

NW Argentina Aug 2-13, 2013

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Introduction

This report covers a 12-day trip to Northwestern Argentina during which I covered approximately 3,000km in buses and taxis and walked a little over 70km, traveling cheaply with a backpack and sleeping in hostels, buses, or camping.

While researching a trip to Northern Argentina for the austral winter, I noticed two things. First off, that there is no real trip report out there for backpacker-style traveling on the cheap for this area, and secondly that reports are all but nonexistent for the months of July and August. Although I was slightly worried about species being tough to locate due to the fact that it is winter, it ended up not being an issue.

My goal here is to show how feasible and relatively cheap it is to get around on public transportation (with a little legwork), and to detail what the birding is like in this not oft-visited time of year. I also entered the region in a different way than other reports – through Bolivia at the border crossing of Pocitos/Yacuiba. I had flown into Santa Cruz, Bolivia, and returned there after the time in Argentina to begin several weeks of travel in Bolivia before returning to the United States. I have included the travel to and from Bolivia in here in case people are interested in that aspect of this trip.

I was specifically targeting species that I had not seen before, not paying so much attention to overall species totals as opposed to the more unusual and interesting birds. My three main goals were Rufous-throated Dipper, Scimitar-billed Woodcreeper, and Cinnamon Warbling-Finch, all of which I was lucky enough to locate.

Resources Consulted

I ended up planning the trip mainly using a combination of eBird data (<http://ebird.org/content/ebird/>) and several trip reports, especially the Tropical Birding December 2012 report by Nick Athanas (http://www.tropicalbirding.com/wp-content/uploads/pdfs/SouthAmerica/Argentina/TR_Argentina_Dec2012.pdf) for bird location information and Clayton Burne's independent travel via bike (<http://solomaverick.blogspot.be/p/11-september-2012-18-october-2012.html>) for logistical help.

For field guides I used the Ridgley and Tudor Field Guide to the Birds of South America: Passerines, and Birds of South America: Non-Passerines: Rheas to Woodpeckers by Erize, Mata, and Rumboll. Most of the areas did not have too many species, and being already familiar with most of the species that were there, these served perfectly fine for my needs this trip.

Travel, Lodging & Expenses

I traveled long distances by bus in afternoons and overnight generally, arriving at a birding destination the night before, grabbing a few hours of sleep, and then either walking or taking a taxi predawn to bird for the morning. Buses were frequent to the major locations (e.g. Salta, Jujuy, Pocitos), but were much more specific to the smaller locations such as Cafayate and Taco Pozo.

Buses were much more expensive in general than I'm used to from Latin American countries, running at often \$5-8USD/hour of travel using the official exchange rate (c. 5.5 pesos/USD). The quality of buses was high, with all being at least "semi-cama", or partial-bed seats. They generally left on time and out of the 16 that I took, only one broke down. One of the strange customs in Argentina is to tip the person who puts a luggage tag on your bag to stow it under the bus, usually \$2-5 pesos for just putting a tag on and lifting the bag 2-3 feet. Seemed very strange to me, but often they wouldn't give you the luggage ticket until they got their tip.

I generally stayed at hostels or cheap hotels, ranging from \$45-80 pesos/night. The employees/owners at the hotels were very accommodating for getting up early to let me out and keeping my big backpack safe until I was done birding for the day, free of charge. Breakfast was generally not included, and when it was it was forgettable. Some means of transportation for rent was available easily in every town except Taco Pozo, where I didn't try too hard because the birding sites were within walking distance. The best means for getting a taxi for the following when arriving late is to ask the person at the hotel if they know someone to call, if not then you have to go out and track down someone at the plaza usually, which is more difficult but usually not necessary.

