



Rufous-throated Dipper - © Jorge La Grotteria

North West Argentina's Jujuy birding route

10 to 16* days in Argentina's most diverse region

***With 3 optional extensions to La Union's Dry Chaco,
Santa Victoria Oeste's specialties and Salta's Wine Country**

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Pre-Puna semi-desert in Quebrada de Humahuaca - © Marcelo Gavensky

INTRODUCTION

North-west Argentina is famous for its diversity of landscapes, wildlife and cultures. In a relatively small area, it is possible to travel from the subtropical warm plains of the eastern lowlands to the high altitude cold Andean peaks, with a wide array of habitats and landscapes in between. This produces a very high bird diversity that goes from toucans and trogons to flamingos and condors, just to mention a few iconic species.

Apart from the birds, this region is very diverse in other animal groups, such as mammals and butterflies. The green corridor formed by the Tucumano-Boliviano forest coming down from southern Bolivia to the Argentine provinces of Tucuman and Catamarca, connect some very well protected national parks such as Baritú and El Rey (in Salta) and the fabulous Calilegua (in Jujuy), probably the most accessible and biodiverse of them. This gives refuge to many endangered or scarce species such as the Jaguar and the Brazilian Tapir, which also use the increasingly fragmented Chaco forest that extends to the east. In this last habitat, encounters with other very attractive members of the neotropical fauna, such as the Giant Anteater and the Chacoan Peccary, are rare but still a possibility in the most remote places.

The highlands are as different to the lowlands as they can be, in pretty much all means. From the Pre-Puna semi-desert with giant columnar cacti, to the Puna steppes and marshes, and passing near high Andes peaks of more than five thousand metres above sea level, one can almost forget that just a few days ago we were birding in the warm subtropical forests. There are fewer species of fauna but the open landscape makes them easier to see. Every now and then we go across special spots teeming with bird activity, or with groups of Vicuñas staring at us.

Culturally speaking, the lowlands are “gaucho” (South American cowboys) territory and the highlands are part of the ancient “Tawantinsuyo” (the Inca Empire) and its reminiscences survive until today. In a land of strong traditions, world-famous wines and exquisite cuisine (best empanadas in the world) this tour and its optional extensions comprise all major habitats of north-west Argentina in a **10 to 16 days** trip (if all extensions are booked together with the main itinerary) along a fairly new birding route that has been designed by us to take the best advantage of a relatively short period of time.



Yellow-striped Brush-Finch, Argentine endemic - © Jorge La Grotteria

TOUR DESCRIPTION

A short flight connection to Jujuy or Salta airports will take us to this exciting and extremely diverse region of Argentina (we recommend using Jujuy as the starting point but if the trip is connected from Iguazu then Salta is so far the only airport that receives direct flights).

After meeting with the tour leader and local guide/driver, we will travel northwards to our first birding destination: Eco-portal de Piedra. This nice accommodation with its own private reserve is located at the foothill of the Sierra de Santa Bárbara, a small mountain where two types of forest can be found at their best: Sierran Chaco forest (semi-humid forest) and Tucumano-Boliviano forest (locally called “Yungas”), a subtropical humid forest which is one of the most bio-diverse habitats in Argentina.

The bird fauna of this place, off the beaten path, is very diverse and the first chances of seeing **Andean Condors** in this tour are right here, as well as another remarkable “new world’s” vulture: the **King Vulture**. This is one of the best places for watching both species, which can be even seen together at times, soaring over the subtropical forest.

An interesting mix of Chaco related species (such as **Chaco Puffbird** and **Chaco Chachalaca**) with Yungas species (such as **Tucuman Parrot**, **Large-tailed Dove**, **Golden-olive Woodpecker** and **Bridge’s Guan**), as well as the beautiful landscape, are some of the main attractions of the area. At least two Argentine endemic birds are found in this private reserve: **Yellow-striped Brush-Finch** and the skulking **White-browed Tapaculo**, from the “*santabarbaerae*” subspecies (which is only found in this mountain). Many species of very scarce raptors are often seen here, such as the **White-rumped Hawk**, **Zone-tailed Hawk**, **Rufous-thighed Kite** and **Collared Forest-Falcon**, although the rare **Black-and-chestnut Eagle** and **Orange-breasted Falcon** are the reserve’s highlights, with breeding pairs living within it.



