

## Trip Report: Chile (January 16<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup> 2015)

### Santiago, including Valle del Yeso and Farallones/Valle Nevado

During a weekend in Santiago indulging in the ever tempting pisco sours, red wine and *cerviche*, I spent a full day birding in the spectacular Valle del Yeso in the company of Feña Díaz (fernando@albatross-birding.com), followed by a morning birding alone whilst using a local taxi to ascend, via Farellones, to the Valle Nevada ski resort.

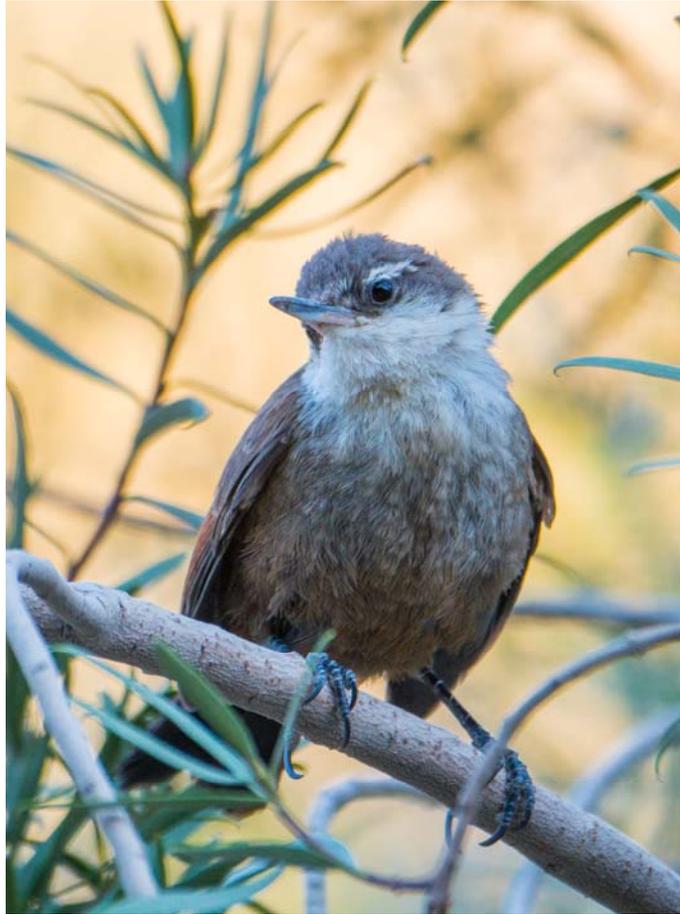


*Diademed Sandpiper-Plover [Valle del Yeso @ 2,500m ASL]*

The dry Andean scenery, offset against bright blue skies, was amazing and my two birding outings were very productive despite the summer weather being especially hot and sunny (reaching 35°C in the afternoon in Santiago and still very warm even at the highest altitude that I visited of ~3,000m ASL). Highlights included eyeball-to-eyeball views of a confiding pair of Diademed Sandpiper-Plovers (with a fledgling) as they wandered around a wetland in the upper Valle el Yeso, excellent views of six Chilean endemics (including three tapaculo species), and close encounters on both days with several Andean Condors that provided me with an up-close-and-personal appreciation of their 3.2m wingspan. Of the 49 species identified, 21 were lifers. This report includes a summary of the locations visited and species seen.



