

Notes on the distribution and natural history of some birds in Santa Cruz and Tierra del Fuego provinces, Patagonia, Argentina

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Se presentan registros y notas sobre historia natural y problemas de conservación, y se actualiza la distribución de algunas aves en las provincias de Santa Cruz y Tierra del Fuego, Patagonia sur, Argentina. Las observaciones fueron obtenidas durante el período 1994–2002 y corresponden a 39 especies, muchas de ellas escasamente conocidas, contribuyendo al esclarecimiento de su distribución en esta zona, poco visitada por ornitólogos fuera de la temporada estival. Se discuten y analizan las distribuciones hasta hoy publicadas. Se incluye información de especies categorizadas como casi-amenazadas⁵: *Podiceps gallardoi*, *Macronectes halli*, *Phalacrocorax gaimardi*, *Tachyeres leucocephalus*, *Gallinago stricklandii*, *Pluvianellus socialis* y *Melanodera melanodera*, una Vulnerable⁵: *Larus atlanticus* y endemismos de la zona: *Tinamotis ingoufi*, *Cholephaga rubidiceps*, *Attagis malouinus*, *Columba araucana* y *Asthenes anthoides*. Además se registran 11 especies nuevas para la provincia de Santa Cruz, y 16 extensiones de distribución.

Southernmost Argentine Patagonia comprises Santa Cruz and Tierra del Fuego provinces and a variety of habitats, including austral forest, alpine desert above the treeline, shrub and grassland steppes, and c.2,100 km of sea coast between 46°00'S and 55°00'S. The predominant westerly winds are the region's most remarkable climatic feature, with mean speeds of 30–70 km/h and gusts occasionally reaching 180 km/h in spring and summer. Precipitation, caused by the barrier imposed by the Andes, is concentrated over a narrow western fringe, and diminishes to the east, with means declining from 3,000 to less than 200 mm per annum, creating a striking vegetational gradient. The transition between forest and arid steppe occurs over less than 40–50 km, with bunch grasses (mainly *Festuca* sp. and *Poa* sp.) and shrubs rapidly replacing forests (*Nothofagus* spp.). Much of the area is dominated by extremely dry steppe, forests being restricted to a narrow band (30–40 km) of the Andean foothills. In Tierra del Fuego, the steppe covers the north part of the island and forest follows the Andes, where here run west–east, occupying the southern part.

The huge area (270,000 km²) and its generally harsh conditions have rendered it an ornithologically little-explored part of the country. Furthermore, a strong bias exists towards research in spring/summer (November–February); thus, not only is much of the area poorly known, but there is also an incomplete knowledge of the phenology of most species in the majority of areas.

Here, I report new distributional records and data concerning the natural history and conservation of the poorly known and Near Threatened⁵ Hooded Grebe *Podiceps gallardoi*, Northern Giant Petrel *Macronectes halli*, Red-legged Shag *Phalacrocorax gaimardi*, Chubut Steamer-duck *Tachyeres leucocephalus*, Fuegian Snipe *Gallinago stricklandii*, Magellanic Plover *Pluvianellus socialis* and White-bridled Finch *Melanodera melanodera*, the Vulnerable⁵ Olrog's Gull *Larus atlanticus* and other regional specialities, such as Patagonian Tinamou *Tinamotis ingoufi*, Ruddy-headed

Goose *Chloephaga rubidiceps*, White-bellied Seedsnipe *Attagis malouinus*, Chilean Pigeon *Columba araucana* and Austral Canastero *Asthenes anthoides*. Sixteen range extensions and 11 first records for Santa Cruz province are also reported.

Methods

During the period 1994–2002, I undertook a number of ornithological projects in numerous localities and covering most of the habitats found south of 46°S. These trips also permitted several opportunistic observations. In some cases, searches for, or censuses of, particular species were conducted. Tape-recordings of some species were made using a Marantz PMD-222 recorder and Sennheiser ME-66 microphone, and have been or will be archived at the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology, Ithaca, New York. Collections at the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH), New York, and Museo Argentino de Ciencias Naturales (MACN), Buenos Aires, were visited in search of specimens from the study area. Coordinates of the localities mentioned in the text (taken from GPS readings or topographic maps), altitude and principal habitat of such areas are presented in Appendix 1. All observations are by the author unless otherwise stated.

