



# BIRDS

OF PENINSULA VALDES



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# 6.1 MAGALLANIC PENGUIN

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## SPHENISCUS MAGELLANICUS

Also known as Magellanic Penguin, Child bird, Booby Bird, Donkey bird, Patagonic Penguin or Common Penguin. They visit Valdes Peninsula in their thousands, and allow us to observe them very, very closely.

Penguins are perfectly adapted to marine aquatic life at low temperatures. A product of evolution, their spindle-shaped body allows better displacement of water, resulting in high hydrodynamic corporeal form.

The Penguins' beak is vertically flattened, very strong, long and curved at its end, together making it an excellent tool to capture their food.

Like other birds its beak is adapted inside to regurgitate transported food for their young.

On the bird's palate, there are "rugae (wrinkles) palatal" which channel prey down the oesophagus and prevents it from escaping.

Penguins' wings are short, very flat and strong. They are flightless, but their movement in the water is really a flight rather than swimming. The bird's sternum is

also very powerful, and is a shield to withstand the shock of diving into the water from considerable heights. In water, the wings act as propellers, driving the Penguin at speeds up to 28 miles per hour. They are extremely acrobatic underwater, which is necessary for them to catch their prey and also to allow them to escape predators. This agility comes about by using their feet as rudders.





## BEHAVIOUR

In late January and February, groups of young born the previous season, spend nearly two weeks on land where moult their pens for first time. These non-breeding birds tend to group together under bushes to escape the heat of the Sun.

All penguins moult once a year and during that time remain on land, without feeding.

Penguins spend much of their time preening and maintaining their plumage, which is very important to maintain the waterproof quality of the plumage.

## REPRODUCTON

Males are slightly larger than females and have longer and wider beaks. The male weighs about 4 to 5 kg and is 45 cm tall. They reach sexual maturity at 4 or 5 years for both sexes.

Each year in late August, early September males start arriving, then females. Males renovate nests used in previous years.

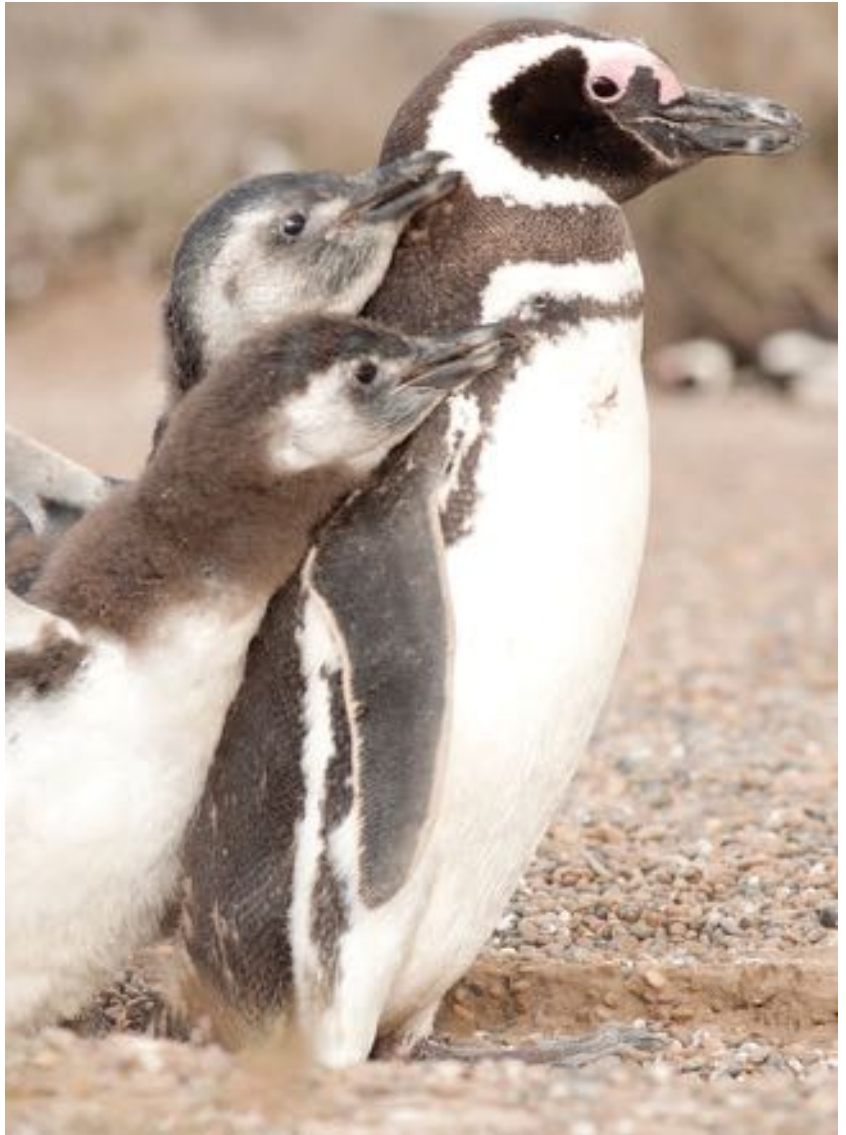
They nest up to about 800 meters from the coast, but natural accidents can make their walk from the sea more than one kilometre.

Females usually lay two eggs in early October and after 40 days of incubation (shared with the male) the chicks are born.

Both sexes defend the nest and feed the young with fish such as anchovies and squid.

The chicks are born covered with dark gray down, which is lost in February when moving into juvenile plumage. At this time the chicks become independent making their first forays into the sea in search of food.

The following year they'll acquire adult plumage after another moult.



