

# ANTARCTICA, THE FALKLANDS & SOUTH GEORGIA

3–23 November 2018



*Light-mantled Albatross at sea west of South Georgia (Mike Watson).*

## **LEADER: MIKE WATSON**

On a windswept visit to the Southern Ocean and ultimately the white continent, Antarctica, we enjoyed some amazing wildlife spectacles in stunning surroundings. One of the main features of this tour is the opportunity for endless seabirding from the deck of MV Plancius and our highlights included Wandering, Southern and Northern Royal, Light-mantled (Sooty), Grey-headed and Black-browed Albatrosses. Other tubenoses included Southern and Northern Giant Petrels, Southern Fulmar, Antarctic, Cape, Snow, Blue, Atlantic, Soft-plumaged, White-headed and White-chinned Petrels as well as Antarctic and Slender-billed Prions and Sooty, Manx and Great Shearwaters.

Our cruise is timed to coincide with the height of bird activity at the start of the southern hemisphere's spring and in the Falkland Islands many seabirds were already busy breeding. We visited bustling Black-browed Albatross, Southern Rockhopper and Gentoo Penguin colonies as well as



*Beach scene St Andrew's Bay, South Georgia with King Penguins galore and Southern Elephant Seals (Mike Watson).*

taking in other avian highlights in the form of the endemic Falkland Steamer Duck and the trio of geese, Upland, Kelp and the pretty Ruddy-headed. Magellanic and Blackish Oystercatchers delighted along the kelp-covered shore. A special land excursion out of Port Stanley delivered super smart Two-banded Plovers and Rufous-chested Dotterels as well as South American (or Magellanic) Snipe and breeding Magellanic Penguins of note in a historical setting courtesy of Falklands War veteran Sergeant Major Brian Sullivan.

South Georgia was the jewel in the crown this time with unbeatable King Penguin performances at the mega colonies of Salisbury Plain, St Andrew's Bay and Gold Harbour, with a superb supporting cast of Southern Elephant Seals, Antarctic Fur Seals, Southern Giant Petrels and Brown Skuas and all in the most perfect un-spoilt glaciated landscapes. Our landing at the iconic location of Grytviken included a toast at the grave of heroic Irish explorer Sir Ernest Shackleton, as well as a fierce snow-storm, which made the experience even more atmospheric than usual. South Georgia Pipits, now happily recovered after the recent rat eradication project were seen on all landings on the island and even offshore!

Heading further south we added Chinstrap and Adelie Penguins to our list in the South Orkneys as well as some of the world's most impressive tabular icebergs including the infamous and enormous B-09F. We also visited the Orcada (Laurie Island, South Orkneys - Argentinian) and Bellingshausen (King George Island, South Shetlands - Russian) Antarctic research bases. Ultimately our visit to the Antarctic Peninsula itself was blighted by stormy weather, which prevented us from entering the Weddell Sea or Antarctic Sound and therefore also killing any realistic hope of Emperor Penguin. This was a disappointment for the birders but we did at least have one perfect day further south along the peninsula, landing at both the idyllic Danco Island and Neko Harbour Gentoo Penguin colonies. The latter of course involved setting foot on the seventh continent itself rather than simply its offshore islands, a very significant moment for many! Other wildlife included the southern seals: Crabeater, Leopard and Weddell and numerous cetacean sightings included Peale's, Dusky and Commerson's

Dolphins, Orca, Southern Bottlenose, Humpback, Sei, Fin and Antarctic Minke Whales, not forgetting those Southern Right Whales that we cruised past out of Puerto Madryn so long ago. However we were not able to detour for cetaceans while cruising at sea as many sightings are fleeting anyway, so many blows went unidentified with only a minority close enough to see their makers in the usually choppy seas. For the record we tallied 86 bird species and 17 mammals.

This cruise remains one of the world's classic wildlife expeditions and is simply a must 'bucket list' experience for anyone interested in the natural world with the time and resources to make the dream a reality. My overwhelming feeling was of being very privileged to be able to visit such a remote part of the planet, where we have done relatively little to screw up the natural world as we have done almost everywhere else. The astonishing numbers of birds and other wildlife were overwhelming at times. Added to this some very impressive scenery indeed and all via the comfort of our purpose built expedition ship MV Plancius made for an unforgettable experience.

With the vast distances to cover between locations there is a lot of time spent sailing far from land on this cruise. For those not wishing to stay on deck as long as possible there were numerous excellent lectures to attend covering all aspects of the region we were travelling through, mostly encompassing its geology, wildlife and history of exploration, all delivered with passion and enthusiasm by the very knowledgeable and experienced expedition staff.

*Gentoo Penguin, Neko Harbour (Mike Watson).*











*Southern Giant Petrel at sea off the Valdes Peninsula & previous page: Chinstrap Penguins, South Shetland Islands (Mike Watson).*

### **3 November Sailing from Puerto Madryn (42.45S/65.01W, wind NW5, 15 Celsius)**

Once we had boarded the lovely MV Plancius moored along the jetty at Puerto Madryn and had completed the tedious but necessary embarkation formalities there was a little time to watch for wildlife as we sailed away from the Valdes Peninsula. As we had sat in the bus waiting to take us to our ship we had watched the distant Southern Right Whales in the bay, so full of energy with much breaching and tail fluke waving. Southern Giant Petrels zoomed around and there were some interesting birds in the bay itself, notably Great Grebe, Red-gartered Coot, Chiloe Wigeon, Red Shoveler, Yellow-billed Pintail and Black-headed Duck. We could even still make out Southern Martin flying around the hotel buildings on the sea front! Three South American Sealions were slumbering on the pilings of the jetty behind our ship but these soon departed when the time came to leave our moorings. As the sun dipped on the western horizon we were treated to a truly stunning sunset, with the sky over the Valdes Peninsula on fire and happily still some seabirds flying against it to satisfy the artists amongst us.

### **4 November Cruising towards the Falkland Islands (44.35S/63.35W, wind NNW5, 14 Celsius)**

After a very pleasant rolling night's sleep we awoke to a lovely sunny day at sea, with lots of seabirds around MV Plancius all day as we continued southeast towards the Falkland Islands, roughly following the South American continental shelf. The moderate swell and following wind meant that the great albatrosses were on the wing and occasionally zooming in to check us out like light aircraft. They are always such a thrill and we could identify (often from photos checking cutting edge of the bill detail) Wandering and both Northern and Southern Royal Albatrosses amongst hundreds of Black-browed. There were also hundreds of Southern Giant Petrels (no definite Northerns but many youngsters are not separable) and Cape and White-chinned Petrels, however, the commonest seabird today by far was Slender-billed Prion, which could be seen in several tight flocks, each



*Great Shearwater at sea west of the Falkland Islands (Mike Watson).*

containing a thousand or so birds. From a distance their white undersides looked like migrating terns but through binos their shearing flight quickly became obvious. Wilson's Storm Petrel was another common sight today. Bird of the day today, however, was Great Shearwater, with around 20 logged. This would be the only day we saw this smart shearwater, now back in its Austral summer latitudes. Tim had a Manx Shearwater and we also saw our first handful of Sooty Shearwaters. There was still a mob of Kelp Gulls following us today and a number of South American and Arctic Terns was noted. Two of three jaegers we saw could be identified as Parasitic, the other was probably a Long-tailed. Four Magellanic Penguins were seen in the water as we cruised by and several small groups of smart little Peale's Dolphins rode the bow of MV Plancius throughout a brilliant day of seabirding. We were even treated to a double green flash as the sun set over a bumpy sea, our own movement creating this effect.

