

# **WILD PATAGONIA & CENTRAL CHILE PUMAS, PENGUINS, CONDORS & MORE!**

**OCTOBER 30-NOVEMBER 17, 2023**

## **SANTIAGO HIGHLIGHTS EXTENSION ANDES, WETLANDS & ALBATROSS GALORE!**

**NOVEMBER 15-21, 2023**

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**Breathtaking Torres del Paine National Park holds the highest density of Puma anywhere in the Americas, which are always a trip highlight! © Andrew Whittaker**

***Breathtaking Chile! Whether exploring wild Patagonia, watching a Puma hunting a herd of Guanaco against a backdrop of snow-capped spires, enjoying the fascinating antics of a raucous King Penguin colony in Tierra del Fuego, observing a pair of Magellanic Woodpeckers or colorful tapaculos in a towering Southern Beech Forest, or sipping fine wine in a comfortable lodge, this lovely and modern South American country is destined to captivate you!***

*On this tour, we will experience the majestic scenery and abundant wildlife of Chile, widely regarded among the most beautiful countries in the world. From Santiago and Talca in south-central Chile to the famous Lake District and charming Chiloé Island, and on to wild Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego in the far south, we will seek all of the special birds, mammals, and vivid landscapes for which the country is justly famous. Our visit is timed for the radiant southern spring when the weather is at its best, colorful blooming wildflowers abound, birds are outfitted in stunning breeding plumage and singing, and photographic opportunities abound. Perhaps most exciting, we will have the opportunity to observe the intimate and poorly known natural history of wild Pumas amid spectacular Torres del Paine National Park, often known as the eighth wonder of the World!*



*Chile truly is a wonderful place to experience nature. It is also a modern, well-developed country, which makes exploration a true pleasure. Chile's geography is as remarkable as the country itself, extending some 2,650 miles from north to south yet averaging only 110 miles across, making it both the longest and the narrowest country in the world. Forming Chile's spine, the mighty Andes Mountain range dominates the topography and includes some of South America's highest ice-capped peaks. The extensive Pacific coastline teems with life—a direct product of the nutrient rich, cold Humboldt Current streaming north from the Antarctic.*

*On our first day, we'll visit the snowcapped Andes right outside Santiago, seeking an array of birds including woodpeckers, ovenbirds, hummingbirds, ground-tyrants and colorful sierra-finches. We will also concentrate on finding several endemics including Chilean Tinamou, Crag Chilia, Dusky-tailed Canastero and three neat tapaculos including the bold, large Moustached Turca, and colorful White-throated Tapaculo. Close studies of the mighty Andean Condor at a roost area will be among the highlights while the huge "Magellanic" Great Horned Owl may also be found at a day roost. The*



*flower displays here can be breathtaking and we will hope to see the spectacular and unique giant Puya bromeliads.*

*From the bustling capital of Santiago, we'll drive south through the fertile central valley and its famous wine producing area, while to the west, the towering snow-covered summits of the Andes run parallel all the way down to the "Land of Fire." Birding along the way will produce wonderful studies of Burrowing Parakeet and Spectacled and Torrent ducks (often with young at this time of year).*



Magellanic Woodpeckers  
© Andrew Whittaker

*Our destination is the city of Talca and the nearby Altos de Lircay National Reserve, home to sensational mountain scenery and extensive towering Southern beech forest, where Magellanic Woodpeckers are common, White-throated Hawks can be seen hunting, and amazing Green-backed Firecrown hummingbirds abound at our lodge hummingbird feeders. The highly-sought Chestnut-throated Huet-huet (a brightly colored thrush-sized tapaculo) occurs here as does the striking Rufous-legged Owl.*

*We then fly south to Puerto Montt, the jump-off point for the famous Chilean Lake District, Alerce Andino National Park and Chiloé Island, the latter a picturesque and popular destination just off Chile's southern Pacific coast. Here, the temperate, or "Valdivian," forests are home to a rich avifauna that boasts the very rare Rufous-tailed Hawk, flocks of endemic Slender-billed Parakeet, colorful Black-throated Huet-huet and the enchanting Chucao Tapaculo. The rocky coastlines, wetlands and rich estuaries host a yet to be named new Flightless Steamer-Duck, in addition to a menagerie of waterfowl and migrant shorebirds. Our explorations will provide exposure to a profusion of wildflowers and flowering trees, including our first blooming Fire Trees, and an exciting visit to a mixed colony of Humboldt and Magellanic penguins. Here, we will also take a private boat trip in search of the recently described (2013) Pincoya Storm-Petrel (seen on our last three tours), while a comfortable ferry crossing between the island and the mainland should yield specialty seabirds*

*such as Black-browed Albatross, Red-legged Cormorant, Magellanic Diving-Petrel and our first Southern Giant-Petrels (the vulture of the southern oceans).*

*While on the island of Chiloé, we will enjoy a lovely boat trip to a mixed colony of penguin and extensive forested roadsides hold flocks of the endemic Slender-billed Parakeets. We'll keep our eyes open for the poorly-known Southern Pudu, the world's smallest deer. The island also holds the attractive, endemic Darwin's Fox, which is rarely seen but still possible.*

*Our adventure then continues to the tip of South America as we travel further south to Punta Arenas. Along the coast we'll find old wooden piers and pilings lined with breeding cormorants and delicate,*

*colorful Dolphin Gulls, while inland the landscape is dominated by the giant granite walls of the Paine massif rising dramatically above the Patagonian steppe. In between are wetlands alive with waterfowl, with up to three members of beautiful “sheldgeese” possible: Ashy-headed Goose, Upland Goose and the endangered Ruddy-headed Goose, along with a host of colorful grebes and other exciting ducks.*

*In Punta Arenas, we will visit Magdalena Island in the Strait of Magellan, home to a thriving colony of Magellanic Penguins, South American Fur Seals, and the occasional Snowy Sheathbill or a vagrant Rockhopper Penguin, which were seen on previous tours. From the mainland, we’ll take a ferry across the famous strait, with its rich marine birdlife and pods of colorful black and white Commerson’s Dolphins, before disembarking on the enchanted island of Tierra del Fuego, the “Land of Fire,” for an opportunity to visit a thriving colony of King Penguins and enjoy the ever so cute fluffy chicks.*



Another trip highlight is enjoying the spectacular King Penguin colony on Tierra Del Fuego. © Andrew Whittaker

*Beyond penguins, these wild barrens hold many other enticing species, with brackish lakes ablaze with pink-hued flocks of Chilean Flamingos and a range of beautiful waterfowl. We’ll search for the distinctive Magellanic Plover (a bird in its own family and seen on all of our past visits), colorful Rufous-chested and Tawny-throated dotterels, and diminutive Least Seedsnipes. Meanwhile, immaculate Chocolate-vented Tyrants grace remote fence posts while strikingly beautiful White-bellied (canary-winged) Finches are found amid the taller grasslands.*

*For a grand finale, we’ll travel to the famous Torres del Paine National Park, Chile’s number one national park, where breathtaking scenery abounds. In a country filled with scenic wonders, no one place exceeds the grandeur of Torres del Paine National Park, where glaciers, ice fields, snow-*



Cuanaco Bushes in Torres del Paine National Park © Andrew Whittaker



*covered mountains, turquoise lakes, and hillsides ablaze with carpets of scarlet, orange, and yellow wildflowers provide sensational panoramic landscapes. Amid such splendor we will seek our prime target, the powerful Puma (seven different cats were seen in 2016, eight in 2017 and six in 2018, nine in 2019). We will also enjoy herds of wild Guanaco, flocks of Lesser (Darwin's) Rhea, and observe*



**A Guanaco at Torres del Paine National Park, the Puma's favored prey © Andrew Whittaker**

*majestic Andean Condors, one of the world's largest flying birds. With great luck, we may even see the critically endangered and recently rediscovered Austral Rail, which was seen so well on our 2016 trip. On one day we will visit a stunningly remote glacial valley outside the park, in search of the gorgeous Yellow-bridled Finch, rare Band-tailed Earthcreeper, Patagonian Mockingbird and the lovely White-throated Caracara.*

*Those who want to see more of Chile beyond what is offered on the main tour, or those who seek a shorter stand-alone trip, should consider our optional exciting post-tour extension.*

*Our Santiago Highlights Extension will take us from the Chilean capital area to the rich coast and breathtaking El Yeso Valley in pursuit of a host of range-restricted birds, several of which are endemic, including Crag Chilia, Moustached Turca and Seaside Cinclodes. Regional specialties include Humboldt Penguin, Andean Condor, Stripe-backed Bittern, Black-headed Duck, the enigmatic Diademed Sandpiper-Plover (one of the world's most beautiful shorebirds), , Gray-breasted Seedsnipe, White-sided Hillstar, and Rufous-tailed Plantcutter. Marshes and estuaries team with wildfowl, terns, the stunning Many-Colored Rush Tyrant and the recently split Ticking Dorodito. Always a trip highlight is a half-day pelagic trip (seas are normally very calm) where we hope to see from three to five species of albatrosses, including the lovely Salvin's (the commonest), Black-browed, "Northern" Royal, the rarer Buller's, and even the striking Chatham's (seen on our 2018 trip); delightful Inca Terns; as well as various southern petrels, storm-petrels and Peruvian Diving-Petrel.*

**October 30, Day 1: Departure from Home.** Flights from the United States bound for Santiago, Chile (Arturo Merino Benítez Airport; airport code SCL) depart on October 30 and arrive early on the morning of October 31. Those concerned about the travel time to Chile are encouraged to arrive a day early so as to be rested and better

able to enjoy our activities. Upon request, the VENT office will be happy to assist with early arrival hotel and airport transfer arrangements.

NIGHT: Aboard aircraft in transit to Santiago

**October 31, Day 2: Arrival in Santiago.** Most flights from the United States arrive in Santiago between 6:00-10:00 a.m. Upon arrival and after clearing immigration, collect your bags, pass customs, and then proceed outside the baggage claim area where you will be met by our local agents and transferred to our hotel.

Santiago is home to 5.1 million people and enjoys a reputation as one of South America's most modern and cosmopolitan cities. The metropolis is constructed on a rich inland plain, the Santiago Basin, bounded by mountains on three sides. Santiago is Chile's largest city, is economically significant, and is the seat of national government. For many first-time travelers to Chile, Santiago is the logical starting point.



**Southern Lapwing © Andrew Whittaker**



**Long-tailed Meadowlark (male) © Andrew Whittaker**

The Hotel Diego de Almagro features spacious rooms, a restaurant and bar, and a swimming pool. Additionally, the hotel grounds are certainly worth a walk as a number of locally common birds may be found including Southern Lapwing, Chimango Caracara, White-crested Elaenia, Tufted Tit-tyrant the endemic Chilean Mockingbird, Austral Thrush, Black-chinned Siskin and Long-tailed Meadowlark.

You will have the rest of the afternoon at leisure, with time to rest and recover following the long international flight. Lunch is on your own. This evening we will meet in the lobby at 6:00 p.m. for a tour welcome and orientation followed by dinner.

NIGHT: Hotel Diego de Almagro, Santiago Airport

**November 1, Day 3: A Day in the Andes, Including Farellones, Yerba Loca Reserve and Valle Nevado (Valley of Snow).** Our adventure begins as we depart the hotel after breakfast, leaving early to avoid city traffic. We'll drive a relatively short distance out of town before we begin to climb into the incredibly scenic Andean foothills. We'll make several stops along the highway, each of which offers chances to see birds. A variety of raptors may be seen soaring overhead, and an impressive assortment of terrestrial birds scamper around the vegetation, which together present a wonderful introduction to the special birds of the Chilean *Matorral* (Mediterranean-like woodland and scrub biome) and *Sclerophyllous* forest.

