My Big Cat Year – Chile and the search for the Andean Mountain Cat – 31/10/26 to 15/11/26

Chile could not be excluded from the Big Cat Year as it harbors some special wildcat species, i. e. the Kodkod and the Andean Mountain Cat. The Kodkod can be found on Chiloé Island which I visited and the Andean Mountain Cat lives in Lauca NP, high up in the Andes in the north of Chile.

All in all, we managed to see **19 mammal species**, **123 Bird species** and **2 Reptiles and Amphibians**!

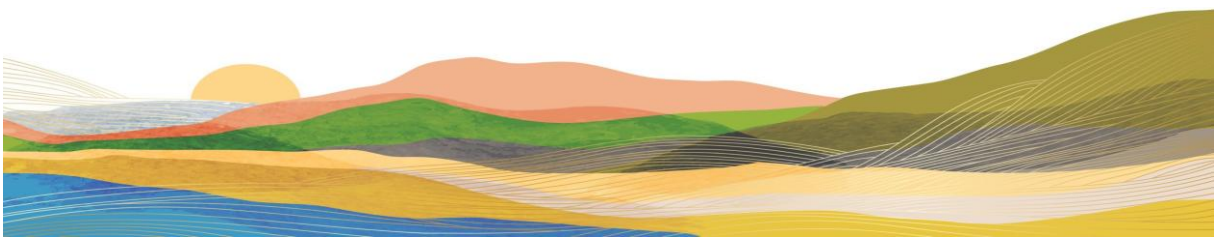
With regard to the mammals, the highlights for me were **Southern Pudu, Monito del Monte, Darwin Fox, Southern River Otter, Marine Otter, Vicuna, Lama, Alpaca, Common Mountain Viscacha, Culpeo, Molina's Hog Nosed Skunk, Northern Huemul**

Bird highlights for me were **Tufted Tit-Tyrant, Rufous-legged Owl, Chucao Tapaculo, Slender-billed Parakeet, Snowy-crowned Tern, Rufous-tailed Plantcutter, Humboldt Pinguin, Peruvian Pelican, Peruvian Booby, Andean Avocet, Inca Tern, Lesser Rhea, Chilean Flamingo, Ornate Tinamou, Puna Tinamou, Magellanic Horned Owl, Mountain Parakeet**

Top 5 Mammals	Top 5 Birds	Top 5 Wildlife moments
Darwin Fox	Rufous-legged Owl	Following a Southern River Otter up the river
Southern River Otter	Mountain Parakeet	A Darwin Fox with its prey, a Lamprey
Molina's Hog Nosed Skunk	Inca Tern	Molina's Hog Nosed skunk foraging
Monito del Monte	Humboldt Penguin	An inquisitive Culpeo approached me to 2 meter
Northern Huemul	Puna Tinamou	A total of 11 Northern Huemul up the mountain

The Big Cat Year is not just about spotting wild cats. It is also about habitat and wildlife conservation. The aim is to support a project/organization in every country visited. With regard to Chile, we have made a contribution towards Fundacion Con Garra.

Currently I am still at 24 Wildcat species for the year and 26 in life. We have been able to contribute financially to 15 Projects and/or Organizations for a total of 20.500 USD. Many thanks to those who have contributed to make this possible! In addition, we have been able to give 13 Conservation Talks, Presentations and Interviews.



My Big Cat Year – Chile and the search for the Andean Mountain Cat – 31/10/26 to 15/11/26

Chile and the search for the Andean Mountain Cat

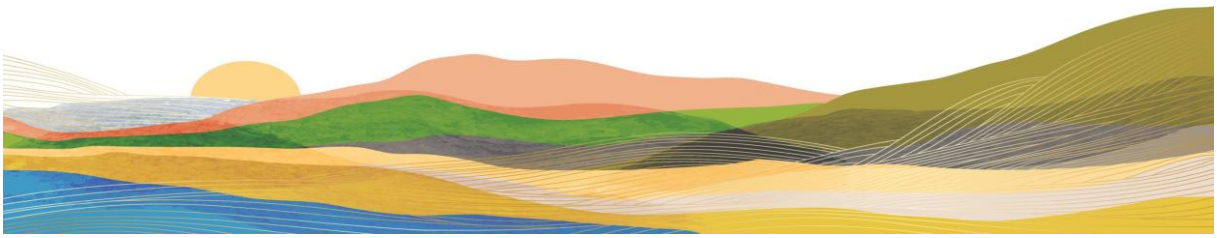
On the 30th of October, in the afternoon, I had my first committee meeting with the Dutch organization '**Brabants Landschap'**. I thoroughly enjoyed it, met many new, interesting people and I am really looking forward to making a positive contribution to the important work Brabants Landschap is doing. Immediately after the meeting I rushed home to catch the train in time to get **my flight to Chile**.

So in the evening of the 30th I left for a flight with three legs, from Schiphol to Paris, Paris to Santiago (Chile) and from there a domestic flight to Castro on Chiloé Island. In Santiago I had a bit of stress. After arriving I moved from the international to the domestic terminal and was enjoying some spare hours with a cup of coffee. I decided not to go through customs yet which was a good decision …

As I was enjoying my coffee, I got a WhatsApp message with a picture showing my luggage. It seemed they had offloaded it! I was surprised as my luggage was checked through to Castro, my final destination. In Amsterdam, I requested it specifically and as such I did not expect it to be offloaded in Santiago … I made my way back to the International Terminal and a very friendly customs officer brought me the bag. I checked in again at the domestic terminal and was in time for my flight. This year I escaped major drama with my luggage so I was happy I didn't spoil my good record!