**5 November Cruising towards The Falkland Islands (48.54S/61.57W, wind WNW5, overcast, 8 Celsius)**

Another day cruising steadily towards the Falkland Islands saw a bigger swell but with the wind behind us MV Plancius steered an easy rolling course through even the biggest seventh waves. Most of us spent the day on deck seabirding or sleeping. Happily only one of our number suffered seasickness on this trip and the rest of us (some medicated) came to enjoy the rolling life on the ocean wave. The composition of the birds around us changed today, with noticeably fewer of most things except Southern and North Royal Albatrosses and Sooty Shearwaters. Northern Giant Petrel, Grey-backed Storm Petrel and Brown Skua put in their first appearances today as the bow deck was closed and most seabirding took place from the bridge wings, where there is much more movement but at least shelter from the spray.







*Black-browed Albatross, at sea west of Falkland Islands. Previous page: Southern Royal Albatross, above and Northern Royal Albatross, below (Mike Watson).*

**6 November The Falkland Islands, Westpoint Island and Grave Cove** (51.17S/60.47W, wind SW8, sunny, 7 Celsius)

The Falkland Islands, also known as the Islas Malvinas, is an archipelago of over 700 islands situated almost 500km to the east of Patagonia at around 52 degrees. The islands are a British overseas territory and are of particular interest owing to their strategic position as well as the oil reserves to the north. They are, however, better known to wildlife enthusiasts for their impressive penguin and sea-bird colonies (more than 80% of the world's Black-browed Albatrosses for instance). As we awoke we were passing the world's largest Black-browed Albatross colony on Steeple Jason, one of the most northwesterly of the Falkland Islands, the albatrosses filling the sky above the western tip of the island like insects. Our original plan was to land on Steeple Jason (where we would have seen Cobb's Wren) and Saunders Island, however, unfortunately their landing sites were now exposed to a big southwesterly well. Carcass Island a fall back location for Cobb's Wren was also out of bounds today in the exceptionally windy weather from the southwest, so we cruised onwards towards plan B.

Westpoint Island fortunately has a sheltered bay facing in the just the right direction to allow a very calm landing. Waiting to board the zodiacs for the first time we could already see some of our target birds along the kelp-covered shoreline, Upland and Kelp Geese as well as a few Falkland Islands Steamer Ducks. Westpoint is a very pretty location indeed. Once on shore we quickly added the even prettier Ruddy-headed Goose, Austral Thrush, Long-tailed Meadowlark and Dark-faced Ground Tyrant and there was a skulking Grass Wren, in a stream gully by the shore. A steamer duck was watched close to the landing jetty, a big ungainly duck diving frequently. We battled our way into a headwind across the island to the simply awesome Devil's Nose albatross and penguin colony.

Perched at the head of a geo overlooking surf crashing over the rocky shore far below, a throng of Black-browed Albatrosses and smart Southern Rockhopper Penguins jostled for a limited number of





*Falkland Steamer Duck, West-point Island (Mike Watson).*

mud stool nests. We were able to watch them at very close range indeed with albatrosses hanging in the wind as they came in to land overhead. We could feel the rush of air of their two metre wing-spans. Fab-u-lous! Against a lovely yellow backdrop of (the introduced) Gorse bushes, we also saw some Falkland land birds in the form of Striated Caracara, Correndera Pipit, Black-chinned Siskin and Blackish Cinclodes, which was singing and foraging among the seaweed covered rocks on the shore. Some of us had a Chilean Swallow here too, an uncommon Falkland Islands bird.

We relocated in the afternoon to Grave Cove on West Falkland, where Richard spotted a pod of the gorgeous black-and-white Commerson's Dolphin from the dinner table! We dashed out and watched them around MV Plancius. They hung around long enough to check out the zodiac operation to the cove itself. Once ashore, the very hospitable landowner, Marie Paule met us and guided us towards the opposite side of the island where a windswept beach was the perfect setting for some returning Gentoo Penguins of the 6000+ birds colony on the island.

To say it was windswept was putting it mildly, I have never been blown off my feet before and I weigh only just short of 100kg!!! The Striated Caracaras were particularly obliging here, allowing very close approach as they foraged nearby. In the evening we cruised north through the outer islands and then turned east along the north coastline, on our way to the capital Port Stanley, where we would go ashore the next day.





























*Commerson's Dolphin, Grave Cove. Pages 10 & 11 Black-browed Albatross, Page 12: Southern Rockhopper Penguin, Page 13: Ruddy-headed Goose, above & Kelp Goose, Page 14: Upland Goose (male) and Long-tailed Meadowlark (Mike Watson).*

## **7 November Port Stanley, Falkland Islands (51.41S/57.50W, wind WNW6, 8 Celsius)**

As we cruised down the northeast coast of East Falkland we started to see lots of Sooty Shearwaters, our first significant numbers of this abundant worldwide seabird. We also saw eight Southern Fulmars in this area, quite a good number for this latitude. Turning back west into the narrows at the entrance to Port Stanley harbor Imperial Shags were noted in higher numbers and Kelp Gulls found us again. Port Stanley harbor and its surrounding area was a focal point of the 1982 Falklands conflict and the names of the Royal Navy vessels assigned to protect the islands through the ages are commemorated on the shore opposite the city – Barracouta, Beagle, Protector, Endurance, Dumbarton Castle and Clyde.

Once ashore we met our local birding guide for a special excursion, Brian Sullivan. We enjoyed a fantastic morning birding to the east of the city towards Cape Pembroke. Starting at the aptly named windswept Surf Bay we quickly spotted the hoped for Two-banded Plover, several of which were feeding in gnarled pieces of kelp above the high water mark. The lovely white sand beach also held a migrant White-rumped Sandpiper, a very long distance Arctic-breeding migrant, newly returned to East Falkland for the winter. After enjoying some fine close views of the very confident plovers we continued inland from the beach seeing another very confiding shorebird, South American (or Magellanic) Snipe, which also allowed close approach. We left it where we found it though. It was not too long before we were looking at a third shorebird, a little further along the Cape Pembroke road and the best of all here, the gorgeous Rufous-chested Dotterel (sorry, I can't let go of the name dotterel!). They were also approachable and we later discovered they had small chicks nearby.

We saw three pairs in total including one of them next to a water-filled crater made by one the RAF Vulcan's 1000lb bombs dropped during the war. A miss, it was nowhere near the runway the RAF





*Two-banded Plover, Cape Pembroke  
(Mike Watson).*

was trying to damage! However, the seven bombing missions from Ascension Island some 6000 km away, codenamed Operation Black Buck, remain some of the most audacious ever attempted and they ultimately did succeed in one direct hit on the runway, which dissuaded the Argentinians from basing their fast jets here and even withdrawing them from Tierra del Fuego to bases at Buenos Aires. Brian pointed out some smaller bomb craters from Hawker Harrier 500lb bombs. Also here were some very showy Correndera Pipits and on nearby pools, Upland and Ruddy-headed Geese, Crested Duck, Silver Teal, Chiloe Wigeon and Yellow-billed Pintail.

As Sergeant Major of the Territorial Army regiment in Stanley at the time of the 1982 invasion, Brian was held as a prisoner of war under house arrest in West Falkland and so missed the arrival of the British forces. He was able to point out numerous landmarks surrounding Stanley, which had featured in the war. Overlooking the little city are Tumbledown where the Scots Guards took part in some of the fiercest fighting and a little to the northwest the lower Mount Longdon, which was taken by 3 Para. Many of the pretty beaches of this part of East Falkland were mined by the Argentinians, who anticipated an attack from the east. The British forces attacked from the west instead, having landed at San Carlos, some 56 miles to the west and 'yomped' over the peatlands to Stanley in three days, each man carrying a 36kg load. Many minefields have now been cleared, often by Zimbabwean experts but also by unfortunate sheep and we can now visit some previously off limits sites.

