

The Falkland Islands

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1	Depart Brize Norton.
Day 2	Arrive Mount Pleasant & transfer Stanley.
Day 3	Volunteer Point
Day 4/6	Bleaker Island.
Day 7/9	Sea Lion Island.
Day 10/11	Carcass or Saunders Island.
Day 12/14	Pebble Island.
Day 15/16	Port Stanley.
Day 17	Depart Mount Pleasant.
Day 18	Arrive Brize Norton.

Departs

October/November.

Focus

Birds & marine mammals.

Grading

Grade A – easy walks but sometimes over rough terrain.

Dates and Prices

Visit www.naturetrek.co.uk (tour code FLK01).

Highlights

- Explore some of The Falkland's smaller islands including Pebble, Carcass and Bleaker
- Southern Rockhopper Penguin colonies
- Visit the King Penguins of Volunteer Point
- Gentoo & Magellanic Penguins, plus colonies of Black-browed Albatrosses
- Southern Elephant Seal, Orca and Commerson's Dolphin all possible.
- Explore Port Stanley
- Landbirds including Long-tailed Meadowlark, Tussock-bird & the endemic Cobb's Wren



Southern Rockhopper Penguins, Black-browed Albatrosses & Southern Elephant Seal (Shutterstock Images).



Naturetrek Mingledown Barn Wolf's Lane Chawton Alton Hampshire GU34 3HJ UK

T: +44 (0)1962 733051

E: info@naturetrek.co.uk

W: www.naturetrek.co.uk

Introduction

Lying just 480 kilometres from the coast of Argentina amid some of the richest fishing grounds of the South Atlantic, the Falkland Islands are inhabited by huge numbers of seabirds during the breeding season which extends from October to March. Arriving from Britain the visitor finds a landscape which brings to mind the northern isles of Scotland and there is an essentially British feel to life in the settlements. The wildlife, however, is excitingly different. It is this constant blend of the familiar and unfamiliar that makes the Falklands such an interesting place to visit. Walking along the seafront at Stanley one might almost imagine being in a small North Sea resort until a Northern Giant Petrel sails past on stiff wings and reminds you that these waters are only some 1,000 kilometres from the edge of the Southern Ocean surrounding Antarctica!



Prior to the 1982 conflict, the Falklands enjoyed a quiet anonymity, helped by the lack of direct air services from Europe and shortage of accommodation away from the capital Port Stanley. A population of about 2,000 was distributed around a landmass roughly the size of Wales with isolated settlements relying on sheep farming as the principal source of income. The post-war construction of a military airfield at Mount Pleasant facilitated a regular direct air link with the UK and, realising the potential for bringing interested civilian visitors to the islands, a tourist plan was initiated by the newly formed Government Tourist Organisation. To provide suitable facilities a custom-made lodge was built on Sealion Island, one of the most interesting islands for wildlife in the south of the archipelago, and existing buildings at other locations were upgraded to receive parties of tourists. The infrastructure has been in place for over two decades now and whilst mass tourism was never contemplated, a steady stream of visitors have been able to enjoy this unique holiday destination.

The Falklands archipelago comprises the two main islands, East and West Falkland, plus some 778 other islands of varying sizes, many of which remain uninhabited. Travel between the far-flung settlements is accomplished by a fleet of light aircraft operated by the Falklands Island Government Air Service (FIGAS) which utilize grass strips and even beaches to maintain a daily link between the islands. We will be using FIGAS flights to reach the offshore islands which form the principal components of this exciting Naturetrek tour, and will enjoy a birds-eye view of the islands en route between settlements.



Grass strip runway (G. Stacey)

This will certainly be a wildlife holiday with a difference combining Southern Ocean seabirds, neotropical land birds and marine mammals with an intimate view of a very individual style of island life which has managed to endure despite the dramatic events of recent history.

Itinerary

Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.

Day 1

Depart Brize Norton

We check-in at RAF Brize Norton in Oxfordshire for our scheduled RAF flight to the Falkland Islands.

