



BIRDING NORTHWEST ARGENTINA: FROM THE FOOTHILLS TO PUNA

10 - 27 OCTOBER 2020



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Spot-winged Falconet, photographed on our 2017 tour

Where else can you go from arid scrub with huge cacti to Yungas cloudforest at 7000 feet, to puna at 10000 feet, and to alto andino (high Andean) habitat at 13000 feet within the space of days? You'll see cloudforest wonders like the highly range-restricted **Rufous-throated Dipper** and **Red-faced Guan**. Four species of attractive *Metriopelia* ground doves, one of them endemic, can be seen in the arid pre-puna of the Humahuaca Valley. Spectacular rock formations greet you along the way up into the Andes. You'll find high altitude alkaline lakes filled with three different flamingo species, including one of the world's rarest, **James's Flamingo**. Isolated pockets of finches, hummingbirds, and furnarids of all shapes and sizes abound. Marshes full of rails, herons, jacanas, limpkins, screamers, seriemas, and ibis plus the many splendors of Calilegua National Park fill you with wonder. One of the most charismatic targets on this trip is the stunning **Rufous-throated Dipper**. **Torrent Duck**, **Andean Condor**, and other classic Andean species are rather easy to find here. Both **Black-legged** and **Red-legged Seriemas** are usually found without too many problems, along with a host of other amazing Chaco birds that with some luck will include **Quebracho Crested Tinamou**, **Chaco Owl**, the sought-after **Spot-winged Falconet**, and so many others. All in all, this is a spectacular tour through Argentina's famous wine-growing area for some of South America's classic birds as we traverse varied, spectacular scenery.

Itinerary (18 days/17 nights)

Days 1 – 2. Arrival in Buenos Aires and birding/sightseeing there

We meet you when you arrive at the airport in Buenos Aires. Birding at Costanera Sur Ecological Reserve is scheduled for the afternoon if everyone has arrived early enough, otherwise for tomorrow. This is a wonderful place for finding **Coscoroba Swan**, **Black-necked Swan** (both of them really beautiful), fabulous-looking **Rosy-billed Pochard**, strange-looking **Masked Duck**, many other good wildfowl species, **Wren-like Rushbird**, brightly-colored **Red-crested Cardinal**, and many other species. **Rufous Hornero** and **Guira Cuckoo** are common, tame, and full of charisma. **Monk Parakeet** abounds, and we usually also find its stunning-looking cousin, **Nanday (Black-hooded) Parakeet**. We also plan to do some sightseeing in this huge and interesting South American city. The amazing Ceibas can be visited during the full day we have in Buenos Aires. We'll look for fabulous species like **Saffron-cowled Blackbird**, **Southern Screamer**, **Straight-billed Reedhaunter**, **Scimitar-billed Woodcreeper**, **Giant Wood Rail**, and a great many others. We also have a bit of time in Buenos Aires at the end of the trip in case we missed anything on days 1 and 2 of the trip. A lot of these species near Buenos Aires don't occur in northwestern Argentina, so it's important we find them!

Overnight: Hotel Dolmen or similar, Buenos Aires, for two nights

Day 3. Flight to Tucumán and transfer to Tafí del Valle

We may have more time for Buenos Aires birding before going to the domestic airport. We then fly to Tucumán and drive from there to Tafí del Valle, where we spend two nights. During our drive we ascend into beautiful cloudforest (Yungas), and we already start looking for **Rufous-throated Dipper** (one of the most important birds of the trip), typically also finding **Yellow-striped Brushfinch**, **Rusty-browed Warbling Finch**, **White-browed Tapaculo**, **Torrent Duck**, and other specials without too many problems.

Overnight: Posada la Guadalupe or similar, Tafí del Valle

Day 4. Birding the Tafí del Valle area

This always proves to be an exciting, birding-packed day, as we bird various altitudes. We start the day by ascending the El Infiernillo pass until we are high above the treeline, often seeing **Burrowing Owl** and good-looking **Black Siskin** sitting on fence posts as the van climbs. We stop and do short walks at a couple of high-altitude sites in search of a mouth-watering list of targets. These include two Argentinian endemics, **Moreno's Ground Dove** and **Tucuman Mountain Finch**. **Andean Flicker** is pretty common and likes to sit atop boulders. This is also usually where we see our first **Andean Condor**, and with luck we might also encounter **Cinereous Harrier**. Various high-altitude finches abound. We have a special site for **Scribble-tailed Canastero**, but this involves a steep walk, so do speak to your guide in advance in case you want to skip this. It's worth seeing, though: what a bird! Various earthcreepers, two species of cinclodes, **Cinereous Ground Tyrant**, and various others are also often seen here.

After what will hopefully have been an amazing morning we head after lunch to a small lake, where we hope to see the black-backed-gull-like **Andean Goose**, **Andean Coot**, **Andean Gull**, and others. Usually we then continue back to the cloudforest to clean up on species we may have missed the previous afternoon – **Rufous-throated Dipper**, of course, being the main target if we haven't seen it yet.

