

Chile - March 2019

I spent two weeks in Chile back in March, half in the Patagonia region and half in the desert north. It was primarily a sightseeing and birding trip, but I paid close attention to the mammals that were around.

Day 1 - Arrive Punta Arenas

Day 2 - Day trip to San Gregorio area and Isla Grande Tierra del Fuego

Day 3 - Coast south of Punta Arenas and drive to Torres del Paine (TDP)

Day 4 - TDP

Day 5 - TDP

Day 6 - TDP

Day 7 - TDP

Day 8 - Transfer TDP to Punta Arenas to Santiago to Arica

Day 9 - Arica and transfer to Putre

Day 10 - Putre

Day 11 - Putre to Salar de Surire via Lauca NP

Day 12 - Salar de Surire and back to Putre via Lauca NP

Day 13 - Lauca NP

Day 14 - Putre to Arica to Santiago

Day 15 - Santiago

Species Seen:

Puma – 1 female near Lago los Juncos five minutes into TDP, put a stalk on two Upland Geese.

Admittedly, after this encounter we didn't spend much more time specifically looking for pumas in the park.

Guanaco – especially common on Isla Grande but also very common in the right habitat within TDP.

Huemel – three different sightings of a total of four animals. This was a highlight of the trip as I thought these would be much harder to see. Two animals, M and F seen feeding in a slide clearing on the towers hike in TDP, between the famously windy corner and Chileno Refugio. Then just after, a second female seen much higher climbing up another slide area. Lastly, a fairly tame female in the Pehoe Camping area that approached us within probably 20 ft, yet still seemed extremely cautious of other potential threats (pumas). Since the campground is a small, isolated area of forest this animal may be reliable to look for in the future. I was surprised after hiking the Largo Sarmiento trail that they have been reported from there, did not seem to be the right habitat, no forest to speak of.

Chilla – 6 seen between San Gregorio area and Isla Grande, then 2-3 seen on the Lago Sarmiento Trail in TDP, one feeding on a dead Guanaco.

Culpeo – 3 likely young animals playing and hunting pigeons right by the crowd of people waiting to board the catamaran at Paine Grande Lodge, TDP. Another 2 animals staking out the Vizcacha colony at the CONAF building, Salar de Surire.

Humboldt's Hog-nosed Skunk – 2 seen separately in the early morning in the San Gregorio area.

European Hare – common around Punta Arenas esp at night/early morning, less common but present in TDP

Commerson's Dolphin – 4-5 seen on the Punta Delgada ferry crossing to Isla Grande, none well, and none seen on the return trip.

Muskrat – two seen swimming the channel between the two wetland parcels at Humedal Tres Puentes on the north side of Punta Arenas.

South American Sea Lion – pretty common along the coast near Arica, especially near Cuevas de Anzota

Marine Otter – one seen in the Cuevas de Anzota area on the rocks near shore

Vicuna – very common in Lauca NP and Salar de Surire, even saw three down along A149 near Putre which seemed a bit out of place

Vizcacha – common in Lauca NP and Salar de Surire on rocky slopes. There is also a small colony off road A149 heading up out of Putre near where it connects with highway 11.

Taruca – three sightings of 1, 2, and 6 animals, all on road A149 heading out of Putre. The pair was early morning, the single at about 9 pm, and surprisingly the 6 were in the middle of the afternoon, around 2:30 pm.

Feral Donkey – a group of 4 off A149 northeast of Putre just before it connects with the main highway.

Unidentified dolphin/porpoise sp. – 2 with black backs/fins swimming close to shore in kelp forest along the coast south of Punta Arenas just north of Fuerte Bulnes.

Unidentified whale sp. – multiple sightings of dark whales with small fins and pretty significant spouts along the coast south of Punta Arenas.

Unidentified rabbit sp. – one crossed the road to Farellones ski area in Santiago, built more like a true rabbit than a hare, but I don't think any species naturally occur in that area.

Misses:

Andean Mountain Cat and Pampas Cat – Besides the flamingos and avocets of the Salar, this was my main reason for making the long drive to Surire. I arrived in the afternoon and parked at the CONAF building. Nobody was there and I just slept in my car in the parking lot, making three different ventures during the night up into the hills to see what was around. Unfortunately, a pair of Culpeos staked out the Viscacha colony for nearly the whole night, which likely kept any other predators away.

Tuco-Tucos – I saw a few burrows but didn't spend much time trying to see the actual animals

Armadillos – kept an eye out for these but did not see any

If you have any questions feel free to reach out: m.andrews32@gmail.com