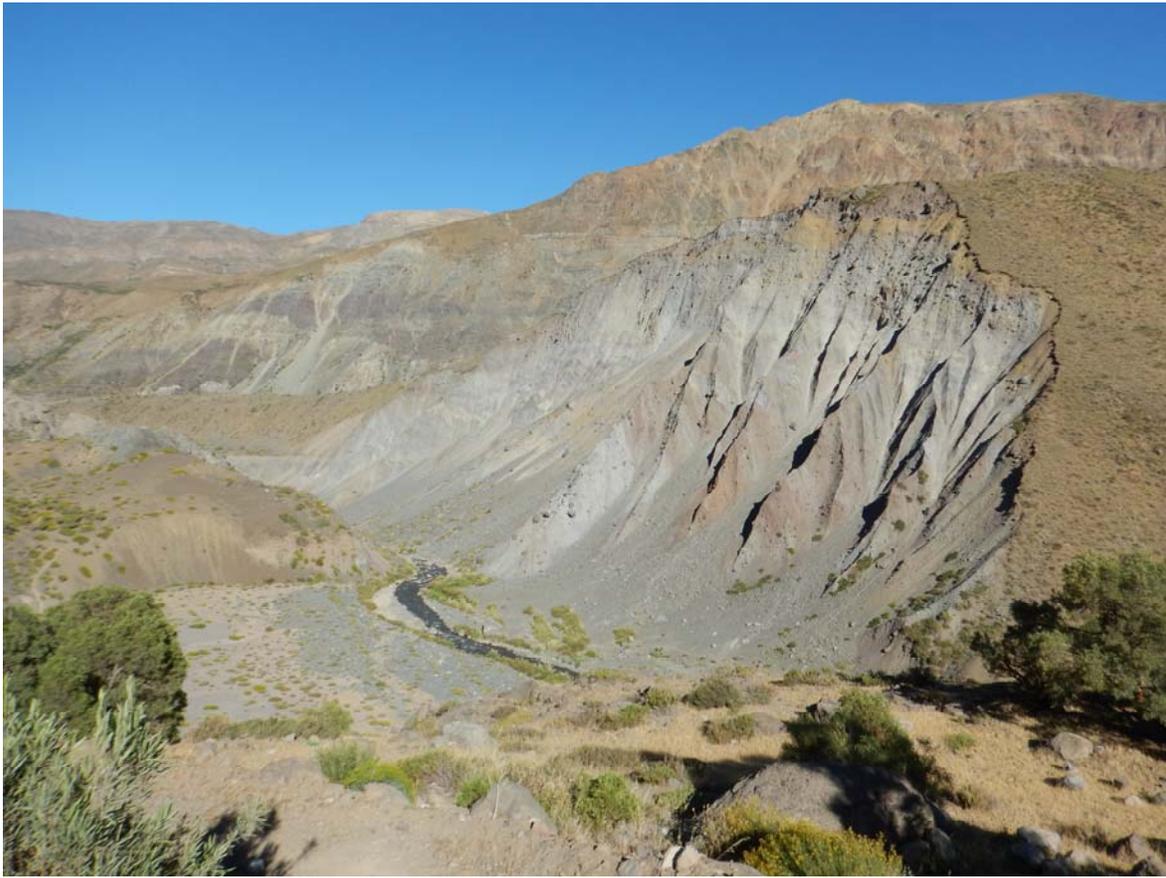
*Andean Condor [Valle Nevada @ 3,000m ASL]*



*Crag Chilia [Valle del Yeso @ 1,400m ASL]*



*Moustached Turca [Valle del Yeso @ 1,400m ASL]*



*Río el Yeso @ 2,100m ASL*



*Embalse el Yeso @ 2,500m ASL*



*Wetlands above Embalse el Yeso @ 2,500m ASL*



*Diademed Sandpiper-Plover [Valle del Yeso @ 2,500m ASL]*



*Photographing White-sided Hillstars in the Valle del Yeso @ 2,500m ASL*



*White-sided Hillstar (female, or possibly immature male?) [Valle del Yeso @ 2,500m ASL]*



*White-sided Hillstars (females, or possibly immature males?) [Valle del Yeso @ 2,500m ASL]*