One such place is Gypsy Bay, where we were able to enjoy some point blank views of Magellanic Penguins in and next to their burrows. Magic! Also here were Grass Wrens singing, Black-chinned Siskins, Austral Thrushes, Long-tailed Meadowlarks and a single White-bridled Finch. Several Falkland Steamer Ducks were in the bay itself and we got to see (and even to eat some of) the lovely Falkland flowers like Diddle-dee, Teaberry and Scurvygrass. However, delicate white petals of Pale Maiden were in flower on the heathland all over Cape Pembroke and this was probably my favourite. Little wonder it was voted the national flower of the Falkland Islands. Returning to Port Stanley some







*Rufous-chested Plover (or Dotterell!). Previous page: Sgt Major Brian Sullivan by one of the 1982 RAF Vulcan bomb craters, Cape Pembroke and bottom, South American Snipe (Mike Watson).*

of our group had a couple of pints of beer in the two English pubs, The Victory and The Globe. It had been a very enjoyable visit to this friendly little corner of Britain in the South Atlantic. The anchor was raised during lunch and we were off again, this time cruising out into the open sea to the southeast and heading for South Georgia, still with a tailwind of 40 knots pushing us along. Before too long we started to see ocean-going seabirds again including Grey-backed Storm Petrel, Southern Royal Albatross and Southern Fulmar among our usual companions. A Southern Bottlenosed Whale was seen briefly this afternoon.

#### **8 November At sea east of Falkland Islands (52.18S/51.46W, wind NW6-7, 8 Celsius)**

Today was another special day! It featured our first Light-mantled Sooty Albatrosses, with four sightings of this supersonic graceful albatross. They circled MV Plancius numerous times, affording some wonderful views. Maybe from our destination, South Georgia, which at around 5,000-7,000 pairs makes it home to biggest breeding population but they also breed on isolated islands all around the Southern Ocean so they need not necessarily all be South Atlantic-bred birds that we were seeing here.

The Southern Royal Albatrosses we saw today came all the way from either Campbell or Auckland Islands in the New Zealand Subantarctic! We also saw our first Grey-headed Albatross today, another South Georgia breeding bird and a White-headed Petrel, seen and photographed from the bridge wings while most were either sleeping or vacuuming their belongings in preparation for the South Georgia biosecurity check. This bird came all the way from Crozet or Kerguelen in the Southern Indian Ocean.

Happily the strong passage of Atlantic Petrels all day made up for it, presumably heading in the same direction away from the eye of the depression following us towards South Georgia. Atlantic













*Wandering Albatross (Richard Greenhalgh). Page 20: Magellanic Penguin, Page 21: Gypsy Bay, Grass Wren, Austral Thrush & White-bridled Finch, Page 23: Atlantic Petrel (Mike Watson), Blue Petrel (Richard Greenhalgh) and White-headed Petrel (Mike Watson).*

Petrel breeds in the Tristan group. Late in the evening, after sundown, we crossed the Antarctic Convergence but it was difficult to discern any difference in birds heading towards or away from the convergence itself. We also saw our first of many Black-bellied Storm Petrels today, struck by how easy they were to identify even at extreme distance.

### **9 November At sea west of South Georgia (53.06S/44.33W, wind WNW7, 3 Celsius)**

We spent another full day at sea today, nearing South Georgia as time went by. The sea was again very bumpy, with a swell of more than 3 metres but occasional combined wave crests would easily double that. Watching albatrosses shearing effortlessly across such a sea is one of the finest sights. We logged another three Wandering, six Southern Royal, three each of Light-mantled (Sooty) and Grey-headed as well as many Black-browed.

Our first Snow Petrel appeared today and Northern Giant Petrels started to appear with greater frequency among their much commoner Southern cousins. Blue Petrel also made its first appearance amongst the prions on this stretch, which were all Antarctic now we had left the Falkland Islands far behind. Blue Petrel is one of the smartest petrels and has a white tail tip, which shines like a light in dull weather. Also today we saw four Soft-plumaged Petrels and our first South Georgia Shag and Antarctic Tern. Macaroni Penguin, South Georgia's commonest penguin also made its first appearance in the sea off the Plancius's bow. After another 15 hours of observation today we were ready for our bunks this evening (or cots if you were in the la-di-da cabins!).











**10 November Grytviken, South Georgia (52.18S/37.05W, wind WSW7, 0 Celsius)**

Today was another classic day! Maybe the most dramatic of the whole cruise for some? We started with some seabirds as we cruised down the northeast coast of South Georgia in the morning, snow-capped mountain peaks on the starboard side. It was still winter down here. King Penguins started to appear in the water as we continued on our way, another three Wandering, three Light-mantled and eight Grey-headed Albatrosses also made their appearances and appropriately the Snow Petrel tally increased to eight.

However, the former whaling settlement at Grytviken is *THE* landing that those with an interest in polar exploration look forward to here. After a little deliberation our bold expedition leader Ali decided to take us ashore in some rather windy weather. After all, no one wanted to miss this one. It was still windy and clouds behind the mountain wall threatened as we landed in the comparative shelter of King Edward Cove just a stone's throw from the small graveyard containing the grave of Irish explorer Sir Ernest Shackleton. We all gathered graveside to take a look at his very impressive headstone and made a toast with everyone's favourite Guatemalan explorer Eduardo Rubio-Herrera. It was a special moment for many of us having read so much about Shackleton.

Shackleton's life was a rollercoaster of spectacular endeavours and he didn't really achieve any of his goals but what he is remembered for is his leadership, bravery and determination against overwhelming odds. The event that immortalized his memory was the rescue of his men stranded on Ele-

*Northern Giant Petrel. Page 24: Light-mantled  
(Sooty) Albatross (Mike Watson).*







*Antarctic Fur Seals on the beach next to the cemetery at Grytviken.*

*Next page: Martin Parry and Richard Greenhalgh at Shackleton's grave and the wreck of MV Petrel a former whaler (Mike Watson).*

phant Island in the South Shetland Islands after his ship *Endurance* sank 557km away in the Weddell Sea, crushed by Antarctic ice. Despite his health issues (he had to leave the 1901-4 Scott Expedition to the South Pole owing to ill health and ultimately he died of a heart attack at the age of only 47), he and five of his men sailed in one of *Endurance*'s 6m long life boats 1300km to South Georgia... and then, with one axe and 15m of rope, Shackleton together with the ship's captain Worsley and Tom Crean, the dog handler, managed to cross 51km of the mountainous island's spine in winter in a mere 36 hours to reach the whaling station at Stromness.

They later learned that a storm they had endured just before reaching South Georgia had sunk a 500-ton steamer also bound for there! Shackleton's efforts did not end there, it took four attempts to successfully rescue his remaining 22 men from Elephant Island, where they had been stuck for four and a half months. He was finally greeted by his trusted deputy, Frank Wild, with the words '*We are all well boss*'. They had all survived. Unfortunately three of the team on the other side of the pole setting provision stations for his proposed crossing of the continent were not so lucky and were either lost without a trace or were known to have perished. They rarely get a mention.

