

Bird & Mammal Trip Report
Antarctica – South Georgia - Falklands
(Nov-Dec 2023)



Rob Jansen
photography

Introduction

About us

We are two enthusiastic nature lovers who travel the world together to search for stunning birds, fascinating mammals and incredible nature. Our world travel started in October 2021 in Chile, where we bought a car to drive through South-America in search of birds and mammals for about 2 years.

Rob Jansen is a biologist and wildlife photographer, and thus has a lot of knowledge about species and ecology. He's enthusiastic about all that's in nature, but mainly photographs birds and mammals.

Romy Jansen-Houtzager is a marketing professional. Our social media accounts, the look and feel of this report and the website are her work. In the field, she is an excellent spotter and very patient (give me some of her patience ...and hurry!).



Rob & Romy with the biggest iceberg A23A



The expedition ship The Endeavour

Information and how to use this trip report

This trip report is about our cruise to Antarctica, South Georgia and The Falkland Islands plus some days in Ushuaia, Argentina. The cruise was from the 21st of November – 10th of December 2023. For all photos of this trip, comments, compliments, any specific questions, visit and/or contact us via our website. We would love to hear from you!

 robjansenphotography.com/antarctica

 robjansenphotography.com/falklands

 robjansenphotography.com/southgeorgia

 www.instagram.com/robjansenphotography

Species are highlighted in this trip report: **blue for birds**, **red for mammals** and **green for herpetofauna**. Target species which we missed at a specific spot are written in *italic*. This gives you an idea which species to pay extra attention to. All observations made by us can be found on Observation.org. We observed a total of 90 bird species and 12 mammal species on this trip to Antarctica, South Georgia and Falkland Islands. Click here for the: [bird list](#), [mammal list](#) or the [total species list](#).

For more trip reports see our website: www.robjansenphotography.com/trip-reports

Map and specific locations

After bird- & mammalwatching a big part of South America (see previous trip reports) we almost looped back to the beginning; Santiago, Chile. To end our trip in South America we decided to end with a grand finale; a cruise to The Falklands, South Georgia and Antarctica. A typical map would look like the one underneath, as before it is not yet clear which locations you will be able to visit.



We made a [map in Google My Maps](#) with the locations we visited. You can view this map, download the points and add them to your own map (click on the three dots above the legend and download the KML file and drag this to your own map), or add them in the app 'Maps.me'.

Literature

- [Harrison, P., M. Perrow, H. Larsson \(2021\). Seabirds – The New Identification Guide, Lynx Editions.](#) *Just an amazing book and in my opinion the best book to have for seabird identification! Very clear drawings and text*
- [Birds of Argentina and the South-west Atlantic, Helm Field Guides, 1st edition, 2020, Mark Pearman & Juan I. Areta.](#) *Drawings are generally good, but for some species the details and proportions seem a bit off. But no matter your opinion on the book; it's practically the only good book for birding in Argentina. Searching up a bird (family) isn't made easy as the list in the beginning of the book is not alphabetically ordered. They do, however, pay extra attention to taxonomy and possible splits.*
- [Carwardine, M \(2020\). Handbook of Whales, Dolphins and Porpoises of the World, Princeton University Press.](#) *This has to be the best book for identifying cetaceans and I can't recommend it enough. Great drawings and specific info about the life of each species.*

- Mammals of the Southern Cone, Argentina, Chile, Paraguay, Uruguay, 2020, 1st edition, Lynx. *Happy that Lynx decided to make mammals guides. This book is small and easy to take along and has all the mammals in there! For Antarctica it's just enough to have this as an overview, but not as a detailed guide for cetaceans for example.*

- iSail app if you have an iPhone. *We don't have iSomethings, but the app looked great on other people's phones. It gives you good info about islands, water depth etc which can come in handy when planning your meal and rest times to maximize your best hours on deck for seabirds..*

- BirdNet app for recording the bird sounds. *If you don't know all the sounds, BirdNet can give a possible ID.*

- iOverlander app for camping places. *This app gives nice information on where to camp or buy stuff.*

- Add this number to your contacts: +54 9 11 5349 5987. You can forward Spanish voice messages you get in WhatsApp and it will transcribe and translate to the language of your choosing!

Equipment

Photography: Sony A9 II + 200-600mm + 1.4x converter + Sony 24-105mm, GoPro Hero 9

Binoculars and telescope: Swarovski EL 8x32 WB, Eden 8x32 XP, Swarovski 65HD + 25-50mm

Be sure to bring a sturdy waterproof cover for you camera, as it can get very wet on zodiac rides or with snow/slate. Also bring enough microfiber lens cloth for cleaning lenses! The store on the ship is really expensive, so test your waterproof pants, dry bag etc. before you travel.



Buy me a coffee

If you enjoy my wildlife photos and trip reports, support my creative journey by [buying me a coffee](#). Your generosity brings me closer to capturing impressive wildlife and untold stories

Selecting a cruise

We just want to give you an idea of what to expect when selecting a cruise. Obviously we don't know all the ins and outs, behind the scenes and margins that are there. We only booked it once, and that's as far as our experience goes. Still we hope this piece helps you a bit in your decision-making for that once-in-a-lifetime-trip.

Travel Agent

Cruises to the polar region are often not sold by the expedition ships themselves, but rather via travel agents. There are many of them, some located in Ushuaia, but many in the United States. Most of them specialize in both the Arctic and Antarctic region. We got a contact – Antarctica Travels – via friends and the first contact via email was fantastic and super friendly. We hoped to get a friend-of-a-friend discount, but after seeing the prices (more about that below) we of course tried to bargain a bit and see what could be done about it. The email after that wasn't that friendly anymore and very pedantic. This made us contact some other companies – [Polar Dream Travel](#) & [Freestyle Adventure Travel](#) –, both of which replied swiftly, friendly and actually answered most of our questions.

It seems that most travel agents offer the exact same trips for the exact same price. Only sometimes we got different prices from one agent compared to the other. It also occurred that some agents only offered certain expedition ships, while others only included them when asked specifically for a price for a certain ship. Small differences may lay in extras that you get, like a water bottle or a book about Antarctic wildlife, but obviously that is not going to make a big difference with such a price.

In the end we booked a trip on the Ocean Endeavour (run by Intrepid) with Polar Dream Travel (reservation@polardreamtravel.com). Frank was very swift in his replies, answered our questions point by point and we had friends booking with him a year earlier, giving us the confidence that he delivered on his promises. Only the aftersales weren't what we expected, but that's partly because the expedition ships themselves put out information quite late.

We also had contact with a very nice person, David Sinclair. He has a smaller ship and one can book directly with him (www.islandsandicetravel.com or hello@islandsandice.com). As the expedition vessel is a bit smaller, prices are generally a bit higher, but have less people to share the wildlife with:)

Finance

A trip to Antarctica is expensive; an extended trip including South Georgia and Falklands even more so. As written above, most offers we got were pretty comparable. Several offers will be included in or

copied from a standard email, with different expeditions and different categories for cabins/suites. Prices will depend heavily on the kind of trip: only Antarctica or including The Falklands and/or South Georgia. Timing is another important factor, with the trips in Dec-Jan (Feb) being high season and thus more costly. Ship size will obviously be important, with bigger ships (up to 200 people) often having the best offers and smaller ships (50-100 people) being a bit more expensive. The cabin category will influence a lot; think of a nice suite or a small cabin. Be aware that many offers are based on a price per person and are actually for a **shared** cabin with one or two others of the same gender.

