

ARGENTINA 2018

(NOVEMBER 14th-December 5th)

After several trips in the past I wanted to return in Argentina to look at mammals I had missed. As I had been only south of Buenos Aires I decided to go north, first to El Palmar, then Ibera marshes and finally to Salta area. Because it was regularly raining in the north I decided first to go to El Palmar and then south of Buenos Aires until Punta Tombo. My main targets were La Plata Dolphin, Geoffroy's Cat, Lesser Grison, Molina's Hog nosed Skunk and Plains Viscachas. Armadillos were also on my wish list and I wanted to do a try for Burmesiter's Porpoise. I decided to drive than to fly because I wanted to stop regularly at all places I had informations that there were La Plata Dolphin called locally Franciscana. The southern limit of the distribution of this species is Golfo San Matias. In the past it was the Valdès Peninsula. The places where I wanted to try for this species are Golfo San Matias, the mouth of the Rio Negro in Viedma, Bahia San Blas, Claromeco, Necochea, Santa Teresa and San Clemente del Tuyu but the bad weather prevented me to check all these places except the mouth of the Rio Negro.

EL PALMAR NATIONAL PARK

This park is now regularly visited by mammalwatchers looking for Geoffroy's cat after the trip report of Richard Webb. It is still interesting but now your mammalwatching is quite limited:

- only the road leading to the camping is open by night
- all the side roads are closed from 8pm to 7h30am, sometimes later.
- spotlighting is forbidden in the park except at the camping (I spotlighted during 2 evenings without knowing that when I met rangers by night. Hopefully I was able to explain what I was doing and one of them gave me plenty of informations)
- as they kill Spotted Deers introduced from Asia, on my last morning the side roads were still closed at 8h15am (by 5h30 am it is daylight!). Disappointed I left the park after 2 nights there.

The mammals:

I saw:

- 2 **Nine Banded Armadillos** by 5h30am near the camping,
- a **Six Banded Armadillo** late afternoon at the view point at the end of Los Arroyos road,
- Crab Eating Fox** (no more than 5 along the main road by night, plus a few sighting by day light at the same places),
- Pampas Fox** (2 pairs and a 3rd one along the main road by night (plus 1 by daylight),

-**Plains Viscachas** (more than 50) in and close to the camping (there is also a family with den close to the fire station),

-melanistic **Geoffroy's Cat** (3 sightings: 1 by 6pm at the bridge of Los Arroyos road, 1 sitting at the mirador but very far from the former at 7h30 pm (probably the same), finally one at the junction of Los Arroyo road and the main road in the park (by 8h30 or 9 pm). I got the last one by spotlighting and approached it from less than 7m as I was pishing- even it was black it had transversal bars on the legs. This cat is well known by the rangers and is apparently regularly at this place,

-**Capybaras**: abundant everywhere in the park.

-**Molina's Hog Nosed Skunk**: 2 sightings (may be the same) along the main road in the park.

But even I looked hard day and night for a Lesser Grison I missed them. Rangers and the staff of the camping told me it was not the season to see them at the camping: winter is the best time when they come to kill young Viscachias in their dens.

-**Spotted Deer**: common

There is a black domestic cat close to the fire station.

CEIBAS.

I visited this place mentioned by Richard Webb who saw a Geoffroy's Cat and probably a Pampas Cat. As it was very hot, and after heavy rains during the afternoon the road was very slippery. I saw a dead **Molina's Hog Nosed Skunk**, at least 20 **Brazilian Cavies**, plenty **Coypus** and domestic cats. Local told me that all people hunt in this area and that they are very few mammals. But the birding was excellent. This place is in the Mesopotamia as the Mesopotamia in Irak.

RESERVA OTAMENDI-PARQUE NACIONAL CERVIOS PANTANOS

I wanted to see again Marsh Deers but the park was closed until further notice for improving.

As it was Sunday on a long week end and huge traffic was expected on Monday I drove as possible south of Buenos Aires on very pot holed roads. I spent the night close to AZUL where I saw 1 **European Hare**, 1 **Pampas Fox** and 1 **Molina's Hog Nosed Skunk**.

The following day driving south I saw by 9am another **Molina's Hog Nosed Skunk**, plus a **Brazilian Cavy**. I arrived in Viedma late afternoon and rushed to Balneario El Condor where La Plata Dolphins were studied near and at the mouth of the Rio Negro.