Species accounts

Patagonian Tinamou *Tinamotis ingoufi*

Poorly known, and little has been published on its ecology. Contradictions exist in the literature regarding its preferred habitat: the species has been associated with the high plateaux of western Patagonia (above 1,000 m)⁵² as well as 'grassland steppes, in sheltered valleys with patches of dense, low brush, mainly at 200–800 m'²³. Several observations demonstrate it to be rather plastic in this respect. *T. ingoufi* was observed at Ruta Nacional (hereafter RN) 40, 45 km south of Perito Moreno (360 m), on 12 November 1995; Ruta Provincial (hereafter RP) 77, in an area known as 'Manchuria' (750 m), on 13 October 1998 (P. Sturzenbaum & P. Imberti pers. comm.); Estancia (hereafter Ea) Coy Inlet (80 m), on 13 June 1999; Ea La Angostura (370 m), in October 1999 (H. Rodríguez Goñi pers. comm.); Bosques Petrificados Natural Monument (hereafter NM; 115 m), in May and October 1997, when breeding¹; 20 km east of the latter locality (110 m), on 3 January 2001, when breeding (P. Collavino pers. comm.) and from where other reports exist¹⁷; Bahía Laura (30 m), on 10 January 2001; Ea Cañadón Vasco (250 m), on 11 January 2001; Cañadón Vacas (150 m), on 22 April 2001 (P. Sturzenbaum & P. Imberti pers. comm.); San Julián Península Provincial Reserve (hereafter PR; 30 m), on 29 June 2001 (S. Sturzenbaum pers. comm.) and 10 January 2002, when breeding. All localities are in Santa Cruz province. All observations involved groups of 1–8, which were often feeding near roads, in open areas with scattered bushes (usually *Junellia tridens*), where they seek cover if approached. Breeding records involved an adult with six chicks and a nest with 12 eggs at Bosques Petrificados NM, and an adult with six chicks at the San Julián Península, demonstrating that Patagonian Tinamou breeds at sea level (not occasionally or only in winter, *contra* Fjeldså & Krabbe²³), as well as on Patagonian plateaux. At most localities, Elegant Crested-tinamou *Eudromia elegans* is commoner than *T. ingoufi*, indicating an overlap in their distributions not observed in Chubut, where *T. ingoufi* is apparently replaced by *E.*

elegans at lower levels or in sheltered valleys, and the two appear parapatric⁵². There are, however, specimens at MACN from lago Musters (29289) and a chick (2763a) from the coast of Chubut, which suggest the contrary. Further searches are needed in the higher plateaux of Santa Cruz to establish the degree of overlap in the area. Farm workers agree that *T. ingoufi* is not common but not infrequently observed, and that numbers diminish following harsh winters with heavy snowfall.

Hooded Grebe *Podiceps gallardoi*

The winter grounds of this species were discovered only recently^{30,32}. During searches of suitable wintering areas, S. Sturzenbaum, E. Rodríguez and I confirmed that it spends much of the non-breeding season (April–August) in Atlantic coast estuaries. At río Coyle estuary we made maximum counts of 50 (May 1998), 65 (April 1999), 70 (May 1999), 55 (June 1999), 20 (May 2000), 250+ (May 2001) and 235 (May 2002). At the río Gallegos estuary, which is larger and less easily surveyed, counts and photos of two (May 1998), nine (June 1998), three (July 1998), 15 (May 1999), 120 (June 1999), seven (August 1999), 33 (May 2001) and five (June 2002) reveal its significance as the second-most important known wintering area. Grebes follow the tides within the estuaries and most appear to be feeding, as they dive frequently, benefiting from the high food concentrations in the channels (also used by *Phalacrocorax* spp., *Larus* spp., South American Tern *Sterna hirundinacea* and some marine mammals) and the currents probably permit them to avoid higher rates of energy expenditure. Others appear just to be resting. I presume that not all birds move into the estuaries on every tide, and therefore these numbers are a fraction of those wintering on coasts, as in other grebes (J. Fjeldså pers. comm.). Courtship display was frequently observed, suggesting pair-bonds persist through winter, or the species mates prior to arrival on the breeding grounds. Magellanic Penguin *Spheniscus magellanicus*, Silvery Grebe *Podiceps occipitalis* and *Phalacrocorax* spp. are regularly drowned in fishing nets, and *P. gallardoi* may also be at risk. Predation of *P. occipitalis* by Brown Trout *Salmo trutta* is known (pers. obs.) and it is possible that some *P. gallardoi* are also taken. Furthermore, illegal introduction of trout on the species' breeding lagoons continues, increasing competition for snails and amphipods on which it depends at this season²³. At the Coyle estuary, Southern Sea Lion *Otaria byronia* has been observed suddenly emerging at the surface, possibly attempting to prey on *P. gallardoi*.

