

Trip Report: Argentina (January 9th – 11th 2015)

Río Negro Province

I followed up my enjoyable November 2014 morning of birding in the Monte Desert near to General Roca in Río Negro province with a full weekend visit in early-January 2015. Local residents Jaime (a co-author of a Neotropical Birding article on the area) and Cristina hosted me for visits to a variety of habitats including: Monte Desert steppe in the Ruta 7 area above Paso Córdoba (a few km to the south of General Roca); an area with larger Monte Desert trees at Chimpay (some 130km east of General Roca); open water, reed and rush beds at Lago Pellegrini (some 70km north-west of General Roca), and the banks of the Río Negro at both Paso Córdoba and Cipolletti.



Carbonated Sierra-Finch [Ruta 7, Río Negro]

Jaime and Cristina welcomed me to Río Negro with an excellent *asado*, accompanied by vegetables from their organic farm, during which we firmed up our weekend birding plans. First on the agenda was an early-morning visit to the flat steppe habitat at the start of Ruta 7, beyond Paso Córdoba and the desert scrub where we had birded in November and above the *bardas* (cliffs) that border the Río Negro valley. Although the absolute number of birds was low, the quality was high, including endemics such as Carbonated Sierra-Finch (several inquisitive pairs), Rusty-backed Monjita (small family groups, with the adults being particularly sharp looking birds), and Patagonian Canastero (including some worn adults). Despite the flighty nature of the birds (see the ‘life of a photographer’ photo later in this trip report), the low scrub vegetation and warm morning light made for good photographic conditions, so we came away with photos of all three, plus Sharp-billed Canastero and Common Diuca-Finch. Unfortunately, Sandy Gallito was added as a ‘heard only’.

Near to the lookout at the top of the *bardas*, which offers panoramic views across the green strip of agriculture along the Río Negro, we added close up views of several Crested Elegant-Tinamou that crossed the dirt road (one of which then attempted to hide in plain view under a bush), plus a tiny, juvenile Common Yellow-toothed Cavy that tried the similar trick of freezing at the roadside and trying to make itself invisible. By late-morning the temperatures were starting to suppress bird activity and we moved down to Paso Córdoba. The most notable species seen during our walk through the sun-baked riverine habitat were a Baird's Sandpiper and a pair of Collared Plover (in full breeding plumage) with one juvenile bird. By the end of the morning we had the hat-trick of all three Mockingbird species possible in the area (Patagonian and White-banded at Ruta 7 and White-browed at Paso Córdoba).



Carbonated Sierra-Finch [Ruta 7, Río Negro]



Carbonated Sierra-Finch (f) [Ruta 7, Río Negro]

After a relaxing lunch and siesta we drove about two hours east to a birding site that was new for Jaime, just north of Highway 22 at the large cross before the village of Chimpay. This sandy area includes a large stand of Monte Desert chañar (*Geoffroea decorticans*) and brea (*Parkinsonia praecox*) trees along a dry creek bed. There, during a two-hour period before dusk, we located several endemics including Hudson's Black-Tyrant (several males and at least one distinctive female) and Cinnamon Warbling-Finch. Other specialities that we saw included Ringed Warbling-Finch, Crested Gallito, Greater Wagtail-Tyrant and White-tipped Plantcutter. Despite the good light conditions, it was frustratingly difficult to get attractive photos of these interesting birds as they perched in the taller vegetation characteristic of this valley!

On Sunday we headed to an entirely different habitat, an artificial lake in the desert created by a large dam on the Río Neuquén. Lago Pellegrini measures approximately 15km by 5km but is very shallow for much of its extent, with a shoreline surrounded by reeds and rushes that comprise fantastic bird habitat. There we enjoyed a complete morning observing a range of skulkers and open water birds. A highlight was fulfilling a long-held desire to see the stunning Many-coloured Rush-Tyrant (locally known as 'Tachurí Sietecolores', or 'Seven-coloured Tachuri', and indeed the flashy colours in such a small bird are amazing to behold). Several pairs were seen although, despite putting on waders and searching for an active nest as a potential photo stake out, it appeared that the breeding season was already over. Other highlights found amongst the reeds and rushes included several hyperactive Wren-like Rushbirds, secretive Plumbeous Rails and several Lake Duck (with iridescent blue bills) swimming in quiet bays. A male Austral Negrito searching for food on a drying mud flat was also a nice find.