Among the birds possible this morning are three wonderful and endemic species of tapaculos: the large Moustached Turca and colorful but skulky White-throated Tapaculo—both of which have amazingly loud and musical songs—and Dusky Tapaculo, a smaller species. We'll also watch for Chilean Tinamou, endemic Dusky-tailed Canastero, Black-chested Buzzard-Eagle, Austral Pygmy-Owl, Striped Woodpecker, Chilean Mockingbird,

Common Diuca-Finch, and the striking Rufous-tailed Plantcutter, a member of the cotinga family. Fence Degu, an endemic cute rodent, may be seen sunning itself on rock walls.



**Andean Condor (male) © Andrew Whittaker**

We'll continue higher into the mountains into Yerba Loca reserve. Our final destination for the afternoon is the mountain town of Farellones and the Valle Nevado (Valley of Snow). The road up to Farellones switches back and forth about 40 times before reaching the turnaround point at Valle Nevado (about 9,000 feet). Pullouts at some of the bends offer excellent birding and pleasing vistas. As we've come to expect, we'll be immersed in breathtaking scenery of epic proportions. Immense snow-covered Andean peaks will surround us while the immediate landscape will ripple with blue-hued mountain streams (due to leaching minerals) and hillsides blazing vivid orange with millions of poppies. We may also note the presence of impressive turquoise Puya bromeliad flower spikes, a favored nectar source for Giant

Hummingbirds!

Typically, the birding is extremely good throughout the area and we'll seek many exciting and localized species. These include Black-winged Ground-Dove; White-sided Hillstar, an amazing high-altitude hummingbird; Cordilleran and Sharp-billed canasteros; Scale-throated Earthcreeper; Black-fronted and White-browed ground-tyrants; Black-billed Shrike-Tyrant; Band-tailed, Mourning and Plumbeous sierra-finches; Greater Yellow-Finch; and Yellow-rumped Siskin. At this elevation we will pay particular attention to the Rufous-banded Miners as we try to pick out the rarer look-alike, Creamy-rumped Miner. Another highlight should be exceptional close studies of Andean Condors (in good weather) at their daytime roost where we can also watch these remarkable birds—the world's largest flying birds—in flight! With some luck we may encounter a roosting "Magellanic" Great Horned Owl or the comical Coruro, a chunky all-black rodent with big yellow teeth endemic to Chile. Of special interest, we'll always be on the lookout for the extremely rare Andean Cat (a miniature Snow Leopard look-alike) that has recently been found in this region.

NIGHT: Hotel Diego de Almagro, Santiago Airport

**November 2, Day 4: Santiago to Talca; Birding Colbún Lake and onto Altos de Lircay National Reserve.** Today we will head south, driving through a rich belt of agriculture, famous for its excellent grape vineyards. In this part of Chile, the climate is comparable to that of California and the Bordeaux region of France, and is ideal for producing grapes of some of the highest quality. In particular, the region has gained renown for its Cabernet Sauvignons, Chardonnays, Merlots, and Sauvignon Blancs. Meanwhile, the snow-capped volcanic peaks of the Andes shimmer to the east, and the mountains of the coastal range may be visible to the west as we push south toward the city of Talca. After lunch, about 30 miles southeast of Talca, we'll visit Colbún Lake. Colbún Lake is not a natural lake, but rather a reservoir that was created



**Colorful Burrowing Parakeets breed along the river banks.  
© Andrew Whittaker**



in 1985 with the damming of the Maule River. The reservoir serves as a source of irrigation for agriculture and for hydroelectric power generation. It is also a productive spot for birds and we will spend time here checking the shoreline, open water, and surrounding vegetation for a fine variety of birds. Among the many possibilities are the localized Chiloé Wigeon, Spectacled (Bronze-winged) Duck, Black-faced Ibis, Andean Gull, Chilean Pigeon and, best of all, a superb colony of colorful Burrowing Parakeets (big enough and bright enough and even sounding like) to be accepted as a macaw.

Continuing on to our secluded forested lodge where we'll spend the next two nights, we will watch the adjacent river for Torrent Duck (in this southern subspecies the males are all black below) and, at this season, are often attended by the cutest ducklings. Then we'll drive up through the forested foothills of the Andes to the tiny community of Vilches and into our lovely family run "pousada" complex located within a *Nothofagus* (Southern Beech) forest, often with birds right at our doorstep.



**Green-backed Firecrown (male)**  
© Andrew Whittaker

The Altos de Lircay National Reserve, sometimes referred to as Vilches Protected Area, is a 37,000-acre reserve created in 1996 to protect the sensitive botanical community, wildlife, and natural wonders of an especially ancient mountain range, the pre-cordillera of San Clemente. By any measure, it is a spectacular place. Much of the park is above tree-line, with the highest sector reaching over 7,300 feet, and features spectacular views of giant, snow-capped volcanoes and the north side of the Lircay River, which flows along a channeled riverbed formed by volcanic lava. Other aspects of the landscape are deep gorges and magnificent *Nothofagus* forest.

The remainder of the afternoon will be spent birding the lodge gardens and adjacent woodlands, home to many distinct species such as Thorn-tailed Rayadito, the nuthatch-like White-throated Treerunner, Magellanic Tapaculo, Tufted Tit-Tyrant and Patagonian Sierra-Finch. In the late afternoon we will enjoy the non-stop action of the Green-backed Firecrowns at the lodge's hummingbird feeders.

NIGHT: Hotel Picamaderos, Vilches Alto

**November 3, Day 5: Birding the Lovely Altos de Lircay National Reserve.** After breakfast, we will make our way up to the reserve's trail system, armed with a picnic lunch. We will spend most of the day exploring this majestic forest along dirt roads and well-kept forest trails, birding different stretches of forest. A wonderful collection of interesting birds live here among the giant Coigüe (genus *Nothofagus*) and Roble (genus *Lophozonia*) trees, some covered with an odd orange fungus that serves as a local delicacy at certain times of the year.

Early on, our main objective will be to track down the large, endemic Chestnut-throated Huet-huet (pronounced wet-wet), a remarkably colorful member of the otherwise drab tapaculo family, best located by its amazing and loud vocalization.



**The amazingly colorful Blue-tailed Tree Iguana** © Andrew Whittaker



The spectacular Magellanic Woodpecker, one of the great birds of South America, is actually fairly common here. We will keep our eyes peeled for several other interesting species such as the rare White-throated Hawk, diminutive Striped Woodpecker, Austral Pygmy-Owl, Austral Parakeet, Fire-eyed Diucon, Black-chinned Siskin, and Common Diuca-Finch. Additionally, we'll look for the spectacular Blue-tailed Tree Iguana and lovely Culpeo Foxes, which often visit the picnic area.

Majestic flowering orchids brighten up the forest understory. At night we'll enjoy a wonderful family-prepared meal at the lodge. A night excursion may reward us with views of the seldom-seen and lovely Rufous-legged Owl, often found on the hotel grounds.

NIGHT: Hotel Picamaderos, Vilches Alto

**November 4, Day 6: Return to Santiago with Birding en Route; Flight to Puerto Montt.** Today we will embark on our return trip to Santiago. Depending on flight times, we may stop en route to bird at a lakeside where waterfowl may be abundant and we may see our first Spectacled Tyrant or the striking Band-tailed Sierra-Finch.

Upon arrival in the Chilean capital, we'll proceed directly to the airport in time to catch a mid-afternoon flight to Puerto Montt. Our flight path will take us south for 600 miles along the spine of the Andes, yielding impressive views of snow-clad volcanic summits as far as the eye can see. We will descend to the unique Chilean Lake District and splendid Valdivian forests where the valleys between the Andes and the coastal range are filled with beautiful lakes formed by hundreds of rivers descending from the mountains above.

Founded in 1853 during the period of German colonization, the coastal city of Puerto Montt grew quickly into a permanent settlement due to its strategic position, geographically at the southern end of the Central Valley and as the gateway to the Chiloé Archipelago. The town also was famous during the 1990s and 2000s as the second largest salmon producing center in the world. The city's cultural heritage mixes elements of Chiloé (indigenous with Spanish influence) and German traditions.

Puerto Montt is dominated by two snow-capped volcanoes, Osorno and Calbuco, the latter having erupted and blown off its top as recently as May, 2015.

NIGHT: Hotel Diego de Almagro, Puerto Montt

**November 5, Day 7: Alerce Andino National Park and Coastal Tidal Mudflats.** Today we will drive the coastal road to Alerce Andino National Park, arriving early for an exciting morning in the park. Situated on the southern shore of Lake Chapo, Alerce Andino National Park is another of Chile's natural wonders, where some of the trees are an amazing 1,500-2,000 years old. The park takes its name from the unique Alerce ("larch" in Spanish) trees that cover most of its nearly 100,000 acres. The tree is actually a member of the cypress family in the mono-typic genus *Fitzroya* and a key component of the local temperate or "Valdivian" forest. Other features of the national park include enormous mountains, deep valleys, lakes of varying shades of blue, and ancient *Nothofagus* trees whose stunted, twisted shapes reflect the harsh conditions that predominate in southern Chile.

These huge forests stand in stark contrast to the open wilderness of Patagonia farther south. In our time here, we'll seek a wonderful array of tapaculos, marveling over their wild and often explosive voices that echo through the lovely forested valleys. The two largest and most spectacular tapaculos occurring here are the enigmatic Chucao Tapaculo and the much more secretive Black-throated Huet-huet, while dense bamboo thickets hold the "mice" of these forests, the skulking Ochre-flanked and Magellanic tapaculo. In fact, this park is the tapaculo capital of the world, and hopefully we will all be in love with them after today.

The supporting cast includes the rare Chilean Hawk (seen on our last two tours), rare Rufous-tailed and uncommon White-throated Hawk, Austral Parakeet, Des Murs's Wiretail, Tufted Tit-Tyrant, the localized Patagonian Tyrant, and remarkably colorful Torrent Ducks (the males are all black below in this distinctive subspecies).



**Enigmatic Chucao Tapaculo © Andrew Whittaker**

After a picnic lunch in the park where we may well be visited by the local Patagonian Gray Fox, we will bird our way back along the coastline. Here, the coastal scenery is wonderful, and the cold waters harbor many concentrations of shorebirds, gulls, terns and sea ducks. We will have a great chance to study the subtle differences between three species of oystercatcher, often found side by side: the Blackish, American and Magellanic



**Black-faced Ibis male calling © Andrew Whittaker**



oystercatchers. Other birds we could see are Black-faced Ibis, Ringed Kingfisher, Southern Lapwing, Baird's Sandpiper, Peruvian Pelican and the tiny colorful Austral Negrito.

NIGHT: Hotel Diego de Almagro, Puerto Montt

**November 6, Day 8: Morning Pincoya Storm-Petrel Pelagic Trip; Afternoon on Chiloé Island Birding the Estuary Beside Our Hotel at Castro.** This morning we will take a private boat trip a short distance into the sheltered Fjords of this region in an effort to see the highly localized Pincoya Storm-Petrel, a bird only described to science in 2013.



**Pincoya Storm-Petrel (2013) © Andrew Whittaker**

The Pincoya Storm-Petrel is named after the mythical legend of Pincoya, a female “water spirit” of the Chilotan Seas. She is said to be of incomparable beauty with long blonde hair, is cheerful and sensual, and rises from the depths of the sea. Pincoya personifies the fertility of marine species, and through her ritual dance provides the *chilote* (residents of Chiloé Island) with an abundance of fish and other seafood. With the help of some chum, our chances are excellent for seeing this special endemic bird at close quarters. In fact, on all previous tours here, we have not failed to see the bird. More than once we’ve enjoyed great success observing several individuals at close quarters, among a suite of other pelagic species.