In general I managed to travel for \$40-45USD (200-250 pesos)/day, most of which was spent on transportation. I generally would buy some vegetables, bread, and cheese at a little market in the evening and eat that for dinner and breakfast the next day (c. 30-40 pesos), often forgoing lunch as a result of being on a bus or birding. The major mistake that I made, that I didn't find out about until the end, was getting money officially from ATMs. By the end of the trip I had talked to around a half-dozen people who all said that you should change money in the street, you'll often get \$8-8.5 pesos/USD, as opposed to the official exchange rate of \$5.5 pesos/USD. I never tested this myself, but if it is indeed true, you could cut the cost of the entire trip by a full third, which is not something to be laughed at. In the border city of Pocitos the bus company that sold me my ticket accepted Bolivian bolivianos, and changed a couple hundred bolivianos into pesos, which is definitely a good bargain for the traveler.

In the below descriptions all prices are in Argentinean pesos unless otherwise specified.

Itinerary

This was my general day-by-day schedule, which I've expanded on below in individual detailed day reports.

Day 1 (2 Aug): AM Santa Cruz / PM Travel from Santa Cruz to Argentina / Night Bus
Day 2 (3 Aug): AM border crossing / PM Travel to Yala / Night Yala
Day 3 (4 Aug): AM Lagunas de Yala / PM Travel to Cafayate / Night Cafayate
Day 4 (5 Aug): AM Cafayate / PM to Amaicha del Valle / Night Amaicha del Valle
Day 5 (6 Aug): AM Encalilla / PM Travel to Tañi del Valle / Night Tañi del Valle
Day 6 (7 Aug): AM El Infiernillo / PM Travel to Tucumán / Night Tucumán
Day 7 (8 Aug): AM Travel to Salta / PM Travel to Taco Pozo / Night Taco Pozo
Day 8 (9 Aug): AM Taco Pozo / PM Taco Pozo / Night Taco Pozo
Day 9 (10 Aug): AM Taco Pozo / PM Taco Pozo / Night Taco Pozo and bus
Day 10 (11 Aug): AM Travel to Calilegua NP / PM Calilegua NP / Night Calilegua NP
Day 11 (12 Aug): AM Calilegua NP / PM Travel to Pocitos / Night Bus to Santa Cruz
Day 12 (13 Aug): AM Arrive in Santa Cruz / PM Begin Bolivia trip

Day 1 – Travel from Bolivia to the border, night on bus

The Santa Cruz bus terminal has official prices posted, making the decision of which company to take rest only on their schedule. Buses to the border town of Yacuiba only left in the evening (7pm-10pm), and I took a bus-cama bus, with seats that recline almost horizontally, for \$131 bolivianos (7.5hrs).

Day 2 – Bus birding from the border to San Pedro de Jujuy, night Yala

Arrived at the border predawn, only to discover that in my last-minute preparations for Argentina, having only planned the trip two weeks prior, I had missed something fairly major. I had confirmed that there was no visa, but hadn't noticed the entrance tax, which costs \$160. Of course you can't pay it in person, so I had to go to an internet café and pay it online – easy, right? Turns out that the website that you use to pay the tax was down..for most of the morning. I ended up sitting there at a cafe for about three hours, trying repeatedly and calling my family in the US to try as well, until the official page finally started working, and I could pay the tax and continue into Argentina. This was an easily avoidable mishap, and was effortless once I had the proper piece of paper in hand.

There were no buses leaving to San Salvador de Jujuy (Jujuy), instead only to San Pedro de Jujuy (\$134, 4hrs), where you could then easily continue on to Jujuy and Yala. The road here (Ruta 34) passes through vast expanses of agricultural fields and scrubby edge, which provided birds like Toco Toucan, almost 200 Greater Rhea, a flock of 25 Maguari Storks in a field, and various other common species. Checklist here:

<http://ebird.org/ebird/view/checklist?subID=S14848133>

After a short wait at the San Pedro terminal there was a departure for Jujuy proper (\$19, 1hr), followed by a final taxi ride (\$82) in the dark to the Refugio Complejo Turistico in Yala, directly across from the entrance to the road to the Laguna de Yala (-24.118124,-65.40453). This cost \$50/night, for a dorm bed with hot water, and apparently internet at the reception. When I was there the dorm was empty, so I ended up with a pretty good deal. According to the owner of the hotel there are no taxis in Yala, but I got him to call a friend of his who agreed to drive me to the Laguna at 5:30am for \$100, a 35 minute ride.