In the more open waters we found many coots and grebes, plus potentially hundreds of Black-necked Swans, including near shore family groups with cygnets. Juvenile and adult White-tufted Grebes were particularly confiding as they fed near to shore, keeping the photographers busy.



Black-Necked Swan [Río Negro, Río Negro]

After lunch we headed for a relaxing afternoon in the shade along the banks of the Río Negro in Cipolletti, where the highlight was a group of some 20 Black-necked Swans that came over to feed just off the bank and entertained the photographers with their poses.

Overall some 71 bird species were identified during the trip, including 7 Argentina endemics and 19 lifers.



Patagonian Canastero [Ruta 7, Río Negro]



Common Diuca-Finch [Ruta 7, Río Negro]



Sharp-billed Canastero [Ruta 7, Río Negro]



Sharp-billed Canastero [Ruta 7, Río Negro]



Rusty-backed Monjita (imm.) [Ruta 7, Río Negro]



Rusty-backed Monjita [Ruta 7, Río Negro]



Elegant Crested-Tinamou [Ruta 7, Río Negro]



Story of a photographer's life: Where did that bird go? [Ruta 7, Río Negro] – photo courtesy of Jaime Prieto



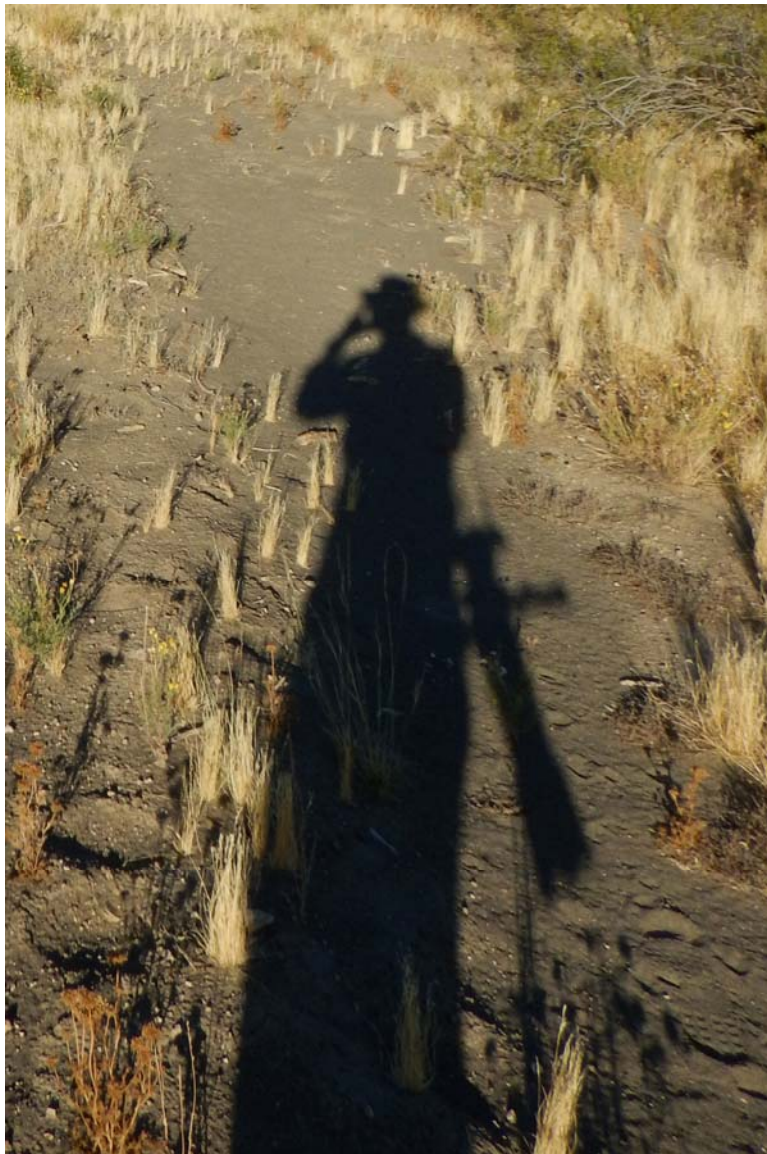
Photographing shorebirds [Paso Córdova, Río Negro] – photo courtesy of Jaime Prieto



