dotterel having seen several on the way over the hill and some Black-throated Finches and the ubiquitous Upland Geese.

Having spent some time here, we followed the penguins down to the waters edge where we could see some birds zooming through the shallows, occasionally porpoising as they came rushing to the shore. A Blackish Oystercatcher came and landed in front of us, as did a few Magellanic Oystercatchers and some Two-banded Plovers. On the little islets two South American Terns were resting when a group of four Brown-hooded Gulls came in and added themselves to our list. A little further away was a colony of Rock Shags with a small group of Imperial Shags roosting nearby and a few Turkey Vultures overhead.

With so much to see it was hard to drag ourselves away but it was time to head back to the lodge and a late dinner but it had been worth it to make the most of our time here. On the way we found some more of the ever-attractive Dotterels and some singing Falkland Pipits. Then it was back to the first of Sue's superb meals at the end of a busy day.

Day 5

Saturday 10th November

West Falkland

The flat calm sunny morning enticed everyone out and about before breakfast where there was a coating of frost that soon melted in the morning sun.

Following breakfast we piled into the two vehicles and set off along the track towards Fox Bay our ultimate destination today. Our first stop was to do a little botany not far from the road where we found the first shoots of the Yellow Orchid that flower here plus some Mountain Berry and Christmas Bush. This sidetrack then led us past the remains of the Argentine Skyhawk and Mirage fighters that had been shot down during the 1982 war by the British Sea Harriers. We had a stop at each site for some photos and to watch the Rufous-chested Dotterel and Falkland Pipits that were breeding nearby. We also had superb views of some of the Dotterel from the cars as we passed, as well as a couple of Magellanic Snipe and some Black-throated Finches.

Moving on again we left Port Howard land and continued south until we reached a roadside turn off with a non-descript pile of stone. A closer inspection of these showed that it was full of fossils, mostly bivalves with a few crinoids and a lone Trilobite tail. Although to be strictly accurate these were the internal moulds as the original hard structure had dissolved away but they were often very detailed. It was amazing to think that some 390 millions years ago this had been a shallow sea and had been joined onto the South African plate.

As time was moving on we got going through Little Chartres to the Hawks Nest Shanty where we left the road to reach the Southern Hawks Nest Pond. Wayne very quickly spotted a Black-necked Swan with six cygnets close to our bank. We had good views of this bird as it swam away from the reeds as well as three other adults that stayed quite close to our shore. We also soon found a Yellow-billed Pintail and some very photogenic White-tufted Grebes that cruised by as we started our picnic lunch. Our first Flying Steamer Duck was found out in the middle of the lake and a couple of Silver Teal flew by, as did a mystery duck. Having finished eating we followed the latter to the other reedbed where it turned out to be a male Red Shoveler, a rare vagrant from Patagonia. Nearby we also found some Chiloe Wigeon and had flight views of a pair of Yellow-billed Pintails.

By now the wind had picked up and was rather cold, that plus the spots of rain hastened our return to the vehicles ready for the next part of the trip through what is aptly named Lakelands. As we neared Fox Bay East the rain showers began to ease and had almost stopped by the time we came across a small group of the delightful Two-banded Plovers. Having passed the two small minefields we came across a male Kelp Goose stood on the top of the beach not far from where his well-camouflaged female was incubating, hiding in the middle of a clump of Diddle-dee.

A short drive led us to a Gentoo Penguin colony that this year had decided to nest at the top of a small cliff. Others were gathered on the rocky shore as if having a rest before tackling the walk inland. Away out at sea Black-browed Albatrosses could be seen with the occasional one coming closer inshore enabling us to get a better view. Southern Giant Petrels, Kelp Gulls and a few Falkland Skuas were cruising past just offshore with the occasional group of Upland Geese joining the flyby. Rock Shags and Imperial Shags came and went next to the Gentoos on the rocky shore.

Eventually it was time to head back to Port Howard as we did not want to miss Sue's dinner. We did stop for the occasional scenic photo on the way as the snow showers had white capped some of the higher hills, which looked very dramatic in the late afternoon sunshine. Conversation at dinner was varied to say the least with subjects as diverse as the radio shipping forecasts to Ross's Gull and of course food! A good end to an excellent day.

Day 6

Sunday 11th November

Port Howard to Carcass Island

It was a rather damp start to the day but there were blue patches between the showers in a stiff southwest wind. As we were on the first flights today it meant we only had time for a short wander about the settlement or look in the museum before we headed for the airstrip nearest to the lodge and said goodbye to Wayne and Sue. Our two flights were only a short time apart and both went direct to Carcass Island where our new host Rob met us in the midst of a hail shower. Thankfully these showers did not last long so we had chance to have a look around as we drove the short distance to the settlement. Tussac Birds were everywhere, investigating everything to see if it might be edible.

As we got our first view of the settlement, surrounded by gorse and nestled at the base of Stanley Hill, Rob stopped so we could see a Black-faced Ibis. This vagrant had apparently been present for three days but was a very welcome addition to our list. Once at the house and allocated our rooms we had a quick cuppa before we had time to explore the nearby beach before lunch. Here we found a very tame young Black-crowned Night Heron that was a photographers dream plus lots of geese, ducks, Striated Carcaras and of course the ubiquitous Tussac Birds. A little further along the track surrounded by the incredibly dense flowering gorse with that scent of Coconut in the air we had good views of both Grass Wrens and Cobb's Wrens plus more Meadowlarks in their finery and some singing Falkland thrushes. A nesting Magellanic Oystercatcher stood to show us its one young that had been sheltering in the plumage. All too soon we had to drag ourselves away for more food!

Following lunch we jumped into the two rovers and set off for the southeastern end of the island and Leopard Beach. We kept one vehicle with us as Rob left us to explore our first Tussac Grass area that contained good numbers of Upland Geese and Falkland Skuas as well as several pairs of Magellanic Penguins. At our feet we found a Native Strawberry in flower and could hear Grass Wrens singing from the clumps of Tussac.

As we reached the beach a family party of Upland Geese wandered back and fore for a while as if unsure of what to do next. A Striated Caracara decided we were worthy of inspection so flew in for a good look but headed off after having its photo taken. The occasional Magellanic Penguin was coming ashore and wandering up through the dunes but it was the three Gentoo Penguins that were most interested in us as they walked some way along the beach to get a better look at us before returning to the sea. Also very curious was the Dark-faced Ground Tyrant that hopped up and down the rocks quite close to us.

A heavy hail shower made walking across the green less than pleasant but did not seem to worry the skuas and geese that were widespread here. One of the two very small young Two-banded Plovers did not seem to mind the weather unlike its sibling that hid underneath its parent. The two pools that contained water were home to Ruddy-headed Geese with young, a few Speckled Teal and a pair of Chiloe Wigeon. Walking through the scattered Tussac we had very good views of a couple of Magellanic Snipe that just walked away from us unlike their European counterparts that zoom off up into the sky. Some of the singing Grass Wrens put in an appearance but were never on show for long on this windy afternoon.

