

TRIP REPORT

Pelagic Trip off Necochea Buenos Aires - Argentina

26 April 2009

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INTRODUCTION

Our pelagic trip in the Atlantic Ocean started from the city of Necochea, in the province of Buenos Aires: about 5 hours' drive south of the Argentine capital. Over the last 15 years, we've been taking trips either from here or Mar del Plata, a little closer to Buenos Aires city, always with very successful results. At about 38 degrees south, we are near the subtropical convergence zone and, depending on seasons, we can get species which breed as far south as Antarctica all the way up to the Northern Hemisphere.

This time we departed on 26th April 2009. Our group consisted of about a dozen birders, most of us members of Aves Argentinas/BirdLife Argentina, cooperating with the association's Seabirds Program. Our intention was to get as many photographs as possible of every species found during the trip.

We met at the port at about 0700, all geared up for this kind of excursion. Binoculars, waterproof clothing (and sea sickness prevention for some, including myself...). Our vessel was a 15 mt launch adapted for taking up to 18 tourists to sea. Mainly used for fishing, the sailing crew has also made several trips with birdwatchers since our first group some years ago. We had everything we needed for the excursion: offshore sailing permission, plenty of fuel, safety materials, a GPS device and chum (sliced squid).

After receiving the usual safety instructions and reviewing the terminology used on board for pointing birds, we set sail at about 0800. The weather forecast predicted low winds at about 6-12 Km/hr from the south, 1.1 to 1.4 mt waves at intervals of 8 seconds, and variable cloud cover. These were near perfect conditions for a pleasant journey, although higher winds from the east or southeast are usually better to draw in more procellarids near the coast.

While we were still in the harbour, we saw GREAT GREBES, BROWN-HOODED GULLS, TRUDEAU'S TERNS and OLRONG'S GULLS. We passed by a rookery of SOUTHERN SEA-LIONS resting on the beach, which were attended by some 10 SNOWY SHEATHBILLS. Shortly after we were sailing out on the open sea, with several KELP GULLS following us as they usually do.

With our GPS running to track the whole trip, we set a SE course, perpendicular to the coast. We had some MAGELLANIC PENGUINS shortly after leaving the harbour, and after sailing around 3 miles, we saw our first procellarid, a WHITE-CHINNED PETREL. Then a GREATER SHEARWATER appeared and the first BLACK-BROWED ALBATROSS crossed the horizon. They all became gradually more numerous, with the photographers busy at their job, documenting the different plumages.

A juvenile YELLOW-NOSED ALBATROSS appeared then, followed by adults. Both species of albatross were common throughout the trip, flying around and approaching us. The former is about 10 to 1 times more numerous than the latter, although both are suffering a sharp decline due to the impact of long line fishing.

After about an hour's sailing we decided to make a stop and try some chumming. White-chinned petrels approached immediately, followed by Greater Shearwaters, and soon after came the albatrosses. The group was really excited taking pictures and studying the plumages of all the species, at which time we added another one to our lists: MANX'S SHEARWATER. As usual, they didn't approach the boat as other species do, but they were particularly numerous on this trip.

We continued sailing out to sea, now taking an S course, making stops for chumming every hour or so. CHILEAN SKUAS approached periodically, especially during our stops, allowing us to study them carefully and taking some photos. We also had a Jaeger, but it was quite frustrating to see it fly away before we could actually get a positive ID.

At about midday, we decided to change course once again. Bearing East now and approximately 14 miles away from the coast, we had all the aforementioned species accompanying us on very calm seas. A SOOTY SHEARWATER crossed at that time, surprisingly the only one we found on the trip. In wintertime we see hundreds of them, so no doubt it was too early in the year.

Strangely enough, we didn't get any Giant Petrels at all, usually a common sight, so it, too, was probably a question of timing. Other procellarids we have seen in winter are Southern Fulmars, Cape Petrel, Wilson's Storm-Petrel. Summertime brings Long-tailed Jaeger, Cory's Shearwater and Magnificent Frigatebird. After sailing another 10 miles, a sharp-sighted sailor found a pod of COMMON DOLPHINS. Our binoculars soon revealed that they were really numerous, as they spread out over a line approximately 1 Km long. We changed course to approach them, and soon we were surrounded by hundreds, probably thousands! Many came near the boat and jumped up out of the water, allowing us to take many pictures and enjoy their acrobatics.

When time came to return to harbour, the captain proposed we retrieve a fishing net he had spread out the day before. We accepted since this usually lures some seabirds, and soon the crew pulled it out of the water. We were curious about the different creatures caught in the net, until we saw a FRANCISCANA emerging. Unfortunately, it was dead. It was sad to have such a rare dolphin in front of us and being too late to save it. So we took down all the information we possibly could about this poorly known cetacean and reported it to the people in charge of the conservation program.