Northern Giant Petrel *Macronectes halli*

Pelagic and poorly known in Argentine waters: of the few available records, most are from the subantarctic islands or the Antarctic Peninsula, and only two from close to the continental coast⁴⁷. A few sight records exist for Chubut and Buenos Aires provinces (M. Pearman pers. comm.). A. Steinfurth and I observed an adult and three immatures feeding very close inshore at Cabo Vírgenes PR, on 20 December 2000, the first record for Santa Cruz.

Red-legged Cormorant *Phalacrocorax gaimardi*

Common on the Pacific coast with a small population on Atlantic shores, in Chubut and Santa Cruz provinces^{19,27}. Mentioned as far south as the Strait of Magellan, but no specific records known^{19,27}. It has been observed at Cabo Vírgenes PR (C. Albrieu & S.

Sturzenbaum pers. comm.) and further west in the Strait of Magellan (pers. obs.). Two were observed in the estuary of the río Gallegos, on 25 May 2001, and photos of other individuals are available from this locality. Indeed, a colony is perhaps becoming establishing in the area, as sightings are becoming increasingly frequent. The north shore appears suitable, and the species is continuing to colonise new areas in the south, with breeders now established at Monte León NP⁵⁷.

Cocoi Heron *Ardea cocoi*

Scarce in Santa Cruz province: a specimen labelled 'Lago Posadas, 20 julio 1941' at Museo de La Plata is probably the first (unpublished) record and only two others are available¹¹. J. Mazar Barnett and I observed one at Ea La Carreta, on 1 April 1998. An adult in breeding plumage was at San Julián Bay, on 14 June 1999, where sightings are regular (M. Iñiguez pers. comm.). There is a record at Los Glaciares NP in 1990 (C. Zoratti pers. comm.). Apparently a reasonably regular vagrant to the province.

White-faced Ibis *Plegadis chihi*

Possibly occurs in Santa Cruz province^{13,23,39,43} and it has been recorded in the Strait of Magellan^{7,48}. However, no specific records for Santa Cruz are available, and only a few exist for Chubut³. Fifteen were found dead at Ea La Alice on 27 April 1999. The previous month, an unspecified number was observed flying over neighbouring Ea La Soledad (L. Bernacchi & B. Roil pers. comm.). These are the first province records.

Ruddy-headed Goose *Chloephaga rubidiceps*

Though not considered formally threatened, the continental population of *C. rubidiceps* numbers fewer than 900 individuals³⁷. Several authors have discussed possible causes of the decline (summarised in Vuilleumier⁵³). Many farmers shoot *Chloephaga* spp. and are unaware that more than one species is involved. Furthermore, they sometimes welcome tour companies on goose-hunting trips. It is probable that shooting is still affecting the population, and this reason should not be eliminated as a possible cause of decrease, as was suggested⁵³. Egg collecting is also common and may affect species. During a two-week visit to Tierra del Fuego (April–May 2001), R. Matus and I confirmed that overgrazing in the north of the island is very severe compared with similar areas on the mainland, especially in marshy areas. Thus, its preference for nesting localities with tall grass near water (R. Matus pers. comm.) should also be considered important in the species' decline²², aggravated by the loss of nests to predators due to the lack of protection³⁷. Those in the Falklands nest 'well hidden in long grass or rushes, in an old Magellanic Penguin burrow, on top of a tussock grass clump or quite exposed amongst low diddle-dee'⁵⁶ and the continental form may have done likewise in the past; unprotected nests are easily predated by introduced foxes, at least in Tierra del Fuego. The continental population, being migratory, is at greater risk and the application of conservation measures consequently more difficult. A pair with five chicks photographed at Cabo Vírgenes PR, on 4 December 2001, is among the few recent confirmed breeding records in continental Argentina.