Having made our way back to the rover some of the group decided to walk all the way back whilst others had progressively longer rides before alighting and wandering along looking at the abundant wildlife that included

nesting Kelp Geese and Oystercatchers as well as some not fully opened Scurvy Grass flowers and the ever changing scenery.

Everyone made it back in time for dinner with tales of the flora and fauna they had seen on this wildlife filled island.

Day 7

Monday 12th November

West Point Island

Although still cold for the time of year the wind had died down overnight so that we could visit West Point Island by boat as planned. We were ready by the quay when Michael Clark's boat Condor came into view to collect us.

The first part of the trip towards West Point was relatively uneventful until we passed a small group of South American Terns feeding close to a small island, but from then on there was always something to watch from the increasing numbers of Imperial Shags to our first albatross of the day and as we neared the island a few Gentoo and Magellanic Penguins in the water. We cruised through 'Woolly Gap' between West Point and the headland of West Falkland where we encountered a few Southern Sea Lions hauled out on the lower rocky ledges or in the more open Tussac Grass. Upon reaching the western side of the island we saw more and more Black-browed Albatross in flight and could see them sitting on the nests high on the sides of the island. On the sea a couple of Southern Fulmars were sat with a small group of Southern Giant Petrels. Mid way around this section we were joined by a small group of Peale's Dolphins that stayed playing on the bow wave for quite some time enabling us to get very good views.

The last section of the voyage before we landed on West Point Island was to sail alongside the reef that runs north from Gibraltar Rock (known locally as the Slipper). At first we came across large numbers of albatross and gulls but soon found small flocks of Southern Fulmars and a Cape Petrel. The latter two are Antarctic breeding species and are therefore unusual around the islands during the summer months. A Peregrine Falcon carrying prey passed by as it returned to the island after a successful hunting trip. Just as we reached the busiest part of the reef a large hail storm restricted our viewing but we did see hundreds of Thin-billed Prions shearing about low over the water, often only a few yards from the boat. Later as we headed for the jetty we added a few Snowy Sheathbills to the tally as they fed along the waters edge.

Once ashore we headed for Michael and Jeanette's house for a warming cuppa and a cake or two before piling into the landrover and driving the short distance to the albatross colony at the 'Devil's Nose'. It quickly became obvious that it was not only Black-browed Albatross that bred here as many hundreds of pairs of Rockhopper Penguins were adding their unique sound to the clamour of this photogenic colony.

We spent the best part of three hours at this colony, taking photos, video and just sitting watching this dynamic spectacle. The albatrosses were constantly coming and going resulting in many flight photos. Others were calling and displaying with a studied grace whilst their neighbours were staring into space as if trying to ignore the noise next door.

If any of the albatross moved too far out of place there was always a gang of Rockhoppers to let them know that it was their patch and they should stick to their mud-pot nests. These penguins were also displaying, shaking their heads to make their yellow ear tufts more obvious. In all this hustle and bustle we found a lone Macaroni Penguin that was seen singing at one point but spent most of the time preening. The occasional Striated Caracara and Falkland Skua cruised by overhead looking for food and one of the latter was seen stealing a penguin egg.

Eventually we had to head back to the quay via a brief stop at the house before being transferred to the 'Condor' by zodiac, as it was a very low tide. The trip back was rather uneventful with just a few albatross, shags and gulls to be seen so it was not long before we passed the last passengers leaving Carcass Island as they rejoined their cruise ship and we were welcomed by Rob and his team who must have had a busy afternoon whilst we were away.

Following another excellent dinner we added quite a few new species to our list when we did the log call at the end of a rather special Falkland day.

Day 8

Tuesday 13th November

Carcass Island to Sea Lion Island

It was rather a cold start to the day so unusually there were not many of us outside before breakfast. Having settled our bills and finished packing we had time before our flight to have a last look around. Sheila M headed towards the Night Herons whilst the rest of us wandered up the hill to see if the Black-faced Ibis was still present. Although we looked at every flock of Upland Geese to see if it was still with them we could not find it. However we did see lots of Tussac Bird, thrushes and Ground Tyrants plus the inevitable Striated Caracara. From the brow we had good views out towards West Point Island in one direction and down over the settlement in the other. We headed back to the buildings for a last Carcass 'smoko' before piling into the landrovers for the short drive out to the airstrip.

The two flights departed only a few minutes from each other. Having said goodbye to Rob we settled in for the hour-long flight over West Falkland and Lafonia. The second flight stopped at Fox Bay so arrived after those on the first flight who were already in the lounge looking out of the window at the nearby Gentoo Penguin colony only a few yards from the lodge! When we were all on Sea Lion Island we had lunch and were then shown our rooms before setting out to explore the eastern side of the island. The cold wind and occasional snow/hail shower made sure we knew where the nearest shelter was!

Having crossed the airport we stopped to watch one of two singing Striated Grass Wrens that were in full voice very close to us. The first proper stop was overlooking the Small Pond but it was not until we walked through the Tussac that we found the Chiloe Wigeon, a family party of Upland Goose and a Magellanic Penguin or two. At the end of the pool we came across our first Elephant Seal but all we saw of this one was its rear end as it slumbered in the grass. A much larger male was on the beach when we reached the shore but it was the tiny Cobb's Wrens that caught our eye as they popped in and out of view in the boulder beach. Heading east from here we passed a group of Striated Caracaras sat out of the wind in the sun who kept a beady eye on us at all times.

We knew we were getting near the seals at Elephant Corner as we could hear the young weaners barking at each other. There were also several huge males on this beach. One of which had a cut on its neck, presumably from fighting, that the Tussac Birds could not leave alone. The end result was that the seal forever had to chase off these tiny birds that were giving it such aggravation. Also scavenging on the beach was a small party of Sheathbills that were inspecting any likely subject in case it was a potential meal. Much closer to us was a Striated Caracara sat in its nest with its mate coming by every so often to see what was going on.

Wandering further along the beach we passed many more weaner seals as well as some more large males asleep on the sand. We then cut across the island passing the many Gentoo Penguin colonies that dot this part of the island. One of these contained a moulting King Penguin that had come to stand with its relatives until it had grown its new feathers. More seals were in the shallow pool in the middle of the island, which also contained a scattered flock of White-rumped Sandpipers busy feeding in the shallows. As we neared the north side of the island we could see the surf crashing onto the shore where a flock of Gentoo Penguins were gathered with more coming shore as we watched. Further out at sea two large flocks of Southern Fulmars were resting on the sea or flying low over the back of the kelp beds. It was then time to head back to the lodge passing yet more penguin colonies, both Gentoo and Magellanic. Several seal pups were playing in one of the shallow pools as we walked by, some of which were very interested in us but we did not stop for long as smoko was beckoning us back to the lodge.