*'MEN WANTED for hazardous journey, small wages, bitter cold, long months of complete darkness, constant danger, safe return doubtful, honor and recognition in case of success. Ernest Shackleton 4 Burlington st.'*

Our return to MV *Plancius* from Grytviken was rather exciting too with winds recorded by the bridge as gusting up to 71 knots. I kept thinking about a hot shower and a hot chocolate as we circled, waiting for our turn to come alongside. It is always very nice to get back on board the big warm ship! Before I get totally carried away by the incredible history of today's landing location there was also some excellent wildlife at Grytviken! This landing also saw our first encounters with Antarctic













*King Penguins and (South Georgia) Yellow-billed Pintail at Grytviken and previous page: John Arkle and fur seal in whiteout conditions at Grytviken (Mike Watson).*

Fur Seals. Like super-sized Rottweilers with flippers they look a lot scarier than they actually are and they can be kept at bay simply by raising your foot to them. Nevertheless it is best not to take any unnecessary liberties so we kept a close eye on them when getting down for a lower angle photo with snowflakes in the air. Fab-u-lous! We also got our first point blank King Penguin encounters here as well as (South Georgia) Yellow-billed Pintails (the world's only carnivorous duck owing to its habit of feeding on corpses – life on South Georgia is hard). A couple of Southern Elephant Seals was lounging around the beach as well with Brown Skuas in attendance as Antarctic Terns flew overhead.

A couple of us even managed to see South Georgia Pipit before the snow closed in and several whiteouts ensued. After exploring the remnants of the whaling station, which closed down in the 1960s, as well as the post office, boat gallery and the really excellent little museum, some of us hiked out to King Edward Point, the permanent UK base where there were some more feisty fur seals and a few Southern Elephant Seals. We felt like we had done something today as we sailed away, more snowflakes filling the air.

South Georgia was first sighted by Anthony de la Roché, a London merchant in 1675 and was named Roche Island. The island was a





commercial sealing base (and later also whaling) from 1786 to 1964. However, it is most famous for the part it played in Sir Ernest Shackleton's miraculous rescue of his marooned crew of *Endurance*. It also played a part in the 1982 Falklands Conflict, when Argentine forces annexed the island on 19 March. It was retaken by British 42 Commando on 25 April during an operation unofficially named '*Paraquat*'.

**11 November Rosita Harbour and Salisbury Plain, South Georgia** (51.01S/37.14W, wind SSW6, occasional snow showers, -1 celsius)

Early this morning we neared the tiny Prion Island off South Georgia's northeast coast, well known as the last outpost of the diminutive South Georgia Pipit (before the successful rat eradication programme returned it to the whole of mainland South Georgia's east coast!) and in fact we even saw one at sea not far from Prion, keeping up with MV *Plancius* in the lee of her bow for a while! After a brief recce of its west facing landing beach, rammed with fur seals, during which the wind picked up significantly we got the news that our planned landing had been cancelled and with it our only chance of seeing the majestic Wandering Albatross at its nest.

Instead we continued further northwest to Rosita Bay, an east facing landing and much easier in the continuing wind. We made a nice if somewhat brief zodiac landing here, in subzero conditions and flurries of snowflakes in the air. The South Georgia Pipits here were in full song-flight mode, spring was in the air here! The fur seals were quite feisty here as well but the few elephant seals were much more sedate and relaxed. After admiring these superb creatures from a tussock grass vantage point for a while we returning to MV *Plancius* and its lovely hot chocolate coffee!

Later in the afternoon the wind had dropped a little and our planned landing at the world famous King Penguin metropolis of Salisbury Plain could go ahead. After our intrepid expedition staff had made a pathway between the ubiquitous fur seals we were all taken ashore. We got our first good views of Snowy Sheathbill, a small group of these unbelievably dumb birds were scavenging among the seals on the beach. The main attraction here of course is the massive 60,000+ birds King penguin colony and we gazed in awe at the massed ranks of penguins stretching far into the distance from the beach and up the surrounding hillsides.

*King Penguin, Grytviken (Mike Watson)*







Brown Skuas and giant petrels of both species hung around the colony looking for an easy meal. We saw a couple of the penguins with bad injuries, maybe the result of Leopard Seal attacks? It was surprising that they were still alive. The sheer number of penguins was overwhelming and it was difficult to know exactly what to look at, there were so many. From time to time my eyes just glazed over.

**12 November St Andrew's Bay, South Georgia** (54.26S/36.10W, wind variable, 8 Celsius)

Today was without doubt our best in the South Atlantic! Sir David Attenborough described St Andrew's Bay as '*The Serengeti of the South*' and it certainly lived up to this bold statement. The steep, 3km wide beach here is a difficult landing and fortunately we had a window of some very calm weather in which to make it so we awoke to a glorious sunrise, a calm sea and no wind at 0400 and the announcement that we were going ashore.

We actually made two landings, one before breakfast and one after, the latter was preceded-

*Antarctic Fur Seals, Rosita Harbour*  
(Mike Watson)







*South Georgia Pipit, Rosita Harbour (Mike Watson).*

ed by a short zodiac ride along the beach for a different perspective. Spectacles are the new megas in birding and this one takes some beating. The 150,000+ birds King Penguin colony is the biggest of all and is simply breathtaking. The beach is full of elephant seals, with harems and their attendant beach-masters and usurpers scattered all along the shore. Thankfully there were not many fur seals here. All this against a terrific glaciated mountain backdrop. To put our good fortune into perspective, this was the only the second time that Mike from German tour operator Icarus had managed to land here in eight attempts!

The afternoon saw us make another zodiac landing at nearby Godthul, which means 'Good Cove'. With the weather worsening our landing was ultimately curtailed but not before some of us had clambered up the tussock grass covered slopes to a Gentoo Penguin colony, where we could watch the comings and goings of birds to their grass mound nests. Brown Skuas were again in attendance as were Southern Giant Petrels, which were also nesting nearby. Some of the other passengers went on a hike to see the view from a hill overlooking the bay but there was no other reason to go there so we simply enjoyed extra time with the penguins.

The best thing about Godthul I can think of is the point blank views of the tame South Georgia Pipits in the tussock grass there. The beach at Godthul is the site of a former tiny whaling station and there are some relics of this horrible industry in the form of whalebones all over the beach and some rusty tanks and other industrial paraphernalia. The weather closed in again quickly and the return zodiac ride to MV Plancius was another wet one. The maximum gusts recorded by the bridge on our return zodiac ride were 40 knots. The thought crossed my mind that I must get one of those 100% waterproof sailing jackets! Standard hiking showerproof jackets are simply inadequate in Antarctica in the spring.











































**13 November Gold Harbour, Cooper Bay and Drygalski Fjord (54.37S/35.56W, wind NW3-4, 8 Celsius)**

We started the day with a zodiac landing at the lovely Gold Harbour on South Georgia's southeast coast. Smaller than Salisbury Plain and St Andrew's Bay but even more picturesque, with King Penguins, Southern Elephant Seals, Antarctic Fur Seals and the best glaciated mountain backdrop of all. We could also get much closer to the King Penguin youngsters here, or was that the other way around? The wind increased throughout the morning as we sailed around the southern tip of South Georgia and by the time we passed Cooper Bay the bridge recorded gusts of 51 knots, so no zodiac operations here.

We could see the massive Macaroni Penguin colony but at least we could get some good views of them in the water as MV Plancius cruised past. Our first Chinstrap Penguins were here as well along with new favourites like Light-mantled (Sooty) Albatross. It was difficult to stand up on the bridge wings let alone point the camera today. Lunchtime saw us enter the dramatic Drygalski Fjord, a 11km long narrow fjord named after German geographer Professor Erich Dagobert von Drygalski (1865–1949), the leader of the First German Antarctic Expedition 1901–03. A good number of Snow Petrels was seen here as the weather closed in and snow started to fall.