*Gray-breasted Seedsnipe [Valle del Yeso @ 2,500m ASL]*



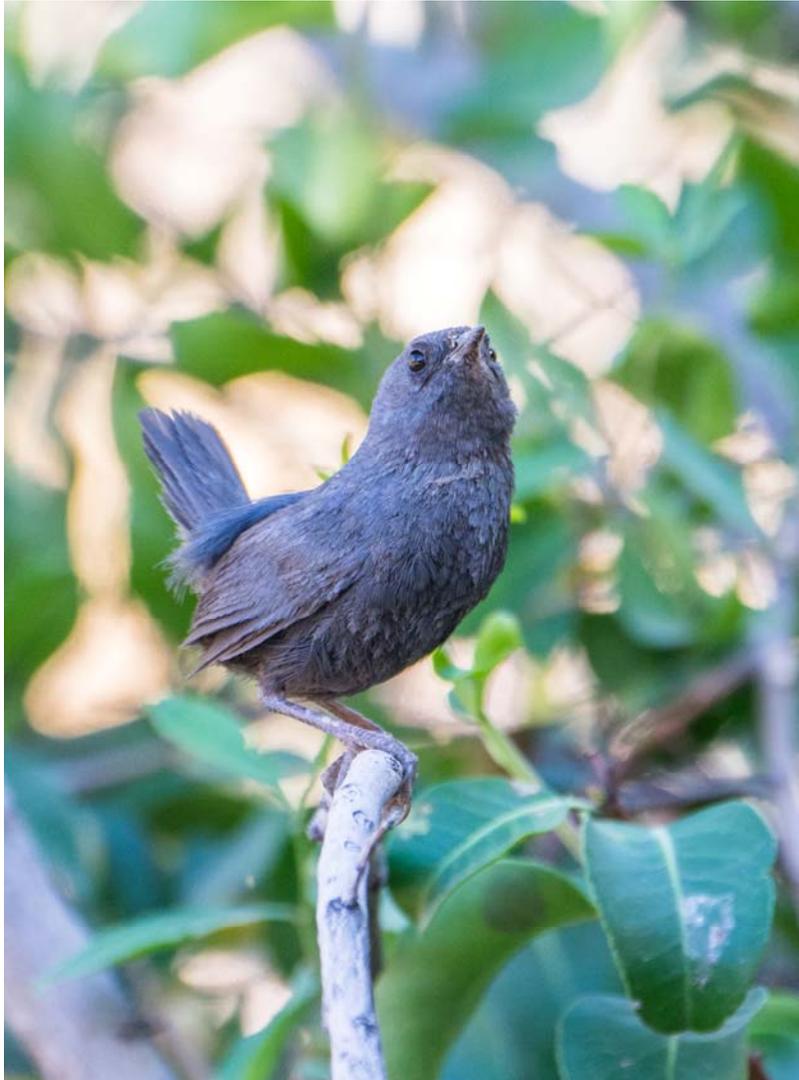
*Greater Yellow-Finch [Valle del Yeso @ 2,500m ASL]*



*Andean Fox [ @ 1,500m ASL en-route to Farallones ]*



*Andean Fox [ @ 1,500m ASL en-route to Farallones ]*



*Dusky Tapaculo [Sanctuario de la Naturaleza Yerba Loca @ 1,600m ASL]*



*Common Diuca-Finch [Sanctuario de la Naturaleza Yerba Loca @ 1,600m ASL]*



*Andean Condor (imm.) [Valle del Yeso @ 2,500m ASL]*



*Andean Condor [Valle Nevada @ 3,000m ASL]*



*Chilean Andes en-route from Buenos Aires to Santiago*



*Argentinean Andes en-route from Santiago to Buenos Aires*

# 1. Bird Trip List<sup>1</sup>

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 order of travel:

**VdM** = Valle del Maipo. Early-morning roadside birding on January 17<sup>th</sup> along Río Maipo before the Río el Yeso turn-off. Altitude between ~600m in Santiago and ~1,100m ASL at our one roadside birding site.

**VdY** = Valle del Yeso. Full day birding on January 17<sup>th</sup>, after we had turned-off from the Valle del Maipo. The altitude at multiple morning roadside birding sites in barren terrain with shrubs, grass and rocks along the Río el Yeso was between ~1,400m and 2,200m ASL as we ascended towards the Embalse el Yeso. The afternoon was spent around the wetlands at ~2500m ASL, upstream of the Embalse el Yeso. This trip was organized at short notice by Fred at Albatross Birding (see <http://www.albatross-birding.com>) and guided by Feña Díaz. In addition to being a very good and experienced guide who knows the area and birds very well, Feña is also engaged in conservation work with species such as the Diademed Sandpiper-Plover and was therefore able to provide a lot of value-added insights during our day together.