As we ate dinner more scattered showers came by so the idea of looking for owls was discarded fairly quickly as we settled for a comfortable evening indoors.

Day 9

Wednesday 14th November

Sea Lion Island

We decided to spend our first full day on the island walking from the west end of the island back to the lodge so after breakfast we got a lift up to the Rockhopper Penguin colony. The weather was again rather cool with spitty rain that got a little heavier early in the afternoon but cleared to give some sunshine albeit still with the odd shower.

The three sections of the Rockhopper Penguin colony use the same route to and from the sea and it was here that we started our day. The slope these birds climb is incredibly steep and is pounded by some very large waves and yet we watched three of these very tough penguins descend and later come back ashore with only minimal scabbling to get a grip, definitely living up to their name.

A short walk away was a colony of Imperial Shags with their mud pot nests. Those in the middle of the colony were sat quietly incubating whilst others on the edge were displaying, nest building and robbing nearby nests for material, often taking part in a tug of war over one particular piece of weed. There was a steady stream of birds coming and going with the occasional Dolphin Gull dropping by to see what titbits were on offer. The last part of the colony here was a mixed colony of shags and penguins and as a result was a good deal noisier. One of the skuas that was floating overhead seemed to show a long central tail which was rather strange and was very keen on defending its patch against any passing Striated Caracara, as it showed when dive bombing one that landed nearby.

Walking past the airport we added a few new plants to our list including Pale Maiden, the national flower of the Falklands, which proved to be a little difficult to photograph on this windy hill. A few Two-banded Plovers and Rufous-chested Dotterel were on the open heaths with Tussac Birds in every habitat plus a few Thrushes and finches in the more sheltered Tussac Grass areas. Upon reaching the Long Pond we crept up to the sheltered edge and were rewarded with superb views of a pair of Silver Teal and then up to nine of the ever-delightful Silvery Grebe. Four of these attractive birds stayed close to the bank so we were able to enjoy prolonged close views of this new species for the trip.

It was then time for lunch so we headed for the shelter of the nearest bank of Tussac where we were able to relax out of the wind and rain that was by now a little heavier. As we were walking over the middle of the island Jenny came to see if any of us wanted a lift back to the lodge but departed with an empty vehicle as we headed for the cliffs on the south side of the island. From here we could see a huge male Southern Sea Lion and a very small female at the top of the beach. A little further away another male was dozing on the shingle. By now smoko was calling us at the lodge so we headed back for a warm up and relax before heading out again as the sun came through.

Those that headed towards Elephant Corner spent a while watching the antagonistic or amorous antics of the enormous males or the squabbling weaners scattered all over the beach. In amongst these mammals Magellanic Penguins were coming and going plus various gulls were along the shore with a small group of Snowy Sheathbills. The highlight of this part of the day proved to be the male and three female Killer Whales that we spotted out beyond the kelp at first but then coming closer inshore and staying in view for some time. The male in particular seemed to delight in cruising along with part of its tall fin showing at all times. We found that on our return to the lodge the two Sheilas had found and filmed a white form of the Southern Giant Petrel on the other side of the island. Although a regular sight in South Georgia this variation is a rare sight in the Falkland Islands.

Following dinner the wildlife cameraman Michael Pitts gave us some idea of how they were going to be filming the Killer Whales over the next month and of some of the other projects he had worked on and brought in his laptop to show some of the superb photos he had taken over the years.

Day 10

Thursday 15th November

Sea Lion Island

Some of the group, who were up and about before breakfast had slight difficulty finding Elephant Corner, suffice to say a lot of Tussac was involved! Yellow Violets and white Southern Giant Petrels were on order before we set off for the day. The violets were easy enough to find but although there were large numbers of Giant Petrels in Cow Bay the white one from yesterday had moved on. A short walk led us to Elephant Corner where a few minutes later we had our first group sighting of the male Killer Whale and its three females more or less where they had been before breakfast. They stayed around for some time, not always on view but never far away until they eventually left in mid morning.

When they were not on show there was plenty to watch from the entertaining Elephant Seals slumbering/fighting/scratching in front of us to the busy Sheathbills and Tussac Birds.

One of the latter saw its chance and quickly stole a section of Trevor's Mars Bar. I'm not sure what all that sugar would do to the metabolism of an already hyper bird! The mate of the Striated Caracara that was nesting nearby flew in to see what we were up to, eventually posing to have its photo taken like a true professional model.

Following the departure of the whales we set off along the beach past the numerous weaner seals along with the occasional slumbering adult who hardly opened an eye as we walked by. We found several Two-banded Plover chicks with their anxious parents plus a female who having done its distraction display returned to its nest and sat down in front of us. We also had much better views of the White-rumped Sandpipers we had seen two days ago. One of the Sheathbills also gave the photographers a chance to add it to the "photographed list".

Our route then took us through the open Tussac that leads towards the Giant Petrel hide. There is not a defined track, only one that avoided the scattering of Elephant Seals that were laid here and there! We had our picnic in the hide overlooking the petrel colony, that it must be said was not at its most active. Somewhat noisier was the Elephant Seal that was slumbering outside the hide making the usual variety of snorting noises. Away beyond the kelp was a flock of birds that included albatrosses, petrels and some Southern Fulmars.

Having made our way back onto the sand beach we passed some very battered looking seals that had been in the wars by the look of the scarring around their necks. As we neared the main Gentoo walkway birds could be seen porpoising their way to shore before eventually coming into the beach with quite a whoosh. Some of the group stayed with these penguins to film and photograph them as the numbers increased during the afternoon. Others continued exploring following the Gentoo to the colonies where a few new chicks were seen along with the two King Penguins that had come ashore to moult here.

As ever by mid afternoon smoko began to call so we all called into the lodge at some point, especially as that the calm, sunny weather had deteriorated to a fine misty drizzle with occasional heavier bursts. The sea remained calm so those who ventured out to look for the Killer Whales again were rewarded by another swim-by and there was still plenty of light for yet more photos of penguins!

The nightly reviewing of photos produced another species for the list after we had done the log call as Jeremy found that, in amid the group of Southern Giant Petrels he had photographed on Cow Bay, was a Northern Giant Petrel. This species is rare in the Falklands, possibly due to its close similarity to the Southern Giant Petrel so was a very good discovery and something to look for before our flight off the island in the morning.

Day 11

Friday 16th November

Sea Lion Island to Pebble Island

Only the very early birds saw the Killer Whales this morning, as although they had been closer than before they did not stay around for long. As ever there was much to see in that magical little spot from Elephant Seals to Sheathbills, a variety of wildfowl and birds of prey. It gave us chance to say goodbye to the Cobb's Wrens, and Striated Caracara, as we would be leaving them behind when we headed north after breakfast. Both flights were on time and on the ground at the same time so we said goodbye to Jenny and her staff and set off on the forty-minute flight over Lafonia, Port Howard and West Falkland before landing on Pebble Island.