Afterwards, we will take a ferry a short distance from the mainland to famous Chiloé Island. From the deck of the vessel, we should have our first good views of Southern Giant-Petrel, Sooty Shearwater, Magellanic Diving-Petrel, attractive Imperial Cormorants, and with luck, our first look at a type of Flightless Steamer-Duck (in fact a locally distinct NEW SPECIES as yet undescribed)! We also often see Dusky or Peale’s dolphins as they follow the ferry.

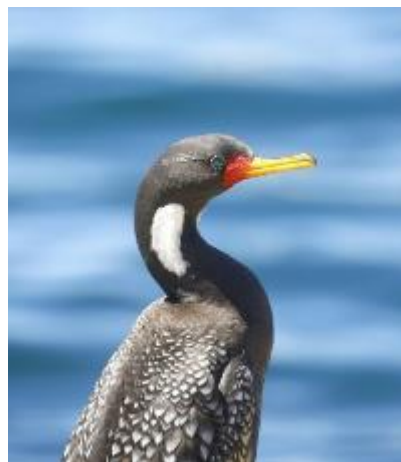


**A pair of the new and as yet undescribed species of Flightless Steamer-Duck, on Chiloé Island © Andrew Whittaker**

We will then travel inland, keeping our eyes peeled for Plumbeous Rail and flocks of Slender-billed Parakeet. We will work our way south through picturesque landscapes, passing through small communities that feature the brightly colored and characteristic *Chilote* houses. Our hotel in Castro is well positioned with splendid views over the bird rich estuary and mudflats right behind the hotel. Chiloé Island is a major wintering ground for boreal migrant shorebirds such as Hudsonian Godwit, Hudsonian Whimbrel, Baird's Sandpiper and good numbers of both yellowlegs along with an assortment of wildfowl, gulls and terns. We'll watch out for hunting White-tailed Kite or our first Cinereous Harriers by our delightful hotel. Tonight, we will enjoy the wonderful seafood cuisine and wines.

NIGHT: Hotel de la Isla, Castro

**November 7, Day 9: Morning Birding at Puniuil Bay; Afternoon Birding mudflats in Puerto Montt.** Following breakfast, we will briefly bird the grounds before driving on to the lovely secluded beach at Puniuil Bay, where we will should encounter our first Kelp Geese feeding on the abundant kelp. On the way to the beach, we'll be on the lookout for Slender-billed Parakeets. We'll then board a private boat for a wonderful hour excursion around the rocky islands of the bay. Our main objective will be to observe the mixed colony of Humboldt and Magellanic penguins that reside here. We should be able to watch the often-hilarious antics of these highly charismatic birds. Nearby, the rocky cliffs hold breeding cormorants including Rock (Magellanic) and Red-legged cormorants, the latter an exquisitely colored bird. There is also a good chance to encounter the local South American Marine Otter fishing.



**The stunning Red-legged Cormorant is hard to beat. © Andrew Whittaker**

Afterwards we will indulge in a delightful lunch in a restaurant overlooking the beach that offers excellent seafood empanadas. This afternoon we will bird our way back, visiting the rich estuaries before catching the ferry from Chiloé Island to the mainland and our Puerto Montt hotel.

NIGHT: Hotel Diego de Almagro, Puerto Montt

**November 8, Day 10: Flight to Punta Arenas.** This morning we will catch our morning flight to Punta Arenas, our southernmost destination and the gateway to wild Patagonia. Punta Arenas is the largest city in southern Chile and the capital of the country's southernmost regions: Magallanes and Antartica Chilena. It is situated on the 46<sup>th</sup> parallel south, and as of 1977, has been one of only two free ports in Chile. Initially, the city's growth occurred as a result of the waves of immigrants that descended on the area during the gold rush of 1883-1906, and for sheep farming. As for the latter, the largest sheep company, controlling 10,000 square kilometers in Patagonian Chile and Argentina, is based in Punta Arenas. A special breed, the large and hardy Golden Sheep, was created in 2000 and is characterized by superior fertility, leaner meat, and significant daily weight gain. It is said to be truly delicious! In recent decades, the city's considerable growth has occurred, in large part, as a result of commercial shipping and tourism.



**Our Golden Lamb barbecue Chilean style is always a trip favorite! © Andrew Whittaker**

Depending upon our arrival time, we will bird our way from the airport to our seafront hotel overlooking the Magellan Strait. Nearby, abandoned piers are alive with



breeding Imperial and Rock cormorants and lovely Dolphin Gulls. This afternoon we will either bird south along the coast or visit a nearby wetland reserve for waterbirds. For dinner one night here, we will visit one of the city's best restaurants to savor the delicious local specialty dish: Golden Lamb, Chilean barbecue style!

NIGHT: Hotel Diego de Almagro, Punta Arenas

**November 9, Day 11: Boat Trip to Magdalena Island Magellanic Penguin Colony; Afternoon Exploring Estancia San Juan Reserve.**

Today begins with a boat trip to Magdalena Island in the Strait of Magellan, home to a thriving colony of Magellanic Penguins. The trip starts with an hour trip to the main island, home to a lighthouse with a well-designed marked trail, which will enable us to walk through the colony without disturbing it. These special trails allow close-up insight into penguin life, such as a look at how the birds cope with the ever-present Chilean Skuas and Kelp Gulls, which prey upon unattended eggs and chicks. We will also be able to enjoy the antics of a large colony of South American Terns in their full breeding plumage and Common Miner. After a brisk hour stroll, we will be served a much welcomed hot chocolate before we set sail to a small islet, which is home to a very noisy colony of South American Sea Lions.



Magellanic Penguin © Andrew Whittaker

These huge male beach masters will be looking after and fighting for control of their harems. We can't land; however, from a safe distance we can enjoy these beaches full of wildlife, which are also home to Dolphin Gull and the much-prized Snowy Sheathbill (in its own family), rarely seen away from the Antarctic. We have been successful on two out of three trips here. Afterwards, we will head back to town to have a marvelous French meal in a family run restaurant.

Midafternoon, we will drive south to visit Estancia San Juan, a rich, wetland reserve offering chances for a great variety of waterfowl. Our target species here is the highly-sought and endangered Ruddy-headed Goose. Other species we will enjoy are the lovely Upland and Ashy-headed geese, the true Flightless Steamer-Ducks, Crested Duck, Yellow-billed Pintail, Chiloé Wigeon, a variety of shorebirds including South American (Magellanic) Snipe, and possibly even Short-eared Owl. On the town's old wooden piers, we will be able to enjoy breeding Rock and Imperial cormorants.

NIGHT: Hotel Diego de Almagro, Punta Arenas

**November 10, Day 12: Ferry Across the Magellan Straits to Tierra del Fuego.** This morning we'll board a ferry (with our picnic lunches) and transit across the Strait of Magellan to Tierra del Fuego. In effect, this short voyage essentially amounts to an awesome two-hour pelagic trip as the famous channel, depending on winds, can be a conduit for seabirds moving between the Pacific and Atlantic oceans. We should see scores of Black-browed Albatross, Southern Giant-Petrel, White-chinned Petrel, ghostly Southern Fulmars, Wilson's (Fuegian) Storm-Petrel, Magellanic Diving-Petrel, Chilean Skua, stunning Dolphin Gulls and, with a bit of luck, Fin or Humpback whales which we have seen once.

Arriving on the enchanted island of Tierra del Fuego, the "Land of Fire," we'll head straight to a complex of brackish lakes ablaze with pink-hued flocks of Chilean Flamingos, iconic emblems of the coastal zone of Chilean



The much sought after and unusual Magellanic Plover is in its own family!  
© Andrew Whittaker

Patagonia. Our main target bird will be the highly sought after Magellanic Plover, so unique as to be the sole member of its own family, *Pluvianellida*! Unique in almost every regard, the Magellanic Plover is anatomically more like a dove than a shorebird, with striking pink legs, a blazing red eye, a short peg-like bill, and dove-gray plumage. Physiologically similar in appearance to a turnstone (*Arenaria*) and often observed looking under stones, the Magellanic Plover's most common foraging method is to stomp around in shallow water with its strong legs while moving in quick circles and pecking at food items brought to the surface.

However, the bird exhibits the dove-like behavior of secreting a crop-milk to its young. Molecular data, however, clarifies that it is indeed a shorebird, but belongs in its own family; its closest relative may well be the sheathbills (*Chionidae*).

We will continue our drive through a remote stretch of landscape along a good dirt road en route to Bahia Inútil to enjoy a close encounter with a thriving colony of around 130+ King Penguins (and growing!). Here we will observe these marvelous birds from a blind at close range, with enough time to enjoy their fascinating behavior. Young birds should be in evidence and are instantly recognized by their fluffy brown plumage. No other bird has a longer breeding cycle than the King Penguin. They take 14-16 months to fledge a single chick. During the winter, the chicks may fast from one to five months. Because of the length of the chick-rearing cycle, adults can rear only two chicks every three years. Double-banded Plover breed here and we should keep a sharp eye open for the odd burrowing Patagonian Tuco Tuco.

Late afternoon we'll head towards the remote town of Cerro Sombrero, where we'll search sandy areas for the localized Short-billed and local race of Common miner, Buff-winged Cinclodes, Patagonian Yellow-Finch and the beautiful but uncommon Chocolate-vented Tyrant (in flight its long wings give the bird a Kestrel-like appearance). We'll also keep an eye out for the rare pallid subspecies of Peregrine Falcon. Tonight we'll enjoy a relaxed evening and a home-cooked Chilean dinner.

NIGHT: Hosteria Tunkelen, Cerro Sombrero

**November 11, Day 13: Patagonian Steppe En Route to Torres Del Paine National Park.** After an early breakfast, our adventure continues. At this point, we'll re-cross the Strait of Magellan, with chances to spot dolphins again, especially the stunning black and white Commerson's Dolphin.

Heading north, we begin climbing slightly in elevation through preserved grassland and remote barren steppe along a well maintained 135-kilometer dirt road. First, we move onto an extensive marsh where we will encounter flocks of the odd Coscoroba Swan, various



Commerson's Dolphins © Andrew Whittaker



ducks including the prized Rose-billed Pochard and hopefully Silver Teal, a mixed variety of shorebirds including Magellanic Snipe, and hopefully lovely close breeding Silvery Grebes.



**Tawny-throated Dotterel © Andrew Whittaker**

Returning to the asphalt road, the scenery will gradually change from grassland to stunted Andean-Patagonian Forest as we set a course for spectacular Torres del Paine National Park, unofficially regarded as the “8<sup>th</sup> Wonder of the World.” We will overnight on the way to the park in the gateway town of Puerto Natales. Puerto Natales was founded in May, 1911 as a port for the sheep industry; today tourism is most important, followed by cattle and aquaculture industries. Our hotel has a magnificent view of snow-capped mountains over the fjord.

NIGHT: Hotel Remota, Puerto Natales

**November 12, Day 14: Puerto Natales to Torres Del Paine National Park.**

After an early breakfast, we will drive on to magnificent Torres Del Paine National Park. Awaiting our arrival will be spectacular Fire Bushes alight with vivid scarlet hues, snow-covered mountain peaks, incredible turquoise lakes, and vast glaciers. The awesome Cordillera del Paine is the centerpiece of the park, featuring three monumental granite “torres” (towers), each rising more than 9,000 feet above sea level. We’ll meander through incredible scenery with one unbelievable panoramic view after another, finally marvelling at the setting of our classy island lodge (our comfy home for 3 nights), situated on picture-perfect, stunning turquoise Pehoe Lake with a scenic backdrop of the towering, bleak Paine Massif and its tremendous 2,000 m (6,500 ft) snow-capped spires and wondrous glaciers glimmering in the sun! Great Grebe and Flying Steamer Ducks and the resident pair of Upland Geese welcome us to our island paradise.