On the 1st, I arrived in **Castro** and wildlife guide Martin Cardenas was waiting for me and drove me for 1.5 hours to the **Parque Tepuhueico Lodge** where I would stay the next 4 nights. My sole goal being the **Kodkod**, a small wildcat species (smallest of the Americas) which has a good population in **Chiloé Island**, towards the south of Chile. It is one of those small cats in the Leopardus family and it occurs regularly in the melanistic form. See the IUCN website for more info on the Kodkod, also known locally as the Güiña; https://www.catsg.org/living-species-kodkod





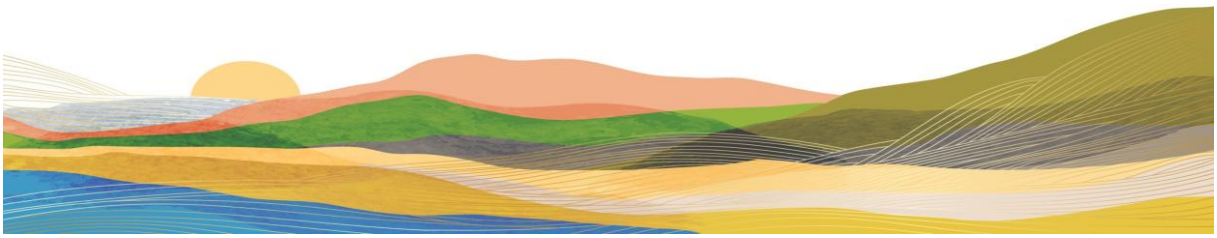
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At the lodge, I was welcomed by **Gloria** and she showed me the place and how it all worked. Over the coming days, it became clear that the lodge has some very nice staff and the food is excellent. I really enjoyed the place and its tranquility. The lodge is totally made of wood and feels like a small castle as it is built upwards. In the dining area, you have a great view of the forest and the lake. **Slender-billed Parakeets** do feed on the trees in front of the lodge and on the grass in front of it, often a **Pudu** can be found at dusk. The Parque Tepuhueico is privately owned and is close to 20,000 hectares, more like the size of a national park. It is all about nature and conservation, see the site for more info about this unique place; https://tepuhueico.com/5-pequenos-gigantes/?gad_source=1&gad_campaignid=22282646628&gclid=Cj0KCQiAh9vXBhDKARIsAMooYheYVwmeGuR-EHRr4tlk10Vs9OsQycZqPsM89tqQEjCv6oCzTeQi8X4aAjBwEALw_wcB



In the evening, after dinner, I went out with both **Martin** and the **local guide Simon**. We searched the whole evening from 20:00 to 24:00 and it became clear that it would be a **big challenge to find mammals**. The only mammal we found was the **Southern Pudu**, a small kind of deer, which is widespread through the reserve. But no other mammals … no rodents … no bats … nothing. Obviously, it did not come as a surprise as I did read a lot about the place but still, the confrontation with reality was there. Regarding the birds, we had a pair of **Rufous-legged Owls** showing themselves well.





The habitat of the reserve can be described as Temperate Rainforest (their description) and the big mammal attractions are the **5 Little Giants** as they call it;

1. **Southern Pudu**
2. **Monito del Monte**
3. **Darwin's Fox (Zorro Chilote)**
4. **Southern River Otter (Huillin)**
5. **Kodkod Cat (Güiña)**

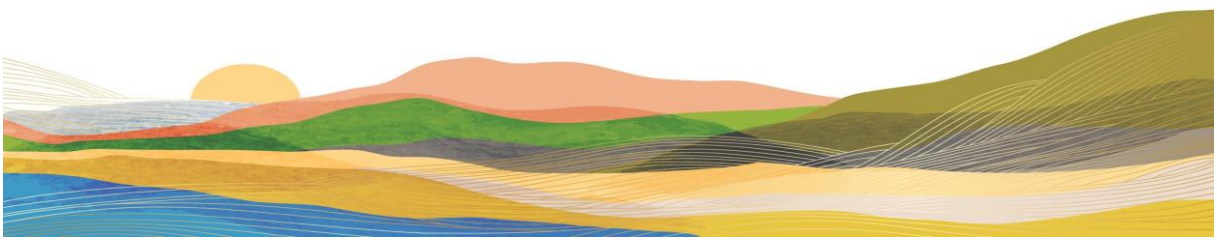
Normally, when an area promotes a top 5, you would expect many more mammals out of which a selection of 5 is made. Not so here … these 5 mammals are basically it. Again, with respect to the bigger mammals, I was aware of it. However, I did expect more rodents and/or smaller mammals, amphibians, reptiles, interesting insects, etc. Although it is a beautiful and a bit of a magic place, I believe I have never been in an area with so little biodiversity on the surface.

In **4 nights**, **3 full days**, we managed to see **6 mammal species** (2 of them in the coastal area, outside of the reserve), **1 amphibian**, **2 interesting insects** (a spider and a caterpillar). **Birdlife** was interesting with **56 species** and about 19 new to me. Just to show how hard it is and it requires long days and hard work to get sightings of the aforementioned 5 little Giants. **We managed to get 4 out of 5! But which ones …!**

The second day, we were out again at 6 AM and we did some walking around some trails close to the lodge. **Pudus** again and some good birds like the **Chucao Tapaculo**. The forest is dense and the only exception is an open area one hundred meters away from the lodge, which they call the Pampas and it is supposed to be good for **Kodkods** crossing it.

We came back around 10 AM and had an excellent late breakfast. I did some work on my laptop but after an hour I decided to go out again and did a **nice walk along the river to the waterfalls** and an area in the forest called Los Manios.

There are some nice viewpoints along the river and the **Southern River Otter (Huillin)** visits this part of the river sometimes. I really enjoyed being on my own again in the forest. I have not been to New Zealand yet but people say parts of these forests resemble the ones in New Zealand.