Overnight: Posada la Guadalupe or similar, Tafí del Valle

Day 5. Birding the Monte Desert

We will leave Tafí del Valle and ascend the El Infiernillo pass, continuing beyond into the dry Calchaquí Valleys and birding the majestic Monte Desert with its large cacti. **Sandy Gallito** and **White-throated Cacholote** (endemic) are the major targets, but we'll also look for a lot of other birds, such as **Greenish Yellow Finch**, **Rufous-sided Warbling Finch**, **Ringed Warbling Finch**, **White-browed Brushfinch**, **Band-tailed Sierra Finch**, and noisy, active **Greater Wagtail-Tyrant**.

Overnight: Hotel Boutique Villa Vicuña, Cafayate

Day 6. Cafayate to Coronel Moldes

We continue our exciting journey that traverses the spectacular scenery of wine country, looking for **Burrowing Parrot**, two species of tit-spinetail, several different canastero species including the endemic **Steinbach's Canastero**, finches, woodpeckers, **Golden-billed Saltator**, and as always many others.

We spend some of the morning driving through the picturesque Enchanted Valley. After lunch we spend some time birding transitional forest in the canyon formed by the Juramento River. We'll be looking for sought-after denizens of this arid region, including **Sandy Gallito**, **Crested Gallito**, **Spot-winged Falconet**, **Red-legged Seriema**, **Black-chested Buzzard-Eagle**, and many others.

Overnight: Hostería Cabra Corral, Coronel Moldes

Day 7. Bishop's Slope (Los Cardones National Park)

The scenery arguably gets even better (if that is possible)! We drive through Los Cardones National Park and other remarkable areas. We might see our first of some unusual, spectacular hummingbirds, **Red-tailed Comet** and **White-sided Hillstar**. **Rufous-bellied Mountain Tanager** is one of our key targets. We should add further parrots to our list, and these might

include **Scaly-headed Parrot** and **Grey-hooded Parakeet**. A high-altitude bird that we really hope will co-operate is **Zimmer's Tapaculo**. **Rock Earthcreeper** and **Rufous-banded Miner** are usually easy enough to find.

We then drive to our next hotel, which happens to have some good Yungas birds all around it, including in the garden! We sometimes add a good number of trip birds just by having late afternoon drinks on the balcony, and the next morning we try and find whatever we are missing by walking around the garden and neighborhood. The species that we often see here include the majestic **Cream-backed Woodpecker**, **Smoke-colored Pewee**, **Rough-legged Tyrannulet**, **White-bellied Hummingbird**, beautiful **Plush-crested Jay**, **Golden-winged Cacique**, and **Gray-necked Wood Rail**.

Overnight: Hotel Selva Montana, Salta

Days 8 – 9. Salta to the Chaco habitats of Taco Pozo

We bird a completely new habitat, where a diverse array of new birds awaits us. There's a long list of immensely sought-after species such as **Black-legged Seriema**, **Red-legged Seriema**, tinamous including the spectacular-looking **Quebracho Crested Tinamou**, **Chaco Chachalaca** (in the late afternoons we may see hundreds of these along the road), **Ultramarine Grosbeak**, **Many-colored Chaco Finch**, **Black-bodied Woodpecker**, spectacular woodcreepers such as **Red-billed Scythebill**, **Scimitar-billed Woodcreeper**, **Great Rufous Woodcreeper**, and their smaller relative, **Narrow-billed Woodcreeper**. **Chaco Puffbird** will hopefully be added to our list at some point. **Spot-winged Falconet** is never easy, so it usually needs quite a bit of work. Much easier are **Lark-like Brushrunner**, **Crested Hornero**, the sometimes skulky **Crested Gallito**, **Chaco Earthcreeper**, and some new parrots that add splashes of color. As always, there are far more birds than we can mention here, but pretty much these two days of the trip are disproportionately productive in terms of adding a great many high-quality species to our growing bird list. We should mention that we'll be sure to try for **Chaco Owl** one night.

Overnight: Hotel Oasis, Taco Pozo, for two nights

Day 10. Drive to Calilegua

We have the option of “sleeping in” after doing some owling the previous night, or we can do some additional Chaco birding this morning if we missed any important birds and need to “clean up”. We then drive to the small town of Calilegua, the gateway to the national park of the same name.

Overnight: Benitez Hostería, Calilegua

Days 11 – 12. Birding Calilegua National Park

We spend one entire day in Calilegua National Park itself, and on the second day we bird beyond the park as far as the small town of San Francisco. We have a long list of tantalizing birds to find. The steep, forested slopes are home to birds like **Black-and-white Hawk-Eagle**, **Black-and-chestnut Eagle**, **Solitary Eagle**, **Bat Falcon**, **Dusky-legged Guan**, **Golden-collared Macaw**, **Speckled Hummingbird**, **Blue-capped Puffleg**, **Slender-tailed Woodstar**, **Blue-crowned Trogon**, **Golden-olive Woodpecker**, **Great Rufous Woodcreeper**, **Black-banded Woodcreeper**, **Giant Antshrike**, **Sclater's Tyrannulet**, **White-throated Antpitta**, **Mountain Wren**, **Spotted Nightingale-Thrush**, **Glossy-black Thrush**, **Rusty-browed Warbling Finch**, **Grey-browed Brushfinch**, **Crested Oropendola**, and **Yungas Pygmy Owl**.

Overnight: Benitez Hostería, Calilegua, for two more nights

Day 13. Birding Calilegua to Potrero de Yala Provincial Park

Lyre-tailed Nightjar (what a spectacular bird!) and **Yungas Screech Owl** are usually not too difficult to find on the outskirts of town. **Red-faced Guan** is one of our major targets and can be tricky, but of course we usually find it with persistence. **Streak-throated Bush Tyrant**, **Chilean Elaenia**, **Spot-breasted Thornbird**, **Andean Lapwing**, and **White-winged Coot** are other targets for the day.

Overnight: La Casona del Camino Real, Yala

Day 14. Birding the Humahuaca Ravine

Today we drive higher along the Humahuaca Valley, birding the puna salt lakes and highland lake habitats as we approach the town of La Quiaca on the Bolivian border (12000ft). We'll bird the dry valley along the way, looking for **Lesser Rhea**, **Andean Condor**, **Mountain Caracara**, **Mountain Parakeet**, **Andean Swallow**, **Rufous-banded** and **Puna Miners**, **Puna Yellow Finch**, **Andean Negrito**, **Brown-backed Mockingbird**, **Black-hooded Sierra Finch**, and **Black Siskin**.

From La Quiaca we drive south, passing the Laguna de los Pozuelos National Park, a huge Altiplano lake, where we have a chance to see **Andean Coot**, **Puna Teal**, **Puna Ibis**, **Andean Avocet**, **Puna Plover**, three species of **Flamingos** (**Chilean**, **Andean**, and **James's**), **Andean Goose**, **Cordilleran Canastero**, and **Burrowing Owl**. Then we continue to Yala, located near alder forest habitats, where we can scour the rivers for **Rufous-throated Dipper** and check in the evening for **Lyre-tailed Nightjar**.

Overnight: Hotel Rincon de Fuego, Tilcara

Day 15. Puna Lakes

From Tilcara we continue driving northward (and higher), passing some lakes, where we have a chance to see **Andean Coot**, **Puna Teal**, **Puna Ibis**, **Andean Avocet**, **Puna Plover**, three species of **Flamingos** (**Chilean**, **Andean**, and **James's**), **Andean Goose**, **Cordilleran Canastero**, and **Burrowing Owl**.

Overnight: Yavi

Day 16. Yavi

Yavi is a small hamlet that is home to the range-restricted **Citron-headed Yellow Finch**. We'll also bird the highland valleys above, looking for **Rufous-backed Sierra Finch**. Here we'll also have a chance for **Mourning Sierra Finch**, **Puna** and **Bright-rumped Yellow Finches**, **Black-billed Shrike-Tyrant**, **Cream-winged Cinclodes**, **Spot-winged Pigeon**, and others. The star bird we'll be looking for, however, is **Diademed Sandpiper-Plover**.

Overnight: Yavi

Day 17. Birding the high Puna

From Yavi we ascend to over 12,000 feet (4,000 meters) above sea level, searching for further specials such as **Lesser Rhea**, **Puna Tinamou**, **Puna Yellow-Finch**, and others.

Overnight: La Casona del Camino Real, Yala

Day 18. Flight from Jujuy to Buenos Aires

We bird the area further, then eventually drive to Jujuy (about 1.5 hours away) for our afternoon flight back to Buenos Aires. Here, back in the big city, we hope to have some time to clean up on birds we may have missed there.

Overnight: Hotel Dolmen or similar, Buenos Aires

Day 19: Flights depart Buenos Aires

We may have time to visit Municipal Ribera Norte Natural Park or other birding sites near Buenos Aires before flying home.

Please note that the itinerary cannot be guaranteed as it is only a rough guide and can be changed (usually slightly) due to factors such as availability of accommodation, updated information on the state of accommodation, roads, or birding sites, the discretion of the guides and other factors.

Duration: 18 days
Group size: 8
Date: 10 – 27 October 2020
Start: Buenos Aires
End: Buenos Aires

Price: US\$8222 per person sharing
Single supplement: US\$1131

Price includes:

All meals
Water
Lodging
Guides
All transport
Entrance fees

Price excludes:

Internal flights (about US\$500, depending on rate fluctuations)
International flights
Personal insurance
Alcoholic beverages
Gratuities
Laundry service
Personal expenses such as gifts
Departure tax from Argentina