The stark wilderness of this Patagonian steppe country is truly magnificent. Here, amid arid grasslands in the rain-shadow of the Andes, we will enjoy our first looks at herds of wild Guanaco, a member of the camel family. Botanically, these steppes are fascinating and we hope to find small carpets of spectacular Virgin’s Slipper flowers. The barren steppe are also the realm and breeding grounds of two stunning shorebirds—the magnificent Rufous-chested and stately Tawny-throated dotterels. Meanwhile, amid this ever-changing landscape, we may be lucky enough to hear echoing songs of Least Seedsnipes as they perform their aerial displays. We may also encounter the uncommon Austral Canasteros serenading from stunted brush. Other species likely include the handsome Cinnamon-bellied Ground-Tyrant and in areas of longer grass we will search for the exquisite and uncommon localized White-bridled (canary-winged) Finch which certainly is a stunner.



**White-Bridled (Canary-winged) Finch © Andrew Whittaker**

Our accommodation is perfectly located within the heart of the park with quick access to our main private estancia in the heart of Puma land. This afternoon, after a tasty meal at the hotel restaurant (offering fine panoramic views), we will continue our exploration of the park, taking in the awesome views and birds, but looking especially for our first Pumas. Often sunsets can be truly breathtaking here.

NIGHT: Hosteria Pehoe, Torres Del Paine National Park

**November 13-14, Days 15-16: Exploring Torres Del Paine National Park and Puma Safari.** With two full days to enjoy this incredible location, our main objective will be sighting wild Pumas and the special birds of the park. We have had fantastic success in the past with Pumas. On each of the four previous tours we've operated, we have enjoyed observations of multiple magnificent cats. To achieve this goal, we have arranged for special permission to enter a rich private ecological estancia adjoining the national park that has a robust population of the cats. We have our own team of local Puma trackers who will have radio contact with us, keeping us updated on where the Puma action is located. If possible, we will embark on a short walking "safari," or a longer hike which often enables us to follow specific cats hunting or, if lucky, observe their behavior from the comfort of our bus.

It should be emphasized that the notion of going to a place with the expectation of seeing wild Pumas is a new phenomenon. This is all possible thanks to an excellent tracking system devised by scientific advisor, Dr. Charles A. Munn, who utilizes the combined 40 years' experience of the highly competent Puma trackers. The Pumas here are of the subspecies *Puma concolor puma* and are enormous, being much larger than their "Mountain Lion" counterparts of North America. These animals are not so rufous, being more the color of the Guanaco (their main prey item, along with European Hare). As they are protected and have never been hunted, they have no fear of humans, so we anticipate seeing Pumas at close range, engaged in a variety of behaviors and situations, including animals actively hunting, females with cubs, and with luck, even animals feeding on a kill. Here, the Puma is the apex predator and can run as fast as 43 miles per hour, leap 20 horizontal feet from a standing position, and vertically leap 8 feet. However, they have been seen to jump 40 feet horizontally and almost 16 feet vertically! Adult males are larger and bulkier than females and may exceed 8 feet from nose to tail, and have an average mass of about 260 pounds.

While Torres Del Paine is most famous for its astonishing scenery, with photo opportunities at almost every bend in the road, it is also rife with special birds. We will venture to the eastern side of the park looking for waterfowl amid myriad lakes, ponds, and reed-fringed pools while seeking the recently rediscovered Austral Rail (seen well on our 2016 tour). With much luck we might even be treated to the marvelous but highly endangered Hooded Grebe observed during our scouting trip. Other birds of the area include majestic Andean Condor, Cinereous Harrier, Silvery Grebe, Red-gartered Coot, Spectacled and Andean ducks, Magellanic Snipe, and "Austral" Sedge Wren (a possible split that would be known as "Patagonian Wren").

We will keep our eyes open for small flocks of migrating Dark-faced Ground-Tyrants or resident Austral Canastera. We'll travel further afield one morning into remote foothills, searching for the highly localized Band-tailed Earthcreeper (once thought to be an Argentine endemic but recently recorded in Chile), White-throated Caracara (rare here), Sharp-billed Canastero, the rare Gray-bellied Shrike-Tyrant, Patagonian Mockingbird, Ochre-naped Ground-Tyrant, and another stunner: Yellow-bridled Finch. Commoner residents include Austral Pygmy-Owl, Black-chested Buzzard-Eagle, Crested Caracara, Chilean Flicker, Cinnamon-bellied Ground-Tyrant, Rufous-banded Miner, Scale-throated Earthcreeper, Black-billed Shrike-Tyrant, Long-tailed Meadowlark, Gray-hooded Sierra-Finch, and Greater Yellow-Finch. We could be lucky enough to spot a rare Southern Huemul Deer (the size of an elk, seen on our 2019 tour) in the nearby forest. Other mammals we hope to encounter in the park are Humboldt's (Patagonian) Hog-nosed Skunk, Culpeo (Andean Fox), and with luck, the odd Patagonian Hairy Armadillo.

NIGHTS: Hosteria Pehoe, Torres Del Paine National Park



**November 15, Day 17: Morning Birding Torres Del Paine National Park; Return to Punta Arenas with Afternoon Birding Reserva Canquen Colorado.** This morning we'll be birding our way out of the park before we drive in to Puerto Natales for a wonderful lunch and some time to shop for souvenirs. Continuing on to Punta Arenas, we'll allow for some late afternoon birding on the city outskirts at Reserva Canquen Colorado. This interesting reserve offers great opportunities for photographic close-up looks of a great variety of waterbirds with Chilean Flamingo, White-tufted Grebe, various geese, Red Shoveler, Flying Steamer-Duck, Magellanic Snipe, and Red-gartered Coot all possible. This evening, we'll gather for a final checklist session followed by dinner.

NIGHT: Hotel Diego de Almagro, Punta Arenas

**November 16, Day 18: Punta Arenas to Santiago for Flights Home, or Continue to the Santiago Highlights Extension.** Depending on exact flight times, we will have a relaxed few hours of morning birding around Punta Arenas with many options. We may offer a return visit to the Reserva Canquen Colorado or drive south. Time permitting, we'll have lunch at a splendid French restaurant in town before catching our flight to Santiago. Upon arrival in Santiago, those continuing on the extension will transfer to the Hotel Diego de Almagro. Those not continuing on the extension will remain at the airport for their evening departing flights or if later departures, return to the hotel with day room use and have a private transfer later back to the airport. International flights to the USA generally depart late at night (or just after midnight), arriving in the United States the following morning.

NIGHT: Aboard aircraft in transit  
(For those not continuing on the Santiago Highlights Extension)

**November 17, Day 19: Arrival Home.** International flights that departed Santiago the previous evening will arrive in the USA this morning.

## **SANTIAGO HIGHLIGHTS EXTENSION ANDES, WETLANDS & ALBATROSS GALORE! NOVEMBER 15-21, 2023**

*On this exciting extension, we will experience the majestic scenery and abundant wildlife of central Chile, focusing on the Santiago region's "birding hotspots" and the nearby rich Pacific Coast. In the process, we'll witness first-hand why Chile is widely regarded among the world's most beautiful countries. This opportunity will appeal to those who want to see more of Chile beyond what is offered on the main tour, and those who seek a shorter stand-alone trip.*

*In close proximity to Santiago, Chile's capital city, the impressive snow-capped Andes and the prolific, nutrient-rich Humboldt Current and associated coastline offer exceptional scenery and birding in equal doses. From sea level to scrubby foothills to above tree-line in the alpine zone, this part of Chile abounds in natural wonders and wildlife not as easily accessed in any other part of the country. Excursions around Santiago and further afield will see us in pursuit of an assortment of range-restricted birds. A sample of the target species we'll seek include remarkable birds like the gigantic Andean Condor, the much sought after and enigmatic Diademed Sandpiper-Plover, , Gray-breasted Seedsnipe, comical Humboldt Penguin, Stripe-backed Bittern, amazing Inca Tern, stunning White-sided Hillstar, and Rufous-tailed Plantcutter. Among these are several endemics including Crag Chilia, Moustached Turca, Dusky Tapaculo, Seaside Cinclodes, Chilean Mockingbird and Dusky-tailed Canastero.*



*Our travels will take us to the breathtaking El Yeso Valley, featuring picture-perfect Andean Mountain scenery. With a tremendous glacial valley serving as a backdrop to equally spectacular montane birding, we'll seek an array of marvelous birds including Andean Condor, Giant Hummingbird, Chilean Flicker, miners, earthcreepers, ground-tyrants, and colorful sierra-finches and siskins. In contrast, on another day we'll explore the rich Maipo Estuary (one of Chile's most important coastal reserves) and the Laguna Cartagena Marshes for a variety of birds associated with both saltwater and freshwater ecosystems. Stripe-backed Bittern, the recently split Ticking Dorodito (an endemic Chilean breeder), Many-colored Rush Tyrant, Seaside Cinclodes, and a great variety of waterfowl—including the rare and parasitic Black-headed Duck—are all possible.*



Many-colored Rush Tyrant © Andrew Whittaker

*We'll also visit a mixed colony of Humboldt Penguins and Peruvian Pelicans and an islet full of South American Sea Lions and Peruvian Boobies. From our hotel we'll enjoy close views of the stunning Inca Tern. At another offshore islet, we will gain exposure to a fantastic botanical community that includes lovely flowering succulents, cactus, and bromeliads, while watching for the rare and localized Great Shrike-Tyrant and Red-legged Cormorant among many others. The marine mammal viewing can also be very good here. Most trips yield views of Marine Otters, while "bigger game" possibilities include Sperm Whale and Dusky and Chilean dolphins.*

*Without a doubt, the "crème de la crème" will be a pleasant, half-day offshore boat trip into the famous Humboldt Current, renowned as the world's most productive waters for all aspects of marine life. The seas are simply teeming with life! Our objective will be locating a stellar mix of seabirds unique to the southern Pacific Ocean. As many as five species of albatrosses are possible, including*



*the silvery Salvin's Albatross, Black-browed, immense "Northern" Royal Albatross, beautiful and less common Buller's Albatross, and even the rare Chatham's Albatross (seen on our 2018 trip). Even less common, but certainly possible, are Peruvian Diving-Petrel; Westland, Juan Fernandez, and Masatierra petrels; and an assortment of neat shearwaters and storm-petrels.*



A rare Buller's sandwiched between two Salvin's Albatross © Andrew Whittaker

**November 15, Day 1: Departure from Home.** For participants not continuing from the main tour, flights from the United States bound for Santiago, Chile (Arturo Merino Benítez Airport; airport code SCL) depart on November 15 and arrive early on the morning of November 16. Those concerned about the travel time to Chile are encouraged to arrive a day early so as to be rested and better able to enjoy our exciting activities. Upon request, the VENT office will be happy to assist with early arrival hotel and airport transfer arrangements.

NIGHT: Aboard aircraft in transit to Santiago

**November 16, Day 2: Arrival in Santiago and Transfer to Hotel.** Most flights from the United States arrive in Santiago between 6:00-10:00 a.m. Upon arrival and after clearing immigration, collect your bags, pass customs, and then proceed outside the baggage claim area where you will be met by our local agents and transferred to our hotel. Participants arriving for the extension only will have the remainder of the day at leisure, with time to rest and recover from the long international flight (lunch is on your own).