THE RIO NEGRO VIEDMA

Just before reaching Balneario El Condor I saw 6 **Patagonian Maras**. I first went to a view point at the lighthouse where I saw 2 **South Atlantic Right Whales**, but I was too far from the Rio Negro.

After that I found by luck a road leading to the Rio Negro. It was high tide. I climbed a dune and immediately I saw 2 or 3 **La Plata Dolphins**! Really lucky, I expected to check many places along the coast, and I found them at the first place. The following morning at high tide again I got 2 **La Plata Dolphins** at the same place. Like last evening I saw them perfectly with their relatively short and rounded dorsal fin and very long beak. Their color was very pale, nearly sandy. There was also a South American Sea Lion. After a long sighting from the dune and even the shore of the river I went to La Loberia, the largest colony of **South American Sea Lion** in Argentina (exactly at Punta Bermeja (30km from Balneario El Condor) which like nearly all parks and reserves in Argentina was closed. I approached the colony from the sea side at low tide. And sure there was a lot. A night drive produced only **European Hare**.

I stopped in Golfo San Matias (San Antonio Este) the southern limit of the distribution of La Plata Dolphin, but due to the very strong wind I didn't see anything.

It was too late to reach the Valdès Peninsula and the weather was stormy, so I stopped approximately 100km north of Puerto Madryn. By night I saw a dark **Tuco Tuco** with short tail and a black median line on the back (that I can't identify with the Handbook of the Mammals of the World. It is often impossible to identify rodents in such conditions without catching them and they are many tuco-tucos and probably many of them not described).

Early morning I left arriving 1h30 later at the Valdès Peninsula.

THE VALDES PENINSULA RESERVE

It was my 3rd visit. During my 2 days stay I visited Punta Norte, Punta Delgada and la Caleta between them, plus the area around Puerto Madryn.

I saw:

-**Southern Right Whales** (more than 16; it was not anymore the high season). You can see them by boat but also from the mirador close to Puerto Madryn.

-**Dusky Dolphins**: a group approached during the tour to see the whales.

-**Southern Gray Fox**: just one outside of the reserve

-**Southern Elephant Seals**: a lot specially at Punta Delgada

-**South American Sea Lion** (Lobo Marino de un pelo in Spanish): Huge colony between Punta Delgada and Punta Norte, a smaller colony but far closer at the mirador of Puerto Piramides and a few elsewhere.

-**Southern Mountain Cavy**: Very common at Punta Norte and close to the Mirador of Puerto Piramides (easier to see early morning and late afternoon when they sunbathe like Brazilian Cavy).

-**Guanacos**: very common specially along the road to Punta Norte.

-**Patagonian Maras**: only 8.

I missed Large Hairy Armadillos which are common but mainly nocturnal. I saw a few dead ones and their works. They used to come at each restaurants (Punta Delgada, Punta Norte and la Caleta) to be fed by tourists. I missed also Pichy that I saw in the past in southern Argentina. In all except for Elephant Seals I would say that Valdès is not an easy place to see mammals. Driving by night (even early morning) is forbidden and it is too bushy to see animals. Finally the distances to drive to reach interesting places on bad gravel roads are very long.

After passing Trelew I stopped in Raywson to see again Commerson's Dolphins.

RAYWSON

This place is famous for resident **Commerson's Dolphins**. I had seen them before several times but they are so beautiful that I wanted to see them again.

Early morning I saw one from the beach. Later at high tide I went on a tour and saw at least 4 playful ones, plus 2 close **Southern Right Whales and South American sea Lions**.

PUNTA TOMBO

Again I had been there twice already but I wanted to look for Lesser Grison and Large Hairy Armadillo in the colony of Penguins (the largest in Argentina). I had seen before skunks in Penguin colonies in southern Argentina and southern Chile. I thought it was my last chance to see a Grison. I spent there a late afternoon and a full morning.

Late afternoon by 5pm I saw a **Humboldt's skunk** (Zorrino patagonico in argentina) appearing and by 7 it was a **Large Hairy Armadillo** (Peludo in Argentina)

Early morning I saw a **Lesser Grison** disappearing in a den. After waiting for half an hour it reappeared and left the den for 5 mn. I pished it and it came close to my feet and disappeared again in the same den. After I left visiting again the reserve. When I came back after a while it reappeared several times. It was already large, but I think it was a juvenile not yet used to leave completely the den.

