

Magellanic, a forgotten plover at the end of the map

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Magellanic Plover *Pluvianellus socialis*, a charismatic, evolutionarily unique and ecologically surprising shorebird of southern South America, is currently considered Near Threatened at a global level. But recent surveys spanning Argentina and Chile suggest that it may be in severe trouble.



All photos depict Magellanic Plover *Pluvianellus socialis* (Near Threatened), unless otherwise specified.

1 Adult, Laguna Los Palos, Magallanes, Chile, February 2020 (Ricardo Matus). This species is one of a trio of sought-after breeding birds of southern Patagonia.





When perusing books preparing a birding trip to southern Patagonia, one's eyes are quickly drawn to three of the most sought-after birds of the region (indeed, arguably of the Neotropics): the 'Austral Grail' (aka Austral Rail *Rallus antarcticus*; Vulnerable), believed extinct barely 25 years ago but rediscovered thanks to a NBC conservation award (Mazar Barnett *et al.* 1998, 2014); the Critically Endangered and very handsome 'Holy Grebe' (Hooded Grebe *Podiceps gallardoi*), which has featured several times in this magazine (Imberti & Casañas 2010; Roesler *et al.* 2011, 2018); and Magellanic 'Magic' Plover *Pluvianellus socialis*, an intriguing, Near Threatened and perpetually poorly known shorebird. This article focuses on the last member of the trio.

First studied in some detail in the 1970s (Jehl 1975), Magellanic Plover partially shares its habitat with the Hooded Grebe – and so too a superficially similar history in that it has been considered to be 'safe', conservation-wise, due to the remoteness and mostly pristine condition of the areas it inhabits. But as with the bird itself, we now know that there is more to its conservation than meets the eye.

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A very singular bird, Magellanic Plover looks more like a dove than a plover. Evolutionarily unique, it is the sole species of its family and is only very distantly related to true plovers. Indeed, it is more closely related to the (also very strange) sheathbills *Chionis* spp. A particularly strange characteristic of the species' ecology also sets it apart from other plovers: adults eagerly dig the ground searching for food items and later feed young by regurgitating food from their crop.

For decades, most of the work on shorebirds in Patagonia (indeed, in southern South America) was focused on Nearctic migrants, with little interest or funding dedicated to the region's several endemic breeding species. This problematic situation has been flagged up a few times by researchers in recent years, and some gaps have been filled subsequently. Nevertheless, for many species, the level of basic knowledge remains inadequate.

Mythical species such as Fuegian Snipe *Gallinago stricklandii* (Near Threatened; once treated to a Photospot in this magazine: Schmitt 2017), the larger seedsnipes (*Attagis* spp.) or even some more common, even relatively abundant,