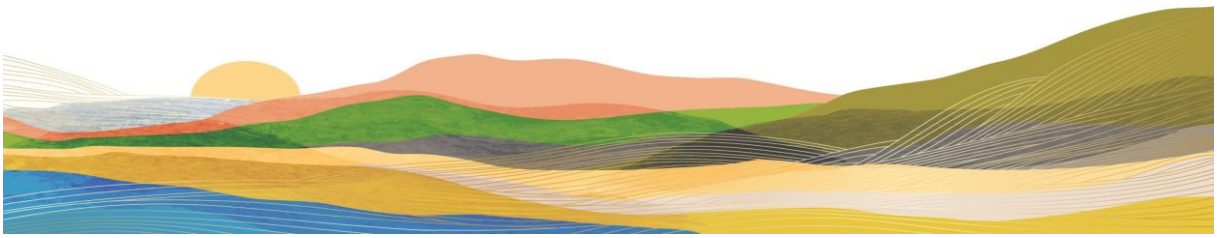
In the afternoon we had a good lunch and went out from 16:00, mainly by car on the different tracks. The one hummingbird, the **Green-backed Firecrown**, showed itself nicely. When it hovers, it sometimes shows its Firecrown, a great sight!

At 7 PM we had dinner and we went out again from 8 PM to midnight. Simon went on his own, searching for a **Monito del Monte**. Around 21:30, we got a call over the radio saying he found one. Both Martin and I went quickly to the spot. When we reached Simon and he showed us where it was in the tree, some 4 meters away, it still took me a few minutes to locate it. The **Monito del Monte**, a small nocturnal marsupial, sat still behind a leaf and did not move at all. I could see it in my thermal but it was so difficult to find with my binoculars and when I found it I was relieved. It is one of the big targets in the area and a small stunning creature. Thanks Simon! So after the **Pudu**, the **Monito del Monte** was **number 2 of the 5 little Giants**.



The 3rd day we spent the whole morning and afternoon outside of the reserve and we went to **a reserve on the coast**, close to the small town of Cucao. It felt good to be in an area again with a different habitat and where it was easy to spot wildlife. Seeing the ocean was great and the island has a beautiful coast. Regarding the mammals, we had a few **Coypus** and a mouse which we later identified as a **Long-clawed Mole Mouse**. Birdlife was excellent with species like **Snowy-crowned Tern, Rufous-tailed Plantcutter, Lake Duck, Plumbeous Rail, Red-fronted and Red-gartered Coot, Magellanic Snipe, Chilean Flicker** and a **Correndera Pipit**.





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Near Cucao, there is a hotspot for the **Southern River Otter (Huillin)**. We spent two hours searching but unfortunately we couldn't find it. The **Southern River Otter** has a very small distribution range and is probably the most endangered otter species in the world. From all the signs, it seems it is well protected now. Read more here about this beautiful species; https://www.otterspecialistgroup.org/otter-species/lontra-provocax/

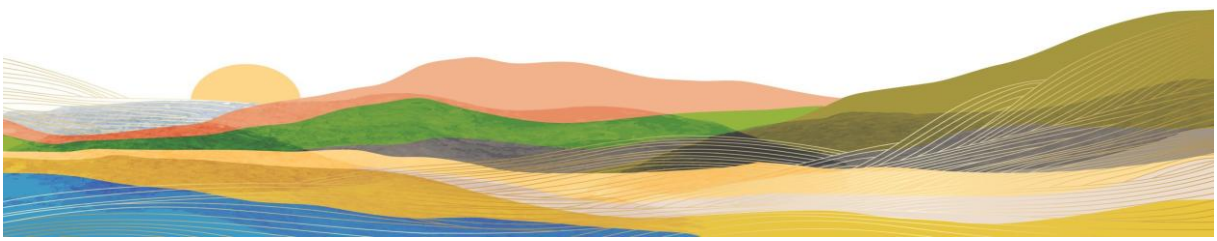
As Simon had another group from the lodge to guide, after dinner I went out with Martin again and he found another **Monito del Monte**. This time I could clearly see its face. Simon also found a nice **Emerald Forest Frog**. And we found another **Rufous-legged Owl**, which was sitting on a pole next to the road. Hearing its sound in the forest is magic and on the video I made the previous night, it can be clearly heard; https://youtu.be/z060kmpZ0mE



The 4th and last day we would spend again in the reserve walking trails and driving on the different tracks at night. In the morning, we walked the trail along the river (which I had done before) and approached the waterfall. **That morning would become the best part of the time I spent there …**

We were walking slowly on the trail, I was 5 meters behind Simon and Martin followed some 10 meters behind me. Simon crossed a bend and stood still, when I arrived he looked behind his back … and there it was, the endemic and endangered **Darwin's Fox**!! It moved away from the trail into the forest and as it was relatively open there, we could follow it. It had a prey, a **Lamprey**, which is a **kind of eel**. It must have caught it in one of the small pools on the rocks close to the waterfall. I tried to photograph it but it is a small fox, moves quickly and the light was poor. I managed a few





photographs and then the **Darwin's Fox** started to bury its prey. Something predators do more often and they will fetch it later when they are hungry. It allowed me to video it. Soon afterward, it disappeared into the forest.

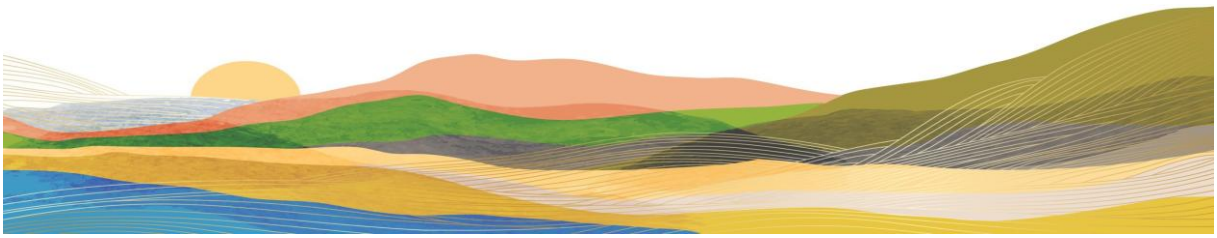
The three of us were excited. A fox is normally not the most difficult mammal to find and to observe. But here it is different and it is not easy to find one. And to see one with a prey like this is extraordinary. We prided ourselves on being lucky and high-fives followed.