*Females usually lay two eggs in early October and after 40 days of incubation (shared with the male) the chicks are born.*



*You can see penguins at Punta Cantor and Estancia San Lorenzo.*

### THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE MAN

While they do not fear the presence of man, they are not 100% sociable. They tend to run behind people who walk between nests, and if someone gets too close or try to touch them, don't have any doubt that will receive a painful peck.

Although Penguins are lucky enough f not to possess anything useful to Man, they are adversely affected by Man's actions, due to over fishing and water pollution, especially with the spillages of oil offshore. Once oiled, penguin's feathers lose their insulating capacity, so they lose warmth and seek refuge on the beaches, where they die by poisoning caused by ingesting oil whilst attempting to clean their plumage and starvation.

It is therefore very important to generate awareness and for strict legislation regarding transportation and extraction of oil.





## 6.2 CHOIQUE (DARWIN'S RHEA)

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### PTMENEMIA PEMIATA

It is the Patagonia symbol. Source of inspiration for stories and legends, the rhea is so present in folklore as in all the paths in Patagonia.

It is a large , herbivorous, flightless bird. They use their soft wings as stabilizers, and are fast runners. It is one of the two “American ostriches”, but unlike its African relative has three toes instead of two.

Females lay 8-10 eggs which are incubated by the male. He also assumes parental responsibility for the “charitos”, who follow him for

most of the summer. In winter they form mixed groups of males, females and juveniles. The harem is composed of one male and one to fifteen females. This varies by region and is very much dependent on the availability of food.

The male measures 1.50 meters and weigh up to 30 kilos; the female is smaller in height.



It feeds on grasses, lowering its head and long neck. The Choique also eat grains, bread, flies and insects which are trapped in the air. Choique have also been known to eat metal items, coins and small stones.

### THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE MAN

The rhea has been one of the species of wildlife most utilised by Man in Argentina. For Patagonian natives, it was a favourite food, along with the guanaco, and they full took advantage of all of it: the meat, cartilage and fat were consumed for food; feathers as ornamental, fans and whisks; the leg tendons were used in making ropes for bolas, bones for musical instruments; leather for tobacco pouches and saddlebags; and the eggshell and feathers were used as medicines.

It is also found of countless legends, as in the following story, which tells how a rhea was the origin of the Southern Cross constellation.

### LEYEND OF THE MOCOVIES TRIBE AND THE SOUTHERN CROSS

“The old chief recalled that his father had told him that Manic, the rhea, was the animal with the most beautiful feathers.

The chief sent for the best hunter in the tribe: Nemeç, an agile and faithful youth.

The boy looked his best weapons. He has never seen a rhea - this mysterious bird was unknown in the hinterland.

Nemeç asked the elders of the tribe to give him advice. He was told that Manic was very fast and it was impossible to find him without his noticing. He had to find a footprint

similar to a bird, but much larger, and that the key was to follow the South path. Grateful Nemeç left with the honour and responsibility of such a goal.

He walked for days until one afternoon, when he found tracks: they were heading south, and he followed them. Walking under the first light of the next day, he noticed something strange. He looked up and there it was.

It was the rhea, with its long, slender legs, with its beautiful plumage shaken by the wind, trembling his little head supported by a long neck, and looking at who knows what... But what struck him most were his feathers and he knew why the chief wanted to have them.

Nemeç remembered his duty. He crept. He almost threw the spear when the rhea escaped at full speed, leaving just an astonished hunter.

The next day, Nemeç followed the tracks and again found his target. But the rhea escaped again. The same thing happened again and again.

Nemeç began to doubt if he really would get to hunt it. Then he found it at sunset. There it was, and the opportunity could not be wasted. Man and animal froze. Suddenly, Nemeç ran with all his might. The rhea ran also. Nemeç flexed his arm and released the weapon. And, according to Mocovi legend, Manic spread his wings and soared. And continued rising until he reach the sky, and in the dim light of dusk, was lost to view.

Suddenly, in the same place where the rhea had disappeared, four stars emerged in a cross: one took



*Choique's chick or "charito".*

the place of the head; two marked the tips of its wings and the last, the end of its legs. Nemeç spent the night watching the sky and recalling images of the rhea he could never catch. The next day, he started back to his home.

He arrived back at the tribe with empty hands but with a twinkle in his eye.

That night, when everyone sat around the campfire, Nemeç told of his strange adventure.

Then, they saw the new stars that the sky was wearing, indicating forever the direction in which Manic had escaped: south.”



## 6.3 TURKEY VULTURE

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### CATHARTES AURA



The turkey vulture is a bird of the vulture family, which can be found all across the Americas. In the different countries of the continent, it has different names, such as buzzard, aura, or just vulture.

In Valdes Peninsula, it is one of the largest of the vultures, with a red head, blackish plumage, more brown on the upper surface of the wings. The underside of the flight feathers are grey, creating a sharp contrast. The head is small in proportion to the body and has no feathers - in adults it is reddish and in juveniles, it is black.

It weighs between 1.4 and 2.7 kg, measures 60-76 cm in length and

has a wingspan of up to 2 meters. It glides with wings in a "V" shape and often sways in a way that gives the impression that it is drunk.

It's typically seen in Puerto Piramides, flying around the valley, and taking advantage of thermal wind generated by the hills that protect the town from east to west, on the north side.

The turkey vulture is a scavenger, ranging over large distances and finding carrion with a keen sense of smell. Typically, it will feed on the carcasses of sea lions, guanaco, hares and rabbits. If it finds a large piece of carrion, such as a calf, it will circle over it, to let other vultures know where the carcass is.