We were met by Allan and Jacqui and were soon taken to the nearby lodge and settled into our rooms and given smoko. As we had plenty of time today we arranged to get a lift out to Big Pond and explore from there. A Magellanic Oystercatcher on its nest in the Falkland Lavender was our first wildlife, shortly followed by a flock of Kelp Gulls roosting on the point. On the pool two pairs of Black-necked Swans kept their distance, as did several White-tufted Grebes but the Chiloe Wigeon and a female Flying Steamer seemed quite happy to ignore us. Another pair of Flying Steamers were out on the lake and a Yellow-billed Pintail flew by before settling a little distance away. We did not get far before deciding that the nicely angled bank out of the wind was the ideal spot for our picnic. It was a much warmer day with a stiffening north wind and rather cloudy skies and yet it was still quite bright.

Our route then took us around the east side of the pond where a small flock of Two-banded Plover with a couple of White-rumped Sandpipers caught our eye. Those stopping to photograph these birds were lucky enough to see and take pictures of a Queen of Falklands Fritillary butterfly as it made a brief stop. Along this track we had good views of Rufous-chested Dotterel and many Falkland Pipits. Walking from Big Pond to Long Pond we found a pipit's nest containing five eggs tucked away in the grass and an Upland Goose nest with six very much larger eggs!

The east end of Long Pond contained a good number of Speckled Teal, a pair of Yellow-billed Pintail and a pair of approachable White-tufted Grebes. We had several showers of rain as we walked back towards the sand dunes but we did see yet more Dotterel and a scattering of Black-throated Finches plus some of the blue tinged Scurvy Grass flowers. Having navigated our way over another fence we followed the dunes back to Big Pond where we had better views of one of the pairs of Black-necked Swans as well as some very nice Meadowlarks.

As the weather had improved we set off through the dune in a typically round about route until we reached Elephant Beach, four miles of flat sand. A few steamer ducks, oystercatchers and gulls were at the water's edge. There was plenty of marine life washed on the shore for us to examine, from some very long strands of kelp, to shells, barnacles and various unidentified bits and pieces. A group of Commerson's Dolphins were playing in the waves but were very difficult to see well as they surfed in the breakers.

Leaving the beach we found a family of Flying Steamers with their young on the small pond along with another pair and a lone female, the latter of which may well have been the one we had seen in flight over the beach a little earlier. Another Upland Goose nest was close to the path as we returned to the settlement but this female sat tight as we walked by. As we came over the rise we could see the navy were anchored a little distance off shore. We later gather from the seamen who were leaving the lodge that this was the navy's newest ship HMS Clyde and was to be the Falkland Islands new patrol ship. As we strolled through the settlement we came across a Sea Lion sat up high on the remains of the old quay. It posed nicely for photographs now that the sun was almost out, although it did look like it would have rather gone to sleep than keep an eye on us. Our first afternoon on a new island had given us a taster of what to look for in the next two days...

Day 12

Saturday 17th November

Pebble Island

Although it was dry before breakfast it was not to stay that way as rain came sweeping in and was with us for most of the day, also the wind increased to gale force in late afternoon.

In view of the weather forecast we had decided to spend the day on the eastern part of the island where we could use the vehicles as mobile hides to great effect. Leaving the settlement we sped along Elephant Beach making use of the island's 'motorway' at low tide passing steamer ducks, gulls and a scattering of waders, which included good numbers of White-rumped Sandpipers and Two-banded Plovers. The Sea Lion spotted by those in the last vehicle was a good find as it was never on show for long as it 'spy hopped', watching us. The track then turned inland past a good many Magellanic Penguin burrows before we reached Quark Pond. Amongst the more expected waterfowl was a pair of Flying Steamer Ducks, a pair of Chiloe Wigeon and a lone Silver Teal that showed well in a narrow inlet.

Next stop was Bett's Pond where two pairs of Black-necked Swan were seen along with three Yellow-billed Pintail more Wigeon and Pintail and some distant White-tufted Grebes. By the time we reached Tamar Head the rain was quite heavy so Jacqui hopped out for a quick look but as there was little on show we contented ourselves by watching some albatrosses passing offshore and some buds of the Falkland Thrift that was showing through the Diddle-dee before moving on again.

We had just passed through one of the gates along the north of the island when the last vehicle called us back as a dark phase male Red-backed Hawk had landed nearby. By the time the rest of us arrived it had decided to fly on but at least we had now seen our first male. Having passed a small Rockhopper Penguin colony we stopped at the largest one at this end of the island that was mixed with an even larger Imperial Shag colony. We were able to park and watch all the comings and going in this busy colony. Shags were arriving in waves much to the delight of the marauding gulls and skuas with Sheathbills always on the lookout for a tasty morsel. At one end of the colony was the leucistic Rockhopper Penguin that we discovered was sitting on an egg, so its strange colour did not seem to have inhibited it pairing up. We had smoko here enthralled by all the activity before continuing to a nearby Gentoo Penguin colony which were sitting tight keeping their eggs dry and thus were less dynamic than usual for this species.

As it was not weather for walking we decided to head for Tamar Pass, the narrow stretch of water between Pebble Island and West Falkland. After an eventful drive we reached a point where we could look over the water streaming out to sea where flocks of South American Terns were feeding and the skuas seem to be having a field day. Imperial and Rock Shags were flying by close to our shore with the occasional Black-browed Albatross low over the middle of the Channel. It was a good spot to have our lunch with plenty to see and some very impressive waves curling into the shore that attracted the photographers.

Eventually it was time to move on back to the main Rockhopper colony where we had a brief fruitless look for a Macaroni Penguin before setting off back towards the pools. Although the weather was not in our favour it was obvious there was a lot to see on Green Pond with over thirty Black-necked Swans, a good range of smaller ducks and some quite large flocks of smaller waders in the distance that were probably White-rumped Sandpipers. It was whilst looking at these that we realised that there was a larger wader in the deeper water. We drove around the lake to get closer for a better look, where our mystery bird turned out to be a Hudsonian Godwit, a rare visitor to the islands which breeds in the western tip of Alaska and winters in Tierra del Fuego. On our way back to the lodge on the high tide route we passed two more Black-necked Swans and a pool that contained three White-tufted Grebes a nice bird to finish on. Considering the weather we had seen a wide range of wildlife and found a rarity, so not a bad day. Following dinner there was much discussion about where else to visit in the world and I suspect some plans for the future were made that evening.

Day 13

Sunday 18th November

Pebble Island

We awoke to find that the rain had gone and left a bright and windy day for our day out on the western end of the island. Having crossed the airstrip we had a quick but fruitless look for some Dog Orchids before continuing up the edge of First Mountain to the memorial to HMS Coventry that had been sunk 13 miles North West of the island in 1982. The newly refurbished memorial looked splendid in the sunshine. From here one gets superb views away towards the eastern part of the island and the hills of West Falkland.