Chubut Steamer-duck *Tachyeres leucocephalus*

Inhabits coasts from Península Valdés south to Comodoro Rivadavia, Chubut^{26,40}. Observations from Santa Cruz suggest the species may be extending its range south or was previously overlooked, due to identification difficulties³³. Six were at San Julián Bay on 18 January 1996 (M. Pearman, D. Thorns & A. Eardley pers. comm.), two at río Deseado estuary, on 16 January 1998 (J. Mazar Barnett pers. comm.), a pair with three chicks at Bahía Laura, on 1 January 2001, and a pair at San Julián Bay, on 10 January 2002. The Bahía Laura observation is probably the southernmost breeding record and the first for Santa Cruz. More research is required to fully understand its distributional limits and separation from congenetics.

Bicoloured Hawk *Accipiter bicolor*

In southern Patagonia, *A. bicolor* inhabits beech forests in the Andes²³, although Zapata⁵⁹ reported several dead near the Atlantic coast, at least 300 km from the nearest native forest. I recorded two juveniles at Río Gallegos on 15 April 2000. One died soon after discovery, while the other was feeding on a Rock Pigeon *Columba livia*. Though some appear to winter in towns, e.g. Ushuaia¹³, which is surrounded by native forest, it is infrequently reported from open areas and I presume these may have been individuals displaced by the strong south-west winds that prevailed in the week prior to their observation.

Rufous-tailed Hawk *Buteo ventralis*

Considered rare in Argentina, with very few records¹² and a poorly known distribution in the Andes, from Neuquén province to Tierra del Fuego²³. Gelain & Trejo²⁵ present new observations in northern Patagonia and mention the lack of records from Santa Cruz, although it breeds in nearby Torres del Paine NP³⁶. I observed singles at the río Mitre, on 1 January 1995, near the entrance of Los Glaciares NP, and at El Chaltén, on 2 February 1998, in the north section of the same park. Both were in the transition zone between *Nothofagus* forest and steppe, habitat considered typical of the species^{13,23,25}. These are probably the first published records for the province.

White-backed (Black-necked) Stilt *Himantopus (mexicanus) melanurus*

In Patagonia, the species has a similar distribution to White-faced Ibis, with the southernmost records being from central Chubut^{10,26}. Two were at Laguna Nimez, El Calafate, on 8 December 2000 and 11 March 2001. Others were photographed there in 1999 (no specific date, B. Roil pers. comm.) and at Ea La Soledad (L. Bernacchi pers. comm.). These represent the first confirmed reports for Santa Cruz province.

Rufous-chested Plover *Charadrius modestus*

Typical shorebird of alkaline lagoons in southern Patagonia²⁸; concentrations are unknown in the breeding season. P. Sturzenbaum and I observed 200 non-breeders at Laguna Travesía, on 1 January 2000. In late summer, when the lagoons are usually dry, it is observed near rivers and estuaries in groups of up to 30.

Fuegian Snipe *Gallinago stricklandii*

Poorly known and considered Near Threatened⁵. Its presence in Santa Cruz has been implied^{8,23,28} but no specific records are available. J. Fjeldså (pers. comm.) suspects he

flushed two at lago Roca, Los Glaciares NP. It is a probable resident in nearby Región de Magallanes, Chile⁵⁰, where its preferred habitat of marshy, peaty and rushy areas²⁸ is more abundant than on the drier east side of the Andes, where only small pockets of such habitat occur in extreme west Santa Cruz. One at Ea Cancha Carrera, on 13 February 2001 (P. Sturzenbaum & P. Imberti pers. comm.) is probably the first province record.

Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*

In Santa Cruz, observed at Punta Quilla, on 25 January 1987¹¹ and Puerto Deseado, on 16 May 1988 (M. Pearman pers. comm.). Regularly recorded at the río Gallegos estuary²⁰, in flocks of 20–50, usually with Hudsonian Godwit *Limosa haemastica* and Magellanic Oystercatcher *Haematopus leucopodus*, and some overwinter in the area (pers. obs.). Also regularly recorded at Bahía Laura, and accidentally at Cabo Vírgenes PR. In Tierra del Fuego, a regular visitor in similar numbers (*contra* Humphrey *et al.*²⁹) to coasts near Río Grande and further north (L. Benegas pers. comm., pers. obs.).