Day 2

Mount Pleasant & Port Stanley

Our flight to the Falkland Islands departs normally in the very early hours of the morning and includes a two-hour refuelling stop at Cape Verde. We are due to touch down at Mount Pleasant



Port Stanley (M Capper)

Airport on East Falkland at around 1730 hours, a large military complex constructed after the Falkland conflict which has revolutionised island life by facilitating regular air links with the UK.

Once at Mount Pleasant Airport, you will meet your tour leader and transfer to the Malvinas House Hotel in Port Stanley for a one-night stay.

Day 3

Volunteer Point

King Penguins are everyone's idea of what a penguin should look like, thanks no doubt to their association with the famous biscuit advertisements! Standing some three feet high, it is a very striking bird which lives a very rigorous lifestyle in the southern oceans but it is difficult to resist smiling at these natural comedians as they amble about their nesting grounds like so many bewildered waiters. The main breeding population is on Sub-Antarctic islands to the south of the Falklands, but small numbers do occur among Gentoo Penguin colonies at various places around the Falklands and an increasing colony of over 500 pairs has been established at a remote headland called Volunteer Point which we will visit today.

Formerly groups were taken to Volunteer Point by boat, but in recent years improvements to the limited network of island roads have made access by motor vehicle a more popular all-weather option. Whichever mode of transport is favoured, it entails a long journey from Port Stanley but any discomfort is quickly forgotten on reaching the flat headland where the King Penguins congregate. Areas of open country away from Port Stanley are known to islanders as the 'camp', and the peat moorland at Volunteer Point is a typical example of the most widespread habitat on the islands, a mix of various grasses and a heather-like shrub called Diddle-Dee (*Empetrum rubrum*). The ground



King Penguins at Volunteer Point



King Penguins incubating eggs

here is honeycombed with the nesting burrows of Magellanic Penguins and as we walk past the entrances many pairs of eyes will follow our progress. The King Penguins tend to congregate on an area of flat ground not far from the sea and in this well trampled clearing we may find several hundred adults and young. Because of their protracted breeding season some birds are invariably present at the colony, but November is the peak period for egg laying so we can expect maximum attendance. The young

penguins, which are fed for an astonishing 11 to 12 months are even more comical figures than their parents, the youngest resembling large chocolate brown balls of fur with a long bill poking out of the top and large feet at the bottom. Slightly older birds exhibit all manner of transitional plumage with some individuals almost in adult dress but still retaining random tufts of juvenile 'fur' sprouting from unlikely places. The best strategy is to settle down near the colony and simply watch the entertainment. The adults occasionally throw back their heads in courtship display but it is the

youngsters that provide the best show. Overcome with curiosity they gradually shuffle closer, uttering a variety of whistling cries and periodically beating their stumpy little wings as if making a futile attempt at flight. Within minutes the advance guard will form a bemused line just a few metres away then one or two bolder than the rest will advance even closer and start nibbling at our feet and clothing or any interesting items of equipment scattered about on the grass. It is impossible to resist these entrancing creatures and for once it is easy to get frame-filling photographs without recourse to special lenses.

The King Penguins are the star act but other birds inhabit Volunteer Point and we can expect to see plenty of Upland Geese, the attractive Kelp Goose, Crested Duck, Turkey Vultures, Crested Caracara, Brown-hooded Gull, Magellanic Oystercatcher, Rufous-breasted Dotterel, and Two-banded Plover. There is also a sizeable colony of Gentoo Penguins here too. If conditions are at all windy it may be worth looking out to sea from the point as even a short watch can produce a number of seabird species.

Black-browed Albatrosses are numerous off this coast but rarer relatives including the huge Southern Royal Albatross are possible and other less predictable birds could occur.



