

Why birdwatching in this Region?

Birds of the region

In the world there are around 9800 species of birds, belonging to 29 orders. 1/3 of them can be found in South America. In Argentina there are 998 species, grouped in 84 families and 23 orders. In San Martín de los Andes there are 189 species, 18% of the country's total amount, and they represent 41 families, grouped in 19 orders. Most of these species are permanent (resident or migratory) but others are vagrant (registered only a few times throughout the century) or accidental (registered only once). Of the total amount of species presented here, 165 have confirmed presence, some are rare or difficult to see, others are common and yet others are very abundant.

Environments

In the area we can differentiate the following four environments: steppe, forest, highlands and wetlands.

The steppe (S), in the east, is characterized by semi-arid habitats with shrubs and bushes covering hill, plains and plateaus. The precipitation in this area ranges from 300 to 1500 mm per year. The climate is dry in the summer but cold and snowy during the winter. Annual average temperatures oscillate between 9 and 13°C. The vegetation in the area is highly adapted to the semi-desert environment. One of the most typical plant associations is that of the spiny shrub *Milunum spinosum* and the hard grass *Stippa sp.* Some wetlands (locally called "mallin") and river valleys interrupt these dry lands and are especially rich in birds. Amongst the most typical birds found in the area is the "choike" (Lesser Rhea) *Pterocnemia pennata*, the Elegant Crested-Tinamou *Eudromia elegans*, numerous raptors, the parrot *Cyanoliseus patagonus* and amongst the passerines are the Diuca Finch *D. diuca*, the Canasteros belonging to the genus *Asthenes*, the Long-tailed Meadowlark *Sturnella loyca* and the Shrike-tyrants of the genus *Agriornis*.

The forest (F) includes a wide range of trees belonging to the genus *Nothofagus* which dominate the slopes of the Andean mountains and adjoin ecotone forests (characterized by *Austrocedrus chilensis*, *Maytenus sp.* and *Trinerva chacaya*). The ecotone marks the transition to the steppe. Communities dominated by *Araucaria araucana* are present in the north and Valdivian forests dominates in the west. The precipitation is above 800 mm in the ecotone forest, typically above 1500 mm in the *Nothofagus* forest and reaches 4000 mm in the Valdivian forest. Summers are dry with heavy snows during the winter which increase to the west. Average temperatures fluctuate between 7 and 11°C. The diversity of birds is less than in the steppe, however, several endemisms and typical families exist in the subantarctic region. Some typical examples are the Magallanic woodpecker *Campephilus magellanicus*, the Southern Pigeon *Columba araucana*, the Southern Fire-crown *Sephanoides*

sephanooides, the tapaculos of the Rhinocryptidae family, the White-crested Elaenia *Elaenia albiceps* and the blackbird *Cureus cureus*.

The highland (C) involve all of the ecosystems which exist on the mountain chains above the limit of the forest at 1800masl: grasslands, steppes, wetlands. Snows are frequent during the entire year and the annual average temperatures are below 7°C. The vegetation is well adapted to the cold and strong winds, therefore the vegetation is commonly short and rounded. Wetlands, richer in diversity, are found in the protected areas. Some species like the condor *Vulture gryphus* inhabit the area year-round, but many species arrive from the Puna (northern high Andean plains) during the summer and it is only possible to see them by ascending to the high mountain areas. Some typical species are the Ground-Tyrants of the genus *Muscisaxicola* and the Sierra-Finches of the genus *Phygilus*, whilst some species like the Seedsnipes (Thinocoridae family) are characteristic of the western high Andean environments and steppes.

The aquatic environment (A) includes lakes, ponds, rivers or springs and wetlands of all types. Like we mentioned before, these are the richest environments and in some cases the strictly aquatic species live there regardless of them being surrounded by forest or steppe. Numerous species of ducks, grebes, coots, swans, geese, cormorants and gulls live in these bodies of water. Other species live strictly on river banks or lagoon shores and yet others live in the marsh vegetation. Amongst them we find the Cinclodes, the Wren-like Rushbird *Phleocryptes melanops* and the Yellow-winged Blackbird *Agelaius thilius*.

In the case of species associated to urban zones we include special abbreviation: U. Cosmopolitan species like pigeons and sparrows are possible to be seen only in this environment. With respect to the rural areas (R) is well known that a large quantity of species have experienced a clear expansion from northern Argentina to southern rural areas. Some have already arrived like the Saffron Finch *Sicalis flaveola*, whilst others are spreading rapidly from the north-east and the first registers have been made of species

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