

## Montevideo Birding Experience

This full-day itinerary explores some of the most productive birding areas in and around Montevideo, offering an excellent introduction to the region's wetlands, grasslands, and coastal environments.



Mixed vegetation on the margins of the Santa Lucía wetlands nature reserve.

West of Montevideo lies the **Santa Lucía Wetlands**, a natural reserve integrated into Uruguay's National System of Protected Areas. This extensive landscape encompasses river shores, marshes, rural and suburban zones, as



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well as native and exotic woodlands, creating a rich mosaic of habitats within close proximity to the capital.

One of the key hotspots within the reserve is the Important Bird Area of **Playa Penino**, stretching for approximately eight kilometers along the Río de la Plata and combining sandy beaches with coastal marshes. These shores are key feeding grounds for migratory species. During the austral summer, shorebirds arrive from the high Arctic, while in austral winter the coast also hosts species moving northward from southern latitudes. Notable coastal birds include **Rufous-chested Dotterel** (winter), **American Golden-Plover** (summer), **White-rumped Sandpiper** (summer), the endemic **Olrog's Gull** (winter), and **Snowy-crowned Tern**, among many others.

The itinerary also includes a nearby rural area where diverse habitats support a rich assemblage of **grassland and wetland birds**. Raptors are well represented, with good chances of observing species such as Long-winged Harrier. In marshy environments, highlights may include Rufous-sided Crake, Spectacled Tyrant, and a variety of waterfowl.

Scattered gardens, tree lines, and lightly wooded patches provide habitat for species such as **Green-barred Woodpecker**, **Narrow-billed Woodcreeper**, and **White-throated Hummingbird**.

Grassland specialists are a central feature of this excursion. During the austral summer, pampas habitats hold **Bearded Tachuri**, **Dark-throated Seedeater**, and **Chestnut Seedeater**, along with characteristic species of the pampas such as **Long-tailed Reed Finch**, **Great Pampa Finch**, and the impressive **Giant Wood Rail**.

Overall, this full-day tour offers an excellent introduction to the birds of the pampas, wetlands, and Río de la Plata coast, with the possibility of recording **over 80 bird species in a single day**.

This itinerary combines habitat diversity, comfortable logistics, and excellent observation conditions, making it a rewarding and accessible birding experience just outside the capital.



Lagoon at Playa Penino.

## Full-Day Option

**Maximum duration:** 8 hours

Pick-up is provided directly at the guest's accommodation. For cruise passengers arriving at the Port of Montevideo, pick-up takes place at the port entrance. Transfer time to the first birding location ranges between 20 and 40 minutes, depending on the starting point of the itinerary.

The order of the sites visited may vary according to weather conditions and the guide's recommendations, ensuring optimal bird activity and the best possible observation opportunities throughout the day.

## Birding Locations

### **Santa Lucía Wetlands (tajamares sector)**

The tour begins at a series of artificial ponds located along the margins of the Santa Lucía

Wetlands reserve. This area offers excellent close-range views of marsh species, as well as birds associated with scattered trees and woodland edges. The combination of open water, emergent vegetation, and tree patches creates ideal conditions for detailed observation and photography.

### **Playa Penino – Important Bird Area**

We then continue to Playa Penino, a designated Important Bird Area featuring a remarkable diversity of habitats, including coastal marshes, shallow lagoons, sandy beaches along the Río de la Plata, and psammophilous shrublands. Terrestrial birds are often observed at short distances, while aquatic species can be comfortably studied from stationary vantage points using binoculars and spotting scopes, with generally moderate viewing ranges.

### **Rural Grassland Mosaic**

The final stop is a nearby rural area characterized by tall grasslands, wetlands, tree lines, and cultivated fields. This habitat mosaic results in high species richness, with many birds presenting themselves at very convenient observation distances.



Landscape at Playa Penino.