Days 4 – 6

Bleaker Island

Next, we fly to Bleaker Island, located off the south-eastern corner of East Falkland. Bleaker is long and thin island with a very long and intricate coastline that attracts a multitude of wildlife. The island is home to three species of breeding penguin (Magellanic, Southern Rockhopper and Gentoo) and a variety of wildfowl and seabirds, plus Southern Sea Lion and Southern Elephant Seal. The key wildlife is also conveniently located close to the settlement which makes for easy exploration. The Bleaker Island Group is internationally recognised as an Important Bird Area and the northern part of the island was designated as a National Nature Reserve in 1970. Several of the tussock islands



are rat-free, and are home to both Cobb's Wrens and Tussac-bird, whilst Sooty Shearwaters and Grey-backed Storm-petrels have recently been found to be breeding on Sandy Bay Island and, probably, on Ghost Island too. The main island covers 2,070 hectares and is edged with low cliffs, sandy beaches, bays and sheltered coves. It's easy walking country, and sunset overlooking Sandy Bay with a mixture of Gentoo and Magellanic

Penguins congregating on the white sand is just one of the spectacular views to be enjoyed in the whole of the Falklands!

The northern end of Sandy Bay teems with Gentoo Penguins which walk down from the top of Penguin Hill, just to the north-west of the bay, where the breeding colony of about 3,300 pairs is located. Magellanic Penguins also nest in extensive burrows just behind the beach, as they do along

Silvery Grebe (K Elsby)



many coastal fringes of the island. There are occasional sightings of King Penguins in this area too. Seven sub-colonies of Southern Rockhopper Penguins (about 700 pairs), breed alongside the southern side of Long Gulch, whilst the rocky cliffs of the gulch itself are a nesting site for Rock Shags. In the nearby extensive tussac plantations, Tussac-bird and Falkland Grass Wrens can often be seen or heard. These tussac areas also offer regular sightings of Black-chinned Siskins, Dark-faced Ground-

tyrants, Falkland Pipits, Black-throated Finches and Long-tailed Meadowlarks.

Both Big and Small Ponds are popular with Chiloe Wigeon, Silvery and White-tufted Grebe, Speckled and Silver Teal, Flying Steamer Ducks and Black-necked Swans, whilst the surrounding open areas are frequented by Crested and Striated Caracaras, Variable Hawks, and decent populations of Ruddy-headed Geese, Two-banded Plovers and White-rumped Sandpipers. Adjoining coastal zones are favourite haunts of the Falkland's Flightless Steamer Duck, Magellanic and Blackish Oystercatcher and Crested Duck.

Days 7 – 9

Sea Lion Island

Our next flight will take us to Sea Lion Island, the most southerly inhabited island in the archipelago. The time of our departure will depend on the FIGAS schedules.

Macaroni Penguin (K Elsby)



Anyone with a fondness for islands will love Sea Lion Island. A slab of rock eight kilometres long by two kilometres wide it embodies all the attributes a wildlife enthusiast could wish for, not least being a warm and comfortable lodge! Undeterred by a lack of accommodation on the island, the Falkland Islands Government arranged for a pre-fabricated tourist lodge to be shipped to the island in 1986 and in a tricky exercise

involving boats and helicopters it was lifted into place. Visitors can now enjoy the benefits of this very special hotel which occasionally has Southern Elephant Seal pups in the garden and frequently Striated Caracaras perched on the roof. With three nights on the island we have plenty of time for a thorough exploration on foot and by Landover to reach the further extremities. Three species of penguin breed regularly, each preferring a different type of habitat. Magellanics honeycomb the short turf near the shores, Gentoo form dense crowds around bulky mud nests on flat ground and Southern Rockhoppers favour sloping cliffs which they access by suicidal-looking landings through thundering breakers at the foot of the cliffs. Southern Rockhoppers coming ashore have been featured on many natural history films and we will certainly spend some time watching their determined efforts to reach the rocks. Other Antarctic penguins are occasionally drawn in by the nesting colonies; King Penguins are not unusual among the Gentoos and Macaroni Penguins regularly turn up amid the similar-looking Rockhoppers. Rarer vagrants are also seen from time to time, in fact ten species of penguin appear on the Falklands bird list!



