

## Chile (Chiloé Island) Parque Tepuhueico February 2024

I spent ten nights at Tepuhueico Lodge on Chiloé Island in Chile with David Couve from Far South Expeditions as my guide. The primary goal was to find a kodkod, but Parque Tepuhueico, wherein the lodge is situated, is a great place to see other uncommon species like Darwin's fox and the monito del monte. The park is private land and the owner's son, Martín, is responsible for all tourism activities, including management of the lodge. Martín is really passionate about the park and the animals that live there, having visited the park a lot as a kid. He's doing everything he can to increase tourism so that the park will be preserved for the animals, and I think his efforts are paying off; there was a steady stream of visitors during my stay. He's trying to understand the movements and behaviors of the kodkods through camera-trapping in the hope that they'll become easier for people to see. He has tried putting a little food in trees (out of reach of the foxes) on the grounds of the lodge to attract more cats from the depths of the forest, but has gotten inconsistent results with this strategy. For example, a cat will be seen somewhere not far from the lodge two or three times in one week by employees or guests of the lodge, but then activity will cease around the lodge for weeks. During my visit at the beginning of February, there weren't any signs of kodkods near the lodge. David and I thus decided to focus our time and energy on some of the quieter roads within the park that were originally made for access to private residences, some of which have since been abandoned. The forest is dense and visibility can be challenging, but with enough persistence, the kodkod is definitely findable. David and I saw two within the park, and a third way outside the park as it was trying to cross a busy highway; David had to slam on the brakes to avoid hitting it. Our first sighting inside the park was magical and you can watch my video [here](#). The kodkod, a melanistic one at that, jumped onto a fallen tree and we both put our flashlights on it. We got a nice look, but it retreated from the lights quickly and was hidden behind the fallen tree. David then started to make a squeaking noise and the kodkod came out into clear view. Obviously curious, it just sat there and looked at us until, again, the lights were too bright. It disappeared in some vegetation as David continued to squeak and then popped out a second time! There it sat and pondered our intentions before leaving for good. Our second sighting inside the park was much more ordinary. We saw eyeshine on the side of the road and as we walked closer, the kodkod moved into the undergrowth, just giving us a glimpse of its face. David tried to entice it out with the squeaking, but it wouldn't leave the safety of the undergrowth. I expected to come across more foxes given the amount of time we were searching for kodkods, but we did have a few good sightings, including one on the road during the middle of the day. For people who are interested in seeing a fox and don't have ten nights at the lodge, Martín puts out some food and a fox typically shows up shortly after dark. With regard to the monito del monte, we saw ten or so in the course of spotlighting for the kodkod. I wouldn't say it's easy to find, especially on a chilly night, but shouldn't be too much trouble with a dedicated search. A huge bonus during my stay was an amazing sighting of three southern river otters: a mom and two youngsters. They didn't mind our presence and have a den close to the lodge. We did see an otter briefly on the Chepu River, but sightings there are fifty-fifty at best. Martín said otters are often spotted near the lodge. In summary, I think Parque Tepuhueico offers the best chance for finding a kodkod, plus it's really good for the other species mentioned herein.