Black-and-chestnut Eagle © Matías Chavez

Other attractive species in the area include **Red-tailed Comet**, **Toco Toucan**, **Cream-backed Woodpecker** and **Yellow-collared Macaw**. In the evening, we will try to spot some of the many interesting nocturnal species that live in the reserve, such as **Black-banded Owl**, **Spectacled Owl**, **Buff-fronted Owl** and **Montane Forest Screech-Owl**.

From the Eco-portal we will make short trips to visit the Dry Chaco forest near the border with the province of Salta, in order to have good chances of seeing some of the specialties of that habitat, such as **Black-legged Seriema**, **Many-colored Chaco-Finch** and **Crested Hornero**; and to El Fuerte area (in the heart of the Sierra de Santa Bárbara) to look for **Huayco Tinamou**, **Olive-crowned Crescentchest** and the stunning **Red-legged Seriema**.

After Ecoportal de Piedra we will travel westwards, making a few birding stops along the way, to finally get to one of the best preserved protected areas in north west Argentina: Calilegua National Park. Calilegua is a great natural area with different layers of Tucumano-Boliviano forest. There we will be looking for more specialties of this habitat, such as the **White-throated Antpitta** (another skulking target of the trip) and the scarce **Yungas Pygmy-Owl**, or the more common **Fulvous-headed Brush-Finch**, **Spot-breasted Thornbird** and a recently found species for Argentina: **Yungas Manakin** (far easier to hear than to spot, but we will do our best to increase our chances).

Other attractive birds to look for include **Solitary Eagle**, **Amazonian Motmot**, **Blue-crowned Trogon**, **Speckled Hummingbird**, **Slender-tailed Woodstar**, and the “*cinerea*” subspecies of **Giant Antshrike**. Recent records of **Harpy Eagle** make the experience of birding in Calilegua National Park even more exciting.

Our following destination is Potrero de Yala Provincial Park. This strategic birding area will give us the best chances of finding some of the most attractive birds of the region: **Torrent Duck**, **Red-faced Guan**, **Rufous-throated Dipper** and **Lyre-tailed Nightjar**, as well as the **Black-and-chestnut Eagle**, which is often seen soaring in the area.



Red-tailed Comet (male) - © Andrés Terán

Other attractive birds to look for in this reserve include **Streak-throated Bush-Tyrant**, **Highland Elaenia** and **Zimmer's Tapaculo**, among many others.

From the last place we will start climbing up the Andes to higher elevation, with our first birding stop in the surroundings of Volcan, a town located at the beginning of the Quebrada de Humahuaca (UNESCO World Heritage site). Here we will be looking for **Stripe-capped Sparrow** (from *dabbenei* subspecies, which is likely to get split) and we will have our first chances for **Subtropical Doradito** and **Patagonian Mockingbird**. A bit higher in elevation we will start getting into the Pre-Puna desert ecoregion, where we will look for the endemic **Bare-eyed** (or **Moreno's**) **Ground Dove**, and other special birds such as the **White-tipped Plantcutter**, **Gray-hooded Parakeet**, **Creamy-breasted Canastero**, **Brown-backed Mockingbird**, **Black-hooded Sierra-Finch**, **Yellow-billed Tit-Tyrant** and (especially when the cacti are blooming) the world's largest hummer: **Giant Hummingbird**.

Continuing our way north and climbing up the Andes we will see the scrubland turn into a vast steppe, as we enter the Puna ecoregion. The Puna has many bird specialties, and its dry plains have scattered lagoons and marshes where plenty of aquatic birds are found, including three species of flamingos: **Chilean**, **Andean** and **James's**. This is a land with lots of "puna" and "andean" birds, such as the **Puna Rhea** (recent split from Lesser Rhea), **Puna Tinamou**, **Andean Tinamou**, **Puna Ibis**, **Puna Teal**, **Andean Goose**, **Andean Coot**, **Andean Avocet**, **Andean Lapwing**, **Puna Plover**, **Andean Gull**, **Andean Swift**, **Andean Hillstar**, **Andean Flicker**, **Puna Miner**, **Puna Canastero**, **Andean Negrito** and more, that will be our target species while we delight our eyes with some of the most incredible landscapes.