Day 3 – Rio Yala, travel to/night in Cafayate

The driver arrived on time and I got dropped off right at Laguna Rodeo (-24.10698,-65.47888), spending the time until sunrise walking down the road and back, trying for Montane Forest Screech-Owl and Lyre-tailed Nightjar with no luck. The only nightbird I had in the sub-freezing temperatures was a single Barn Owl flying around making a ruckus. Once dawn came, the upper reaches of the road came to life, and ended up being quite birdy. The section of straight road just below the Laguna had many mixed flocks, the bulk of which were Rusty-browed Warbling-Finches, Fulvous-headed Brush-Finches, and Common Bush-Tanagers. Spot-breasted Thornbirds were common in pairs, and a few Brown-capped Tit-Spinetails were in the upper reaches of the road as well. Right where the switchbacks started I heard Red-faced Guan (-24.11503,-65.467572), and further down had my main target – Rufous-throated Dipper. The dipper was feeding at the edge of the water (-24.120827,-65.455534), and was visible from the road maybe 75% of the time I was in the area before eventually flying down the river out of sight. I walked all the way back to town through a residential zone, and arrived back at the hotel around midday. List from the morning with some specific locations: <http://ebird.org/ebird/view/checklist?subID=S14872051>

After I retrieved my bags I went to the bus stop right across the highway from the hotel, where I had to wait less than ten minutes before the colectivo I was looking for arrived. For a mere \$3.75 I got a ride to within a block of the bus terminal in Jujuy, over \$75 cheaper than the ride the other way the night before! From here it was a two-hour bus ride to Salta (\$40), where I grabbed a second bus to Cafayate (\$86, 4.5 hours), arriving an hour or so after dark. It seems that the buses to Cafayate only left in the late afternoon, getting you in after sunset. Here I stayed at the Cafayate Backpackers Hostel, a nice place that cost \$45 for a dorm with hot water, internet in some of the rooms, and breakfast (which I didn't partake in). I was also able to get the guy here to call a taxi friend of his who agreed to take me to the birding destination in the morning for \$40.

Day 4 – Cafayate, travel to/night in Amaicha del Valle

At 6:30 I was off to the Km 8 area on the road back towards Salta, an area of monte desert with lots of sand dunes covered by nice desert scrub (-26.049149,-65.899429). No luck with Chaco Owl predawn in this area or along the road, but once again the below-freezing temperatures likely had something to do with that. As dawn rose the Sandy Gallitos started up, and proved to be one of the more omnipresent noises of the location. This area also held a couple small groups of Elegant Crested-Tinamou, Chaco Earthcreepers, and an unexpected Gray-bellied Shrike-Tyrant. There were numerous cattle paths through the thorn scrub, and I

just walked those and could pretty easily track down everything that was calling. If you familiarize yourself with the calls of these species, they were all quite easy at this location. The only expected species that I didn't locate was White-throated Cachalote – but based on experiences from later in the trip I think that the habitat was not open enough for that species. One of the interesting species located here were Sharp-billed Canasteros – not shown to be present in the field guide. This subspecies apparently represents a local population that is separate from the austral migrants further south, and was quite abundant!