We continued our walk and moved slowly forward on the trail, towards the waterfall. A few minutes later, when we approached the waterfall, I suddenly saw an otter running over the rocks!! A **Southern River Otter** and I was surprised by the big size of the mammal. Simon immediately noticed my excitement and realized what I just saw. The next 30 minutes or so were great!! To make a long story short, Simon, knowing the behaviour of the otter, started running back over the trail towards the lodge. Three times we managed to go down to the bank of the river and hide until the otter passed. At the mouth towards the lake, the otter turned and the both of us did the same on the way back. The otter returned to the waterfall and even made its way down on the other side of the river. **All in all we managed to see it 7 times at different spots along the river**. We both were thrilled but also exhausted by the kilometer or so we ran across the trail. We met Martin again and the three of us went back to the lodge.



The drive and walks in the afternoon and night did not bring any new mammals. In the end we had 4 of the 5 little Giants but **missed the most important one for me**, the **Kodkod**. That's unfortunate but it is what it is. As I understood, the rainy and windy weather did not help. The cat likes sunny weather and it then often goes to the sides of the road where it rests at times. I have to come back one day!

Next morning, the three of us had breakfast and I said goodbye to Simon and Gloria and Martin drove me back to the airport where I took the morning flight to Santiago. Arriving around 1 PM I had 8 hours at the airport before my flight took off at 20:40 to Arica. Time I needed for some work to be done on my laptop.



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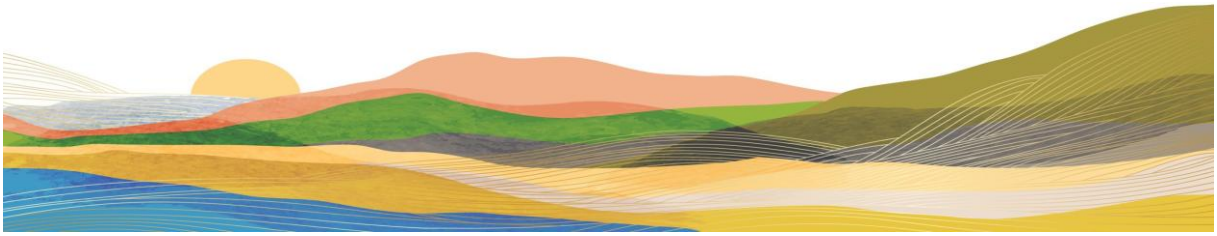
Arriving at midnight in Arica, I made my way to a hotel and the next morning, the 5th of November, at 9 AM I was back at the airport to pick up the 4x4 I rented for the next 4 days. Before going to **Putre**, 140 km into the mountains and close to **Lauca NP**, I decided to make a morning visit to the **Anzota Caves**, a place good for **Marine Otter** and 15 km south of Arica.

Arriving there, some 2.5 km from the caves, the road had been closed. I decided to just stroll and look around the rocky areas in the ocean. There were some fishing boats close to the shore and lots of birds were flying around; **Peruvian Pelican, Peruvian Booby, the stunning Inca Terns, Red-legged Cormorant** and a nice **Elliot's Storm Petrel**. Somewhat later I saw the **Peruvian Diving-Petrel**. Close to the boats were also around 10 **South American Sea Lions**. Quite a spectacle to watch. I missed out on the **Marine Otter** but as I would spend later in the trip another day in Arica, I would have a second chance.



I left Arica and took the **'Desert Route' to Putre**, about 140 km, through dry mountainous areas with little wildlife. It took me about 2 ½ hours to reach Putre and check in at the Chakana Mountain Lodge. Very basic, but clean and run by a very nice couple. Putre is at a height of 3500 meters and you do feel it when you come from around sea level. It would have been better for me to have a rest and to acclimatize; however, I desperately wanted to go to the **Altiplano in Lauca NP.** So after a local lunch in town, I left around 3 PM for Lauca.

I decided to go to **Salar de Surire** in **Lauca NP**, around 130 km from Putre, at a height of 4500 meters. The drive was magnificent; the first part was paved roads but after 50 km or so it went into gravel. The landscapes are spectacular and **Vicuñas** are abundant. They are all over the place. It is the perfect habitat for the **Pampas Cat** while the **Andean Mountain Cat** prefers the rocky cliffs. Seeing the landscape I realized it would be a tough challenge to find either of those two cats. Luckily this was only a pre-trip on my own as the real trip would start on the 9th of November, together with **David Couve** of **Far South Expeditions** and we will be looking for 6 days for first the **Andean Mountain Cat** and if successful, we will then focus on the **Pampas Cat**. The latter I had seen last year in Bolivia in the area around Trinidad.



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I took some regular stops to scan the areas but could not find any other wildlife, except for **Llamas** and **Alpacas**. Birdlife was very quiet with only **Andean Goose, Mountain Caracara, Grassland Yellow-Finch, Black-hooded Sierra Finch** and **Cream-winged Cinclodes**. I was especially happy with **Lesser Rheas** which I encountered a few times.



It was already getting dark and I was some 30 km from Salar de Surire. At 8 PM I turned around and started spotlighting and using my thermal. Around rocky areas, I found some **Common Mountain Viscachas**, the favourite prey of the **Andean Mountain Cat**. Other than **Vicuñas**, I could not find any mammals and around 11 PM I was back in Putre.