Cobb's Wren



Southern Elephant Seal (K Elsby)

As we explore Sea Lion Island we will encounter extensive stretches of Tussac Grass (*Poa flabellata*), a characteristic maritime grass of sub-Antarctic islands which is very vulnerable to grazing and as a consequence is becoming increasingly rare on the Falklands. Clumps can grow up to 4 metres high and the dense cover it provides is an efficient wind break for small birds such as Cobb's Wrens and the entertaining Tussac-bird. This dumpy, all dark member of the cinclodes tribe has a very restricted world range and is just as

inquisitive as the caracara, the arrival of a human visitor triggering off a frenzy of twittering calls as the birds stream out of the tussac to view the newcomer! Black-crowned Night-Herons also like to pass the daylight hours roosting in the tussac and Short-eared Owls can sometimes be watched hunting along the dunes.

Some of the other residents on this magical island include Silvery Grebe, Rock and Imperial Shags, Ruddy-headed, Upland and Kelp Geese, Crested Duck, Chiloe Wigeon, Falklands Flightless Steamer Duck, Peregrine, Turkey Vulture, Crested Caracara, Magellanic and



Snowy Sheathbill

Blackish Oystercatchers, Two-banded Plover, Rufous-chested Dotterel, Magellanic Snipe, Brown-hooded, Kelp and Dolphin Gulls, Dark-faced Ground-Tyrant, Black-chinned Siskin and Black-throated Finch. Passage flocks of White-rumped Sandpipers pause to feed along the seashore and offshore rarer seabirds can occur among thousands of Black-browed Albatrosses gliding over the ocean. There is a very big colony of Black-broweds on Beauchene Island to the south of Sealion, and it is one of the commonest birds in the waters around the islands.

Sea Lion Island is also noted for its marine mammals. Strangely enough only a few Southern Sea Lions are likely to be seen during our visit but we will witness scores of snorting, groaning Southern Elephant Seals on some of the beaches and youngsters often travel some distance from the shore, appearing in most unexpected places in the interior of the island. The animals on the beach will be



a mixture of cows with newly born pups and immature males but most of the really big adult males will be out to sea although a few could still be present asserting their dominance over the young pretenders. The sight of these enormous beasts confronting each other with all the bluster and bravado of a playground fight is a memorable experience, but one best viewed from a discreet distance as the bulls can move a lot quicker than their bulk suggests! Always in attendance around the seals are pigeon-like Snowy Sheathbills, a tough southern ocean scavenger which finds rich pickings around penguin and seal colonies. The activity on the beaches also attracts Orca and for prolonged periods they are a regular sight off Sealion Island. November is a good month for sightings and whilst nothing can be guaranteed, we have enjoyed a performance by these magnificent creatures on each of the last five tours.

Days 10 – 11

Carcass or Saunders Island

Carcass Island:

We continue our exploration of West Falkland by embarking on a short domestic flight to Carcass Island. This delightful island in the north-west of the archipelago takes its name from HMS Carcass, which visited in the late 18th century. For over a hundred years the island has supported a thriving sheep farm and is particularly noted for having a large, and tame, population of landbirds thanks to an absence of cats and rodents. It also boasts extensive areas of tussac providing cover for such species as Cobb's Wren and Tussac-bird which are very vulnerable to predators where these occur. Over a dozen pairs of Striated Caracaras breed here and there are also colonies of both Gentoo and Magellanic Penguins. Accommodation on Carcass Island is a little simpler than some of the other lodges but this is a favourite island among many visitors to the Falklands and regarded as one of the most pristine and picturesque of all the many wonderful locations in West Falkland.

Gentoo Penguins



If conditions are suitable we hope to take a boat ride to West Point Island (subject to the island being open to visitors) which lies to the south across an expanse of clear water where both Peale's and Commerson's Dolphins may be seen. West Point is particularly important for an accessible colony of Black-browed Albatrosses, but it also supports a typical selection of Falkland seabirds including Southern Rockhopper and Magellanic Penguins. The albatrosses are remarkably tame as they sit on their mud nests and will allow close approach. Staring into the dark eyes of a sitting bird, it is difficult to imagine the years of ocean wandering that constitute the life of these magnificent seabirds, an existence that is spent in the harshest of environments amid conditions that we can

Magellanic Penguin (K Elsby)



barely contemplate. The recent decline in albatross populations has demonstrated how vulnerable these magnificent birds are to modern fishing practices and it is to be hoped that colonies such as West Point will continue to flourish for future generations to enjoy. The Falklands boast a sizeable share of the world population of Black-browed Albatross, and it is estimated that over 14,000 pairs breed on West Point alone.