After birding here for a few hours I started the walk back towards town, figuring that I would flag down a bus at some point. Turns out that there weren't any buses going past, or for that matter any vehicles that would be likely to pick up a hitchhiker. To add to the fun, I had also apparently lost my water bottle at some point, and by now it was mid-morning and the sun was beating down in the montane desert. Close to 6km of walking later I finally came upon a couple houses, one of which held an amazingly kind woman who gave me a bottle of water to quench what had become quite a thirst. Aside from the minor dehydration, the walk back had some good birding at times, with lots of Patagonian and White-banded Mockingbirds, hundreds of Burrowing Parakeets, and a few White-bellied Tyrannulets, with most of the activity being in the area of the vineyards (-26.061795,-65.955005). Full checklist from the morning with some specific locations can be seen here:

<http://ebird.org/ebird/view/checklist?subID=S14862224>

A few more kilometers of walking and I was back at the hostel, from where I caught a bus to Amaicha del Valle after a few hours of waiting (\$28, 1.25 hours), arriving around dark. I had been recommended to go to a certain hostel in town, but after over a half hour of searching and being no closer to finding it, I eventually just chose the Complejo Los Algarrobos (\$50), the worst hotel of the trip in my opinion. I was definitely the only person staying there, and the owners promised me internet, only to say that it didn't work after I had paid. Bathrooms were shared and truly horrifying, even for someone with no standards like me – I'd much rather choose the woods. They were also completely unwilling to help try to arrange a ride for the following morning, so I tracked down a taxi driver in the square and set up a 7am departure for the following morning (\$45).

Day 5 – Encalilla area, travel to/night in Tafi del Valle

At 7am the taxi rolled up and I said farewell to the two dogs that had been keeping me company during my predawn wait – after a quick 15-minute ride I was in Encalilla at the eastern bank of the river I had crossed the previous day en route from Cafayate (-26.509444,-66.007533). Going on information from an article published in Neotropical Birding (<http://www.mendeley.com/download/public/6741623/4127019253/bf4baad1b94463b3cb904680fdbaf2611a78329e/dl.pdf>), I spent the best part of the morning walking the scrub just to the east of the river and north of the highway. Although this was indeed fairly productive (Black-legged Sereima, Spectacled Tyrant), the birds that I was really looking for today, namely Cinnamon Warbling-Finch and White-throated Cachalote, were nowhere to be found.

After several hours of seeing the same common things repeatedly near the river, I started making my way east along the highway through the town of Encalilla proper, not yet sure

whether I felt like trying to make my way back to Amaicha on foot or hitching. The town area itself turned out to be quite productive, with some unexpected birds in the form of monjitas! I had at least 6 White Monjitas and a single Black-crowned – not species I expected this high in the Andes. Right upon reaching the edge of town, as hope seemed to be fading, I saw a few birds flush from the margin of the road..two Rufous-collared Sparrows – and a Cinnamon Warbling-Finch! The warbling-finch almost immediately vacated the area, flying a hundred meters or so into the scrub. Upon pursuing it I found an amazing spectacle of hundreds of seed-eating birds in a single wintering flock, feeding amidst the monte scrub. There were about 650 individuals, mostly split among Rufous-collared Sparrow (260), Common Diuca-Finch (200), and Cinnamon Warbling-Finch (170), with the remainder being Collared Warbling-Finch (25). I spent a long time following them around as they fed – occasionally the flock would move towards me and pass by like a living cloud, only to descend and vanish again. They were only a couple hundred meters from the highway, but you could be half that distance and have no idea they were present. In the area there were also several pairs of White-throated Cachalotes – just find the large stick nests and the birds will soon appear. eBird list from the morning here: <http://ebird.org/ebird/view/checklist?subID=S14871351>

All my wished for species under my belt, I went to the bus stop in Encalilla and hitched a ride back to Amaicha in the bed of a pickup after 90 minutes of waiting. After picking up my bag from the hotel, I got the next bus to Tafi del Valle (\$38, 1.25 hours). Today was one of the few days I arrived somewhere in the daylight, so I took advantage of the extra time to arrange a taxi earlier in the day and get to bed early! At the taxi stand along the main street in town I got someone to agree to pick me up at 7:30 the following morning to go to El Infiernillo (\$100), the pass I had crossed earlier in the day coming from Amaicha del Valle. Night at La Cumbre hostel, seemed to be the best deal for what you get in this touristy town with inflated prices - \$70/night for a dorm with shared bathroom and internet which worked in the room. Once again, I had the room to myself and couldn't complain.

