

TRIP REPORT

Hooded Grebe Expedition

Argentina

4th-6th November 2017

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INTRODUCTION

Finding Hooded Grebes is one of those great challenges birdwatching offers to the adventurous traveler. Searching for an endangered species is not an easy task, even if you have seen it in the past. Especially so when your target is not just scarce, but also unpredictable on its migration movements and thinly distributed on a vast territory. Not to mention that it lives in one of the most remote areas of South America.

The southern Patagonian plateau is an isolated area, largely unpopulated by man, which seems to have remained unreached by the modern world. This vast territory was modelled by massive geological phenomena, including volcanic and glacial activity, giving to the landscape a sense of inaccessibility and wilderness that is hardly found anywhere else in the planet. Its beauty lays mainly in the fact that the presence of humans is virtually undetectable. This is where this amazing species has evolved to survive and thrive, but in the last decades it's been pushed to the edge of extinction.

Our trip departed from El Calafate, in the southwestern edge of the province of Santa Cruz, Argentina. We drove towards the central west of the province, stopping from time to time to watch and photograph other species from the Patagonian Steppe. Lesser Rheas, Tawny-throated Dotterel, Least Seedsnipe, Magellanic Owl, Patagonian Yellow-Finch, Austral Canastero, the beautiful Cinereous Harrier and lots of Upland Geese, just to mention some. Guanacos, a large, primitive looking mammal related to camelids, were abundant.

After arriving to our lodge and settling in, we were positioned to dedicate a full day to look for the Hooded Grebes. After a few hours driving secondary roads that enter to the very heart of the plateau, we succeeded in our quest and enjoyed amazing views in three different lagoons. The grebes were quietly swimming right in front of us, calling and feeding. We were also treated with fascinating views of several couples performing their breeding display, raising their crests and dancing with their bodies above the water. The conservation project undergoing in the area has estimated a total population of less than 800 individuals, we feel proud of counting over 50 individuals. Nearly 7% of the total population!

Our expedition was also successful in finding the amazing Magellanic Plover and the rare Austral Rail, two highly sought after specialties of the area.

REFERENCES USED ON THE LIST

X = A species seen on several localities.

i = INTRODUCED

e = ENDEMIC SPECIES

eb = ENDEMIC BREEDER

ne = NEAR ENDEMIC (90% or more of their distribution is in one country)

Global threat categories by BirdLife international:

CR = CRITICAL

EN = ENDANGERED

VU = VULNERABLE

NT = NEAR THREATENED



Patagonian Steppe by Hector Slongo



Fitz-Roy and Torre Massif by H. Slongo



Magellanic Plover by Hector Slongo



Hooded Grebes by Hector Slongo



Cinereus Harrier by James Lowen



Austral Rail by James Lowen



Hooded Grebes displaying by James Lowen

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NUM	REF	ENGLISH NAME	LATIN NAME	
Family Rheidae (Rheas)				
1	NT	Lesser Rhea	<i>Rhea pennata</i>	Several groups and individuals
Family Anatidae (Ducks, Geese, Swans)				
2		Upland Goose	<i>Chloephaga picta</i>	Abundant
3		Flying Steamer-Duck	<i>Tachyeres patachonicus</i>	Seen in the lakes
4		Crested Duck	<i>Lophonetta specularioides</i>	Abundant
5		Chiloé Wigeon	<i>Mareca sibilatrix</i>	Common
6		Speckled Teal	<i>Anas flavirostris</i>	Common
7		Yellow-billed Pintail	<i>Anas spinicauda</i>	Common
8		Silver Teal	<i>Spatula versicolor</i>	A few pairs
Family Podicipedidae (Grebes)				
9		Silvery Grebe	<i>Podiceps occipitalis</i>	Abundant. In the distance, easy to confuse with Hooded Grebes!
10	eb-ne-EN	Hooded Grebe	<i>Podiceps gallardoi</i>	57 birds counted in three different lagoons. Swimming, feeding and displaying.
Family Phoenicopteridae (Flamingos)				
11	NT	Chilean Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopus chilensis</i>	Common
Family Threskiornithidae (Ibises, Spoonbills)				
12		Black-faced Ibis	<i>Theristicus melanopis</i>	Several pairs and groups
Family Cathartidae (Vultures)				
13	NT	Andean Condor	<i>Vultur gryphus</i>	Seen a few times
Family Accipitridae (Hawks, Kites, Eagles)				
14		Cinereous Harrier	<i>Circus cinereus</i>	common, great views
15		Red-backed Hawk	<i>Geranoaetus polyosoma</i>	common
16		Black-chested Buzzard-Eagle	<i>Geranoaetus melanoleucus</i>	Birds seen flying and perching
Family Falconidae (Caracaras, Falcons)				
17		Southern Caracara	<i>Caracara plancus</i>	Common
18		White-throated Caracara	<i>Phalco boenus albogularis</i>	Unexpected, but well seen
19		Chimango Caracara	<i>Milvago chimango</i>	Common
Family Rallidae (Crakes, Rails, Coots)				
20	ne-VU	Austral Rail	<i>Rallus antarticus</i>	Good views of this rare rail on the same rush fields where our team rediscovered it in 1998.
21		Red-gartered Coot	<i>Fulica armillata</i>	Common
Family Charadriidae (Plovers, Lapwings)				
22		Tawny-throated Dotterel	<i>Oreopholus ruficollis</i>	good views on steppe habitats
23		Southern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus chilensis</i>	Common
24		Two-banded Plover	<i>Charadrius falklandicus</i>	Common
Family Pluvianellidae (Magellanic Plover)				
25	NT	Magellanic Plover	<i>Pluvianellus socialis</i>	Great views of a couple with a chick
Family Scolopacidae (Snipes, Sandpipers)				
26		Baird's Sandpiper	<i>Calidris bairdii</i>	Common
Family Thinocoridae (Seedsnipes)				
27		Least Seedsnipe	<i>Thinocorus rumicivorus</i>	Abundant
Family Laridae (Skuas, Gulls, Terns, Skimmer)				
28		Kelp Gull	<i>Larus dominicanus</i>	Spreading over the Hooded Grebe territory due to advancing human settlements. Predation over its nests is one of the main conservation concerns.