Our time on the island depends on factors such as tide and weather but after visiting the albatrosses we hope to have time for at least a cursory look at this attractive and wildlife rich island before

returning to Carcass. Only two people live on West Point and we will probably enjoy afternoon 'smoko' in their cottage before catching the return boat to Carcass.

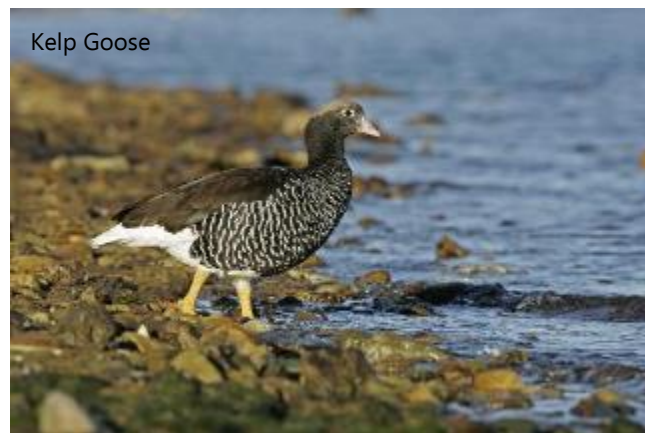
Carcass has penguin colonies at the southern end of the island, but the north is of particular interest for naturalists, as there are scores of Southern Elephant Seals among the inhabitants of the shoreline. The overwhelming impression here is the sheer abundance of birds and in November many of the residents will be either sitting on eggs or protecting young. Hundreds of Upland Geese

goslings are tended by anxious parents, Magellanic Oystercatchers pipe nervously at intruders and Magellanic Snipe fill the air with the ethereal sound of their drumming display flights. In the short turf near the coast we may find clusters of elegant Lady's Slipper Orchids adding their delicate beauty to the landscape.



Striated Caracara

Back at the comfortable lodge there is also plenty of birdlife to keep visitors entertained in the surrounding garden and shore. Striated Caracaras, one of the world's rarest raptors, congregate around the buildings on the lookout for any scraps on offer. It is also one of the tamest of all raptors



Kelp Goose

with a fearless curiosity which can almost seem intimidating as a flock of these buzzard-sized birds attempts to discover the contents of your pockets! Carcass Island contains a good population of 'Johnny Rooks' as the islanders call these birds, and we will see them daily. Meanwhile Black-chinned Siskins sing from the belt of conifers surrounding the settlement and pairs of attractive Kelp Geese sort out their territorial quarrels on the nearby beach.

Saunders Island

If West Point Islands is closed to visitors, we will visit Saunders Island instead of Carcass Island (subject to availability of accommodation), also in West Falkland, to allow us to visit a breeding Black-browed Albatross colony. Saunders Island has dramatic scenery, and is particularly well known for The Neck, with its swathe of white sand a direct contrast to the rugged hills on either side. It is made up of three peninsulas joined by narrow sections of land known as necks.

The island is named after Sir Charles Saunders, a prominent British Naval Admiral and First Lord of the Admiralty, not to be confused with Saunders Island in the South Sandwich Islands which is also named after the same gentleman. It is the site of the first British settlement in the Falklands, Port Egmont, which was established in 1765 as a garrison and village by the Royal Navy. Farmed since 1948, it still supports a thriving sheep farm, with many more sheep than inhabitants! It's been owned by the same family for around 40 years and is open to visitors during the summer season. The



Black-browed Albatross

highest point is Mount Richards at 457 metres and the northern slopes hold around 12,000 pairs of Black-browed Albatross during the breeding season. These albatross mate for life and use the same nest in the same colony every year. They sit on their towering nests made up of mud, guano and a small amount of vegetation. A single egg is laid in early October and are incubated for between 68 – 71 days; during November the parents take turns incubating their egg.