With Jaime and Cristina at a large stand of Chañar habitat [Chimpay, Río Negro]



Hudson's Black-Tyrant [Chimpay, Río Negro]



Long-lens Photography [Chimpay, Río Negro]



Wren-like Rushbird [Lago Pellegrini, Río Negro]



Rush habitat at Lago Pellegrini, Río Negro



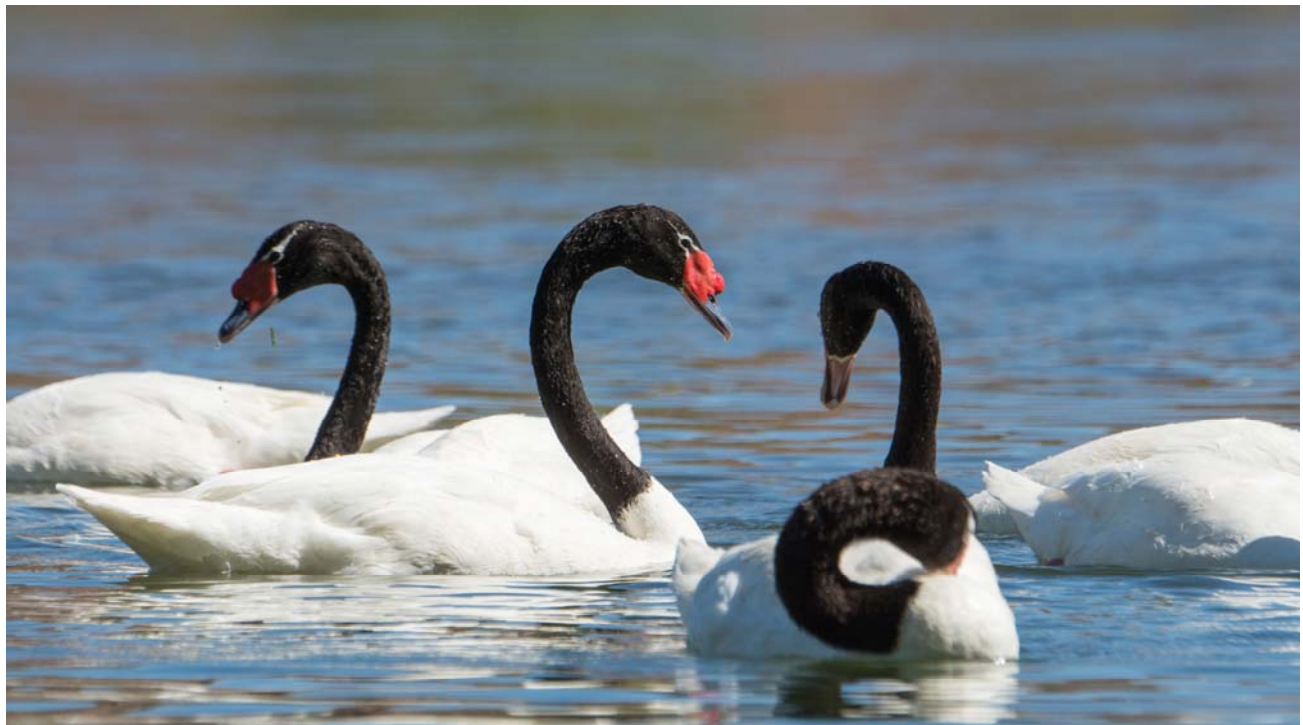
White-tufted Grebe (imm.) [Lago Pellegrini, Río Negro]