The South American high altitude wetlands host one of the most diverse waterfowl repertoires of the continent, and we will be looking for them including **Crested Ducks**, **Yellow-billed Pintails** and **Teals**, plus other species such as the **Andean (Silvery) Grebe**.



Aquatic diversity in the Puna's high altitude lagoons - © Marcelo Gavensky

Among the most remarkable birds in this area are the **Giant** and **Horned Coots**, two species of large and (the second one) scarce species only found in this part of South America. Visiting the Natural Monument "Laguna de los Pozuelos" we will increase our chances of finding all these species, although the abundance of aquatic birds will very much depend on the time of the year (and the amount of rain fallen during the rainy season).

The Puna is also surprisingly diverse in some group of birds such as the yellow-finches: **Olive Yellow-Finch**, **Puna Yellow-Finch** and **Bright-rumped Yellow-Finch** can be fairly common in some areas and even towns. The rocky valleys host many interesting species such as **Rock** and **Straight-billed Earthcreepers**, and the flat plains are especially good to look for **Least Seedsnipe**, **Golden-spotted Ground Dove**, **Ornate Tinamou** and the regionally very scarce **Darwin's Nothura**.

Further north, we will visit the small village of Yavi. This beautiful place is located in a narrow valley that comes down from Bolivia (which is only a few kilometres away) and host species that are only found in this remote point of the Country. These include the **Wedge-tailed Hillstar**, **Citron-headed Yellow-Finch** and **Bare-faced Ground-Dove**. Other attractive birds to look for in Yavi surroundings are the **White-winged Cinclodes**, **Streak-fronted Thornbird** and the rare **Tawny Tit-Spinetail**.

Finally, we will go across the heights of Abra del Lizoite (located at 4600 metres above sea level) in the High Andes ecoregion, looking for some very rewarding specialties such as the **Red-backed Sierra-Finch** and the very scarce **Diademed Sandpiper-plover**, as well as many other species such as **Slender-billed Miner**, **Puna Tinamou**, **Puna Ground-Tyrant**, **Puna Canastero** and more. This is the furthest away spot visited in the 10 days Jujuy Birding Route itinerary, and from this place we will start going back to Jujuy or Salta city, making a few stops along the way to have a second chance with possible missing targets.



Scribble-tailed Canastero - © Jorge La Grotteria

TOUR EXTENSION 1:

Santa Victoria Oeste's Specialties (3 days/2 nights)

This tour extension begins on the DAY 8 of the basic itinerary and visits the very remote village of Santa Victoria Oeste (in the province of Salta) that is reached after a not-shorter than 6 hours car ride from Yavi across impressive Andean highlands. But make no mistakes: this trip is a birding summum by itself, as it offers great chances of finding some of the most attractive bird species of northwest Argentina, including the **Short-tailed Finch**, **Scribble-tailed Canastero** and the **Rufous-webbed Bush-Tyrant**. It also provides with a second chance for the **Diademed Sandpiper-Plover** (compared to the 10 days itinerary) and more possibilities for finding some rare species such as **Zimmer's Tapaculo** and **Tawny Tit-Spinetail**.

The small patches of Polylepis forest and surrounding scrublands found before arriving in Santa Victoria Oeste are great to look for the **Rufous-bellied Mountain Tanager** and the **Tucuman Mountain-Finch**. But some of the rarest birds of Argentina are found after crossing the town, when the landscape changes and turn into an acacia brushland, which is related to the Bolivian Dry Inter-Andean valleys ecoregion. Here our main targets would be the **Bolivian Warbling-Finch** and the super scarce **Bolivian Earthcreeper**. Both species were considered to be endemic of Bolivia before they were discovered in this faraway place.

The town has almost no tourism at all so the accommodations are very limited and basic, but the tour is suited for the more adventurers and for anyone who wants to experience the magic and remoteness of a unique place. Spending two nights in Santa Victoria Oeste we have plenty of time for the long trips from and to La Quiaca (the nearest town where we spend the night in our itinerary) and to make all the stops we would need for finding our targets.