While off the nest, the adults may travel over 200 miles per trip to find the best feeding grounds for fish, krill and squid. These long-lived birds may not return to a colony to breed until they are between 7 – 10 years old, and they can live for over 50 years, returning to the same breeding island year upon year.

Five species of penguin are found here – Southern Rockhopper, Magellanic, Gentoo and King breed here, while Macaroni Penguin are occasional breeders and only seen irregularly. On the expanse of white sands at The Neck, penguins are a frequent sight, crowding onto the beach, and their raucous calls carry across the island. Along the shoreline, wading species such as Blackish Oystercatcher and Two-banded Plover can be seen amongst the Kelp Geese and Falkland Steamer Ducks. Caracaras and skuas lurk in the hope of grabbing an unguarded egg or hatchling. The wealth of wildlife found here has caused the island to feature on BBC's Planet Earth and National Geographic programmes, among others.

Elephant Point in the north west is, unsurprisingly, where Southern Elephant Seals haul out, creating a small colony. South American Sea Lions are known to surf the waves in sheltered inlets, and the sandy



King Penguins

coves are excellent places to watch out for the black and white bodies of Commerson's, or perhaps Peale's, Dolphins. Both are small dolphins, although Commerson's is the smaller of the two with more sharply defined back and white patterning, while Peale's Dolphins have shades of grey in their

colouration. If the conditions are right, it is also possible to spot larger cetacean species from the shore.

Days 12 – 14

Pebble Island

Each days' FIGAS flight rota is determined the preceding evening in accordance with passenger requirements, thus it is not possible to know too far in advance what time a particular flight departs. Our first flight, however, will take us to Pebble Island for a three-night stay. One of the largest northern islands, it is over 38 kilometres long and comprises areas of grassland and a distinctive trio of conical mountains along the western side. There are many freshwater pools and marshes of varying sizes making this an attractive breeding area for wildfowl. In shape it is essentially two large islands joined together by a neck of land and the settlement is situated on this isthmus. A magnificent sandy beach adjacent to the buildings is sometimes used by the FIGAS aircraft as a landing strip but before each landing someone from the settlement has to ensure that no Elephant Seals or sea lions have gone to sleep on the runway! Pebble operates as a working sheep farm, but the former manager's house has been converted into comfortable visitor accommodation forming an ideal base to explore this interesting island. Because of the distances involved, most of our excursions here will be by landrover but there are plenty of walking opportunities too.



Pebble Island at this time of year is teeming with young birds. Upland Geese are abundant and will be starting to congregate into huge flocks in preparation for their summer moult. Ruddy-headed Geese are only slightly less numerous and every headland seems to have a pair of Kelp Geese standing on the rocks. Falkland Steamer Ducks occur in rafts around the coastline, but it is worth paying particular attention to any birds seen on the freshwater lakes as these could be the confusing



can be watched sailing around on the open water with tiny cygnets hitching a lift on their parents back.

Flying Steamer Duck which is easy to overlook. If a steamer duck sustains flight for more than ten seconds it is probably the latter! Most of the pools support breeding populations of wildfowl with Speckled and Yellow-billed Teals the most frequently encountered ducks along with smaller numbers of Chiloe Wigeon. With a little luck it may also be possible to find a few Silver Teals with perhaps one or two rarer vagrants. The most striking residents are the stately Black-necked Swans which nest on one particular pond and

The nesting frenzy is not confined to wildfowl and everywhere we go on Pebble there will be evidence of the season with some birds still sitting on eggs, others looking after chicks. Both Silvery and White-tufted Grebes inhabit the pools, Magellanic and Blackish Oystercatchers create a typical fuss at any intrusion, Snipe 'drum' over the marshes and Two-banded Plovers escort chicks through the vegetation. The long and varied coastline offers many other attractions for us and during our stay we will visit a number of sites where the inhabitants of the cliffs include; Rock and Imperial Shags, Southern Rockhopper Penguins, Black-crowned Night Herons, Turkey