Most offers we got gave a certain percentage discount, obviously stating at least 2-3 'old' prices, underlining the fact how good their offer was. The best offer we got was 2-for-the-price-of-1 / one-plus-one free. Unless you get to fill up a last minute spot from someone who cancelled, this is probably the best realistic goal. We got an offer from the travel agency and bluffed that we got the same expedition offered for almost half the price –just to check if there was margin between the different travel agents–. Then suddenly we got an email back saying that the specific expedition ship gave 2-for-1 discounts only to a selected group of partner travel agents. It seems that our bluffing made him call the ship and that he is now a selected partner too. On top of that he offered 200USD discount per person to make sure we would book with him and not with the other (fictional) travel agent that supposedly gave the same price. We tried to (further) lower the price by taking out some luxuries like the pre-voyage hotel, leave out 'drinks all-included' etc. but ship companies weren't willing to take counter offers. Everyone on board will receive the exact same services. Everything is pre-booked (hotels, and when included, charter flights). Strangely enough we did see a better price for our trip one month before the trip started for 6700USD p.p. in a shared cabin and cruise only (no pre-voyage hotel).

Travel Insurance with medical coverage (50.000 USD) and at least 250.000 USD medical evacuation coverage is required and not included in any of the trips.

In the end we paid 15.550 USD total for 2 people, for a cruise of 20 nights, cabin category 4 Twin Porthole + 1 night in Wyndham Garden hotel del Glaciar in Ushuaia with the Ocean Endeavour Expedition Ship. Once we got our tickets about 2 months before, we saw that we got a free upgrade to a category 6 cabin (offered price to us was 17.195 USD total for 2 people).

Just some examples of offers we got:

21 Nights Falkland, South Georgia and Antarctica from Montevideo - 30% Off by July 31 2023

Ship: [MS Expedition](#) (134 passengers)

22 Oct 2023 – 12 Nov 2023 Cat 2 Twin ~~\$47499~~ \$12,039.30 pp Cat 3 Twin ~~\$48399~~ \$12,879.30 pp Cat 3 Twin ~~\$20599~~ \$14,419.30 pp etc

21 Nights Antarctica, South Georgia and Falklands - Private Sale - Up to 56% Off

Ship: [MS Seaventure](#) (149 passengers)

Nov 2-23 2023 Window ~~\$26945~~ \$12,999 pp Veranda ~~\$34095~~ \$14,999 pp Owner's Suite ~~\$46495~~ \$24,999 pp

Just was able to get the promotional prices for you on Ocean Endeavor's Nov 20 voyage-

Cat 3 Twin Interior: US\$17,840pp

Cat 4 Twin Porthole: US\$15,950pp

Cat 5 Twin Window: US\$16,695pp

Cat 6 Comfort Twin: US\$17,195pp

Cat 7 Select Twin: US\$17,895pp

Cat 8 Superior Twin: US\$18,395pp

Cat 9 Junior Suite Double: US\$19,595pp

Please let me know your thoughts, and any additional questions.

PRIVATE OFFER!

Falklands (Malvinas), South Georgia & Antarctica (22 days) aboard the **139-passenger Seaventure**

Includes one pre voyage hotel night in Puerto Madryn & one post voyage hotel night in Ushuaia

Dates: Nov 2-23, 2023

Description: The sub-Antarctic Falkland Islands/Malvinas and South Georgia are home to some of the most unique and abundant wildlife on earth. With beaches covered in fur seals, elephant seals, and hundreds of thousands of penguins, it's one of the most jaw-dropping nature scenes you will ever experience. We'll also explore the fascinating history of the area, dating back to the grandiose times of the 'Heroic Age of Antarctic Exploration' of the late 1800s and early 1900s. Spend 2 full days in the Falkland Islands, 4 full days in South Georgia & 4 full days in the Antarctic Peninsula!

Starts in Puerto Madryn

Ends in Ushuaia

Price:

USD \$20,895 NOW \$11,950 per person in a Triple Cabin (**2 female berths left**)

USD \$24,035 NOW \$13,520 per person in a Porthole Cabin (**sold out**)

USD \$22,880 NOW USD \$13,728 per person in a Window Suite

USD \$26,245 NOW USD \$15,757 per person in a Veranda Suite

Timing and Weather

Trips to Antarctica run from the end of October until March/beginning of April, with Dec-Jan being the high season. As our time in South America ended in December 2023 the following months were not an option. Time-wise we decided on a trip starting end of November. A big advantage these months is that there is more ice/snow cover in Antarctica, the Elephant Seals in South Georgia are still on the beaches and we would have a very slight chance for Emperor Penguin. Some other species are apparently harder to find later in the season, like Snow Petrel. Wildlife should be great during November! The later months in the season are known for whales, but as our trip shows there were already plenty – which seems to be more common last few years according to guides –. Some early trips might start north of Ushuaia (Puerto Madryn/Buenos Aires/Montevideo) and give you a change for Southern Right Whale.

Ship/Company

If you are a fanatic bird- and/or mammalwatcher then make sure to check the type of ship. Generally speaking the older ships have more space on deck to walk around. The newer ships offered up more space to cabins and communal areas, leaving less room on deck and less (or no) room for walking around the deck. We even heard of a ship where the birdwatcher had to stand on a small space

shared with smokers as that was the only outside communal space suitable for birdwatching. The Ocean Endeavour has lots of deck space, and there were always options to be outside, sheltered from the wind or rain. It is quite an old ship and it's not the most stable one. You also feel the engine roaring quite well when on deck. Newer ships can have stabilisation they turn on when the ocean gets rough.

Ship size is important as landing sites in Antarctica have a limit of 100 tourists (50-60 on a few sites) on land at any time in order to protect the fragile environment. Half of the ship will go on land, the other half will go zodiac cruising to observe ice and look for whales and seals. With a ship of 200 passengers that means you will always have half zodiacs, half on land. With smaller ships you will be able to spend more time on land. And less people equal less logistics and therefore more time actually observing wildlife! David Sinclair from www.islandsandicetravel.com has the smallest expedition vessel with just 51 passengers. This allows for being on land all the time when possible and less people around the wildlife while taking pictures. The ship itself has access all around, making it perfect for bird- and mammalwatchers.



Our cabin sleeping area

Our cabin seating area

Visited sites

Ushuaia

[-54.83956, -68.31224](#)

Visited dates: 17-21 November & 11 December 2023

Ushuaia - Dump

[-54.79203, -68.22367](#)

Right when we arrived in Ushuaia – known as a place with some of the most beautiful landscapes in the world – we went to the ugliest place around: the rubbish dump. We still hadn't seen White-throated Caracara on our travels, and this uncommon species is known to associate easily with **Chimango Caracara** and **Southern Crested Caracara** at the dump. Unfortunately it was drizzling and most Caracaras we observed were resting in trees. We found only one subadult White-throated far away. The next day we returned without finding one, despite lots of activity. In the end we found both an adult and juvenile **White-throated Caracara** on the road along the coast (-54.81408, -68.20373) where it associated with many individuals of the other two species.



Andean Condor



White-throated Caracara

Beagle Channel mini catamaran tour

[-54.80729, -68.30262](#)

As we had some time to fill we checked the tours offered at the tourist pier (-54.807231, -68.302557). The tours were all starting with 28k ARS p.p. (around 30USD at the time, Blue Dollar conversion rate). As we were just interested in one bird, they quickly offered discounts up to 20k, and eventually we got it for the local price of 14k ARS p.p. (±15USD p.p.). The catamaran can take about 200 people and we wondered why anyone would pay full price for this, as most of them are on their phone and maybe look up when they pass the small **South American Sea Lion** colony.