-**Southern Mountain Cavy**: several

-**Guanacos**: a few

-**European Hare**: common

-**Geoffroy's Cat** (not a black one): 1 by night outside of the reserve alongside the very quiet road

The rangers told me they are also Pampas Cats but they are rare contrary to the Geoffroy's Cats (called Gato Montes like the European-Asian Wild Cat in Spain) which are common.

After Puna Tombo I drove to the north, but it was always cold and very windy so I never saw anything in the sea except **South American Sea Lions** like in Necochea (more than 50)and San Antonio El Este (more than 70). I stopped again at Balneario El Condor.

BALNEARIO EL CONDOR

It was late afternoon and this time when I approached the village I counted 62 **Patagonian Maras** (far more than in Valdès). The following morning I went to the tourist office to ask for the timing of the tides and I met a person with a good knowledge of the local wildlife. He knew the presence of the dolphins and there were even pictures of them in the office and how to identify them. He knew the presence of **Plains Viscachas** between Balneario and Viedma (I went there and saw 52 in 15mn), skunk at the rubbish dump... By night I went twice at this place and saw a cat very similar to a **pajeros Pampas Cat** but the sighting was too short to say anything. I saw also **European Hare** and a freshly dead **Large Hairy Armadillo**. I stayed there 3 nights waiting for a quiet day which never arrived. But even the weather was stormy I glimpsed several times a **La Plata Dolphin** at high tide. On my last morning I also saw 4 **Lowland Yellow toothed Cavies** (1 adult and 3 young ones).

SOUTH OF SANTA TERESITA

The sides of the road are wide with grass cut short and I saw several **Cacaracas** hunting on the ground. I flushed one. It had a rodent in the beak. I suspected it was a tuco tuco. I checked the environment. There were a lot of signs of rodents with dens and sand expelled outside: of course it was the work of tuco tuco. It took me time to finally see 2 at the entrances of their dens. One even went very fast outside to grab some grass. By what I saw, plus their habitat and the informations of The Handbook of the Mammals of the World they are **Talas Tuco-tuco**.

SAN CLEMENTE DEL TUYU

I first went to Campo del Tuyu park office to see if it was possible to see the Pampas Deers, but unfortunately the park is not open to the public. I met very helpful staff explaining me where to try to see a Southern Long Nosed Armadillo and giving me plenty of brochures. Like all the farmers I met they told me these armadillos are strictly diurnal and that the best time to see one is after 10am. I walked a lot in the middle of the day seeing a a lot of evidence of Large Hairy Armadillos, a few signs of the Long Nosed One and:

-many **Coypus (Nutria in Argentina, but in Spain Nutria is Otter)**

-a **Molina's Hog nosed skunk** (Zorrino comun in Argentina) sleeping in an armadillo den

-a **Pampas Fox**

and the best of all:

-a **Lesser Grison (Huron in Argentina)**. It was around lunch time when a little tired to walk I stopped at the junction of 3 gravel roads hoping to see a Southern Long Nosed Armadillo, when at my big surprise I had a Lesser Grison crossing one of the roads close to my car (window open). It didn't look at me, I pushed it, it looked at me and without any rush disappeared in the vegetation. If you look at the Handbook of the Mammals of the World, they are no Grisons in this area.

At the office of the headquarters of Campo del Tuyu park I saw a book "Mamiferos del Sur de America del Sur". I had not the time to look at all the pictures but it seems to be good. It is not too old, not heavy, not expensive and is still on sale in Argentina.

On my last day in San Clemente I first went to Punta Rasa where I saw a **Brazilian Cavy (Cuy in Spanish)**. Then I lost a lot of time to have the car cleaned. I had only 2 hours to look again for the armadillo that of course I didn't see. Then I left to approach Buenos Aires. One hour later I asked my way. I was driving in the opposite direction. I turned back and nearly immediately I saw a **Southern Long Nosed Armadillo** (Mulita Pampeana in Argentina) on the road just in front of my car. Finally!!! This armadillo is very prized by locals, the meat being very good I was told, contrary to Large Hairy Armadillo.

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