Southern Rockhopper Penguin

Vultures, Peregrine Falcon, and Dark-faced Ground-Tyrant. Magellanic Penguins burrow into the turf wherever they can and, although only Magellanic and Southern Rockhopper can be regarded as guaranteed residents, most seasons one or two Macaroni Penguins can be located amid the Southern Rockhoppers and a few King Penguins come ashore to commence their protracted moult. Pebble is also a particularly good location to view Southern Sea-Lions, the massive bulls with their leonine features and fearsome yellow teeth looking much more menacing creatures than the Californian Sealions of circus fame! Scanning out to sea we will once again witness large numbers of Black-browed Albatrosses cruising over the waves, sometimes joined by Sooty Shearwaters, White-chinned Petrels and other seabirds from Steeple Jason to the west which is an important island for nesting seabirds.

Other breeding birds include Falkland Skua, Red-backed Hawk, Rufous-breasted Dotterel, Long-tailed Meadowlark, Falkland Pipit, Black-chinned Siskin and Black-throated Finch making the Pebble



Long-tailed Meadowlark (K Elsby)

bird list one of the most varied of any island in West Falkland and it is also favoured by passage waders such as White-rumped Sandpipers giving potential for a few unexpected additions.

Mention should also be made of the Pebble Island flora which includes delicate Dog Orchids, Vanilla Daisies, Pale Maidens and many other attractive species which will be in flower at this season. The only

resident butterfly on the Falkland Islands, the Queen of Falkland Fritillary, may be seen on sunny days sipping nectar from these moorland flowers.

Day 15

Port Stanley

Today we will fly to Port Stanley for a two night stay at the Malvina Hotel. The brightly painted roofs of Port Stanley clustered along the shore of a wide inlet look strangely familiar from many hours of



Crested Duck

news coverage, but the capital is much smaller in reality than most visitors expect. The population of around 1,800 is barely that of a small English town and even on the busiest of days the sparse motor traffic is a refreshing contrast to the chaos of modern cities. The cathedral is one of the most prominent landmarks in the town and like most of the buildings faces north overlooking the harbour. Stanley was once regularly visited by sailing ships and early steam vessels taking advantage of a final

refuge before braving the treacherous waters of Cape Horn and the harbour formed the last resting place for some of these vessels which returned from the experience in such a damaged condition that they were unable to continue their voyage. The hulks of these ships represent a veritable maritime museum and a guide book can be obtained in Stanley detailing the history of the various wrecks. The best preserved of these are popular nesting sites for Rock Shags which delight in building their bulky seaweed nests wherever they can find a large enough platform among the decaying timbers. A stroll along the waterfront after settling in at our hotel should quickly provide further evidence of the southern latitude for in addition to the Rock Shags we are likely to find Kelp and Dolphin Gulls, South American Terns, and perhaps a Falkland Steamer Duck dabbling in the shallows. Northern Giant Petrels will be gliding like albatrosses over the water or quarrelling over some disputed scrap of food. Although magnificent to watch, these huge seabirds are arch scavengers and cruise Stanley inlet looking for anything that is remotely edible in the water.



Dolphin Gull

The Dolphin Gull is a particularly attractive member of its family, a neat slate-black and white bird with deep red bill and legs. Nesting activity is just beginning at the time of our visit and males will be energetically courting their mates with elaborate bowing and posturing. Other birds might be

discovered in the gardens around Stanley, such as the ubiquitous Falklands Thrush. Should anyone wish a little more exercise we could follow the shoreline west from the town to a muddy bay where Crested Ducks and Speckled Teal may be found and White-rumped Sandpipers feed in the tidal pools.