Quebracho Crested-Tinamou - © Jorge La Grotteria

TOUR EXTENSION 2:

Dry Chaco forest of La Union and Bermejo river flood valley (2 days/1 night)

This tour extension is taken from Eco-portal de Piedra on the DAY 3 of the basic itinerary and is ideal for anyone who wants to have a better insight of the Dry Chaco wilderness and increase the chances of seeing some of the most attractive and rare species of this ecoregion.

Only 2 driving hours away from Eco-portal (although we will take more time making birding stops along the way), La Union is located in the province of Salta and is surrounded by a still lush Chaco forest where our chances for the rare **Quebracho Crested-Tinamou** begin. The more common **Black-legged Seriema**, **Many-colored Chaco-Finch**, **Chaco Puffbird**, **Chaco Earthcreeper**, **Little Thornbird**, **Stripe-backed Antbird** and **Black-crested Finch** could be seen or heard long before arriving in town. The very vocal **Crested Gallito** is an increasingly common bird as we get further into the Dry Chaco, and some naturally scarce species like the **Black-bodied Woodpecker** and **Chaco Eagle** could surprise us at any moment.

From La Union there is a challenging road that rewards adventurers with the possibility of seeing very attractive aquatic species in a marsh which is part of the flood valley of the Bermejo river, one of the main tributaries of the Parana river. One of this species is the **Orinoco Goose**, which is very rare and endangered in Argentina, but is recorded in good numbers using the place every southern hemisphere's summer season. Another bird that is worth finding is the **Jabiru**, the largest of the new world's storks.

La Union is seldom visited by tourists but has got a comfortable (though basic) hotel where we will spend the night in order to have enough time to look for all those targets, and also to go out owling in search of the **Chaco Owl**, which is often seen in the town surroundings.

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Sandy Gallito - © Jorge La Grotteria

TOUR EXTENSION 3:

Salta's famous wine country and Monte desert of Cafayate (3 days/2 nights)

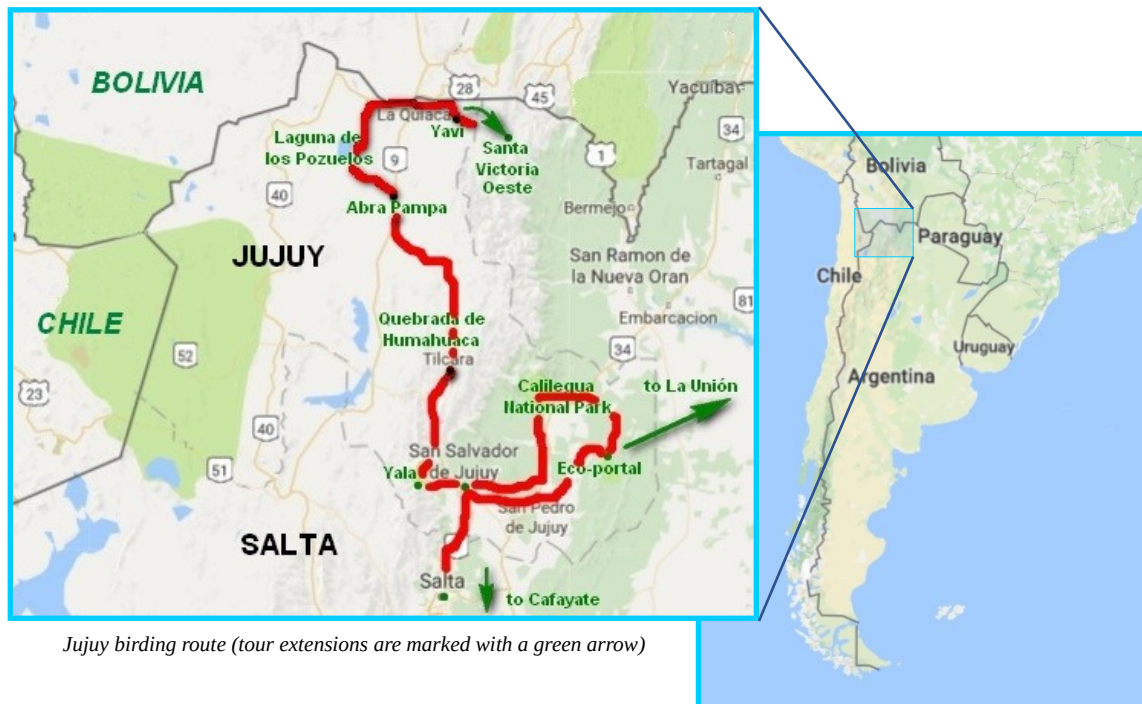
This tour extension can be taken either at the beginning of the trip (on DAY 1, before starting the 10 days itinerary) or at the end (recommended) and it offers the possibility of leisurely enjoy the famous vineyards and quality wine of Cafayate, plus birding in a different ecoregion: the Monte semi-desert (in a transitional area with the Arid Chaco and the High Andes ecoregions).