**Mountains around Ushuaia****South American Sea Lion**

The boat sails pretty close by the islands, giving you a good chance to see **Magellanic Cormorant**, **Imperial Cormorant** and **Snowy Sheathbills**. The only target for us was **Blackish Cinclodes** (*spp. maculirostris*, known as **Black Cinclodes**). As the weather was not that good we had some trouble finding one on the first islands we sailed past. Then at the next island we played the tape once and one responded immediately (-54.87391, -68.19635). In the end we got to see another pair at the lighthouse; one of them flying up to the boat when it sailed close and sitting on the hand rails!:

Seabirds seen from the boat include **Southern Giant Petrel**, and one individual of each of the following; **Southern Fulmar**, **Black-browed Albatross**, **Magellanic Diving-petrel**.

**Dolphin Gull****Blackish Cinclodes**

Paso Garibaldi

[-54.68955, -67.84178](#)

Paso Garibaldi is known as one of the few reliable places for **White-bellied Seedsnipe** in the last years. However, weather was way different when we visited than for friends who visited exactly a year before. Right when we came to the pass we felt the strong wind (5Bft with gusts of 9Bft) and black ice on the road suddenly. Our car made half a pirouette, but lucky nothing bad happened. We waited a couple of hours, but after checking the app Windy we turned around. We returned two days later, and there was barely any wind. Still there was a thick layer of snow, cloud cover and fog coming and going. We also didn't have a clear description of how to approach the mountain, but

luckily Olmo van Herwaarden told us it was easier to walk once on the top instead of the swampy terrain at the bottom. We took the gravel road going up 50m before the viewpoint (-54.69007, -67.84290) and walked this for a short while and went up through the woods at a small ditch (-54.690018, -67.847723). As everything was covered in snow the walking was a bit hard and slippery, and even dangerous as meltwater had made big holes underneath. On steep slopes and on top of the mountain there are icy parts where it was quite slippery. Eventually we reached the place where the Seedsnipes tend to be seen, but we suspect there was too much snow for them still. They probably resided at lower altitudes still. We did observe **Yellow-bridled Finch**, **Buff-winged Cinclodes**, **Dark-faced Ground-tyrant** and **Ochre-naped Ground-tyrant**.



Route walked (blue line) and area with most White-bellied Seedsnipe sightings (yellow oval)

Going down took about 1h, up probably 1.5/2x that time due to the altitude gain and searching our way up the snowy slope. On the way back the track noted 123m elevation gain and 371m elevation loss.



Elevation profile on our way back (with altitude in meters above mean sea level)

The day after the cruise we tried again. As we didn't have a car nor the sube-card for the public transport, we hitchhiked to the Paso (better get yourself to the main road at the 'entrance' of Ushuaia for that purpose). There was barely any snow going up, which made the hike way easier. On top there were snowy patches, but not so much slippery ice anymore. Despite hours of searching with binoculars, the thermal camera and the use of playback, we didn't find the Seedsnipe. We also couldn't find it around the spot that a birding group had found it one day before. Other species seen were the same as the previous visit.



Yellow-bridled Finch



Yellow-bridled Finch

Tierra del Fuego NP

[-54.83488, -68.44678](#)

We went one morning to Tierra del Fuego NP (entrance at -54.834888, -68.446782). The park is officially open between 08.00-20.00, but the gate is open outside those hours too. As most tourist only go after breakfast, there is no one operating the cash register, and entrance for us was free (normally 10k ARS p.p./±11USD p.p. Blue Dollar conversion rate).



Upland Goose male



Upland Goose female

We first drove to Mirador Lago Acigami (-54.830510, -68.563800), where we observed **Magellanic Woodpecker** in the surrounding forests as well as **Dark-faced Ground-tyrant** and **Thorn-tailed Rayadito** along the road. On the water we only observed **Great Grebe**.



Magellanic Woodpecker



Flightless Steamer-duck

We then drove towards the end of the road (-54.855222, -68.576653) and scanned the lakes along the road for birds. This is how we observed **Austral Parakeets** sitting in a tree, **Flightless Steamer-Duck**, **Yellow-billed Teal** and even two **Spectacled Ducks**. With many tourists dripping in we went to the post office (-54.846696, -68.480605), where we observed **Black-faced Ibis**, and called it a day.



Spectacled Duck



Black-faced Ibis

South Polar cruise

Dates: 21 November – 10 December 2023

Most sea days were spent on deck, searching for seabirds and mammals like whales and dolphins. Once at Falklands, South Georgia or Antarctica it's important to know that the landing sites for the two expeditions per day aren't known (far) in advance. Obviously you will go to the capitals of South Georgia and Falklands, but other than that it heavily depends on the weather. Therefore you might visit different places, even when booking with the exact same expedition ship for the same period. We even heard stories of ships waiting for 4-5 days in the Beagle Channel due to a storm, only spending 12 hours in Antarctica. Another trip only spent 1 day in South Georgia instead of 4 due to a storm. Changes can be big, so keep that in mind!

Ushuaia -> Falklands

Dates: 21-22 November 2023

Beagle Channel (21 November 2023)

The first surprise we got was the schedule; apparently the route was not like communicated Antarctica, South Georgia and then Falklands, but the other way around. We left the port a bit later than planned (18.15), and with dinner at 19.00 there was only a bit of time left before sunset to stand on deck in the Beagle Channel. We did get to see **Magellanic Penguins**, **Snowy Sheathbills**, **South American Sea Lion** and a probable **South American Fur Seal**. No **Dusky Dolphin**, **Sei Whale**, **Fin Whale** or **Humpback Whale** unfortunately (although for whales it was a bit early in the season they said).



Ushuaia



Ushuaia

Beagle Channel -> Falklands (22 November 2023)

We had a full day at sea. When we woke up at 05.00 we went straight to the deck and got to see the last land from the Mitre Peninsula and the island to the east of there (-54.6798, -64.8305). **Cape Petrels** and **Southern Giant Petrels** were abundant behind the ship, and both were seen throughout the day (no **Northern Giant Petrels** at all during the whole day!). **Black-browed Albatross**, **Sooty**

Shearwater and **Wilson's Storm-petrel** would make up the other more abundant species. Every now and then we got to see **Southern Fulmar**, **Southern Royal Albatross** and **White-chinned Petrel**. I photographed one **Northern Royal Albatross**. Prions were seen from about halfway the day in good numbers, and the ones photographed -they stayed quite far from the boat for some reason- turned out to be both **Slender-billed Prion** and **Antarctic Prion**. Closer to the Falklands I got to see one **Common Diving-petrel** flying off, and even though we spent some time on the bow, we didn't see more Diving-petrels. Despite paying good attention to floating rafts of kelp, we didn't observe **Grey-rumped Storm-petrel**. We also missed the **Grey-headed Albatross** seen by someone else.



Southern Giant Petrel



Southern Fulmar

Falklands

[-51.3653, -60.6329](#)

Dates: 23-25 November 2023

Graves' Cove (23 November 2023)

Already when positioned in the bay for the first expedition the boat announced there were 1-2 **Humpback Whales** being seen from the deck. We left our breakfast plates as they were and made our way to the deck, just to get a glimpse of one blow and a tail before it went for a deeper dive. Already from the ship we could observe **Falkland Imperial Shag**, **Falkland Steamer-duck** and **Turkey Vulture** (*ssp. falklandicus*). These all turned out to be quite common throughout the expeditions.