Day 16

Port Stanley & Cape Bougainville

Our last full day on the Falklands will be spent at Cape Bougainville. We'll use 4x4 vehicles to reach the cape, where Macaroni and Rockhopper Penguins nest. Located on the north coast of East Falkland, this is a very picturesque destination with cliffs and sandy beaches. It's around a 2 hours drive from Port Stanley and we'll have the opportunity to view different landscapes and spot wildlife along the way. Once there, we'll look for sealions resting among the tussock grass and along the shores we may find Southern Giant Petrel, Imperial Cormorants and various gull species.

Day 17

Depart Port Stanley

We leave Port Stanley after an early breakfast and drive to Mount Pleasant where the RAF flight to Brize Norton departs mid-morning. As we pass through the rough terrain en route to the airport we are likely to spot our last Falkland birds from the coach and typically these will include Upland Goose, Turkey Vulture, Rufous-breasted Dotterel and possibly a few waterbirds on roadside pools and creeks.



Day 18

Arrive Brize Norton

The flight is scheduled to arrive back at RAF Brize Norton at around 0900 hours.

Images courtesy of Shutterstock, Graham Stacey, Kevin Elsby & Matthew Capper

Weather

Contrary to the popular image it is not always cold and wet in the Falklands, indeed it can be quite warm and sunny in the spring with a high risk of sunburn in the clear unpolluted atmosphere. Conditions do, however, change with great rapidity and it is frequently windy, adding a wind-chill factor to temperatures. The average wind speed is about 15 knots but stronger gales occur regularly. The average monthly temperature is around 15 degrees C with a range of 5-20 degrees C. Rain can occur at any time and should be packed for.

Tour Grading

This is a traditional birdwatching and wildlife tour with a moderate amount of day walking. Walks are mostly easy in nature but the terrain can be rough, rocky and sandy in places.

Focus

The main focus of the tour is birds and mammals, as well as the landscapes of the islands.

Food and Accommodation

All meals are included in the tour price. Accommodation will be in a comfortable hotel in Port Stanley and in comfortable tourist lodges at most other locations. Tourist accommodation on the Falkland Islands was either custom built in 1988 or upgraded from existing accommodation to achieve a suitable international standard and all rooms have private facilities, except on Saunders Island, should we be visiting there. The standard of catering is very high, utilising local vegetables and meat.

Saunders Island has the most basic of all the accommodation. Here we stay in a large house, with shared bathroom facilities. There are also a limited number of rooms, so single occupancy rooms may not be possible for these few days. Catering will be done slightly differently and coordinated by your tour leader or guide. Evening meals will be a set menu, although any dietary requests will be catered for.

Flights

We normally use the MOD flights from RAF Brize Norton for this tour, as these are the most direct flights available. These operate twice weekly and have a refueling stop part way, either at Ascension Island or the Cape Verde Islands. Flights from Brize Norton are operated by Air Tanker and all seats are of the same standard. Meals are provided, however it is a dry flight (no alcohol) due to being a military operated flight. In flight entertainment can be accessed via an app.



Air Tanker interior & exterior

The only alternative flights are via South America, with a weekly flight from São Paulo; these used to be twice weekly and it is hoped that the second flight will be reinstated.

Flights to and from the Falklands are dependent on suitable weather conditions for landing and taking off on the islands as there is only one runway and it can be very windy, so you need to be prepared for changes being made to the travel plans.

Extensions

It is possible to extend your time in the Falkland Islands, or to visit South America at either end of the tour. If you would like to discuss options and possibilities, please contact the Naturetrek office for further information.

Your Safety & Security

Risks to your safety and security are an unavoidable aspect of all travel and the best current advice on such risks is provided for you by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. In order to assess and protect against any risks in your chosen destination, it is essential that you refer to the Foreign Office website – www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/falkland-islands prior to travel.

How to book your place

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website. Please stipulate any special requirements, for example extension requests or connecting/regional flights, at the time of booking.

Receive our e-newsletter

Join the Naturetrek e-mailing list and be the first to hear about new tours, additional departures and new dates, tour reports and special offers. Visit www.naturetrek.co.uk to sign up.