## 6.4 FLAMINGO

### PHOENICOPTERUS CHILENSIS

The Southern Flamingo is a large bird, most often seen in flocks. They can measure five feet, are easily identified by their pink colour on the outer feathers, their long neck, long legs and large wings. The legs have short toes, which are also webbed, helping the bird when swimming.

Male flamingos are larger than females and this feature is the only visible difference between the sexes. The colour of their feathers are acquired by the food they eat, that's why their offspring are born whitish and take on the intense pink colour from the small crustaceans, which form the major part of their diet. Flamingos are not resident in Valdes Peninsula area, however they nest in lakes in the Province of La Pampa.

They are very wary birds and are easily disturbed by human presence. They can be very difficult to approach and photograph. The best way we have found to photograph them is to wait, camouflaged, at low tide. As the tide comes in, the birds will come to feed closer inshore. You must take great care not to alarm them or your opportunity will be lost. Photographing Flamingos requires a great deal of patience, as many of the professional photographers who live and work in the area will attest. Flamingos are not at all used to humans, living completely wild, and are, therefore, very elusive.

Remember that Valdés Peninsula is an important area for wildlife to



raise their young, and, as such is deserving of respect and minimal human impact. There are already 300,000 tourists visiting the area each year and the Peninsula is to some degree, affected by human greed. Please help to raise awareness of the need for respect for our wildlife by your own example.

#### REPRODUCTION

Flamingos are monogamous, and before pair-bonding, males and females gather in groups of up to 150 individuals, and perform the so-called "wedding march", with their necks stretched upwards, moving head vigorously from side to side and up in one direction. The march is accompanied by a strong hoarse croak from the whole group. The birds then form pairs.

Weeks later, nesting begins. Flamingo breeding colonies are characterized by a gathering of thousands of individuals. The nest is usually made of clay, in the shape of a truncated cone, with a

depression in the centre. A single egg only is laid. After 30 days of incubation shared between both parents, the young are born with white plumage and straight beak, which takes the hooked form as they grow. At the age of a week or so, the young birds gather in creches, which can number up to a thousand individuals, guarded by several adult birds.

After a few weeks, the appearance of the chicks changes. Plumage colour turns grey, with black legs, and the beak curves to resemble the parents'. The creches stay together until the age of three months, after which, the young are able to fend for themselves.



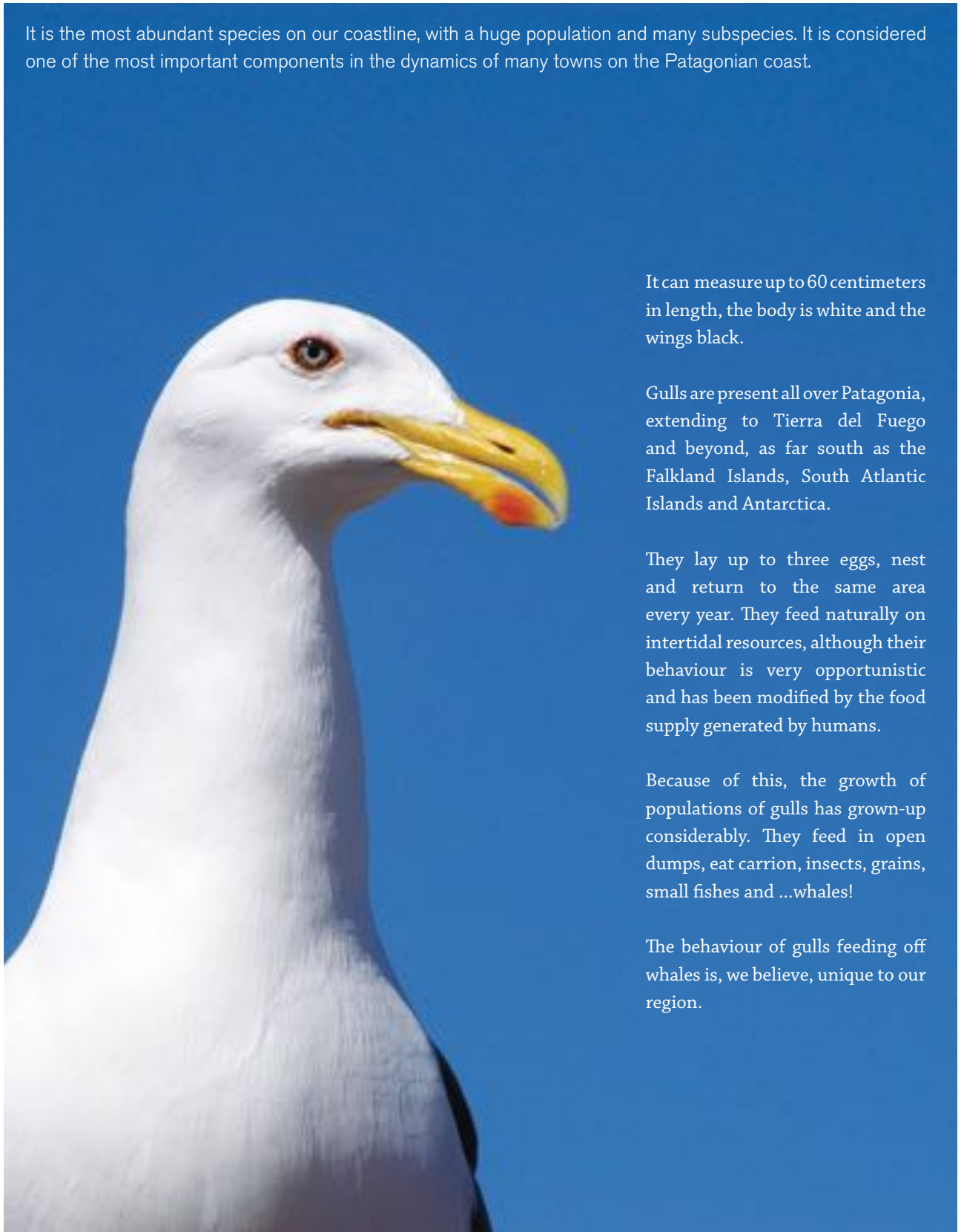
*The best time to see them: from September to April on Bird Island.*

## 6.5 KELP GULL

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### LARUS DOMINICANUS

It is the most abundant species on our coastline, with a huge population and many subspecies. It is considered one of the most important components in the dynamics of many towns on the Patagonian coast.



