



destination marketing



representation



ONCE IN A LIFETIME

Matt Merritt rubs shoulders with penguins and tries to stop Johnny Rook from pinching his shoes on a trip to the Falklands

If you're going to fly halfway round the world, you need a very good reason. A species that can't be seen anywhere else, a large-scale ornithological spectacle, or a landscape unlike anything you're used to. Within 24 hours of arriving in the Falklands, I was sitting on a beach enjoying all three, aware that a whole bundle of preconceptions had been blown away. Unique species? Striated Caracaras (it breeds in Tierra del Fuogo, but it's very rare there). Locally known as Johnny Rooks, you're going to be hearing more about them later. Spectacle? I'm surrounded by hundreds of penguins. I feel like David Attenborough, which is pretty much all that any of us want from our birdwatching. Landscape? Well, it's not the bleak, freezing wasteland we think we remember from the 1982 war. The sea is startlingly blue, the sand



King Penguins

are a long way away, some 200 miles off the southern tip of South America. That means flying from RAF Brize Norton via Ascension Island, or through Santiago and Punta Arenas in Chile, on the weekly flight. The latter offers the opportunity to add a few ticks to your South American list, even if you only make an overnight stop, but there's also the option to stay for a few days

February at the tail end of the southern hemisphere summer, we were whacked straight to Darwin, a tiny settlement on the 1.5-mile wide isthmus that joins the two halves of East Falkland. Overnighing at Darwin House, a very comfortable B&B, we were able to get off to a gentle birding start. Imperial Cormorants and Falklands Steamer Ducks were around



Johnny Rook

less wary of humans than at Darwin, and they weren't especially shy there. Just outside the house, we sat on the grass, with a small group of Johnny Rooks in attendance. Rather like gulls and corvids back home, they're on the lookout for any tasty morsel they can pinch, but they're so inquisitive that they've been known to take items such as cameras, so be on your guard.

The small islands also provide a home for ground-nesting species that, on the mainland, have been wiped out by invasive predators such as rats. The Blackish Cincloides, known here as the Tussac-bird, is the most notable of these. Roughly Starling-sized, what they lack in glamour they more than make up for with charm, foraging so

Factfile
Geography: With a total land area of 12,173km² and a coastline of around 3,500km, the Falklands consist of two main islands, West Falkland and East Falkland, and approximately 776 smaller islands.
Population: Estimated at 3,140 in 2008, primarily of British descent.
Government: The Falklands are a self-governing British Overseas Territory. Capital: Stanley.
Tourism: The islands have become a regular choice for cruise ships, and have attracted over 30,000 visitors a year in recent years.

encounter, you're going to see lots, lots more. Secondly, accept that you just can't help but think about them anthropomorphically. That afternoon, at the south-eastern tip of the island, both points were driven home emphatically. We sat and watched a beach crowded with what looked for all the world like holidaymakers traipsing to and from the sea, milling around in small family groups, or basking in the sun. There were Gentoo Penguins as well as Magellanic, with Falkland Skuas and the ever-present Johnny Rooks lurking around the edges of the colonies on the lookout for weak birds. A few of the skuas were nesting behind the beach, too, and were surprisingly unperturbed by passing by at close quarters.



Raising the Falkland Islands profile

The Falkland Islands Tourist Board (FITB) wanted Keene to raise their profile amongst birding and wildlife enthusiasts. Keene arranged for a number of journalists to visit the islands, and got Birdfair founder and industry expert Tim Appleton MBE to escort them and two tour operators to the Falklands. Keene created separate itineraries to meet the different participants' needs and, as a result of our work, tour operator Avian Adventures now features the Falklands in their brochure and has already filled their group escorted tour for the season. Coverage was achieved a range of publications, including Birdwatching magazine and Wild Travel.

client: Falkland Islands Tourist Board

service: Familiarisation Tours