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Family Columbidae (Pigeons, Doves)				
29		Pacific Dove	<i>Zenaida meloda</i>	Common
Family Strigidae (Owls)				
30		Lesser Horned Owl	<i>Bubo magellanicus</i>	Nice views
Family Furnariidae (Ovenbirds)				
31		Common Miner	<i>Geositta cunicularia</i>	Good views
32		Short-billed Miner	<i>Geositta antarctica</i>	Good views
33	ne	Band-tailed Earthcreeper	<i>Ochetorhynchus phoenicurus</i>	Well seen in scrub habitats
34		Scale-throated Earthcreeper	<i>Upucerthia dumetaria</i>	Seen in desert scrub
35		Bar-winged Cinclodes	<i>Cinclodes fuscus</i>	Common
36		Plain-mantled Tit-Spinetail	<i>Leptasthenura aegithaloides</i>	A couple seen in scrub habitat
37		Cordilleran Canastero	<i>Asthenes modesta</i>	Seen in steppe habitat
38		Sharp-billed Canastero	<i>Asthenes pyrrholeuca</i>	More heard than seen, in scrub habitat
Family Tyrannidae (Tyrant Flycatchers)				
39		Spectacled Tyrant	<i>Hymenops perspicillatus</i>	Nice bird, seen near the lodge
40		Cinnamon-bellied Ground-Tyrant	<i>Muscisaxicola capistratus</i>	Beautiful sights in steppe habitats
Family Hirundinidae (Swallows)				
41		Chilean Swallow	<i>Tachycineta meyeri</i>	Common
Family Troglodytidae (Wrens)				
42		Sedge Wren	<i>Cistothorus platensis</i>	Seen in humid habitats
Family Turdidae (Thrushes)				
43		Austral Thrush	<i>Turdus falcklandii</i>	Common, generally near human settlements
Family Mimidae (Mockingbirds)				
44	ne	Patagonian Mockingbird	<i>Mimus patagonicus</i>	Common
Family Thraupidae (Tanagers, etc)				
45		Patagonian Sierra-Finch	<i>Phrygilus patagonicus</i>	Common
46		Common Diuca-Finch	<i>Diuca diuca</i>	Common
47		Greater Yellow-Finch	<i>Sicalis auriventris</i>	A few couples in rocky formations in the plateau
48	ne	Patagonian Yellow-Finch	<i>Sicalis lebruni</i>	Groups in steppe habitats
Family Emberizidae (Sparrows, Finches)				
49		Rufous-collared Sparrow	<i>Zonotrichia capensis</i>	Common
Family Icteridae (Orioles, Caciques, Blackbirds, Cowbirds, Meadowlarks)				
50		Long-tailed Meadowlark	<i>Sturnella loyca</i>	Common
Family Passeridae (Old World Sparrows)				
51	i	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	Common near human settlements.