



NORTHWEST ARGENTINA: YUNGAS, CHACO AND HIGH ANDES BIRDING TOUR

20 SEPTEMBER - 06 OCTOBER 2021



Rufous-throated Dipper is one of the most-wanted targets of the trip.

Argentina is the second-largest country in South America and this birding trip offers the opportunity to travel across the northwestern section of this vast and picturesque land. We will go from lowland wetlands of Buenos Aires, through the dry Chaco shrublands and into the lush Yungas cloudforest, before we climb in elevation through the dry Andean valleys and puna mountains to the high Andes in the Altiplano where we seemingly reach the roof of Argentina at 13,000 feet (3,900 meters).

Our northwest Argentina trip can be considered one of the best birding trips in southern South America as it provides a unique set of birds found only in this part of the world which can be enjoyed by the most serious birder to those only setting foot on the continent for the first time. During this spectacular 17-day birding trip you may feast your eyes on some of the region's most-wanted species such as **Rufous-throated Dipper**, **Horned Coot**, **Diademed Sandpiper-Plover**, **Sandy Gallito**, **Red-faced Guan**, **Tucuman Mountain Finch**, **Moreno's Ground Dove**, **Red-tailed Comet**, **Wedge-tailed Hillstar**, the attractive **Burrowing Parrot**, **White-throated Antpitta**, **Tucumán Amazon**, **Lyre-tailed Nightjar**, **Giant Antshrike**, **Black-legged Seriema** and **Black-bodied Woodpecker**. Other more widespread yet classic neotropical species will include **Andean Condor**, **Andean Goose**, **Torrent Duck** and **Southern Screamer**, highly prized for those visiting South America for the first time.



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

Spectacular rock formations greet you along the way into the Andes. You will find high-altitude alkaline lakes filled with three different South American flamingo species including **Chilean Flamingo**, **Andean Flamingo** and **James's Flamingo**, one of the world's rarest members of the family. The trip will provide a unique set of waders too, such as **Andean Avocet**, **Puna Plover**, **Collared Plover**, **Tawny-throated Dotterel**, **Andean Lapwing** and the most-wanted **Diademed Sandpiper-Plover**, a highly attractive wader and considered among the 100 top birds in the world for many birdwatchers.

The great Chaco will provide you with both **Black-legged** and **Red-legged Seriemas** along with a host of other amazing Chaco birds that, with some luck, will include **Lark-like**

Brushrunner, Black-bodied Woodpecker, Quebracho Crested Tinamou, Chaco Owl and Spot-winged Falconet.

The splendors of the Calilegua National Park include stunning birds such as **Yungas Manakin, Golden-collared Macaw, Giant Antshrike, White-throated Antpitta, Tucuman Amazon** and with luck **Ornate Hawk-Eagle** and **Solitary Eagle**.

Lowland marshes around Buenos Aires are full of water birds including the likes of **Maguari Stork, Limpkin, Black-necked Swan, Plumbeous Rail, Whistling Heron** and **Southern Screamer** which will all help boost our already impressive bird list and crown a fantastic trip.

All in all, this is a spectacular tour through Argentina's famous wine-growing area taking in some of South America's classic bird species as we traverse varied and breathtaking landscapes.



Andean Goose can be seen in high-altitude wetlands.

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 and Costanera Sur Ecological Reserve

We will meet you on arrival at the Ezeiza International airport in Buenos Aires. You will be transferred to the hotel and if time permits and the group is keen, we can spend our first afternoon birding the Costanera Sur Ecological Reserve. This is a wonderful spot located within the city where we might find **Coscoroba Swan**, the fabulous-looking **Rosy-billed**

Pochard, Masked Duck, Silver Teal and many other good wildfowl species. **Picazuro Pigeon, Gilded Sapphire, Checkered Woodpecker, Green-barred Woodpecker, Wren-like Rushbird**, the brightly colored **Red-crested Cardinal, Rufous Hornero** and **Guira Cuckoo** are common here and are certainly full of charisma. **Monk Parakeet** abounds and we usually also find its stunning-looking cousin, **Nanday Parakeet**. **Rufescent Tiger Heron, Chimango Caracara, Grey-breasted Martin, Masked Gnatcatcher** and if we are lucky **Long-winged Harrier**.

Overnight: Hotel Pestana, Buenos Aires

Day 2. Flight to Tucumán and transfer to Tafí del Valle

We shall fly to Tucumán and drive from here to Tafí del Valle, where we spend two nights. During our drive we ascend into beautiful cloudforest (Yungas) and start looking for **Rufous-throated Dipper** (one of the most important birds of the trip). Other good birds to be found in the area include the spectacular **Red-tailed Comet, Yellow-striped Brushfinch, Rusty-browed Warbling Finch, White-browed Tapaculo, Torrent Duck, Grey-hooded Parakeet, Aplomado Falcon, Variable Hawk, Plain-mantled Tit-Spinetail, Brown-capped Tit-Spinetail** and **Ornate Tinamou**.