The Hotel Diego de Almagro features spacious rooms, a restaurant and bar, and a swimming pool. Additionally, the hotel grounds offer a nice garden and are certainly worth a walk as a number of locally common birds may be found. These could include Southern Lapwing, Chimango Caracara, White-crested Elaenia, the endemic Chilean Mockingbird, Austral Thrush, Black-chinned Siskin, Tufted Tit-Tyrant and colorful Long-tailed Meadowlark.

This evening we will meet in the lobby at 6:30 p.m. to meet the main Chile group for a tour welcome and orientation followed by a delicious Chilean dinner.

NIGHT: Hotel Diego de Almagro, Santiago Airport

**November 17, Day 3: El Yeso Valley.** This morning after an early breakfast, we'll depart Santiago, heading south and east through rich farmland via the Maipo River valley. Eventually, we'll start gaining altitude and pass through the picturesque "capital" of the valley, San José de Maipo. We'll follow the river, where we have a good chance for locating the stunning Torrent Duck, often with young at this time of the year, before finally reaching our destination, El Yeso Valley, where we will bird our way up an ascending rough and rocky road.



**The endemic Moustached Turca © Andrew Whittaker**

Our first stop will involve an attempt for the endemic Crag Chilia, a localized inhabitant of steep-sided rocky valleys. Here we will find the first of several tapaculos; the large, endemic and oddly named Moustached Turca. These chunky ground-dwellers hop and run quickly over the rocky ground, foraging like a towhee as they move along (bold behavior for a

tapaculo). Vocally, they are very loud. Amid damp meadows we'll seek other targets such as Yellow-rumped and Thick-billed siskin (rare), Mountain Parakeet, White-sided Hillstar, Giant Hummingbird, and Chilean Flicker. We will keep our eyes open on the rocky outcrops for the Southern Mountain Vizcacha, a fascinating half squirrel, half wallaby-like rodent (although much larger than a squirrel).

Climbing higher, the scenery becomes even more spectacular as we emerge into a huge, glacially carved valley—a wonderful natural amphitheater. Stunning snow-capped peaks line the valley sides as do some truly immense scree slopes. A series of still, turquoise lakes mirror the breathtaking scenery above, making for a photographer's dream! At once we'll set about our main task for the day; finding the enigmatic and often confiding Diademed Sandpiper-Plover, a bird generally regarded among the world's most beautiful shorebirds. Here a few pairs nest each year along the crystal-clear streams and saline edges among higher elevation marshy bogs. We will work our



**Reservoir in El Yeso Valley © Andrew Whittaker**

way carefully and deliberately around the area until we succeed in finding our quarry. Our sandpiper-plover search will bring the added pleasure of Gray-breasted Seedsnipes issuing their wondrous songs as they complete their vertical flight displays. Often, we encounter both Andean and Upland geese here as well.





**Gray-breasted Seedsnipe, male © Andrew Whittaker**

We will enjoy a picnic lunch surrounded by scenery that is glorious even by Chilean standards. Our exploration of the general region will turn up a fine variety of other target species, a short list of which includes Crested Duck, Andean Condor, Mountain Caracara, White-sided Hillstar, Sharp-billed and Cordillerean canasteros, Buff-winged and Gray-flanked cinclodes, Scale-throated Earthcreeper, Rufous-banded Miner, and possibly its highland counterpart: Creamy-rumped Miner.

Among the grassy areas we will learn how to separate Cinereous, Spot-billed, and White-browed ground-tyrants. In areas where seeds may be found, we should expect Gray-hooded and Plumbeous sierra-finches. By mid-afternoon we'll begin retracing our way out of the valley and back to Santiago, making detours as necessary to find any species that have evaded us to this point. We'll arrive back at the hotel in the late afternoon in time to freshen up, hold our first bird checklist session, and enjoy a good Chilean dinner.

NIGHT: Hotel Diego de Almagro, Santiago Airport

**November 18, Day 4: Santiago to the Maipo Estuary; Drive to Vina Del Mar via Laguna Cartagena.** We'll set out from Santiago very early this morning and head for the coast. The drive will be a leisurely one as we plan to stop at several lakes and freshwater marshes along the way.

We'll now set our sights on birds associated with both freshwater and saltwater ecosystems. Upon reaching the coast, almost due west of Santiago, we'll pay a visit to one of Chile's most important bird refuges: the Maipo River Wetland and Estuary. This area, where the Maipo River reaches the Pacific Ocean, is of such high conservation importance that it was made part of the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network (WHSRN). In an area encompassing 345 acres are a sand bar, the estuary, grasslands, marshes, shrublands, sand dunes, and a beach—which together form a vital nesting area for gulls, terns, and skimmers, and a sanctuary for wintering shorebirds from North America.

We will spend a couple of hours at this site. The reed-margined lake edges provide cover for the dazzling Many-colored Rush-Tyrant. A special effort will be made to observe the recently described Ticking Doradito (freshly arrived and singing); the endemic Dusky Tapaculo; and the drab Wren-like Rushbird, whose non-bird-like clicking, metallic calls will be a constant background noise. We also hope to see Collared Plover; a variety of gulls including the unique desert-nesting Gray Gull; hordes of Black Skimmer (freshly arrived from the Amazon); a number of tern species, possibly including the rare Snowy-crowned Tern; and boreal migrants such as Hudsonian Godwit, Whimbrel, Red Knot, Sanderling, Baird's Sandpiper, and Correndera Pipit.

Our next stop of the day will be at a small marsh where we have a great chance to see the retiring Strip-backed Bittern, a bird that we've seen with great success on all our previous trips here. Other species here include the wonderful Plumbeous Rail.

Next, we'll visit the small reserve of Laguna Cartagena, with its well-kept trails offering elevated close-up views of an abundance of waterfowl. Photographic opportunities are excellent. The many secluded pools here are ideal locations for viewing secretive species that inhabit the reed beds and the more open expanses of water. The birding possibilities are considerable, with chances for Red Shoveler, Chiloé Wigeon, White-cheeked and Yellow-billed pintails, Silvery and White-tufted grebes, the elegant "White-backed" Black-necked Stilt, Chilean Swallow, Common Diuca-Finch, and Yellow-winged Blackbird.



**White-tufted Grebes © Andrew Whittaker**

Leaving the estuary, we'll work our way north along the coast, stopping for lunch at an excellent and picturesque restaurant (famous for its seafood) and a great spot to see the endemic Seaside Cinclodes.



**The incomparably beautiful Inca Tern close up off our hotel balcony © Andrew Whittaker**

Sometime in the mid-afternoon, we'll reach the lovely coastal resort of Viña del Mar. The first settlers of the territory where the city of Viña del Mar stands today were the native "changos," who used to dominate these lands up to the valley of Peuco. They were mostly fishermen and collectors who lived in this area until the coming of the Spanish conquistadores. Today it's a tourist destination par excellence that attracts the attention of people from all around the world and is well known for its lovely gardens, nice beaches and interesting high-rise buildings, which are becoming high-class real estate for the wealthy Santiago elite who commute here for weekends. Our hotel for the next two nights overlooks a quiet cove where we can enjoy the resident Inca Terns, which really may be the most beautiful member of its family. From the veranda, we

often have luck observing either Gray Gull or the cute Marine Otter. The hotel offers great cuisine and is laid out so that sunsets may be viewed from your room or from the charming pool area.

NIGHT: Hotel Oceanic, Viña del Mar

**November 19, Day 5: Half-day Pelagic Trip; Afternoon at Cachagua to Visit a Humboldt Penguin Colony; Return to Viña Del Mar.** Today we will sample the "cremé de la créme" of pelagic trips, enjoying an action-packed half-day offshore boat trip (optional) into the Humboldt Current that surges north out of the Antarctic. Renowned as the world's most nutrient-rich waters, the Humboldt Current nourishes all forms of marine life.



After an early breakfast, we'll embark on a private pelagic trip (with bathroom) that promises five to six hours of non-stop excitement. Spring is a perfect time to go offshore as the seas are typically very calm. No place on earth offers more productive seabirding than here in the Humboldt Current, where a wondrous cross-section of sub-Antarctic seabirds and warm water petrels may be seen on a single trip. On a "good" day, the sheer numbers of birds out here reach the thousands!

Our objective will be locating Pacific Ocean specialties and southern-tier pelagic birds. Among the many species possible are a marvelous variety of albatrosses, including the lovely Salvin's Albatross (most common), Black-browed Albatross, the immense "Northern" Royal Albatross (whose 12-foot wingspan has to be seen to be believed), the less common Buller's Albatross, or possibly the rare Chartham's Albatross (seen on our 2018 trip)!



**The Salvin's Albatross is always the most common we see in great numbers © Andrew Whittaker**

Other species seen in these waters include Northern Giant-Petrel; Westland, White-chinned, Juan Fernandez, and Masatierra petrels (the last two rare); Pink-footed and Sooty shearwaters; Wilson's and Elliot's (rare) storm-petrels; and the sought-after Peruvian Diving-Petrel. Chumming from the back of the boat should result in a tremendous flock following us around the sea, affording tremendous views of a fine variety of birds. There will also be superb photographic opportunities. Close to shore, we can expect Inca Terns, Peruvian Booby and the gorgeous Red-legged Cormorant. The marine mammal viewing can also be good here (with a little luck) and offers chances for Dusky and Common dolphins, South American Fur Seal, and even Humpback and Sperm whales have occasionally been found.

We'll return to the dock in time for a tasty lunch at a nearby seafood restaurant. Afterward, we'll drive a short distance to experience the antics of a fascinating colony of Humboldt Penguins and Peruvian Pelicans. There is also a good chance of seeing the playful Marine Otter. We will then return to our hotel to rest up and enjoy a good dinner.

NIGHT: Hotel Oceanic, Viña del Mar



**The majestic Cinereous Harrier  
© Andrew Whittaker**

**November 20, Day 6: Visit to Bатуco Lagoon Nature Reserve; Return to Santiago; Departures for Home.** This morning we'll depart the hotel early for a trip to the rich Bатуco marshes near Santiago. Amid the freshwater wetlands and hundreds of waterbirds, we hope, depending on water levels, to find the rare Black-headed Duck, the world's only obligate brood-parasitic waterfowl species. Host species of Black-headed Duck provide parental care only for the incubation phase of the breeding cycle. A remarkable range of birds serve as host species, from gulls to caracaras, even Snail Kite! Other species of interest we hope to see should include Cinereous Harrier, Burrowing and breeding Barn owl, Coscoroba Swan, Andean Goose, Great Grebe, Red Shoveler, Yellow-billed Pintail, Yellow-billed Teal and all three species of coot. We anticipate arriving at the Hotel Diego de Almagro in Santiago in the mid-afternoon, where day rooms have been reserved.

## ***Wild Patagonia and Central Chile, Page 24***

This evening, we'll gather for a final checklist session and a farewell dinner before transferring to the airport. International flights to the USA generally depart late at night (or just after midnight), arriving in the United States the following morning.

DAY ROOM: Hotel Diego de Almagro, Santiago Airport

**November 21, Day 7: Arrival Home.** International flights that departed Santiago the previous evening will arrive in the USA this morning.

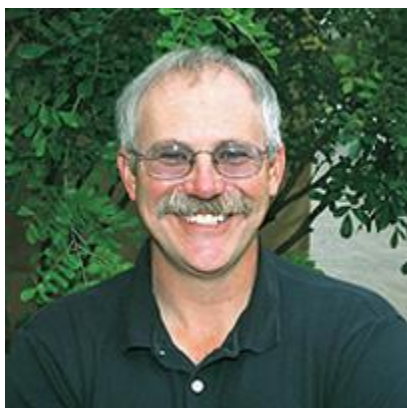
**TOUR SIZE:** Each tour segment will be limited to 12 participants. However, VENT reserves the right to increase the tour limit by one in order to accommodate a couple when only one space is available.