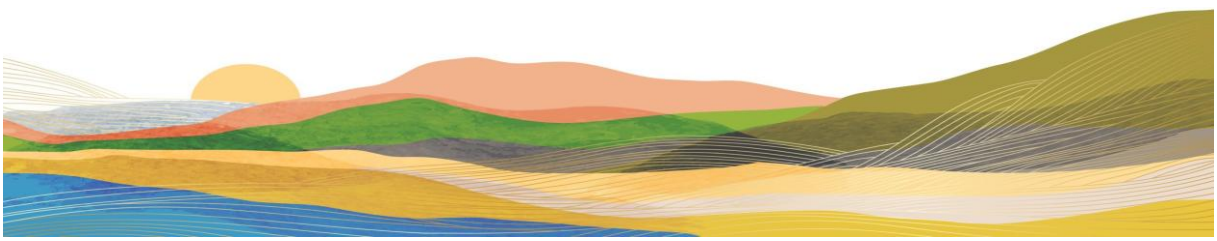


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With a bad headache … not smart to do such long drives in such a short time with so much difference in height. I recognized the feeling and tried to get some sleep. Around 3 AM I was awake and the headache was even worse. I decided to take two Paracetamol (normally I don't do this as it covers possible altitude sickness ..). I got some sleep again and decided to rest as long as I could.

Next day I still felt not good but at least the severe headache was gone. I went for the local lunch again and at 1 PM I went again to Salar de Surire. However, now I did not stop at many places and around 4 PM I was at Salar de Surire. A big salt flat in the mountains with **Chilean Flamingos** in the water areas and I even found some **Andean Avocets**. I turned around and made my way back to Putre, arriving at 7 PM. The headache was returning again but not as bad and I went in for an early sleep.





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I slept great and next morning I felt good and had a nice breakfast prepared by the couple who run the place. Really nice. I felt recovered and around 9:30 AM **I made my way back to Arica**. Going downhill through the mountains is fun and as I felt good again, I enjoyed the ride tremendously. Arriving Arica, I decided to go back to the Anzota Caves to try if I could find the **Marine Otter**. This time, I walked 3 km or so from where the road was blocked.

It was a bit of a surreal place, a beach area closed to the public. Good for wildlife though and

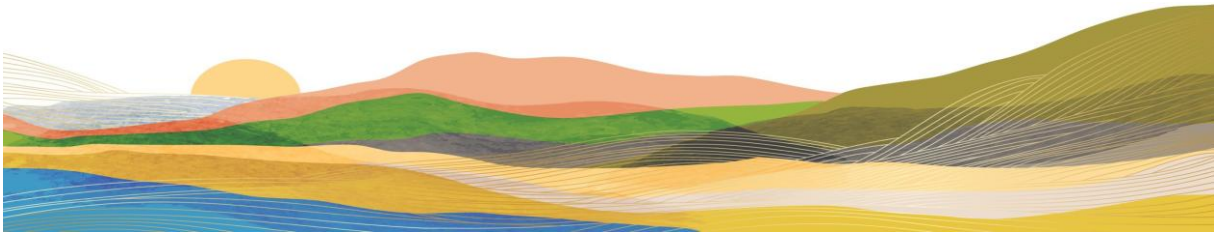


I found some new bird species like the **Seaside Cinclodes**. Two young **South American Sea Lions** were dead and lay on the beach with three **Turkey Vultures** on them. At the end of the walk I reached the **Anzota Caves**, the place for the **Marine Otter**. I scanned the ocean for half an hour but could not find any otters. Suddenly, there was something in the sea, some 200 meters in front of me. I took my binoculars and it was a penguin! Not expected but very nice. I identified it as a **Humboldt Penguin**, great.

I was looking for it to appear again in the sea and suddenly I noticed some movement in the big rocks beneath me, which were teeming with **Four Banded Pacific Iguana**, some 25 meters away. A **Marine Otter** popped up and scanned its environment. After 2 seconds it disappeared again, too quick for me to take a photograph. But hey, I saw it! **Very happy with my fourth otter species on this continent**; the Giant Otter and the Neotropical Otter in the North Pantanal in Brazil, the Southern River Otter in Chiloé Island, Chile and Marine Otter!!

I waited another half an hour but it never showed itself again and I made my way back to the car and checked in at the Novotel. A nice place where I would stay two nights, get some work done and get some rest before the mini expedition in the Altiplano of Lauca NP would start.

After a good night's rest, I went in the morning to **Humedal Rio Lluta**. It is the place where the Rio Lluta enters the ocean and it is good for birds and I had a few new species; **Black Skimmer, Franklin's Gull**, etc. There was one person there who was guarding the beach, focusing mainly on preventing people with dogs entering the area. His name was **William** and he was so friendly to ask me if I would enter the area and to come closer to the birds.



We had a nice chat and it was great to be so close to this spectacle of **Peruvian Pelicans, Inca Terns, American Oystercatchers, Belcher's Gulls, Gray Gulls** and **Elegant Terns**. I saw some **dolphins** swimming in the ocean but it was too brief to identify what species.

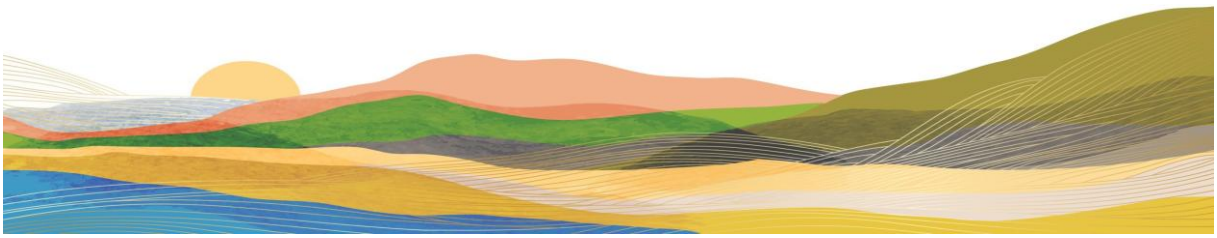
I said goodbye to William and went to the police station to get a replacement for my tourist card. It is a form which you receive when you enter the country and which you need when you leave the country. I lost it … not so smart … so I needed a new one. The first police station referred me to another and when I came there, they explained to me that as it was a Sunday, the right person was not present. I had to come next day at around 9 AM.