Surfbird *Aphriza virgata*

Rarely recorded away from the Pacific coast²⁸. Since the first observation in Argentina³⁸ no further records have been published, although several sightings from Río Grande town exist (L. Benegas pers. comm.). On 10 February 2000, two were feeding on exposed kelp *Macrocystis* sp., c.150 m from the Beagle Channel shore, east of Ushuaia. They were walking on the floating kelp, occasionally taking food items. This is the second published record for the country.

Red Phalarope *Phalaropus fulicarius*

Most winter at sea in the Southern Hemisphere²⁸ although inland it is known in Argentina from Buenos Aires, Córdoba, Mendoza, Neuquén, Río Negro and Chubut^{12,14,16,28,51} (M. Pearman pers. comm.). One photographed by C. Albrieu at Laguna Nimez, on 21 October 2000, and I recorded two at Bahía del Viento Norte, lago Argentino, Los Glaciares NP, on 28 November 2001, and another at Laguna Tonchi, Ea La Angostura, on 3 December 2001, the first records for Santa Cruz.

White-bellied Seedsnipe *Attagis malouinus*

During the breeding season, inhabits scree slopes and boggy areas above the treeline in the southern Andes²³, while its winter movements are poorly understood. I found that in direct relation to the prevailing winter conditions, the species descends to steppes, gathering in groups up to 200, but delaying its departure until conditions necessitate. Prefers areas with ground cover dominated by *Empetrum rubrum*, a bush that is possibly encroaching due to overgrazing of other plants (mainly grasses) by sheep, and is becoming dominant on eroded soils (A. Cibils pers. comm.). In less severe winters, small groups remain above the treeline until later, even if the soil is partially snow-covered. Near coasts—in April to August—it is common south of río Coyle to the Strait of Magellan (several pers. obs. and photos) and at Bahía San Sebastián, northern Tierra del Fuego (L. Benegas pers. comm.).

Magellanic Plover *Pluvianellus socialis*

Typically occurs at lakes and lagoons, and not previously recorded on rivers³¹ although recorded once at a rivermouth^{5,29}. I observed it at the río Penitente, at Ea Rincón de los Morros, on 14 February 2000 and 20 January 2002, the río Gallegos, at Ea Glencross, on 21 March 2001, 12–13 February (photos) and 24 March 2002, and río Leona, at Paso Biggieri, on 2 December 2001. All observations involved groups of 1–5. On two occasions, the species was observed drinking water by submerging the entire head, which was raised to swallow. The February observation at río Gallegos was of a pair feeding a chick; the down-covered chick was probably less than ten days old, suggesting the pair may have nested beside the same river, as the closest suitable lagoons are over 10 km away. The río Gallegos estuary is an important site in winter for the species²¹ and it is probable that the species follows the course of the river.

Franklin's Gull *Larus pipixcan*

Northern Hemisphere breeder that principally winters on western coasts of South America²⁷, is accidental in the southernmost part of the continent^{3,50}, and, in Argentina, has been observed in Córdoba, Mendoza and Chubut⁶. De la Peña⁴³ mentions it for Santa Cruz, incorrectly locating a record from Comodoro Rivadavia, Chubut¹⁸ in Santa Cruz, which was corrected by Martínez *et al.*³⁴. On 9 January 1998, J. Mazar Barnett, G. Pugnali, M. della Seta and I observed four at the río Gallegos estuary, the first province record.

Olrog's Gull *Larus atlanticus*

Winter dispersal of *L. atlanticus* in southern Patagonia is poorly known²⁷, although it perhaps reaches Puerto Deseado (northern Santa Cruz)³⁵ or even the Strait of Magellan^{5,19}, but no specific records are available. On 23 September 2001, one was observed at Río Chico PR, probably the first record for the area.

Black Skimmer *Rynchops niger*

Few records exist for southern continental Patagonia^{6,50} and it is rare in Tierra del Fuego, from Río Grande to Cabo San Pablo¹³. S. Ferrari & C. Albrieu (pers. comm.) observed one at the río Gallegos estuary, on 16 March 1999, and S. & P. Sturzenbaum and I observed another there, on 18 April 1999. I also observed one in the Beagle Channel, Tierra del Fuego, on 1 January 2000. It is probably a regular vagrant to the region.