**TOUR LEADERS:** Fernando Diaz & Kevin Zimmer



**Fernando Díaz, or “Feña,”** showed a special interest in birds that lived around his neighborhood during his childhood. He grew up birding in the fields and wetlands of Lampa, a few kilometers from Santiago de Chile, where he developed his bird observation abilities at an early age. Feña has strong skills for recognizing birds by song. His first serious approach to bird study was as a volunteer participant in waterfowl censuses and bird banding. This was the catalyst that led him to leave his landscaper position in order to pursue his true passions, birds and nature. Feña has traveled extensively throughout most of the habitats of Chile and several countries in South America birding and studying birds. He also spent five months banding birds in the U.S. and Canada. He enjoys spending time birding in the field, especially in the high Andes of Chile, where he co-leads a study on the charismatic Diademed

Sandpiper-Plover. Feña is also one of the eBird-Chile reviewers, and he is involved in several other bird projects with the Chilean NGO Red de Observadores de Aves de Chile (the Chilean Birders Network). Feña leads bird trips in Chile, Argentina, and Brazil. During his travels he enjoys showing and teaching tour participants about birds, as well as all other aspects of nature.



**Kevin Zimmer** has authored three books and numerous papers dealing with field identification and bird-finding in North America. His book, *Birding in the American West: A Handbook*, deals with finding and identifying birds in the western United States. Living in Alaska contributed to his affection for the Far North, where he has anchored VENT's tour program since 1986. For the past 30 years he has concentrated his attention on the Neotropics, particularly on Brazil, Costa Rica, Panama, Peru, and Venezuela. He has directed VENT's Brazil program since 1991. Kevin has a PhD in biology (research emphasis in Avian Evolutionary Ecology) from New Mexico State University, and is a Research Associate of the Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History, an elective member of the American Ornithologists' Union, a longtime member of the A.O.U. South American Classification

Committee (SACC), and a former two-term member of the American Birding Association (ABA) Check-list Committee. He is a regular contributor to Cornell's Macaulay Library of Natural Sounds. He has authored numerous technical papers on the taxonomy, distribution, and behavior of Neotropical birds, particularly those of the Amazon Basin. In 2003 he completed (with co-author Mort Isler) the major chapter on the *Thamnophilidae* (antbirds) for the prestigious *Handbook of Birds of the World* series. In 2006, he and Curtis Marantz coauthored a six-CD compilation of *Bird Voices of Alta Floresta and Southeastern Amazonian Brazil* (produced by the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology's Macaulay Library of Natural Sounds) that represents the most comprehensive set of commercially available bird recordings for any part of the Amazon Basin. He and Andrew Whittaker are currently at work on a comprehensive field guide to the birds of Brazil, to be published by Princeton University Press. Kevin lives in Atascadero, California with his wife, Susan. Their daughter, Marina, is a licensed Marriage



and Family Therapist (MFT). She and her husband, Ryan, and their daughter, Brinn, are now living in Napa, California.

**FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS:** The fee for the Wild Patagonia & Central Chile trip is **\$15,495** per person in double occupancy from Santiago, Chile which includes all meals from dinner on Day 2 to lunch on Day 18, internal flights in economy class (Santiago-Puerto Montt / Puerto Montt-Punta Arenas / Punta Arenas-Santiago), hotel accommodations as stated in the itinerary, ground transportation during the tour, boat excursions as described, guide services provided by the tour leaders and all tips to hotel, lodge and transportation staff.

**Please Note: Domestic airfares are included in the tour fee. At the time of printing the approximate cost of the air tickets is \$500. VENT reserves the right to assess a surcharge should costs increase significantly.**

The fee for the Santiago Highlights Extension is **\$3,995** per person in double occupancy from Santiago, Chile which includes all meals from dinner on Day 2 through dinner on Day 6, accommodations as stated in the itinerary, ground transportation during the tour, boat excursions as described, guide services provided by the tour leaders and all tips to hotel, lodge and transportation staff.

Participants on the Santiago Highlights Extension coming from the Wild Patagonia & Central Chile tour will receive a combined tour discount of **\$325** per person.

Tour fees do not include airfare from your home to Santiago and return, airport departure taxes, alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, phone calls, laundry, or items of a personal nature. Rates are based on group tariffs. If the tour does not have sufficient registration, a small-party supplement may be charged.

The single supplement for the Wild Patagonia & Central Chile tour is **\$1,695**. The single supplement for the Santiago Highlights Extension is **\$465**.

**REGISTRATION & DEPOSIT:** To register for these tours, please contact the VENT office. The initial deposit for these tours is **\$1,000** per person per tour. A second deposit for the main tour of **\$3,000** is due 210 days prior to departure (April 3, 2023). If you prefer to pay your deposits using a credit card, the deposits must be made with MasterCard or Visa at the time of registration. If you would like to pay your initial deposit by check or bank transfer, your tour space will be held for 10 days to allow time for the VENT office to receive your deposit and completed registration form. The VENT registration form (available from the VENT office or by download at <https://ventbird.com>) should be completed, signed, and returned to the VENT office.

**PAYMENTS:** All tour payments may be made by credit card (MasterCard or Visa), check or bank transfer (contact the VENT office for bank transfer information). These include initial deposits, second deposits, interim payments, final balances, special arrangements, etc. Full payment of the tour fee is due 150 days prior to the tour departure date (June 2, 2023 for the main tour and the pre-trip; June 18, 2023 for the extension).

**MEDICAL EVACUATION INSURANCE REQUIREMENT:** The main tour visits remote locations where immediate access to primary medical care may **NOT** be available. **For this reason, travel insurance which covers you for emergency evacuation is required for participation on the main tour.** This coverage is included in the **Ripcord Rescue Travel Insurance™** program. Through Ripcord, “emergency evacuation” can be purchased as a stand-alone benefit or as part of a comprehensive travel insurance policy. If you choose not to purchase insurance through Ripcord, you are required to obtain it through another provider.

### **CANCELLATION & REFUNDS:**

#### **Cancellation by Participant on Wild Patagonia & Central Chile:**

Refunds, if any, for any cancellation by a participant are made according to the following schedule: If participant cancels 210 days or more before the tour departure date, a cancellation fee of **\$500** per person will be charged unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12

months, in which case the cancellation fee will be **\$100** per person. If cancellation is made between 209 and 151 days before departure date, the deposit is not refundable, but any payments covering the balance of the tour fee will be refunded. If cancellation is made fewer than 150 days before departure date, no refund is available. **For participants' protection, we strongly recommend the purchase of travel insurance that covers trip cancellation/interruption.**

If participant cancels:

210 days or more before departure date

209 to 151 days before departure date

150 days or less before departure date

Participant's refund will be:

Your deposit(s) minus \$500\*

No refund of the deposits, but any payments on the balance will be refunded

No refund available

\*Unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months, in which case the cancellation fee will be \$100 per person. To qualify, cancellation must occur 180 days or more before departure date; deposit transfers must be made at the time of cancellation; and one transfer per deposit.

**Cancellation by Participant on the Santiago Highlights Extension:**

Refunds, if any, for any cancellation by a participant are made according to the following schedule: If participant cancels 180 days or more before the tour departure date, a cancellation fee of **\$500** per person will be charged unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months, in which case the cancellation fee will be **\$100** per person. If cancellation is made between 179 and 151 days before departure date, the deposit is not refundable, but any payments covering the balance of the tour fee will be refunded. If cancellation is made fewer than 150 days before departure date, no refund is available. **For participants' protection, we strongly recommend the purchase of travel insurance that covers trip cancellation/interruption.**

If participant cancels:

180 days or more before departure date

179 to 151 days before departure date

150 days or less before departure date

Participant's refund will be:

Participant's deposit minus \$500\*

No refund of the deposit, but any payments on the balance of the tour fee will be refunded

No refund available

\*Unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months, in which case the cancellation fee will be \$100 per person. To qualify, cancellation must occur 180 days or more before departure date; deposit transfers must be made at the time of cancellation; and one transfer per deposit.

**Cancellation by VENT:**

If VENT cancels a tour prior to departure without cause or good reason, VENT will provide the participant a full refund, which will constitute full settlement to the participant.

If VENT cancels or delays a tour or any portion of a tour as a result of any Force Majeure event, VENT will use its reasonable best efforts to refund any payments on the balance of the tour fee to participant; provided that, VENT will have no obligation to provide a participant with a refund and will not be liable or responsible to a participant, nor be deemed to have defaulted under or breached any applicable agreement, for any failure or delay in fulfilling or performing any term of such agreement. A **"Force Majeure"** event means any act beyond VENT's control, including, without limitation, the following: (a) acts of God; (b) flood, fire, earthquake, hurricane, epidemic, pandemic or explosion; (c) war, invasion, hostilities (whether war is declared or not), terrorist threats or acts, riot or other civil unrest; (d) government order, law or actions; (e) embargoes or blockades; (f) national or regional emergency; (g) strikes, labor stoppages, labor slowdowns or other industrial disturbances; (h) shortage of adequate power or transportation facilities; and (i) any other similar events or circumstances beyond the control of VENT.

This VENT Cancellation & Refunds policy does not apply to air tickets purchased through VENT or to any special arrangements, such as additional hotel nights, that fall outside of the services described in the tour itinerary.



**Victor Emanuel Nature Tours is not a participant in the California Travel Consumer Restitution Fund. California law requires certain sellers of travel to have a trust account or bond. This business has a bond issued by Travelers in the amount of \$50,000. CST #2014998-50.**

**TRAVEL INSURANCE:** To safeguard against losses due to illness, accident, or other unforeseen circumstances, we strongly recommend the purchase of travel insurance as soon as possible after making a deposit. VENT has partnered with Redpoint Travel Protection as our preferred travel insurance provider. Through Redpoint, we recommend their **Ripcord** plan. Designed for all types of travelers, Ripcord is among the most comprehensive travel protection programs available.

Critical benefits of Ripcord include a completely integrated program with a single contact for emergency services, travel assistance, and insurance claims; **medical evacuation and rescue services** from your point of injury or illness to your **hospital of choice**; comprehensive travel insurance for **trip cancellation/interruption**, primary medical expense coverage, and much more. Optional expanded insurance coverage is available and includes items such as security evacuation coverage in case of a natural disaster or other security events, **waiver for pre-existing medical conditions exclusion**, and a “Cancel for Any Reason” benefit. Ripcord is available to U.S. and non-U.S. residents.\*

For a price quote, or to purchase travel insurance, please visit: <https://ripcordtravelprotection.com/ventbird>; or click the **Ripcord** logo on our website (click Help and Trip Insurance); or call +1-415-481-0600. Pricing is based on age, trip cost, trip length, and level of coverage.

\*To be eligible for the pre-existing medical condition exclusion waiver and the optional Cancel for Any Reason (CFAR) upgrade, you must purchase your policy within 14 days of making your tour deposit. The CFAR benefit provides reimbursement for 75% of covered costs, and increases the policy premium by approximately 50%. Policies may be purchased either for the full value of the tour fee at the time of deposit or in segments as individual tour payments are made (deposit, mid-payment, final balance, additional arrangements, etc.). The “pay as you go” approach reduces up-front expense and ensures that the amount paid toward your full policy premium is in proportion to the amount paid toward the full tour fee. If you choose to “pay as you go,” you must cover each deposit or payment within 14 days in order to maintain the CFAR benefit. The primary medical expense benefit is available to U.S. residents only. For this reason, non-U.S. residents will pay an adjusted premium when purchasing a comprehensive policy, which includes all of the other benefits available to U.S. residents. Please refer to the policy for a full description of coverage.