**F** = Farallones access road. Early-morning of January 18<sup>th</sup>, including roadside birding and a trail through dry scrub and woodland habitat at curve 16 (of 40 on the climb to the village of Farallones) at an altitude of ~1,500m ASL. (Note that curve 14 is reportedly a more productive area, but I missed the parking area there).

**YL** = Yerba Loca (Sancutario de la Naturaleza). Mid-morning of January 18<sup>th</sup> in dry scrub and woodland habitat, mainly alongside a small creek ~2km inside the reserve, at an altitude of ~1,600m ASL.

**VN** = Valle Nevada. Late-morning of January 18<sup>th</sup> in barren, high altitude open mountain terrain where we reached a maximum altitude of ~3,000m ASL at the main resort complex above the 20 curves in the road from Farallones.

## DUCKS, GEESE & SWANS Anatidae

**Crested Duck** *Lophonetta specularioides* [VdY]: Several scoped on the edge of the Embalse el Yeso.

**Yellow-billed Teal** *Anas flavirostris* [VdY]: Several scoped on the edge of the Embalse el Yeso.

## NEW WORLD VULTURES Cathartidae

**Andean Condor** *Vultur gryphus* [VdY; VN] \*: A couple of adults and juveniles mid-afternoon above the wetlands in Valle del Yeso gave good views against the scenic backdrop of the surrounding mountain slopes. Even better views of at least 3 adults and 3 immature birds flying late-morning around the valley behind the ski resort at Valle Nevada. They flew so close we could hear the wind rushing across their wings.

## HAWKS, EAGLES & KITES Accipitridae

**Black-chested Buzzard-Eagle** *Geranoaetus melanoleucus* [VdY; VN]: One seen soaring high over the wetlands at Valle del Yeso and another from the ski resort at Valle Nevada.

## CARACARAS, FALCONS Falconidae

**Mountain Caracara** *Phalco boenus megalopterus* [VdY]: One seen soaring mid-morning around 2,100m ASL.

**Chimango Caracara** *Milvago chimango* [VdM]: One seen on our descent back towards Santiago.

**American Kestrel** *Falco sparverius* [VdY]: One seen flying around the Río el Yeso at ~1,600m ASL and perching on boulders near to the river.

## PLOVERS Charadriidae

**Southern Lapwing** *Vanellus chilensis* [VdY]: Several in open country at ~1,400m ASL.

**Diademed Sandpiper-Plover** *Phegornis mitchellii* [VdY] \*: Finding a DSP was a key reason for visiting the Valle del Yeso! A pair and their single fledgling were found on their territory in the wetlands above the Embalse el Yeso where Feña and some academics have been monitoring them and many other breeding pairs. I avoided approaching the juvenile which always stayed close to one or other of the adults, focusing instead on whichever adult was feeding separately in the flowing water and mud pools. The adults were quite confiding, approaching to within a few meters of where I was crouched down on the wet ground.

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<sup>1</sup> First sighting ever for DJS; **E** = Chile endemic species; \* = photo available

## SEEDSNIPES Thinocoridae

**Gray-breasted Seedsnipe** *Thinocorus orbignyianus* [VdY] \*: One was flushed as we returned from the DSP site for our picnic lunch. Two more were later seen across a creek and allowed for quite close approach, occasionally popping up on available vantage points, such as horse dung or a boulder, to survey the surrounding area.

## GULLS, TERNS & SKIMMERS Laridae

**Andean Gull** *Chroicocephalus serranus* [VdY]: Two scoped on the edge of the Embalse el Yeso.

## PIGEONS & DOVES Columbidae

**Eared Dove** *Zenaida auriculata* [VdM]: Several in lower valley habitat.

**Black-winged Ground-Dove** *Metriopelia melanoptera* [VdY; YL] \*: Several seen in the Valle del Yeso at ~1,400m ASL and a pair came to the creek at Yerba Loca.