Day 6 – El Infiernillo, travel to/night in Tucumán

At 7:30 the taxi was waiting, and after the half-hour ride I was happily shivering ~1km east of the pass itself (-26.742219,-65.755384), where I started the walking for the day. Buff-breasted Earthcreeper was present right by the main highway, and also where I spent most of the morning, in a valley northeast of my starting point (-26.736067,-65.749912). This valley, in addition to the earthcreepers, had Ornate Tinamou, Slender-billed Miner, Cordilleran Canastero, and Cinereous Ground-Tyrant, as well as a curious Andean Fox that followed me as close as 3-4 meters away at times. As a note – I would not recommend hiking around at this elevation in case you're prepared for being cold when you stop, hot when you walk, and out of breath almost always. But the birds are great!

At about 10:30 I started making my way downhill towards Tafi, not seeing much in the first couple kilometers except some Cinereous Harriers and a Puna Canastero, but as I lost more elevation I started seeing lots of ground-doves. My next birding goal was an area where two quebradas (streams) cross the road near each other, and join up just downhill from the highway (-26.774848,-65.729613). Along the highway within about 1km either side of this area there were loads of ground-doves, including 77(!) Bare-eyed (Moreno's) Ground-Doves, and even more Black-winged. By this time the wind had picked up to a sustained 15-20 knots,

but I still managed to coax Tucuman Mountain-Finch and White-throated Tapaculo out of the brush growing along the sides of the ravines. I continued walking downhill from here, hoping to stumble across something else unusual, but aside from some more Tucumán Mountain-Finches in another gully (-26.792452,-65.728734), I didn't have much until I caught a bus back to Tafi del Valle (\$5). eBird checklist from the morning here:

<http://ebird.org/ebird/view/checklist?subID=S14878539>

Back in Tafi I grabbed my stuff and decided to skip the planned destination for the morning, the Rio Sosa valley, in lieu of heading to the lowlands for another half-day in the Chaco. By doing this I negated all chance of seeing Yellow-striped Brush-Finch, which was quite regrettable, but the birding would have been logistically complicated as it was, and could have resulted in the loss of a day further on. I caught a bus from Tafi to San Miguel de Tucumán (\$48, 2.5 hours), with the plan of spending the night there, and then making it to the distant Taco Pozo by the following afternoon. I did manage to see Torrent Duck and Bare-throated Tiger-Heron along the Rio Sosa on the bus ride – so not all was lost! Night at the Hostal Tucumán, \$85/night for a dorm bed and internet in the room – a pretty poor deal but this seemed to be another location with inflated prices.

Day 7 – Travel from Tucumán to Salta and Salta to Taco Pozo, night Taco Pozo

This day didn't go quite as planned, but still got me to Taco Pozo in time for birding the following morning. I got up very early to catch a 5am bus from Tucumán to Salta (\$158, 4 hours), anticipating that there would be a bus going to Taco Pozo sometime early or mid-morning. I found upon my arrival that I couldn't have been more wrong about the bus schedule, and that the only buses to Taco Pozo left at 4, 5, and 6pm. I got tickets for the 4pm bus as there was no alternative, and spent 7 hours waiting in the bus station until I was finally on my way to Taco Pozo (\$112, 5.5 hours), arriving at 9:30pm at night.

I spent the night at Hotel Taco Pozo, a basic hotel across from the bus station that was \$70/night for a private double room with a shared bathroom, and internet that varied between not existing and providing a 1kbps connection – enough to download a few emails every minute. Better than nothing. I inquired about a taxi, but the proprietress informed me that there were no taxis in town, and she apparently didn't know anyone with a vehicle who wanted to make some easy money in the morning.

Day 8 – Taco Pozo south road, night Taco Pozo

Due to the apparent lack of hireable wheels in Taco Pozo, I did a lot of walking over these next couple days. Since this area is pretty much an unknown for birding, based on what I could (or rather couldn't) find online, I had identified locations for birding based on what the habitat looked like on Google Earth, and just walked there from the town until I saw what I wanted to see. This first morning was spent along the road heading south from town (start at -25.622316,-63.264202), which initially passed through cutover habitat with scattered buildings, eventually becoming short (5-10 meter) Chaco thorn forest.