#### **Coronavirus (COVID-19):**

Concerns about COVID-19 may present uncertainty for those holding travel insurance policies or who are considering future travel and purchasing such insurance. Redpoint features a **Coronavirus FAQ page** on its website that addresses questions and concerns regarding its travel insurance and the impact of COVID-19. We strongly recommend that you visit the page for an overview of topics such as policy coverage and limitations, policy modifications, cancellation, refunds, and more.

Please visit the **Coronavirus FAQ page** at the following link:

[https://redpointtravelprotection.com/covid\\_19\\_faq/](https://redpointtravelprotection.com/covid_19_faq/)

Additionally, some countries maintain COVID-19 entry requirements, including mandates to purchase travel insurance covering medical expenses due to COVID-19 illness and in case of quarantine. Ripcord’s comprehensive travel insurance plans are designed to satisfy the various country-specific travel insurance entry requirements. Those who purchase a Ripcord policy will receive a “letter of confirmation” that affirms that the policy satisfies such requirements.

**FUEL AND FUEL SURCHARGES:** In the uncertain, often volatile oil market of late, it is difficult – if not impossible – to predict fuel costs over the long term, and more specifically, at the time of operation of this departure. Our prices are based upon the prevailing fuel rates at the time of itinerary publication. While we will

do everything possible to maintain our prices, if the fuel rates increase significantly, it may be necessary to institute a fuel surcharge.

**EXCHANGE RATE SURCHARGES:** In the erratic global financial markets of today, it is difficult to predict foreign currency exchange rates over the long term or at the time of operation of a tour or cruise departure. Tour prices are based upon the rate of exchange at the time of itinerary publication. If exchange rates change drastically, it may be necessary to implement a surcharge. If a surcharge is necessary, every effort will be made to minimize the amount. In many cases, these additional foreign exchange rate surcharges are passed to VENT by its vendors and suppliers.

**AIR INFORMATION:** Victor Emanuel Travel is a full-service travel agency and wholly owned subsidiary of Victor Emanuel Nature Tours (VENT). Victor Emanuel Travel will be happy to make any domestic or international air travel arrangements from your home and return. Per person fees apply for each set of travel arrangements: \$50 domestic; \$75 international.\* Many of our travelers choose to make their own air travel arrangements, but we emphasize the benefits to using our services. If you book your air arrangements yourself, Victor Emanuel Travel is unable to provide support in managing any flight delays and/or cancellations that could occur before and during a tour. When you purchase air tickets through Victor Emanuel Travel, our staff has ready access to your air ticket record and can provide assistance as problems arise. Please feel free to call the VENT office to confirm your air arrangements. **Please be sure to check with the VENT office prior to purchasing your air ticket to confirm that the tour is sufficiently subscribed to operate. VENT cannot be held responsible for any air ticket penalties.**

\*An air ticket will be purchased by Victor Emanuel Travel on behalf of the traveler with the traveler's consent. A purchase is considered final upon receipt of payment. If a ticket is subsequently reissued at the behest of the traveler (i.e. voluntary change of plans), the same fee rates apply for the reissue process, in addition to any fees that may be charged by the airline.

**BAGGAGE:** We request that you limit your luggage to one medium or large bag (duffels or roller bags are best) and one carry-on bag, if possible. Soft-sided luggage is recommended.

The main tour includes three internal flights for which we will travel aboard LATAM. LATAM is strict about luggage limits and employs a more restricted weight limit on domestic flights than on international flights. For checked luggage, the limit is currently one bag at 23 kilograms (50 lbs.) per person; for carry-on luggage the weight is limited to 5 kilograms (about 11 lbs.) per person. The overweight charge for checked luggage amounts to a little more than a dollar per kilogram. In truth, weight allowances are not always strictly enforced; however, we recommend that travelers adhere to the stated limits. **Please do not bring large carry-on bags.** At present, smaller roll-ons up to about 18" in height are permitted, while anything over that size will probably have to be checked. In general, packing lighter is better. Extra baggage can be securely stored in Santiago for those participants combining both tours. Excess baggage charges, which can be substantial, are the personal responsibility of each participant. As a precaution against lost luggage, we suggest that you pack a change of clothes, toiletries, medications, travel documents, optics, and any other essential items in your carry-on bag.

Due to ever-changing circumstances in the government's attempts to improve airport security we recommend that you check the website of the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) for the most updated information: <http://www.tsa.gov/>.

**CLIMATE & WEATHER:** This trip will take place during the austral spring, a time when weather conditions can vary markedly but can be extremely pleasant, too. Given the north-south breadth of the tour, we are likely to encounter a diversity of weather. We're more likely to experience warm, sunny conditions farther north, such as around Santiago, and cooler, more variable circumstances in Patagonia where it can be windy and cold at times, normally early in the morning. In the northern Andes around Putre, temperatures early morning and at night can drop significantly and even in early November it can become cold.

In general, conditions in Chile can change without warning and may include cold temperatures, heavy overcast, strong wind, and possible rain, particularly in the higher latitude region of Patagonia. Around Santiago temperatures (°F) may range from the 60s to low 80s; from the 50s to the low 70s in the Andes; and upper 30s to upper 60s in Patagonia.

**CLOTHING:** This program is a very casual birding and natural history trip. We suggest you bring primarily field-type clothing and be prepared to dress in layers as it will certainly be cold at times in Patagonia, especially early in the morning. Casual attire will be appropriate for all occasions. The following items are recommended:

- **Pants:** A couple pairs of pants are essential. Many people prefer lightweight pants made of cotton or other material, but denim, though not as comfortable, is certainly acceptable. Lined thermal pants are great against cool winds sometimes encountered in Patagonia or on our ferry crossings.
- **Field Clothing:** Outdoor stores such as Cabela's and REI carry field clothing that many birders find appealing. Pants and shirts made of lightweight durable and dull colored materials with multiple pockets and ventilated seams are popular.
- **T-shirts (long- and short-sleeved)** – Simple cotton shirts for wearing under warmer outerwear.
- **Jackets** – A warm, water and wind proof jacket is essential for the Andes and especially the south and for Patagonia as well!
- **Rain Pants:** Can provide double duty for both rain protection and an extra layer in lieu of long underwear on cold or windy days.
- **Warm, waterproof gloves and mittens** – Strongly recommended. Although Chile warms up quickly in the spring, cold weather is very much a possibility, particularly in Patagonia with wind chill.
- **Warm Socks** – Thin cotton or polypropylene socks are a good choice, in combination with a few pairs of wool socks. It is important to have clean, dry socks when in the field.
- **Hats, scarfs and gaiters** – A hat for protection from the sun is essential while a warm pull-down hat, scarf, or neck gaiter will come in handy when exposed in windy conditions.
- **Warm Sweaters or Polar fleece** – Offer excellent insulation against cold temperatures.
- **Smart-Casual Attire** – Some people may prefer blouses or sport coats for evening meals although this is not necessary.

**FOOTWEAR:** For footwear, we recommend a good trail-walking shoe or sturdy hiking boot (waterproof or Gore-Tex) when in the field. Athletic shoes are acceptable but will not keep your feet dry and can become soiled from muddy conditions. A good walking shoe (such as an athletic shoe) may be preferred for down times or when traveling between destinations. Rubber boots are not necessary.

**LAUNDRY SERVICE:** Laundry service is available at all hotels we stay at more than one night, but will be an extra charge.

**EQUIPMENT:** One of the most important aspects of having an enjoyable travel experience is being prepared with proper equipment. The following items will come in handy during your trip to Chile.

- **Backpack** – good for carrying extra clothing, field guides, supplies, and optical equipment during all land excursions
- **Notebooks and pens**
- **Travel alarm clock**
- **Polarized sunglasses with good UV protection**
- **Sunscreen, lip balm, skin lotions** – at least SPF 30
- **Personal toiletries**
- **Water bottle** - essential
- **Cameras, lenses, memory cards, and extra batteries**
- **Collapsible walking stick** – a highly recommended item for those who have trouble walking



- **Folding stool** – a recommended item for those who have trouble standing for more than 10 or 15 minutes at a time that can come in handy. The typical folding stool is small, lightweight and portable, consisting of three aluminum legs connected by a central bolt, with a sturdy but pliable material seat.
- **Tissue packs**

### **BINOCULARS & SPOTTING SCOPES:**

**Binoculars** – We strongly recommend good binoculars of at least 7x35, 8x42, 10x40, or 10x42 magnification. We recommend that you do NOT bring mini-binoculars of any kind. Some people like “minis” because they are small and lightweight; but they have an extremely small field of view and very poor light gathering power. Trying to find a bird in your binoculars using minis is like trying to read a book through a keyhole. You will be very frustrated, and even if you do manage to get the bird in your binoculars before it flies, you will have a poor view. You will find that 7x35 or 8x42 binoculars are compact and light enough.

**Spotting Scopes** – Your tour leader(s) will have scopes available for group use throughout the trip. If you wish to do digital scoping, as this is an excellent tour to do so, please feel free to bring your own.

### **CONDITIONS:**

**Main Tour:** While birding will receive heavy emphasis on your trip to Chile, this program encompasses other aspects of natural history including scenery, mammal viewing, star-gazing, and doses of botany as it is spring and the flowering plants are incredible. The scope of the tour, and planned range of activities, necessitates travel by multiple means including small bus or coaster; internal flights, of which there are three; auto-ferry; and small boat (for the pelagic trip). Accommodations and food are good throughout. One lodge in a national park will be heated by a log fire if it is cold.

There will be two long days with drives (and frequent birding stops) in Patagonia at Tierra Del Fuego. There is simply no way to avoid this but the rewards are, as you will see, well worth it!

Walking conditions are generally easy as our activities in most of the areas we visit are along flat roads and trails. There are some gradual climbs in both Altos de Lircay National Park and Torres del Paine National Park. No activities will take place above 3,300 feet elevation and we have never had any problems with any altitude sickness.

**Puma Excursions:** Our walking excursions to view wild Pumas entail driving to various points along roads either within the park or in a private adjacent ranch, then hiking anywhere from one to three miles on open and rolling grassy terrain interspersed with short stunted bushes. These endeavors are not overly difficult, and we will make frequent stops to scan the surrounding terrain, especially if the Pumas are hunting. This activity also involves stopping to sit or stand quietly as we observe the animals engaging in undisturbed behavior such as sleeping, playing with cubs, or attending a kill. **However please note - leaving the road for puma observations will certainly require physical hiking and is optional.**

**Extension:** The travel conditions for the Santiago Highlights Extension are similar to those of the main tour. The scope of the tour is reduced, with all activities taking place within a few hours of Santiago, but the range of activities and style of travel are similar. Accommodations and meals are good to excellent throughout, and all walking will be on mostly flat and even terrain. There are no internal flights on the extension and we'll travel by small bus or coaster for the duration of the trip. Our pelagic trip of five to six hours is on a larger boat appropriate for the open ocean with a bathroom.

For all tour sections, we emphasize that no one will be subjected to physical demands that exceed their capabilities. All walking will be done at a slow pace **bar the puma hiking**. Meals will be good and we will be able to enjoy some excellent Chilean sea food on both trips, as well as both lamb barbeque and great French cuisine in Punta Arenas on the main tour.

**Special Note:** This tour is intended as a natural history extravaganza with virtually no time included for exploring the country's historical and cultural attractions. Participants with an interest in enjoying more of Santiago or visiting other parts of the country should come early or stay after the tour ends. Santiago is a European-flavored blend of colonial and modern architecture, reflected in its many churches, museums, theatres, and parks. Some of the city's famous major landmarks you can visit on your own are the beautiful horse-racing track Club Hipico, the Pre-Columbian Art Museum, and the summit of San Cristobal Hill, where an enormous statue of the Virgin Mary overlooks the city.