We then followed the track westwards passing a few Black-throated Finches and Rufous-chested Dotterel and a scattering of Pale Maiden blowing in the wind. Turning towards the coast we reached the white sandy beaches near Green Rincon. On one side was a colony of Southern Giant Petrels that has increased over the years to 103 nests this year, whilst on the other at the far end of the bay was a group of Gentoo Penguins and a scattering of waterfowl. Some of the Upland Geese goslings were having great difficulty standing up in the wind or the surf so were not having a good day. A small group of Commerson's Dolphin were apparently playing the waves, often coming quite close to the shore.

We then moved around to the far end of the beach where we had smoko looking down on the resting Gentoos and out to the dolphins that were now visible from this end of the beach. The Crested Caracara that put in a brief appearance as we drove across did not show again even when we visited the old nest site on the western side of the headland. On the way out to the point we passed the new Gentoo Penguin colony situated in a very exposed bare patch. From the other side of Green Rincon we could see more Commerson's Dolphin a little further offshore. It is normally an easy drive along the beach from here but yesterday's rain had created a deep gully in the sand so we had to take the inland route to get to the memorial to the crew from the Argentine Learjet that had been shot down by HMS Exeter in 1982. A few yards further on we stopped to look at a couple of good examples of Woolly Ragwort, one of the island's endemic flowers.

The biggest Rockhopper Penguin colony on the island is near Marble Mountain and this was our next stop. This colony has been home to two of the more unusual species of penguin to visit the islands in recent years. There is a scattering of Macaroni Penguins breeding around the Falklands and one of the pair that has been here for several years was present today, apparently incubating an egg. Also incubating an egg was the Erect-crested Penguin that been returning to Pebble Island for ten summers. This species breeds in the sub-Antarctic islands of New Zealand and is a rare bird elsewhere in the world so we were very privileged to see it.

We had our lunch overlooking the colony, as usual with Rockhoppers this one was a hive of activity. We could see more and more birds coming in from the sea along their 'runway', hopping or bouncing in to join their mate in a display of shaking head plumes. From a vantage point on the far side we could see them making their way up and down the cliff or stopping for a splash and wash in the small pool just above sea level. On the way to the colony we had seen a distant adult Striated Caracara but had better views of an immature bird when it flew low over the penguins.

Jacqui knew a spot for Ladies Slipper not far from here so this was our next stop and sure enough a number of this very pretty flower were in bloom next to the track. The name of the island is derived from the distinctive translucent pebbles that are found here so it was fitting we should go and have a look.

It was quite a dramatic beach with breakers curling into the shore, penguins on the far end of the beach and albatrosses gliding effortlessly offshore. After a few minutes searching we got our eye in and managed to find some of the pebbles amongst the drifts of shingle before it was time to move on to our last stop of the day.

This was to be at the Gentoo colonies at the base of Middle Mountain, quite some walk from the sea. We were very pleased to find a lone King Penguin stood in the middle of the colony as this meant that we had now seen six species of penguin in a little under 90 minutes. As far as I can discover there is nowhere else in the world one can see six species in a day let alone in such a short period of time!

The Gentoo Penguins were much further along in their breeding season than others we had seen as there were a good number of quite well grown young trying to hide by putting their head out of sight and leaving their rear in full view. Others were still on eggs but the majority seemed to have young of varying sizes. The King was obviously feeling a bit lonely as it kept bugling to contact a mate but with no success. This site was a fitting place to end a super day, as it was now time to head back to the lodge, although we did have a stop on the airfield to have a look at what was left after the SAS raid there in 1982. Thanks to all of the gate openers and closers- much appreciated.

As we had dinner we kept an eye out to see if there was going to be a good sunset but although it was mostly clear there was no colour in the sky tonight. As we neared the end of the tour thoughts were beginning to turn to home but we still had one more island to visit tomorrow.

Day 14

Monday 19th November

Pebble Island to Bleaker Island

Those who ventured out before breakfast found it was a very windy day to say the least. As a result our flights to Bleaker Island were delayed by a few hours. This did give us time to have another look around the settlement or photograph "Forest" the pet sheep but as most birdlife was going sideways the lounge was popular, especially when 'smoko' was announced. Eventually our two flights arrived in close succession in early afternoon, those on the first went via Hill Cove whilst the second went direct so was on the ground first where we were met by our hosts Rob and Elaine Short. Once we were all on the island we drove the short distance to the settlement where we used the main house, 'The Outlook', to sort out who was sleeping where and order lunch!

A little later we assembled at Cobb's Cottage, had lunch and then set off towards the coast following the Imperial Shags we had seen flying overhead in small groups towards their colony. As this was one of the largest Imperial Shag colonies in the islands it did not take long to find, but we did get diverted by a very tame Dark-faced ground Tyrant that flitted along the fence posts in front of us as if wanting its picture taken. The shag colony was a buzz of activity with birds coming and going all the time plus the predators looking for that unguarded egg including Dolphin Gulls, Falkland Skuas and Snowy Sheathbills. We slowly ambled along the fence that was between the shags take-off runway and us, watching all the hustle and bustle and, as we got down wind, discovering the smell of such a large colony!

Tearing ourselves away from them we continued a little further before heading through a gap in the Tussac to the mixed Rockhopper Penguin and Imperial Shag colony. On the way in we had superb views of a Striated Grass Wren singing from one of the Tussac bogs.

The colony gave us a much better view of the shags in the late afternoon sunshine as well as watching and listening to the Rockhopper Penguins. Out at sea the occasional Black-browed Albatross cruised by, whilst closer to shore flocks of South American Terns were feeding, often in close association with penguins. Two Sooty Shearwaters zipped by but were not seen by all, as they were not on view for long. We spent some time here before eventually moving on to look over one of the bays where Magellanic Penguins were watching us from just outside their burrows. On the way we had a close view of a group of Black-chinned Siskins feeding on some Groundsel near the fence and a Long-tailed Meadowlark did its best to hide its red breast further along the track.

On the return journey another diversion took us through a narrow strip of Tussac to overlook a narrow gorge where a pair of Crested Caracara put on an excellent display, calling and head tossing as they perched on a rock at the end of the gully. An excellent species to end the day, although it was not quite the end, as we still had to wander back past the shag colony as well as try to photograph another meadowlark and watch a Magellanic Snipe as its mate sang nearby.

We all had dinner in Cobb's Cottage as darkness fell. Although the wind had dropped at last there was enough cloud to stop us watching the sunset as we ate. By the time those staying 'up the hill' made their way back there was only a little light in the sky but we did hear some Snipe and a Magellanic Oystercatcher displaying.

Day 15

Tuesday 20th November

Bleaker Island

By the time we got going this morning it was quite windy again, not as strong as yesterday but more than enough. Having had breakfast in our respective cottages we set off in the landrover to visit the main wildlife areas of the island. That was after checking to see if the Ruddy-headed Goose with the twenty young still had all its charges on the green outside the house.