We also saw a couple of spectacular calvings of the icefalls on the surrounding cliffs as well as waterfalls that did not complete their fall, with the strong wind simply blowing their cascade all over the

*South Georgia Pipit, Godthul. Pages 33-36 King Penguins, Brown Skua and a very determined Tim Wright, Salisbury Plain, page 37: Snowy Sheathbill and Southern Giant Petrel, pages 38-42 St Andrew's Bay scenes - Snowy Sheathbill, King Penguin and Southern Elephant Seals & page 44: Gold Harbour King Penguins (Mike Watson)*











*Southern Giant Petrel, above and  
Light-mantled Albatross, Cooper Bay  
(Mike Watson)*





*Macaroni Penguin, Cooper Bay,  
South Georgia (Mike Watson).*



*Chinstrap Penguins, Cooper Bay, South  
Georgia (Mike Watson).*





place. We reached the glacier at the head of the fjord, turned around and headed back out to sea, bound for the South Orkney Islands. As we left South Georgia we saw around 25 diving petrels. All looked dusky-headed though and therefore just Common. Some have very whitish wing linings though, just like the two 'bird strikes' that I was able to see on board MV Plancius. Identifying South Georgia Diving Petrel in the field is very difficult indeed. This evening also saw some mountainous seas, the red wine was in tumblers at evening meal and the restaurant was depleted as folks sought refuge in their cabins.

**14 November Cruising towards South Orkney Islands all day** (57.00S/38.46W, wind W6, 1 Celsius)

Another day at sea with conditions calming from the 6m swell overnight hitting MV Plancius in the side to some much more enjoyable rolling along. The composition of the seabirds was changing as we cruised further south. Albatrosses were petering out, with only a few Black-browed and a single Light-mantled (Sooty) today but Blue Petrels were on the increase. Although we put in a lot of effort today in the hope of a Kerguelen Petrel, we were not rewarded.

**15 November Orcada Base, Laurie Island, South Orkney Islands** (60.40S/44.08W, wind W5-6, -1 Celsius)

At last we had left the '*furious fifties*' behind and had reached the '*serene sixties*'. Lying 600km to the north of the Antarctic Peninsula the South Orkney Islands were first discovered in 1821 by two sealers, Nathaniel Brown Palmer and George Powell. Originally named 'Powell's Group' the archipelago was given its present name by James Weddell who visited them in 1823, owing to their location being roughly the same latitude south as the Orkneys are north, 60 degrees. After we passed a few large icebergs, the orange units of the Argentinian base on Laurie Island loomed through the murk.



We were fortunate that the sea ice had cleared and the swell on the south facing landing beach was not too great. A delegation of four penguins greeted us on the snowy landing beach - three Gentoos and one Adelie, our first of the trip! There was also a couple of Chinstraps further along the beach. After shedding our life jackets we plodded through the sleet to have a look around the base. The Argentinians were very pleased to see us. We were only the second ship to land anyone here since February and they were also happy to receive some of the supplies we took ashore. The staff also showed us their emergency route up the adjacent cliff face in the event of a tsunami warning. Their base occupies a very low lying piece of land between two bays and is vulnerable to a tsunami wave.

The base was pretty much bird-less apart from a few shags (still South Georgia in the South Orkneys, despite the fact we are now technically in Antarctica), Brown Skuas and Cape Petrels but it was interesting to take a look at the ramshackle museum and also inside the base units themselves, which smelled of fuel. The lovely base staff were very kind to serve us hot drinks and biscuits and I was glad to get back on board MV Plancius without receiving another top to toe soaking. We talked about whether or not a landing on the South Orkneys counts as the seventh continent or not. Where to draw the line? In fact many modern references now recognise eight continents with Australia and Oceania separate.

As we left the razor sharp peaks of the South Orkney Islands behind we started to encounter even more impressive tabular icebergs and could see their previous sea level lines as explained by our amazing on board glaciologist Andreas Alexander. These would be the best ones we saw on the tour, some blue with compression. *Fab-u-lous!* Bird of the day today was probably Cape Petrel, appearing in large numbers and often swarms were attracted from nearby icebergs, which came over to check us out for a while. Still no Antarctic Petrel yet, we had to keep trying. Cetacean sightings today included several Humpback Whales as well as Fin and Sei Whales, the world's second and third biggest.

*Orcada Base, Laurie Island, South Orkneys and next  
pages: South Orkney icebergs (Mike Watson)*









**16 November Cruising towards South Shetland Islands all day** (61.21S/50.00W, wind NW5, 0 Celsius)

Another seabirding all-dayer with highlights Light-mantled (Sooty) Albatross and white morph Southern Giant Petrel. Cape Petrel numbers peaked but still no Antarctic or Kerguelen Petrels. Several Antarctic Minke Whales were spotted. In the evening we encountered Iceberg B-09F, so large it has been named. We could see it was at least 21 nautical miles long (38km!), part of a larger iceberg, which broke off from the Ross Sea ice shelf in 1987 (Ross Sea ice bergs start with 'B') and drifted 2000km to its present position. In 2010, it had been responsible for the deaths of 150,000 Adelie Penguins when it cut off access to their colony at Cape Denison in Commonwealth Bay.

*Light-mantled Albatross (Richard Greenhalgh)*





**17 November Penguin Island and Maxwell Bay, King George Island, South Shetland Islands**  
(62.05S/57.54W, wind W5-6, -2 Celsius)

This morning we arrived in the snow-covered South Shetland Islands. If you are wondering why we were here instead of in the Weddell Sea, as we ought to have been by now, it was because there was a big storm forecast for the east side of the peninsula so we had to divert to the South Shetlands while it passed. This morning also saw our only Antarctic Petrel sighting, only available for the early watch as it disappeared into the distance after circling the boat for a short while with Cape Petrels. Our first Antarctic Shags followed soon afterwards.

The South Shetlands also represent the easiest way for folks to join an Antarctic cruise, flying in to the airstrip at the Chilean base Eduardo Frei, thereby avoiding sailing across the notorious Drake Passage. The islands were first sighted by Captain William Smith in the British vessel Williams, while en route to Valparaíso in 1819. He visited the islands again in October of the same year, claiming them for Britain. Named New South Britain briefly they were soon renamed at the South Shetland Islands, like the Orkneys, being a similar latitude south as their northern namesake (well the Faroe Islands actually) but of course much colder. There are presently 19 research stations around the islands, four belonging to Chile, three to Argentina and the rest to a variety of 11 other nations including Bulgaria!

Unfortunately the westerly wind was presently throwing a heavy swell onto our preferred landing spot at Turret Point on King George Island, so instead we opted for the relative shelter of the aptly named Penguin Island just offshore but with a northeast-facing landing beach. The lucky early birds were rewarded with a Leopard Seal, which investigated their zodiac before moving on. Some of us hiked towards the peak at the top of the volcanic island while others stayed down lower and enjoyed the packed Chinstrap Penguin colonies. There is a small Adelie colony on the other side of Penguin Island but our expedition leader was concerned about the length of time it would take to get folks back from there if the weather changed for the worse, as indeed it did by the time our landing came to an end.

*Adelie Penguin (Mike Watson)*











*South Polar Skua, Maxwell Bay (Mike Watson). Previous page: Chinstrap Penguins, above (Richard Greenhalgh and below, Mike Watson)*

The occasional flurries of snow made time with the hundreds of Chinstraps even more atmospheric as they waddled back to their partners with stones for their 'nests'. These birds (I often think of penguins as being something other than birds) were pioneers and were staking a claim to the best breeding sites, even before they were snow free. Ali reminded us that penguin colony landings become a real mess after the turn of the year and it is trickier to find clean penguins to take photos of!