I started walking in the dark around 7am, reaching the initial agricultural areas by dawn. All I had predawn in town was a single Barn Owl in someone's yard, but I bet that Chaco Owl is

present in the habitat further out of town. The cutover agricultural areas had more open species like Guira Cuckoo, Lark-like Brushrunner, and White Monjita, as well as singles of Yellow-browed Tyrant and a Common Diuca-Finch – the latter of which is out of the range shown in Ridgley and Tudor.

After a couple kilometers you cross some powerlines and pass by the last house (-25.649361,-63.278503), and are now in Santiago del Estero province. Just 2-300 meters south of the powerline cut there is a small crossroads, where there was a pair of Scimitar-billed Woodcreepers and a single Little Thornbird. From here on south the habitat is fairly similar – dry thorn forest with cow paths branching off from the main road, which is just a dirt track with about 3-4 inches of loose dust as a surface. Birding was fairly active throughout here, with the common species seen regularly.

One of the more productive areas was a small clearing as the road bends to the west (-25.673054,-63.291378), which held a pair of Scimitar-billed Woodcreepers, Great Rufous Woodcreeper, Black-crested Finch, Brown Cachalote, with Cream-backed and Black-bodied Woodpeckers heard in the larger trees just to the north and east of the clearing. By 10am the wind had really picked up, gusting 20-30kts regularly and whipping up the previously mentioned 3-4 inches of loose dust into choking clouds that rendered birding, and breathing, less than optimal. eBird checklist from the morning here:
<http://ebird.org/ebird/view/checklist?subID=S14915680>

Throughout the day there were locals actively logging and hunting the area, going by on horses, dirtbikes, or even horses carrying carts full of firewood, and every person had either a chainsaw or a rifle. People were very nice, a couple stopped and talked about birds briefly, but the future of this location is likely fairly limited for species like Quebracho Crested-Tinamou, Black-bodied Woodpecker, and the other more sensitive Chaco species.

Around noon or so I started back towards town, getting back around 3pm and spending the night again at Hotel Taco Pozo.

Day 9 – Taco Pozo northwest road, night Taco Pozo

Today I decided to explore another road that looked interesting based on Google Earth, this one much closer to town and leaving civilization in a northwesterly direction. I walked out in that direction at 6am and found a gate across the road that was unlocked and slightly ajar (-25.607969,-63.26461), so I figured that it was to keep cattle in and not people out. From here I walked north in the gathering dawn, ending up on a wide dirt road (-25.59689,-63.262904), heading northwest. An earlier start would be better, since I didn't get to the best habitat until dawn chorus had already peaked.

I spent most of the morning walking between the last coordinates and the next crossroads (-25.57624,-63.275242), where there were absolutely tons of birds, no traffic, and great habitat. This area had been cleared on the eastern side of the road, but the few standing trees made good habitat for woodpeckers and raptors. The western side of the road was large and healthy forest (15-20 meter canopy), and had Quebracho Crested-Tinamou, tons of Scimitar-billed Woodcreepers, several Cinereous Tyrants, and lots of mixed flocks. A single Spot-winged

Falconet was about half way down the road (-25.586769,-63.267989), and there were Black-legged Sereimas sounding off occasionally throughout the morning, with a few eventually seen near the crossroads.

After the crossroads the forest was on both sides of the road, and in this area I found multiple Black-bodied and Cream-backed Woodpeckers, including both species simultaneously by this small clearing (-25.568111,-63.279963). This section of the road stretched for a couple kilometers, and looked like even better habitat than the stretch south of the crossroads. The road ends at a little house/barn area at the edge of some agricultural fields, and there is a Monk Parakeet colony right around the buildings (-25.558974,-63.285198). Also around in the cleared area were Red-crested Cardinal and Black-capped Warbling-Finch, two species I didn't have elsewhere in Argentina.