Chilean Pigeon *Columba araucana*

Scarce in southern Patagonia²³, with only two records for Santa Cruz, both in Los Glaciares NP, at Lago Roca²³, the southernmost locality for the species, and El Chaltén, in November 1997¹. J. Mazar Barnett and myself videotaped a dead bird at El Zurdo, on 26 March 1998, c.160 km south of Lago Roca, in open steppe, the third province record.

Black-winged Ground-dove *Metriopelia melanoptera*

Present throughout the Andes, but few records for southern Patagonia or Tierra del Fuego^{13,15,29} and in adjacent Chile is accidental in Torres del Paine NP³⁶ and unknown elsewhere⁵⁰. I observed five near Bahía Túnel on 3 March 1999 and one at the río Mitre, on 17 April 2001 (both Los Glaciares NP). More interesting were two in a rocky valley

(45°50'S 67°56'W, at 600 m), 35 km west of Comodoro Rivadavia, on 2 February 2002, which is probably the westernmost record in Patagonia (and the nearest to the coast).

Ringed Kingfisher *Megaceryle torquata*

Its distribution has been reported to cover all or part of Santa Cruz^{23,24,40,42,55}. In ten years, I have never encountered the species. Furthermore, it is unknown to local people, even from apparently suitable habitat. It is, however, common in forested areas of neighbouring Chile and Tierra del Fuego, suggesting it may favour more humid environments, which are very scarce in Santa Cruz. There are, therefore, no confirmed reports for Santa Cruz, although it may be locally present at the base of the Andes.

Oustalet's Cinclodes *Cinclodes oustaleti*

Poorly known in Santa Cruz²³ from where very few records exist. Ridgely & Tudor⁴⁶ mention its presence in western Chubut and in Tierra del Fuego, with an apparent gap in Santa Cruz, although unreflected in the distribution map. Singles were observed on 18 April and in October 2001 (M. Gutiérrez pers. comm.), and on 8 January, 12 March and June 2002 (including photos), in Los Glaciares NP. One observation involved a bird carrying an insect, probably to an unlocated nest. Another was observed at Puesto La Nana, Ea El Cóndor, Lago San Martín, on 27 March 1999. These records confirm *C. oustaleti* is locally common along the Andes in southern Santa Cruz.

Des Murs' Wiretail *Sylviorthorhynchus desmursii*

Sometimes considered to occur in steppe east of the Andes in Santa Cruz^{39,40}. I can trace no published records from these areas, the only certain occurrences being near the Andes⁴⁴ and a specimen at Museo Argentino de Ciencias Naturales (MACN 3925a) obtained by Radboone at 'lago Argentino, S. Cruz'. It is possibly resident in the Región de Magallanes, Chile⁵⁰. Despite intensive searches, I found it only once, three at Puesto La Nana, Ea El Cóndor, lago San Martín, on 27 March 1999. They were in very dense low bushes, where *Escallonia virgata* was dominant, with *E. rubra*, *Berberis* sp. and *Embotrium coccineum* also present. Given the lack of such habitat away from the Andean foothills, and that the only certain records are from such areas, it can be assumed that *S. desmursii* is largely restricted to the Andes^{23,44,46}.

Austral Canastero *Asthenes anthoides*

Endemic to southern Patagonia, Vuilleumier⁵⁴ states 'there is no evidence that it occurs from southwest Chubut southward through Santa Cruz', but suspected that surveys of this area might find it. Although no records from the west are available, the distribution is sometimes considered to cover most of Santa Cruz⁴⁶. *A. anthoides* was observed at río Bote, in December 1994, when breeding (L. Bernacchi pers. comm.), El Calafate, on 2 March 1995, Ea La Soledad, on 3 February 1998, and Ea Cristina, Los Glaciares NP, on 8 April 2000. There is a specimen (MACN 4766a) from lago San Martín, it is present at Perito Moreno NP and it breeds in Torres del Paine NP³⁶. These records confirm its presence in the Andes to central Santa Cruz. Surveys further north are required to confirm whether the northern population is disjunct. I observed that *A. anthoides* is present in a variety of shrub-steppes⁵⁴ but not in grassland, as erroneously suggested²³ (J. Fjeldså pers. comm.). On the Atlantic coast, it is common from río Gallegos south to

Cabo Vírgenes PR and, in winter, groups of up to eight are regular (pers. obs. and tape-recordings), confirming the assumption that it is not migratory²⁹.