## Logistics & Comfort

- **Minimal travel time between sites** — generally no more than 20 minutes by vehicle, maximizing time in the field.
- **Low to moderate level of physical activity.** Most birding takes place on firm ground, including paved roads and compact gravel tracks. Short walks are occasionally required — typically only a few dozen meters — such as brief stretches on the beach where sections of soft sand are minimal and most walking occurs on firm sand. Several observations are also made from comfortable stationary viewpoints on flat terrain, allowing guests to enjoy excellent birding opportunities without physical effort.
- **Clean restroom facilities** — scheduled stops at a modern and well-maintained service station provide access to restrooms and a food shop if needed.
- **Picnic lunch** — midday, we enjoy a relaxed lunch under the shade of trees in a riverside park overlooking the Río de la Plata, seated at tables in a peaceful coastal setting.



Spectacled Tyrant. By Bill Pohley.



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## Half-Day Option

**Maximum duration:** 5 hours

For guests with limited time in Montevideo, we offer a half-day birding experience designed to maximize efficiency without compromising observation quality.

Two tailored approaches are available. The first maintains a diversity of habitats by reducing the time spent at each location, allowing for a well-rounded introduction to the region's wetlands, coast, and grasslands within a shorter schedule. The second option focuses exclusively on the sites most relevant to the client's wish list, prioritizing target species and specific habitat preferences.

The order of visits and site selection are carefully planned according to seasonal conditions, bird activity, and logistical considerations, ensuring the most productive use of available time.

This flexible format is particularly suitable for cruise passengers or travelers on tight schedules who wish to experience high-quality birding near the capital in a limited timeframe.



Rusty-collared Seedeater. By Bill Pohley.

## Alternative Woodland & Urban Birding Options

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In addition to the core sites proposed in the Montevideo Birding Experience, there are other excellent birding options that can be included in place of, or in combination with, the coastal and wetland locations — especially for birdwatchers who prefer woodland and forest-edge habitats and the species associated with them.

One such option is the **Museo Jardín Botánico Prof. Atilio Lombardo**, a 13-hectare botanical garden in the Prado district showcasing a wide variety of native and exotic trees, shrubs, and understory plants. Its diverse vegetation structure attracts a rich bird community, with nearly 100 species recorded year-round, including diurnal raptors, woodpeckers, hummingbirds, and a variety of passerines. The garden's network of shaded paths, open glades and mature trees provides excellent, close-range observation opportunities in a peaceful urban natural setting. Some notable species may include:

- Harris's Hawk
- Picazuro Pigeon
- Gray-cowled Wood Rail
- White-thorated Hummingbird
- White-spotted Woodpecker
- Narrow-billed Woodcreeper
- Blue-and-yellow Tanager
- Sayaca Tanager
- Hooded Siskin

Another appealing alternative is **Parque Lecocq**, a 120-hectare conservation park on the western edge of Montevideo, adjacent to the Santa Lucía Wetlands. Originally conceived as a center for flora and fauna conservation, the park now supports a mosaic of prairies, woodlands, and water bodies, making it a valuable birding spot near the city. The diversity of vegetation and open space within the park draws a wide range of bird species (more than 100 have been reported), offering enjoyable birdwatching along its trails, meadows and forest edges. Some notable species may include:

- Snail Kite
- Long-winged Harrier

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- Spot-flanked Gallinule
- Guira Cuckoo
- White Woodpecker
- Stripe-crowned Spinetail
- Diademed Tanager
- Golden-billed Saltator

Including these sites provides the opportunity to experience forest and woodland birding — a complement to the coastal and wetland environments — and can be customized based on client preference or specific target species. Whether you are interested in woodpeckers, hummingbirds, raptors, or songbirds that favor wooded and parkland areas, these urban oases can enrich your birding itinerary around Montevideo.



Whistling Heron. By Bill Pohley.

#### **Extended Bird List for Montevideo Birding Experience**

Southern Screamer • Neotropic Cormorant • White-tufted Grebe • Great Grebe • Pied-billed Grebe • Black-necked Swan • Coscoroba Swan • Fulvous Whistling-Duck • Brazilian Teal • Yellow-billed Teal • Silver Teal • Chiloe Wigeon • Rosy-billed Pochard • Lake Duck • Yellow-billed Pintail • Cocoi Heron • Great Egret • Snowy Egret • Cattle Egret • Whistling Heron • Striated Heron • Black-crowned Night-Heron • Bare-faced Ibis • White-faced Ibis • Plumbeous Ibis • Limpkin • Giant Wood-Rail • Plumbeous Rail • Rufous-sided Crake •