The rest of the day I relaxed in my room and even managed to watch the Formula 1 in Mexico in which Max Verstappen became second. Next morning, the 9th of November, I met my guide **David Couve** and driver **Kael** who picked me up at the hotel. After visiting a supermarket to get some water, etc., we went to the police office and they smoothly got me a new tourist card, many thanks!

Next we were off for a 2-hour drive to **Codpa**, the place where we would stay for the coming 5 nights and from where we would move every afternoon to Lauca NP. Codpa is great; it is a small town of around 200 citizens and is in a narrow valley where there is some agriculture because of a small river which runs through it. It is only 100 meters wide and on both sides it is flanked by mountain ridges and pure desert. It is almost surreal to be in a green place surrounded by pure desert.



It is based at around 2000 meters and as such it is good as a base and you don't have problems with the altitude. As we will be out at night, it is a good place to get some rest. During lunch David explained where we would go and search with thermals and spotlights for the different wildcat species. David is the son of the founder of Far South Expeditions, is very knowledgeable and a very experienced Wildlife guide. And he has a very nice personality, we had interesting talks about a variety of subjects.



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Prime target being the **Andean Mountain Cat**, one of the most difficult cat species in the world. David has been here many times, is the best guide in the world regarding this wildcat species so I am very hopeful that we will manage to observe it. Second target for me would be the **Pampas Cat**, a species I have seen last year unexpectedly in Bolivia and which I hope to see again this year in My Big Cat Year. Third target would be the **Puma**, a species I have seen this year, for the first time in my life, in Bolivia.

The **Andean Mountain Cat** moves especially in areas frequented by **Common Mountain Viscachas**, its favourite prey. So any place where these animals roam should be good for **Andean Mountain Cat**.

So after dinner, around 7:30 PM we were out for our first night drive in **Lauca NP**. The first



hour you move uphill through mountainous bare deserts. Lauca NP is at a platform around 4500 meters and I noticed my two days at Putre helped to acclimatize; I had no problems at all. I expected we would be back at 2 or 3 AM in the morning as that is what I have been used to on night drives. Not so here. We would stay out until sunrise and only then we would move back to Codpa, arriving there at 07:30 AM, a stint of 12 hours!! And we would do that for the coming 5 nights …

Before we arrived at the plateau we had our first mammals as David spotted 2 **Guanacos** close to the road. A species I had seen before last year in Argentina but which I missed in this trip around Putre. As soon as darkness fell, we started spotlighting and using the thermals. I preferred the spotlighting as I saw there were still quite some heated rocks making it difficult to pinpoint potential mammals. Also, I do like spotlighting more as it makes me feel more into nature instead of continuously watching my thermal screen.

We saw a few (introduced) **European hares**, a group of 5 **Feral Donkeys**, several **Common Mountain Viscachas**—in some places they are everywhere—but suddenly I picked up a strong eyeshine and when I put my torch on it, I immediately realized it was a **Culpeo**, a kind of a fox. David made some sounds and the **Culpeo**, being very inquisitive, approached the car to some 25 meters allowing some nice photos and videos.

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A good start of the night!! We continued and some moments later, we got our first and only



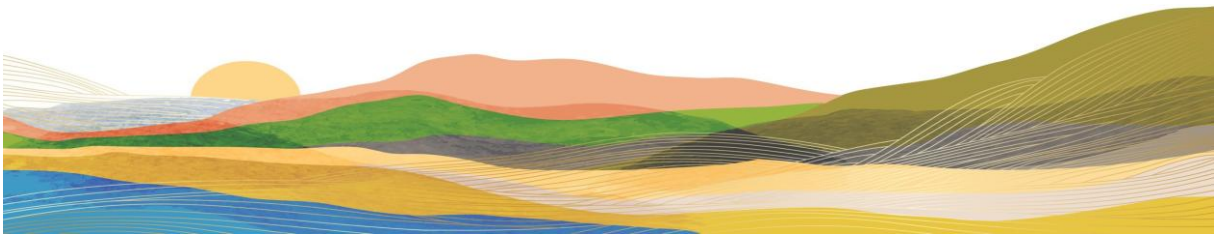
Vicuñas of the night. A species very common in Lauca NP but not so in the area where we were focusing. We continued and half an hour later I spotted a black mammal foraging through the puna grasses; I immediately realized it was a skunk. We got out and as the skunk was foraging through the landscape, we approached it quickly and silently and at one moment, it was three meters from my feet. Very nice, a **Molina's Hog-nosed Skunk**.



The remainder of the night we focused on certain areas for the **Andean Mountain Cat** and we got out a few times and the three of us spread out over the landscape and started searching with our torches. We stayed in contact through walkie-talkies in case one of us got something interesting.

At 5 AM we stopped the car and started dozing off for 30 minutes after which we made a final round through a certain area. We then made our way back and arrived at Codpa around 07:30 AM. Although we had not seen any wildcat species yet, I enjoyed the night drive thoroughly. I find it extremely exciting to spotlight and find out what's out there. It is so much more exciting than during daytime and obviously it is much easier to find mammals as they are active at night and can easier be found with spotlight or thermal.

The rhythm during daytime was difficult with breakfast at 9 AM, lunch at 12 PM and dinner at 6 PM. So you have to find a few hours of sleep in between …. Not easy, but I hope I will manage the coming days.