Wren-like Rushbird *Phleocryptes melanops*

Few records from southern Patagonia in general, where usually considered rare, accidental^{13,29,40,50} or absent^{23,46}, although now confirmed to breed at Torres del Paine NP³⁶, and specifically from Santa Cruz¹¹. I observed it at El Zurdo (photos), Laguna Nimez, and Eas. La Angostura, San Lorenzo, 9 de Julio, El Cóndor, La Alice, Coy Aike, La Soledad and María Aike, being common south to the border with Chile (52°00'S). It may be extending its range or becoming more abundant, as was not recorded in such areas until recently, despite previous visits to suitable areas²³.

Black-throated Huet-huet *Pterotochos tarnii*

Ranges along the Andes south to north-west Santa Cruz, in Argentina, and northern Magallanes, in Chile^{2,23,46,50} although Narosky & Babarskas⁴⁰ extend it to southern Santa Cruz but mention 'Araucarian forests except in the south'. I recorded it at río Blanco on 2 February 1998, El Chaltén, on 12 December 1998 (photos) and 8 March 1999 (all in Los Glaciares NP), Puesto La Nana at Ea El Cóndor, on 27 March 1999, and it is common at Perito Moreno NP (A. Falcone pers. comm.), extending its range to at least 50°30'S in southern Santa Cruz and it could occur locally farther south as, despite being absent from nearby Torres del Paine NP³⁶, it has been recorded at Península Brunswick, Chile (pers. obs.). One observation at Los Glaciares NP involved an adult feeding 2–3 chicks at a nest in an abandoned Magellanic Woodpecker *Campephilus magellanicus* hole, c.2 m above ground.

Many-coloured Rush-tyrant *Tachuris rubrigastra*

As with *Phleocryptes melanops*—though no records from Tierra del Fuego—*T. rubrigastra* may also be extending its range, as it had not previously been recorded in suitable areas of the region¹¹. Usually considered to reach south to north-central Santa Cruz^{23,46,40} and recently extended to Puerto Bandera⁹, near Los Glaciares NP. Since 1995 I have observed it regularly at Laguna Nimez and Eas. La Angostura, La Soledad, 9 de Julio, San Lorenzo and La Alice, extending its range to at least 51°00'S. To confirm the expansion, fresh visits to localities farther south where it has not been detected (El Zurdo, Ea Brazo Norte and Pali Aike NP, Chile) are advisable.

Spectacled Tyrant *Hymenops perspicillatus*

Easily detected due to its habit of perching on exposed branches. A similar situation to *Phleocryptes melanops*, with no records from Tierra del Fuego. M. Kusanovic (pers. comm.) reported the first sightings at Ea La Angostura in 1993, raising the possibility that *P. melanops*, *Tachuris rubrigastra* and Yellow-winged Blackbird *Agelaius thilius* may have become recently established in southern Patagonia, as previous workers failed to record it²³ or did not cover this area⁴⁶; only recently has its range been extended south to Puerto Bandera⁹. Few records for Santa Cruz are available¹¹. Since 1995, I have regularly recorded it at Laguna Nimez, Lago Posadas, El Pluma and Eas. La Angostura, La Soledad, María Aike, and Los Glaciares NP, and there are also records from Bosques

Petrificados NM. It is present south to 51°00'S and, like the previous species, it should be specifically searched for even further south.

Southern Martin *Progne modesta*

Zapata⁶⁰ first mentioned its presence south of Chubut, where is probably a regular visitor^{17,58}. In a trip from Bahía Laura, on the Atlantic, towards the Andes, through Bosques Petrificados NM and following the río Deseado Valley, on 10–13 January 2001, *P. modesta* was the commonest swallow, in groups of up to 20. Very few Blue-and-white Swallow *Notiochelidon cyanoleuca* and Chilean Swallow *Tachycineta meyeni* were recorded where *P. modesta* was present, but both are increasingly common as *P. modesta* becomes increasingly scarce in the southernmost part of its range, in northern Santa Cruz.