## **TRAVEL DOCUMENTS:**

### **PASSPORTS**

A passport is required for entry into Chile and must be valid for the duration of your stay. Please check the expiration date on your passport. You will also want to make sure that you have at least two blank pages in your passport for stamps. A tourist card is issued at the international port-of-entry.

If you need a passport, you should get it well in advance of the tour departure date. Allow four to six weeks to obtain a passport. For additional fees, a passport can be issued on an expedited basis. In the United States this can be done at the nearest passport office, many post offices, or the county clerk's office. You may also visit <http://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en.html> for information on how to get or renew a passport.

As a safety measure, photocopy the first two pages of your passport. Keep the photocopies in a safe place, so if your passport is lost you will have proof of identification. Your passport should be signed and easily available at all times. You will need it for check-in at the airport on your first day of departure, so **do not pack it in your checked luggage.**

### **VISAS**

Visas are not required for U.S. and Canadian citizens for entry into Chile for a stay of up to three months. Note that the "reciprocity" fee that formerly applied to all U.S. and Canadian citizens entering Chile has been eliminated. Rules and regulations pertaining to non-U.S. citizens may vary; please check with the consulate or embassy of Chile.

**CURRENCY & MONEY MATTERS:** Your trip to Chile includes most necessary expenses. You will want to bring enough cash to cover personal expenses not included in the program, such as taxi rides, gifts, laundry, special gratuities, meals on your own, and personal items. It is best to carry small denominations of cash as many places we visit may be unable to provide change for large bills. While U.S. dollars may be accepted in more populous areas, it is always convenient to have a supply of local currency for such items. It is best to acquire local currency before leaving home, or at the airport or a bank upon arrival in Santiago.

Should you extend your vacation in Chile beyond what is offered in the program, you'll want to obtain local currency. Please check with your bank and credit card issuer for more information regarding banking and the use of ATM and credit cards overseas.

The official currency of Chile is the Chilean Peso (CLP). You can check the latest currency conversion rate by visiting "XE-The World's Favorite Currency Site" at: <http://www.xe.com/>.

**ELECTRICITY:** The electrical current in Chile is 220V (110-120V in the U.S.). Most electrical outlets are of the European standard socket "Type "C" Europlug". These outlets are ungrounded with openings for two round pins. A less common outlet features openings for three flat blades, with two of the blades angled. Both types are in use in most of the hotels we will stay in. A few hotels may provide plug-in adapters that can accommodate standard American-type plug-ins with two flat pins of similar size (but not with one flat blade larger than the other). Many appliances now are dual-designed to operate on European electrical voltages, but you definitely should bring adapters and an all-purpose transformer if there is any doubt whether your appliances are suitable for higher voltage.

**INTERNET/WI-FI:** Internet and Wi-Fi service is available at all of the hotels.

**LANGUAGE:** Spanish is the language primarily spoken in Chile.

**TIME:** Chile is on Chilean Standard Time (CLT) and is 2 hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time (EST).

**HEALTH:** As of this writing, no major shots or inoculations are required for entry into Chile.

**Typhoid:** Typhoid fever is a bacterial disease spread by contaminated food and water. Because it is present in Chile, the CDC recommends vaccination as a standard precaution for most travelers.

VENT follows Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommendations for standard travel precautions, which includes vaccination against a variety of preventable diseases. Among these so-called Routine Vaccinations are measles/mumps/rubella (MMR) vaccine, diphtheria/pertussis/tetanus (DPT) vaccine, poliovirus vaccine (boosters for adult travelers), and Varicella (Chickenpox). You should also be up-to-date with Hepatitis A and Hepatitis B vaccinations.

If you are taking personal medication, prescription or over-the-counter, be sure to bring an ample supply that will allow you to get through the tour safely. Please consult your physician as necessary. Remember to pack all medication in your carry-on baggage, preferably in original containers or packaging. As airline baggage restrictions can change without warning, please check with your airline for procedures for packing medication.

**COVID-19:** We continually emphasize that our number one priority is the health and safety of our customers and employees. Although VENT no longer maintains any of its COVID-era prevention protocols, we strongly recommend best practices for protecting yourself and your fellow travelers against COVID-19 illness. These measures include receiving the primary series vaccinations for those eligible, staying “Up to Date” with COVID-19 booster shots, wearing high filtration N-95 or KN-95 masks when in airports and on airplanes, and avoiding risky social settings in the lead-up to your tour. These recommendations are firmly rooted in CDC guidance regarding recommendations for avoiding COVID-19. Please visit the **Coronavirus Travel Update** page of our website <https://ventbird.com/covid-19> for our official statement regarding COVID-19 and the operation of our tours. Please visit the CDC website for the most up to date information about COVID-19 and associated guidance for proper health and hygiene: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html>.

In addition to your physician, a good source of general health information for travelers is the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta, which operates a 24-hour recorded Travelers’ Information Line (800) CDC-INFO (800-232-4636). You can check the CDC website at <https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel>. Canadian citizens should check the website of the Public Health Agency of Canada: [www.canada.ca/en/public-health.html](http://www.canada.ca/en/public-health.html) (click on Travel Health).

Those who are not fit for light to moderate physical activity, including those with physical disabilities that affect mobility and balance or other conditions associated with poor health, are advised not to join the trip.

**Sun Exposure** – The sun’s ultraviolet rays are more dangerous in Chile than many other places in the world (due to the long daylight hours in a far southerly destination). The sun’s ultraviolet rays are damaging to the eyes and skin with prolonged exposure. Anytime you are outdoors you will want to protect your skin, including your lips, eyes, nose, and ears. Severe sunburn is potentially very painful and will affect your level of enjoyment. Always protect yourself when outdoors and be sure to bring an ample supply of high SPF sunscreen and lip balm. We strongly recommend the use of ultra-violet blocking, polarized sunglasses.

**Biting Insects** – Biting insects are not a serious problem on this tour in most places we visit and there are no chiggers at all; however, we may encounter some mosquitoes in wetlands around Santiago or some of the forests in the south. To protect yourself, we recommend wearing long-sleeved shirts and pants, and applying insect repellent



when necessary. Lotions are preferable to sprays from the standpoint of being less obtrusive to others and also because lotions tend to come in smaller bottles, and therefore easier to pack. Cutter and OFF! are leading brands.

**Insect Repellents** – There are insect repellents for the skin and an insect repellent used to treat clothing that should not be applied to the skin.

Insect repellents for the skin are commonly available in three forms:

- DEET (N,N-diethyl-meta-toluamide): A chemical compound that is marketed under various brand names (OFF!®, Cutter™, Ultrathon™, etc.) and offered in a variety of formulations including sprays, lotions, time-release preparations, and disposable wipes. The formulations will state a percentage of the active ingredient DEET on the packaging. DEET may be applied to exposed skin directly and/or sprayed on clothing. Please be careful when applying DEET as it can damage plastics and lens coatings.
- Picaridin: A synthetic formulation that is derived from piperine, a substance found in plants that produce black pepper.
- Herbal insect repellents: Various mixtures of organic ingredients such as oils from eucalyptus, citronella, cedar, and other herbs. The herbal repellents are more difficult to categorize because of the difference in ingredients from one brand to another. There is considerable variation in their effectiveness.

An insect repellent for clothing is marketed in one approved formulation:

- Permanone® (Permethrin) is an odorless spray-on repellent that may be used for **pre-treatment** of clothing, gear, and tents. It should not be used directly on the skin or sprayed on clothing while it is being worn. The pre-treatment process requires a number of hours to complete and must be done outdoors, so is best completed in advance of travel. Do-it-yourself pre-treatment has to be repeated more often than commercial treatment using Insect Shield® technology. It is available at various outdoor stores and can easily be found online.
- Insect Shield® apparel: Clothing pre-treated with Permanone is made by a variety of manufacturers. It is available for purchase from some sporting goods suppliers. The clothing is advertised as retaining its repellency for up to 70 washings.

The US EPA offers a search tool to help choose a repellent that is best for a particular situation. For example, some repellents work for mosquitoes, but not for ticks.

<https://www.epa.gov/insect-repellents/which-insect-repellent-right-you>

**SUGGESTED READING:** A number of traditional booksellers and online stores list excellent inventories of field guides and other natural history resources that will help prepare you for this tour. We recommend [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) which has a wide selection; [www.buteobooks.com](http://www.buteobooks.com) and [www.nhbs.com](http://www.nhbs.com) which specialize in ornithology and natural history books; and [www.abebooks.com](http://www.abebooks.com) for out-of-print and hard-to-find titles.

### ***Birds:***

Jaramillo, Alvaro. *Birds of Chile*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003. This is the most important field guide for this trip. It is the best all-around field guide to the birds of Chile, featuring excellent plates, text, and interesting taxonomic notes. It is also lightweight and easily portable.

Pina & Cifuentes. *Field Guide to the Birds of Chile*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2021. An excellent new updated guide showing new additions to the country's avifauna. Plates are excellent, especially non passerines. Text good too and updated showing all vagrants recently recorded. It's lightweight and easily portable.

### ***Other Birding References:***

Erize, Francisco., Jorge R. Rodriguez Mata, and Maurice Rumboll. *Birds of South America. Non-Passerines: Rheas to Woodpeckers*. Princeton Illustrated Checklist. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006. Small and portable, but of limited usefulness because it does not include any non-passerine birds, and its broad coverage of birds extends far beyond Chile.

Ridgely, R. S., and G. Tudor. *Field Guide to the Songbirds of South America*. Mildred-Wyatt World Series in Ornithology. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2009. Features excellent plates and maps but covers only passerines (no raptors, waterbirds, waders, etc.), so is of limited usefulness.

**Other Natural History References:**

Bridges, E. Lucas. *Uttermost Part of the Earth: The First History of Tierra del Fuego and the Fuegian Indians*. London: Overlook/Rookery Publishing, 2007. (although earlier editions from other publishers are also available). Excellent background on Tierra del Fuego; essential reading for those on the main tour.

Chester, Sharon. *A Wildlife Guide to Chile*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008. Excellent read and a perfect all-around guide. Full of info and good illustrations from plants, animals, fish, cetaceans & butterflies to the country's various habitats, zones and weather types.

Hilty, Steven L. *Birds of Tropical America: A Watcher's Introduction to Behavior, Breeding and Diversity*. Shelburn, Vermont: Chapters Publishing Ltd., 1994. This wonderful resource was written by VENT leader Steve Hilty. Even though the book's focus is primarily on the tropical forest ecosystem, it conveys information that applies to any South American destination. Highly recommended.

Kricher, John C. *A Neotropical Companion: An Introduction to the Animals, Plants, and Ecosystems of the New World Tropics*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999. The focus is primarily tropical, but travelers may find it of use even on this trip.

**History/Non-fiction:**

Shipton, Eric Earle. *Tierra del Fuego: The Fatal Lodestone*. Readers Union, 1974. Long out-of-print but recently republished, this classic work recounts the history of the discovery of sailing routes in the region of Tierra del Fuego and of the settlement of the region. Part historical narrative and part autobiography, Shipton chronicles some of the most remarkable adventures imaginable. Essential reading for those on the main tour.

**TIPPING:** Tipping (restaurant staff, porters, drivers, local guides) is included on VENT tours. However, if you feel one or both of your VENT leaders or any local guides have given you exceptional service, it is entirely appropriate to tip. We emphasize that tips are not expected and are entirely optional. Tips should be given directly to your tour leader; they should not be sent to the VENT office.

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