We landed after eight hours at sea, tired but extremely satisfied with our findings. A list with all the species found follows on the next pages. Our close encounter with the procellarids and the common dolphins surrounding us were voted as some of the best life experiences for the participants on the trip. I specially thank Aves Argentinas for their support and all the trip's participants : Andrés Bosso, Juan Raggio, Daniel Almirón, Yayoi Sato, Ricardo Doumec-Milieu, Marcelo Rodríguez, Carlos Agulián, Hugo Hulsberg, Luciano Ianotti, Maximiliano Montero and David Hilton.

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

Trip Report

NUM	REF	ENGLISH NAME	LATIN NAME	
Family Podicipedidae (Grebes)				
1		White-tufted Grebe	<i>Rollandia rolland</i>	One in the harbor
2		Great Grebe	<i>Podiceps major</i>	Aprox. 20 in the harbor
Family Spheniscidae (Penguins)				
3	NT	Magellanic Penguin	<i>Spheniscus magellanicus</i>	About 100 in the sea
Family Diomedeidae (Albatrosses)				
4	EN	Yellow-nosed Albatross	<i>Thalassarche chlororhynchos</i>	Approximately 50
5	EN	Black-browed Albatross	<i>Thalassarche melanophrys</i>	Approximately 300
Family Procellariidae (Petrels, Shearwaters)				
6	VU	White-chinned Petrel	<i>Procellaria aequinoctialis</i>	Approx 200.
7		Manx Shearwater	<i>Puffinus puffinus</i>	Some 50 or so.
8	NT	Sooty Shearwater	<i>Puffinus griseus</i>	Only one.
9		Greater Shearwater	<i>Puffinus gravis</i>	Several hundreds, probably close to a thousand.
Family Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants, Cormorants)				
10		Neotropic Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax brasilianus</i>	One in the harbor.
Family Ardeidae (Herons, Egrets, Bitterns)				
11		Black-crowned Night-Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>	One in Necochea
Family Falconidae (Caracaras, Falcons)				
12		Chimango Caracara	<i>Milvago chimango</i>	Several in Necochea
Family Rallidae (Crakes, Rails, Coots)				
13		Red-gartered Coot	<i>Fulica armillata</i>	A couple of dozens in the harbor
Family Charadriidae (Plovers, Lapwings)				
14		Southern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus chilensis</i>	Two in Necochea
Family Recurvirostridae (Stilts, Avocets)				
15		Black-necked Stilt	<i>Himantopus mexicanus</i>	About 8 in the harbor.
Family Chionidae (Sheathbills)				
16		Snowy Sheathbill	<i>Chionis albus</i>	Aprox 10 individuals attending a Southern Sea Lion rookery
Family Stercorariidae (Skuas)				
17		Chilean Skua	<i>Stercorarius chilensis</i>	6-8 approx.
Family Laridae (Skuas, Gulls, Terns, Skimmer)				
18		Grey-hooded Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus cirrhocephalus</i>	One in the harbor
19		Brown-hooded Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus maculipennis</i>	Really numerous and surprisingly far away from the coast.
20	eb-ne-VU	Olrog's Gull	<i>Larus atlanticus</i>	A couple of juveniles in the harbor, both banded.
21		Kelp Gull	<i>Larus dominicanus</i>	Same as Brown-hooded, probably followed us even farther into the sea.
22		Snowy-crowned Tern	<i>Sterna trudeaui</i>	Individuals flying near the harbor
Family Columbidae (Pigeons, Doves)				
24		Eared Dove	<i>Zenaida auriculata</i>	Numerous in Necochea
Family Furnariidae (Ovenbirds)				
25		Bar-winged Cinclodes	<i>Cinclodes fuscus</i>	One on the beach in Necochea
26		Rufous Hornero	<i>Furnarius rufus</i>	Common in Necochea
Family Tyrannidae (Tyrant-Flycatchers)				
27		Great Kiskadee	<i>Pitangus sulphuratus</i>	Common in Necochea
Family Troglodytidae (Wrens)				
28		House Wren	<i>Troglodytes aedon</i>	A couple in the harbor.
Family Mimidae (Mockingbirds)				
29		Chalk-browed Mockingbird	<i>Mimus saturninus</i>	Common in Necochea.
		ADDITIONAL SIGHTINGS		
		Common Dolphin	<i>Delphinus delphis</i>	A pod of several hundreds, at ~ 18 miles offshore.
		Franciscana	<i>Pontoporia vlavelliei</i>	A male caught on a net at S38 37 04.4 W58 33 53.6, approximately 12 miles off the coast.
		Southern Sea-Lion	<i>Otaria flavescens</i>	20 or 30 in Necochea harbor rookery, plus some in the water.



Black-browed Albatross



Yellow-nosed Albatross



Photographing sea birds



A group of sea birds approaching our boat



Greater Shearwater



White-chinned Petrel



Albatrosses, Shearwaters and Petrels



Black-browed Albatross



Yellow-nosed Albatross



Common Dolphins

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