Going southwards from Salta city, it's an approximately three hours and a half car ride until we arrive in the well touristically developed town of Cafayate, located in the beautiful Calchaqui Valleys. The surrounding landscape hosts some very attractive bird species, including many Argentine endemics such as **Sandy Gallito**, **White-throated Cacholote** and the poorly known **Steinbach's Canastero** and **Monte Yellow-Finch**. Other targets to look for in Cafayate area are the **Elegant Crested-Tinamou**, **Burrowing Parakeet**, **Greater Wagtail-Tyrant**, **White-banded Mockingbird**, **Ringed Warbling-Finch**, **Gray-hooded Sierra-Finch** and many more.

Cafayate is known for the quality of its wines, that have been produced locally for hundreds of years. The most local varietal of the Calchaqui Valleys is the *Torrontes* (a white wine distinguished by its intense aroma and fruity flavor), but other kinds cultivated in the area include *Malbec*, *Cavernet Sauvignon*, *Merlot*, *Syrah* and *Tannat*. We will spend a significant part of the tour extension visiting some of the most traditional vineyards and tasting their world famous wines (for that reason we recommend to take this extension **after** finishing the 10 days itinerary, in order to slow down the birding pace for a couple of days and enjoy a bit of quality life style celebrating the successful tour!).

It is also advised to make a short visit to Salta's city Archaeological Museum of High Mountain*. In spite of its small size, its impressively well preserved collection (and the way it's displayed) makes it one of the most attractive archaeological museums in South America.

**A visit to this museum is also optional. Please ask us in advance if you would like to book it.*



Jujuy birding route (tour extensions are marked with a green arrow)

BASIC ITINERARY*

DAY 1: Arrival in Salta or Jujuy airport. Meet with local driver/guide and birding transfer to Ecoportal de Piedra reserve & lodge, with birding stops in the Sierran Chaco ecoregion. Afternoon birding in Ecoportal area. Night at Ecoportal.

DAY 2: AM birding in Ecoportal de Piedra's foothill forest. PM birding in the Dry Chaco. Night at Ecoportal.

DAY 3: Full day birding in Ecoportal de Piedra's different layers of Tucumano-Boliviano forest. Night at Ecoportal.

DAY 4: AM transfer to Calilegua National Park with birding stops along the way. Rest of the day birding in Calilegua National Park and surroundings (Rio Jordan valley). Night in Ledesma.

DAY 5: AM transfer to Potrero de Yala Provincial Park. FD birding in the temperate montane forest of Potrero de Yala. Night in Villa Jardín de Reyes.

DAY 6: AM transfer to Quebrada de Humahuaca valley. Birding stops in Volcan, Cuesta de Lipan and Tilcara surroundings. Night in Humahuaca.

DAY 7: AM birding transfer to La Quiaca visiting Abra Pampa's surroundings and Laguna de los Pozuelos Natural Monument. Night in La Quiaca.

DAY 8: FD birding in Yavi surroundings and Abra de Lizoite. Night in La Quiaca.

DAY 9: FD birding transfer back to Jujuy or Salta city, making stops in search for possible missing targets. Night in Jujuy or Salta city.