Falkland Steamer-duck female



Falkland Steamer-duck male

The first expedition on the Falklands was to Graves' Cove ([-51.3653, -60.6329](#)). Here we did a short walk to the other side of the peninsula, where there was a big colony of ± 5000 **Gentoo Penguins**.



Gentoo Penguin



Striated Caracara

Striated Caracara and **Brown Skua** flew over the colony every now and then. From that beach Romy was the first to spot **Commerson's Dolphins**, of which about 6 individuals were hunting in the waves. On the walk back we observed **Long-tailed Meadowlark**, **Correndera Pipit**, **Yellow-billed Teal**, **Crested Duck** and both **Magellanic Oystercatcher** and **Blackish Oystercatcher**.



Gentoo Penguin



Commerson's Dolphin

West Point Island (23 November 2023)

The second expedition we did was to West Point Island ([-51.3495, -60.6853](#)), where we made a walk of about 2.2km to the other side of the island. We didn't see much on the way there due to rain and strong winds, except for the (all common) **Austral Thrush**, **Upland Goose**, **Kelp Goose** and **Dark-faced Ground-tyrant**.

**Kelp Goose****Austral Thrush**

The **Black-browed Albatross** colony on the other side of the island is where we spend most of our time, observing courtship ritual and **Southern Rockhopper Penguins** that nest in the same colony.

**Southern Rockhopper Penguin****Black-browed Albatross**

The colony nests in tussock grass and it therefore wasn't too surprising we already observed our first **Cobb's Wren** (e) flying over the tussocks at one time. At the local house we heard **Black-chinned Siskin** singing from within the pines. Some zodiacs had **Peale's Dolphin** and others **Commerson's Dolphin** bow riding on the way back.

**Black-browed Albatross****Black-browed Albatross**

Carcass Island (24 November 2023)

This island was the first expedition on day 2 and one of the islands we were most eager to visit on the Falklands. All of the endemics can be found on the island, and already when we landed on Leopard Beach (-51.30913, -60.52093) we observed many **Blackish Cinclodes/Tussock Birds** (e) on the shoreline. These turned out to be very, very common here. **Cobb's Wren** (e) was seen quite soon as well, going from **Magellanic Penguin** burrow to the other. We found two more in the Tussock grass around there.

**Blackish Cinclodes****Cobb's Wren**

The colonies of **Gentoo Penguins** were awesome to see again, and some had their first chicks of just a couple of days old here as well.

**Gentoo Penguin with egg****Gentoo Penguin with chicks**

Magellanic Snipe were quite abundant in one patch of higher grass next to a ditch. The rest of the time we enjoyed **Grass Wrens**, **White Bridled-finch**, **Black-chinned Siskin**, **Ruddy-headed Goose** (quite common on the previous islands too), **Striated Caracara** and **Brown Skua** (one of which caught a gosling!). We missed the **King Penguin** that apparently came on land short shortly, but we'll get enough opportunities for those. We also missed **Black-crowned Night-heron** that some saw from the zodiac in a little cove along the coast.



Magellanic Snipe



Ruddy-headed Goose female

Saunders Island (24 November 2023)

This island was the second expedition on day 2 in the Falklands. *Commerson's Dolphin* was observed by others going from the morning location to the second (while I was editing photos; never again that trip!). They were seen again by guides on the first zodiacs that go to shore to check the conditions.



King Penguin



King Penguin

We arrived at a beach ([-51.3084, -60.23948](#)) and were allowed to walk to the other side of this narrow neck of this huge island. Four penguin species can be found nesting on this stretch of land; **Gentoo Penguin, Magellanic Penguin, Southern Rockhopper Penguin** and best of all; **King Penguin!** The colony on land of the latter comprised about 10 individuals, but on the beach at least 20 more could be found, including big fluffy brown chicks that had hatched about a year ago.

**King Penguin chick****King Penguins**

Falkland Imperial Cormorants breed mixed with the Southern Rockhopper Penguins and about 200m after that on the same slope is a colony of **Black-browed Albatross**. Except for **White Bridled-finch** we didn't see much else on this island, but in all honestly we only had eye for the King Penguins ;-)

**Falkland Imperial Cormorant****Black-browed Albatross colony**

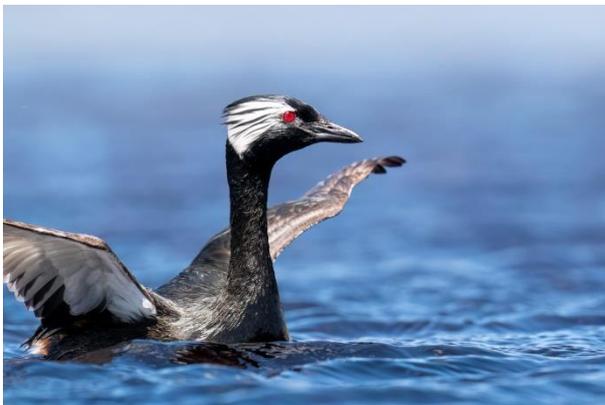
On the way from Saunders Islands to Stanley we observed a pod of **Commerson's Dolphins** north of the Falklands in the late evening from the front deck 9.

Stanley (25 November 2023)

We had a full day from 08.30-21.00 in Stanley ([-51.69157, -57.85654](#)) with regular shuttles back to the ship. There were some activities, but we were free to go on our own. We had to buy a couple of things to waterproof the camera for zodiac rides as my cover wasn't waterproof anymore. There is a big store 'Home Builder' where locals go to. It's cheaper than most of the touristy stores and had quite some supplies like pants etc.; This store was also cheaper than the boutique on the boat (what?! 85-120USD for rain pants?!).

**Ocean Endeavour and shipwreck****Another shipwreck**

We then walked to Moody Brooke ([-51.68580, -57.92078](#)), where there were recent –and regular– sightings of **White-tufted Grebe** *ssp. rolland*. We observed it right away when we came to the area and it was surprisingly big compared to the mainland *ssp.* It was also quite confiding! Along the coastline we found the usual suspects from the days before, except for the colonial breeding birds. On top of that we observed **Correndera Pipit**, **Southern Crested Caracara** (breeds in the big tree up the hill; -51.69063, -57.92711) and **Yellow-billed Pintail**. After a local said she sometimes saw **Barn Owl** flying there at night we went to search for it in the old building along the road, but we didn't find any traces. **Rufous-chested Dotterels** could potentially be seen around here, but we didn't see any. Local birders we met had seen many of them, but farther away outside walking range. There are surprisingly many cars going around, and it was easy to hitch a ride back. But that might be because it was a Saturday.

**White-tufted Grebe****Long-tailed Meadowlark**

Back at the port around midday the wind had picked up considerably and the tide had gone up too. That's why we missed the **Black-crowned Night-heron** that was seen on the east side of town. We walked all the way towards the harbour next to the road going to the airport (Boxer Bridge; -51.69354, -57.80183), which is a place they commonly hang out. In hindsight we would have opted to get a ride and go to the area northwest of the airport. The Grebe has been seen there as well, and there is a rookery of **Gentoo Penguins** (-51.67619, -57.78299). With all the avian flu restrictions and many people on land at the same time, it would have been a great opportunity to have these

Penguins to ourselves. Along the way we added **Flying Steamer-duck** (less common than Falkland Steamer-duck) to the trip list.



Magellanic Oystercatcher



Kelp Goose female

Falklands → South Georgia

Dates: 26-28 November 2023

Due to weather conditions (8m high waves and 60 knot winds) we had to stay in Stanley all day until 21.00. As sunset was already around that hour it didn't allow for any time on deck anymore when leaving the Falklands.