It can measure up to 60 centimeters in length, the body is white and the wings black.

Gulls are present all over Patagonia, extending to Tierra del Fuego and beyond, as far south as the Falkland Islands, South Atlantic Islands and Antarctica.

They lay up to three eggs, nest and return to the same area every year. They feed naturally on intertidal resources, although their behaviour is very opportunistic and has been modified by the food supply generated by humans.

Because of this, the growth of populations of gulls has grown-up considerably. They feed in open dumps, eat carrion, insects, grains, small fishes and ...whales!

The behaviour of gulls feeding off whales is, we believe, unique to our region.



## ATTACKS TO WHALES

In the last decade whales have been affected by attacks by gulls, who have developed a liking for the proteins in the skin and blubber of whales. Over the years, the technique that had developed by only a few gulls, has been passed on to other birds and new generations, making the attacks happen more frequently and altering the behaviour of these giant cetaceans. Moreover, fish discards and waste dumps, and mainly the landfill at Puerto Madryn, have led to a huge increase in the numbers of seagulls, which have food guaranteed all year, thus increasing their birth rate. As a result, the number of individuals is growing exponentially in Valdes Peninsula.

In order to escape the unwelcome and possibly painful attention of the gulls, whales have taken to adopting the “galleon” position, in which only the animal’s head and tail are exposed above water, the rest of the body being submerged. They also try to outwit the gulls by remaining submerged totally for longer periods, swimming and breaching. These techniques



involve the whales expending a great deal more energy and, as the Valdes Peninsula is primarily a mating and breeding area, where food is not common, could have an adverse effect on the population.

### CASE STUDY.

In 2005, a study group led by Ms. Anne Fazio, Biological Sciences graduate, and Dr. Marcelo Bertellotti, planned a study with three years’ duration, in which the first thing they wanted to know was, if the whales skin and fat feeding behaviour was or was not widespread throughout the population of gulls. They wanted to ring them, so as to identify them when they were attacking. This task took place at Punta Piramides platform, where there is a nesting colony of gulls. They captured the gulls by means of a cannon-net. The gulls were then ringed with individually coded rings and samples of blood and feathers etc were taken, to ascertain the overall health of the gull population.

Despite the great effort and hours of work of the whole group, it became increasingly difficult to

capture gulls, because they learned very fast and avoid the traps. In the event, ringing was achieved only in 20% of the population.

In addition there are seagulls from different areas feeding on whales. Ana says that “(...) for these two reasons, the brand was very dilute, we had only 2% of cases where we saw a branded seagull attacking. Also, with so many hours and days of observation in the water, you could see that even not all the seagulls attacked, it was not a small group, and the worst of all: they were more and more!

We also have an overall record of the Attack Rate during the three seasons of whales watching, knowing the peaks of the curves (times of increased number of attacks per unit time).

This information is very useful, since at the time of taking up the study comparisons can be made with other years to see if the attack rate has increased or decreased. In addition, samples were analyzed to search for pathogens with which the gulls can infect whales; we’ve found some and it is something that really concerns

*us. It is likely that, by moving from whale to whale, the gulls will not only infect the whales with pathogens which they carry, but could also transmit as carriers, pathogens and infections which are carried by the whales. As Valdes Peninsula is an area with a high transient population of whales, including calves, this is a matter of real concern and could have a greater effect on the whales than a mere change in behaviour. “*

One of the most important conclusions, agreed by a majority, was to close the open dump in Puerto Madryn. We know that populations of gulls increased for many years, until '97 and then remained constant. The main causes were fishing discards and waste dumps. That's why the plan launched by the Province to eradicate open dumps around Chubut is an incredible

breakthrough on minimizing environmental impact, and may get the rate of reproduction of the gulls back into balance.

## 6.6 SOUTH AMERICAN TERN

### STERNA HIRUNDINACEA

The South American Tern is one of the 3 species of terns that nest on the coast of Argentina and is found in Peninsula Valdes. It is rather more difficult to observe than the kelp gull, because it has a small population size.

The breeding season begins in

December and you will be able to see them flying over the ledges and cliffs. After nesting, from March onwards they are no longer predictable.

Terns nest every year, but not in the same places, often choosing quiet coastal places in very

exposed sites but are very sensitive to disturbance.

Their diet is based on fish; their fishing technique is to plunge into the sea to capture their prey.



## 6.7 IMPERIAL CORMORANT

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### PHALACROCÓRAX ATRICEPS

The blue-eyed cormorant is very similar to the royal, that's why both species are also referred as Imperial Cormorant.