With Trevor on gate duty again we only had a short drive to the first pond close to the track. As we arrived we could see two Black-necked Swans, some Silver Teal and a pair of Flying Steamer Ducks with two young. A few White-rumped Sandpipers and Two-banded Plovers were around the edge along with the usual gang of Ruddy-headed and Upland Geese. We then wandered over to the south end of Big Pond where it became apparent that the Silvery Grebe that breed here had done very well with large chicks being fed by their parents in several locations plus more Silver Teal and another pair of Flying Steamer Ducks. We wandered along to the far end of the pool passing a small flock of Magellanic Oystercatchers, who were reluctant to move out of our way, before finding a pair of White-tufted Grebes that must have decided that we were worthy of study as they stayed close to our bank and even began displaying much to the delight of the photographers amongst us. My plan to come around behind the hill back to the original pool to see if we could get close to the Black-necked Swans did not work as they saw us coming and drifted out from the shore, so we contented ourselves with better views of the flock of Silver Teal, the largest group we had seen.

Once back into the vehicle we drove around to find a place to overlook the middle of Big Pond where we found the Chiloe Wigeon we had seen earlier, more Silvery Grebes and three Black-necked Swans. At the far end of the pool we had seen a large number of terns at the water's edge so this was our next target. As we arrived they flew and landed a couple of times before generally ignoring us and enabling us to get our best views of these elegant birds.

There was a steady stream of terns coming and going from the beach, most were adults but there were a few immature and one or two in non breeding plumage but over three hundred were present at highest count. Some Brown-hooded Gulls came and went including a few adults with a nice pink tinge to their breasts and there were a small number of Kelp and Dolphin Gull to add to the mix.

Our route then took us past two more small ponds with their almost obligatory broods of Upland Geese and then over the heath to the far side of the island and the airport before reaching the main Gentoo Penguin colony scattered over quite an area of Diddle-dee. It appeared that they had decided to nest in the middle of each clump of Diddle-dee to save building a nest, although there were some birds wandering around with sticks and stones in their beaks to add to their nests. In view of the cold wind it was no surprise to find the penguins lying on their nests so we could not see if they had any young yet.

Having negotiated the myriad Magellanic Penguin burrows we reached the edge of the sand beach and had our lunch overlooking this scenic spot. There were even more terns feeding out over the bay although we were not sure how many as the counts did not seem to get to more than three! Following one rather nasty hail shower we set up the telescope to see how many Sea Lions were hauled out on the shore of Ghost Island, the Tussac Island a little distance offshore. With over twenty females there were at least two quite large bulls lumbering along the beach. We then drove around the seaward edge of the Big Pool getting different views of the grebes, swans and other waterfowl before heading for the higher ground. Another snow/hail shower reduced the visibility for a few moments until we came across another Gentoo Penguin colony high on the slope. This rookery looked quite picturesque for a few moments before all the hail melted away again. We completed our drive around by reaching the large Imperial Shag colony before continuing back to the settlement for smoko and to decide what to do next.

Although the wind was still strong it was much sunnier again so everyone ventured out to explore the settlement and the skeleton of the Sei Whale that had been arranged on the grass. Others headed further south along the island whilst some went back to the Imperial Shag and Rockhopper Penguin colonies for another look. It's amazing how many photographs can be taken on one small island!

Following dinner in Cobb's cottage Elaine came in with a selection of items for sale that strangely enough all had Bleaker Island printed on them! She had a busy few minutes as many souvenirs of a popular island were snapped up. Plans were then made for our last morning in camp before returning to the metropolis of Stanley.

Day 16

Wednesday 21st November

Bleaker Island to Stanley

Our last full day on the islands started with some rain but cleared to a glorious morning reverting to windy by the time of our planned boat trip. As it was our last chance to visit a penguin colony some of the group were up and about early to walk to the Gentoo Penguin colonies, whilst others had a lift or walked up to the huge Imperial Shag, Rockhopper rookery closer at hand.

By late morning we were all back at the two houses and ready to head for the airport. As the two flights were due only a few minutes apart we headed to the airport in one group and it was not long before the first flight was landing in the warm sunshine.

As it took off we noted that Angela had managed to get herself in the co-pilot seat so she could film the flight! The second flight was delayed which gave those left the chance to have another look around this wildlife site and add Brown-hooded Gull and Blackish Oystercatcher to the day's list as well as watch and photograph just a few more penguins.

By early afternoon we were all in Stanley and discovering what souvenirs we couldn't do without or visiting the excellent museum. We had been due to take a boat trip out of the harbour towards the entrance of Berkeley Sound in the area of Kidney Island but the increasing wind meant that our last wildlife adventure had to be cancelled so we had another chance to explore the island's capital before meeting for our final dinner.

Days 17/18

Thursday 22nd - Friday 23rd November

Stanley to Brize Norton

We had to be up and about early to be ready for the bus that was to take us from Stanley to the airport at Mount Pleasant. The landscape that had looked so new two weeks ago was now familiar as were the Upland Geese, vultures, meadowlarks, finches and tyrants we saw as we drove by. The check-in and customs clearance was very quick today so we were all in the departure lounge in good time. Those who wanted another Falklands stamp in their passport were able to do so for a donation to a military charity. As there were not so many on the flight it meant that we had a bit more space than we had on the way down, although as ever there was often someone's head in the way when one wanted to watch the Tornados that came up alongside either wing with a typically adroit flying display.

We then settled into the first leg of the flight, which was shorter than usual at seven hours before we landed in the humid night on Ascension Island. We were due to be here for two hours but were called back to the plane earlier than expected and were airborne again in no time at all. The rest of the night was spent dozing, watching films etc before landing on a cold grey dawn back at Brize Norton where our adventure had begun many moons ago (or so it seemed!).

The tour ended as our bags came around on the carousel and we returned home having spent two weeks in one of the wildlife spectacles of the world.

I hope you all enjoyed the tour and that this report brings back memories of what we saw and of the places we stayed in these magical islands.

Note: Smoko = Falklands traditional name for a mid morning coffee/tea break!

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Species Lists

Mammals

Killer Whale (Orca) *Orcinus orca*

A male and three females were seen from Elephant Corner on Sea Lion Island on 14th-16th

Peale's Dolphin *Lagenorhynchus australis*

Ten plus were seen offshore from Volunteer Point on 8th and three were bow riding the boat around West Point Island on 12th.

Commerson's Dolphin *Cephalorhynchus commersonii*

Six plus were playing in the surf at Elephant Bay Pebble Island on 16th with many being seen on either side of Green Rincon, Pebble Island on 18th

Southern Sea Lion *Otaria flavescens*

Nine were seen around the coast of West Point Island on 12th. Two bulls and a female were on Sea Lion Island on 14th and one was on the old jetty, Pebble Island on 16th with one from Elephant Bay and four off Wreck Point, Pebble Island on 17th.