From here I went back south along the road that goes due south from the buildings (-25.562691,-63.285928), which was pretty slow for birding (admittedly it was midday and sweltering), but there was also noticeable logging traffic here. I turned back east towards the initial road at the first opportunity (-25.576356,-63.28567), and rejoined it at the crossroads, heading back towards where I entered in the morning. eBird checklist from the morning: <http://ebird.org/ebird/view/checklist?subID=S14915684>

As I was heading back, a pickup truck, the only car I'd seen all day, pulled up next to me, and two angry looking men got out. They told me that I was on private property, and questioned me about what I was doing, how I got there, and why I was there. After slowly scrolling through all 1000 photos on my camera to prove that I was only looking at birds, and explaining that the gate this morning had been open, and that I'd found the place by looking on Google Earth, they believed that I wasn't from Greenpeace or trying to steal anything (their exact words). I told them I was on the way out, and apologized profusely, and they said that it was alright that I was there, but just that they needed to know ahead of time know who any strange person was. We parted ways then, and I continued my walk back towards town.

As I reached the gate I had entered this morning, it was closed and locked, and the only other exit was along a track through the front yard of a quite nice looking house. As I walked through the yard, one of the men from earlier came out on the porch and called me over...only to promptly invite me in for lunch! Turns out that his name is Silvio, and he is the owner of all the land that I was on today, as well as agricultural fields in the area, a sawmill, livestock, etc. He was very interested in the birds that I had seen, and I showed him photos and talked about the importance of the habitat on his land, which he was protecting from general firewood harvesting, albeit so that he could later harvest it for charcoal and sawtimber, but at least at a slower rate than surrounding habitat.

Silvio is receptive to people coming and birding his property in the future, and I know of one birder who already has done so, but you MUST check with him in advance and let him know that you will be birding there. His house is at -25.608327,-63.263698, and in order to bird this property you will need to go there and talk to him ahead of time. I gave him my email to contact me but never heard anything – if anyone does go here and gets his contact info, please let me know.

Other roads around the perimeter of town are surely excellent birding and habitat as well – and anyone with a rental car could easily explore and find the same things I did or better in nearby locations.

Back in town after being treated to lunch, I spent the afternoon heat catching up on photos and figuring out when buses headed back towards Salta – it turns out that they only depart in the middle of the night into early morning, so I booked a ticket for a 2am departure, and went back to grab a few hours of sleep at Hotel Taco Pozo for one last night.

Day 10 – Overnight travel to Calilegua, morning birding and night in Calilegua NP

Up briefly for the 2am bus and then back asleep for the ride to General Güemes (\$115, 3.75 hours), where I was able to find a bus that left soon for Libertador General San Martín (\$55, 1.5 hours), the jumpoff point for Calilegua NP. I got a taxi from the Libertador General San Martín bus station to the entrance to the park (\$50, 15 minutes), and from there caught the morning colectivo that heads west through the part at around 9am. I took the colectivo as far as the second ranger station (-23.699806,-64.866779), 13km into the park (free ride!). At this point I still had my day pack as well as my large backpack, since I had intended to camp somewhere at the higher elevations for the night. A quick evaluation of my sleeping options revealed that I wasn't going to have any luck, and that I was going to have to camp at the campground back at the entrance where I had just come from.

I ditched my large pack in the bushes for the moment and started birding the area around the second ranger station, including the roadside and the trail that leads downhill directly across the road from the station. The trail held a friendly Tataupa Tinamou that walked within a couple meters of me, as well as a lovely Spotted Nightingale-Thrush hopping on the path – but not much other activity. Back on the main road the action picked up, with lots of mixed flocks, Dusky-legged Guan calling downslope, and multiple Blue-capped Puffleg and Red-tailed Comets feeding at roadside flowers.