## HUMMINGBIRDS Trochilidae

**White-sided Hillstar** *Oreotrochilus leucopleurus* [VdY] \*: Fleeting roadside glimpses at 2,100m ASL and then several females and/or immature males were hawking insects from ground-level perches alongside a creek in the wetlands at 2,500m ASL. We invested some time in trying to capture eye-level images of them on their favourite perches.

## WOODPECKERS Picidae

**Chilean Flicker** *Colaptes pitius* [VdM; VdY; F]: Pairs seen in a variety of open and wooded habitats including at 1,100m ASL in the Valle del Maipo, at 2,000m ASL in the Valle del Yeso and at ~1,500m ascending towards Farallones.

## PARROTS Psittacidae

**Mountain Parakeet** *Psilopsiagon aurifrons* [VdY]: Small flocks of 4-6 individuals seen on two occasions, including perched on a boulder at 2,100m ASL.

## TAPACULOS Rhinocryptidae

**Moustached Turca** *Pteroptochos megapodius* [VdY]: A pair on the roadside at 1,400m ASL provided good views as they hopped around the rocks and scratched in the dirt. Another pair flushed from on the road itself a short distance further up the valley.

**White-throated Tapaculo** *Scelorchilus albicollis* [YL]: One seen moving across open ground towards the creek at Yerba Loca.

**Dusky Tapaculo** *Scytalopus fuscus* [YL] \*: One popped up from within a bush next to the creek at Yerba Loca and sat in the open for a few seconds, fortunately just when I was ready to take its photograph. Another proceeded to sing from a hidden spot within a nearby low shrubby tree.

## OVENBIRDS AND WOODCREEPERS Furnariidae

**Rufous-banded Miner** *Geositta rufipennis* [VdY; VN] \*: After being first seen at 2,100m ASL, proved to be common in open terrain in upper elevations of both valleys.

**Crag Chilia** *Ochetorhynchus melanurus* [VdY] \*: A pair was spotted simultaneously with the first pair of Moustached Turcas at 1,400m ASL, and proceeded to divide my attention between these two pairs of lifer endemics. Responded to playback and hung around the roadside bushes, providing good views.

**Scale-throated Earthcreeper** *Upucerthia dumetaria* [VdY]: One seen feeding on muddy ground in the wetlands.

**Buff-winged Cinclodes** *Cinclodes fuscus* [VdY]: Several at high altitude, initially seen at 2,200m ASL.

**Plain-mantled Tit-Spinetail** *Leptasthenura aegithaloides berlepschi* [VdY] \*: Pairs seen moving between bushes at 1,400m in the Valle del Yeso and 1,600m at Yerba Loca.

**Sharp-billed Canastero** *Asthenes pyrrholeuca* [VdY]: A pair seen moving between low bushes at 2,100m ASL.

**Dusky-tailed Canastero** *Pseudasthenes humicola* [VdM]: A pair seen in large roadside bushes at 1,100m ASL.

## TYRANT FLYCATCHERS Tyrannidae

**Tufted Tit-Tyrant** *Anairetes parulus* [VdM]: A group of ~6 adults and juveniles seen in large roadside bushes at 1,100m ASL.

**White-crested Elaenia** *Elaenia albiceps chilensis* [VdM; YL] \*: One seen in large roadside bushes at 1,100m ASL in the Valle del Maipo and another coming to the creek at 1,600m ASL in Yerba Loca.

**Austral Negrito** *Lessonia rufa* [VdY]: One male seen on open ground in the wetlands.

**Spot-billed Ground-Tyrant** *Muscisaxicola maculirostris* [VdY]: Several seen as we ascended the valley from around 2,000m ASL.

**White-browed Ground-Tyrant** *Muscisaxicola albilora* [VdY]: Several seen as we ascended the valley from around 2,200m ASL.