White-tufted Grebe [Lago Pellegrini, Río Negro]



Black-necked Swans [Río Negro, Río Negro]



Black-necked Swans [Río Negro, Río Negro]

1. Bird Trip List¹

Confirmed personal sightings only for DJS – excludes birds heard only unless otherwise indicated. As field guide I used [‘Birds of Southern South America and Antarctica’ by Martín de la Peña and Maurice Rumboll \(Princeton University Press, 1998\)](#). Some names have been updated since this guide was published, so birds in the trip list are identified as per ‘The Clements Checklist of Birds of the World’, Cornell, 2007 with updates through December 2010 (online version 6.5).

Locations where species were seen in Río Negro province, in order of travel:

R7 = Ruta 7, including steppe and desert-scrub habitat in the Monte Desert (early-morning of January 10th).

PC = Paso Córdova, including riverine habitat on the southern bank of the Río Negro near to General Roca (late-morning of January 10th).

GR = General Roca, including Jaime and Cristina’s garden (early-afternoon of January 10th).

C = Chimpay, including a tall stand of Chañar trees in the Monte Desert (late-afternoon of January 10th).

LP = Lago Pellegrini, including marsh and lake habitat (morning of January 11th).

RN = Río Negro, from northern river bank near to Cipolletti (afternoon of January 11th).

Weather was dry and sunny, with a mild mornings rapidly giving way to afternoon temperatures around 35°C, so we did avoided birding during the low bird activity periods during the heat of the day. The altitude in the areas visited was ~200m ASL (+/- 100m elevation variation across the region).

TINAMOUS Tinamidae

Elegant Crested-Tinamou *Eudromia elegans* [R7] *:

DUCKS, GEESE & SWANS Anatidae

Coscoroba Swan *Coscoroba coscoroba* [LP]:

Black-necked Swan *Cygnus melanocoryphus* [LP; RN] *:

Chiloe Wigeon *Anas sibilatrix* [RN]:

Cinnamon Teal *Anas cyanoptera* [LP]:

Yellow-billed Teal *Anas flavirostris* [PC; RN]:

Yellow-billed Pintail *Anas georgica* [RN]:

Lake Duck *Oxyura vittata* [LP]:

GREBES Podicipedidae

White-tufted Grebe *Podilymbus podiceps* [LP] *:

Pied-billed Grebe *Podilymbus podiceps* [LP]:

Great Grebe *Podiceps major* [LP] *:

FLAMINGOS Phoenicopteridae

Chilean Flamingo *Phoenicopus chilensis* [LP]:

HERONS, BITTERNs Ardeidae

Striated Heron *Butorides striata* [LP] *:

Great Egret *Ardea alba* [LP]:

Snowy Egret *Egretta thula* [LP]:

CARACARAS, FALCONS Falconidae

Southern [Crested] Caracara *Caracara plancus* [LP]:

Chimango Caracara *Milvago chimango* [R7]:

RAILS, CRAKES & COOTS Rallidae

Plumbeous Rail *Pardirallus sanguinolentus* [LP]:

White-winged Coot *Fulica leucoptera* [LP]:

¹ **First sighting ever for DJS**; **E** = Argentina endemic species; * = photo available

Red-gartered Coot *Fulica armillata* [LP] *:

STILTS, AVOCETS Recurvirostridae

Black-necked (White-backed) Stilt *Himantopus mexicanus melanurus* [PC; LP]:

PLOVERS Charadriidae

Southern Lapwing *Vanellus chilensis* [PC; LP]:

Collared Plover *Charadrius collaris* [PC] *:

SANDPIPERS, SNIPES Scolopacidae

Lesser Yellowlegs *Tringa flavipes* [LP]:

Baird's Sandpiper *Calidris bairdii* [PC] *:

GULLS, TERNS & SKIMMERS Laridae

Brown-hooded Gull *Chroicocephalus maculipennis* [LP] *:

Snowy-crowned Tern *Sterna trudeaui* [LP]:

PIGEONS, DOVES Columbidae

Rock Pigeon *Columba livia* [GR; LP]:

Picazuro Pigeon *Patagioenas picazuro* [PC; GR; LP]:

Spot-winged Pigeon *Patagioenas maculosa* [LP]:

Eared Dove *Zenaida auriculata* [RN]:

Picui Ground Dove *Columbina picui* [RN]:

PARROTS Psittacidae

Monk Parakeet *Myiopsitta monachus* [GR]:

OVENBIRDS AND WOODCREEPERS Furnariidae

Rufous-banded Miner *Geositta rufipennis* [R7]:

Rufous Hornero *Furnarius rufus* [GR; LP]:

Wren-like Rushbird *Phleocryptes melanops* [LP] *:

Tufted Tit-Spinetail *Leptasthenura platensis* [R7]:

Plain-mantled Tit-Spinetail *Leptasthenura aegithaloides berlepschi* [R7]:

Short-billed Canastero *Asthenes baeri* [C]:

Sharp-billed Canastero *Asthenes pyrrholeuca* [R7; C] *:

Patagonian Canastero *Asthenes patagonica* E [R7] *:

White-throated Cacholote *Pseudoseisura gutturalis* E **beard only** [R7]:

TAPACULOS Rhinocryptidae

Crested Gallito *Rhinocrypta lanceolata* [C] *:

Sandy Gallito *Teledromas fuscus* E **beard only** [R7]:

TYRANT FLYCATCHERS Tyrannidae

Tufted Tit-Tyrant *Anairetes parulus* [R7]:

Many-colored Rush Tyrant *Tachuris rubrigastra* [LP] *:

Greater Wagtail-Tyrant *Stigmatura budytoides* [C]:

Hudson's Black-Tyrant *Knipolegus hudsoni* E [C] *:

Austral Negrito *Lessonia rufa* [LP] *:

Spectacled Tyrant *Hymenops perspicillatus* [LP]:

Great Kiskadee *Pitangus sulphuratus* [LP]:

Tropical Kingbird *Tyrannus melancholicus* [C]:

Fork-tailed Flycatcher *Tyrannus savanna* [C]:

Rusty-backed Monjita *Xolmis rubetra* E [R7] *:

COTINGAS Cotingidae

White-tipped Plantcutter *Phytotoma rutila* [C] *:

SWALLOWS, MARTINS Hirundinidae

Southern Martin *Progne elegans* [R7]:

Brown-chested Martin *Progne tapera* [LP]:

Chilean Swallow *Tachycineta meyeni* [LP]:

WRENS Troglodytidae

House Wren *Troglodytes aedon* [GR]:

MOCKINGBIRDS, THRASHERS Mimidae

Patagonian Mockingbird *Mimus patagonicus* [R7] *:

Chalk-browed Mockingbird *Mimus saturninus* [PC]:

White-banded Mockingbird *Mimus triurus* [R7; C]:

THRUSHES Turdidae

Austral Thrush *Turdus falcklandii* [GR]:

TANAGERS & ALLIES Thraupidae

Ringed Warbling-Finch *Poospiza torquata* [C] *:

Cinnamon Warbling-Finch *Poospiza ornata* [C]:

Saffron Finch *Sicalis flaveola* [PC]:

BUNTINGS, NEW WORLD SPARROWS & ALLIES Emberizidae

Rufous-collared Sparrow *Zonotrichia capensis* [R7; C]:

Carbonated Sierra-Finch *Phrygilus carbonarius* [R7] *:

Common Diuca-Finch *Diuca diuca* [R7] *:

OROPENDOLAS, ORIOLES & BLACKBIRDS Icteridae

Yellow-winged Blackbird *Agelasticus thilius* [PC]:

Shiny Cowbird *Molothrus bonariensis* [PC]:

Total 71 confirmed species for the trip (including 7 Argentina endemics as per <http://avibase.bsc-eoc.org> and 2 heard only), of which 19 were 'lifers' for DJS.

2. Mammal Trip List

South American Grey Fox *Pseudalopex griseus* [R7]:

Common Yellow-toothed Cavy *Galea musteloides* [R7] *: