



**BIRDING TOUR ARGENTINA: NORTHWEST FROM THE
FOOTHILLS TO PUNA**

20 SEPTEMBER - 06 OCTOBER 2021



Diademed Sandpiper-Plover will be targeted in the high puna.

Where else can you go from arid scrub with huge cacti to Yungas cloudforest at 7000 feet (2134 meters) to puna at 10000 feet (3048 meters), and to alto andino (high Andean) habitat at 13000 feet (3962 meters) 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 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 are **Torrent Duck** and **Andean Condor**, and other classic Andean species are rather easy to find here. While in the high Yungas we will also be searching for **Diademed Sandpiper-Plover**! 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.



*The charismatic **Torrent Duck** occurs in fast-flowing streams in the foothills of the Andes.*

This tour can be combined with our **Birding Tour Argentina: Northeast – Iberá Marshlands and Iguazú National Park**, followed by our **Birding Tour Argentina: Southern Patagonia – Los Glaciares National Park and Austral Rail**.

Itinerary (17 days/16 nights)

Day 1. Arrival in Buenos Aires

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 morning. This is a wonderful place for finding **Coscoroba Swan**,

Black-necked Swan (both of them really beautiful), the fabulous-looking **Rosy-billed Pochard**, the strange-looking **Masked Duck**, many other good wildfowl species, **Wren-like Rushbird**, the 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 here.

Overnight: Hotel Dolmen or similar, Buenos Aires



Ceibas holds good numbers of Southern Screamer (photo Alejandro Ronchetti).

Day 2. Flight to Tucumán, and transfer to Taquí 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 Taquí 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, Taquí del Valle

Day 3. Birding the Taquí 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 the 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, Taquí del Valle



Andean Goose can be seen at high-altitude wetlands.

Day 4. Birding the Monte Desert

We will leave Taquí 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 the noisy, active **Greater Wagtail-Tyrant**.

Overnight: Villa Vicuña Hotel Boutique, Cafayate

Day 5. 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



Black-chested Buzzard-Eagle can be seen in the arid regions of the Enchanted Valley.

Day 6. Bishop's Slope via 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 cooperate 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'll 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**, the beautiful **Plush-crested Jay**, **Golden-winged Cacique**, and **Gray-necked Wood Rail**.

Overnight: Hotel Selva Montana, Salta

Day 7. Salta to the Chaco habitats of Joaquín V. González

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 them 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 disproportionally 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, Chaco

Day 8. Chaco habitats at Joaquín V. González to Calilegua National Park

This is another day looking for specialties of the thorny habitats of the Chaco woodlands. Among the many species we might encounter are **Greater Rhea**, **Tataupa Tinamou**, **Bicolored Hawk**, **Blue-crowned Parakeet**, **Striped Cuckoo**, **Ferruginous Pygmy Owl**, **Blue-tufted Starthroat**, **Spot-banded Puffbird**, **Chaco Earthcreeper**, and many others. From here we drive to Calilegua National Park, looking for birds we may have previously missed.

Calilegua National Park is a stunning destination for birding. It protects an important Yungas cloudforest habitat. Our hotel is located very close to the park's entrance and will give us the chance to spot some interesting birds before dark.

Overnight: Benitez Hostería, Calilegua



Dusky-legged Guan can be seen in the forests of Calilegua National Park.

Day 9. Birding Calilegua National Park

We spend an 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

Day 10. Calilegua to Potrero de Yala Provincial Park

Today will be our second day birding in this lush region of Calilegua National Park. Over the last few years a pair of **Harpy Eagles** has been seen many times from the upper roads of the park, but even if we luck out here we should still find **Blue-crowned Trogon, Toco Toucan, Dot-fronted Woodpecker, Streaked Xenops**, and the rare **White-browed Tapaculo**. In the afternoon we will drive from Calilegua to Potrero de Yala Provincial Park, another wonderful transitional Yungas habitat.

Overnight: La Casona del Camino Real, Yala

Day 11. 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 12. 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 at 12000 feet (3658 meters). 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.**



Andean Condor (photo Alejandro Tello) is an iconic bird of the high Andes.

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 13. 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 14. 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



*The attractive **Bright-rumped Yellow Finch***

Day 15. Birding the high Puna

From Yavi we ascend to over 12,000 feet (3657 meters) above sea level, searching for further specials such as **Lesser Rhea**, **Puna Tinamou**, **Puna Yellow-Finch**, and others.

Overnight: Yavi

Day 16. 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 17. Departure

After a morning visit to Costanera Sur Ecological Reserve we will transfer to the international airport to board your departure flights.

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: 17 days

Limit (group size): 6 -12 (We have a higher limit for this than for most tours.)

Dates: 20 September - 06 October 2021

Start: Buenos Aires, Argentina

End: Buenos Aires, Argentina

Prices: US\$7951 per person sharing (2021)

Single supplements: US\$895 (2021)

Price includes:

Meals (from dinner on day 1 until breakfast on day 17)

Accommodation

Guiding fees (English-speaking guide)

Entrance fees

All transport while on tour

Tolls

Price excludes:

All flights

Items of a personal nature, e.g. gifts

Alcoholic drinks

Personal insurance

Gratuities