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The 10th we went out again and left at 7:00 PM. We had some good sightings of **Guanacos** on the pre-puna. While the **Vicuñas can** be seen at the Altiplano, at the Puna, the **Guanacos** typically live somewhat lower. Although I felt tired, the spirit was there and we started spotlighting again. It was slow and we did not get many sightings. Nice was a **Molina's Hog-nosed Skunk** which David spotted. When we got out of the car to get closer, the mammal had already vanished …

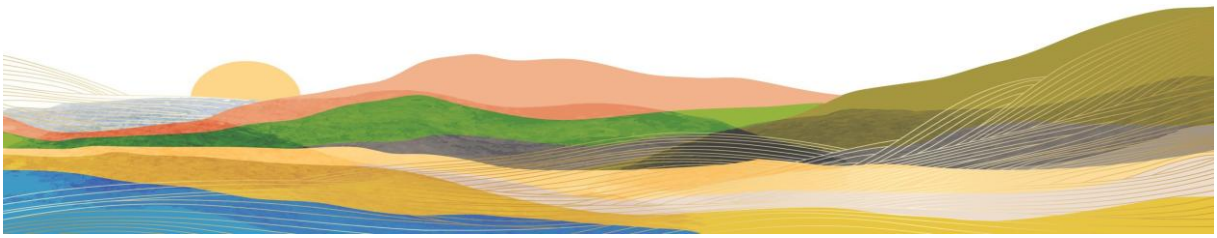


We came again into the area good for **Andean Mountain Cat**. It is a very rocky area with many Viscachas, its prey. David spotted some scat on the road and was not sure it was of a fox or a cat. As the scat was fresh, he said that we should go out and search the area. So the three of us scattered around and used our spotlights. We had walkie-talkies so in case any of us found something we could warn the others.

I went to the right of the area and because of the spotlights, I could see where David and Kael were, a few hundred meters to the left. I found many Viscachas but suddenly, on the other side of the road, I had some clear eyeshine. I put my spotlight on it and at the same time tried to identify it through my binoculars. Which by the way, is quite difficult to do … I didn't use my bright light yet as I did not want to scare the mammal. When I had it in my binoculars, I thought it was a cat!! So I took the walkie-talkie and said with excitement in my voice '**Gato, Gato'**!

Two minutes later, David was the first to arrive. I had shut down my light until then so I would not scare it away. David pointed his torch on it so I could use my binoculars freely and could clearly see the mammal now … it was a **Culpeo** (a kind of a fox). What a disappointment. I said 'Shit, it's a fox, it's a Culpeo'. David felt sorry for me and reacted really well and fully understood why and how I had originally misidentified it. We could approach it quite closely and made some nice pictures.





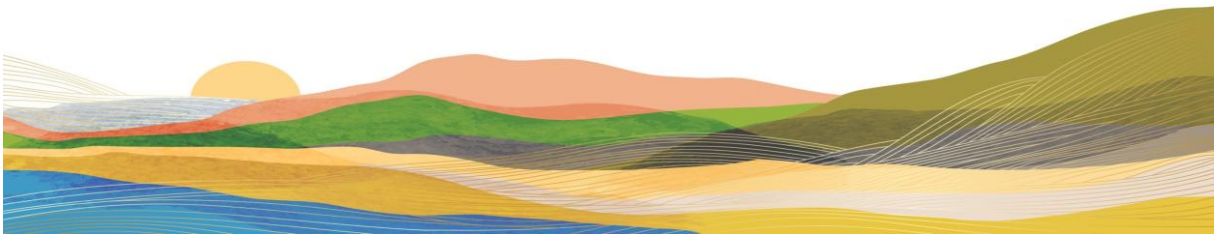
We continued and decided around 2 AM that we should better go back and try to get some sleep as tomorrow would be a very long night to the Altiplano. We arrived at 3 AM and had a good 5 hours of sleep before having breakfast.

The 11th we would have a different schedule; we had lunch at 1 PM and left at 2 PM for a full night, returning back the following morning at 8 AM. It would bring us to Salar de Surire, Mitisune and 'Stone City'. It was a long drive and we had several half-hour naps/rest during the evening and night. Mammal-wise it was very slow and except for the **Guanacos, Vicuñas, Llamas** and **Alpacas** we had literally nothing. Regarding the birds, it was good with **Ornate Tinamou, Puna Tinamou, Magellanic Horned Owl, Puna Ground-Tyrant, Mountain Parakeet, Black-bellied Shrike-Tyrant** and **Grey-breasted Seedsnipe**.



We skipped breakfast in order to get some hours of sleep and would meet again at lunch at 1 PM. Tonight after dinner we would leave at 8 PM and spend the whole night at **Stone City**, an area which David has called that because of the stunning rocky landscape and which is good for **Andean Mountain Cat**. He has seen it there during his last two trips. It has lots of Viscachas, the prey of the **Andean Mountain Cat**, has water nearby and has enough cover, i.e. the perfect place. Fingers crossed …

Expectations were high as we left at 20 PM for stone city. We arrived around 22 PM and started scanning the areas next to the road with the torches. Around 23 PM we rested and slept for an hour and from 24 PM until 4 AM we walked systematically through the area and scanned with our thermals and torches on both sides of the road. We then left for Codpa but after an hour we were so tired that we parked the car and all three of us slept for nearly two hours in the car after which we continued and arrived at Codpa around 8:30 AM. In time for breakfast but also puzzled about the results from last night. Except for an inquisitive **Culpeo**, which approached me to 2 meters, we had nothing …

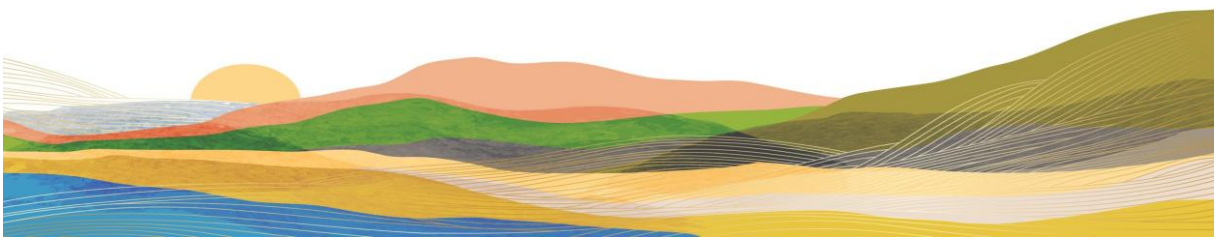


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During lunch David explained the approach for the last night, we would go around 20 PM to Stone City, scan the area well, then continue to Salar de Surire and check the rocks behind the ranger station, then move on to Lauca Cruzani, check the 'Cathedral' near Misitune and then move to Putre and end in Arica around 13 PM. As usual we would stop the car on the way and try to take some half hour naps. It would mean that we would not come back to Codpa but we would finish at Arica on the coast from where I would fly home the next day. Excellent plan as it would create new chances.