Sunset over sea

Sea day 1 (26 November 2023)

The first full sea day was a good as they get! Some nice waves, good winds, nice weather and nothing too much. We were only able to go 6-8knots as otherwise we would sail right into the storm. Going slow we stayed behind it. It luckily didn't take too long before we picked up our first **Grey-backed**

Storm-petrel (e) hanging above floating kelp. Besides the common **Wilson's Storm-petrel** we also observed our first **Black-bellied Storm-petrels**.



Grey-backed Storm-petrel



Black-bellied Storm-petrel

Giant/White-backed Albatross were abundant and we had one **Northern Royal Albatross** as well as many **Southern Royal Albatross** and **Wandering Albatross**. This was also the day we got to see our first **Grey-headed Albatross** and at the end of the day **Light-mantled Albatross**.

Prions were abundant, and I found at least two **Fairy Prions** between the many **Slender-billed Prions** and **Antarctic Prions**. In the afternoon I found the first (and only as it turned out) **Atlantic Petrel** of the trip.



Fairy Prion



Slender-billed Prion

The best bird of the day was however a mammal. Right after the scheduled bird survey activity I observed some **White-chinned Petrels** gathering above a patch of water. When I wanted to check the ID by making a photo I noticed some fins below in the water. Shouting "DOLPHINS!!!" to all others on deck (which due to the scheduled activity were many instead of none or just a couple) made many people observe the 15+ big pod of **Long-finned Pilot Whales**. Then suddenly it turned out there were other Dolphins going with them too; **Hourglass Dolphins**; one of our most-wanted species. The Pilot Whales suddenly vanished, but the Hourglass Dolphins went bow riding and we got some incredible views of them.

**Long-finned Pilot Whales****Long-finned Pilot Whales** (see male on right)

In the evening when everyone was at dinner (20.30) Romy spotted 2-3 **Hourglass Dolphins** from the back of the ship, of which we got some record shots. We ran to the bow, but they didn't appear there.

**Hourglass Dolphins** coming up**Hourglass Dolphin** bow riding

Sea day 2 (27 November 2023)

As good as the first day was, so dull was the second day. The waves (5m and possibly higher) and wind had picked up big time, and there wasn't really any place to find shelter from the wind on the hind decks. The birds also didn't really stick with the boat and just flew past it very fast. We got some of the more common species of day 1 in way lower numbers. With the big waves and white caps seeing any whales or dolphins was impossible. The only new species for the trip was **Blue Petrel** at the very end of the day.

**Southern Royal Albatross****Northern Royal Albatross****Sea day 3 (28 November 2023)**

Day 3 was even more quiet than day 2. The wind had calmed down, so there were barely any birds behind or around the ship. We did see many icebergs, which seemed abnormal to all the guides this early in the season this far from Antarctica. The only new bird species was a very good one; **Snow Petrel!** This pretty white bird went around the ship for at least 2 hours. As there were no white caps on the waves we decided to spend the day on the front of deck 9. There we had very good views of the Southern Ocean and it didn't take long before we picked up the first group of **Humpback Whales**. We alerted the crew and many people got to see them. This group turned out to be the first of many, and we had at least 15 different sightings throughout the day of 1-3 individuals passing by.

**Snow Petrel****Humpback Whale**

Blue Petrels and **Black-bellied Storm-petrels** were a bit more common than the day before, but nothing else bird-wise. One of the guides that has quite some experience says he was 95% sure that **Kerguelen Petrel** had passed in front of the ship (just when we decided to catch up on some much needed sleep for 2 hours).



Atlantic Petrel



Southern Fulmar

South Georgia

Dates: 29 November - 1 December 2023

Fortuna Bay (29 November 2023)

We arrived early morning in Fortuna Bay ([-54.12673, -36.82319](#)) and soon enough found **South Georgian Shag/Imperial Cormorant**. We also had a probable **Yellow-billed Teal** fly over; a darker-headed bird without a longer tail. Not possible I thought, but it turns out that Yellow-billed Teal occurs in low numbers in South Georgia and is probably overlooked as every tourist and guide ID's all similar-looking Ducks as South Georgia Pintail.



Landscape at Fortuna Bay



Mountain at Fortuna Bay

This was our first and only wildlife landing on South Georgia. As we were the only ship around, half the passengers went at 05.30-07.30 and the other group after breakfast. This allowed for 2-2.5h on shore instead of 1h15m. After the staff had found and made a way through the many feisty **Antarctic Fur Seals**, we were able to land. Due to Avian Influenza we couldn't lie down, kneel or crouch (or even squat or bend for that matter). Hearing about the wounds Fur Seals can inflict it doesn't seem like a bad idea anyways to stay on your feet (that particular ship had to turn around to the Falklands after 15 minutes on land in SG). The male Fur Seals are very aggressive this time of the year. Besides Fur Seals there were many **Southern Elephant Seals** (mainly weeners) lying around. The biggest

attraction of Fortuna Bay however is the sheer amount of **King Penguins**; which was amazing! This is one of the biggest colonies in the world (I believe the 4th biggest). When we heard a songbird we knew it had to be **South Georgia Pipit** (e), the only songbird in SG.



The huge **King Penguin** colony is the biggest attraction of Fortuna Bay

As the early morning group was doing a part of the Shackleton hike from Fortuna Bay to Stromness, we went sailing there with the ship after our landing. There were sooo many icebergs around SG, apparently broken off the huge iceberg A68 that drifted to SG a couple of months earlier. This might be the reason that **Snow Petrel** was quite common all around; with sometimes having 3 around the ship (highest count was 9 seen from the ship at the same time!). White morphs **Southern Giant Petrels** were not uncommon, and this was the first day of the trip we had **Northern Giant Petrels** in higher numbers as well.



Antarctic Fur Seals and **King Penguins** are the numerous in Fortuna Bay

Stromness (29 November 2023)

The other group had walked in very misty and snowy weather, being soaked to the bone. We were supposed to land in Stromness ([-54.1584, -36.70583](#)) after them, but as there were too many Fur Seals on the beach this was deemed unsafe. Just to get those passengers back on board they had to form a protective wall with walking sticks to keep away the Seals (sometimes 4 staff to 1 Seal).

**Antarctic Fur Seal adult male****Antarctic Fur Seal pup**

We ended up doing a zodiac ride for about 1.5h, which allowed for some nice views of both the Whaling Station as well as the wildlife around. This mainly involved **Antarctic Fur Seals**, **Southern Elephant Seals** (some of them being quite large males) and here and there something else like **South Georgia Shag**, **Brown Skua** and **Snowy Sheathbill**. We observed multiple **South Georgia Pintail** and **South Georgia Pipit** feeding on the rocks right on the water's edge.

**Antarctic Fur Seals at Stromness****Antarctic Fur Seal at Stromness**

Sailing away at night was filled with looking at the amazing landscapes and the even more stunning sunset. The rugged wilderness of South Georgia is definitely a reason to go there besides the wildlife!