The wind picked up dramatically this afternoon, presumably the tail end of what was happening in the Weddell Sea, as we headed west along the southern coastline of King George Island. Our afternoon landing in Maxwell Bay was at the Bellingshausen Russian Base and again we were greeted here by a delegation of penguins. Mostly Gentoos but also a few Chinstraps. There were some Adelies on a distant shore. Unfortunately the Adelie colony at the entrance to Maxwell Bay only allows a very limited number of folks ashore at a time and it was now too exposed for the zodiacs this afternoon anyway so our last chance of an Adelie colony landing slipped away.

Some hiked up to the little Russian Orthodox Church on the hill overlooking the bay where the priest was conducting a service. Others hung around on the shore where sharp-eyed Tim and Dawn saw another Leopard Seal. A Russian guy was smoking some fish in a metal tin near the water's edge, the smell of which had attracted a South Polar Skua.

**18 November Wilhelmina Bay, Bransfield Strait** (64.14S/61.28W, wind NE4-5, -1 Celsius)

Today was very quiet from a birding point of view. We managed just 11 species, the most interesting being Southern Fulmars and Snow Petrels in the ice of Wilhelmina Bay. This 24km wide bay was discovered by the 1897 Belgian Antarctic Expedition of Adrien de Gerlache (who has the nearby strait named after him), and it is named after Wilhelmina, Queen of the Netherlands. The expedition itself was trapped in the Antarctic ice for seven months before eventually returning home in 1899!









*Danco Coast, Antarctic Peninsula. Previous page: Bellingshausen Base, Maxwell Bay and Mv Plancius cruising through ice in Wilhelmina Bay (Mike Watson)*

Several Crabeater Seals were spotted on the ice and there was another claim of a distant Leopard Seal. Some close but rather inactive Humpback Whales were seen but things were otherwise very subdued.

The visibility was rather poor with snow in the air and the wind put paid to our planned landings, as well as locked up the icebergs in Wilhelmina Bay, forcing us to do a U-turn. The expedition staff tried their best to do something constructive in the afternoon and the resulting zodiac cruise in the drift ice was very interesting to those with an interest in geography, steering close to blue icebergs and watching the sea freeze around us but we only saw a handful of birds. The hot chocolate laced with Baileys on our return was better! That reminds me, I must get around to buying one of those waterproof sailing jackets.

The Antarctic Peninsula was probably first sighted by a Russian Navy expedition led by Fabian von Bellingshausen on 27 January 1820 but they probably did not realise what they were looking at. A mere three days later Edward Bransfield and William Smith on a British expedition were the first to chart part of the Antarctic Peninsula in the extreme northeast. Other expeditions followed culminating in the race to the South Pole in the early nineteenth century. The peninsula itself is a mountainous region, with peaks rising to 2800m and higher, like an Alps at the end of the Earth. It is also a volcanic region with huge glaciers flowing into the Larsen Ice Shelf and ultimately the Weddell Sea with a suitably extreme climate and average temperatures in January of 1-2 Celsius and June of -15 to -20 Celsius. We had arrived in spring but the subzero temperatures and the amount of snow lying and still falling(!) indicated that winter was far from over. At least it made for some nice snowy backgrounds to our photos.





*Gentoo Penguin Highway,  
Danco Island (Mike Watson)*





*Humpback Whale, Danco  
Island (Mike Watson)*





Weddell Seal, Neko  
Harbour (Mike Watson)

**19 November Danco Island and Neko Harbour, Antarctic Peninsula** (64.35S/62.43W, wind variable 1, cloudy with sunny intervals, 5 Celsius)

We had one perfect day in Antarctica and this was it. We woke to blue skies, calm sea and no wind at Danco Island, a small snow-covered islet off the peninsula. The landing here was very easy and soon almost everyone had strapped on their snowshoes and was heading up towards the Gentoo Penguin colony at the top of the island. There was a braided penguin highway to cross first though and it took some time before there was a gap as *'the penguins always have a green light'*. The views today were nothing short of spectacular, with ice capped mountains all around and although the bird diversity was close to zero it was still a very enjoyable landing watching the antics of the curious penguins. However, as lunchtime approached the clouds started to roll in behind the mountain peaks and before too long the wind was back again and snowflakes were in the air.

A Humpback Whale put on a great show diving in front of MV Plancius for a while, its tail flukes slicing through the ice. Our afternoon landing was *THE* big one for many people, the Antarctic continent proper and although Danco is made of the same rock it is not quite the same for folks who make lists of these kind of things. Our destination Neko Harbour is another Gentoo Penguin colony site but has a terrific blue glacier calving face backdrop. There was also one Chinstrap Penguin here, looking alone in a crowded room. Some Kelp Gulls, Snowy Sheathbills, South Polar Skuas and Southern Giant Petrels were hanging around the penguins and a couple of Humpback Whales were offshore. Snow flurries came and went before it time came to return to the ship. This evening saw our postponed barbecue from Grytviken take place on aft deck three and we had a great time in a very atmospheric setting, partly thanks to the free spiced apple plonk. Another Humpback Whale swam over to take a look at us in this idyllic setting.





*Gentoo Penguins, Neko Harbour  
(Mike Watson)*







**20 November Melchior Is.** (64.19S/62.58W, wind NNW5, snow, -1 Celsius)

The early watch struck gold again this morning with three Orcas, including at least one bull with a massive dorsal fin that surfaced only a couple of times as we cruised past. With a small window to cross the Drake Passage ahead followed by a nasty storm, we headed north, reaching the Melchior Islands this morning. There is a tiny Argentinian base here, occupied for only a short time each summer. Its huts poked out of the deep snowdrifts on the point of one of the islands.

There were several Gentoo Penguins by the base as well as a couple of Chinstraps. We went on a zodiac cruise around the islands this morning admiring the stunning scenery. Snow drifts and ice caps merging into one, huge icicles and precarious ice slabs waiting to fall. Birding was quiet again with only a few Antarctic Shags of note as well as some Antarctic and a couple of Arctic Terns. From here it was north again towards the Drake Passage. This afternoon we started to see some ocean-going seabirds again, with Light-mantled and Black-browed Albatrosses and White-chinned Petrel reappearing.

**21 November Drake Passage** (60.40S/64.11W, wind W6, cloudy, 5 Celsius)

With only a moderate swell that we were well used to, it was more of a *Drake Lake* for our crossing, however, there was enough wind to get the tubenoses airborne. Light-mantled Albatross peaked at seven today, it is always a pleasure when the '*moon goddess*' shows up. A couple of Grey-headed Albatrosses was seen and both Blue Petrel and Antarctic Prion showed up in numbers again. It was difficult to know how many as some of them may have left and rejoined the ship?

*Grey-headed Albatross (Richard Greenhalgh).*  
*Previous page: Gentoo Penguin and sunset in the*  
*Gerlache Strait (Mike Watson).*







*Wandering Albatross, old imm.*



*Wandering Albatross, young imm.*



*Southern Royal Albatross, near ad.*



*Southern Royal Albatross, imm.*



*Southern Royal Albatross, young imm.*



*Southern Royal Albatross, imm.*



*Southern Royal Albatross, young imm.*



*Northern Royal Albatross, imm.*



A Humpback Whale was the only positive ID from many whale blows today, they are so difficult to be sure of in windy conditions. Sadly we probably left Antarctic Petrel behind today. Happy hour at the bar this evening included a pub quiz in which we were happy to finish joint 12<sup>th</sup> last (or 4<sup>th</sup> depending on which way you look at it), despite having attended only a few lectures. We did manage to win the best team name though!