DAY 10: Transfer to Jujuy or Salta airport. End of the tour.

** The itinerary may change due to force majeure*



Diademed Sandpiper-Plover in Abra Lizoite - © Andrés Terán

TOUR DETAILS

Price

Please contact us to find out about our prices for the current and/or following seasons.

Our prices **include** all accommodations, three meals a day (breakfast, lunch and dinner), all land transfers in private vehicle, local guide/driver and tour leader with quality spotting scope, site guide for Calilegua National Park (mandatory), snacks and drinks (bottled water) during the tour. Our prices **do not include** flight tickets (unless asked on request) to and from Salta or Jujuy airport, personal insurance, alcoholic drinks, entrance tickets and guide at the Archaeological Museum of High Mountain (optional), tips, nor anything not mentioned on previous sentence.

Group size

We run this tour on request for groups with a minimum size of 2 and a maximum of 6 passengers. Please contact us for information about larger groups and options for single travelers.

Physical difficulty

Easy to moderate.

Accommodations

Vary from a comfortable lodge with cabins located within a natural reserve (Eco-portal de Piedra) to comfortable 3 and 4 star hotels located in towns near birding sites (Ledesma, Villa Jardin de Reyes, Humahuaca, La Quiaca, La Union, Cafayate and Jujuy/Salta cities). Rustic cabins are only expected for Santa Victoria Oeste's tour extension.



King Vulture - © Adrián Heredia

Weather in NW Argentina

The diversity of habitats and altitude above sea level that we will experience along this trip will also give us a diverse array of weather conditions. Generally speaking, weather will be subtropical (we will in fact go across the Tropic of Capricorn at some point of the tour), but in the heights of the Andes it can be very cold, especially in winter. The eastern lowlands are usually warm and can be even hot in the winter. The Puna and high Andes heights can reach warm temperatures during the day (not very often in winter), but at night the temperature decreases drastically, being cold. Around the highest Andean peaks that we will pass by (especially in the tour extension to Santa Victoria Oeste), there is the possibility of snow fall. Southern hemisphere's winter is the dry season and we should expect very few rain falls, mainly in the cloud forest. Our summer and autumn is the rainy season, when strong storms may happen, but usually very localized.

High altitude sickness possibilities

The entire itinerary (and its optional extensions) is planned in order to reduce the risk of getting high altitude sickness, to the minimum possible. The tour begins in the lowlands and starts getting gradually higher, giving your body enough time to adapt (also gradually) to higher altitude conditions. While in the highlands we will avoid making unnecessary physical efforts, having our vehicle near us most of the time. In any case you must **ASK YOUR DOCTOR BEFORE THE TRIP**, especially if you have got any particular health condition that might be affected by the lower atmospheric pressure and thin air.

Best time of the year

This is a tour that can be made at any time of the year, although we recommend the southern hemisphere's late autumn to early spring (May-September) for fewer rain, milder temperatures in the lowlands and more water availability in the high altitude marshes and lagoons.



Tucuman Mountain-Finch - © Marcelo Gavensky

Packing for the trip

In spite of the complex weather conditions previously described, packing clothing for this trip is not an impossible task: take with you a good amount of light clothing (long-sleeves shirts and long pants to avoid insect bites), a light coat for the nights in the lowland, and a warmer coat and a good sweater for the highlands, with a scarf, wool hat and gloves. It's also essential to bring closed shoes (2 pairs if possible), a raincoat ("ponchos" are very useful) and a good hat. Along with that you should bring sunglasses, sun screen and insect repellent (this last one mainly for the forest).

Best combined with

North-east Argentina: Ibera Marshes and Atlantic Forest of Iguazu Falls (14 days/13 nights)

Best of Argentine Atlantic Forest and Iguazu Falls (7 days/6 nights tour)

Punta Rasa & surroundings (3 days/2 nights tour)

Important (READ): our tours are designed for small groups, with low impact, personalized attention and hiring local guides whenever possible, in order to increase their quality. We keep the use of play back down to a minimum possible so to avoid stressing the birds or affecting their natural behavior, thus actively contributing to the conservation of the same and promotion of responsible birding and ecotourism practices.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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