**Mountains and sunsets****Stunning rugged landscapes**

Grytviken (30 November 2023)

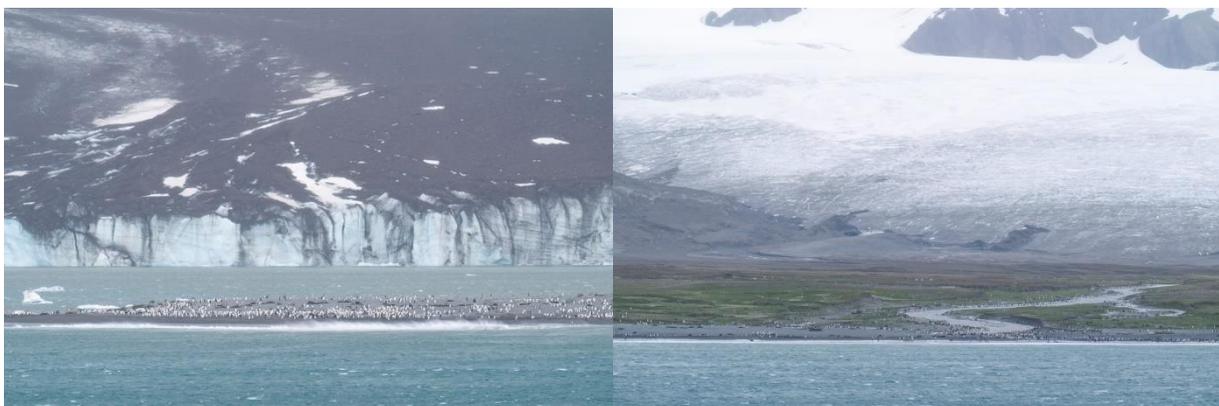
The second day in SG we had our mandatory excursion to Grytviken ([-54.2802, -36.50632](#)). As the government officials from King Edwards Point have to do checks on board, every ship will make this excursion if weather allows. Wildlife-wise this wasn't a very interesting morning, but the **Antarctic Fur Seals** are a bit more relaxed in Grytviken as there are no females around (and they might be more used to tourists). Unfortunately you can't walk in between the Whaling Station anymore, but it's still an impressive site to see and read in the museum about the whaling and sealing times. Besides a toast of Shackleton scotch at his grave we admired the huge male **Southern Elephant Seals** and more **South Georgia Pintails**.



Southern Elephant Seal weener (left) vs adult male (right) in comparison with Antarctic Fur Seal

New Harbour & St. Andrew's Bay (30 November 2023)

After Grytviken we set sail to New Harbour ([-54.3364, -36.2241](#)). The location was closed for landing due to avian influenza, but it didn't matter in the end as winds picked up quite heavily and even zodiac rides were cancelled. The expedition leader decided to head into St. Andrew's Bay ([-54.43029, -36.13566](#)). This bay hosts the biggest **King Penguin** colony in the world, with estimates up to 500.000 individuals including chicks. The captain got as close as he could without beaching the ship to give us an impressive sight of the colony and the landscape. After this we went on our way again to the next destination, enjoying the marvellous landscapes of rugged mountains, icebergs and great cloud formations.



St. Andrew's Bay – King Penguins

St. Andrew's Bay

Cooper Bay (1 December 2023)

It first seemed that instead of the initial 4-5 days we would only get 2 days in SG due to an upcoming storm. Luckily the captain and expedition leader managed to make a plan around that, and we got a third day. This meant we still had a slight chance for Macaroni Penguin! Cooper Bay ([-54.78668, -35.80791](#)) was one of the few sites where we were allowed to do zodiac rides in the south, as the rest was closed due to avian influenza. The landscape was amazing as usual in SG, and we got to see the **Macaroni Penguins** from the ship. Just when they started loading zodiacs the wind picked up and the excursion was cancelled. We brought our telescope up and got slightly better views, but not very satisfactory of course. By the way, it's surprisingly hard to scope from a ship that has the engine on. There were –of course- quite some **King Penguins** here, as they seem to occupy every beach in SG. On the rocks one could observe quite some **South Georgia Shags** and **Snowy Sheathbills**. We didn't see Chinstrap Penguins that have a colony just around the corner of the harbour.

**Cooper Bay****Cooper Bay**

Sailing to the next location we got to observe 1000's of Prions on the water, which was a spectacle to witness! The one's I photographed were all **Antarctic Prion** (one of the most common breeding birds on SG), but there seemed to be Fairy Prions in between too.

Gold Harbour (1 December 2023)**Gold Harbour****King Penguins in front of hanging glacier**

Within 2 hours we arrived at our next and last destination in SG; Gold Harbour ([-54.6256, -35.9359](#)). This site was mainly picked because of its sheltered location and besides; it was one of the few open for zodiac rides in the south of SG again due to avian influenza. Another huge **King Penguin** colony here (the 3rd biggest), set on a nice beach with a hanging glacier as background.



King Penguin in front of hanging glacier

South Georgia Pintail

To maximize our time outside, all 20 zodiacs were prepared and we got 1h45m on the water! We first hang around the rocky area on the east side in hope for **Leopard Seal**. We had to do with **Gentoo Penguin, Snowy Sheathbill, South Georgia Shag** and **South Georgia Pintail**, but other groups got to see the Seal shortly. Of course **Antarctic Fur Seals** and **Southern Elephant Seals** were present, but quite a bunch of them not alive. The avian influenza seems to hit the Seals even harder than the birds here. Still we got to see our biggest male Elephant Seals here, one of which was probably a beach master (most of them have left back into the ocean already and will only come back to moult a bit later in the season). It was hilarious to watch the King Penguins hop, run and tumble over while they tried to get away from an **Elephant Seal** blubbering his way over the beach.



Southern Elephant Seals with King Penguins

Southern Elephant Seal with King Penguins

Due to the storm we didn't sail around the south side of SG, which should be good for Diving-petrels. Luckily as we went north we had headwinds, which caused some of the first Diving-petrels of the trip to fly parallel to the ship for quite a while. I managed to get some photos and these turned out to be

South Georgia Diving-petrel (e)! Besides that we got our occasional **Black-browed Albatross**, **Grey-headed Albatross**, **Light-mantled Albatross** and **Snow Petrel**.

We woke up at 02.00 during the night to hope for a bright starry sky. The captain said that these are some of the most beautiful night skies around, without any light pollution from cities or boats (they have to turn off all the lights near SG to prevent birds landing on the ship). However, when we came on deck we were greeted only by 2 stars and almost full overcast.



Drift winds

Southern Giant Petrel white morph

South Georgia → Antarctica

Dates: 2-4 December 2023

Day 1 (2 December 2023)

As we left South Georgia, the seas were pretty calm and there wasn't too much wind. Bird-wise there wasn't much following the ship, so we decided to head to deck 9 up front. With a nice swell but no breaking waves it seemed perfect for whale watching! This turned out to be true as we had 10's of **Humpback Whales** in the morning, often mixed with **Fin Whales**. Quite frequently the ship had to steer around to avoid a possible collision. Activity died out a bit during lunch, but Fin Whales were seen in good numbers again in the afternoon –albeit sometimes with nothing for 1h-. One time we had a Fin Whale right next to the boat, very clearly showing the white right lower lip.



Humpback Whale

Fin Whale (note chevrons and white lip underwater)

Bird-wise we observed the occasional **Light-mantled Albatross**, **Grey-headed Albatross**, **Black-browed Albatross**, 1 **Snow Petrel** and **Blue Petrels**, besides the usual suspects like **Cape Petrels** and **Prions sp.** The best bird however was observed thanks to one of our guides (Brent). He had been whale watching one deck below us from the bridge on deck 8, when he suddenly came running up the stairs pointing intensely to the front. I thought he'd observed a Blue Whale or something like that, but it turned out to be a bird; small and quite blackish. It made big arches, going high and low (apparently often doing a shimmy at the highest point of the arch); **Kerguelen Petrel!** We got a couple of record shots as it flew off. The guide said he always some them this way, never following the ship for some reason.