**Black-fronted Ground-Tyrant** *Muscisaxicola frontalis* [VdY]: One seen on wet open grassland at 2,200m ASL.

**Black-billed Shrike-Tyrant** *Agriornis montanus* [VdY] \*: Our last new bird of the day in the Valle es Yeso, seen perched in boulders as we departed the wetlands.

**Great Shrike-Tyrant** *Agriornis lividus* [VdY]: One seen perched in roadside boulders at 2,100m ASL.

**Fire-eyed Diucon** *Xolmis pyrope* [VdY]: One seen perched atop a bush at 1,400m ASL.

## SWALLOWS, MARTINS Hirundinidae

**Blue-and-white Swallow** *Pygochelidon cyanoleuca patagonica* [VdY]: First noted at 2,100m ASL. Several in upper elevations of the valley.

## WRENS Troglodytidae

**House Wren** *Troglodytes aedon* [VdM]: Several roadside at 1,100m ASL.

## MOCKINGBIRDS, THRASHERS Mimidae

**Chilean Mockingbird** (*Mimus thenca*) [VdM; VdY; F; YL]: Common at lower elevations, from Santiago city at ~600m ASL up to at least 1,600m ASL in Yerba Loca.

## THRUSHES Turdidae

**Austral Thrush** *Turdus falcklandii* [VdM; F; YL]: Common at lower elevations, from Santiago city at ~600m ASL up to at least 1,600m ASL in Yerba Loca.

## TANAGERS & ALLIES Thraupidae

**Gray-hooded Sierra-Finch** *Phrygilus gayi* [VdY; YL] \*: Small flocks (2-6 birds) initially seen at 2,100m ASL as we ascended in the Valle del Yeso and males and females visiting the creek at 1,600m ASL in Yerba Loca.

**Mourning Sierra-Finch** *Phrygilus fruticeti* [VdY; YL] \*: Individuals seen at 2,200m ASL as we ascended the Valle del Yeso and visiting the creek at 1,600m ASL in Yerba Loca.

**Plumbeous Sierra-Finch** *Phrygilus unicolor* [VdY]: Males and females seen above 2,100m ASL.

**Common Diuca-Finch** *Diuca diuca* [VdM; YL] \*: Pairs seen at 1,100m ASL in the Valle del Maipo and when visiting the creek at 1,600m ASL in Yerba Loca.

**Greater Yellow-Finch** *Sicalis auriventris* [VdY] \*: Common at high altitude. First seen at 2,200m ASL and then enjoyed whilst singing adjacent to our picnic spot at the edge of the wetlands.

## BUNTINGS, NEW WORLD SPARROWS & ALLIES Emberizidae

**Rufous-collared Sparrow** *Zonotrichia capensis* [VdY; YL]: Seemingly cannot escape these noisy little creatures anywhere I visit at the moment! Seen from 2,200m ASL in the Valle del Yeso and at 1,600m in Yerba Loca.

## TROUPIALS & ALLIES Icteridae

**Long-tailed Meadowlark** *Sturnella loyca* [VdY]: Several seen in open terrain at 1,400m ASL.

**Austral Blackbird** *Curaeus curaeus* [VdY; F]: Flocks of 4-8 individuals seen on several occasions as we ascended the Valle del Yeso, initially at 1,400m ASL. A flock of ~8 birds was seen in woodland at 1,500m ASL during my stop-off below Yerba Loca.

## SISKINS, CROSSBILLS & ALLIES Fringillidae

**Black-chinned Siskin** *Carduelis barbata* [VdM]: Heard singing from roadside trees at 1,00m ASL, but despite extensive searching we could not locate them.

**Yellow-rumped Siskin** *Spinus uropygialis* [VdY]: After being initially seen at 2,100m ASL, pairs and small flocks were seen on several occasions in open terrain and on the ground as we ascended the Valle del Yeso.

Total 49 confirmed species for the trip (including 6 Chile endemics as per <http://avibase.bsc-eoc.org> and 1 heard only), of which 21 were 'lifers' for DJS.

## 2. Mammal Trip List

**Andean Fox** *Pseudalopex culpaeus* [F] \*: One seen sunning itself in the early morning at 1,500m ASL