Overnight: Hostería Lunahuana, Tafí del Valle



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

Day 3. Birding the Tafí del Valle area

This always proves to be an exciting, birding-packed day, as we bird at various altitudes. We start the day by ascending the El Infiernillo Pass until we are high above the tree line, 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 fairly 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 too. 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 as it's a highly range-restricted species! While here we will also look for **Rock** and **Buff-breasted Earthcreepers**, **Maquis Canastero**, **Monte Yellow Finch**, **Rufous-bellied Mountain Tanager** and **Brown-backed Mockingbird**.

After what will hopefully have been an amazing morning, we will enjoy lunch and then head to a small lake, where we hope to see **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: Hostería Lunahuana, Tafi del Valle

Day 4. Birding the Monte Desert

We will leave Tafi 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. The poorly-known **Sandy Gallito**, **White-throated Cacholote** (endemic) and **Patagonian Mockingbird** are the major targets. We will of course 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**, **Black-winged** and **Moreno's Ground Doves**, **Slender-billed** and **Rufous-banded Miner**, **Streak-fronted Thornbird**, **Puna Canastero**, **White-browed Chat-Tyrant** and the noisy **Greater Wagtail-Tyrant**.

Overnight: Viñas de Cafayate Wine Resort

Day 5. Cafayate to Coronel Moldes

We continue our exciting journey that traverses the spectacular scenery of Argentina's wine country looking for **Long-tailed Meadowlark**, **Burrowing Parrot**, **Tufted Tit-Spinetail**, **Yellow-billed Tit-Tyrant**, **Rusty-vented Canastero**, the endemic **Steinbach's Canastero**, **Many-colored Chaco Finch**, **Band-tailed Sierra Finch**, **Green-barred** and **White-fronted Woodpeckers**, **Golden-billed Saltator**, **Chaco Earthcreeper**, **White-tipped Plantcutter**, **Ultramarine Grosbeak**, **Pampa Finch**, **Stripe-crowned Spinetail**, 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 **Crested Gallito**, **Spot-winged Falconet**, **Red-legged Seriema**, **Black-chested Buzzard-Eagle** and the poorly known **Sandy Gallito**.

Overnight: Hostería Cabra Corral, Coronel Moldes

Day 6. Bishop's Slope via Los Cardones National Park

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

Then we will head to Salta looking for **Cream-backed Woodpecker**, **Smoke-colored Pewee**, **Rough-legged Tyrannulet**, **White-bellied Hummingbird**, the beautiful **Plush-crested Jay**, **Golden-winged Cacique** and **Grey-cowled Wood Rail**.

Overnight: Hotel Boutique Villa Vicuña, Salta



The handsome Cream-backed Woodpecker is possible around Salta.

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

Today we shall explore *El Chaco* where a diverse array of new birds awaits us. This dry desert, dominated by scrub and large cacti, is found only in northern Argentina, Paraguay and southern Bolivia. There is a long list of immensely-wanted species, such as **Black-legged Seriema**, **Tataupa Tinamou**, **Brushland Tinamou** and the spectacular-looking **Quebracho Crested Tinamou**, **Chaco Chachalaca**, **Many-colored Chaco Finch**, the sought-after **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 and it usually needs quite a bit of work. Much easier are **Lark-like Brushrunner**, **Crested Hornero**, the sometimes-skulking **Crested Gallito**, **Chaco Earthcreeper** should hopefully be found too while new parrot species add splashes of color. As always, there are far more birds than we can mention here and these two days represent the

most productive days of the trip in terms of adding many high-quality species to our growing bird list. We should mention that we'll be sure to try for **Chaco Owl** at night.

Overnight: Hotel Rass Ballbeck, Taco Pozo, Chaco



*The most-wanted **Black-legged Seriema** is one of the main targets in the Chaco.*

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

This is another day looking for specials 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**, **Chaco Puffbird**, **Chaco Earthcreeper**, **White-barred Piculet**, **White Woodpecker**, **Campo Flicker**, **Turquoise-fronted Amazon**, **Great Antshrike**, **Variable Antshrike** and **Stripe-backed Antbird**. 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 important Yungas cloudforest habitat and we will get to explore this impressive park and its avifauna over the next couple of days.

Overnight: Posada del Sol, Calilegua

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**, **Yungas Manakin**, **Golden-olive Woodpecker**, **Great Rufous**

Woodcreeper, Black-banded Woodcreeper, Giant Antshrike, Sclater's Tyrannulet, White-throated Antpitta, Mountain Wren, Sclater's Nightingale-Thrush, Glossy-black Thrush, Rusty-browed Warbling Finch, Grey-browed Brushfinch, Crested Oropendola and Yungas Pygmy Owl.

Overnight: Posada del Sol, Calilegua



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

Day 10. Calilegua to Potrero de Yala Provincial Park

Today will be our second day birding in this lush region of Calilegua National Park. We shall look for species such as **Blue-crowned Trogon, Toco Toucan, Dot-fronted Woodpecker, Streaked Xenops, Ochre-faced Tody-Flycatcher, Mottle-cheeked Tyrannulet, Saffron-billed Sparrow, Two-banded Warbler, Orange-headed Tanager, Ochre-cheeked Spinetail, Brown-capped Whitestart, Andean Slaty Thrush, White-tailed Kite, Swallow-tailed Kite** and the shy **White-browed Tapaculo**.