Falkland Islands Fur Seal *Arctocephalus australis*

One was seen briefly from the boat trip around West Point on 12th.

Southern Elephant Seal *Mirounga leonine*

Many, including lots of pups were on Sea Lion Island between 13th and 16th.

Birds

King Penguin *Aptenodytes patagonicus*

The large colony at Volunteer Point was visited on 8th where 430+ of the 'woolly bears' were also seen. On Sea Lion Island one was seen on 13th with two seen there on 15th. One was with Gentoo Penguins on Pebble Island on 18th.

Gentoo Penguin *Pygoscelis papua*

Seen daily away from Stanley. Colonies were visited at Volunteer Point, Gladstone Bay, Fox Bay, Carcass Island, Sea Lion Island (also from the lodge), Pebble Island and Bleaker Island.

Erect-crested Penguin *Eudyptes sclateri*

The bird that has summered on Pebble Island for the last ten years was present, incubating an egg, at the Marble colony on 18th.

Rockhopper Penguin *Eudyptes chrysocome*

Colonies were visited at West Point Island, Sea Lion Island, Pebble Island where many were seen and Bleaker Island.

Macaroni Penguin *Eudyptes chrysolophus*

Singles were seen in Rockhopper colonies on West Point Island on 12th and at the Marble colony on Pebble Island on 18th.

Magellanic Penguin *Spheniscus magellanicus*

Seen daily apart from in Stanley and at Port Howard, usually in dispersed colonies not far from the shore.

White-tufted Grebe *Rollandia rolland rolland*

One was seen on way to Volunteer Pt on 8th and six were on the Hawks Nest Pond on 10th. Nineteen were on Long and Big Ponds Pebble Island on 16th with ten plus on Betts and Green Pond next day. Two pairs, one with a chick was on Big Pond, Bleaker Island on 20th.

Silvery Grebe *Podiceps occipitalis*

Nine were on Long Pond, Sea Lion Island on 14th. Three were on a small pond on east of Pebble Island on 17th and 22 plus 9 young were on Big Pond, Bleaker Island on 20th.

Black-browed Albatross *Thalassarche melanophrys*

The colony on West Point Island was visited on 12th where many were seen with small numbers offshore most days.

Southern Giant Petrel *Macronectes giganteus*

Commonly seen around all islands. The white form was seen off Sea Lion Island on 14th. The colony on Sea Lion Island was visited on 14th and 15th and the larger colony on Pebble Island containing 103 nests was visited on 18th.

Northern Giant Petrel *Macronectes halli*

One was identified from Jeremy's photographs in evening of 15th having been photographed in Cow Bay, Sea Lion Island that day. Jeremy has since sent me photos of several other individuals all taken on Sea Lion Island with apparently four individuals being present that day.

Southern Fulmar *Fulmarus glacialisoides*

At least 150+ were off the reef from West Point on 12th with 120+ offshore from Sea Lion Island on 13th and 60+ there on 15th.

Cape (Pintado) Petrel *Daption capense*

Two were seen from boat trip around West Point Island on 12th.

Thin-billed (Slender-billed) Prion *Pachyptila belcheri*

Hundreds if not thousands were seen over reef north west of West Point Island on 12th.

Sooty Shearwater *Puffinus griseus*

Two were seen offshore from Bleaker Island on 19th.

Rock Shag *Phalacrocorax magellanicus*

Small numbers were seen daily from most coastlines, usually nesting on low cliffs on many of the islands visited but best seen on Bleaker Island.

Imperial Shag (King Shag) *Phalacrocorax atriceps albiventer*

More common than previous species, often seen in large groups. Colonies visited on Sea Lion Island, Pebble Island and the largest was on Bleaker Island.

Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax falklandicus*

Small numbers were seen on nine dates in most localities with a maximum of twelve on Carcass Island on 12th.

Black-faced Ibis *Theristicus melanopsis*

One of this vagrant species from South America was on Carcass Island on 11th.

Black-necked Swan *Cygnus melancoryphus*

A pair with six young and four other adults was on the Hawks Nest Pond, West Falkland on 10th. On Pebble Island four were on Long Pond on 16th with a further 37 seen on 17th. Five were on Big Pond, Bleaker Island on 20th.

Upland Goose *Chloephaga picta leucoptera*

Widespread on all islands, but particularly numerous on Sea Lion and Bleaker Islands where many young were noted, often with quite large broods.

Kelp Goose *Chloephaga hybrida malvinarum*

Not as numerous as previous species but seen on most rocky shores and very common near the settlement on Carcass island.

Ruddy-headed Goose *Chloephaga rubidiceps*

Seen on all islands but most common on Sea Lion Island and Bleaker Island.

Flying Steamer Duck *Tachyeres patachonicus*

A good tour for this species with a pair plus two young and another pair on the Hawks nest Pond on 10th. Eight adults and two young on Pebble Island on 16th with a further two pairs, one with five young also on Pebble Island on 17th. Two pairs, one with two young plus another female were on Bleaker Island on 20th.

Falkland Flightless Steamer Duck *Tachyeres brachydactyla*

Widespread around the shore on all islands, often in large flocks with small family groups noted daily.

Chiloe Wigeon *Anas sibilatrix*

Between two and fifteen seen on ten dates on all islands except West Point with most seen on Pebble and Bleaker Islands.

Speckled Teal (Yellow-billed Teal) *Anas flavirostris*

Seen on freshwater pools most days with most seen on Pebble Island on 16th when 60+ were noted.

Crested Duck *Anas specularoides specularoides*

Seen in small number around the coast or in tidal pools on all islands.

Yellow-billed Pintail *Anas georgica spinicauda*

Two were on the Hawks Nest Pond on West Falkland on 10th. Three were on Long Pond, Pebble Island on 16th with six seen on Green and Betts Pond, Pebble Island on 17th.

Silver Teal *Anas versicolor fretensis*

Two were on the Hawks Nest Pond on West Falkland on 10th with a further two on Sea Lion Island on 14th. Ten were on Pebble Island on 17th with two noted on Bleaker on 19th and 17 there on 20th.

Red Shoveler *Anas platalea*

A male of this rare vagrant was on the Hawks Nest Pond, West Falkland on 10th.

Turkey Vulture *Cathartes aura jota*

Commonly seen on all islands in all weathers.

Red-backed (Variable) Hawk *Buteo polyosoma*

One was seen near Fox Bay on 10th with singles then on Carcass Island on 11th and 12th. A female was on Pebble on 16th with a dark phase male there on 17th and a juvenile on 18th. One was seen from flight to Bleaker Island on 19th with a dark female on Bleaker also on 19th.

Striated Caracara *Phalacrocorax australis*

Common on Carcass Island and Sea Lion Island with an adult and an immature on Pebble Island being the only other sightings.