Along the entire coast of continental Patagonia, the imperial cormorant is a species almost piscivorous but also feeds on marine invertebrates such as cephalopods, crustaceans and polychaetes. The Imperial Cormorant consumes a large proportion of pelagic and demersal fishes such as anchovy, hake and some species of mackerel and

uses a broad range of depths throughout the water column. Recent studies showed that the Imperial Cormorant feeds both in shallow coastal waters as well as deep waters (about 70m) and offshore (more than 8 km). The imperial cormorant is the leading producer of guano in Patagonia. Currently, the guano is mined in only a few colonies of

Chubut and Santa Cruz. The guano exploitation is still carried out in a similar way to that of a few decades ago, and its extraction is carried out manually and sporadically.





## 6.8 KING CORMORANT

### PHALACROCÓRAX ATRICEPS ALBIVENTER

They measure between 60 and 70 cm. and belong to the pelecaniformes order whose most notable character is to have all four toes on the foot webbed, which distinguishes them from any other web-footed bird. King cormorants nest on outgoing sandbars, sometimes sharing the area with sea lions. They form colonies of dozens of individuals as do all fish-eating cormorants. They are excellent divers and a feature is that they propel themselves underwater with the legs- in this they differ from penguins, which use their wings to swim. The plumage of cormorants is not very waterproof and therefore has to be dried in the sun with outstretched wings and tail.



## 6.9 ROCK SHAG

### PHALACROCORAX MAGELLANICUS

They nest in the cliff walls of San José and Nuevo gulfs, forming important colonies. In Puerto Pirámides you can visit a colony on whale watching excursions or boat excursions near Punta Piramides.

#### REPRODUCTIVE CYCLE

Overall, the nesting cycle begins in early October when adults begin to occupy and rebuild the nest. The egg laying starts between the last week of October and early

November, in the Chubut colony, as in Santa Cruz.

The egg laying is completed in periods ranging from four to twelve weeks from the laying of the first eggs.

The chicks hatch between the months of November and December and fledge between late January and February. This species is not migratory, so most Black



Rock Shag breeding adults remain throughout the year in nesting colonies or in the surrounding areas.

#### FEEDING

Their diet consists mainly of benthic fish (those living near the bottom) and to a lesser extent, a few species of pelagic fish (those that move in large schools) and

marine invertebrates (cephalopods, polychaetes and crustaceans). It usually feeds in shallow water (no more than 10 m) and offshore (no further than 5 km).

## 6.10 NEOTROPIC CORMORANT

### PHALACROCÓRAX OLIVACEUS



It is frequently seen flying swiftly, striking the water with a straight and accurate flight, and occasionally touching the surface with the tip of the wings.

#### FEEDING

This species is primarily piscivorous. However, these observations suggest that, unlike the King cormorant and the Rock

shag, the diet of this species is characterized by a high proportion of fish moving in schools and near the surface such as the smelt and bottom fish as bass. In marine environments, this cormorant has been observed feeding both individually and in flocks. It feeds mainly in shallow coastal waters (less than 1.3 km and not more than 10 m depth). After diving in

search of food, it is common to see it with spread wings to the sun on a branch, drying off.

The neotropic cormorant builds nests with branches cemented with their own guano.

# 6.11 AMERICAN OYSTERCATCHER

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## HAEMATOPUS PALLIATUS

The oystercatcher is a large bulky bird, which can reach more than 40 cm in length.

Their weight ranges between 400 and 700 grams.

The plumage is a very intense black on the upper parts of the animal: the back, the head and neck. The undersides however, are a snowy white. The wings are black.

It is noted for the colour of its long and laterally compressed beak from orange to bright red and orange-red eyes. To complete the “collage”, its legs are pink. The flight is strong, walk and it can run fast. Occasionally, it will swim.



### BEHAVIOUR

It is fairly a gregarious animal and you can frequently see them on small groups, moving swiftly on land.

They are very territorial and much of the male's time is occupied defending its territory. It is often seen in aerobatics trying to draw away occasional invaders of the same species.

Some studies indicated that the population of oystercatchers is experiencing a slight decline. Possible causes would point to human plundering of nests or to the destruction of them caused by the increasing coastal occupation and increasingly frequent transit of vehicles used for recreation in nesting areas. To this is added the dwindling resources for human consumption.

### FEEDING

The oystercatcher uses coastal areas of all types: sandy beaches, estuaries

and rocky cliffs, feeding mainly on bivalves, snails, small crustaceans and worms.

They locate the prey visually or by probing the muddy bottoms with their peak, which is very sensitive to touch.

When dealing with hard-shelled molluscs, the oystercatcher uses its beak to cut into the shell and the adductor muscles, usually placing the mollusc on hard rock, causing the separation of the two shells of the bivalves so that the tender meat inside can be removed.



# 6.12 SOUTHERN GIANT PETREL

## MACRONECTE GIGANTEUS

This special bird has an incredibly aerodynamic shape. The distance between the tips of the extended wings reaches 2m. An adult male can weigh up to 5 kg.

The family feature is the nostril, located in the upper beak in the form of a single nasal tube, but internally divided in two by a central partition.

Monitoring these birds has shown that they have incredible flying skills and stamina. One ringed specimen from New Zealand was seen a week later on the Patagonian coast, implying that it flew more than 5000 kms. over open ocean, in less than 7 days!

### FEEDING

They have an excellent sense of smell which helps them find food on the coast. It does not only feed on carrion, such as dead penguins, sea lions and elephant seals, it will also eat penguin or other birds chicks, eggs and sometimes hunts penguins and other seabirds as prey.

In the sea they feed on refuse dumped by hundreds of fishing boats which jettison fish unwanted for human consumption, that is to say that tons of dead fish daily discarded at sea. Human predation is causing birds like Giant Petrel have more food as a result of which, their lifespan and reproduction rate are increasing. Consequently birds currently

appear in disproportionate numbers, compared to previous years.