So we left at 20 PM in good spirit. However, to make a long story short, again no activity at Stone City, nor Salar de Surire and the other places we scanned. The only exciting moment was when Kael spotted a likely **Puma** through his thermal. We stopped the car and scanned the area with thermal and torches for 20 minutes but could not find it due to the bushes. We continued and arrived around sunrise at Putre where we searched for the **Northern Huemul** which David and Kael found. A nice group of 11 mammals and we watched the behaviour for over an hour. They were grazing at some grass area belonging to a farm, saw them mating and moving upwards up the mountain. What stunning animals! We had a sandwich for breakfast and enjoyed the rich birdlife with birds like **Harris Hawk, Variable Hawk, Bare-faced Ground Dove, White-throated Earthcreeper, Rufous-naped Ground-Tyrant**, etc. The sun was up and it was good to feel its warmth after a cold and chilly night.





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On our way to Arica, we stopped at Kael's parents' place, a unique place in the middle of the desert. We had a tea and a nice conversation with his parents, really nice and special people in a unique place.

Around 12:30, David and Kael dropped me off at my hotel, I thanked them warmly and we said goodbye to each other.

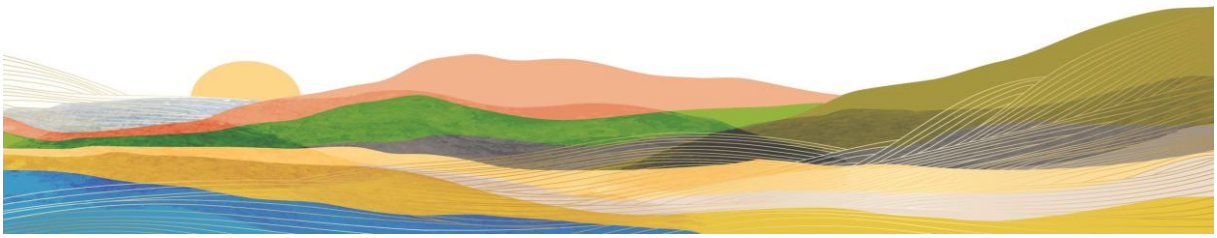
All in all, it has been a disappointing trip for me as it is the first country during My Big Cat Year where we did not manage to see any Wildcat species. Missing the Kodkod in Chiloe was unexpected. I knew the Andean Mountain Cat in Lauca NP was difficult with a 50% chance but to have not a single eyeshine or thermal excitement with regard to Wildcat species (except Kael had one) in five full nights with David and Kael and 2 full days I had by myself in Lauca NP was unexpected for me. Nobody to blame because David and Kael really pushed for it and if somebody can do it, it's David, he has proven that in the past many times.

It is a year of high and lows but where in the beginning of the year, I was quite relaxed about missing target species, I notice that has changed for me. More than ever, seeing the target species is key to me. Perhaps as the year drags on, I am looking forward more and more to the end of the year and just a nice trip in a beautiful country with great people is at this stage not enough for me. Getting the targets has become essential to me enjoying it all. Not what I wanted originally but I notice things have shifted. However, it is what it is and we move on to the next country.

Tomorrow I fly home and arrive the 16th in the morning at Schiphol and at the end of the day I fly to Western Sahara for the Sandcat. I missed it in February when I was in Western Sahara but hopefully we will get it this time.

The Big Cat Year is not just about spotting wild cats. It is also about habitat and wildlife conservation. The aim is to support a project/organization in every country visited. With regard to Chile, we have made a contribution towards Fundacion Con Garra. Read here more about what they do; https://bigcatrescue.org/conservation-news/fundacion-con-garra

Would you like to contribute to supporting these important projects and/or organizations in the world with regard to conservation and protection of nature and wildlife, please have a look at the funding page. All help is appreciated! Big and small, it all counts. You can already help by buying the projects a coffee



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Mammal List Chile 2026

Species	Seen 2026	New / Before	Chiloe Island - 4 nights - 31/10 en 1/2/3	Arica and Putre - 5 nights - 4/5/6/7/8	Lauca NP - 7 nights - 9/10/11/12/13/14/15
Coypu	1	Before	5 x		
Mountain Viscacha	1	Before		6 x	> 60 x
South American Sea Lion	1	Before		10 x	
Guanaco	1	Before			10 x
Culpeo	1	Before			3 x
Feral Donkey	1	Before			6 x
Puma	1	Before			(1 x)
European Hare	1	Before			10 x
Alpaca	1	New		> 30 x	1 x
Darwin Fox (with a eel/lamprey) (zc	1	New	1 x		
Lama	1	New		> 30 x	2 x
Long-clawed Mole Mouse	1	New	1 x		
Marine Otter	1	New		1 x	
Monito del Monte	1	New	2 x		
Southern Pudu	1	New	> 40 x		
Southern River Otter (Hiulin)	1	New	1 x		
Vicuna	1	New		> 100x	10 x
Molina's Hog nosed Skunk	1	New			2 x
Northern Huemol	1	New			1 x
Total	19				