**22 November Drake Passage** (56.00/65.58W, wind NW4-5, sunny, 7 Celsius)

OK so we got a completely false impression of the Drake Passage, the most feared stretch of water in the world. In fact it was lovely, just a gentle rolling motion as we cruised along surrounded by great seabirds. Great albatrosses were with us almost all day until we reached the South American continental shelf and then they were gone. Southern Royal outnumbered Wandering again (they can be tricky without good photos) today but we also had a Northern Royal, thousands of Black-browed and at least five Grey-headed. Southern Giant Petrel was also still with us as were Cape and Blue Petrels.

A few diving petrels were spotted and record shot photos confirmed the white half-collared Magellanic. White-chinned Petrels increased as we continued north but probably the biggest event was running into Sooty Shearwater traffic up on the continental shelf, thousands were on the move mostly going southwest towards Cape Horn, that little dark triangle on the western horizon. We spent much of the day inside it and therefore out of danger of the nasty storm that was on the way from the northwest. It was already making life a misery for boats behind us in the Drake Passage so we were happy to have set off some hours earlier than planned.

*Southern Royal Albatross against the mountains of Tierra Del Fuego and previous page: a selection of Drake Passage 'great' albatrosses (Mike Watson).*







*Southern Giant Petrel in the Beagle Channel (Richard Greenhalgh).*

In the evening we entered the Beagle Channel and although it was now very windy, these waters did not trouble MV Plancius, which has lovely lines that cut through the big waves. We started to see lots of different inshore birds now, Magellanic Penguin, Imperial Shag, Kelp Gull, South American Tern (thousands) and our first Chilean Skuas. The end of cruise meal this evening was a very stable one for a change as we chugged along very slowly killing time until our pilot from Ushuaia arrived.

### **23 November Ushuaia (54.47S, 68.17W, wind WNW4, rain showers)**

Disembarkation always seems to happen very quickly and soon after arriving in the port of Ushuaia in the early morning we were walking down the gangway at 0830. We managed a few extra birds before the tour ended, including Flying Steamer Duck, Southern Lapwing, Chimango Caracara and Chilean Swallow. Black-browed Albatross and Southern Giant Petrel were still with us until almost the jetty in Ushuaia, the latter the only ever-present entry on the daily log.

Finally thanks to the Captains, crew and expedition staff of MV Plancius who worked so hard to keep us safe and make this a very memorable voyage for everyone, cruising almost 24/7. Thanks also to our merry band of Birdquesters who embraced the adventure we were taking part in. One thing I learned is that once you have made this voyage you will want to return. There is so much to see and mostly thanks to the Antarctic and Southern Ocean weather, you cannot see it all on one cruise.





*Snow Petrel, South Shetland Islands  
(Mike Watson).*

## SYSTEMATIC LIST OF BIRD SPECIES RECORDED DURING THE TOUR

The species names and taxonomy used in the report mostly follows Gill, F & D Donsker (Eds). IOC World Bird Names. This list is updated several times annually and is available at <http://www.world-birdnames.org>.

Species which were heard but not seen are indicated by the symbol (H). Species which were only recorded by the leader are indicated by the symbol (LO). Species which were not personally recorded by the leader are indicated by the symbol (NL).

Species marked with the diamond symbol (◊) are either endemic to the country or local region or considered 'special' birds for some other reason (e.g. it is only seen on one or two Birdquest tours; it is difficult to see across all or most of its range; the local form is endemic or restricted-range and may in future be treated as a full species). Conservation threat categories and information are taken from Threatened Birds of the World, BirdLife International's magnificent book on the sad status of the rarest 10% of the world's avifauna and updates on the BirdLife website: <http://www.birdlife.org/datazone/home>

E = Endangered, V = Vulnerable, NT = Near Threatened, DD = Data Deficient.

### Birds (86 species)

**Flying Steamer Duck** ◊ *Tachyeres patachonicus* A male in Ushuaia harbour.

**Falkland Steamer Duck** ◊ *Tachyeres brachypterus* 20 noted in the Falklands

**Upland Goose** ◊ *Chloephaga picta* Common in the Falklands, noted on all landings.

**Kelp Goose** ◊ *Chloephaga hybrida* Common in the Falklands.

**Ruddy-headed Goose** ◊ *Chloephaga rubidiceps* A total of 12 in the Falklands.

**Crested Duck** *Lophonetta specularioides* Three at Grave Cove and one at Cape Pembroke.

**Silver Teal** *Spatula versicolor* One at Cape Pembroke, Falkland Islands.

**Red Shoveler** *Spatula platalea* One with the other ducks at Puerto Madryn port.





*Southern Giant Petrel, white morph (Mike Watson)*

- Chiloe Wigeon** ♦ *Mareca sibilatrix* Four Puerto Madryn and four in the Falklands.
- Yellow-billed Pintail** ♦ *Anas [georgica] spinicauda* Singles at Puerto Madryn and Cape Pembroke.
- Yellow-billed Pintail** ♦ (South Georgia P) *Anas [georgica] georgica* Common on South Georgia.
- Black-headed Duck** ♦ *Heteronetta atricapilla* One at Puerto Madryn.
- King Penguin** ♦ *Aptenodytes patagonicus* Tens of thousands in South Georgia.
- Gentoo Penguin** ♦ *Pygoscelis papua* First noted at Grave Cove, Falkland Islands.
- Adelie Penguin** ♦ *Pygoscelis adeliae* One at Orcada base, South Orkneys and four in the South Shetlands.
- Chinstrap Penguin** ♦ *Pygoscelis antarcticus* First noted Cooper Bay, South Georgia.
- Southern Rockhopper Penguin** ♦ *Eudyptes chrysocome* c300 at Westpoint Island, Falkland Islands. VU
- Macaroni Penguin** ♦ *Eudyptes chrysolophus* c30 at sea then c2000 Cooper Bay, South Georgia. VU
- Magellanic Penguin** ♦ *Spheniscus magellanicus* Four at sea, 3 Gypsy Bay and 2 Beagle Channel. NT
- Wilson's Storm Petrel** *Oceanites oceanicus* Common at sea throughout.
- Grey-backed Storm Petrel** ♦ *Garrodia nereis* A total of eight sightings at sea.
- Black-bellied Storm Petrel** ♦ *Fregetta tropica* c30 tallied at sea.
- Wandering Albatross (Snowy A)** *Diomedea exulans* A total of 14 recorded. VU
- Southern Royal Albatross** ♦ *Diomedea epomophora* A total of 44, the commonest great albatross. VU
- Northern Royal Albatross** ♦ *Diomedea sanfordi* A total of six recorded. EN
- Light-mantled Albatross** ♦ (L-m Sooty A) *Phoebastria palpebrata* A total of 34 sightings. NT
- Black-browed Albatross** *Thalassarche melanophris* Many thousands noted throughout.
- Grey-headed Albatross** ♦ *Thalassarche chrysostoma* A total of 21 sightings. EN
- Southern Giant Petrel (Common G P)** *Macronectes giganteus* Common, including several white morphs.
- Northern Giant Petrel** *Macronectes halli* c30 definite sightings.
- Southern Fulmar** ♦ *Fulmarus glacialis* c200 sightings.
- Antarctic Petrel** ♦ *Thalassoica antarctica* Only one sighting near King George Island, South Shetlands.
- Cape Petrel (Pintado P)** *Daption capense* Very common.
- Snow Petrel** ♦ (Lesser S P) *Pagodroma [nivea] nivea* A total of 34 sightings.