### REPRODUCTION

In the colonies of northern Patagonia, the laying date (for a single egg) begins during the last week of October and is relatively synchronous. The first chicks hatch during the last week of December. Adults remain in the nest with the chick for nearly two weeks, after which time, the chicks are left alone in the colony while parents feed at sea, returning to regurgitate food for them.

In Patagonia, the chicks become independent around the second week of March and early April.



*You can observe the petrel in Punta Norte.*



## 6.13 CRESTED DUCK

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### ANAS SPECULAROIDES

The crested duck lives in ponds, lakes and freshwater rivers and sea coasts, from the Andes to Patagonian, up to 4,700 m. altitude. It lays five to eight cream coloured eggs .

Incubation takes about 30 days. They feed on molluscs and invertebrates and also eat some algae. They are between 50 and 60 cm and weigh slightly more than one kg. It has a pointed tail, although that of the female is less acute than the male.

During the winter both the Andean and Patagonian subspecies migrate northward, as far as the centre of Chile and Argentina.

The crested duck is an ochre brown

colour, with lighter rump and belly. It has a wide crown (except on the forehead) and dark nuchal crest. Its tone is subdued, except in the flight, when a purple and white flash can be seen. The colour of the iris of the eye is red.



## 6.14 CHIMANGO

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### MILVAGO CHIMANGO



The chimango is a bird of prey characteristic of Argentina, Uruguay, Chile and parts of southern Brazil, and a member of the Caraca family. On the Valdes Peninsula, it is a solitary bird.

It has a wide and varied diet, including, carrion, insects and uses it's excellent vision to catch small rodents. Usually, on the Valdes Peninsula, they nest singly, but they can also form

colonies of nests.

This bird of prey is about 40 cm, the female being slightly larger.

They nest in bushes protected from the sun and rain. The female lays 2 to 5 eggs and incubates for four weeks, one week after, the chicks leave the nest. Because their varied and abundant diet, the chimango is one of the most efficient natural "refuse collectors" and performs an essential role in controlling diseases and pests.

# 6.15 GREAT EGRET

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## ARDEA ALBA

This elegant bird, was on the verge of extinction by early 1900. The cause of this destruction was the prevailing fashion amongst women for “aigrettes”, which were made from the breeding plumage of the male bird.

The spectacular nature of these feathers gave them great value and hunters pursued the bird tenaciously without any control and without respecting the breeding season. Finally, at the last moment, laws began to be applied to protect our wildlife. In this way

the beautiful white egret survived and in recent years they have more numerous but are still rare.

### REPRODUCTION

The Great Egret nests in colonies of several pairs, which may number 20 individuals.

When nesting, the egret chooses wooded areas and builds a large, platform like nest of branches, reeds, leaves etc. at the top of a tree. It lays 6 to 8 uniformly light blue eggs.

After hatching, the chicks are fed by both parents on a diet of toads, frogs, lizards and small fish, depending upon the type of food available and the area where they are nesting. AT about 4 weeks, the chicks are able to forage for food for themselves. When the chicks fledge, the parents abandon them. The Great Egret is a solitary hunter, but roosts and nests in flocks.

It is easily recognised when in flight, particularly when migrating. It flies in flocks, keeping perfect formation, with legs trailing and neck bent into an “S” shape.





# 6.16 MARTINETA TINAMOU

## EUDROMIA ELEGANS



The martineta is a bird with distinct characteristics. It is a land bird which will only fly short distances when under extreme duress, preferring to hide and lie still, blending in with the vegetation. It has a very elegant walk, hence its scientific name includes the word elegans. Its appearance is also very elegant, the head, mottled yellowish brown/ black, is adorned with a long and thin tuft bending forward at the tips.

It takes frequent dust baths.

Their diet consists on insects, seeds, berries and tender stems and it's doet makes it a very useful

bird to Man as it feeds on large numbers of insects.

When danger threatens -mainly the presence of any of the birds of prey- they group together and move in the group. If any of them are left behind, it is inevitable that they will be victims of the predator, who is waiting for the right moment.

Whenever they are in groups, one bird will always act as a lookout and it's behaviour is always imitated by the other members of the group - if it flies when danger is sensed, the others fly also whereas if it crouches and remains still, the

others also do the same.

Their natural predators during all stages (eggs, chicks and adults) are birds of prey (hawks, eagles) and mammals (foxes, skunks, ferrets).

### REPRODUCTION

Martinetas females are polyandric, serving a varying number of males, laying eggs in

the nests made by the males.

Studies on the reproduction of this species made by two north Americans in Valdes Peninsula, Province of Chubut, described the reproductive habits of *Eudromia elegans*

in these terms:

*“.. A female lays 14 eggs (maximum) in the nest of a male. After laying, she visits the nest of another male. And so on until she has laid clutches in seven to eight nests in the course of the breeding season. A remarkable fact is that if one male loses any number of eggs by predation, the female will lay again in that nest before going on to lay in other nests.*

*After three weeks the chicks hatch, and as soon as they dry they are able to move by themselves.*

*At birth they present the appearance of a small grey cotton ball. When the adult plumage grows, they retain the characteristic grey colour. The adult*

*male leads the chicks to search out food and protects them from natural hazards as they feed. When danger is sensed, the adult nods and as if by magic, the chicks all crouch and remain*

*immobile, blending into their surroundings. It is very difficult to locate them and they will not move even if you are a few inches of them.*

*Two weeks after the first attempts at flight begin, they gradually become independent, achieving full independence at four weeks of age”*

## 6.17 VARIABLE HAWK

### BUTEO POLYOSOMA

Also known as “Ñanco”, it can be seen throughout the Valdes Peninsula. The males measure up to 48 cm and the female is slightly larger, reaching 52 cm. The plumage is grey on the back, with a white underside in adults. Its’ most distinctive feature is a black stripe down the tail. Juveniles keep their brownish striped and spotted plumage and yellow legs for two years.