Southern (Crested) Caracara *Caracara plancus*

Three were seen from trip to Volunteer Point on 8th and twelve were in the area of Many Branch house, West Falkland on 9th with one seen on trip to Fox Bay on 10th. One was seen distantly on Sea Lion Island on 15th but two showed very well on Bleaker Island on 19th and 20th.

Peregrine (Cassin's) Falcon *Falco peregrinus cassini*

One with prey was seen from boat trip around West Point Island on 12th and one was over Bleaker Island on 20th.

Magellanic Oystercatcher *Haematopus leucopodus*

More common than previous species, with young noted regularly in most locations and small flocks of up to fifty birds seen on occasion.

Blackish Oystercatcher *Haematopus ater*

Seen along rocky shores on all islands but rarely more than four birds on view at any one time.

Two-banded Plover *Charadrius falklandicus*

Seen in small groups or in pairs on all islands except West Point Island with chicks noted on most islands.

Rufous-chested Dotterel *Charadrius modestus*

Seen on drier heaths on West Falklands, Sea Lion Island and Pebble Island. Often seen in pairs defending territory with some display noted.

Magellanic Snipe *Gallinago paragaiae magellanica*

Seen on ten dates, usually less than five per day but common, and very tame, on Sea Lion Island. Singing birds were heard on the smaller islands and 'drumming' was heard on Sea Lion and Bleaker Islands.

Hudsonian Godwit *Limosa haemastica*

This rarity on the islands was identified on a windy Green Pond, Pebble Island on 17th.

White-rumped Sandpiper *Calidris fuscicollis*

Small flocks were seen on nine dates, often with Two-banded Plovers, in particular on Sea Lion Pebble and Bleaker Islands.

Snowy Sheathbill *Chionis alba*

After nine on West Point Island on 12th up to fifteen per day were on Sea Lion Island and up to thirty were on Pebble Island with a similar number on Bleaker Island.

Falkland Skua *Catharacta antarctica*

Seen daily in all coastal locations, often associating with breeding seabirds.

Dolphin Gull *Larus scoresbii*

Widespread in small numbers with a maximum count of fifty plus on West Point Island on 12th.

Kelp Gull *Larus dominicanus*

The most numerous of the gulls, seen in all locations, often in flocks roosting near the shore.

Brown-hooded Gull *Larus maculipennis*

Four were at Gladstone Bay, West Falklands on 9th and three were seen from boat trip around West Point on 12th. Six were then on Pebble Island on 16th and four on Bleaker on 19th with ten plus there on 20th.

South American Tern *Sterna hirundinacea*

Seen offshore or over some of the larger ponds in small groups most days apart from 100+ in the Tamar Pass, Pebble Island on 17th and 300+ on pools on Bleaker Island on 20th with many more over the sea that day.

Tussacbird *Cinclodes antarcticus antarcticus*

Common on Carcass and Sea Lion Island plus up to five per day were on Bleaker Island.

Dark-faced Ground-tyrant *Muscisaxicola maclovianus maclovianus*

Seen most days on all islands, most often on fence posts or beside the tracks as we walked or drove by.

Falkland Pipit *Anthus correndera grayi*

Noted in small numbers in the White Grass Camp on ten dates with most noted on Pebble Island where seen and heard displaying.

Falkland Grass Wren *Cistothorus platensis falklandicus*

Seen and heard in small numbers on Carcass and Sea Lions Islands, with a few noted on Pebble and Bleaker Islands. Often seen singing from top of the leeward side of a clump of Tussac.

Cobb's Wren *Troglodytes cobbi*

Only noted on Carcass and Sea Lion Islands but much easier to see and hear on the latter island this year.

Falkland Thrush *Turdus falklandii falklandii*

Often heard singing around settlements on all islands, never common but seen daily with most noted on Sea Lion Island.

Black-throated (Canary-winged) Finch *Melanodera melanodera*

Seen in White Grass and Diddle-dee camp on most days, often in pairs and occasionally singing males were heard on calmer days.

Long-tailed Meadowlark *Sturnella loyca falklandica*

Regularly seen on all islands except Sea Lion Island where absent.

Black-chinned Siskin *Carduelis barbata*

Most numerous on Sea Lion Island but seen daily and small groups were encountered on all islands.

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*

Common in Stanley but not seen elsewhere.

Insects

Queen of Falklands Fritillary Butterfly *Yramea cytheris*

One was seen and photographed on Pebble Island on 16th.

Plants

(# = Endemic I = Introduced)

Small Fern (*Blechnum penna-marina*)

Sheep's Sorrel (*Rumex acetosella*) I

Native Strawberry (*Rubus geoides*)

Prickly Burr (*Acaena magellanica*)

White Clover (*Trifolium repens*) I

Scurvy Grass (*Oxalis enneaphylla*)

Field Pansy (*Viola arvensis*)

Pig Vine (*Gunnera magellanica*)

Balsam Bog (*Bolax gummifera*)

Diddle-dee (*Empetrum rubrum*)

Changing Forget-me-not (*Mysotis discolor*) I

Native Boxwood (*Hebe elliptica*)

European Daisy (*Bellis perennis*) I

Fachine (*Chilliotrichum diffusum*)

Woolly Falkland Ragwort (*Senecio littoralis*) #

Falkland Lavender (*Perezia recurvata*)

Soft Camp Bog (*Astelia pumila*)

Native Rush (*Juncus scheuzerioides*) I

Tussock grass (*Parodiobloe flabellata*)

Cinnamon Grass (*Hierobloe redolens*)

Yellow Orchid (*Gavilea littoralis*)

Tall Fern (*Blechnum magellanicum*)

Field Mouse-ear Chickweed (*Cerastium fontanum*) I

Oval-leaved Prickly Burr (*Acaena ovalifolia*)

Gorse (*Ulex europaea*) I

Red Clover (*Trifolium pratense*) I

Native / Yellow Violet (*Viola maculata*)

Teaberry (*Myrteola nummularia*)

Clubmoss Azorella (*Azorella lycopodioides*)

Wild Celery (*Apium australe*)

Falkland Thrift (*Armeria macloviana*)

Ladies Slipper (*Calceolaria fothegillii*)

Antarctic Eyebright (*Euphrasia antarctica*)

Christmas Bush (*Baccharis magellanica*)

Sea Cabbage (*Senecio candicans*)

Groundsel (*Senecio vulgaris*) I

Dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale*) I

Pale Maiden (*Sisyrinchium filifolium*)

Basket Rush (*Marsippospermum grandiflorum*)

White Grass (*Cortaderia pilosa*)

California Club Rush (*Schoenoplectus californicus*)

Dog Orchid (*Codonorchis lessonii*)

Ascension Island birdlife

Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis*

Some were seen from the compound on outward flight

Ascension Frigatebird *Fregata aquila*

One or two flew over the compound on outward journey.