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Spot-flanked Gallinule • Common Gallinule • Red-gartered Coot • Red-fronted Coot • White-winged Coot • Wattled Jacana • Black-necked Stilt • American Oystercatcher • Southern Lapwing • Rufous-chested Dotterel (W) • Collared Plover • Two-banded Plover • American Golden-Plover (S) • Greater Yellowlegs • Lesser Yellowlegs • Solitary Sandpiper (S) • Hudsonian Godwit (S) • White-rumped Sandpiper (S) • Pectoral Sandpiper (S) • South American Snipe • Kelp Gull • Olrog's Gull (W) • Brown-hooded Gull • Yellow-billed Tern • Common Tern • Snowy-crowned Tern • Royal Tern • Sandwich Tern • Black Skimmer • Ringed Kingfisher • Amazon Kingfisher • Green Kingfisher • Glittering-bellied Emerald • White-throated Hummingbird • Gilded Hummingbird • Picazuro Pigeon • Eared Dove • Picui Gorund Dove • White-tipped Dove • Turkey Vulture • Osprey (S) • White-tailed Kite • Long-winged Harrier • Snail Kite (S) • Roadside Hawk • Harris's Hawk • Crested Caracara • Chimango Caracara • American Kestrel • Aplomado Falcon • Burrowing Owl • Short-eared Owl • Monk Parakeet • Dark-billed Cuckoo • Guira Cuckoo • Mottled Piculet • White Woodpecker • White-spotted Woodpecker • Green-barred Woodpecker • Campo Flicker • Narrow-billed Woodcreeper • Rufous Hornero • Wren-like Rushbird • Buff-winged Cinclodes (W) • Freckle-breasted Thornbird • Firewood-gatherer • Sulphur-bearded Reedhaunter • Stripe-crowned Spinetail • Chotoy Spinetail • Spix's Spinetail • Rufous-capped Antshrike • Variable Antshrike • White-winged Becard • Many-colored Rush-Tyrant • Mottle-cheeked Tyrannulet • Southern-beardless Tyrannulet • Bearded Tachuri (S) • Warbling Doradito • Small-billed Elaenia (S) • Sooty Tyrannulet • White-crested Tyrannulet • Swainson's Flycatcher • Bran-colored Flycatcher (S) • Vermilion Flycatcher (S) • Spectacled Tyrant • Austral Negrito (W) • Gray Monjita • White Monjita • Great Kiskadee • Streaked Flycatcher (S) • Cattle Tyrant • Tropical Kingbird (S) • Fork-tailed Flycatcher (S) • Rufous-browed Peppershrike • Red-eyed Vireo (S) • Gray-breasted Martin • Brown-chested Martin • Blue-and-white Swallow • White-rumped Swallow • Southern Rough-winged Swallow • Barn Swallow • Cliff Swallow • Masked Gnatcatcher • Chalk-browed Mockingbird • White-banded Mockingbird (W) • House Wren • Creamy-bellied Thrush • Rufous-bellied Thrush • Tropical Parula • Southern Yellowthroat (S) • Golden-crowned Warbler • White-browed Warbler • Hepatic Tanager • Diademed Tanager • Sayaca Tanager • Blue-and-yellow Tanager • Glaucous-blue Grosbeak • Long-tailed Reed-Finch • Grassland Yellow-Finch • Great Pampa-Finch • Blue-black Grassquit • Black-and-rufous Warbling-Finch • Gray-throated Warbling-Finch • Black-capped Warbling-Finch • Double-collared Seedeater • Dark-throated Seedeater • Rufous-rumped Seedeater • Chestnut Seedeater • Scarlet-headed Blackbird • Yellow-winged Blackbird • Brown-and-Yellow Marshbird • Variable Oriole • Grayish Baywing • Screaming Cowbird • Shiny Cowbird • Red-crested Cardinal • Saffron Finch • Rufous-collared Sparrow • Hooded Siskin • European Goldfinch • European Greenfinch

\*(W): Austral Winter, (S): Austral Summer.

Bird lists are based on previous records; it is not guaranteed to see them all during the tour.

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