It feeds on small mammals, nothing bigger than the hare and also varying species of birds. Some reptiles, amphibians and invertebrates are also included in the diet. The method of hunting is to fly in a circular motion over an area and plunge at an angle, striking the prey on the back with it’s powerful talons.

Nests are built by both members

of the pair. The Variable Hawk likes thorny trees, in this region, preferring to nest in Molles. The bird will also nest lamp posts. The nest is large, about three feet in diameter and is made of sticks. The male feeds the female during incubation. After the chicks hatch (in December), she will be responsible for them.

Folk tales say that if, when travelling, a hawk crosses your path in front of you, your trip will go well. If, however, it crosses your path behind you, you should take great care until you reach your destination.





# 6.18 BURROWING OWL

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## ATHENE CUNICULARIA

The Latin name of this species “cunicularia” means “digging mines or tunnels”, reflecting how this owl builds its nest: in underground tunnels.

The owl typically nests in open areas, under the protection of a tree or shrub. It chooses sloping ground, which prevents rainwater from entering the tunnel and flooding it. It is not averse to making use of the abandoned nesting tunnels of other birds and animals.

The Burrowing Owl commonly excavates a burrow at the side of fields or by roadsides.

Should the entrance become blocked for whatever reason, it will excavate another burrow at the edge of the field.

The nesting season runs from October to December. The chicks hatch in 28 days. During hot spells, they can be seen rubbing their beaks or cuddling each other.

The owl is not afraid man, on the contrary, it easily adapts to his presence.

It lives in open grasslands and can be found in the Caleta Valdes and Punta Delgada.

### FEEDING

Burrowing Owls have been subject to persecution by Man, due to irrational superstitions. As a result of this, in addition to placing the Burrowing Owl in danger of extinction, this persecution has altered the environmental balance. This is because, as well as birds,



scorpions, insects and other small mammals, which, if allowed to multiply unchecked, would have an adverse effect upon agriculture, they eat rodents which are known carriers of Haemorrhagic Fever, or O'Higgins Disease, which is endemic in Argentina. Many times the man usually irrationality attacks the owls especially because superstitions.

The Burrowing Owl has a refined

sense of hearing. They can hear sounds of low intensity that allow them to detect the presence of small prey. The thick layer of feathers covering its flat face, operates as a kind of receiver screen that helps to focus sounds on the ears.

Their natural predators are ferrets, weasels, cats and foxes, besides man.

Whilst out and about, you are sure to see Burrowing Owls and, through binoculars, you will be able to see the deep and direct gaze of their large eyes. The owl's eyes, like ours are front facing, resulting in binocular vision which allows refined perception of distance. The eyes have many photosensitive cells and large pupils, which permit the bird to distinguish objects clearly in low light.

## 6.19 BURROWING PARROT

### CYANOLISEUS PATAGONUS

They are usually seen on Valdes Peninsula during spring and summer months. It mates for life and nests in cliffs. They dig a deep burrow in which 2 to 5 eggs are laid. The eggs hatch in late December.

The Burrowing Parrot is very colourful and has seven colours in its plumage.

On the Valdes Peninsula, they are usually seen in flocks of 10-20 individuals and are very noisy, constantly chattering.

Their diet is based on shoots and fruits of shrubs, and they also travel great distances to feed in other regions, attracted by planted fields. This frequently leads to conflict with farmers, because they eat the seed and damage crops.

The Eco Lodge would recommend a unique place for travellers, birdwatchers and those who are attracted by birds and nature. 550 km north of Valdes Peninsula, there is a town called El Condor, the Viedma's beach,

capital of Rio Negro province.

Here, there is one of the largest parrot colonies in the world, comprising over 100,000 Burrowing Parrots in 9 km of cliff, something which cannot be seen anywhere else on the Planet.. We were surprised when we saw this incredible cliff, another natural wonder of Patagonia Argentina, which we had never heard of

before. If you decide to go spend a few nights at this resort we recommend the Apart Hotel Costa del Faro, located on the coast, just meters from the cliff.



*For advice and information about travel to El Condor, ask at front desk.*





## 6.20 HOODED SISKIN

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### CARDUELIS MAGELLANICA

This small bird grows to 12 cm and can be seen the length of Argentina, from Tierra del Fuego to Jujuy. Here, they can be seen at Caleta Valdes, nesting on cliffs, next to swallow gully, gathering grass and straws to fix the nest burrows they occupied.

These birds usually nest in the branches of the trees, but unusually, here, we find this good solid home with spectacular views, where 3 to 6 eggs are laid. The Siskin feeds on seeds and sprouts. A curious fact is that, of the 112 siskin species, only the hooded siskin inhabits the Patagonian coasts.

In Andean camping sites is common to see them sifting through the ashes of camp-fires for any food debris which may have been left behind.

They are very active and constantly moving. If they feel the proximity of a human being, they immediately retreat to the top of the nearest tree until the disturbance ends.

It is often seen in pairs or small groups in the breeding season, but outside of that time, it is grouped into large flocks.