Random icebergs along the way



Light-mantled Albatross

Day 2 (2 December 2023)

The Scotia Sea was quite rough and we could feel the temperature drop with the hour as we were getting closer to Antarctica. The strong wind came head on, so most of the decks were closed. The hind deck was pretty ok to stand on, especially after they got rid of the icy layer that had formed overnight. For the whole day 100's of **Cape Petrels** and 10's of **Southern Fulmars** followed the ship, occasionally accompanied by some **Prion sp.**, **White-chinned Petrel**, **Black-browed Albatross**, **Grey-headed Albatross** and **Light-mantled Albatross**. Sometimes **Wilson's Storm-petrel** and **Black-bellied Storm-petrel** were observed.



Cape Petrels



Random icebergs along the way

I decided to scan the far horizon in search of shearwaters when suddenly some people came running towards me, asking if I had seen anything. A bit confused I couldn't say I had, just when I noticed a huge fin not far behind the ship; **Killer Whale** (type A)! Apparently a woman sitting inside had noticed them and shouted 'Orca' through a workshop that was given. Lucky me, as I might have missed them totally! Romy was in the sauna and of course I had no clue where that was. After I had finally found it the Orcas had already gone. We checked the bow just in case, but as we were going 13 knots it might have been a bit too fast for some leisurely bow riding. Another person had spotted **Humpback Whale** that day, and a couple of us observed **Fin Whales** later at night. As we passed within 40km of South Orkney Islands we got to see our first **Chinstrap Penguins** jumping in the water.



Snow Petrel in front of iceberg

Orca/Killer Whale type A

Day 3 (4 December 2023)

We had an hour extra at night as the clock went backwards again, which basically meant I was on deck an hour earlier. Besides the many **Cape Petrels** and **Southern Fulmars** I immediately got my eye on **Antarctic Petrel** that was in between the Capes. As the sea was quite calm it was easy to see whales, and it took only 10 minutes before I observed the first spouts and then the fins; **Fin Whales!** Later that day we had 4 **Antarctic Petrels** around the ship for the rest of the morning.



Distant glow of the A23A iceberg

A23A iceberg

An iceberg that came by had lots of **Adélie Penguins** on them and we eventually saw 100's of them on dozens of icebergs that we passed during the day. Something we hadn't realised is that these

Penguins are quite often missed during a classic 'Antarctic Peninsula only' trip. There are only about 4 colonies with accessible landing sites in 'downtown Antarctica'. With about 45 different ships being around when we were there, there's lots of competition for those sites. They breed on the northeast of the peninsula too, and that is why encountering them on icebergs coming from South Georgia might be your only chance.

We then got to A23A, the biggest iceberg in the world. Already an hour before we got to the iceberg we could already see the glow in the sky; amazing! Seeing **Snow Petrels** in front of this gigantic mass of ice and snow was just fabulous.



A23A iceberg

A23A iceberg with Antarctic Petrel

Cruising along the iceberg we were on the front deck and observed a big spout. It took a long time before we observed another blow, and the Whale only surfaced a little before 'sinking' down. It was only after it came between the iceberg and the ship that I got good looks and pictures of the back and saw that it was mottled. As there were 20 more people on deck I didn't want to shout it out in case I was wrong. Then we got to see it again and we got to see the very small fin (after seeing endless amounts of back); **Blue Whale!** Unluckily all staff was in a meeting and the ship was going fast, so there was no chance to slow the ship down to get prolonged views. Seeing the biggest mammal in the world in front of the biggest iceberg in the world; wow!



Snow Petrel

Blue Whale (note the very small fin on the right)

The rest of the day was filled with many more **Adélie Penguins** on icebergs and one **Chinstrap Penguin** between them. We got one **Snowy Sheathbill** that (unsuccessfully) land on the ship and a **Snow Petrel** that tried the same thing twice on the front flag mast (also unsuccessfully). Another **Antarctic Petrel** was seen just before we headed for our cabin.



Adélie Penguins on iceberg

Adélie Penguins on a small iceberg

Antarctica – Antarctic Peninsula

Dates: 5-7 December 2023

With some delay due to the storm we hadn't arrived at our first landing site yet. We decided to get up around 05.30 to be on the hind deck. This was rewarded pretty soon when we got coffee and Romy spotted a pod of 3 **Killer Whales** type A from the window! We ran to the back deck and were able to see them as they went in the same direction as the ship, but at a way lower speed. Not much later we got to see **Humpback Whale** (the first of many in Antarctica) and 2 probable **Antarctic Minke Whales**.



Killer Whale type A with iceberg

Landscape with icebergs

Day 1 Morning - Mikkelson Harbour (5 December 2023)

We arrived later in the morning and our first landing site down south was at Mikkelson Harbour ([-63.9015, -60.78904](#)). There were quite some **Gentoo Penguins**. This time surrounded by snow and

huge mountains it was a stunning sight to see. Our first **Weddell Seals** were lying on the snow right at the landing site.



Weddell Seal



Weddell Seal with Gentoo Penguin

They made for great pictures as we were able to get a lower vantage point, as we were still not allowed to crouch, sit down *et cetera* because of avian influenza. On the zodiac ride that followed we got up close to a **Humpback Whale**, which was a great experience! Other than that we got to see **Antarctic Shag** from far away.



Zodiac with Humpback Whale



Antarctic Shag

Day 1 Afternoon - Cierva Cove (5 December 2023)

Cierva Cove ([-64.13902, -60.94034](#)) has an Argentine research base (*primavera*), but no landings are allowed there. There was quite some drift ice around, so the zodiac rides were very interesting (it's amazing what these boats can take). The sound of the ice was amazing to hear. Most of our time was spent making our way through the drift ice.

**Lots of ice****In all different shapes and shades of blue**

We got some better looks at **Antarctic Shag** here and a bit surprisingly we didn't see many during our time south. Without any wind it was very interesting to see **Wilson's Storm-petrels** flying in a totally different fashion. There was one **Weddell Seal** on the ice, a **Gentoo Penguin** colony near the base and a **Chinstrap Colony** further up. Seeing porpoising Penguins was pretty cool to see.

**Lots of Ice and some Chinstrap Penguins****Chinstrap Penguin**

As the weather was really sunny all day without too much wind, this was the day for the polar plunch! Quite cold, but fun to have done once!

**Stunning landscapes and porpoising penguins****Ocean Endeavour during a sunny afternoon**

Day 2 Morning – Danco Island (6 December 2023)

Our second morning in Antarctica we went to Danco Island ([-64.7278, -62.6005](#)). Again the main attraction here –better get used to it in Antarctica– is the colony of **Gentoo Penguins**. We decided to spend all our time on land near a penguin highway on a nice slope, making for funny videos and interesting photos.

**Danco Island view****Gentoo Penguin going down the highway**

Other than that we got to see **Weddell Seal** on the ice during the zodiac ride – first ID'ed by the guides as **Crabeater Seal** –. We had a possible Crabeater (long snout and seemingly saggy eyes) when sailing past Danco Island on our way to Cuverville island, but it was too far to be sure from a photo. Some got to see **Leopard Seal**, but for some reason they don't always communicate that well between the different zodiacs about such cool sightings.

**Gentoo Penguin gang****Danco Island landing site**

Humpback Whales were quite a common sight going from Danco Island to Useful Island, especially as conditions in the channel were pretty calm.