South Georgia Shag (Mike Watson)

**Blue Petrel** ♦ *Halobaena caerulea* c130 sightings.  
**Antarctic Prion** ♦ *Pachyptila desolata* Common around South Georgia.  
**Slender-billed Prion** ♦ *Pachyptila belcheri* Common west of the Falklands and also noted Drake Passage.  
**White-headed Petrel** ♦ *Pterodroma lessonii* One east of the Falkland Islands, photo. (LO)  
**Atlantic Petrel** ♦ *Pterodroma incerta* A total of 21 tallied on a single day east of the Falklands. EN  
**Soft-plumaged Petrel** ♦ *Pterodroma mollis* Five noted.  
**White-chinned Petrel** *Procellaria aequinoctialis* Common. VU  
**Sooty Shearwater** *Ardenna grisea* Common around the Falkland Islands and in the Drake Passage. NT  
**Great Shearwater** *Ardenna gravis* c20 noted on one day west of the Falkland Islands.  
**Manx Shearwater** *Puffinus puffinus* One for Tim only west of the Falklands (NL)  
**Magellanic Diving Petrel** ♦ *Pelecanoides magellani* A single bird positively identified in the Drake Passage.  
**Common Diving Petrel** *Pelecanoides urinatrix* c30 sightings at sea & 2 in the hand on board MV Plancius.  
**Great Grebe** *Podiceps major* A total of c30 at Puerto Madryn port.  
**Rock Shag** ♦ *Phalacrocorax magellanicus* Common at Puerto Madryn and the Falklands.  
**Imperial Shag** ♦ *Leucocarbo atriceps* Common in the Falklands and Beagle Channel.  
**South Georgia Shag** ♦ *Leucocarbo georgianus* Very common around South Georgia.  
**Antarctic Shag** ♦ *Leucocarbo bransfieldensis* c30 noted in Antarctica.  
**Turkey Vulture** *Cathartes aura* Common in the Falkland Islands.  
**Variable Hawk** *Geranoaetus polyosoma* One for Dawn and Tim only on Westpoint (NL)  
**Snowy Sheathbill** ♦ (Pale-faced S) *Chionis albus* Common South Georgia and Antarctica.  
**Red-gartered Coot** *Fulica armilata* Two Puerto Madryn port.  
**Magellanic Oystercatcher** ♦ *Haematopus leucopodus* Six noted in the Falklands.  
**Blackish Oystercatcher** *Haematopus ater* Eight noted in the Falklands.  
**Southern Lapwing** *Vanellus chilensis* Five around Ushuaia harbour.  
**Two-banded Plover** ♦ *Charadrius falklandicus* 5 + 2 chicks Surf Bay, Cape Pembroke, East Falkland.  
**Rufous-chested Plover** ♦ (R-c Dotterel) *Charadrius modestus* Three pairs + 1 chick, Cape Pembroke.





*Top two: Slender-billed Prion & bottom: Antarctic Prion (Mike Watson)*





*Snowy Sheathbill, above & Southern Giant Petrel (Richard Greenhalgh)*





*South Polar Skua, Neko Harbour (Mike Watson)*

**White-rumped Sandpiper** *Calidris fuscicollis* One Surf Bay, Cape Pembroke.  
**South American Snipe** ♦ (Magellanic S) *Gallinago [paraguaiae] magellanica* Three Cape Pembroke.  
**Brown-hooded Gull** ♦ *Chroicocephalus maculipennis* Common Puerto Madryn and one Gypsy Bay  
**Dolphin Gull** ♦ *Leucophaeus scoresbii* Seven Falkland Islands and c15 Ushuaia.  
**Kelp Gull** *Larus dominicanus* Common.  
**South American Tern** *Sterna hirundinacea* Noted at the start and end of the cruise.  
**Arctic Tern** *Sterna paradisaea* A total of 12 sightings.  
**Antarctic Tern** ♦ *Sterna vittata* Common South Georgia and Antarctica.  
**Chilean Skua** ♦ *Stercorarius chilensis* c30 Beagle Channel.  
**South Polar Skua** ♦ *Stercorarius maccormicki* Common in Antarctica.  
**Brown Skua** ♦ (Antarctic S) *Stercorarius antarcticus* Noted Falklands and common in South Georgia.  
**Parasitic Jaeger (Arctic Skua)** *Stercorarius parasiticus* Two at sea west of the Falklands.  
**Striated Caracara** ♦ *Phalacrocorax australis* Eleven noted Falkland Islands. NT  
**Chimango Caracara** *Milvago chimango* Three Ushuaia.  
**Blackish Cinclodes** ♦ *Cinclodes antarcticus* Noted at Westpoint Island, Falkland Islands. NT  
**Dark-faced Ground Tyrant** *Muscisaxicola maclovianus* Six sightings in the Falkland Islands.  
**Chilean Swallow** ♦ *Tachycineta leucopyga* One for some Westpoint Island and another Ushuaia harbour.  
**Southern Martin** *Progne elegans* One Puerto Madryn port.  
**Grass Wren (Grass W)** *Cistothorus platensis* One Westpoint and two Gypsy Bay, Falkland Islands.  
**Austral Thrush** ♦ *Turdus falcklandii* Common Falkland Islands.  
**House Sparrow (introduced)** *Passer domesticus* Noted Westpoint Island and Port Stanley.  
**Correndera Pipit** *Anthus correndera* Noted Westpoint, Grave Cove and Cape Pembroke.  
**South Georgia Pipit** ♦ *Anthus antarcticus* First seen at Grytviken then c20 in South Georgia. NT  
**Black-chinned Siskin** ♦ *Spinus barbatus* c25 noted in the Falkland Islands.  
**Long-tailed Meadowlark** ♦ *Leistes loyca* Common the Falkland Islands.  
**White-bridled Finch** ♦ (Black-throated F) *Melanodera melanodera* One at Gypsy Bay was the only record.





*Humpback Whale, Neko Harbour (Mike Watson)*

**Mammals (17 species)**

- European Hare (introduced) *Lepus europaeus*** One at Gypsy Bay, East Falkland.
- Antarctic Fur Seal *Arctocephalus gazella*** Very common South Georgia.
- South American Sea Lion *Otaria flavescens*** Noted Puerto Madryn and the Falkland Islands.
- Leopard Seal *Hydrurga leptonyx*** Three sightings for some in Antarctica (NL)
- Weddell Seal *Leptonychotes weddellii*** Five sightings in Antarctica.
- Crabeater Seal *Lobodon carcinophaga*** Four sightings in Antarctica.
- Southern Elephant Seal *Mirounga leonina*** Very common South Antarctica.
- Southern Bottlenose Whale *Hyperoodon planifrons*** One at sea Falklands to South Georgia.
- Commerson's Dolphin *Cephalorhynchus commersonii*** A pod of 12 at Grave Cove, West Falkland.
- Peale's Dolphin *Lagenorhynchus australis*** c15 noted at sea west of the Falklands.
- Dusky Dolphin *Lagenorhynchus obscurus*** Five in the Beagle Channel.
- Killer Whale *Orcinus orca*** Three in the Gerlache Strait for some.
- Southern Right Whale *Eubalaena australis*** c10 Puerto Madryn.
- Antarctic Minke Whale *Balaenoptera bonaerensis*** 8 definite sightings at sea.
- Sei Whale *Balaenoptera borealis*** Two sightings near the South Orkneys. EN
- Fin Whale *Balaenoptera physalus*** Four sightings near the South Orkneys. VU
- Humpback Whale *Megaptera novaeangliae*** c25 sightings beyond the Falkland Islands.