White-bridled Finch *Melanodera melanodera*

Near-Threatened species⁵ of southern Patagonian grasslands and Falklands, the mainland population may be suffering a reduction in its habitat due to overgrazing by sheep, and is considered to be declining^{23,45}. Usually observed on moderately well-preserved pockets of Magellanic steppe grassland in southern Santa Cruz as follows. RP 1: five adults on 10 January 1998, two adults and three juveniles on 16 May 1999, one adult on 29 December 1999, 40+ adults on 7 May 2000, several pairs on 25–26 November 2000, two on 30 October 2001, 20 on 4 December 2001 and 20 juveniles on 6 January 2002. El Zurdo area: flocks of 20 and 50 on 22 March 1998, four on 26 March 1998, flocks of 10, 15 and 20 on 21 May 2000 and three on 11 November 2000. Ea Sofía: several pairs and four flocks of c.50 each on 18–19 May 1999, flocks of 30, 50 and 60 on 21 May 2000, two males on 4 October 2001 and 15 on 12 December 2001. Ea Buitreras: pair with a juvenile on 18 January 2002. Laguna Travesía: 60 in several groups of 4–5 or singles on 1 January 2000. RN 40, near Escarchados: ten on 21 May 2002. Occurs in pairs or up to five in the breeding season (November–February) and in flocks of up to 60 in winter. Rarely observed where grass cover has been severely reduced, and uncommon north of río Gallegos. Pressure on grasslands is intense and further destruction of habitat through desertification and degradation is expected if practices are unchanged⁴.

Common Diuca-finch *Diuca diuca*

The distribution appears not well understood, as it has been shown to cover western Patagonia from Neuquén to Chubut being accidental at the coast of Santa Cruz⁴¹, or northern Santa Cruz^{23,45} and including south Chile to the Beagle Channel²³. In Santa Cruz, regularly observed wherever steppe with scattered bushes is present, e.g. Bosques Petrificados NM, Los Glaciares NP, lago Argentino (also M. Pearman pers. comm.), lago Posadas, río Bote, Ea Cóndor, La Angostura, La Lucha, Morro Chico, La Cabaña and around Gobernador Gregores, extending its range over most of the province.

Greater Yellow-finch *Sicalis auriventris*

Distributed along the Andes²³, in Argentina, the southernmost record is in northern Chubut¹⁰ (Camperi pers. comm.). On 31 December 2001, four were at Sierra Baguales, in a barren area of basaltic rock (c.700 m), the first record for Santa Cruz and a range extension of c.1,000 km. It is noteworthy that on the Chilean side of the same massif, R.

Matus & A. Jaramillo (pers. comm.) observed a group on 20 November 2001, a range extension for that country.

Grassland Yellow-finch *Sicalis luteola*

The known distribution of *S. luteola* in Argentina extends to Chubut^{10,23,39,43,45} and although accidental in Tierra del Fuego^{13,29} no records exist for Santa Cruz, where it may also be a vagrant⁴⁰. J. Mazar Barnett and I observed four at El Pluma, on 15 January 1998, and I observed several more at the same location on 12 January 2001. These are the first records for Santa Cruz where it is probably under-recorded.

Yellow-winged Blackbird *Agelaius thilius*

In Patagonia, its status is similar to *Phleocryptes melanops* with no records from Tierra del Fuego. Few records for Santa Cruz existed^{11,45} until its range was extended to Puerto Bandera⁹. It is a breeding migrant at Torres del Paine NP³⁶. Individuals or flocks are frequently observed at El Pluma, Laguna Nimez, lago Posadas, Eas. La Angostura, La Soledad, 9 de Julio, San Lorenzo, La Alice, María Aike, Los Glaciares NP, and occasionally at Bosques Petrificados NM. These records extend its distribution south to 51°00'S and expansion farther south can be expected.

Shiny Cowbird *Molothrus bonariensis*

Known south to southern Chubut^{23,39,40,45}, the only record further south being from Región de Magallanes, Chile⁴⁹. However, it is accidental at Perito Moreno NP (A. Falcone pers. comm.) and I observed a flock of six at El Pluma, on 12 January 2001. These are the first records in Santa Cruz.

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