I made my way downhill from here, having more of the same roadside flock birds and also a single Yellow-collared Macaw flyover one valley down from the second ranger station. After about 7.5 hours of walking with both backpacks on I was getting pretty tired, and luckily I was able to catch the evening colectivo for the remaining 3km to the entrance, where I set up my tent in the nice (and free) campground (-23.761898,-64.85148), which I had all to myself. A couple Buff-necked Ibis flying along the adjacent river as I set up my tent provided a superb finish to the day. eBird list at: <http://ebird.org/ebird/view/checklist?subID=S14915683>

Day 11 – Calilegua NP birding in the morning, travel to Pocitos/Yacuiba

Woke up to the sound of Plush-crested Jays and Red-legged Sereima calling, but not the hoped for Rufous Nightjars. As I started to head out to walk the road further into the park, four Yellow-collared Macaws flew in and started feeding on fruit almost directly over my tent – providing a much better experience than the distant flyby the day prior. Once I extricated myself from the macaw show, working the road uphill turned up several flocks along the roadsides once more, and nice banks of flowers that had Red-tailed Comet and Slender-tailed Woodstar (-23.758216,-64.853572).

Just above the first mirador there was a Rufous-thighed Kite that was exceedingly vocal for close to 10 minutes, and finally showed himself in flight heading out over the valley. Slightly further on I took the Laguna trail, which wended its way through good forest to a laguna, which was unfortunately dry but yielded a much hoped for Giant Antshrike in a vine tangle at its edge (-23.752363,-64.850761). Ochre-cheeked Spinetails seemed especially confiding along the margins of this trail. I followed the trail to the river and followed that back to the campground – not too much of note, with Cream-winged Cinclodes and Green Kingfishers being new for the location. eBird list at:

<http://ebird.org/ebird/view/checklist?subID=S14915685>

Since my goal was to reach the border by the evening and catch a night bus back to Santa Cruz, Bolivia, I called it a day at 11 and got the park guard to call a taxi for me – a very kind gesture on his part. The ride back to Libertador General San Martín was uneventful (\$50), and after not too long I caught a bus heading for the border (\$128, 4.5 hours). It was an uneventful ride for birding aside from more Greater Rheas and a Savannah Hawk. Normally I would have arrived there around 7:30 or 8pm, but of course this had to be the one bus of the trip that broke down – with a transmission failure after a couple hours. After a delay of a little over an hour, we got a new bus and were once again headed for the border at Pocitos.

Arriving at an international border and crossing by foot at after 9pm is never enjoyable, but it went off without a hitch, and I was soon back in Bolivia, and in a taxi heading to the Yacuiba bus terminal. As I arrived there was one bus in the station, and other people were closing up their doors. It was just after 9:30pm at this point, and it turns out that all other buses had left for the day, except the one that was still idling there as people put their last bags in. Of course every seat was full, and the people in the office told me there was no way I could get on. As I was trying to decide what to do next, the baggage handler for the bus came up and told me I could ride on the floor for \$80 bolivianos. Not about to say no to my only chance of making it to Santa Cruz by the following morning, I paid up and boarded my home for the night.

Day 12 – Travel to Santa Cruz, begin Bolivian travel

After 8.5 hours of riding in the aisle of a bus that was narrower than my shoulders, allowing me to only lay sideways or sit up, while having babies occasionally placed on my head, and pushing away the bags of chickens sliding up and down the aisle – I was in Santa Cruz, Bolivia! My friend Andrew Spencer flew in today, and we started on a 19-day trip through Bolivia that garnered 608 species.

Species Encountered

All of the birds encountered in Argentina are covered in the lists above or text, totaling 203 species for the trip. Photos from the trip (many of which are linked in eBird checklists) can be seen at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/uropsalis/sets/72157634937474868/>.

In addition to birds seen, mammals encountered included singles of Andean Fox (*Lycalopex culpaeus*) at El Infiernillo and Jaguarundi (*Puma yagouaroundi*) at Taco Pozo along the northwest road, among more common species.