Over the last few years, a pair of **Harpy Eagles** has sometimes been seen from the upper roads of the park, although we would consider ourselves most fortunate with a sighting of this massive eagle! In the afternoon we will drive from Calilegua to Potrero de Yala Provincial Park, another wonderful transitional Yungas habitat.

Overnight: La Posta del Lozano, Yala

Day 11. Potrero de Yala Provincial Park

Today we will have a predawn start to look for some night birds including the spectacular male **Lyre-tailed Nightjar** and **Yungas Screech Owl** which 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. The localized **Tucuman Amazon** is another target

of this trip. We shall look for the **Streak-throated Bush Tyrant**, **Chilean Elaenia**, **Rufous-capped Antshrike**, **Spot-breasted Thornbird**, **Buff-browed Foliage-gleaner**, **Mountain Wren**, **Sooty-fronted Spinetail**, **Blue-and-yellow Tanager**, **Glittering-bellied Emerald**, **Yellow-browed Tyrant**, **Crested Becard** and **Golden-rumped Euphonia**.

Overnight: La Posta del Lozano, 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 12,000 feet (3,650 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**.

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 the most-wanted **Horned Coot**. From here we will continue our drive towards Tilcara.

Overnight: Hotel Las Marias, Tilcara

Day 13. Puna Lakes and transfer to Yavi

From Tilcara we continue driving northward (and higher), passing a number of lakes, where we have the chance to admire the stunning Argentinean Altiplano, while hopefully finding **Andean Gull**, **Andean Coot**, **Giant Coot**, **Andean Goose**, **Puna Teal**, **Crested Duck**, **Puna Ibis**, **Andean Avocet**, **Puna Plover**, **Chilean**, **Andean** and **James's Flamingos**, **Cordilleran Canastero** and **Grey-breasted Seedsnipe**.

Overnight: Posada Tika, Yavi



*The **Diademed Sandpiper-Plover** is another trip target in the high Andes of Argentina.*

Day 14. Yavi

Yavi is a small hamlet that is home to the range-restricted **Citron-headed Yellow Finch**. We will also bird the highland valleys above, looking for **Rufous-backed Inca Finch**. Here we will also have a chance for **Mourning Sierra Finch**, **Puna** and **Bright-rumped Yellow Finches**, **Black-billed Shrike-Tyrant**, **Cream-winged Cinclodes** and **Spot-winged Pigeon**. The star bird we'll be looking for, however, is **Diademed Sandpiper-Plover**, a rare high-elevation wader restricted to mossy tundra, grasslands and bogs in northern Argentina, Chile, Bolivia and Peru.

Overnight: Posada Tika, Yavi

Day 15. Birding the high Puna

From Yavi we ascend to over 12,000 feet (3,650 meters) above sea level, searching for further specials such as **Lesser Rhea**, **Ornate Tinamou**, **Puna Tinamou**, **Puna Yellow Finch**, **Puna**, **Spot-billed** and **Rufous-naped Ground Tyrants**, **Grey-bellied Shrike-Tyrant**, **Straight-billed Earthcreeper**, **Golden-spotted Ground Dove**, **Common Miner**, **Puna Miner** and **Andean Swallow**. The high Andes of this section of Argentina are good to see other wildlife like wild **Guanaco**, **Vicuna**, **Montane Vizcacha** and with luck the distinctive **Highland Tuco-Tuco**, an endemic burrowing rodent of this part of the continent that resembles North American Prairie Dogs.

Overnight: Posada Tika, Yavi



Montane Vizcacha is one of the several interesting mammals to see on this tour (photo Alejandro Tello).

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 previously missed.

Overnight: Hotel Pestana, Buenos Aires

Day 17. Otamendi Reserve and transfer to Ezeiza International airport

On our last day, we will invest some time in the morning to visit the Otamendi Reserve near Buenos Aires. The wetlands here hold a large amount of water species including **Southern Screamer, Brazilian Teal, Limpkin, Snowy and Great Egrets, Whistling Heron, Giant Wood Rail, Plumbeous Rail, Black-necked Swan, Anhinga, Wood Stork, Maguari Stork, Cocoi Heron, Rufescent Tiger Heron, White-winged Coot, White-faced Ibis, Cinnamon Teal, Wattled Jacana and Fulvous Whistling Duck**. Other species include **Snail Kite, Grassland Yellow Finch, Many-colored Rush-Tyrant, Yellow-chinned Spinetail** and the most wanted **Curve-billed** and **Straight-billed Reedhaunters**, both secretive reed dwellers and among the most-prized furnarids for birders.

After a busy morning at Otamendi we shall return to the hotel and be transferred to the Ezeiza International airport to connect our international 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\$6,902 per person sharing (2021)
Single supplements: US\$1,101 (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 (please see our [tipping guidelines blog](#))