## 6.21 PATAGONIAN MOCKINGBIRD

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### MIMUS PATAGONICUS

The mockingbird is native to America and is noted for its amazing, melodious and varied song and its innate ability to mimic other sounds. All Mockingbirds have an ability to mimic the songs of other species and the Patagonian Mockingbird is no exception. This has resulted in the scientific name of the genus being "Mimus", from the Latin "Mimus", meaning "Imitator".

Its plumage is typically greyish ochre on the back and lighter on the neck and chest.



At Puerto Piramides, it is often seen perched and singing on the bushes back of the inn, and in the summer when the Yuyin fruits, it can be found eating these round, red fruits, similar to “piquillín” (*condalia microphylla*). They also include insects in their diet and can be seen chasing moths and butterflies.

It can be found throughout the Valdes Peninsula and is specifically common at Punta Norte and Caleta Valdes.

### REPRODUCTION CYCLE

The mockingbird prefers to nest in small, isolated shrubs, building the nest in one of the lower forks. The nest is cup-shaped and both male and female are involved in building it, using twigs and grass to construct an untidy ball. The interior is neat, lined with straw, horsehair and sometimes wool. The female lays three to five small eggs, measuring about three by two inches and are light blue-green with reddish brown spots.

The incubation period extends from thirteen to fifteen days, and it is the female that broods the eggs. The development of the young is fast and they can leave the nest on the ninth day, but usually remain there between 12-14 days. Typically, they fly very little after leaving the nest, staying hidden among the foliage for a week or two. After this period, they follow their parents, being fed by them. Both parents share the job of feeding the young.

## 6.22 ELEGANT MARTIN

### PROGNE ELEGANS

The Elegant Martin is a migratory bird arriving at the Valdes Peninsula in spring. It has a pleasant, sweet song that is heard when flying or perched, usually accompanied by other martins. It is an excellent flyer, able to soar through the air at high speed and is very manoeuvrable.

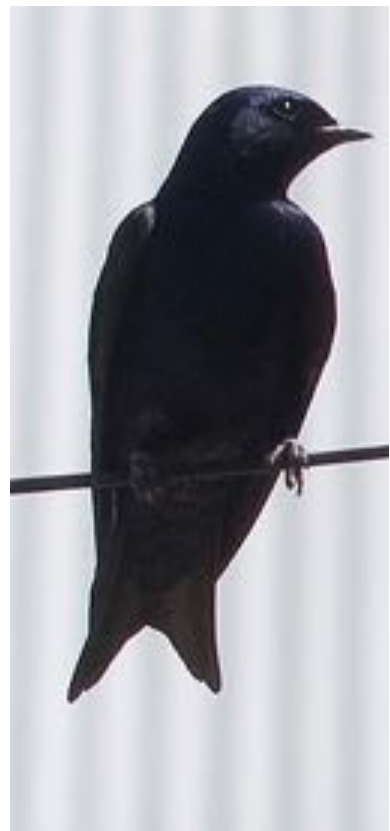
They are very small, measuring less than 20 cm and weigh about 20 gr. The male has a black colour with purple hints and the female has grey under parts, mottled black. They lay several eggs and incubation is 2 weeks long. In 20 days the chick leaves the nest.

Whilst migrating, they can travel a distance of 12,000 km. each way between breeding and wintering grounds. This species migrates particularly to Peru, averaging

200 miles per day. They are insectivorous and feed during the day but do not eat insects which have any form of poisonous sting. They can be seen flying around Puerto Piramides, nesting on rooftops, and there are often disputes between them and the resident sparrows for last year's nests.

They are in turn predated on by raptors, domestic cats, rodents and snakes - the latter being the main natural predators of chicks and eggs. The swallow is the classic bird of Spring - because of its migrations, it lives eternally in Spring.

It makes its nest in hollow walls and roofs with straw matted together, which is then lined with feathers and wool.



### MIGRATION

When approaching the end of the summer season, they are more hectic than usual.

Their agitation, their cries and their daily manoeuvres are a sure sign of its imminent disappearance. Finally, when the day of departure, they group together and rise slowly higher and higher, screaming and performing ariel acrobatics, in a sort of farewell. The migration can start at any time of day, but they have a preference for the afternoon and usually leave when the sun is on the horizon.

They go in groups, remain in pairs within the group. They fly very quickly and only take sporadic brief rest-stops.

They fly by day and do not stop to feed, consuming insects caught on the wing. Sometimes an Elegant Martin, for whatever reason, will miss the beginning of the migration. It will spend the winter the same way as bats: asleep in a shelter, occasionally making a feeding flight during the warmer hours of the day. time to time made, in the hot hours of the day, a feeding flight. This

explains Aristotle's philosophical observation that "one swallow does not a summer make".

## 6.23 BLUE-AND-WHITE SWALLOW

### NOTIOCHELIDON CYANOLEUCA

The blue-and-white swallow is a small migratory bird that visits areas of Patagonia from September to April. One such place is the Valdes Peninsula, particularly Caleta Valdes.

The Blue and White Swallow migrates from Caleta Valdes and the surrounding cliffs, to Colombia, whereas the Elegant Martin, nesting in Puerto Piramides, migrates to Peru.

Both species migrate from April to August.

Swallows are purely insectivorous. Their diet consists preferably by flies, mosquitoes, winged ants, dragonflies and small beetles – all the small flying insects.



## INFORMATION

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If you want to be aware of what is happening right now at peninsula, visit:

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For more information about the lodge, visit:

[www.ecohosteria.com.ar](http://www.ecohosteria.com.ar)



del Nómade Eco Hostería  
Av. de las Ballenas s/n  
Puerto Pirámides (U9121XAQ)  
Chubut - Patagonia Argentina  
Phone: (0280)-4495044  
From abroad: (054) 280 - 4495044