Day 2 Afternoon – Useful Island (6 December 2023)

Useful Island ([-64.71393, -62.86796](#)) was an exciting place to go. First of all the surrounding landscapes are just stunning! The island looks out over two straits, and was therefore useful for whalers as a lookout.

**Chinstrap Penguins mating****Gentoo Penguins anyone?**

Nowadays one is able to observe **Gentoo Penguins** (wow right!) and better; **Chinstrap Penguins** on the very top of the island. **Brown Skuas** nest on the rocks somewhere halfway the walk up, and their young are apparently very cryptic and fun to see later in the season.

**Chinstrap Penguin****Penguins going for a stroll at Useful Island**

Day 3 Morning – Neko Harbour (7 December 2023)

This is apparently a very popular landing site in Downtown Antarctica, as Neko Harbour ([-64.84437, -62.5312](#)) is one of the few sites where you step foot on the actual mainland of continent Antarctica.

Gentoo Penguins are abundant here, and there was one **Weddell Seal** resting on land.

**Neko Harbour****Weddell Seal on an iceberg**

One trail went up to a viewpoint, but we chose to stay close to one of the penguin colonies to observe behaviour of these funny birds. After having taken close-up pictures and penguin-in-landscape pictures it was a lot of fun to just watch and observe individuals bringing pebbles to the nests, stealing pebbles from other nests or see them mating.



Gentoo Penguins courting



Gentoo Penguins mating

Day 3 Afternoon – Cuverville Island (7 December 2023)

Our last landing was Cuverville Island ([-64.68398, -62.6287](#)) just north of Danco Island and was – surprise surprise– having **Gentoo Penguins** as the main attraction. The unique selling point here was that it was the biggest Gentoo Penguin colony on the peninsula. We still had super sunny weather and despite factor 50 sunblock and sunglasses most people got pretty sunburned. The island was still covered in a big layer of soft snow, and timing was right. Earlier in the season they couldn't land due to too much snow (zodiac rides only). Later in the season there is way less snow and according to most guides it gets a more penguin-poo colour and thus less pretty.



Peninsula's biggest Gentoo Penguin colony

Iceberg graveyard at Cuverville

When we heard that a single **Adélie Penguin** had been seen from the zodiacs we skipped our last half hour of our land time and went on the zodiac right away. We got some great views of the individual on top of an iceberg. Later we found another on a pebble beach. Unfortunately our driver didn't seem too interested himself, so we got very limited time with these goofy-looking penguins. Apart from some **Weddell Seals** we didn't get to see much else wildlife. But there is always ice to see.

**Adélie Penguin****Weddell Seal**

Antarctica -> Ushuaia

Dates: 8-10 December 2023

Right after the afternoon activity on the third day we set sail back to Ushuaia. Going past the Melchior Islands (-64.32012, -62.94491) we got an amazing goodbye of Antarctica. The water was mirror flat and it was sunny. Besides the stunning surrounding landscapes we got to see about 40-50 **Humpback Whales**, many of them fluking a lot!

**Antarctic Peninsula landscape****Humpback Whales between the ice**

Then someone spotted some high fins in a distance and asked me if I could tell what that was. Quite soon it was clear there was a big pod of 10+ **Killer Whales** type B small coming our way. They were going quite slow and steady, so some passengers went straight to the bridge to tell them. Luckily there was someone from the staff there and the bridge agreed to turn the ship around. After an announcement every passenger was on deck and got to enjoy the big pod while the ship did a 360° circle. After that amazing moment we enjoyed some more Humpbacks and then got into the Drake Passage.

**Killer Whale** female with calf**Killer Whale** type B small with cape visible**Day 1** (8 December 2023)

As we were exhausted from the whole journey and being out on the deck so much, we slept in. We still got to enjoy no less than 15 (!!!) **Antarctic Petrels** following the boat for about 2 hours. The rest of the day we took our time to rest and get some work done like sorting pictures and writing this report.

**Antarctic Petrel****Antarctic Petrel****Day 2** (9 December 2023)

We went outside a couple of times, but not nearly the hours we put in on the other days. Except for many **Black-browed Albatross** and 1 **Grey-headed Albatross** we didn't see much and it was pretty quiet behind the ship. Some people observed **Fin Whale** and **Long-finned Pilot Whales** in the morning.

**Southern Fulmar****Light-mantled Albatross**

There was 1 funky looking Albatross hanging behind the ship for 2 hours, and the guides wrote it down as Wandering Albatross. I couldn't shake the feeling it had to be something else, as I couldn't match the plumage with any of the stages given for Wandering Albatross in the book *SEABIRDS: The New Identification Guide*. Contacting one of the authors it turned out to be a stage 6 **Antipodean Albatross** indeed! Thank you Peter Harrison for your quick reply!

**Antipodean Albatross****Antipodean Albatross**

Late in the afternoon we went past Cape Horn -in perfectly calm conditions- and observed **Southern Rockhopper Penguins** from the ship. There we also had **Chilean Skua** fly by.

As the ship arrived at the harbour around 05.30 on the 10th of December we didn't bother to get up for the last bit of the channel. As we would have had only half an hour of proper daylight. Others that did get up early didn't see anything of note.

**Cape Horn****Strange and dark looking clouds**

Target species and things we missed

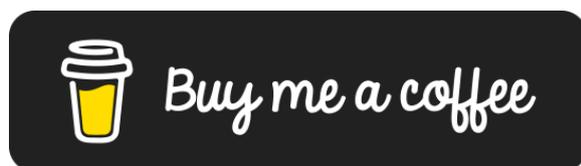
I expected to miss **Ross Seal** for sure (and I so far don't know any guides that have seen them ever on these trips) and I knew chances for **Emperor Penguin** were very slim –especially with a ship that is only ice hardened–. However, I did somehow expect we would see **Crabeater Seal**. I also thought and hoped chances of seeing **Leopard Seal** would be bigger too. Leopard Seal was seen every day in

Antarctica and once in South Georgia by at least 1 of the groups on a zodiac ride, but never by many or for a long time. It also seemed they didn't communicate that well between the different zodiacs about the whereabouts of such a sighting.

Although I am certain enough of our **Antarctic Minke Whale** sighting, I did expect these would be more common to see. Bird-wise we saw more or less everything that I expected to see, including **Antarctic Petrel**, **Atlantic Petrel** and even **Kerguelen Petrel**. However, the latter two were only seen once. **Grey-backed Storm-petrel** was only seen twice by us. Other Shearwaters and Petrels are possible on sea days, but chances might be higher later in the season for those. Even rarer on sea days would be **Orca/Killer Whale type D**, **Arnoux's beaked Whale** or something like that. **Dusky Dolphin** should have been possible if we would have had more proper daylight time in the Beagle Channel. All with all we did very well and it was definitely a trip of a lifetime!

You made it! Thank you for reading 😊

For all photos of our trip, comments, compliments, any specific questions, visit and/or contact us via our website. We would love to hear from you!



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All observations made by us can be found on [Observation.org](https://www.observations.org). We observed a total of 91 bird species and 12 mammal species on this trip to Antarctica, South Georgia and Falkland Islands. Click here for the: [bird list](#), [mammal list](#) or the [total species list](#).

Our Top 5	Birds	Mammals
1	Chinstrap Penguin	Hourglass Dolphin
2	Adélie Penguin	Killer Whale/Orca
3	Snow Petrel	Weddell Seal
4	King Penguin	Antarctic Fur Seal
5	Antarctic Petrel	Southern Elephant Seal

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Weddell Seal



Weddell Seal



Black-browed Albatross



Black-browed Albatross nest



Sunset in South Georgia